

“Chuckling in, Cleaning up and Making Better: The Contested Meaning of Social Housing Renewal”

Lynda Cheshire*

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(*) School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland 4072,
Australia. Email: l.cheshire@uq.edu.au

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Abstract

In recent decades governmental policies have conspired to create a 'residualised' social housing sector where only those with the most complex problems are eligible. For areas where social housing is clustered, the effect is a concentration of poverty, disadvantage and social problems, along with a stigmatised identity for both the place and its residents. The typical policy response to this has been a program of urban renewal involving the physical upgrade of deteriorating housing stock, the supplementation of social housing with 'affordable' housing provided by the private market, and the dilution of disadvantage through strategies of social mix. For those concerned about the place-effects of social housing, urban renewal provides a much-needed means of 'cleaning up' areas that have become residential 'dumping grounds' for undesirable populations. Others believe it provides an opportunity to reconfigure social housing provision so that it better meets the needs of low-income households. A third perspective is that any increase in affordable housing should be opposed because it will further entrench existing social problems and poor neighbourhood reputation. This paper illustrates these contestations by identifying the competing discourses surrounding a planned social housing renewal program in Logan in Queensland. It argues that programs of housing renewal are not always coherent governmental programs with agreed-upon goals and strategies, but a space of contestation where competing interests seek to influence the nature and direction of social housing provision and the identity and reputation of the places involved.

Introduction

Initially built to accommodate the working poor in the post-war period, social housing has become widely viewed as a policy problem by Australian governments across the political spectrum. To a large degree, the problem has been one of their own making. The neoliberal shift towards the market as a means of providing housing support to low-income households has rendered the social housing sector increasingly unviable. In turn, this has been compounded by a tightening of social housing allocation policies, such that social housing is now available only to those with high needs – not only a low income, but also mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependency, a risk of homelessness and an overall inability to sustain a tenancy in the private market. For areas where social housing is concentrated, the effect has been the creation of spatial pockets of severe disadvantage, many of which are brandished with a stigmatised

identity as a residential dumping ground for the poor, the feckless and the socially undesirable.

Across the advanced western world where this scenario repeatedly plays out, the typical policy response has been the implementation of a program of renewal involving the demolition and/or upgrade of deteriorating housing stock; the supplementation of social housing with 'affordable' housing for rent or sale on the private market; and the dilution of disadvantage through strategies of social mix that seek to attract higher income residents into the area, or at least achieve greater tenure diversity (see Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2012). The rationale behind these programs is twofold. First that they are thought to improve the outcomes of social housing tenants by enabling them to live in more diverse and tolerant communities, and to take advantage of employment opportunities that arise through their interaction with, or emulation of, their employed neighbours. In addition, urban renewal also works to 'clean up' problematic neighbourhoods, both through the upgrade of the physical environment, and by attracting more 'respectable' incomers and potentially pushing out those thought to be undesirable or troublesome. In this respect, the creation of socially mixed neighbourhoods has been seen as a step in the process of neighbourhood gentrification, involving the arrival of middle income groups into low income areas and the subsequent displacement of the lower-income groups who already reside there (Lees et al., 2012). Where initially thought to be an unfortunate, but unintended, outcome of urban renewal, researchers now view this process of gentrification as an active state-led campaign to capitalise on the market value of impoverished inner-city areas by re-making them into desirable places for cosmopolitan middle class consumers (van Creikingen, 2012; Shaw, 2012). It is for this reason that Lees (2008) accuses the current social mix rhetoric of masking an explicit gentrification and social cleansing agenda via positive overtones of rendering cities more liveable and sustainable (see also Walks and Maaranen, 2008).

As the Queensland State Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) begins to roll out what has been heralded a 'radical' and 'unprecedented' (Pawson et al., 2013, p.9) reconfiguration of social housing in the form of the Logan Renewal Initiative (LRI), these debates around urban renewal, housing mix and gentrification become particularly salient in Australia. The LRI is designed to achieve large-scale redevelopment and expansion of social housing in the city of Logan in order to improve the housing situation of those on a low income. In addition, it is also intended to revitalise the neighbourhoods where social housing is concentrated by

interspersing social housing with dwellings for private rent or sale in order to create mixed communities. As this paper reveals, however, these dual ambitions represent competing tendencies in urban renewal which different stakeholders – local and state governments, residents, business groups, housing providers and community workers – selectively pursue according to their own priorities and agendas. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the way these competing conceptions of urban renewal play out as the LRI begins to unfold, by highlighting the tensions and contradictions that arise between the housing reform agenda of supporting low income households and the place-based pursuit of cleaning up problem neighbourhoods. In much of the literature, the place improvement agenda is often seen to prevail, as entrepreneurial local governments and corporate capital seek to ‘recapture prime real estate’ through ‘third-wave’ gentrification (Joseph and Chaskin, 2010, p.2349; Blokland and van Eijk, 2012). Whether or not this occurs in Logan remains to be seen although the early debates around the initiative point to the power struggles taking place between these competing objectives. The paper progresses by outlining the principal features of the LRI followed by an account of the competing agendas and discourses bound up within it. What it reveals is that programs of housing renewal are not always coherent governmental programs with agreed-upon goals and strategies, but a space of contestation between different social and urban policy goals which are pursued by different stakeholder groups with very different sets of priorities and agendas.

Social housing reform and place improvement: The Logan Renewal Initiative

The city of Logan, located half way between Brisbane and the Gold Coast in south-east Queensland, is the sixth largest local government area in Australia with an estimated 2012 population of 293,485 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The city is dissected in half by the Pacific Highway, both spatially and socially, such that the eastern side is relatively affluent while the western side contains areas of significant disadvantage, most notably in the suburbs of Logan Central, Kingston and Woodridge which also contain the highest concentrations of social housing in the city. As a result, Logan is seen to embody the ‘crisis’ that the public housing sector is now thought to be facing (DHPW, undated, p.3). According to DHPW, over 91 percent of clients allocated government-managed public housing in Logan in the year to 31 May 2012 had ‘very high needs’ and 47 percent were identified as having at least one family member with a disability (DHPW, 2012). The housing stock portfolio is also aged and in need of repair and, being

largely in the form of three-bedroom homes on detached blocks, unsuited to the needs of the client base which is overwhelmingly made up of single person households (ibid.). The concentration of social housing has also contributed to the stigmatisation of affected neighbourhoods which are unable to shrug off negative stereotypes and judgements relating to perceptions of high crime rates, anti-social behaviour, unemployment and their general undesirability as a place to live. Often, this stigma extends to the entire city, unfairly bestowing onto it a reputation as a low-income and low-class urban space.

Beginning in 2015 and rolling out over the next ten years, the LRI is an attempt to respond to these challenges in Logan, while also being a test-case for a much larger program of housing reform in Queensland, and indeed Australia. The scheme incorporates two key components. The first is the physical renewal and re-profiling of housing stock through the construction of approximately 2,600 new dwellings for both rent and sale, predominantly in the form of medium-density multi-unit dwellings, such as townhouses and apartments, which are more suited to smaller households. Many of these dwellings will be designated 'affordable housing', meaning that they will be priced at a level that makes them accessible to those on low to moderate incomes (Gilmour and Milligan, 2012). These dwellings will be interspersed with social housing to create socially mixed communities with the intention of improving the economic and social participation of low income tenants and reducing neighbourhood-level disadvantage. Tenants currently living in social housing in affected areas will be invited to voluntarily relocate, with the expectation that this will free up almost 1000 properties that are currently under-occupied, which can then be redeveloped or sold and the proceeds allocated to the construction of new, and more suitable, social housing dwellings. In total, it is expected that the LRI will lead to a net increase of 800 social and affordable dwellings in the area.

The second component is the management transfer of all of Logan's public housing stock to a community housing provider (CHP) in place of direct state control. This forms part of a much larger reconfiguration of social housing governance in Australia that echoes similar stock transfer programs across Europe and the UK (Watt, 2009; Pawson et al., 2013). The drivers of this scheme are threefold: first revenue maximisation through the ability of tenants of CHPs to access Commonwealth Rent Assistance which is unavailable to tenants of publicly-owned social housing, and which allows CHPs to charge higher rents; second, the expectation that CHPs will be able to leverage private investment for the construction of new dwellings; and finally, that

tenants will be delivered better services under a CHP model (AHURI, 2015). While stock transfers in Australia have been much more piecemeal than elsewhere, a 2009 intergovernmental agreement stipulating 35 percent of all social housing to be managed by CHPs by 2014 has prompted the beginning of an ambitious transfer program. What makes Logan so significant in this regard is that the property and tenancy management of all 4,870 government-owned and managed dwellings in the city will be transferred, representing Queensland's 35 target for the entire state. The renewal program will be undertaken by Logan City Community Housing, a newly-established consortium comprising Compass Housing Services, which will manage the tenancies of new and existing government-owned housing stock, and Blue CHP: a not-for-profit (NFP) organisation that specialises in the development of affordable housing. The consortium will work in partnership with DHPW for the 20 year duration of the project and will be overseen by a Logan Renewal Board composed of representatives from local and state government, community groups, CHPs and 'entrepreneur' representatives (Flegg, 2012).

Initially announced by the former Queensland government in 2012 and only now unfolding under a new State Labor administration, the LRI has been subject to considerable speculation among stakeholders and local residents over the last three years. Data on the kinds of discourses in circulation around the proposal have been generated for this paper from various sources. First are official policy documents released by the DHPW and other formal stakeholders, such as the Logan City Council (LCC). These documents include information papers provided to proponents during the call for an Expression of Interest to tender for the project, governmental housing strategies, Ministerial media statements and local government planning documents. Second were interviews with 19 local stakeholders from key organisations such as state government agencies, schools, the not-for-profit sector, police/justice and housing providers. Finally, the views of residents and other stakeholders, such as business owners, were obtained from resident blogs, news articles and other online fora that provide space for those outside the formal policy arena to express their thoughts and concerns. One of the richer sources of resident perspectives is the state newspaper, the *Courier Mail* and its associated community newspaper *Quest News* where online news articles invite, and received, public commentary.

Contested meanings of urban renewal in Logan

Contemporary strategies of urban renewal are often understood to be driven primarily by neoliberal place-improvement policy objectives and the 'pro-gentrification agendas of local states' (Rose et al. 2013, p.432; see also Davidson, 2008; Lees, 2008; Walks and Maaranen, 2008; Fraser et al., 2012). Any benefits to low-income groups are expected to arise from the renewal or upgrade of their existing social housing stock and the advantages that supposedly accrue from living in socially mixed communities – providing, of course, that low-income groups remain in place once renewal is complete. Yet Rose and colleagues (2013) offer a cautionary reminder that seemingly unifying discourses of social mix and neighbourhood renewal need to be unpacked because they frequently lack the coherence they are credited with, particularly when enacted in localised contexts where national, regional and local policies shape the form and outcomes of renewal in specific ways. As they explain:

Monolithic and top-down accounts of urban neoliberalism are inadequate when understanding positions taken on social mix in specific local contexts ... [since] locally grounded agendas can shape policies in different ways in different places, and the interplay of dynamics set in motion by local systems of actors can create varied and not always predictable outcomes (2013, p.433).

The LRI demonstrates this point nicely. While place improvement is certainly a goal of the LRI, it is intertwined with an explicit social housing reform agenda that aims to address the perceived crisis of Queensland's social housing system and the particularly problematic way in which it plays out in Logan. In a media statement from the former Minister for Housing and Public Works, Dr Bruce Flegg, announcing the LRI, the case for housing reform was laid out clearly:

... after two decades of Labor neglect, Queensland had a public housing system that has no money to build new houses and was losing a million dollars a fortnight in maintenance and administration costs. 'The human cost of this incompetence was a staggering 30,000 families languishing on a waiting list, the majority of whom had almost no chance of being housed,' Dr Flegg said. 'The time has come for us to sort this mess out ... Logan has some of the most densely concentrated public housing in the state and over the years has had to deal with the effects of that'. (Flegg, 2012).

According to the Minister, the principal aim of the LRI was to address these shortcomings by revitalising social housing in Logan and increasing the supply of new affordable housing for rent and sale (*The Courier Mail*, 28th September 2012). Yet, clearly aware of the connection between ‘densely concentrated public housing’ and the prevalence of disadvantage, poverty and social dysfunction, the Minister also determined that the initiative would equally help Logan combat many of the problems thought to arise from the clustering of social disadvantage and shrug off its mantle as a disadvantaged and undesirable place. Together, these dual ambitions meant that the LRI was ‘not just about providing social housing, but revitalising Logan as a whole and preparing it for the future’ (ibid.).

Bound up in the LRI, then, are two sets of agendas and priorities. As the remainder of his paper reveals, not only are these potentially competing, but they are also pursued separately by different stakeholder groups involved in the process, each with their own understanding of the problems Logan is thought to face; the solutions required; and the potential of the LRI to address these problems if designed and executed in a particular way. The deliberative policy arena for urban renewal is often a political one and these competing priorities often result in a complex set of negotiations, disagreements and compromises which can re-shape the outcomes and directions of such initiatives away from their original intent. While the former Minister for Housing believed that the dual ambitions of providing social housing and revitalising Logan could be achieved with the same policy instrument, other stakeholders involved in the renewal agenda, or keenly observing from outside the policy arena, rejected this view and took competing positions over which goal should be a priority and how the presence of the other would likely undermine it. For those concerned about the welfare of social housing tenants, there was consensus that the LRI had the potential to improve housing provision for Logan’s most disadvantage populations, but ran the risk of fostering their displacement if the program led to gentrification, as typically thought to occur. For others concerned about the place-effects of social housing, the gentrifying potential of the LRI was welcomed, but there was a firm view that any increase in affordable housing should be opposed because it would further entrench existing social problems and poor neighbourhood reputation. Expressed more simply, there was a polarising of debates around two, seemingly incompatible, components of the LRI, with gentrification implicated in both. The first was a housing reform agenda that sought to enhance the provision of social housing, but saw this as potentially undermined by gentrification; and the second was a place-focussed imaginary that pursued a gentrification agenda, but considered it

to be at risk from increased investment in social housing. Table 1 below provides a summary of these two positions.

Table 1. The competing policy discourses of urban renewal in Logan

Policy focus	Social housing reform	Place improvement
Stakeholders	Department of housing, community housing providers, local service providers and welfare groups	Logan City Council, residents ('owner occupiers' and 'tax payers')
The problem	Under funding in social housing, poor quality, inappropriate and inadequate stock	Concentrations of social disadvantage through the concentration of social housing, poor neighbourhood reputation, social problems
The objective	Providing additional, and improved, social and affordable housing stock	Improving the image and reputation of designated neighbourhoods and the city more broadly by diluting the concentration of disadvantage
Policy mechanisms	Stock transfer, housing renewal	Social mix
Beneficiaries	Existing social housing tenants; other low-income groups	Existing residents (owner occupiers) and new residents attracted to the city
Problematic aspect of the initiative	Social mix – gentrification as outcome: the LRI may cause displacement of low income groups; gentrification	Gentrification may not occur: increase in social and affordable housing may concentrate disadvantage further
Proposed solution	Careful management, protection of social housing	Dispersal of social housing

Social housing reform and the problem of gentrification

In academic research, policies of urban renewal and social mix have been subject to considerable scrutiny and critique, not only for the problematic assumptions that underpin them, but also for the lack of any sustained empirical evidence to suggest that they actually work. While Atkinson (2008) has tentatively concluded that social mix may help to improve the physical appearance of targeted areas, reduce place-based stigma and improve resident satisfaction with their neighbourhood, he and others have also identified a range of negative outcomes that are equally likely to ensue. With respect to the specific benefits of social mix, it has been suggested, at best, that relations between the incumbent social housing tenants and the affluent newcomers are

most likely to take the form of a social 'tectonic' which is 'of a parallel rather than integrative nature', meaning that different tenure groups tend to keep to themselves (Butler and Robson, 2001, p.2157). At worst, policies of social mix are said to inadvertently displace lower income groups from regenerated areas via growing affordability pressures in the local housing market and the erosion of commercial and social services that cater to the needs of disadvantaged groups (Rose, 2004; Davidson, 2008).

In Logan, there was awareness of the possibility that the LRI might lead to gentrification and the displacement of Logan's poorest residents from the renewal area, and a sense that this would undermine what was potentially a very positive policy for social housing tenants. This view was principally expounded by local CHPs or other community organisations whose mandate was to provide housing and other social support to the large cohort of disadvantaged people in the city. From their perspective, the main issues that the LRI could potentially address were the poor accessibility, quality and suitability of social housing in the area; the growing challenge of housing affordability in the private rental market for those unable to secure a social housing tenancy; and the real, but relatively hidden, phenomenon of homelessness in Logan. But they also expressed concern that adding policies of social mix to the renewal agenda would have negative outcomes for those who needed help most. Their concerns echoed now-familiar critiques of social mix policies, including that social mix is unlikely to lead to harmonious neighbourly interactions between different income and tenure groups:

I think it [the LRI] could be a good thing if it's administered properly. I don't believe that the social - that the mix of housing that they have in mind for future housing - I don't really necessarily believe that that's a good thing, where we've got owners, people renting at market price and we've got social housing all in the one area, all in the one building. I just don't know how that would work. Personally, I've really honestly have got to say I wouldn't like to go and pay (AU)\$400,000 for a three-bedroom unit in a beautiful complex and know that the person next door was on social security and getting it for next to nothing (community worker).

Second, was a fear that social housing tenants might ultimately be forced out of their neighbourhoods. Interviewees rationalised that property owners might lobby to have social housing removed from the area because of the potentially negative impact of social housing on

local real estate values and worried that the new dwellings would be designed for the affordable housing market (i.e. to households on low to moderate incomes) rather than designated social housing for those on low and very low incomes:

Yeah, I think that they'll [low income groups] suffer, because I think the percentages of social housing within these complexes will drop over time, because I think that they're going to get owners saying, with social housing in this complex the price of our properties are going to drop, not to increase. The price of rentals is not going to be as great as we might achieve elsewhere, so I think you're going to have trouble getting a lot of people to buy into these places. I think that you'll find that people that need social housing are going to become more social pariahs really sort of and pushed to the side as a result of it (community worker).

I guess one of the things with that happening that can be a really positive thing in terms of increasing housing stock. But one of the things that I would be concerned is that it's not more around just the affordable housing aspect; that social housing is important and it does need to be increased in that area to meet the needs of the people... I think there will be a change in the profile of the housing stock. Therefore, there will be a change in the people who move into the area. The people who can no longer afford to live there will have to explore other options, and I don't know where that will be (housing provider).

Place improvement and the problem of social housing

On the opposite side of the debate stood those who understood Logan's housing problems in different terms and thus sought to pursue the urban renewal component of the initiative as a way of 'cleaning up' what was seen as a problematic concentration of social housing. In line with claims that social mix is often driven by an entrepreneurial local state in pursuit of the social upgrade of impoverished areas (Davidson and Lees, 2005), this perspective was mostly articulated by the LCC, although it was also shared by some local residents – specifically property owners – who believed they were suffering the effects of living in a place inhabited by 'undesirable' social housing tenants. In large part, the council's position in the LRI was framed by its broader goal of challenging negative stereotypes of Logan, which was achieving some success. Well aware of the damaging effects of place-based stigma on local business confidence,

employment opportunities and property values, the Logan City Council had long been working to re-brand Logan City through its *Rediscover Logan* strategy that focused on building communities, attracting industry and fostering a sense of pride in the area. While the council remained sensitive to the presence of low-income people in the city, it was well-known among many stakeholders that the council saw the concentration of social housing as a central cause of Logan's problems and that its efforts to improve the city's reputation would have limited success until this was addressed. For the council, then, the LRI presented itself as a potential solution to this problem and it was reported to have lobbied hard to have the initiative first trialled there:

Interviewee: Initially when they first got in, Logan was picked because of the size and the stock density and the Logan City Council was very active in asking for that to happen. Because they really would prefer that we disband really. They would prefer that we weren't here but they are supportive to the point that, you know, they'll help us change things if we can.

Interviewer: As in social housing wasn't made available in this area?

Interviewee: Yep. They would much prefer that we weren't here. There have been various political statements made that, you know, if housing wasn't here, Logan would be better and all that sort of stuff (Department of Housing officer).

Among the component features of the LRI, the neighbourhood renewal and social mix agendas were seen as highly conducive to council's vision for the city and as a long-awaited means of reducing the concentration of social housing in neighbourhoods such as Woodridge and Logan Central. In an interview with a council officer, for example, the interviewee described the LRI as 'a really interesting and critical initiative for the city' in terms of its capacity to produce significant change to the city's image and residents' lifestyles – providing it was managed well. Others similarly observed the gentrification potential of the LRI (*Smart Property Investment*, 24th August 2012) and council's pursuit of this goal. Where some approved of the council's commitment to 'cleaning up the area and creating a better name for the district' (*Homely*, 28th August, 2010), others were a little more critical and understood that this push to 'quietly change perception' was part of an urban modernisation agenda that had little to do with improving the

quality of social housing stock:

They're designed to modernise the city. Really it's urban renewal, and there are not - they weren't undertaken with the aim to improve or increase the supply of social housing. It wasn't the primary aim. I think the Logan Renewal Board's aim is to improve the quality of social housing stock and make it more appropriate to the profile of the demographic down there (housing provider).

In the excerpt above, the dual agendas contained within the LRI are made explicit, as is the pursuit of these separate agendas by different stakeholder groups. For the council, there was acknowledgement of the importance of the housing reform component, but also an insistence that this should not lead to any increase in social housing supply. In a public statement reported in the Queensland *Courier Mail* (5th October, 2012), the Deputy Mayor of Logan insisted that the LRI should not be detrimental to the city's image, or indeed to current social housing tenants:

'My main focus is that I don't want to see the density of public housing increase', he said. 'It's quite high at the moment and we want to see that reduced, and I believe that's what (Housing Minister Bruce Flegg) is thinking as well'.

Among others involved in LRI policy deliberations, however, the council's position was interpreted not merely as being opposed to an increase in the *concentration* of social housing, but to the increase in social housing *per se*. One interviewee from DHPW, for example, described the difficult negotiations taking place between the council and the DHPW to resolve the discrepancy between the department's goal of introducing more social and affordable housing in the area and the council's explicit desire to see a reduction:

There's also the issue between council and us. Our proposal is maintain everybody, build as well, and then add - I can't remember the number - by a certain date in the future, that we'll have extra housing but it will be more tailored to what we need. The council doesn't want that. So they're going to have to have those discussions about how it is that's worked through. Because you don't want those decisions made by the state government and then foiled by council (Department of Housing officer).

Local government has long been recognised as encountering tension between expectations that it will align itself with the interests of its local constituency on the one hand, and that it will execute the prevailing policies of higher levels of government on the other (Aulich, 2005; Barnett, 2011). In Logan, these same challenges were encountered by the LCC. Viewed by many as an unwilling partner in the social housing reform agenda of the state government, but a strong proponent of its own program of urban renewal, the council was reported as willing to compromise with the state government in order to have its urban renewal plans progressed. This involved accepting an increase in the supply of affordable housing, but not of social housing, in order to reduce the proportion of very low income groups. Yet this concession was interpreted by others, particularly residents, as a sign of council 'kotowing' to the state government. In their view, affordable housing was no different to social housing and by allowing both to remain, the council was undermining its own hard-fought efforts to improve Logan and betraying 'tax payers' and 'homeowners' who, as one blogger put it, 'had worked hard to buy their homes only to have 'unsavoury and inconsiderate persons "incorporated" into their residential neighbourhood'. Other residents also expressed their dismay at this proposal:

Council spends millions of dollars on lifting the perception of Logan and then does the exact opposite of making it a better place (Vision or Deception – Save Loganholme, posted 29th September 2012: 2:20am).

Just what Logan needs – more housing commission. I am staggered that with this collective intelligence they come up with a plan to build 1000 more housing commission places. Genius... (The Courier Mail, 20th February 2013 posted 3:20 PM February 19, 2013).

Other residents went even further with their criticism, arguing that the provision of additional low-income housing would take the city backwards by further entrenching the disadvantage and the social problems that already existed in Logan, and ultimately creating urban slums or ghettos:

Oh, just great. Logan has a problem with high crime, racial tensions, lower socio-economic class wars ... so let's fix it by building more slums for the same types of people and encourage more of them to the area. Bright aren't you? (*The Courier Mail*, 20th February

2013 posted 3:20 PM February 19, 2013).

The idea that urban renewal might concentrate disadvantage further has been raised in the literature in only a limited number of cases, although a growing number of studies have identified the limits to gentrification in neighbourhoods that are in peripheral locations, have undesirable and cheaply-constructed housing stock, and which lack the amenities – quality schools, cultural attractions or city access – usually considered desirable by middle class gentrifiers (Shaw, 2005; Ley and Dobson, 2008; Walks and August; 2008). Ley and Dobson (2008, p. 2474), for example, suggest that ‘indicators of deep poverty are generally not sites coveted by gentrifiers’, not only because the presence of social housing acts as a disincentive, but also because it removes the stocks of social housing from the private market, thereby reducing the opportunity for gentrifiers to move in. Going further, studies by Bailey and Robertson (1997) and Skifter Andersen (1998) have shown that after renewal, residents can feel that the neighbourhood has worsened, especially when the process of renewal is undertaken by social enterprises (such as CHPs) rather than private developers. Even though the neighbourhood might look more visually appealing with upgraded properties, the demographics can remain unchanged as the neighbourhood continues to attract those on the lowest income. Indeed, while tenure diversification is often used as the main vehicle for achieving social mix, Tunstall and Fenton (2006, p.12) remind us that ‘the connection between tenure and income is not perfect’, particularly since the residualisation of social housing has forced all but the most disadvantaged groups out of social housing and into the lower end of the private rental market. As Atkinson (2008) points out, there is a potential for private landlords to move into renewal areas and to let their properties to householders in the private rental market with equal low incomes and similar levels of disadvantage as those found in social housing. Were this to occur, the demographic of Logan’s low-income suburbs would be unlikely to change in the way council and residents require.

Conclusion

The LRI has been heralded as Australia’s largest and most ambitious social housing project to date and has promised to improve housing access to Logan’s most disadvantaged groups through the provision of additional, upgraded and more appropriate, social and affordable housing properties. At the same time, it is also an opportunity to revitalise Logan’s most

disadvantaged suburbs through the deconcentration of social housing and, by implication, the deconcentration of social disadvantage, through policies of social and tenure mix. While the State government's DHPW, as the principal proponent of the project, sees the LRI as capable of achieving both policy objectives, other stakeholders bound up in the process are neither convinced of this, nor in agreement that both are equally desirable. On the one side stand stakeholder groups in the sphere of housing and community services who see virtue in the housing reform agenda on the basis that the lack of affordable and quality housing for disadvantage groups is one of Logan's most significant policy challenges. On the other side, however, are stakeholders like the LCC and local property owners who have invested heavily in Logan and see the LRI as opportunity for Logan to free itself of the social disadvantage, stigma and social problems that have attached themselves to the city for so long. For them, more social and affordable housing will not only undermine this place-making agenda, but concentrate disadvantage further by allowing yet more disadvantaged people to move in.

The aim of this paper has been to show how programs of urban renewal are sites of ongoing contestation, challenge and negotiation by different stakeholder groups with different agendas and priorities. In addition, it has shown how the spectre of gentrification surrounds both sets of policy ambitions, albeit in very different ways. In the first, it is framed as an undesirable, but largely unintended, consequence of housing reform which needs to be carefully managed and avoided if the LRI is to achieve its goal of assisting those who are most disadvantaged. In the second, it is an explicit policy ambition of a local state grown tired of the stigmatisation and disadvantage that the city encounters and which sees new opportunities for re-profiling the city so that it attracts aspiration homeowners and middle income groups. From this perspective, the housing reform component of the LRI places this goal at risk by potentially increasing both the number and the concentration of low income groups, if not in the social housing sector, then in the lower rung of the private rental (affordable) housing market. As the LRI moves towards commencement, we will begin to see which of these two policy ambitions prevail, if not both, and which outcomes are produced. Either way, there is a risk that disadvantaged groups will suffer most – either from being displaced from the improved area, or potentially by remaining in areas where stigmatisation and deprivation deepen. Only by placing the needs of these groups at the forefront of the initiative can both outcomes be avoided.

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