

Democratic Infrastructure?

Delivering affordable housing under Australia's
Social Housing Initiative

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A post-political era of local planning?

Allmendinger & Haughton (2010), Swyngedouw (2011), Inch (2012)

“post political” refers to “the use of consensus-based approaches to reinforce mainstream growth-led ideologies and marginalising alternative approaches and opposition” (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010: 804).

“This post-political condition evacuates the political proper – i.e. the nurturing of disagreement through properly constructed material and symbolic spaces for dissensual public encounter and exchange – and ultimately perverts and undermines the very foundation of a democratic polis” (Swyngedouw, 2011: 13).

“It is widely understood that development becomes progressively more politicised and harder to manage, the closer it gets to ‘the ground’ (p529)...”The displacement [] does not destroy political energies, but instead generates a range of displacement effects whereby conflict is channelled in different directions...The management of any putative postpolitical settlement therefore required a considerable amount of political work, much of which is premised on dealing with the return of repressed conflict” (Inch, 2012: 533)”

“Though these costs are hard to assess, there is a sense that they contribute to the attrition of trust in the state and the planning process as a democratically accountable guarantor of the public interest – and the planning profession, which is blamed for failing either to deliver development or to act democratically to protect the environment” (Inch, 2012: 533)

'Democratic' planning in Australia

- Social housing can attract opposition
- Engagement Opportunity 1:
 - “Up-front” citizen engagement in plan-making
 - Protracted
 - Legitimise a growth agenda
 - Visionary and aspirational
- Engagement Opportunity 2:
 - Public notification and Third Party Appeal Rights (Vic and NSW)
 - Contracted
 - Focus is on the individual's desires
 - Manages/addresses reaction to growth

Fast-tracking delivery – Implementing the SHI

NSW

- A-SEPP
- Small task force of planners and gov officials assembled
- Stage 1 -Prelim EIA Report prepared by HNSW assessing proposed development against local and state planning controls
- Stage 2 – Notifying relevant LGA and neighbouring properties
 - 21 day public submission period (down from 30)
 - Submissions considered by task force
- Stage 3 – Proposal goes to independent planning consultants hired by HNSW to conduct additional assessment
- Once approved by both teams, construction permit is granted
- Process took 33 days on average down from 180 days

Victoria

- Victoria Planning Scheme Amendment gives state planning minister approval authority
- Public notification and third party appeal is remove
- SHI projects assessed against municipal planning schemes
- Stage 1 – housing developer employs independent town planner to certify projects
- Stage 2- Once certified, proposal is submitted to state planning authority, then recommended to internal Standing Advisory Committee
 - When compliant, permit is issued

Case study – Parramatta and Port Phillip Councils

- Both LGAs had policies supporting the delivery of social housing
 - Parramatta's Affordable Housing Policy
 - City of Port Phillip's Housing Trust
- One encountered extreme opposition against affordable housing; the other encountered very little opposition to those dwellings built as part of the SHI

Resident opposition?

Table 1: Concerns raised in formal submissions in Parramatta

Concerns	Parramatta
Parking/traffic	84%
Physical form/density	73%
“Out of character”	62%
Amenity (privacy, shadowing etc.)	72%
Safety/crime	40%
Planning process	43%
Management of property	40%
Type of residents/disadvantage	24%
Environmental issues (trees, infrastructure)	12%
Property values	15%
Transiency of residents	20%
Antisocial behavior	3%
Number of submissions analysed	401

Source: Submissions accessed through Parramatta City Council’s “My Development” online planning portal (amended from Davison et al, 2013: 83)

Implementing critical social infrastructure?

*My view was we had a unique opportunity to deliver a project [the SHI] that was going to create jobs...and that I had a responsibility to push this [SHI] program through, even if it was at my own expense....And frankly in my entire life this is the thing I am most proud of – that we built 6,000 homes for poor people and we didn't give a f**k whether people objected. Because otherwise it just would not have happened (former State politician)*

An improved process?

If it hadn't been for the [SHI] process...that was really the most effective technique on that project, independent of any strategies we put in place. Without the [SHI] fast tracking process the project could have been held up in planning for years. The [SHI] process was of great value to us given the tight timeframes that were imposed (NFP Housing Provider, Victoria)

...we found that the self-assessment process was more rigorous than Council...it was by no means a rubber stamp... (Senior staff, NSW State Housing Authority)

Opposition reared its ugly head...

Residents also claim they have been silenced by draconian laws enforced last year which block locals from appealing against public housing in their neighbourhoods.... The rights of citizens to appeal to council or the Land and Environment Court have been over-ruled by the Nation Building and Jobs Plan Act and the State Environmental Planning Policy for Affordable Housing (The Telegraph, 2nd January, 2010).

- Weakened role of local government (acutely felt in Parramatta):

...with planning decisions, everybody just assumes that it is the local council's responsibility (Local Politician)

...But not in all instances

We wrote to all of the mayors at the beginning of the project just to say exactly what we were doing. We worked also through the not for profit housing associations because approximately half of the projects in Victoria were delivered through the housing associations, so they were in some ways the front line in terms of trying to communicate to councils and communities about the benefits of the projects.....

We had a lot of projects; there were 900 plus projects and 4,500 units that needed to be developed. Given that at any one time there may have been four or five contested projects, and often these projects went for quite a long time, I guess we had to put our energies into those projects. But we also had to get some information out there about the quality of the design, and the fact that nowadays public housing and community housing is designed to fit well into the surrounding neighbourhoods and streetscapes. We also need to get out some positive messaging, too, about just the need for affordable housing and affordable rental housing (Department of Human Services Officer)

Re-politicisation of social housing

- Departed away from existing statutory planning procedures
- SHI's fast tracked approach was praised by housing providers
- KPMG (2012: 32) - social housing approvals peaked across Australia at the height of the SHI, now that SHI has ended, approvals have dropped back to their comparatively much lower historical trends
- Resident opposition toward SH was reduced in Port Phillip; opposition existed in Parramatta, but little was directed toward the process
- Parramatta – local government agitation who felt stymied for the new legislation
 - Lack of council consultation
 - By removing the opportunity to formally engage – a basic form of participation in the planning processes – for the sake of avoiding conflict and promoting expediency, this opens other arenas where debate and disagreement can take place.
- In contrast to Port Phillip where a communication structure was in place to address potential concerns in the community
- Was it worth it? What are the policy implications for future planning? Can planning be depoliticised?

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