

'We don't have access to that': Social mix and the right to the city

Associate Professor Kathy Arthurson, Dr Iris Levin and Associate Professor Anna Ziersch,
Southgate Institute for Health, Society and Equity,
Flinders University, South Australia.
Contact: kathy.arthurson@flinders.edu.au

Abstract: This paper draws on the concept of 'right to the city', based on Lefebvre's work, in order to consider social mix policy. Despite some critique around the question of which right is referred to, and more specifically the right to what, for whom, and by whom, we understand it as a right to participate in and influence decision-making, and to enjoy and access local urban spaces. The idea that disadvantaged communities benefit from initiatives that dilute poverty and create mixed-tenure residential environments has been extensively studied over the past decade. Despite questions about the soundness of the underlying assumptions, implementing mixed tenure projects in Australian cities is an ongoing practice. The question of the right to the city is examined through the case study of Carlton Housing Estate Redevelopment Project (Melbourne). Data collection included in-depth interviews with public housing tenants, private residents and service providers, as well as neighbourhood observations and participation in on-site events. The findings suggest that public housing tenants' opportunities to influence and participate in processes of decision-making have been limited and there have been symbolic and physical barriers to full access to onsite urban space. From this perspective, at least in terms of opportunities to participate and fully enjoy newly designed open spaces in their community, they have been denied a right to the city.

Introduction

Renewal Projects to upgrade concentrations of ageing public housing located in particular spatial geographic areas of cities and regions are commonplace in Australia and internationally. Most of these projects involve relocation of public housing tenants to other areas in order to dilute the concentrations of disadvantaged residents and create mixed-housing tenure residential environments. The premise that disadvantaged communities benefit from mixed tenure initiatives has been extensively studied over the past decade. Despite the numerous questions raised about the soundness of the underlying assumptions, implementing mixed tenure projects in Australian cities and internationally is an ongoing practice. Contemporary renewal projects are neoliberal in approach characterised by partnerships with the private sector (Lupton & Fuller 2009; Arthurson 2003a) and discourses about mixed communities, which reflect a move by governments from redistributive to relational policies (Arbaci & Rae 2013). The focus is on who the disadvantaged should mix with and role modelling of good citizenship through propinquity to home owners in urban space rather than on the welfare state providing support for the disadvantaged to reach their full potential.

This paper commences by outlining the theoretical framework for the current project, followed by some background information about the case study of the Carlton Estate upgrading project. Then the findings are presented before drawing some conclusions about what this means for public housing tenants' rights to the city.

Framework

In developing the theoretical framework for the research we utilised Lefebvre's arguments that the right to the city can be achieved through two principal means. The first of these concerns is about the right to appropriate or access and fully utilise local urban space. Pertinent to our study of public housing tenants, ownership of urban space is not a requisite for accessing this right. The second is the right to participate in decision-making processes about issues concerning the production of urban space. Again this appears relevant to public housing tenants on urban renewal sites where the nature and production of urban

space is substantially reorganised. We consider these two aspects in turn and the barriers to achieving them as follows.

The right to access and fully utilise local urban space

Lefebvre (1991) contends that the right to access and appropriate urban space in the local neighbourhood can be impeded through processes of class formation. Some of the ways this happens is, for instance, through the middle classes developing privatized or gated communities within particular neighbourhoods, the displacement of poor residents in the case of gentrification of working class areas, segregation of the poor in certain parts of neighbourhoods or the development of privatised facilities and services that are not shared with the lower classes. In all these different ways the middle classes can control their distance from other class groups. Likewise they may choose to inhabit mixed tenure neighbourhoods without giving up their practices or values (Andreotti et al 2013). Other processes that threaten the right to utilise urban space include where disadvantaged residents are forcibly relocated, stigmatised by others or experience feelings of non-belonging that result in them not being comfortable about accessing local urban space. The latter aspects may include factors, such as harassment, hostility or physical inaccessibility to local spaces (Bezmez 2013: 96).

Market driven redevelopment strategies that privatise public housing, transfer property and administration to private developers and rely for success on attracting middle income home owners to neighbourhoods may also privilege 'exchange value orientations', which are opposed to Lefebvre's notion of access to urban space (Arthurson 2001). Clearly these sorts of processes that reconstitute the housing tenure mix through including homeowners and private renters in local urban spaces previously characterised by high concentrations of public housing tenants have implications for the access to local urban space.

A more positive perspective on the right to access local space is insinuated in the integrationist aspects of urban regeneration projects. This ideal merges with Lefebvre's call to end social segregation in urban space between the classes. Specifically, through mixed tenure projects the disadvantaged may gain access to parts of the city that they otherwise would not have entry to (Chaskin & Joseph 2013).

Thus, in summary, the pertinent question in relation to urban renewal is whether, for residents isolated through disadvantage, reducing physical segregation of public housing tenure through implementing mixed housing tenure projects on public housing estates may assist or detract from their opportunities to fully access local urban space.

Right to participate in decision-making processes about issues concerning the production of urban space

Building on the work of Lefebvre, since the late 1990s a related nascent literature has developed that views the city as a scale where more democratic conceptualisations of urban citizenship can be developed. Certainly contemporary attempts at estate renewal and creating mixed tenure communities acknowledge the importance of working in partnership with the community in the planning and implementation processes. In reality, however the housing authorities' public private partnerships make attempts at involving residents in renewal more challenging due to a number of factors. These include commercial in confidence and other clauses related to timelines for participation that promote expediency, which often detract from community involvement (Arthurson 2003b; Purcell 2003). Regeneration partnerships are also permeated by major power differentials whereby large well-funded and professional partners can control agendas, which may exclude the voices of the disadvantaged in decision-making processes (Bezmez 2013).

Lefebvre (1991) identifies three categories of spatial production: spatial practice; representations of space (space directly lived through associated images and symbols); and representational space (incorporates residential practices and belonging). These practices can also be used to include or exclude the different social classes. In reconstituting mixed tenure communities, for instance, visions of place legitimised by market capital may include symbols and images of what will attract middle class home owners to

purchase housing in the areas. These images may be imposed on residents or the new image may be democratized through providing opportunities for community development through resident involvement in decision-making (Arthurson 2001). The way places are remade through implementing renewal projects thus represents a way of negotiating ownership of space in a given neighbourhood. In these processes issues of place and class intersects as places may 'reconstruct classes identities' (Benson & Jackson 2013).

Some commentators have argued that it is imperative to consider these ideas about the rights to the city within diverse local settings (Bezmez 2013). In responding to these contentions we consider a case study of Carlton Housing Estate Redevelopment Project in Melbourne, Victoria. We also build on Chaskin and Joseph's (2013) work on the 'rights to the city' in housing estates in North America, which focused on controlling behavior, disorder and safety issues. In reporting their findings they suggested that future research needed to explore issues around the design and allocation of public space, and the way citizens are enabled to participate in remaking the city in order to support social inclusion rather than creating divisive spaces. In this paper we consider questions about:

- 1) What sort of mechanisms has the Carlton Estate mixed income project adopted to integrate public housing tenants and provide access to local urban space?
- 2) How have public housing tenants been provided with the right to participate in decision-making processes about issues concerning the production of urban space?

Carlton Estates Redevelopment Project

The case study of Carlton estate is located in the north eastern boundary of the City of Melbourne. It was constructed during the 1960s as a result of a massive slum clearance program undertaken by the then Housing Commission of Victoria (Tibbits, 1988: 124-6). The Estate spans 7.5 hectares over three sites, known as Lygon, Keppel and Elgin. The Carlton Housing Estate redevelopment is the largest public-private partnership project of this type in Victoria. It commenced in 2006, incorporating three stages of implementation, with expected completion overall by 2017 (DHS 2013). The project includes construction of a retirement village, aged-care centre and new public parks and improvements to gardens and landscaping, and demolition and renovation of existing high-rise public units.

The research project focuses on the Lygon site (stage 1) as this was the only completed complex (completed June 2011) at the time the study commenced, and both public and private residents have moved in. Prior to redevelopment, the site included eight walk-up buildings of four stories each. Post redevelopment it contains three adjacent buildings that face out onto different streets but together enclose a communal outdoor space. The public housing building is eight storeys high, while the two private apartment buildings are four storeys with separate entrances and car parks to the public housing. The Lygon site walk-up apartments were demolished in late 2006 and Table 1 summarises the numbers of units before and after redevelopment.

Table 1: Number of public and private units in the Carlton estates, pre- and post-redevelopment

<i>Housing Estate</i>	<i>Pre-redevelopment</i>		<i>Post-redevelopment</i>	
	Public units	Private units	Public units	Private units
Lygon estate – stage 1	128	0	84	98

(Source: DHS 2013)

The Research Project

The research project commenced in early 2011 and included both qualitative and quantitative methods: observations on the Estate and at community events while taking field-notes; in-depth interviews with tenants who relocated and moved back to the redeveloped building and tenants who decided not to return; a survey of tenants; interviews with policy makers and community stakeholders; and interviews with private residents.

As summarised in Table 2, fifty one participants were interviewed in total, including thirty one public housing tenants, ten private residents, and ten service providers and professionals. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting on average 40 minutes (varied between 20 minutes to over two hours) and were recorded in a digital form and then transcribed. Tenants also answered a short survey at the end of their interviews and their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Participants in the research N=51

	<i>Interviewed</i>
Public housing tenants who live in the redeveloped complex	21
Public housing tenants who did not return to the redeveloped complex	10
Private residents who live in the redeveloped complex	10
Policy makers and service providers	10
Total	51

Table 3: Sample demographic characteristics of public and private residents N=31

<i>Characteristics</i>	
Average age (years)	40-49
Female %	40%
Australia-born %	47%
Work or study part- or full-time %	13%

Findings

The right to appropriate or access local space

Local service providers and agencies involved in Carlton estate originally envisaged the mixed tenure aspect of the project as constituting a blend of privately owned and public housing tenure units, within the same buildings. In reality, they responded that the promise of true social inclusion, at least in a physical spatial sense, of propinquity between poor and rich did not eventuate. This situation was attributed by some respondents to the impact of the global financial crisis. It was suggested that the original ideal of social mix then appeared 'too risky' for the developers that needed to sell units to private homeowners to make the project financially viable. The developers invested significant funds in the project so the government 'had to give in' to their demands. Thus the three buildings were located around the block with each facing a different street with a diluted form of social mix comprised of two buildings containing only private units, and one building only public units. There are no shared footpaths or any other open space to enable physical and social interaction between public and private residents.

The whole concept of the redevelopment as put by the Office of Housing was that it was going to break down barriers, break down social barriers, break down the barriers of the 'us and them', private/public, because of the great vision of having private and public residents living together. Very, very good idea in a vacuum but you have to do it properly... (SP3).

Originally this idea of the link through road would have opened all this up and people would have walked this way and that way and that way but now there's no through way. The reason that happened was...it all had to be scrunched up a bit to make it denser so that the private developers could make their profit because there was a world financial crisis going on and they [were] saying 'we've got to make these two bigger to be able to maximise our profits as we originally thought and to make them more attractive we want a private courtyard' and the Office of Housing buckled to that pressure and that's what we've ended up with so it's not a mix anymore (SP8).

The wall

Overwhelmingly the key aspect of the renewal project that has raised issues about access to local space is the so called 'communal garden'. This area (shown in Figure 1) consists of a small courtyard enclosed by the three buildings, which was initially designed for residents from all three buildings to utilise. Nevertheless, while the 'communal garden' is visible from the balconies of units in all the buildings it is now a space that only residents of the two private buildings can access. A wall was built that separates the public housing tenants from their neighbours the private residents.

Figure 1: The communal garden enclosed by the three buildings



.....but really the big side is the social and demographic changes the community needs to address and that's kind of almost been completely missed, I believe. The one difference there - and that's very symbolically marked by the garden that the public tenants can look at but can't go into, a nice little private place. It's not actually that they don't have space because there'll be another public garden just nearby but it's kind of a significant symbolic thing (SP2).

The company that was doing the development suddenly had a lot of power in their negotiations with the Office of Housing because the developers were falling like flies because they didn't make a profit out of it so the Office of Housing, Human Services [DHS] backed away and gave into their demands to have a private courtyard there. They shouldn't have done that, they should have stuck to the principles of diversity on the estate, rich and poor... (SP8)

Lawton (2012) outlined a similar situation in his investigation of social mix policies in Amsterdam whereby a smaller scale barrier was erected in a mixed tenure estate to divide the open space so

only private residents could utilise it. He argues that it formed a “psychological barrier ...and exemplified the division of different groups within the block” (Lawton 2012: 113).

Reactions to the decision about segregating social mix within buildings and constructing the wall were negative from local service providers and public and private residents alike and seen as opposed to social inclusion:

I walked into the sales office...They didn't know who I was....he did not mention the public residents...I said 'now there's a public housing building here, is that right?' and he said 'yes, but there's a wall there and they can't get ...into your private space' that's exactly how he said it, so that was how they were selling them. They weren't selling it as one of the most amazing opportunities for social inclusion..getting to know people ...on a different social level. No, it's not about that it's about getting an inner city unit (SP3).

It could have been a cutting edge project and instead, because of the developers, we didn't get that and now we could say 'we told you' because even private tenants don't like that wall (SP1).

This supports the findings of other studies that have identified analogous situations whereby social mix becomes 'a smoke screen' for promoting homeownership opportunities for middle income residents rather than representing a means for social inclusion between different housing tenure groups (Van Kempen & Bolt 2009).

Respondents described how there was a sense of betrayal amongst tenants at Carlton Estate because initially they were promised a social inclusion project, then with the construction of the wall that did not eventuate. Instead of getting social inclusion it was asserted that they got segregation in the community. This illustrates the obverse situation of Lefebvre's (1991) call to end social segregation between different classes in urban space.

.....the private buildings that are built you can go and see yourself and the public are divided into two. Actually there's a fence, the same fence that you used to have in Germany that divided the east and the west; exactly I've got the same situation here (SP10).

There is a fair bit of a way, like a long way to go actually for – like we feel like they show me like you are the second, like the lowest class, you know. There is upper class always by blocking you, by – you can see green on the other side and on our side all you can see is just no backyard, no nothing and your view is onto the streets, to the cars and their view is to each other, facing each other and like there is an open area in the middle all those sorts of things, you know. But blocking it makes it even – that's it, this is where you stop, that's what it means, you know. They're blocking it; they put in a wall there. They put in a fence there to say that...(SH1)

Lefebvre's concept of appropriation (1991) is useful here as he argues that space must be produced in ways that make full usage and accessibility possible to all inhabitants. The courtyard represents a private space that is inaccessible to public housing tenants.**Differentiating public from private housing**

Numerous examples were provided by respondents of how the interests of market capital in a neoliberal agenda worked against social inclusion, promoting images about acceptable levels of difference in urban space (Lees 2008):

... the two private towers have rules of what they can do and there's no rules for the Director Housing. So it's very segregated in the sense that if they at least all followed the same rules there's some sort of unity and community where it's sort of 'us and them' and it's really hard for me to send out letters to people saying 'please don't put your washing on your balcony' when they look out and it's a Chinese laundry happening with the Director of Housing tower (Pri1).

The right to participate in decision-making processes

Respondents suggested that the consultation processes did not enable tenants to access their rights to participate in decision-making processes about the issues around the production of urban space:

There's been so-called consultations throughout but it hasn't been real, hasn't been effective, hasn't been empowering for tenants. ...You know, it really is a hard thing to do well but it's not that it can't be done. I think some people, significant players in the redevelopment within DHS, have more of an engineering brain...have made it challenging to have effective communication because that's not the way they work.. I'm not saying that the community should have equal say or whatever on the outcome but to really engage and to see people as valuable people to have onboard and to have their input is a very different approach to what was 'yeah, okay we'll do it' (SP4).

The challenges of the private sector partnership

In part some of the problems emerged from the private sector partnership which imposed challenges and limitations on the consultation processes related particularly to commercial in confidence clauses and time pressures.

I'm not privy to commercial in confidence stuff that existed but that really got people off on the wrong track so can you believe anything they – because that wasn't part of years of consultation but when it came to the crunch and the global financial crisis they were – they just could not get the cash from the banks etcetera, so that really tightened their demands on the government and the government then had to more or less like it or lose it (SP7).

I think tenants felt that they were involved and the Office of Housing went through a process which allowed people to have a say but in reality much bigger forces are at play when you're talking about a \$400m redevelopment project than Mrs Jones's view on what her flat should look like. They include the greed of the developers and their need for profits and the world financial crisis and how competent and strong the top bureaucrats in the Office of Housing are. That's the reality so you can tinker around with consultation and make it look good and all bureaucrats obviously will want to go to their politicians and say 'we have consulted, minister, we have asked the people' because there's votes in that..(SH6).

Community Liaison Committee (CLC)

One example that perhaps sheds light on how the consultation was conducted is the Community Liaison Committee (CLC), which is the consultative body that 'brings together public and private residents of Carlton, Melbourne City Council, community agencies, schools and Victoria police to discuss the redevelopment' (DHS 2013a). Tenants and service providers reflected on the way the committee operated and identified power differentials present during the meetings as a barrier to tenant participation.

I've actually been there twice and I felt like I was like – well, like I was nervous and I'm like 'what is this?' ... and you feel like your lack of dress - like properly, the way they are, and you don't have that much connection with them, so like you've been there, you can't express yourself, you can't – you don't get the help you needed... (SH1)

Well the CLC was an intimidating aspect of getting people – as far as tenant involvement was concerned, being run directly by the Office of Housing and chaired by a member of parliament – sorry, placed there by the housing minister who had a clear vested interest in being the chairperson – well, a clear conflict of interest of being the chairperson, not – yeah, so that simple overarching concept of the CLC and with many suits at the CLC, figuratively and literally around the table....(SP3).

Accessibility to the meetings was also raised as an issue:

For a while [CLC] it was on the second storey of the school where you had to go – it was very complicated way of getting inside and up to the top. You had to go through another organisation that had to let you in, often not attended, with an automatic door. The instructions to get upstairs – because you had to go under the school to go to the elevator and go past the school level and then up the top. No multilingual instructions to get thereso the location was a problem So, yeah, consultation poorly done. (SP3).

Well unfortunately because a lot of the meetings....were held during periods of time where I had my kids so I wasn't able to get to a lot of meetings. I know prior to that when we had a few meetings I went and if they ever asked us to write things down I wrote, we discussed things amongst ourselves and went to representatives... I would see what was going on but unfortunately due to their meeting times when they were allowing the public or those who lived here before to come and have a look at the plans and procedures and what was organised I wasn't able to come a lot. The first time I actually saw the building in completion was when I got asked to move in (SH4).

Information provision rather than consultation

Comments from tenants and service providers also suggested that DHS provided information on what was going to happen at the redevelopment site rather than conducting 'real consultation' with residents that took on board tenants' preferences in relation to redevelopment.

...a lot of the time they were only giving information, holding information sessions. When they did consultation - there were some consultations that happened.....it was not consultation, it was going to a session offering choices of what the Office of Housing and other high interest stakeholders, private developers, had decided were options and saying 'okay, which one do you want?' and residents having to choose from often only one or two, like 'this one or that one?' ...the Office of Housing had come with what they were going to do. Questions that didn't fit with those options were not considered, they were mowed down, gently mowed down (SP3).

I'm no Philadelphia lawyer but I reckon that then they can say 'well, we consulted the residents'. They can say 'well we had a meeting once a month with the residents and they – sorry, ex residents – and they know what we're building so it's all above board' (SH2).

They don't speak to the communities or the community leaders or none of those things. Just all of a sudden all you see is block, block, block, they're all blocked. You can't walk this way and once they were trying to make a street through this playground, they were actually going to change it and then that's how – and then the people end up knowing that and that's how they knew that this is actually people that cared because once the news got around everyone started filling up the form 'we don't want – our kids don't – this is our backyard'. They come downstairs, what the kids are going to be run over by cars because why, they can't take about two minutes around the corner, cars and stuff? (SH4).

Conclusions

This paper has investigated issues around Right to the City in the Carlton Estate Redevelopment Project, specifically in relation to public housing tenants' rights to appropriate and access local spaces and participate in decision-making processes.

In terms of appropriating and accessing urban spaces our findings suggest that the Redevelopment Project was originally aimed at breaking down social barriers through a mixed income development where public housing tenants could integrate with other tenure groups in their local neighbourhood. However, due to financial constraints and pressure from the developers DHS 'gave in' and instead of building an inclusive development that promoted access to all residents a complex of three segregated buildings with separate entrances and car parks was developed. This included an enclosed garden that is available only

to private residents. In addition a wall was constructed that symbolically and physically separates public and private residents. Separate management, maintenance and building rules exist for the public and private buildings that have led to visual differences in appearance, resulting in visual segregation of the housing tenure groups. Thus it is concluded that the design and management of this complex does not provide access to local spaces or promote integration of public housing tenants. In effect the right to appropriate or access local space has been denied from public housing tenants.

The findings also suggest that for public housing tenants the processes of decision-making about their local neighbourhood have been challenging. For instance, given major power differentials tenants experienced difficulties in influencing decision-making particularly when their needs were juxtaposed against developers and other more powerful stakeholders. In addition respondents contended that the level of consultation DHS provided to tenants was limited to information provision and prevented tenants from feeling responsible for or owning changes. The design of the CLC, the formal mechanism intended to engage public and private residents in decision-making, prevented public housing tenants from participating fully. Thus the right to participate in decision-making processes appears severely compromised.

In conclusion in applying Lefebvre's concept of the Right to the City, as we have in this paper, to stage one of the Carlton Housing Estate Redevelopment Project tenants' rights have not been fully acknowledged, a practice that we believe is in sharp contrast to the principles social mix policies should stand for.

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