Democratic Infrastructure?
Delivering affordable housing under Australia's Social Housing Initiative

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Abstract:

In response to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-9, city planning in Australia has seen state governments embrace infrastructure packages to stimulate the economy. In particular, the delivery of social housing through the Social Housing Initiative (SHI) occurred through a fast-tracked method of planning. This represented a departure from the local statutory processes, which offer residents engagement opportunities and gave local government control of approving social housing construction in existing established areas of the city. This paper examines how government strategies to deliver social housing in difficult economic climates impacted upon democratic planning in Australian Cities. Reporting on recent AHURI research that compared local opposition to affordable housing projects in two States within the period of the Commonwealth Government's Social Housing Initiative (2009-2012), this paper draws on semi-structured interviews with State and local government planners, housing providers and politicians in Victoria and New South Wales. These interviews show that government stimulus programs, whilst delivering essential infrastructure to cities in a quick and efficient manner, can lead to the re-politicisation of its delivery. Drawing upon the emerging literature on post-politics, this research suggests that locally democratic planning practices respond to national/state government intervention strategies in a variety of ways, which is changing the politics of social infrastructure delivery.

Introduction

Urban planners are perennially confronted with an expectation to consult residents in planning decision-making, while at the same time being decisive, which is to say, getting on with implementing policy (March, 2012). This tension is acutely felt when examining the unique role State and local governments play in contemporary planning practice in uncertain economic climates. The former is concerned with achieving broad collective goals and, particularly the management of economic growth (Rydin, 2013). In contrast, the latter is the level of government that most adheres to formal procedural practices that provide opportunities for citizens to shape policies and programmes (Healey, 2010: 58). Planning remains a process by which competing objectives for land use are reconciled (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2011: 89). In seeking to overcome conflict planners have adopted deliberative and more consensus-building styles of planning practice (Forester, 2009). In practice, governments tend to embrace these engagement styles in strategic plan-making exercises, as is seen to be the case in the recent planning reforms in NSW (NSW Government, 2013). Post, plan-making, residents and other stakeholders (e.g. small businesses) look to opportunities in the statutory planning process for participation in decisions that pertain to specific, neighbourhood-level developments (Willey, 2006).

Similar to the strategic planning process, which is deeply political (Sandercock and Friedmann, 2000), the development application approval process shares similar political qualities. Contestation manifests through not-in-my-backyard resistance to proposed development, and exacerbated by negative media campaigns and may become politicised when opponents look to the political system to avert the proposed development (Davison et al, 2013). In seeking to reduce time-delays, minimize conflict and respond to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008-9, amendments were made to the usual development approval processes - application/public display/public comment/amendments/approval - to enable certain projects[1] to be delivered quickly (i.e. streamlined). Rather than utilise existing local government planning frameworks and democratic systems (e.g. public notification and third party appeals processes), a state government-led streamlined approach was installed. In doing so, conflicts were managed by a higher order of government (the State) by removing opportunities for comment and indeed disagreement.

This paper draws on over 400 planning submissions to proposed social housing projects, semi-structured interviews with State and local government planners, housing providers and politicians across NSW and Victoria and an extensive media and government document review conducted as part of an AHURI project that examined local opposition to affordable housing in Australia. By drawing on this data, this paper seeks to understand the effects of the GFC on local planning processes from a post-politics perspective. Drawing upon Allmendinger and Haughton's (2010) explanation of post politics, the paper examines the impacts the move towards a rapid delivery of much needed social infrastructure (e.g. social housing) had on local democratic planning systems. The following sections present some of the findings from this research by considering and also comparing the different policy contexts, and the processes undertaken to support the quick mass delivery of social housing before turning to a discussion on the impact this had on the democratic systems of planning. However, before presenting the findings, a discussion about the post-political turn in planning is presented.

Shifting towards a post-political era in local planning

The introduction of the Australian Governments' Social Housing (SHI) in 2009 led to the removal of appeal rights for some developments for the sake of expediency, bringing into view the tension between collective goals and local interests in planning (March, 2003; Wiley, 2006). In the context of delivering social housing, the introduction of a streamlined approach is significant for two reasons. First, social housing is a relatively controversial housing type that regularly attracts opposition from the community (Takahashi & Dear, 1997; Karsten, 2012; Powe & Hart, 2011) and during the period of the SHI, it was delivered with relative ease. For some this was a welcome retreat from previous years

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[1] The Commonwealth Government committed $5.25 billion to the construction of new social housing under the Social Housing Initiative (SHI), the la state-levelrgest investment in social housing in recent decades (Milligan et al., 2010: 334). It delivered 19,700 new social housing dwellings across Australia, including over 6,000 in NSW and 4,500 in Victoria (KPMG, 2012: 30). The value it brought to the economy was seen to be approximately $1.1 billion in average annual value-added (GDP) over four years and directly benefitting the construction industry which saw 9,000 full time jobs created (KPMG; 2012: 2).

where, "between 2001 and 2010 the total stock of public housing fell by 6.6%, only partially offset by an increase in the community housing sector"[2] (Ruming, 2012). Second, and as Willey (2006) posits, the opportunity to appeal against an unwanted development is perceived to be an inherent democratic 'right' exercised through an appeal or a submission to local government. By removing such opportunities, state government alter local democratic due process limiting avenues available to residents to participate in the planning process[3]. This tension – minimizing opposition to promote growth within a democratic system of planning - speaks to the core of the "problem of planning", which is: "how to square the circle between commitment to more collaborative forms of policy making – where participation is now seen as crucial for the legitimation of planning decisions – and the reality of increasingly intractable opposition to development" (Inch, 2012).

In seeking to reduce opposition, democratic planning practices in Australia embrace several key mechanisms. Following the ascent of the communicative planning literature (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011: 90), participatory planning, which includes engagement with the community and other non-government stakeholders, is typically contained within strategic land-use plan-making processes and can best be delivered at the local government level. In Australia, city strategic planning processes engage the community in 'up front' dialogues, allowing values and ideas to be shared, which in turn ostensibly shape urban policy development (Wigan et al, 2013). Leading urban scholars have explored the growing importance given to participation in strategic planning and the role it plays in supporting change processes (Albrechts, 2012: 12; also Healey, 2012).

While, the rise of communicative planning brought with it the promise of open, inclusive and power neutralizing methods of engagement, in practice, this did not mean a complete delegation of power to citizens (March. 2004). Rather it created a tension between the implementation of policy (agreed upon in the earlier stages of strategic planning) and the resistance to those policies from individuals (Miller, 2007 in Allmendinger et al, 2011: 96). Relating this tension to the delivery of social housing, the introduction of urban economic stimulus programs, even with clearly defined briefs to implement a growth agenda (KPMG, 2012), relied on amended planning legislation that would ultimately address the conflict between policy implementation and contestation at the local level by redefining – and indeed limiting - the participation of the wider community and the role of local government in the planning process.

In this difficult, post-GFC economic climate, national governments have shown themselves willing to trade-off short-term citizen and local government acceptance of state-level planning decisions against the rapid implementation of major public investment decisions to create jobs (OECD et al., 2012). In doing so, the benefits of local participatory planning described in the planning literatures are potentially lost (Walker et al., 2006; Albrechts, 2010). Inch (2012: 524) calls this style of urban management, 'post-political conflict management'. The 'post-political turn' in planning reduces the opportunity to critically debate and question the basic premises upon which key decisions are fundamentally made. In seeking to suppress contestation through consensus-based politics, the parameters of the debate are narrowly defined to enable a neoliberal growth agenda (Swyngedouw, 2007 in Allmendinger et al, 2011: 91); within the context of the GFC, that was to create jobs – a broader national economic imperative - by building infrastructure.

Resident and local government engagement is often thought to be an essential ingredient to policy delivery because the inclusive nature of participation invites a broad range of perspectives, knowledge and ideas into the policy decision-making and implementation processes (Innes and Booher, 2010). In doing so, the policy outcomes also benefit from being perceived to be more legitimate and acceptable as a result (Dryzek, 2010). Yet, by circumventing arenas where dissent can be heard, critical social housing infrastructure was able to be built quickly, without contestation from residents. This raises an interesting tension: managing a national and state government's prerogative to implement policy goals in a top-down fashion in the name of economic growth *and* to give residents the opportunity to participate and local government the responsibility of steering housing delivery through the local planning process (March, 2012). This tension was magnified by the GFC. With increased economic uncertainty, research into the effects of the GFC on the role of local democratic

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[2] Like Ruming, this article considers social housing to mean housing provided by both the community and public sectors.
[3] It is important to note that Willey (2006) also discusses how third party appeal rights could also be seen to be undervaluing existing representative democratic systems that give elected councils oversight of broader community objectives.

planning can reveal important insights about how to blend growth imperatives with social policy and democratic process into the future.

State government intervention: implementing the SHI in NSW and Victoria

The GFC threatened national economies by impeding job growth. In responding to the GFC, the Australian Commonwealth Government took direct control of public investments at the national government level to stimulate growth and to create jobs. In doing so, the development of the SHI – developed under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package - disrupted efforts by local city managers in some states to lead the delivery of social housing in their own neighbourhoods (Owens et al., 2011). This top-down interventionist strategy initiated by the federal government and then managed through state governments had the public interest aim of accelerated delivery of social housing over a 3.5 year period (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). With an initial investment of $5.64 billion to social housing, $5.24 billion was allocated to construct 19,700 new social housing dwellings, with NSW and Victoria enjoying the largest share of that investment (KPMG, 2012: 2).

The swiftness of this delivery required states to amend their pre-existing State policies: under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan Act 2009 and in conjunction with the A-SEPP in NSW and the temporary amendment VC56 to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 in Victoria (KPMG, 2012: 64) - shifting approval authority from local councils to State Housing Authorities. In the case of NSW, a small task force of planners and government officials was established to assess proposals (Ruming, 2012), thus significantly condensing the stages of approval to three; down from a much lengthier process involving upwards of six or seven stages. In stage one, a preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report was prepared by Housing NSW assessing the local and State planning controls against the NSW Environment and Assessment Act (1979). Stage two involved notifying the relevant LGA and neighbouring properties of the proposed development with a 21-day formal submission period for comments. Under usual state planning legislation – the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 – the public exhibition period is 30 days. The revised process saw submissions considered by the same team responsible for the preliminary EIA, with the EIA then finalised in light of public comments. The final stage involved referring the proposal and finalised EIA to a second team of independent planning consultants hired by Housing NSW to conduct an additional planning assessment. Only once the proposal was recommended for approval by both assessment teams could construction proceed. The SHI shortened this process considerably from 180 days to approximately 33 days (KPMG; 2012: 47).

Also in the case of NSW, the SHI compounded efforts by the State Government through the State Environmental Planning Policy Affordable Rental Housing (A-SEPP) to incentivise privately financed affordable housing developments. Adopting the same streamlined approach to housing, Housing NSW would assess one- and two-storey social housing projects comprising 20 dwellings or less, overriding local council planning controls and bypassing appeal opportunities. These also included privately-financed low and medium developments and boarding houses in existing low density residential zones as long as a proportion of the units provided were managed by a Not-For-Profit (NFP) housing provider (NSW Government, 2009). What this created was a situation where Housing NSW was self-approving its own projects, and because the projects were streamlined there was little interaction between the State government and local planning authorities to elicit shared consent.

In contrast to NSW, Victoria does not share the same history of using the state planning system to achieve affordable housing outcomes and has typically relied upon the statutory planning system to regulate land markets and development. Further, Victoria does not have a NSW style SEPP or any kind of inclusionary zoning mechanism that can be used by councils to drive it. Without State level direction toward affordable housing, local government is left to create policies that support its delivery. When the Commonwealth Government established the SHI in 2009, the Victorian government responded by enacting the Victorian Planning Scheme amendment which gave the State Planning Minister responsibility to approve SHI projects. Under this amended scheme, public notification was removed, as was the opportunity to appeal proposed projects through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). Although public notification was removed, and the process was steered by the State Government, SHI projects underwent an assessment against existing municipal planning schemes which involved the following steps. First, housing developers had to employ an independent town planner to certify their own projects. Once a project was certified, the proposal was submitted to the Victorian Government Planning Authority to be reviewed by planning staff. Once reviewed the proposal was then recommended to an internal Standing Advisory Committee, which

provided an expert and semi-independent review of the application. This committee would consider recommendations on the various applications that came through before submitting recommendations to the ministerial delegate for sign off. However, if an issue was identified, the proposal would be sent back to the planner managing the process internally who would then be tasked with liaising with the developer regarding necessary changes. When the project was deemed compliant, a planning permit was issued (Davison et al, 2013).

Although the Victorian process excluded community members from commenting on development proposals directly, local councils were able to provide feedback over a two-week period. Where councils had concerns, amendments could be made before the permit was issued. Overall, the approval process for each project took approximately a month, considerably less time than would usually be taken under standard assessment processes where projects would be subject to potential appeals.

A 'post-political' approach to housing delivery?

Addressing the "problem of planning" (Inch, 2012) involves seeking a balance between local democratic systems that manage planning and housing ambitions at the neighbourhood level, and those systems that work to achieve broad collective outcomes for the wider metropolitan/state area. As the SHI program shows, one can manipulate how social housing is delivered; in part by managing dissent long enough to get a project through the planning system. In the local government areas (LGAs) of Parramatta (NSW) and Port Phillip (Vic) - the two LGAs of interest to our AHURI-funded research on local opposition to affordable housing (see Davison et al, 2013) - the delivery of social housing post-GFC, circumvented local government planning systems. This included excluding public notification (in Vic) and third party appeal (in both NSW and Vic). Therefore, the opportunity generally given to a resident to oppose a project through the formal statutory channels was removed. These extraordinary steps were taken even while Parramatta and Port Phillip supported the delivery of social housing, evidenced by Parramatta's Affordable Housing Policy (Parramatta City Council, 2009) and City of Port Phillip's long history of local government policies that committed an inclusive and diverse place to live for all (City of Port Phillip, 2007).

Even though Parramatta and Port Phillip Councils shared a commitment to build social housing and to use the local planning system to delivery this built form, dramatically altering the process of delivery had two implications. As discussed earlier, social housing can be a very contentious form of housing (Karsten, 2012; Takahashi & Dear, 1997; Powe & Hart, 2011), and with the introduction of a fast-tracked process, it was expected that residents would express disapproval around the method of delivery. However, the SHI provoked only a moderate amount of resident opposition towards the actual process. In Parramatta, where we examined 401 planning submissions against 51 social housing projects subject to the streamlined process set forth by the State's participation in the stimulus program and A-SEPP, concerns about the planning processes were raised in 43% of the submissions in Parramatta (see Table 1). A similar comparison could not be made of planning submissions in Port Phillip because of the lack of process available to residents to formally object to social housing proposals resulted in no objections. Thus, formal opposition to proposed social housing in Port Phillip was absent. This is in direct contrast to the 267 formal submissions lodged against eight projects, which were not subject to the streamlined process in Port Phillip, but formed part of our analysis (Davison et al, 2013).

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)

Instead, the opposition against social housing in Parramatta, and the process undertaken to deliver it, was fueled by local politicians. In our research we interviewed housing providers, government planners and politicians in Parramatta and Port Phillip. The results from the interviews brought to the fore the tension between local democratic systems and top-down government-led decision-making. Some government and non-government interviewees believed that it simply would not have been possible to deliver the SHI dwellings in NSW and in Victoria under standard local planning assessment and community consultation procedures. It was stated by one former politician in Parramatta that the fast-tracked approval process enabled the large volume of social housing dwellings to be delivered in a shorter period of time:

> 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.

This strategy was viewed as being extremely effective by one housing organisation. Despite the limited opportunity to object, interviewees from the State Housing Authority in NSW claimed that this two-stage approval process was more rigorous than the standard planning approval process through local governments:

> …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)

Some interviewees also held the view that by speeding up planning approval times, the usual risks that proposals typically encounter - including long delays and legal costs resulting from opposition (Willey, 2006) – were removed.

While, the expedient delivery of social housing across Parramatta and Port Phillip may have removed some contestation expressed through the number of public submissions and appeals, it did so by altering the development approval process for social housing and subsequently weakened the role of local government in the delivery of social housing across the two states. Particularly, in Parramatta, this damaged the relationship between the Parramatta Council and the State Government, with Parramatta Council questioning whether the State Government was in an adequate position to determine if the developments were appropriate to specific locations, especially when they bypassed local government planning frameworks and assessment codes. The relationship between these two tiers of government in NSW was compromised after the introduction of the A-SEPP and the SHI, which enabled Housing NSW to self-approve projects, ultimately agitating local authorities and indeed residents who felt silenced through these legislative reforms.

> 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).

A year into the SHI (and not too long into the A-SEPP), residents who were accustomed to directing their opposition against proposal projects to local government continued to regularly direct their concerns (whether formally or informally) at local government rather than the state government who was the responsible authority. Despite the streamlined arrangements put in place by state government, residents still perceived local government to be the responsible agents for planning occurring in their neighbourhoods. The politics of the SHI and A-SEPP were being played out the local tire of government, with potential negative consequences for locally elected councilors.

One locally elected official in Parramatta posited that *"…with planning decisions, everybody just assumes that it is the local council's responsibility"*. In an effort to redirect negative attention back onto the state, Parramatta Council erected three-metre steel signs outside 30 proposed sites that read: 'Unsupported development: brought to you by the State Government'. Furthermore, some also held the view that, because of the self-approval nature, the proposed developments would contravene local planning controls. As such, the council offered little support for the SHI and the A-SEPP.

At the heart of the tension between local and state governments in NSW, particularly in Parramatta, was the issue that local council was not adequately consulted before the A-SEPP was enacted, and the SHI more generally, came into force. This lack of engagement, in part, may be explained by an anxious state government needing to thwart any negative effects brought about as a result of the GFC and a desire to introduce the A-SEPP quickly before new housing development came on line under the SHI. Interviewees suggested that the Department of Planning staff had spoken directly to just four or five local councils from a total of 152 across NSW prior to the introduction of the A-SEPP.

Those in need of housing benefited from this initiative by way of delivering a much needed form of housing. This approach was considered by some to be a welcome change to how social housing is delivered in the State. Similar to the view expressed in response to the SHI in Parramatta, several not-for-profit housing providers in Victoria also believed that if it were not for this initiative, this housing would not have been delivered:

> 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.

This comment is significant as the City of Port Phillip has a celebrated history of delivering social housing; evidenced by its title as the largest local government community housing provider across Australia between 1985 and 2006 (Gurran, 2003: 402; City of Port Phillip, 2012: 7). The City of Port Phillip continues to support community housing through an explicit commitment made to an inclusive and diverse community in Council policy documents (City of Port Phillip, 2007) and the enactment of a Housing Trust in 2005 to protect social housing assets. Even in a council area where support for social housing is one of its distinguishing features, the call to bypass formal engagement processes still persisted.

The Victorian experience under the SHI was slightly different to NSW and substantially more positive compared to the inter-governmental agitation between Parramatta Council and the NSW Government. In Victoria, a process was set in place to allow local government the opportunity to express concerns for development applications early in the process. Interviews conducted in Victoria with local government planners, councillors and State Government officials indicated that this exchange was mutually beneficial for both local and State governments. Local government had the chance to identify issues they thought were problematic and the State government, who could not possibly be across all issues and challenges unique to a particular local government area, could rectify these issues before the development was approved. In addition, for those developments that were subject to the strict timelines of the SHI in Victoria, a former Housing Department officer involved with the SHI revealed that a communications strategy was put in place to manage potential opposition to projects and to target those councils and housing organisations (rather than residents) where a social housing project was being proposed:

> 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.

Also, under the SHI, a robust communication strategy was used for projects deemed likely to encounter opposition.

> 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)

Under the SHI, resident notification and third party appeal rights were removed in favour of fast-tracking social housing development. While a social good was delivered, it flew in the face of local government planning process which residents had grown accustomed too. Despite the speed at which housing was provided and the lack of resident engagement, the Nation Building program and the process it adopted was praised by housing providers as a mechanism to avoid drawn out opposition campaigns.

Conclusion

This paper examined the impact of the SHI on local planning processes involved in delivering social housing. To prepare for the delivery of an unprecedented volume of social housing over a short period of 3.5 years, local government planning procedures were streamlined to accommodate this short-term federally funded stimulus injection. This meant a departure away from existing statutory procedures. Our analysis of local opposition to social housing in the period of the SHI revealed that opposition was indeed reduced and for social housing providers this was a much welcomed government intervention strategy. Instead, the agitation came from local government in NSW who felt stymied by the new legislation. The sentiment was perhaps worsened by the fact that local council was not consulted in the lead up to the NSW A-SEPP and SHI. Negative sentiments towards the NSW Government's handling of social housing implementation reflected a fragmented relationship between the two tiers of government. In contrast to NSW, Port Phillip Council was able to address potential concerns at the neighbourhood level as a result of engagement between the two tiers of government in Victoria. This allowed unforeseen concerns to be quickly addressed.

Regarding the Parramatta case, the question may be asked: was the heartache between the two tiers of government worth the trouble given the broad benefits from a national investment that led to new jobs and had the additional advantage of creating critical social infrastructure? According to an analysis undertaken by KPMG (2012: 32), social housing approvals peaked across Australia at the height of the SHI; however, now that the SHI program has ended, approvals have dropped back to their comparatively much lower historical trends. In answer to this question, the planning system must be prepared to accept that where planning may seek to reconcile competing interests in land use there will be winners and losers (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011: 89). In a streamlined, state-led system where the losers may be residents and local government the planning system must also be prepared to manage objectors, in this case local government, who will seek new arenas for dissent to be articulated (Swyngedouw, 2007 in Inch, 2012: 524): as was seen in the Parramatta case study. It may seem that conflict and dissent is being reduced within the neighbourhoods where social housing is being built, however, what this opens up is the opportunity for the politics of social housing to be constructed through other avenues and in other forums (MacLeod, 2013; Inch, 2012). 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. One of the fundamental principles underpinning the political in planning - that society uses the political to realize itself (Swyngedouw, 2011: 373) – is difficult to suppress over the long term. In the case of social housing delivery, local government plays an important role in

mediating conflict. The fact that conflict did not escalate in Port Phillip (under the SHI) can in part be explained by the communication structures put in place between the two tiers of government.

Nonetheless, the SHI has set a new precedence allowing governments to justify the limits they impose on local government participation on the grounds of national interests (e.g. to promote economic growth, or to produce a public good). Very recently, we have seen similar actions taken to limit engagement. For instance, the Victorian Government has used similar grounds to propose a new Bill that will amend the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act (2009) to enable a more streamlined process of assessment (Victorian Government, 2013) in support of a new road tunnel. The amendment redefines what is up for discussion and what is not as it relates to the implementation of a controversial road tunnel. The opposition against the road is being led by an inner city local government authority, which has initiated the 'Trains Not Toll Roads' Campaign (City of Yarra, 2013). Similarly, in NSW, the Planning Department through its planning reforms, are seeking to improve engagement at the strategic planning end of planning (NSW Government, 2013), while enabling more kinds of developments to be streamlined at the development application stage. This places significant demands on strategic planning to provide enough "locally situated information that can be imparted continuously through the planning process" (Cook et al, 2012: 90). In these cases, consensus politics is confined within the strategic planning end of planning, and the items up for discussion later on are considerably narrowed; indeed the role of local government also narrows. However, the extent to which this will limit opposition and conflict is unlikely. As the Parramatta case study shows, and as Allmendinger et al (2011: 101) who drew upon similar experiences in the UK warn, "What we are witnessing appears to be a new moment in the post-political management of dissent and the continuing selective displacement of the handling of controversial issues to alternative modes and scales of planning".

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