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Few people have their eyes off housing issues today. Whether we are concerned about homelessness, the cost of accessing and maintaining housing or its broader macro economic role, housing has come to be absolutely central to how we understand both our current and future wellbeing. All of this means that housing and community issues have now reached a new level of interest, both by policymakers and by a population at large concerned that the affluence and gains of the preceding decade are being suddenly eroded. For those who were unable to access this wealth the coming crisis offers little respite since even as falling house prices arrive there are now major concerns about unemployment and a slowing economy.

A new Commonwealth government has taken a more direct interest in dealing with the problems of housing supply, homelessness and private rental stress and yet has largely left direct subsidies to more affluent owners untouched and, in some cases, substantially increased them. This has left a worry that the resulting pattern of investment where stress is highest, and growing, may turn out to be insufficient.

The Housing and Community Research Unit have long been at the forefront of these debates about affordability, the need for investment in public and community housing as well as identifying problems around segregation, declining urban investment and the physical infrastructure that connects all of this together. To take two key examples we can see, in statistics generated by our recent research, that just less than a fifth of Australian households have some kind of second home and around 3 per cent of households live in homes or units protected by secure entry systems. Such obvious divisions in wealth and safety continue to mark the Australian housing and urban system. In this context research fills a major need to understand and tackle problems which might otherwise remain invisible. In welcoming you to our Annual Report I hope that you will find something of relevance to your own work or interests in these critical areas.

Dr Rowland Atkinson
(Director)
Housing and Stigma symposium

In June 2008, HACRU hosted a morning symposium to discuss the consequences of negative public perceptions of public housing for Australian society as a whole. Public housing’s problems stem from a lack of investment from policies over many years. Up until the 1980s, public housing was available to a greater mix of tenants but the high demand for public housing has meant that housing authorities have had little alternative but to prioritise those with the most pressing needs; namely households reliant on welfare support and those with serious health problems. Data from the 2006 census show that only 26% of public housing tenants eligible for work are in full or part time employment. The allocation policies that have been put in place negate any subsequent attempts by housing authorities to create more socially mixed communities and reinforces, further, the perceived linkage between public housing provision and policy failure.

There is nothing intrinsic or inevitable about public housing’s negative status or its association with poverty and policy failure. Significant financial investment is an essential first step for re-establishing public housing as an integral component of Australia’s housing system. Most important of all, an increase in the supply of public housing, would enable housing authorities to allocate a far greater proportion of homes to those who are economically active. A more flexible allocations policy to establish socially mixed communities is the best way to counteract the negative associations that have so undermined the life chances of those who reside in public housing. The symposium received considerable media publicity and the discussion paper prepared for the event can be accessed from the HACRU homepage: [www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/Discussion_Papers.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/Discussion_Papers.htm).
The Visual Index of Deprivation and Commonplace exhibition

Since 2007 the Unit has been working on a Visual Index of Deprivation (VID). The Index was designed to re-work understandings of place, amenity and opportunity by taking selected neighbourhoods on intervals of a statistical index (Socio-Economic Index For Areas or SEIFA) and then organising them into deciles and photographing housing, shopping facilities, play areas and public spaces in these areas. The resulting work allowed us to consider an aspect, such as housing, and compare differences in built form, quality and so on. More pertinently the index is designed as a means of generating public debate about what might be considered to be reasonable gaps in opportunity and what also should be considered to be benchmark minimums in residential quality and life-chances. The final report of the VID is nearing completion but HACRU presented the work under the guise of the exhibition Commonplace, which opened at the Moonah Arts Centre in February 2009 with selected images from the VID. Terry Martin MLC opened Commonplace with his observations about the changes in Hobart’s wealth and society and the broader issues raised by the images. 2009 will also see a further series of images, of public benches, presented at the University of Tasmania. Contact: Paula.Silva@utas.edu.au

Stigma Research Lab

HACRU is part of a team that in mid-2009 will deliver The Stigma Research Lab – an innovative arts-based strategy challenging the stigmatised status of disadvantaged housing neighbourhoods. The project is based in Hobart, and is potentially a prototype for significant and exciting interventions challenging housing stigma in other parts of Tasmania and Australia. HACRU has partnered with the Tasmanian School of Art, Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST) and the Moonah Arts Centre. Work is currently being commissioned from three contemporary Tasmanian visual artists, and developed in consultation with disadvantaged housing communities, for site-specific exhibition/installation. Keith Jacobs of HACRU is providing academic direction for the project, drawing on the Unit’s strong interests in housing stigma and social inclusion, and by Natasha Cica, collaborative project developer. Contact: Keith.Jacobs@utas.edu.au
State housing, disaster and emergency management

The bushfires that devastated large parts of Victoria and the tropical storms damage to communities living in northern Queensland in February 2009 have served as a salutary reminder of the vulnerability of many Australians to extreme weather conditions. In the light of the risks posed by natural disasters arising from climate change, AHURI funded research into the role that State Housing Authorities can play in disaster management. The new report available at www.ahuri.edu.au draws on research on flooding, bushfires and cyclones undertaken in New South Wales, ACT and northern Queensland. It provides a wide-ranging discussion on the role housing authorities can provide in assistance when environmental disasters occur such as temporary housing, repairs to damaged property and welfare support to households.

A number of key findings emerge from this project. First, the best forms of planning for disasters need to be transparent, locally based and properly resourced. Special care should be taken to ensure that the tension between ‘top down’ control mechanisms and the need for autonomy is managed well. Second, the high level of stress in managing complex tasks presents major challenges for SHAs and it is apparent that staff involved in disaster management activities are required to collect detailed information and take decisions quickly. Finally, as recent events testify, there is a need for State Housing Authorities to commit more resources - both financial and staffing - into disaster planning. The best forms of intervention require housing staff to collaborate with key relief agencies and where resources are quickly made available. Contact: Keith.Jacobs@utas.edu.au

Gated communities in Australia

Within and beyond Australia’s urban centres has risen a complex of target-hardened, walled and secured residential spaces. In place of largely open suburbs and domestic environments there has been a partial swap for a built environment that holds out significant implications for sociability, social networks, governance and physical mobility. These physical and spatial changes may have much to say about changing forms of social privatism and the relative (dis)integration of affluent households in the broader institutional and social network flow of cities. In this research we examined these forms of socio-spatial withdrawal to reflect on the wider impacts of these changes. A national sample survey was used to estimate the number of Australian households living in gated and secured developments to which public access is restricted. We found that residential housing development with special entry systems, such as entry codes or key cards, accounted for 5.9% of households, higher than that found for the US (3.4%). In addition we also found that 2% of households lived in developments with security personnel. Contact: Rowland.Atkinson@utas.edu.au
Arson and public housing

Dr Angela Spinney of HACRU has recently conducted a review of approaches to combating arson on behalf of Housing Tasmania, for the purpose of gathering and identifying effective and clear options for policy approaches and practice arrangements. The arson rate in Australia has climbed significantly over the past thirty years. During that time the population has grown by fifty per cent, while recorded arsons have increased by almost two thousand per cent. Arson costs Australia around $1.35bn a year and has become a significant and costly issue for many State Housing Authorities, with properties destroyed in this way every month in particular neighbourhoods. The review sought to identify strategies that are effective in promoting community awareness and safety, thus reducing the risk and subsequent cost of arson, as well as the most effective way of responding and supporting the community after an arson attack. The report draws together the major literature on arson, focusing on definitions and a comparison with the situation in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. It takes an overarching view of the causes of high rates of suspicious fires, looking at both the characteristics and motivations of arsonists, and the type of area which is most likely to experience a high incidence of suspicious fires. Contact: Angela.Spinney@utas.edu.au

Second homes in urban and regional Australia

Despite the growth of domestic and international markets in second homes there has been relatively little research on second homes in the Australian context. Yet several features of this context present interesting ways of extending the debates about second home ownership that have characterised social and policy discussions to date in the UK and Europe. In this research we considered the overall extent, regional distribution and broader impacts of a form of second home ownership that has risen rapidly and which is facilitated by a range of fiscal and macro-economic settings. We present the results of two national surveys that asked about the ownership of holiday homes and which reveal extensive ownership across a range of social groups (just less than 20% across households nationally). The research examined a case study in Tasmania by looking at the growing commodification of its holiday ‘shack’ market to add depth to discussions about the localised ramifications of second home ownership. Contact: Felicity.Picken@utas.edu.au

Loneliness in Australia

This research reports on a new nationally representative survey, carried out in 2007, which examined loneliness in contemporary Australia. The paper identifies loneliness to be a potentially very serious and widespread problem with profound implications but it also highlights the most ‘at risk’ groups and the pattern of loneliness across the life course. It strongly suggests that loneliness has reached unprecedented levels and that it may have as much to do with reduced social connectivity and networks as the quality of the social bonds themselves. The paradox of contemporary loneliness is that our unswerving pursuit of freedom means we are, at the same time, unwilling to commit to the enduring and stable bonds we crave as lonely people. While significant loneliness was evident among most groups and ages the survey suggests that for men, particularly those who have separated from partnerships, loneliness has been a more serious problem that is endured for longer periods as well as being a problem they are less able to deal with than women. In fact around a third of both Australian men and women in the prime of life have experienced loneliness as a serious problem at times. Contact: Adrian.Franklin@utas.edu.au or see the full working paper at: www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/occasional_papers.htm
The State of Australia’s cities

Policymaking in Australia has tended to decouple understandings of economic performance and sustainability from the role and state of its urban centres. A federal political system has also led to divided and non-strategic debates around water consumption, energy and transport infrastructure among several other contemporary concerns. Within the cities themselves a long boom has not resulted in the capture of fiscal resources or infrastructure investments that might have been allocated to defend against current and future concerns of resilience, social inequality and innovation or their spatial formation. This research considers a range of indicators of change, stress and well-being across all of Australia’s state capitals as well as many of its regional centres; where possible this is presented over the past decade in order to highlight change. Using measures including housing affordability, income-based segregation, violent crime, population growth and contraction, per capita spending on key items like public housing, schooling and recreation we profile a range of shifts that will be notable to strategists working across all tiers of government, in communities and in the private sector more generally. Fractious and factionalised debates pitched around particular constituencies and political geographies run the risk of exposing Australia to an uncertain and impaired urban future. This project follows the work of Rowland Atkinson and Gavin Wood (RMIT) in Urban 45 (for free download go to: www.rmit.edu.au/urban45) to generate strategic and ongoing interest in the vitality and economic role of Australia’s cities. The report will be available in mid 2009. Contact: Rowland.Atkinson@utas.edu.au

Gentrification and displacement in Australian Cities

Rowland Atkinson and Maryann Wulff are leading a team of researchers considering the question of how the in-migration of affluent households affects poorer and lower income households in cities. The work, funded by AHURI, is looking at Melbourne and Sydney where gentrification has appeared to increase and where there have been persistent risks that this may displace lower-income and vulnerable residents, particularly where their tenure is insecure in private rental accommodation. Gentrification has become a persistent feature of larger metropolitan and rural housing markets. This has had important consequences for community harmony, local services and infrastructure, the quality of local built environments and for the affordability of housing that has previously served low-income populations, often in central city districts. The costs of these processes therefore lies in their social and economic impacts as communities are priced-out of locations, journey to work times are increased and insecure renters face eviction or market dislocation. The research will identify estimates of the scale of displacement over the past decade, consider the social costs and impacts of gentrification via interviews and identify a range of policy initiatives to help ameliorate these problems. Contact: Rowland.Atkinson@utas.edu.au
Social mix, housing policies and community outcomes

What kind of neighbourhoods work and why? How many households of a particular social characteristic can be supported in a neighbourhood before it becomes problematic? These are difficult questions, yet they are often posed by policymakers seeking to manage declining investment in public housing and tighter rules of eligibility for access. This work provided a review of the international literature on social mix to address these questions as far as possible. The review identified a number of key issues. The causal linkage between areas of concentrated poverty and negative outcomes is complex and throws up a range of so-called area effects. These include the quality and availability of local essential public services (such as health and education), the role-model effects generated by living in extensively poor areas, the spatial disadvantage of excluded neighbourhoods as well as the broader attribution of personal deficiencies in residents of poor areas projected by the media and broader community (stigmatisation). Empirical evidence on the impact of area effects, the idea that such concentration has negative impacts on households, is varied but commonly suggests small yet statistically significant impacts on poorer households residing in poor areas. Qualitative research evidence highlights how being poor in a poor area has a stigmatising effect on households that is not present in more diverse or more socially balanced neighbourhoods. Social diversity has become a taken for granted element of producing more sustainable, inclusive and opportunity enhancing communities but local complexity and investment need to be considered as the route by which advances can be made. Contact: Rowland.Atkinson@utas.edu.au

Privatising Neighbourhoods?
Governance and Social Life in Master-Planned Residential Estates

This project, funded by the Australian Research Council, is looking at the newer kinds of neighbourhood being developed privately but which may have wider implications for social life in Australian cities, public spaces for social cohesion more widely (with Robyn Dowling at Macquarie and Pauline McGuirk at Newcastle University). Given a tendency to provide larger private estates which may include their own community services and for gated communities and blocks the possibility for greater privatism and social withdrawal by more affluent households is becoming a stronger possibility. The study is in progress in and around some of the newer estates of Sydney and a household survey has been completed. Across the six case study sites interviews with property developers, the staff of management boards and other relevant personnel is now underway. Contact: Rowland.Atkinson@utas.edu.au
The environmental sustainability of Australia’s private rental housing stock

This AHURI funded project will examine, with colleagues from RMIT and Monash Universities, the potential opportunities for and barriers to improving the environmental sustainability of Australia’s private rental stock. The project’s focus on private rental housing reflects: the growing significance of this tenure in the Australian housing system; the vulnerability of private rental tenants to higher energy prices; and the relative lack of environmentally sustainable policy initiatives directed towards private rental housing stock to date. In particular, the project will examine the impact of the Australian Government’s proposed Carbon Emissions Trading (CET) scheme on private rental tenancies. The scheme poses particular challenges for private rental tenants who are constrained in their adoption of low-emission substitutes as they do not have the right to adapt their homes without landlord acquiescence. Moreover, as the landlord does not reap the immediate benefits of investment in alternative energy efficient equipment, the financial incentives motivating such investment is weaker than those of homeowners. The project will outline the state government budgetary implications of higher energy rebates due to CET and provide policymakers with estimates of the effectiveness of state energy rebates in cushioning the impacts of CET on private renters. In addition, we will provide policymakers with insight into strategies that can encourage providers and consumers of rental housing to adopt more energy efficient practices, whilst ensuring that such policies do not exacerbate existing socio-spatial inequalities in Australian cities. Contact: Michelle.Gabriel@utas.edu.au
Regulatory frameworks and their utility for the not for profit housing sector

There has been considerable interest in Australian social housing in expanding the small ‘not for profit’ sector, within a regulatory framework that makes it possible for governments to give financial support. More generally, there has been an interest in good governance across the sector. Reviews of the legislative framework for community housing have considered the usefulness of regulatory options, including registration and licensing, accreditation and inspections. It is, however, salutary to consider that Chief Executives in Local Authorities in the United Kingdom have used strong language in criticising the Best Value inspection system run by the Audit Commission. More recently, the Cave Review (2007) has argued that regulation has not provided adequate protection to tenants. Regulation of housing in Australia has reached an important stage. A number of states have introduced different schemes, and a new National Regulatory Code is about to be introduced. This 2009 AHURI project will investigate the usefulness of regulatory frameworks for the ‘not for profit’ housing sector in Australia. The project team brings together Max Travers (a regulation specialist), Vivienne Milligan and Bill Randolph from the University of New South Wales and Rhonda Philips from the University of Queensland (who have each contributed to establishing a regulatory framework in Australia), and Keith Jacobs. Contact: Max.Travers@utas.edu.au
What future for Australian public housing?
A critical analysis

This AHURI funded project will be undertaken by researchers based at the University of Tasmania and RMIT. The extent of the problems associated with the lack of funds for public housing provides the rationale for this proposal which focuses on the medium and long-term future of public housing. The work is informed by the assumption that the demand for low-cost housing will remain high and that many of the people who require low-cost housing will be individuals with a high level of need. The overall aim is to look beyond the day-to-day issues that confront State Housing Authorities and to focus on the question of the viability of the sector, both in the medium and long-term. The project will involve a literature review covering the key drivers that have informed housing policy development in the post-1945, another focusing on the current era and developments over the last 10 years and the problems that have arisen in trying to manage housing stock in a period of budget constraint. Finally, the work will examine the viability and long-term future for public housing. It will draw out the resource and strategic implications of the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), scheduled to take effect from January 2009. The most significant potential finding of this project will be a wide-ranging and bold assessment of public housing's future role in meeting the needs of low-income households and its function within the suite of welfare services provided in Australia. Contact: Keith.Jacobs@utas.edu.au
Housing, Public Policy and Social Inclusion

This AHURI funded project will consider the ways in which housing processes can affect economic and social disadvantage and whether, and to what extent, housing and related policies and programs can be effective in addressing such disadvantage. The national social inclusion agenda recognises that, despite 15 years of economic growth, ‘deep’ socio-economic disadvantage or social exclusion persists for some people and some places. It envisages policies to strengthen social inclusion which are ‘joined up’ across different policy areas and between different levels of government. Early policy development has focused on two priority areas: homelessness and Indigenous housing. In this project, we extend this work by examining both exclusion from housing and processes of exclusion through housing.

The project will develop, and draw out, the implications of housing processes which can affect economic and social disadvantage. The final report will set out the opportunities and challenges of pursuing a social inclusion agenda through housing policy interventions, provide guidance on the ways in which housing and related policies can contribute to the social inclusion agenda and on the best ways to evaluate policies aimed at achieving social inclusion based on international best practice. Contact: Keith.Jacobs@utas.edu.au


6. PUBLICATIONS


Confirmed publications for 2009


The Housing and Community Research Unit is located in the School of Sociology at the University of Tasmania. It receives core funding from Housing Tasmania and University along with funding obtained through AHURI, the Australian Research Council (ARC) and other funders. The unit began in 2002 as a collaborative research venture between Housing Tasmania and UTAS as a means of developing capacity to carry out research on housing and related community research which would both support the policy environment within which Housing Tasmania operates, as well as producing academically rigorous work of national and international standing. A range of outputs by the Unit aim to ensure continued academic, community and policy-relevance and include traditional peer reviewed journal articles, work for the housing policy press, seminars held for housing policymakers and practitioners as well as reports for AHURI, among others.
Our core interests

The work of the unit is centred on housing, urban and community issues, within this broad remit there is a focus on the following areas:

- Housing affordability
- Gentrification, neighbourhood change and displacement
- Indigenous and regional housing issues
- Diversity, inclusion and sustainability
- Housing, crime prevention, community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Migration, socio-demographic change and housing impacts

For further details please see our current research page at:

www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/current_research.htm

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