

Exclusive suburban ‘villages’: Master planned estate development and socio-spatial polarisation in Western Sydney

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of master planned estate development has generated considerable debate regarding the exclusive nature of these developments. Master planned estates appear to find considerable support from planners and governments, as well as the residents within these new estate areas. The research presented here analysed the constructions of exclusivity for a master planned estate (Glenmore Park) and the extent to which the constructed identity for Glenmore Park resulted in socio-spatial polarisation within western Sydney. The research concluded that socio-spatial polarisation is intensified through the development of master planned estates. This paper focuses specifically on the future of master planned estate development in Australian cities, particularly given that master planned estates are a favoured form of residential development even though, as is argued in this paper, they have quite obvious implications for social equity. A concluding discussion on the revived urban village concept, the discourse used at Glenmore Park, offers a warning for this current urban planning paradigm, particularly of the associated social outcomes. Research agenda's are proposed in the last instance.

SUBURBANISATION AND THE MASTER PLANNED ESTATE

The Great Australian Dream has long been an aspiration of many Australians. Lewis (1999:61) stated, ‘the quarter acre block is ingrained in our concept of traditional suburban life, along with the Hills Hoist and the barbeque’. The Great Australian Dream ‘was very much an aspiration encouraged by the state’ (Gleeson and Low, 2000:31), especially during the postwar era where suburbia offered a welcome change for many (Mee, 1994). However, access to the housing market, and hence the Great Australian Dream, is becoming increasingly selective. Notwithstanding this selectivity, the notion of ‘The Great Australian Dream’ has remained prevalent. As a result, we continue to witness considerable growth in Sydney’s fringe districts, which has been attributed by many to the lack of affordable housing in Sydney’s inner and middle areas, and a lack of housing choice. In support of this, Burnley *et al.* (1997:1124) concluded that there are two main factors pushing home buyers to the urban fringe: housing affordability and the preference of home ownership. Australians have a general preference for home ownership and as a result, are continually pursuing the Great Australian Dream.

While Australians continue to desire a house in the suburbs, we have witnessed the continual sprawl of Sydney’s outer suburbs. Simultaneously, the popularity of master planned estates as a form of residential development has escalated and found support

from planners and governments (Gwyther, 2005). Yet, the social impacts of master planned estates are unknown, though speculation regarding their exclusivity is rife. Nonetheless, Knox (1992), offering an international perspective, predicted that master planned estates were 'set to constitute and reconstitute part of an increasingly polarised, lifestyle orientated and spatially segregated social order'. Similarly, Putnam (2000:209) contended that as suburbanisation continues, new suburbs are 'fragmented into a sociological mosaic ... as people fleeing the city sort themselves into ... finely distinguished 'lifestyle enclaves''. Closer to home, Gleeson (2002) speculated on the major patterns of change that appeared to be shaping Australian suburbs. One serious process identified by Gleeson (2002:2) was that 'socio-spatial polarisation is strengthening at the regional and local scales within our cities'. Further, Gleeson (2002:3) asserted that the new geography of suburban segregation includes 'privatopias' – the new exclusionary residential developments on the outer suburban edge. Gleeson's (2002) description of 'privatopias' broadly encompasses residential developments, like master planned estates, specifically in the sense that such developments are thought to be contributing to residential segregation. Burchell (2003) also speculated on the exclusionary outcomes that result from master planned estates, with a particular emphasis on their impact within western Sydney. Evidently, international and domestic speculation on the exclusive nature of master planned estate development exists, though we are yet to see the emergence of data to support these claims.

Much of the myth of master planned estates is yet to be validated by empirical evidence. Gabrielle Gwyther's (2003; 2005) research on community formation on master planned estates breaks new ground in this sense. Indeed, if master planned estates are thought to be creating unequal or exclusionary outcomes, then speculation regarding these new developments is insufficient, and thus highlights a much needed research agenda. The urgency with which this agenda should be drafted and executed is obvious to me, having done research on a master planned estate, though it is not obvious to all stakeholders. Developers, planners and councils, as well as the residents within these new estate areas, are full of praise for these new developments. Forster (2005) summarised the differing opinions on master planned estate development. These competing views are a point I'll return to at the end of this paper.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, through the use of a case study (Glenmore Park), I'll examine the construction of exclusivity for a master planned estate and the associated outcomes. Secondly, I want to address the future of master planned estates in Australian cities, specifically engaging with the current debate on urban village-style developments and the competing perspectives on master planned estate development. To understand the increasingly exclusive nature of residential developments in Australia the research presented here addressed one broad question: Do master planned estates purposefully inculcate an image of exclusivity and do these constructions result in socio-spatial polarisation? From here, three aims were developed. The first aim was to analyse the construction of identity for Glenmore Park. The second aim was to identify resident's intentions and motivations for moving to Glenmore Park. An assessment of the socio-spatial outcomes of both the resident's motivations and the constructed identity was the third aim.

To operationalise the aforementioned research question and aims, two main data sets were utilised. The methods used in this research are perhaps not the most

conventional in urban studies though were considered adequate means of analysing constructions of exclusivity, resident intentions and socio-spatial outcomes¹. Content analysis of 286 images and 145 pages of written text in Glenmore Park's marketing material, between 1989 and 2004, and community newsletters, between 2001 and 2004, in conjunction with a review of the estates plans, were used to determine the identity that was constructed for Glenmore Park. Two coding frameworks were developed, one for images and one for written text, to analysis how Glenmore Park's exclusive and distinct identity was constructed. A resident questionnaire was generated to determine the intentions and motivations of the residents in Glenmore Park (eliciting a 10.5% response rate, n.105). Census data was also consulted to ascertain the socio-demography of Glenmore Park and assisted in understanding the socio-spatial outcomes of this master planned estate.

GLENMORE PARK

Glenmore Park is a master planned estate in western Sydney. The estate is located approximately 50km west of Sydney's Central Business District in the Penrith Local Government Area. Glenmore Park houses a population of approximately 17,000 in 5,500 homes (ABS, 2002). Glenmore Park, formerly the South Penrith release area, was a joint venture between Elders Finance Group and the New South Wales state government. Development began in 1990 lead by property developers Lensworth. One of the stated aims for Glenmore Park was to 'create a real community from the outset and to avoid the disasters common to new estates that have to fight for years for basic services' (Williams, 1991:16). The planning and development for Glenmore Park was strategically intense. The planning and development for Glenmore Park included an extensive array of plans and reports, probably surpassing that of any other similar development. These plans were drafted to ensure the estate reached maximum potential. The overriding planning objective for the estate, which was emphasised throughout all estate plans, was for the development of a self-contained community with its own positive identity (Elders Finance Group, 1989; Guppy, 1991; Ibbitson, *et al.*, 1991; Masterplan Consultants, 1990; Penrith City Council, 1991; Sanger, 1991). On these bases, the design philosophy for Glenmore Park was advanced. A fundamental element of the design philosophy for Glenmore Park was the 'creation of a 'village' feel or atmosphere' (Masterplan Consultants, 1990:5). Further, Masterplan Consultants (1990:14) noted that the successful development of Glenmore Park particularly in the eyes of its future residents and the community at large would 'relate very much to the availability of appropriate facilities/services and its image as a community rather than merely a clustering of new housing on the edge of Penrith'. Planning and development for the estate aimed to create a community, not merely a suburb, and to ensure distinctiveness.

As previously noted, master planned estates are thought to be exacerbating polarisation in the urban landscape via the creation of exclusive spatial segments. Analysis of census data for four geographical regions (Glenmore Park, Penrith, Western Sydney and NSW) highlights the socio-spatial outcomes of master planned estate development. Table 1 demonstrates that Glenmore Park's urban environment

¹ Methodological approaches to urban research are a point of concern. Qualitative approaches to urban research are becoming more prevalent, though are in tension with more traditional quantitative approaches. Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for this concern to be addressed in detail here.

consists of a particular mode of housing provision (detached housing – 93.9%), housing tenure (private ownership – 100%); a generally low population density; a particular family type (families with children – 75%); and a particular religious affiliation (Christianity – 77.3%). While these characteristics are dominant in all four geographical regions, there is a definite concentration of these characteristics in Glenmore Park. These characteristics for Glenmore Park are consistent with reports on new estate areas in western Sydney as having ‘a low degree of social diversity’ and are places for families, home buyers and detached houses (Randolph and Holloway, 2003a; 2003b). The dominance of these characteristics assists in providing evidence on the formation of socio-spatial polarisation between the estate of Glenmore Park and its surrounding areas of Penrith and western Sydney. The intensification of polarisation at the local and region scales within Australia, and also within the western Sydney region, is a fear expressed by many Australian urban researchers (see Burchell, 2003; Gleeson, 2003; Gleeson and Randolph, 2002).

Table 1: Selected socio-demographic characteristics for Glenmore Park, Penrith, western Sydney and New South Wales (NSW), 2001.

	GLENMORE PARK	PENRITH	WESTERN SYDNEY	NSW
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS	%	%	%	%
Total Persons	16971	155426	1718939	6371745
Aged under 15 years (children)	29.5	23.9	23.3	20.6
Aged 15 – 19 (youth)	6.8	7.6	7.6	6.9
Aged 15 years and over	70.5	76.1	76.6	79.3
Born in Australia	73.3	72.4	61.4	69.9
Religious affiliation – Christianity	77.3	76.3	69.6	70.7
Housing Type – detached housing	93.9	90	84	77.4
Enumerated in private dwelling	100	98.6	98.4	97
Family Type – families with children	75	68.2	68.3	62.2
Income category – \$1500 - \$1999	24.6	15.3	14	12.4

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2002.

CONSCIOUS CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLACE

Place promotion of Glenmore Park played a key role in determining the identity that was constructed for the estate. Through largely partial representations of the estates demography, Glenmore Park was depicted as a place for young children, young families and Anglo-Australians. This partial imagery was projected in the estates marketing material and community newsletters. Textual references to young children accounted for 29.8 per cent of representations in the marketing material and community newsletters. The imagery projected of young children in both the

community newsletter and marketing material accounted for 34.2 per cent of all images. References to families (22.5%) and projected imagery of families (24.9%) were also dominant in the marketing material and community newsletters. One hundred per cent of the marketing images projected Anglo-Australians as the dominant ethnicity and 99.3 per cent of images in the community newsletter were dominated by Anglo-Australians. Of the 286 images in the marketing material and community newsletters, only one image was dominated by a differing ethnicity. These representations however are by no means consistent with the actual socio-demography of Glenmore Park presented in the census data. The census data does show a more diverse population for Glenmore Park, hence highlighting the partiality of the representations of the estate in the marketing material and community newsletters.

Youth, although present in the estates demography, have been excluded from the estates imaginary construction of identity. Youth were absent from representations of Glenmore Park in the marketing material and only partially represented in the community newsletters, with reference to the local high school's exam performance. According to Bloom (2001), youth, and their perceived anti-social behaviour, do not fair well in the planning of new estate areas, as they appear ill suited to suburbia and attempts are subsequently made to silence them. However, it is of crucial importance to acknowledge, according to Toon (2000:142):

the relationship between official representations of space constructed from above and the cultural geographies of youth which are lived out at the level of everyday life. The perception of 'unruly' youth leads to the representations and planning of spaces to exclude those perceived to be associated with anti-social behaviour. A lack of recognition and representation of youth highlights the partiality with which the identity for Glenmore Park has been constructed, generating the exclusion of a group that are perceived as detrimental to the image of this 'exclusive' location.

In order to assert Glenmore Park as distinct from 'ordinary' suburbs, recreational spaces featured heavily in the planning and marketing of the estate. Lifestyle became a major feature of Glenmore Park's development. Physical landscaping, such as parks and wetlands and recreational spaces were heavily cited in the marketing material and community newsletters for Glenmore Park. Thirty nine per cent of textual references and 35 per cent of images were of recreational spaces. Parks and wetlands were also significantly presented in the textual references (21.8%) and imagery (28.1%). These results indicate that the estate's identity was largely prescribed through this partial imagery of 'lifestyle' options in the suburban landscape.

A guiding principle of the traditional urban village concept is for the development of a self-contained and fully integrated community (Masterplan Consultants, 1990). The estates' village-style development (5.4%), complete with integrated services (13.2%), provided significant representations of the estate in the marketing material. By constructing a village rather than a mere suburb, the developers were able to assert Glenmore Park as 'a city within a city' (Glenmore Park Realty, 1990) and establish Glenmore Park as one of Western Sydney's premier addresses, being: 'a thriving, friendly community; a neighbourhood, not just a suburb. A place where you can enjoy the beauty of its outstanding natural surroundings, within an environment designed to enhance every aspect of your life' (Lensworth, 2003:5).

Gwyther (2005) noted that the planner-developer for a new estate area will make reference to distinct elements of community formation as an attempt to differentiate residential locations. The distinctiveness of Glenmore Park was asserted in the marketing material (48.1 per cent), which distinguished Glenmore Park from the surrounding region - western Sydney. Evidently, the developers were acutely aware that Glenmore Park is within western Sydney, and it is likely that the developers used the perception of exclusion, within western Sydney, as a marketing pitch.

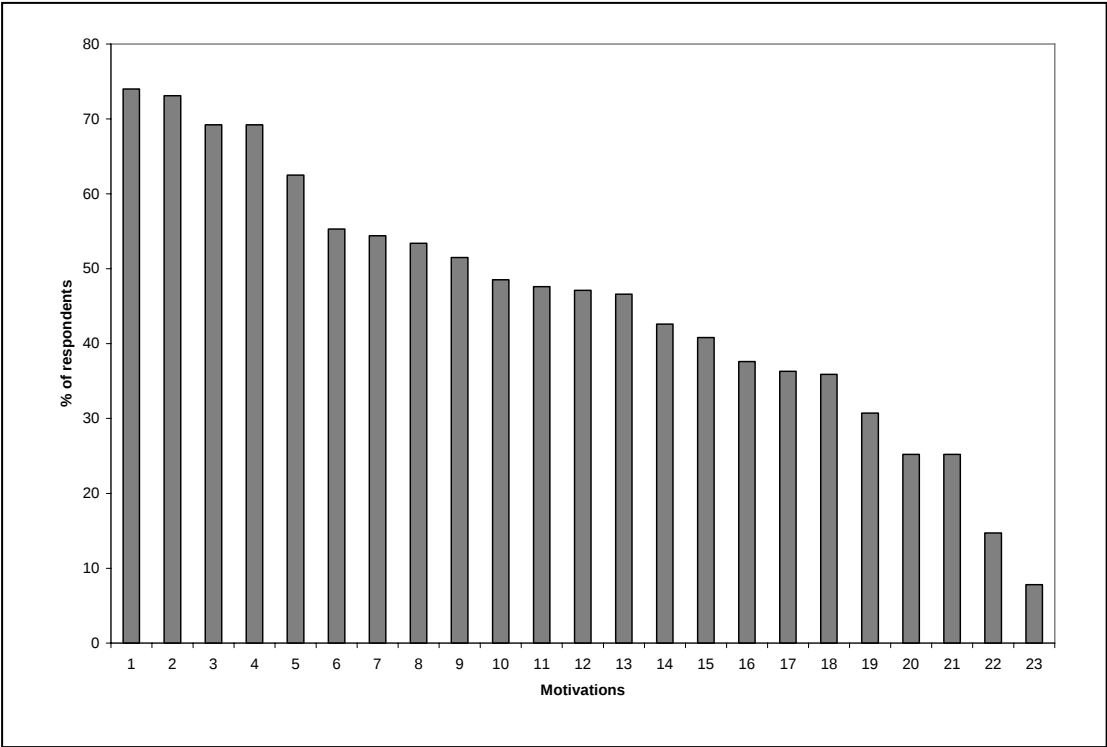
RESIDENT'S SEEKING EXCLUSION?

One element that can assist in our understanding of new estate areas is the residents housing histories. The housing histories of the residents can potentially have two benefits. Firstly, knowledge of residents housing histories can help us determine which stage the residents are at in the home ownership market (i.e. first, second, third, fourth, etc. home owner) and, secondly, knowledge of their previous suburb of residence gives us an indication of where residents of these new estate areas are migrating from. The resident questionnaire asked respondents to identify their previous suburb of residence and whether they were first, second, third, or fourth home owners. Ninety three per cent of respondents indicated that their previous suburb of residence was elsewhere in western Sydney. Of that ninety three per cent, sixty five per cent were previously residing in the Penrith LGA. First home owners are presumed to be either absent or underrepresented in new estate areas. The results of the resident questionnaire indicate that first home owners accounted for twenty six per cent of the responses, which means they are represented in Glenmore Park. However, second and third home owners were dominant, as we might expect, collectively accounting for sixty eight per cent of responses.

Respondents were asked to consider a number of statements regarding possible motivations for moving to Glenmore Park. The dominant motivations, as observable in Figure 1, included: for more parks and open spaces (74%); for a safer residential location (73.1%); for a better standard of people in the neighbourhood (69.2%); to 'upsized' to a bigger house (69.2%); for reduced crime and vandalism (62.5%); for a more affluent local community (55.3%); for more friendliness (54.4%); for like-minded residents (53.4%); to be close to walking trails (53.4%); and for a similar social status among residents (51.5%). The dominance of these responses provides evidence of social mobility and hence social upgrading *within* western Sydney, motivated by the desire for stability achieved by social sameness and reduced crime and vandalism.

It is also important to note those issues that did not rate highly amongst respondents as possible motivations. These included for more social diversity (25.2%); to be closer to educational institutions (primary and secondary schools) (25.2%); for better access to childcare facilities (14.7%); and for better access to medical services (7.8%). The lack of significance placed on services could well be a reflection of the long-standing lack of service provision in Australian suburbia generally. Additionally, it could be a reflection of the individualism of the aspirational, who do not require public services and thus provide for themselves through private transport, health and education.

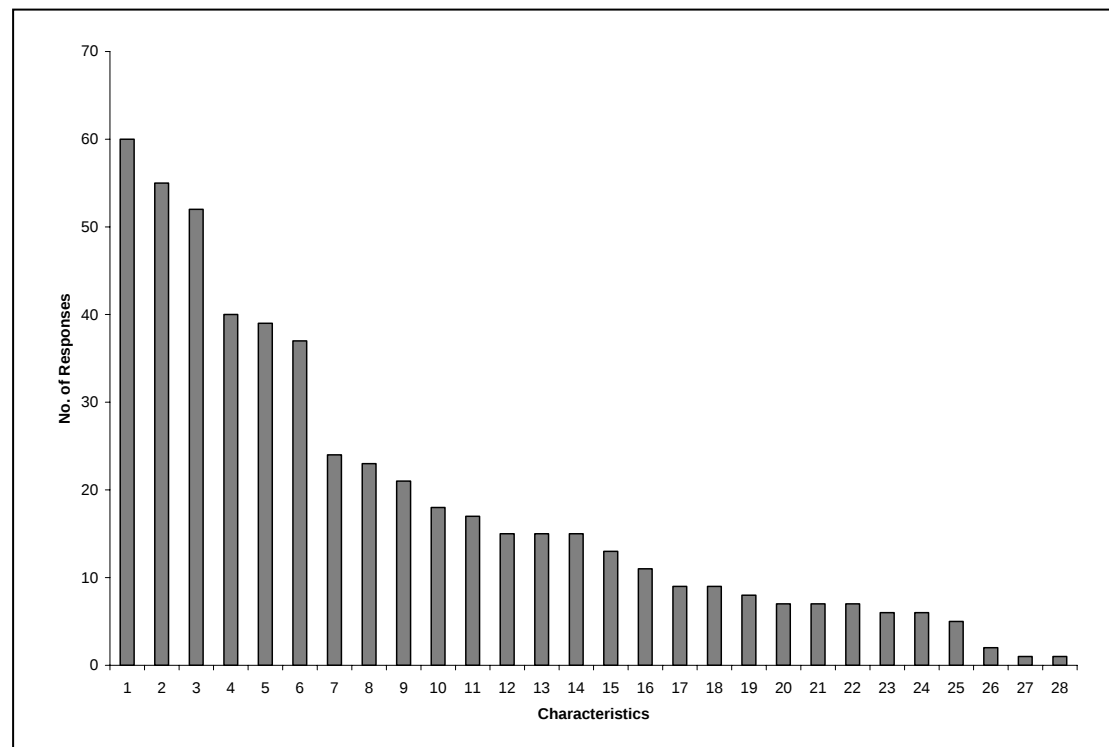
Figure 1: The percentage of respondents in agreement with various motivations for moving to Glenmore Park, regarding affluence/status, stability, services and image.



KEY: 1. For more parks and open spaces; 2. For a safer residential location; 3. For a better standard of people in the neighbourhood; 4. To ‘upsize’ to a bigger house; 5. For reduced crime and vandalism; 6. For a more affluent local community; 7. For more friendliness; 8. For like-minded residents; 9. To be close to walking trails; 10. For a similar social status among residents; 11. For better serviced public areas; 12. For an affordable residential location; 13. For appealing tree lined roads; 14. For leisure activities within the estate; 15. For improved social status; 16. For more children’s playgrounds; 17. For more community interaction; 18. To be close to nature; 19. That trees surrounded the estate creating a buffer zone (i.e. that the estate was secluded); 20. For more social diversity; 21. To be closer to educational institutions (primary and secondary schools); 22. For better access to childcare facilities; 23. For better access to medical services.

Source: Kenna (forthcoming).

In the resident questionnaire, respondents were asked to consider five characteristics that best describe the current situation in Glenmore Park. According to the respondents, the attractive integration of parks and open spaces; a good quality of life; family orientation; safety and security; and distinction from Penrith, were the defining characteristics of Glenmore Park (see Figure 2). Further, the respondents defined the archetypal Glenmore Park resident as ‘upper middle class’, ‘two income’, ‘young families’, ‘house proud’, and ‘high standard’. Overall, the respondents’ affinity with Glenmore Park was overt. Feelings of content, stability, achievement and pride were expressed continually in the responses to the questionnaire.

Figure 2: Respondent's opinions of the current situation in Glenmore Park.

KEY: 1. Attractive integration of parks and open spaces; 2. Good quality of life; 3. Family orientated; 4. Safe and secure; 5. Distinct from Penrith; 6. Friendly; 7. Affordable; 8. Stable residential location; 9. Well serviced; 10. Upper middle-class; 11. Good socio-economic mix; 12. Strong community spirit; 13. Caters to the needs of residents; 14. Similar housing styles; 15. Common type of resident; 16. Large homes, most with 3-car garages; 17. Unique and individual housing styles; 18. Culturally diverse; 19. Affluent; 20. Luxurious; 21. Good social interaction; 22. Diversity of lifestyles and aspirations; 23. Homogeneity of lifestyles and aspirations; 24. Prestigious; 25. Private; 26. Inclusive; 27. Exclusive; 28. Surprising.

Source: Resident Questionnaire, 2004.

The final question of the resident questionnaire asked respondents to express their opinions or attitudes towards western Sydney. In general, respondents began with positive and defensive statements about western Sydney. Respondents noted that western Sydney had been unfortunately labelled, and has 'a misunderstood culture' (GPR 23, 2004). One respondent noted that 'western Sydney is not a 'bad' place to live, it's the stigma attached to the name western Sydney' (GPR 44, 2004, respondent's emphasis). These sorts of responses indicate that the residents are proud to be part of western Sydney, yet are conscious of their 'Otherness'. However, respondents' also departed somewhat from these rather loyal statements, to comment on Glenmore Park's distinctiveness from the western Sydney region and from Penrith. Such references included the following: 'I feel that people outside hear Penrith and turn their noises up, but I think Glenmore Park should be classed as its own little place of paradise, and I don't feel like I'm in the west when I'm at home' (GPR 43, 2004); 'Glenmore Park is an oasis – an island in an ocean of pessimism' (GPR 12, 2004); and 'Glenmore Park is an exclusive pocket' (GPR 87, 2004). Clearly, the respondents felt the need to be defensive of the western Sydney region though they preferred to consider themselves and the estate as distinct or separate from Penrith and western Sydney.

DISCUSSION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF MASTER PLANNED ESTATE DEVELOPMENT TO SOCIO-SPATIAL POLARISATION WITHIN WESTERN SYDNEY

Western Sydney has long been constructed as an undesirable ‘Other’ to the rest of Sydney. Counter constructions have been developed to generate a more accurate representation of the western Sydney region (Burchell, 2003; Collins and Poynting, 2000; Dowling and Mee, 2000; Mee, 1994; Powell, 1993; Symonds, 1997). However, the mostly negative image of western Sydney persists and in many respects has been intensified through the construction of Glenmore Park’s identity. The socially constructed image of western Sydney has been used as a foundation for the construction of Glenmore Park’s exclusive and distinct identity. Rather than constructing a positive image of new residential developments within western Sydney, the constructed identity for Glenmore Park now acts as a way of solidifying those stereotypes associated with western Sydney and concretising this distinction in the minds of the residents. The inherent business-like nature of place marketing makes profit motivation a driving force (see Ward and Gold, 1994). The developers and place marketers played a key role in the construction of exclusivity, which ultimately superseded some of the more socially inclusive planning objectives.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the western Sydney region are beginning to exhibit polarising tendencies, intensified through the development of master planned estates, with the demography of new estate areas like Glenmore Park providing an obvious distinction from the cultural richness and diversity of western Sydney. Socio-spatial polarisation within western Sydney is a feared phenomenon by many urban researchers, though residential differentiation is finding tacit support from governments. One of the more optimistic views about residential differentiation in western Sydney came from former Labor leader Mark Latham: ‘When I grew up in Green Valley in the 1970s, our values were based on the politics of us versus them – the working class versus the North Shore. Now, a young person growing up in my electorate [in western Sydney] can see prosperity in the neighbourhood next door. Social mobility has become more tangible and achievable. The politics of envy has been replaced by the politics of aspiration’. (Latham, 2003:111).

Social mobility is certainly still achievable for many in western Sydney. And no one would criticise residents for the aspiration of social mobility. However, aspects of the so-called politics of aspiration, in western Sydney, are somewhat exclusive and perhaps even idealistic. There is a fear that a rather idealistic politics of aspiration is being created in western Sydney, based in large part around a politics of envy *within* western Sydney. A politics of aspiration, while deserved of many residents, generates an uneven geography of hope for many within western Sydney.

Planners, governments and policy makers acknowledge master planned estates as a progressive form of residential development, being driven for the most part by the rhetoric of the ‘urban village’. Given that the ‘urban village’ mantra has risen again in recent times, a brief discussion of this ideal is necessary here. The creation of an urban village-style suburb was exactly the discourse used at Glenmore Park and this research provides evidence of the socio-spatial polarisation that can result, which should act as a warning for current urban planning paradigms. ‘Village living comes

to West' was a headline of The Sun Herald in 1990, making reference to Glenmore Park (Cantlon, 1990:135). The New South Wales president of the Housing Industry Association, Mr Remo Nogarotto, stated that the 'village green style of development' for Glenmore Park would be:

'a pace-setter for similar estates in other areas of the western suburbs of Sydney ... To my knowledge we haven't had anything like this before in the western suburbs of Sydney. A lot of the new estates planned will be having a look at Glenmore Park and what has been done by the developer and following many of the themes' (as quoted in Cantlon, 1990:135).

Further, Elders Finance Group (1989:1) noted that Glenmore Park 'will create a benchmark for urban development in Australia'. Being conscious of the social outcomes associated with the development of Glenmore Park, I am of course cautious of the planning principles for this estate being applied elsewhere. In December 2004 Bob Carr announced plans to 'fix the mistakes of the past' in suburban design (see Goodsir, 2004) through the creation of urban village-style suburbs:

'Every new suburb built in Sydney in the next three decades will be designed around villages and town centres, with the State Government reversing its recent practice of allowing subdivisions of uniform housing' (Dick, Goodsir and Norrie, 2004:1).

This is exciting for suburban development in Sydney. If executed properly this will no doubt be a significant achievement for residential design and development. I do however, hold reservations about these new developments and caution against the further propagation of socially exclusive communities. Moreover, the social goals of new estate areas seem to rate as subordinate to the discussion of physical design, and in my mind at least, master planned estates should not be considered benchmark urban developments.

As a form of suburban residential development master planned estates do have a series of positive characteristics. Master planned estate development is strategically intense, featuring some of the newer articulations of urban planning (i.e. social, cultural and community planning), and aims to provide a desirable physical and social urban environment for the residents. Master planned estates are one of the more aesthetically appealing suburban ventures seen in a long time. 'Ordinary' suburban sprawl is bland and unexciting. 'House farm' suburbs, like Kellyville, featuring architecturally disastrous McMansion's, are quite disturbing. In light of past suburban design, master planned estates are refreshing, providing an array of 'lifestyle' alternatives. In terms of the physical planning objectives for new estate areas, such as the provision of infrastructure and services, we cannot find fault with new estate areas. They do provide their residents with better access to public transport, main arterial roads, cultural activities, retailing centres and education institutions. This is by no means an exhaustive list of positives. However, the social and cultural objectives of these new estate areas appear to have fallen by the wayside and have been undermined by the developers' goal for profit maximisation. So in this important sphere, master planned estate development leaves a lot to be desired.

If we return to the research question, we can see that master planned estates *do* purposefully inculcate an image of exclusivity and these constructions *do* result in socio-spatial polarisation. This then begs the question: Are we fixing the mistakes of the past, or simply adding to them?

A RESEARCH AGENDA

Throughout the course of this research, I became increasingly convinced that research on the western Sydney region, academic or otherwise, needs to become more focused on the changes occurring *within* western Sydney. Research on the western Sydney region to date has been largely defensive of the region, emphasising its cultural richness and diversity, and rightly so. However, a more pressing issue under current conditions is the segregation that is increasingly apparent within the region. Spaces of affluence are growing and now juxtaposed with spaces of disadvantage. Although capital is now injected into the region, its distribution appears to be selective and mostly focussed on new estate areas. Meanwhile, older established areas are deteriorating and in some respects, worsening the stigma attached to western Sydney – neglected, ugly, dry, featureless, etc. There is a definite and urgent need to critically review these issues.

There is a strong cause for concern that new geographies of exclusion are emerging in Australian cities. Australia is witnessing an increase in the desire for private, exclusive, and often enclosed residential developments. The popularity of master planned estates, as a form of residential development is one supported by governments and urban planners. The encompassing trend of master planning is thus set to continue in Australia and perhaps reconfigure our urban and suburban landscapes. Here, reconfiguration refers to an increasingly polarised and segregated landscape. The danger with this scenario is that master planned estates have hitherto not been critically examined as an exclusionary form of development. Master planned estates are not popularly perceived to be exclusionary, in the way that gated communities are. The exclusion in a master planned estate is not always visible (i.e. no gates or physical barriers). Whilst, the gated community is rare in Australia, master planned estates are increasing in popularity. Thus, I think it is time to direct a more critical eye over these neglected geographies of exclusion. This should necessarily be undertaken through empirical analyses, and through analyses that go beyond examination of census data.

If nothing else, let's get researchers into these new estate areas, collecting quantitative and qualitative data, to figure out exactly what is going on with one of our more contemporary forms of suburban development.

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