

Residents' Perspectives about Social Mix

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ABSTRACT

The idea of balanced social mix, or creating communities with a blend of residents from across different housing tenures and income levels, is a common theme of contemporary housing and planning policies in Australia, the UK and the US that aim to create sustainable communities. In seeking to evaluate this claim, much of the research conducted on social mix attempts to measure any independent effects for disadvantaged residents of living in areas of concentrated poverty compared to more mixed income neighbourhoods. In a nutshell proof is sought that social mix works. As valuable as this research is, commentators point out that limited attention has been paid to explaining how residents understand social mix, or even if from their point of view it matters. The current research starts from residents' perceptions of social mix, utilising three case studies of social housing estates based in South Australia that have undergone substantial changes to social mix to reduce concentrations of public housing tenants and attract private home owners into the areas.

INTRODUCTION

Despite long periods of strong economic growth and increased prosperity within western societies, there are growing concerns about the problems of high unemployment, rising crime rates and the anti-social behaviour of youth gangs in particular regions and areas of cities. The recent riots in the Macquarie Fields social housing estate in Sydney, New South Wales have reinvigorated public and community debate into just what makes a functional neighbourhood – is part of the problem to be found in the planning, the type of housing and the 'social mix' of the residents?

Often the most visible signs of these sorts of problems are on the social housing estates that were constructed in the post second world war period. It is evident that increasingly social housing has become the housing for the most disadvantaged. Over the past two decades, global economic restructuring coupled with changes in family structures and progressively tighter restrictions governing access to social housing has resulted in the sector moving from housing for families and working tenants to housing for more complex and high need tenants. It is not surprising that common characteristics of neighbourhoods with high levels of social housing may include concentrations of residents experiencing higher than average levels of unemployment, low-income and reliance on welfare benefits, poor educational outcomes and mental and physical health problems and crime and anti-social behaviour (Jacobs & Arthurson 2003).

Contemporary urban planning and social housing regeneration policies within Australia, the UK and the US have a common aim of balancing 'social mix', or creating communities with a blend of residents with a range of income levels from across different housing tenures types, including social housing, private rental and owner-occupied housing. This approach is adopted in anticipation of it assisting to create more stable and vigorous communities than when disadvantaged residents are concentrated together in one place (Arthurson 2002). In Australia, there are three major strategies to achieve social mix. First, planning for mixed communities in new private housing developments. For instance, at Golden Grove in South Australia the public housing authority and private developer worked in partnership to include social housing in the planning and development for the new

suburb. Second, the housing authorities spot purchase existing privately built housing that comes up for sale in established suburbs. Third, the housing authorities, through their estate regeneration projects, diversify housing tenure on existing social housing estates in order to decrease the concentration of public housing and increase the level of owner-occupied housing; thereby achieving a more balanced social mix. This is generally achieved through demolition and replacement of obsolete social housing with housing for private purchase in order to attract higher income homeowners/purchasers into the areas. In some Australian States, estate regeneration also involves permanent relocation of social housing tenants to social housing located in other neighbourhoods. These days diversifying housing tenure to create social mix and break up concentrations of disadvantaged residents is only one aspect of estate regeneration. The scope of activities includes:

- Coordinating service provision at the local level;
- Implementing employment projects;
- Promoting community involvement in the projects and partnerships with local communities; and
- Improving the housing and physical environment (see Arthurson 2002).

The focus of the current research is not on communities with dispersed public housing that has been spot purchased, or newly developed planned communities but rather established social housing estates that have undergone regeneration with substantial changes made to the tenure mix of the areas to obtain 'a more balanced social mix'.

Housing and planning policy makers who are proponents of social mix claim numerous benefits for disadvantaged residents of living amongst homeowners and working residents. At the present time, the wide range of benefits referred to include:

- improved access to social networks that link disadvantaged residents to job opportunities;
- the provision of middle class role models to integrate problematic residents into 'acceptable' social behaviours (Arthurson 2002);
- increased education retention rates;
- better access to a range of health and social services;
- improvements in general health (Perri 1997; Scottish Council Foundation 1998); and
- reductions in postcode prejudice, for instance by potential employers, along with the stigma associated with residing in areas that are perceived as negative or undesirable (Atkinson & Kintrea 2000).

Some academic commentators in particular are more sceptical of the likely benefits, especially when social mix is imposed on existing communities. In general, four common and interrelated themes arise. The first theme raises questions about the difficulties of fostering the requisite social contact between public tenants and home owners in order to actualise the anticipated benefits of social mix. Atkinson and Kintrea (2000), for instance, find that home owners leave the estates to work, and participate in various activities outside of the local neighbourhoods. Alternatively, social housing tenants, who often lack access to motor vehicles and jobs, tend to spend more time on the estates and develop their social networks locally. The authors conclude that, it is one thing to suggest that social networks are important; however, it is quite another to propose, as happens in estate regeneration, that government can rebuild more socially integrated, cohesive, inclusive and sustainable communities through making changes to the social mix of the neighbourhood (Atkinson and Kintrea 2000).

Others commentators find some evidence that locating residents with different income levels in the same neighbourhood may raise awareness of class differences and create tensions rather than the sought after social cohesion (Page and Broughton 1997; Biggins and Hassan 1998: 39; Jupp 1999: 11, 84). The two remaining issues concern other adverse impacts of creating social mix in estate

regeneration. These can include reductions in the overall levels of social housing stock, through sales of social housing without replacement housing, and the breaking up of long term residents' social and support networks (Arthurson 2002).

Hence, the research is inconclusive about the benefits or otherwise of social mix, although it is generally accepted as a *fait accompli* in contemporary planning and housing policy. The issue is topical, as within Australia, for instance, the state based community organisations 'Shelter' have hosted several workshops to explore the problems around changing social mix on social housing estates. The media have also participated in the debate with headlines referring to the contemporary lack of broader targeting in social housing, such as, "housing policy 'will create Trust ghettos' " (Advertiser Newspaper 2005: 20). This concern about social mix is by no means restricted to Australia as the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recently released a consultation paper on the importance of 'Planning for Mixed Communities' (ODPM 2005). Likewise, US, Federal legislation now requires that social housing estates have a mix of income groups, with no greater than 40 per cent of housing targeted to the most disadvantaged households (Darcy & Randolph 1999). Interest in social mix is also reflected in the flurry of articles and special editions of major international journals, including 'Housing Studies' (Vol 17, 1 & Vol 18, 6) and 'Urban Studies' (Vol 38, 12). Hence, social mix and the interrelated issue of neighbourhood effects (that is whether living in particular neighbourhoods have some sort of independent effects on people's opportunities) is the subject of much contemporary interest and debate.

The current research project aims to build on the contemporary debates conducted about social mix. The debates have often progressed without fully understanding the day-to-day experiences of the people most affected by social mix policies, the residents of social housing estates, both incoming homeowners and the social housing tenants that have observed changes to the social mix of the neighbourhood. The following section provides the background context for this issue.

RESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

In recent times, in Australia but also elsewhere, there has been little in-depth qualitative exploration of social mix policies from the viewpoint of those most affected by the policies, the residents of the regenerated neighbourhoods. Atkinson and Kintrea (2004: 20), for instance, in the UK context, argue that there are few explanations of how individual actors understand social mix or even if they think it may or may not "affect their decisions and therefore life chances". Likewise, Rose (2004: 12) a Canadian based researcher contends that, debates about social mix are occurring "in the absence of a knowledge base as to how social mix is experienced on a day-to-day basis". Similarly, Friedrichs et al (2003: 799) state that most of the European and US literature has attempted to answer the question of " 'how much independent effects do neighbourhoods have'?" while few studies have looked at how the processes of neighbourhood effects occur.

Perhaps one reason for why residents' experiences have not been vociferous in the debates is that the inquiries of much contemporary research on the topic of social mix are concerned with answering the policy related question of, does social mix work. If we start from this question, it can become more important to objectively measure the social and economic effects of social mix, rather than explaining residents' and other actors' understandings and day-to-day experiences of social mix. There is, for instance, a substantial US literature that is based around questions of does social mix lead to improvements in residents' health, education or employment prospects (see for example, Galster & Zobel 1998; Galster 2003). This type of research often starts with a particular policy question in mind, and then attempts to measure and evaluate the level and size of the effects on disadvantaged residents' lives of living in areas of concentrated poverty compared to neighbourhoods with a more variable income mix. There is no questioning that these sorts of studies have led to valuable information with which to inform debate about social mix. However,

Galster (2003) argues that more qualitative in-depth analyses are needed to complement this work. Some of the other studies, which incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods in the research designs, have concentrated more on exploring aspects of residents' everyday experiences. Facets include their social networks and social interactions and if a more diverse social mix leads to reductions in perceptions of area stigma (see for instance, Rosenbaum 1995; Rosenbaum et al 1998; Beekman et al 2001; van Beckhoven 2003; Atkinson and Kintrea 2004; Ruming et al 2004).

The research study reported in this paper used a mix of qualitative and quantitative design in an attempt to ground the debate about social mix in the life experiences of residents. It focused on two key questions: First, from the point of view of residents does social mix matter or have any real effect on their day-to-day experiences of residents and second, how do residents experience life in the new socially mixed community?

METHOD

The data collection for the research commenced in 2005 in three neighbourhoods, Mitchell Park, Hillcrest and Northfield, all located within the metropolitan region of Adelaide in South Australia. Prior to regeneration commencing, all three areas were characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and concentrations of social housing. These neighbourhoods have been revitalised over the past fifteen years with extensive changes made to the social mix of the areas through demolition and sales of public housing, urban infill and building of new housing to attract homeowners/buyers into the neighbourhoods. As shown in Table 1, Mitchell Park originally had a concentration of 75 per cent public housing that has been reduced over a period of fourteen years to 30 per cent. Similarly Northfield and Hillcrest have had reductions in the concentrations of public housing.

Table 1: Changes in concentrations of public housing in the regenerated neighbourhoods

Regeneration Neighbourhood	Before		After	
	per cent		n	
Mitchell Park	75	30	2382	1923
Hillcrest	56	12	350	118
Northfield	50	30	750	249

Whilst the research also involved a survey, sent to a random sample of eight hundred households, this paper reports only some of the preliminary findings of in-depth interviews conducted to date with residents across the three neighbourhoods.

Interviews:

An expression of interest form to participate in an interview was included in the survey questionnaire that was posted to a random sample of 800 households across the three case study areas. Sixty-five people returned the forms. In total 54 interviews are being conducted, with six public housing tenants, six private rental and six homeowners/buyers in each case study area. Of the 26 interviews conducted to date, twenty were women and six were men with an age range of 26-86 years. Fourteen lived in homes they owned or were paying a mortgage for and eight lived in social housing (7 public housing, 1 association housing) and four were renting in the private sector. The interviews were analysed thematically covering themes relating to social mix and neighbourhood life.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

As noted before, a major change in all three neighbourhoods has been in the level of tenure diversification with an increase in homeowners/buyers and reductions overall in the concentration

of public housing. General discussion about this change was introduced by the interviewer in the following way: “in almost every community there is a mix between people who rent and people who own or are buying their own homes. In this neighbourhood that mix has changed over recent years. I would be interested in any comments you have about this change in mix”. Six key themes have emerged.

Social housing and anti-social behaviour

In the current study homeowners at Mitchell Park tended to associate the public housing tenure with social problems and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the neighbourhood. For instance, one homeowner, who moved into Mitchell Park two years ago, suggested that while the idea of having a range of different tenures in the one community may have sounded good in theory that in practice he didn't think it had worked in that neighbourhood:

“Cause I can tell you going down my street which ones are the housing trust, which ones are the rentals, by the rubbish they are leaving out in the street. Dumping it alongside the road, that sort of attitude and what it actually does is actually instead of pulling up those who are in the lower socio-economic group it actually dumps down, it drags down the neighbourhood. It makes it neighbourhood mediocrity. That's what you come out with, that's the outcome because the people who are quiet and want to get on with their neighbours they become submissive to these people the way they behave. They're frightened of them. They might put a rock, like my neighbour who had a car tyre coming down the road into her bedroom” (MP7 homeowner).

Likewise, another homeowner reported that her neighbours who lived in public housing indulged in problematic and disruptive social behaviour:

“One day it was like being in New York. I looked out my window, and I could see these cars and these police officers in vests with guns, and swarming around the outside of the house. Then there was this big attack, and they grabbed the girl and dragged her, and she bit someone, and they had the ambulance. And it was like the streets of New York here!” (MP9 home owner).

It was clear that in most instances of going about their daily lives homeowners and public tenants at Mitchell Park, and the other neighbourhoods, did not come into direct contact with each other within their neighbourhood. This aspect is discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

Whilst there were also incidents of crime and ASB in the other two areas, respondents did not directly associate the problems with the presence of public housing, as happened at Mitchell Park. At Hillcrest and Northfield, the problems were more often associated with the private rental tenure.

Private rental is problematic

Many of the respondents at Hillcrest and Northfield suggested that the increased mix of private rental tenure was causing issues in their neighbourhoods. In particular, investors had purchased some of the older public housing and newer houses for sale to rent on the private rental market. As one of the residents at Hillcrest stated: “Probably we have more trouble with the private rental ones, of the old transportable ones - one down the street here. We've had problems with various people who have been in there” (H35 public housing). Similarly, a resident at Northfield that lived next door to a newer house that was bought by a private investor said that: “We have one next door and they don't look after it, he couldn't care less (N161 home owner). The private rental tenure was also associated with a high turnover of tenants, which raised issues of neighbourhood stability for some residents. In one instance, a resident described the private rental house directly over the road from her as having had three different lots of people living there over the past two years (H7 homeowner).

We are homeowners now

An interesting and no doubt understandable finding of the current study is that public housing tenants at Mitchell Park in particular were keen to differentiate and distance themselves from a small number of tenants who they perceived as responsible for adding to the stigma associated with public housing in their locality. For instance, one of the public housing tenants in describing her previous neighbours said:

“Oh the language, they used to swear like anything and it was terrible you could hear them all the kiddies.....she couldn’t care less but they were terrible children. Amazing how they get these homes, people like that....Oh it was funny it was like Coronation street! I’m glad there’re gone anyhow.” (MP6 public housing tenant).

In a similar way, at Northfield and Hillcrest, a key theme emerged whereby public housing tenants who felt that they had bettered themselves by becoming homeowners also wanted to distance themselves from their previous association with the public rental tenure. When asked if there were places where they would not want to live this group of respondents commonly identified areas within their current neighbourhoods where there were obvious groupings of social housing. When prompted as to why this was perceived as an issue, responses were characterised as follows:

“Because they are trouble. A lot of them are trouble. It puts your [house]value down. I think if you’ve got them all around. A lot of people don’t notice who they are but I do.” (H55 homeowner – previously public housing rental).

“I think there’s a better class of person coming into the place because of this [redevelopment] ...Although we will always have a certain amount because the housing trust have built units you know in different parts for different people in the area.” (N 282 homeowner - previously public housing rental).

Area stigma

Public housing tenants and homeowners in all three neighbourhoods commonly expressed the view that the higher levels of home ownership in the area had lowered the stigma associated with the previous concentration of public housing:

“I know a lot of people would say you wouldn’t want to go and live there [Mitchell Park] but er, I think it is just wonderful the development that has happened because I walk a lot. I don’t drive, so consequently I do a bit of walking and I’m just amazed at how everyone is fitting in so well together and taking pride. The houses that are obviously privately owned and the trust houses that I would imagine that have come into private ownership they all seem to be blending in so well together and taking pride. I think it’s wonderful. I say ‘I live at Mitchell Park’ and people sort of raise an eyebrow and then suddenly they remember ‘ah that’s right there’s been a huge development going on there hasn’t there?’ and you say ‘yes it’s so good, it’s like living at Mawson Lakes with all the fancy houses!’” (MP2 public housing).

At Hillcrest and Northfield respondents often commented that in addition to the benefits of homeowners coming into their immediate neighbourhoods the stigma of the areas had reduced because of the association with the marketing and promotion of the adjacent new housing development at Oakden:

“[Oakden] was a very upmarket sort of sales promotion thing and that. They then started Hillcrest advertising when they did the redevelopment right next door to Oakden. They attached it to that. You saw it becoming more pleasurable, more likeable, more upmarket as things progressed.” (H35 public housing)

“If I say I live at Hillcrest they kind of look down their nose, but as soon as I tell them it’s on the boarder of Oakden they go ahh... because it’s trendy and new and modern and more expensive.

Whereas they think Hillcrest is still old and crusty.... I know most of the houses in my street and in my block are new but people seem to think it's still the old Housing Trust homes and the dilapidated old homes that were here before. Perhaps because they haven't been here for a long time." (H7 home purchaser)

"They want to buy here, we get phone calls every week from real estate agents at least on phone call a week or more letter box drops every couple of days saying do you want to sell." (H55 home buyer)

The images of Northfield and Hillcrest were also seen to have benefited from the closure of the Northfield infectious disease hospital and the Hillcrest mental hospital. Nevertheless, whilst respondents suggested that the overall stigma of the three neighbourhoods was reduced as the tenure mix changed, homeowners at Mitchell Park highlighted two particular streets where the public housing is still concentrated as being stigmatised. They also said it was the problematic part of the neighbourhood where they would not want to live. From the perspective of some respondents, these streets were singled out as being 'danger zones', 'bad places' where you would not walk down at night and were commonly known as 'the SAHT part of the neighbourhood'. As one homeowner stated:

"[I] don't like to stereotype or whatever but there are some bad areas, streets I don't like to walk down at night [name of street] being one of them...I have heard of people, there's a lady riding her bike has had things thrown at her as she rides her bike she works at night as she works as a cleaner up at Flinders." (MP3 homebuyer).

Another homeowner suggested that:

"The problem with it [public housing] is that there are still pockets. Like that street opposite me, it is a pocket of housing trust people and you can tell it. I think they need to be more in between and the houses need to look the same like my house and my neighbour's house. But you know they don't, they look run down, shabby. And so, you get a little group of those types of houses where these people live and they don't look after them because they don't have to. Whereas if they had houses that look the same as everyone else's there might be more incentive to look after them if the people around them were actually homeowners." (MP9 home owner).

In contrast, at Hillcrest and Northfield homeowners generally described the different housing tenures as more integrated although they still could identify the public housing through some of its unique physical characteristics:

"I know that Hillcrest had a really very bad name many years ago because it was all housing Trust. For some reason or other housing Trust people don't seem to have a good name and yet the people that I know here were very nice people." (H40 homeowner).

"They [SAHT] are all mixed in everywhere but they're not as noticeable now as they used to be. They've blended them in so that you really don't know which ones are the housing trust homes and which are the bought ones. They've done it that way on purpose I think, so they don't stand out. But I know how they stand out. You look for the black numbers on the walls. So you really can't tell until you get to see the pattern as you drive around and you look and you really pay attention then you get to know which ones are which, but overall they blend in really well." (H98 home owner).

"SAHT are identifiable because of driveways, houses are plainer looking." (H55 homeowner).

Certainly, some public housing tenants felt that despite the changes in tenure there was still stigma within the neighbourhoods associated with living in public housing. They expressed the view that new incoming homeowners did somehow perceive them as different. A tenant at Mitchell Park, for

instance, reported that one of her neighbours in their group of units did not want others in the neighbourhood to know that the units were public housing:

“And he said ‘ah I’d never tell anyone this is housing trust’, I said ‘really why?’ ‘Ah no he said’. But there’s nothing, no one would know, you know, they’d just think, ah a nice group of units, all the garden out the front was established by the trust and it’s all nice and neat and tidy. We’ve each done our own things in our back yard and I thought that’s really sad ...It’s a beautiful unit. How lucky are we, how lucky are we! That’s his view that’s how he feels about it, so I guess it’s not really for me to say one way or another whether it’s right or wrong but it’s a shame because he’s not going to add to the area becoming better though.” (MP2 public housing).

Mixing between tenures

In general, across the three neighbourhoods homeowners and public housing tenants mentioned that when they did mix with neighbours or others in the local community they tended to be in the same tenure. In part, this may not illustrate an obvious choice but rather seems facilitated because the public housing is often grouped in particular streets or down one side of a street or in a clustered group of units. For instance, one homeowner mentioned that she lived in a part of the neighbourhood where there was little public housing so she never came into contact with public housing tenants. In fact, the only time she saw “Trust tenants” was when they came into her work as she worked at the local Westfield shopping centre (MP1 homeowner).

The most common place where residents from across the different tenures came into contact with each other was at the local schools.

“When the girls were at the primary school and that’s just down the road there’d be lots of single mothers bringing their kids to school that lived a matter of streets away and myself we own our home, you’ve got a single parents. And we all talk and get on well together.” (H98 home owner).

Other residents expressed the viewpoint that as the new homeowners moving into the areas were younger couples, often child-free and out working to pay their mortgages, they tended not to spend much time in the neighbourhoods or frequent local schools. In addition, it was pointed out that the changes in socio-economic mix of the areas after regeneration made it even less likely for contact to occur across tenures:

“Before there were all mainly the same types of people and now there are huge differences. Like you’re really poor and really wealthy. Not wealthy but much better off people and I think they don’t mix.” (H7 homeowner).

In contrast, another respondent felt that the different tenures ‘mix in pretty well’ and did not really have a choice because although “a lot of people poke their nose up...they can’t do anything about it, you’ve got to live there” (N282 homeowner).

Concentration effects

Some of the public housing respondents expressed the view that it is important to disperse concentrations of public housing. One tenant explained that living amongst people that were similarly disadvantaged impacted negatively on her perception of herself because:

“People need variety to start with. Where you have got areas with all public housing tenants you have got everybody’s on a low income which is why they are in public housing for whatever reason and it’s really easy to be demoralised by that.” (MP 8 public housing).

Likewise, for other public housing tenant, tenure diversity was preferable for:

“the kids, for everybody growing up in the area, its more social, you meet different people in life, you get to learn respect and to value other people’s opinions and property. It is a different setup and I think its working for the best. I think they should have done it a long time ago.” (H2 public housing).

Some of the homeowners expressed similar viewpoints suggesting that it might be better to have a mix of people of different tenures interspersed, so that the ‘Trust people’ can be amongst other residents that are employed or on higher incomes (MP1 homeowner). One of the homeowners associated high concentrations of public housing with “ghettoes”, arguing that,

“getting away from the ghettoes is certainly the way to go because if I think you, just looking at what happened in the past it was certainly a recipe to create dreadful areas and for bad behaviour to be encouraged in the sense that good behaviour was never rewarded. Why bother to do up your house if you’re likely to get a beer bottle thrown through your front yard window, or next door had got five or six car bodies sitting in your front yard.” (H155 home owner).

DISCUSSION

Given that the findings are based on twenty-six interviews across three case study areas it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the effects of social mix on residents. As described earlier the intention of the research was not concerned with generalising the findings more broadly. Rather, the research was designed in order to elicit residents’ viewpoints and reveal their perspectives of how they experience social mix in their day-to-day lives in the three neighbourhoods. Six key themes have emerged, many of which reflect similar findings to that of other studies on social mix. In turn, these themes are about social housing and the problems of ASB, the impacts of increased levels of private rental within the regenerated neighbourhoods, a disassociation of public housing tenants that become homeowners from the public rental tenure, reductions in area stigma through the introduction of middle income homeowners, the lack of mixing between residents from different tenures and issues around concentrations of public housing in particular localities.

The current findings appear similar to those of other Australian studies in that residents often use housing tenure as a means to separate and distinguish their local community (Ziersch & Arthurson forthcoming; Ruming et al 2004). This aspect was more obvious at Mitchell Park than in the other two neighbourhoods. At Mitchell Park there was a strong perception from homeowners that crime and anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood emanated from the public housing tenure. Both this perception and indeed growing realisation that many public housing tenants are also unhappy with what they perceive as the small number of households who persistently engage in ASB activities has been highlighted by other Australian research on public housing estates (see Jacobs & Arthurson 2003; 2004). As well as the considerable distress for tenants who have to endure ASB, areas with high levels of public housing will remain stigmatised unless residents are confident that their concerns are addressed. Jacobs and Arthurson argue that in raising this issue they are all too well aware however well intentioned, that it may reinforce prejudices against already marginalised individuals and distract attention away from what is the primary issue; namely the need to increase resources and material benefits for those residing in public housing. Individuals entering public housing are increasingly high need and complex.

In contrast to Mitchell Park, residents at Hillcrest and Northfield whilst recognising the stigma associated with public housing also perceived the increases in private rental in the two areas as problematic. Issues were raised about the high turnover of tenants in private rental disrupting community sustainability. In addition respondents noted that often the houses were not well maintained as the function was merely to obtain a rental income for the landlord.

A key finding at Northfield and Hillcrest is that previous public rental tenants that had become homeowners were keen to distinguish themselves from the public housing tenure. This point has been highlighted in earlier research in the Hillcrest area. A study conducted by Biggins and Hassan (1998) assessed the success of the integration component of the Hillcrest project specifically from the aspect of residents' acceptance of socioeconomic diversity and the new mix of public and private housing in the suburb. The highest approval for the new mixed community came from low-income earners receiving less than \$25 000 per annum (79.4 per cent). Conversely, middle-income earners (\$35 000-\$55 000) approved the least (40 per cent). This is 25 per cent fewer than those residents on incomes over \$55 000 (Biggins and Hassan 1998: 39). Hence, where social distance is least, that is, from the point of view of middle-income earners, there is greater disapproval of the new mixed income community. It seems middle-income residents want to distance themselves from low-income residents in the income strata below them, which is consistent with general findings on social interactions, social networks and social distancing and the current study.

In relation to stigma, the findings are similar to those of international studies. Beekman et al (2001), for instance, reported that introducing owners onto public housing estates improved the reputation of the areas overall. As in the recent Australian study of the suburb of Belmont in NSW conducted by Ruming et al (2004), the findings suggest a more nuanced account of how stigma materialises is necessary. Whilst Belmont by comparison to the three case study areas consists of lower levels of public housing (8 per cent), it is concentrated in three specific parts of the suburb. The Belmont study found that developing these small-scale areas of public housing prevented the whole suburb from becoming stigmatised as is the case of larger estates. Indeed, the public housing tenants did not identify themselves as being stigmatised. Homeowners could still identify the pockets of public housing and labelled the public housing tenants as somehow different from themselves. Similarly, in the current study the stigma seems to be associated with specific clusters of public housing in particular streets and generated from some to all public housing, especially at Mitchell Park, rather than impacting on the overall image of the neighbourhood as was the situation before the regeneration project commenced.

The findings of the current study also concur with the international research that suggests there is little association between residents across tenures and where mixing does occur it takes place through schools.

CONCLUSION

The findings to date are preliminary in the sense that data from only twenty-six in-depth interviews across the three case study areas have been completed. Nonetheless, from the viewpoint of many of the residents interviewed, social mix certainly does matter. A mixed tenure community appears to create greater awareness of income and tenure differences, rather than smoothing the way to develop a sense of community within the regenerated area. In particular, the private rental tenure is associated with a high turnover of residents. Similar to the findings of other studies, the public housing tenure continues to be stigmatised by private homeowners within the neighbourhood although in reality, in many instances homeowners had not actually had social contact with public housing residents in the local neighbourhood.

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