Making our neighbourhood work: *Exploring a new perspective in public housing.*

Alex Baumann
University of Western Sydney, NSW, Australia

INTRODUCTION

In my time as a public housing resident I have participated in many resident-based activities such as community gardens and social events. I have also engaged with housing authorities on a variety of tenancy related matters. Through these 'Tenant Participation' activities I found myself attempting to encourage participation from other residents. These attempts to 'encourage' were frequently frustrated; my disappointment reaching a crescendo in 2007, as a diary entry at the time attests:

> I'm so over it! How do you organise with people who come and go, who take a role one week and drop it the next …who say they love an idea but run a mile if it involves any real responsibility?

As I delved into the literature on tenant participation I realised that the problems I was experiencing were also playing out in a variety of other contexts – nationally and internationally. Reflecting on my experience and the contemporary literature on tenant participation, it seemed unfair that the 'failure' of tenant participation programs was often rationalised and attributed to residents. It is often all too easy to problematise those who opt out of participation as I had done, and as had been done to me as a public housing resident by others. It is much more difficult thing to step outside of taken-for-granted understandings of participation and undertake an assessment of the sort of engagement processes being used and subjectivities being produced.

Tenant Participation

'Responding to international discourses around 'empowerment' (Perkins et al. 1995; Cruikshank 1999; Newman 2001; McDonald et al. 2005; Clarke et al. 2007) 'public tenant participation' became a strong theme in public housing in Australia in the 1980's. In tenant participation programs public residents are invited to attend forums, or commit to roles in housing management committees (AHURI 2003; McKee 2008; Housing NSW 2010). These forms of participation have typically been delivered within a formal and specialised governance framework.

Despite themes of participation and 'empowerment' many studies reveal that residents have largely felt shut out, shut down and intimidated by this particular 'governance' approach. As both Australian-based and international studies identify, despite the aims of these programs, non-participation has been the overwhelming result (Randolph et al. 2000; Shelters 2003; AHURI 2003; McKee 2007; McKee 2008; McKee et al. 2008; Paddison et al. 2008).

Because tenant participation has been largely seen as self-evidently a good thing (Riseborough 1998), this history of poor resident uptake has resulted in discourses such as 'apathy' and 'dependence' that problematises those residents who choose to 'opt out' (Randolph et al. 2000; AHURI 2003; McKee 2008; Paddison et al. 2008). Given the stigmatized wider characterization of public residents (Atkinson et al. 2008), it is no surprise that many housing and policy professionals have concluded that residents themselves are the problem around non-participation. The result of this problematisation is that it is used as further justification for top-down interventions. In this regard, many researchers and policy makers have begun concerning themselves with the negative social and economic effects these disadvantaged residents may be having on each other. This idea, known as Neighbourhood Effects' (Bill 2005) or Place Effects' (Briggs 2003) is now driving a very concerted intervention focused on dispersing these communities. It is suggested that breaking up these estates will create a much healthier 'social mix', as unemployed residents find themselves resettled in neighbourhoods with people who are employed. The emergence of this recent top down social mix approach suggests a policy undercurrent that is far more committed to the patriarchal idea that residents simply need to be 'taught' to become 'responsible' for themselves, rather than any genuine attempt to help residents find power (Atkinson 2000; Arthurson 2005; Darcy 2007).

A critique of the entire empowerment project, and the problematisation of non-participation has emerged through a governmentality assessment of tenant participation (McKee 2008; Flint 2003; Cruikshank 1996; Dodson 2007). From this perspective there is recognition that supposed empowerment and the key discourses it uses, such as apathy and dependency, are themselves a way of regulating human conduct towards particular ends (Cruikshank 1999; Rose 1999). It is from this governmentality assessment that a new analysis of non-participation has been able to take place and reasons for non-participation, that go beyond

the simplistic problematisation of residents, have been able to emerge. McKee's (2008, 2007) governmentality research on a council housing estate in Glasgow revealed that residents often rejected formal 'governance' processes. McKee (2008:34) also pointed out that residents demonstrated an interest in what she called an 'instrumental approach to participation' in that they were willing to mobilise around specific and singular issues that they deemed important. This finding, and the consequent call for more appropriate engagement processes, is also clearly echoed in Australian policy oriented studies. Despite their underlying focus on dependency and apathy, they also call for processes that recognize and build on resident and community characteristics such as informality and non-specialized roles (Randolph et al. 2000; AHURI 2003).

Cornwall's (2005:87) governmentality work names these new spaces for participation as: 'sites of radical possibility from which marginalised actors are able to define themselves and only then to act'. While a governmentality approach is largely focused on and critical of 'the construction of dominant discourses that 'subject' the individual to powerful forces' it also opens the way to the 'exploration of new discourses that explore ways that the subject can resist and reconstitute power in different ways' (Sheppard et al. 2007:100).

Arising from its origins in the experiences and writings of public housing residents in the Neighbourhood That Works project (NTW 2008), this paper uses a governmentality theoretical framework to review the tenant participation and housing literature and its use of the idea of empowerment. The paper then turns to the types of processes that have been specifically used to realize tenant participation, a review of these processes, their failure to engage, and the rise of an 'apathy' and 'dependency' discourse. Building on this review, a gap in this literature is identified that points toward the need for new types of participation spaces for public residents. The paper will then discuss my participatory action research 'with' NTW, a resident group who are attempting to respond to this need with a new 'resident centered' process they call 'Village'.

GOVERNMENTALITY THEORY AND PROCESSES OF SUBJECTIFICATION

In Foucault's (1983, 1991, 2003) theory of governmentality, government is less about the administrative and political structures of the contemporary state than about the way in which individual conduct can be directed. Foucault argued that to explore government is to explore those techniques (or what he termed technologies of government) that try to shape the aspirations of individuals and groups (Dean 1999). In this way individual conduct can be directed through subtle and indirect means focused on the construction of identity and knowledge. 'Subjectification' is a concept that lies at the heart of governmentality in the way that it describes an approach that seeks to influence and integrate the individual as a key way the population as a whole can be governed. In other words, subjectification seeks to govern people from the inside or from their own subjective viewpoint. In this sense governmentality can be defined as the 'conduct of conduct', or a calculated attempt to direct human behaviour toward specific ends (Foucault 2003; Dean 1999).

Foucault proposed that power can manifest itself through the 'construction of knowledge'. In this approach individuals are understood to accept and internalise this knowledge which they then use to guide their own behaviour. This internalisation of knowledge is an efficient form of social control, as it enables individuals to govern themselves through what Lemke (2001:201) termed 'self-care', as well as play a key role in the conditioning and controlling of others (Rose 1999). To achieve this, Foucault points to 'technologies of government' that have the effect of shaping individuals without directly disciplining them. In this regard the technology of 'responsibilisation' is one of the main tools of government. This technology is used to condition subjects into becoming responsibilised by encouraging them to see problems like unemployment and poverty not as the responsibility of government, but as issues related to individual responsibility or what Lemke (2001) would term 'self-care'.

Another key technology of government is that of normalisation. Rose (1999:76) described a norm as that 'which is socially worthy, statistically average, scientifically healthy and personally desirable'. Importantly, from a governmentality perspective, those who wish to achieve normality will do so by conditioning and controlling themselves as well as their families according to parameters that define what 'normal' is. Rose (1999:73) also points out that norms are 'enforced through the use of shame which creates an anxiety around the appearance of the self'. The sort of stigmatisation of public residents related to their lack of conformity to private housing norms is a strong example of this (Atkinson et al. 2008). In regards to this use of technologies of government in housing, Dufty's (2007:183) study of Australian rural public housing residents demonstrated how even something as innocuous as 'choice' can be used to attempt to produce the; 'economically rational' and 'locationally flexible' outcomes that are pursued by policymakers intent on addressing rural disadvantage through relocation to employment centres.

In this way, technologies, like responsibilisation, norms and choice, are typically aligned with political goals or what Foucault terms a mentality of rule or rationality (1991). Dean (1999) makes the point that the linking of

governing and mentalities in governmentality means that when looking at technologies of government an analysis is also needed of the mentality or rationalities underpinning them. In regards to neoliberal governmentality the technologies used are directly encouraging a reduction in any dependence on the state. In the way that concepts like 'mentality of rule' and 'technologies of government' invite us take a step back from key discourses such as empowerment (and their status as being self-evidently a good thing), governmentality provides a very useful tool for the critique of tenant participation. As governmentality writers like Cruikshank (1996, 1999), McKee (2007, 2008) and Flint (2003, 2006) show us, we then have a platform from which to take a closer and more critical look at the subtle and hidden forces at work within such discourses. This next section reviews the empowerment and tenant participation literature and the emergence of a governmentality critique of both.

EMPOWERMENT AND TENANT PARTICIPATION

Since the mid-1980s terms like 'self-determination', 'participation', 'active citizenship' and 'empowerment' have been widely used both internationally and within the Australian social policy context as part of an emerging 'empowerment discourse' underlying community development and welfare policy theory (Cruikshank 1999; McDonald et al. 2005; Fung et al. 2003; Wainwrigh 2003). Unlike empowerment's earlier incarnation, where it was a project unequivocally committed to subject self-determination (see Freire, 1972), this neo-liberal take on empowerment discourse has become part of a broad political drive to address dependency on the state and promote a more active citizenry (Newman 2001; Clarke et al., 2007). Under the influence of this new discourse, the welfare state has shifted away from the idea of the passive welfare safety net, designed to counter the polarizing effects of capitalism, towards a welfare state now more engaged in the political process of promoting responsibility and active citizenship (Clarke 2005). McKee et al. (2008:133) position this shift as one that has:

> … injected irrevocable change into the public sector where the local governance vernacular is now manifested vis-a -vis empowering discourses, such as user involvement, collective decision-making, local control and so forth.

A governmentality critique of the empowerment discourse suggests that while a liberating potential may exist in the process of empowerment, it is still fundamentally a relationship of power because it is designed to shape and direct human conduct, that is, produce specific subjectivities, towards particular ends (Cruikshank 1999). With a neo-liberal rationality lying behind this empowerment discourse, market integration and independence from the state become the main 'ends' to which the subject is directed (Isin and Wood 1999, Rose 1996; Flint 2003). Flint (2003: 614) argues that 'conduct is rationalized as the ability of subjects to create the means for their own consumption, primarily through gaining access to the labour market' and that 'this involves investing in themselves as 'human capitalists''. This is done through, for example, the new attitudes and skills involved in tenant participation. This approach to empowerment promotes human capital and self-esteem as a means of reducing welfare dependency (Rose 1999; Walters 1997; Cruikshank 1996). Flint (2003) makes the point that it is not just autonomy that is devolved, but also the responsibilities of neo-liberal citizenship. From this governmentality perspective the empowerment project is not necessarily any better or worse than any other type of government intervention (Cruikshank 1996; McKee 2008). Should individuals choose not to adopt certain subjectivities, their behaviours are in turn problematised. As Zygmunt Bauman (1998:614) outlines:

> … individuals unable or unwilling to undertake these 'normalized' acts of consumption become conceptualized as flawed consumers, with a particular focus on the deficiency of those reliant on allocated, as opposed to chosen, goods.

The next section of this paper will explore the origins and evolution of tenant participation in the Australian and international policy context and how the neo-liberal rationalities lying at the core of these processes have resulted in the alienation of public residents.

The Emergence of Public Tenant Participation in NSW

Despite the fact that tenant participation was and remains very much an ill-defined and a slippery concept (Goodlad, 2001), it was broadly promoted, by the then NSW state Minister of Housing, Frank Walker, as being related to two distinct goals (Shelter, 2003:4):

1. Firstly at the organisational level it was promoted as creating an alternative force to the imperatives of the Department, which were not necessarily focused on the welfare of tenants or what they wanted.

2. Secondly, it was promoted as a program that could operate at the estate level; as a means of improving conditions and encouraging community relationships amongst tenants.

To try to engage public residents in housing management, consultation and community development strategies, tenant participation has relied on a set of very specific engagement processes. This paper will now turn to an examination of these specific processes and recent literature on them.

Participation – Public Housing Engagement Processes

With the renewal of housing estates becoming a top government priority in recent times, tenant participation engagement related to estate renewal has become a major focus (Randolph et al. 2000; Shelter 2003; Hickman 2006). Consultation, rather than tenant 'management' and 'decision making' are guiding aims of tenant participation programs in this Australian public housing renewal context (Randolph et al. 2000). In terms of what tenant consultation looks like in Australia, a report on tenant participation by AHURI (2003) identified that the basic participation structures used across the three States studied (NSW, QLD and SA) focused on community forums. The intention in each case was to encourage some local residents to attend a regular meeting at which they could represent the views of local people. In Queensland, the forums invited all residents who wished to attend, whereas in the other two states, the majority of forums were restricted to specified delegates (AHURI 2003).

Where residents have become involved in housing management as opposed to consultation, formal meeting and management processes are promoted. This governance approach, which is typically based around the formation of a committee, is the same as the process that is invariably proposed for management of community development strategies. These processes seek to pass the management of projects like community gardens from paid community workers over to residents. In this model the specialised management positions often include such roles as treasurer, secretary and chair. Meetings are held regularly to manage the project and make key decisions. These formal processes have been taught to public residents by organisations like the Association to Resource Cooperative Housing (ARCH) and they are legally recognised and supported by the NSW Office of Fair Trading.

A REVIEW OF PROCESSES

Across the various processes designed to 'empower' public residents, many studies report a basic failure of uptake (Randolph et al. 2000, Shelters 2003; AHURI 2003; McKee 2007; McKee 2008; McKee et al. 2008; Paddison et al. 2008). AHURI's (2003) study, reporting on the state of tenant participation across several estates, stated that even in Queensland, where the consultation forums where open to all residents, few people took an active part in these meetings and it was very difficult to feel that those who attended were in any way representative of the broader resident population. This study identified that the lack of engagement was consistent across all efforts at involving residents in management issues. Similarly, in a review of tenant participation, Shelter (2003:6) reported that: 'implementation of tenant participation has been patchy at best, and largely reliant on the goodwill of those engaging in it'. A study by Randolph et al. (2000) also identified that few residents were enthusiastic about getting 'involved' in the number of large housing estates they researched. Community development case studies, such as Waterloo's Community Gardens Bountiful Harvest (Thompson et al. 2003), clearly indicate a lack of a simple management processes that enabled residents to move away from depending on paid community workers for the ongoing success of programs. The unfortunate and unsustainable conclusion of such case studies is that this sort of community participation will remain forever dependent on professional facilitation and management for its survival.

In studies outside of Australia, tenant participation programs have been found to be just as ineffective. A UK report (McKee 2008:29) on several tenant participation case studies in Glasgow described 'turnout at organised events and responses to consultation exercises as 'low', and normally comprising of the 'same old faces' and hardcore stalwarts'. For example, in two of the three case studies many of the positions on the management committee were not taken up. This included cases where an Annual General Meeting had to be called off and held again due to an insufficient turnout from shareholding members (McKee 2008). Even with very important issues, all the case studies reported difficulty in securing attendance at participation events and meetings (McKee 2008). When asked if many people get involved one frustrated committee member of McKee's UK case studies (2008:29) stated: 'Not really, they [the 'inactive' tenants] won't join anything; they won't do anything. But they've plenty to say, a lot of them. But nobody will come forward and do anything'.

A number of explanations for the 'failure' of tenant participation programs have been posed. These explanations fall into two main categories: first some discourses have sought to essentially place the blame for program failure on the residents themselves; and second, a more recent discourse has emerged that seeks to explain failure in terms of how the programs are structured.

Explaining Non-Participation: 'Blaming Residents' Discourses

While AHURI's (2003) study on resident participation identified that stigmatization of an area acted as a 'barrier to participation', it also pointed to individual social problems, such as drug addiction, as key contributors to tenant apathy toward participation. The study (AHURI 2003:4) summed up this perspective with a quote that came from an interview with renewal professionals noting that: 'The life experiences of local residents had sometimes resulted in high levels of dependency and apathy, which worked against their inclusion in the renewal process'. This problematising of non-participation is representative of a general characterization and stigmatization of public housing residents in both Australia and abroad as being personally responsible for and contributing to the failure of their communities (Atkinson et al. 2008; AHURI 2003; McKee 2008; Flint 2003).

In this context, tenant participation emerges as a fundamentally 'moral' project, in which 'opting out is not part of the message' (Riseborough 1998:238; see also Flint 2003). Jayasuriya (2002:312) calls it 'a peculiarly moralised form of agency that lies at the heart of the new neo-liberal contractualism'. The core assumption in this construction of apathy and dependency is that tenant participation is assumed to be 'self-evidently a good thing' and presented in 'glowing terms' (Riseborough 1998:230–8). The problem with this approach is that it fails to recognize that structural aspects of tenant participation programs may also be contributing to a lack of participation by residents. At best much of this policy oriented research on tenant participation points to the failure of these processes to engage and the need for a 're-conditioning'/subjectification of the tenant through greater skill development and training (Randolph et al. 2000, AHURI 2003).

Explaining Non-Participation: An Alternative Telling

McKee's (2008) governmentality study '*The 'Responsible' Tenant and the Problem of Apathy*' is a land mark study in that it establishes a new premise for understanding non-participation. In particular, she (2008:26) urges housing researchers to 'go beyond normative agendas, which simply reverberate the benefits of tenant participation and governance' and to 'provide a critical space in which tenants' own reasons for non-involvement can be articulated'. Through a commitment to hear resident voices, McKee (2008) identified an alternative narrative that emerged from residents themselves. Focus group research suggested that residents' reasons for non-involvement were more than simply lack of interest (apathy and dependence). Instead, the research found that residents were eager to mobilise around issues that they were interested in and that directly affect them, but this did not mean that they would become involved in formalised and demanding governance structures. McKee (2008) established that by focusing so overwhelmingly on formal governance, housing professionals adopted a very narrow view of participation that is overwhelmingly focused on the management committee. When asked directly, the majority of focus group participants' expressed 'no demand for continual, formal involvement' (2008:34). In this way McKee's (2008:34) research uncovered '…a latent motivation to participate in a range of decision making from practical issues (e.g. colours of doors, upkeep of communal areas) to more political questions (e.g. housing allocations, anti-social behaviour)'. In short, McKee (2008:34) found that residents demonstrated an 'instrumental approach to participation, and were willing to mobilise around issues they deemed important'. McKee (2008) also reported that front-line housing professionals saw top–down agendas as 'unrealistic', and were keen instead to stress the organic nature of participation and the many reasons why residents may choose to opt out (McKee 2008:30). In this regard a Tenant Participation Officer (McKee, 2008: 30) stated that: 'I think people have a right to participate when they want to and if they want to and at what level. I think the danger is that we all get fixated on there having to be tenant participation'.

Despite their conclusions around dependence and apathy, similar resident sentiments have been reported in Australian policy orientated research. An AHURI (2003) study on achieving resident participation found very low rates of participation in the many estates it studied. The report concluded that; 'often the formality of consultation or participation processes, such as meetings, and the exclusive nature of the language used were daunting, and discouraged local participation' (AHURI 2003:4). The AHURI (2003:3) study also found that for the minority who did try to get involved, they often felt; 'dominated, ignored or manipulated by renewal professionals and felt constrained and limited in their role.' Of this Cornwall (2005:84) argues:

> Having a voice clearly depends on more than just having a seat at a table. In particular arenas in which 'experts' are present, even the most well equipped middle-class layperson may end up feeling cowed. More so those who have spent their lives being on the receiving end of prejudice, and may, as Freire (1972) argued, have so internalized discourses of discrimination that they are barely able to imagine themselves as actors, let alone agents. Exercising voice in such settings requires more than having the nerve and the skills to speak. Resisting discursive closure, reframing what counts as

knowledge and articulating alternatives, especially in the face of apparently incommensurable knowledge systems, requires more than simply seeking to allow everyone to speak and asserting the need to listen.

Cornwall (2005:78) illuminates the possibility that these spaces may be themselves technologies of government, using subtle and coercive means to direct subjects toward specific ends:

> The very act of soliciting the 'voices of the poor' can all too easily end up as an act of ventriloquism as 'public transcripts' are traded in open view. … The contrast here between spaces that are chosen, fashioned and claimed by those at the margins – those 'sites of radical possibility' – and spaces into which those who are considered marginal are invited, resonates with some of the paradoxes of participation in development.

From a governmentality perspective it is being argued that the very design of the participation space made available to residents is intimidating, overly formal, involving too much commitment and, at a more fundamental level, directed toward ends not entirely compatible with the sort of perspectives or 'rationalities' held by many residents. It is little wonder than that so many have chosen to opt out.

Conditioning the Market Integrated Subject

In an attempt to respond to the lack of success of tenant participation programs, much of the policy orientated research has pointed to the need for new tenant governance skill. These studies stress the need for more resources for training of specialised resident skills to achieve better 'governance' in tenant participation programs (Randolph et al 2000; AHURI 2003). In a similar light, AHURI's (2003) study on achieving resident participation also identified the need to address other seemingly intractable barriers to forum and committee participation such as the difficulty in making meeting times that suit people, the problem of finding workable venues and the difficulty in organising childcare. Thus the model of so called empowerment advocated by traditional approaches to tenant participation has replicated the barriers to involvement that exist between the majority of public housing residents and employment in the marketplace. These common barriers come as no real surprise to governmentality writers such as Flint (2003), McKee (2008) and Cruikshank (1999), who argue that the parallels between the empowerment project and the construction of the market integrated subject is no accident. As McKee (2008:29) points out:

> despite the government's endeavour to democratise public services, the tendency remains for citizens to be conceived quite narrowly as rational consumers who can be empowered through quasi-consumerist models of participation.

This recent analysis directly corresponds with Escobar's (1995) Foucauldian analysis of neo-liberal development in areas 'disadvantaged', which reveals an aggressive 'subjectification' of individuals. According to Sheppard (2007:103) Escobar's research in the 'third world' demonstrates that 'subjects produced within and by this discourse are ill-equipped to think outside the presumed Order of the Truth of the economic development story and to reject a vision of the 'good society' emanating from the West'. Many public residents are being subject to the same construction of truth, through concepts like neighbourhood effects and social exclusion (Lupton 2010; Darcy 2007; Arthurson 2005) and the same construction of the solution through a neo-liberal development focus on the independence from the state that comes with employment and private forms of housing. Given this underlying neo-liberal rationality, it is little wonder that 'empowerment' programs (as seen in tenant participation) have almost exclusively focused on the development of specialized and formalized skills needed for market integration. It is also unsurprising that many already vulnerable residents have felt alienated and patronized by such programs and chosen to opt out. As has been outlined, a consistent theme running through both Australian and international assessments of tenant participation clearly points to an approach to participation that is failing to engage residents and is clearly alienating. From a governmentality 'responsibilisation' perspective this experienced alienation is the result of an approach to participation that ultimately seeks to construct the market-integrated subject (Flint 2007).

The Need for New Participation Perspectives

While the recommendations for greater skill development, childcare and more convenient timing of meetings (AHURI 2003; Randolph et al. 2000) may be a path to participation for some residents, it would seem (from a governmentality analysis at least) that alternative perspectives, those which go to the core 'rationality' behind the participation process, are also needed. In this light several key Australian and international studies and reports on tenant participation have hinted, if only subliminally, at the need for fundamental reform of tenant participation processes. Key to such recommendations is the stated need for approaches that are far more accessible and simple for residents (Randolph et al. 2000; AHURI 2003; McKee 2007, 2008; McKee et al.

2008; Paddison et al. 2008). AHURI (2003:1) also state that a key factor was the need for approaches that '…start with local people'. Similarly, McKee and Cooper's (2008:138) research drew on the voices of both housing professionals and residents alike to describe the need to:

> …be flexible in terms of the methods of engagement they offer, and to be innovative and think "outside the box" [and] …participation is no longer to be 'equated with the 'committee' per se or restricted to traditional housing issues, but extended to encourage involvement from the wider tenant group through new initiatives beyond the traditional focus on bricks and mortar activities.

This assessment of the need for new perspectives and processes is consistent with the findings of notable 'self-help' researchers such as Burns et al. (2004) and Butcher et al. (1980). They point out that what is characteristic of all community level participation is that it is typically informal, collaborative, non-hierarchical and involves people in non-specialised roles.

EXPLORING A NEW PARTICIPATION PERSPECTIVE

There have been few tenant participation projects that pursue different participatory perspectives to juxtapose against a more traditional approach to tenant participation. Recently, such an attempt at developing a new perspective has been undertaken in the Blue Mountains by a grass-roots public tenants' community group called Neighbourhood That Works (NTW), a group that I, as a public housing resident, have been an active part of. The process NTW is developing, known as 'Village', acknowledges that many residents are already 'talking over the fence' and it attempts to build on this existing culture of resident engagement in a natural and organic way. This resident centered approach sits in stark contrast to the market oriented approach of most government driven tenant participation programs, with their emphasis on formality and specialized skills (with the ultimate aim of the 'market integrated subject'). It is hoped that this new participation perspective has resulted in the development of a process that will be less alienating to many public residents, many of whom feel deeply alienated and patronized by programs with market integration agendas (Shelters 2003; AHURI 2003; McKee 2008; Paddison et al. 2008). The application of this 'Village' process in a public housing case study, and the resident subjectivities it produces, is the subject of my current PhD research.

What Might a 'Resident Centered' Approach Look Like?

NTW (2008) realised that if this new 'Village' process was going to respond to the key characteristics and needs of residents it would need to be a process that was: [1] an 'instrumental' approach; where residents could focus on issues that they deemed important, [2] informal; supporting casual and non-specialised forms of participation, [3] resident owned; giving residents genuine control [4] convenient; not relying on set times or venues, transport, childcare etc. and [5] organically structured; helping residents get their ideas off the ground in a casual but organised way (Kenny 1999; Burns et al. 2004).

In light of these specific resident characteristics and needs, online forms of engagement are beginning to show remarkable potential. While the internet has been seen in the past as itself an 'exclusive space', what is now being achieved by online spaces like 'Our House Swap' (www.ourhouseswap.com.au), (where thousands of public residents are using a resident designed web application to self-list their housing for exchange) is demonstrating just how the internet can be an accessible, powerful and effective self-help tool for many public housing residents. Writers like Wright and Street (2007) point out that internet based communication spaces, like online forums, are offering each and every community member a space where they can fully express their particular perspectives free from the constraint of set agendas, interruption, domination or qualification. More than this, the ability to discuss matters when, where, how and with whom they want is made far easier. This overcomes issues like the need for a venue, the difficulty of the timing of meetings to suit everyone, transport and childcare that have been identified as key barriers to participation (AHURI 2003; Randolph et al. 2000). Online forums also allow people to communicate without feeling intimidated by impatient onlookers and it gives people the time they need to consider their responses. Importantly, without any commitment to formality, forums also automatically register and provide a public record of what is said and agreed to. In these many ways online engagement spaces correspond directly with the sort of resident needs that have been identified. If an online engagement space is found by residents to be as useful and effective as a space like 'Our House Swap', it would provide enormous potential for expanding on the already existing 'over the fence' resident culture of engagement.

These online forms of engagement directly contrast face to face forums and committees, where people must take time out from their day to day lives to attend infrequent meetings and try and compete to have their issues heard in a formalized, limited and contested space. Writers like Hearn et al. (1983) and Lannello (1992) describe such spaces as being part of a patriarchal management paradigm, where a contest of ideas

is won by the most dominant and powerful voice. Cooke, Kothari (2001) and Cornwall (2005) point out that such traditional participation spaces have typically resulted in the silencing of disempowered, unassertive and less confident voices, undermining the sustainability and meaningfulness of community participation.

In an effort to realize the potential of online spaces, the 'Village' application combines an online forum with a simple and innovative online organizer which has been purpose built for public residents. The idea is that residents will be able to discuss specific issues (as a natural extension of what they are already doing) as well as add and discuss tasks without meetings. In 'Village' these tasks are automatically calendarised and they can be broken down into small non-specialised job steps for all to see and take as they wish. Like the online discussion space, this simplified organizer process sits in direct contrast to formal committee organisation processes where people must convene in formal groups, and where specialised roles like treasurer, chair and secretary are meted out to unsuspecting and unskilled participants - a process that has been a recipe for achieving low levels of participation, burnout and bad management outcomes in many grass-roots groups (McCluskey 1999; Metcalf 1995; Thompson et al., 2003).

'Village' arises from a resident-centered perspective. It is an effort to tailor a process to the specific informal and non-specialised needs of residents who just want to get on with it but who need an accessible, non-hierarchical and non-daunting way to put forward their felt issues and ideas and to organize themselves. In short, 'Village' has been specifically designed to respond to the particular needs and characteristics of residents – in the way that it supports: [1] issues that are deemed important, [2] casual and non-specialised processes, [3] resident ownership of process, [4] convenience and [5] organic structure. In these ways NTW believes that its purpose-built online forum might represent an alternative participation space; providing a natural next step to the 'talking over the fence' many residents are already engaging in. To achieve community development and housing management/consultation objectives, this sort of space may well have the potential to inform, support and in some cases even replace traditional tenant participation committee and forum spaces.

As outlined in this paper, tenant participation literature clearly states that current processes are largely failing and alludes to a need for better approaches. It is here, in this identified need for new 'resident centered' processes, that NTW's work (trialing 'Village' in a Blue Mountains public housing complex) is positioned. This provides an ideal location for a participatory research case study because it is residents themselves who have identified the need for better processes and it is residents themselves who are exploring a potential solution in the form of the 'Village' application. NTW has just recently completed the 'Village' application design and construction phase. To explore 'Village's' potential successes and failures as a new participation space, this research project will conduct a series of in-depth resident interviews. Central to these interviews will be questions exploring the participatory subjectivities (hopes, beliefs and perspectives) of residents and how these subjectivities are either supported or unsatisfied by the approach taken by 'Village'. As a resident myself and in my role as a participant researcher, I will also be keeping a research journal. In this way observation will be a second method employed in the case study.

CONCLUSION

As outlined in this paper, a major, if not central theme in many of the Australian and international studies on tenant participation is one of poor participation rates by public housing residents. Despite subliminal hints that would suggest a need for fundamentally different processes, most of this research typically points back to a lack of appropriate skills, disadvantage and apathy as the main problem. The governmentality perspective proposes that the formal and specialised processes (such as forums and committees) and the entire 'empowerment' project is alienating to many residents. At an even more fundamental level many governmentality researchers attribute the problem of program failure to governments' attempt to engender 'responsibilisation' and a neo-liberal rationality that seeks to integrate subjects into the processes associated with the market (Cruikshank 1999; Flint 2003; McKee 2008). From this perspective, discourses such as 'apathy' and 'dependence' can be seen as technologies of government (responsibilisation and normalization) that engender the shame and stigma necessary to have subjects self-regulate and comply to this neo-liberal agenda. This new analysis has helped facilitate resident voices around their decision to opt out of tenant participation programs.

Whether from a policy orientated or governmentality informed perspective, the literature on tenant participation points to the failure of tenant participation governance processes to engage and the need for new, more accessible and more resident centered approaches to participation. This is a perspective that corresponds directly with the experience and writings of a resident group called NTW (2008). Cornwall (2005:87) names these as: 'sites of radical possibility from which marginalised actors are able to define themselves and only then to act'. It is to this end that this PhD participatory research is exploring a new, resident conceived participation space called 'Village' in a public housing case study.

Alex Baumann - PhD Candidate - University of Western Sydney - a.baumann@uws.edu.au

REFERENCES

AHURI (2003) Achieving resident participation in community and urban renewal in Australia *AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin* ISSUE 19 April

Arthurson, K. (2001) Achieving social justice in estate regeneration: the impact of physical image construction, *Housing Studies*, 16(6), pp. 807–826.

Arthurson, K. (2002) Creating inclusive communities through balancing social mix: a critical relationship or tenuous link?, *Urban Policy and Research*, 20(3), pp. 245–261.

Arthurson, K. (2005) Residents' perspectives about social mix. *Proceedings of the Second State of Australian Cities Conference,* Griffith University, Brisbane.

Atkinson R. Jacobs K. (2008) *Public Housing in Australia: Stigma, Home and Opportunity* Paper No. 01 Housing and Community Research Unit School of Sociology University of Tasmania Housing and Community Research Unit School of Sociology and Social Work University of Tasmania

Atkinson, R. & Kintrea, K. (2000) "Owner-occupation, social mix and neighbourhood impacts", *Policy nd Politics*, 28, pp. 93–108.

Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* , Buckingham: Open University Press.

Baumann A. (2009) *Getting Our Act Together: exploring & further developing a new self-help 'organiser' through action research.* University of Western Sydney Honours Thesis.

Bill, A. (2005) Neighbourhood inequality—do small area interactions influence economic outcomes? *Proceedings of the Second State of Australian Cities Conference*, Griffith University, Brisbane

Briggs, X. (2003) Reshaping the geography of opportunity: place effects in global perspective, *Housing Studies*, 8(6), pp. 915–936.

Burns, D. Williams, C. and Windebank, J. (2004). *Community Self-Help.* Basingstoke. Gill Br Journal of Social Work.2005; 35: 295-296

Butcher, Collis, Glen and Sills (1980). *Community groups in action*: *case studies and analysis* London; Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul

Clarke, J. (2005) *New Labour's citizens: activated, empowered, responsibilized, abandoned?,* Critical Social Policy, 25(4), pp. 447–463.

Clarke, J., Newman, J., Smith, N., Vidler, E., and Westmarland, L. (2007), *Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Publics and Changing Public Services*, London: Sage.

Cooke B. Kothari U. Participation : the new tyranny? London ; New York : Zed Books, 2001

Cornwall, Andrea. (2005) "Spaces for Transformation? Reflections on Issues of Power and Difference in Participation in Development." In *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation?* Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development. Edited by Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan. London, UK: Zed Books, , pp. 75-91.

Cruikshank, B. (1999) *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca: Cornell University).

Cruikshank, B. (1996) 'Revolutions within: self-government and self-esteem', in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne & Nikolas Rose (eds.) (1996), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Darcy M. (2007) Place and Disadvantage: The Need for Reflexive Epistemology in Spatial Social Science *Urban Policy and Research*, Volume 25, Issue 3 September 2007 , pages 347 - 361

Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage).

Dodson, J. (2007) *Government Discourse and Housing* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press).

Dodson, J. (2006) *The "roll" of the state: government, neoliberalism and housing assistance in four advanced economies*, Housing, Theory and Society, 23(4), pp. 224–243.

Dufty, R. (2007) 'Governing Through Locational Choice: the Locational Preferences of Rural Public Housing Tenants in South-Western New South Wales, Australia', *Housing, Theory and Society,* 24: 3, 183 — 206

Escobar A. (1995) *Encountering development : the making and unmaking of the Third World* Princeton Princeton University Press cop.

Flint, J. (2003) Housing and ethopolitics: constructing identities of active consumption and responsible community, *Economy and Society*, 32(3), pp. 611–629.

Flint, J. (2006) Maintaining an arm's length? Housing, community governance and the management of "problematic" populations*, Housing Studies*, 21(2), pp. 171–186.

Foucault, M. (1983) Afterward". *In Michael Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rainbow, 208-52. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M.(1991) 'Governmentality', trans. Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, pp. 87–104. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Foucault, M. (2003) 'Truth and power', in: P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds), *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault,* 1954–1984 (London: The New Press).

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Fung & Wright (2003) *Deepening democracy : institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* London: Verso

Goodlad, R. (2001), 'Developments in tenant participation: accounting for growth', in D. Marsh and A. Cowan (eds), Two Steps Forward: *Housing Policy in the New Millennium*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Hearn, J. and Parkin, . (1983) '*Gender and Organisations: A Selected review and Critique of a Neglected Area', Organisational Studies*, 4(3) Reprinted in A. Mills and P. Tancred (eds), Gendering Organisational Analysis. Newbury ARk, CA: Sage.

Hickman, P. (2006), *'Approaches to tenant participation in the English local authority sector'*, HousingStudies, 21, 2, 209–25.

Housing NSW (2010) Social Housing Tenants Advisory Committee Overview [accessed online 23.08.10]http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/about%2Bus/social%2Bhousing%2Btenants%2Badvisory%2Bcommittee/

Isin, E. F. and Wood, P. K. (1999) *Citizenship and Identity*, London: Sage.

Jayasuriya, K. (2002) 'The New Contractualism: Neo-Liberal or Democratic?', *Political Quarterly*, pp. 309-320.

Kenny, S. (1999) *Developing Communities for the Future: Community Development in Australia*. Melbourne, Australia: Thomson Nelson ITP Publishing Company.

Lannello, K. (1992) *Decisions Without Hierarchy: Feminist Interventions in Organization Theory and Practice*. Published by Routledge,

Lemke, T. (2001) 'The birth of bio-politics: Michael Foucault's lectures at the College de France on neo-liberal governmentality' in *Economy and Society* v.30, i.2, p.190-207

Lupton, R. (2003) *Neighbourhood Effects: Can We Measure Them and Does it Matter*? LSE STICERD Research Paper No. CASE073. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1158964 [Accessed 23 August 2010].

McCluskey A. (1999). *Consensus building and verbal desperados.* [Retrieved on 01.04.09]. http://www.connected.org/govern/consensus.html. Connected Magazine.

McDonald, C. and Marston, G. (2005), 'Workfare as welfare: governing unemployment in the advanced liberal state', *Critical Social Policy*, 25, 3, 374–401.

McKee, K. (2007) 'Community ownership in Glasgow: the devolution of ownership and control, or a centralizing process?', *European Journal of Housing Policy*, 7(3), pp. 319–336.

McKee, K. (2008) *The 'Responsible' Tenant and the Problem of Apathy* Cambridge University Press Social Policy & Society 8:1, 25–36 Printed in the United Kingdom

McKee K. and Cooper, V. (2008) 'The Paradox of Tenant Empowerment: Regulatory and Liberatory Possibilities', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 25: 2, 132 — 146

Metcalf B. (1995) *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

NTW - Neighbourhood That Works (2008) '*Neighbourhood That Works Concept'*. Blue Mountains: NTW Community website [Accessed online 01.06.10] www.ntw.110mb.com

Newman, J. (2001), Modernising Governance: New Labour, Policy and Society, London: Sage.

Paddison, R., Docherty, I., and Goodlad, R. (2008), 'Responsible participation and housing: restoring democratic theory to the scene', *Housing Studies*, 23, 1, 129–47.

Perkins D. Zimmerman M. (1995) *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 5 Empowerment Theory, Research, and Application p569 - 578

Randolph, B. and Judd, B. (2000) 'Community renewal and large public housing estates', *Urban Policy and Research*, 18: 1, 91 — 104

Riseborough, M. (1998), 'More control and choice for users? Involving tenants in social housing management', in A. Marsh and D. Mullins (eds), *Housing and Public Policy: Citizenship, Choice and Control,* Buckingham: Open University Press

Rose, N. (1996) *Inventing Our Selves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shelter, 2003 *Tenant Participation Compact*. Shelter NSW Sydney

Sheppard R. Barnes T. (2007) *A companion to economic geography*. Chapter 7 Poststructural Interventions p 95-109 Malden Mass: Blackwell Publishing

Thompson S. Bartolomei L. Corkery, L. Judd, B. (2003) *Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo Sydney.* Sydney: NSW Department of Housing and the University of New South Wales.

Wainwright H. (2003) *Reclaim the state: experiments in popular democracy* London: Verso

Walters, W. (1997) 'The "active society": new designs for social policy', *Policy and Politics* 25(3): 221–34.

Wright S. & Street J. (2007) 'Democracy, deliberation and design: the case of online discussion forums'. De Montfort University & University of East Anglia, UK: *New Media & Society*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 849-869 DOI: 10.1177/1461444807081230