Defining the density debate in Brisbane: how urban consolidation is represented in the media

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Abstract: Rapid population growth, changing demographic profiles and increased focus on sustainable urban form has led to significant changes in settlement patterns in Australian cities. Growth management strategies are increasingly employed to help cities manage strain on infrastructure, housing and ecosystems. Urban consolidation is one such strategy and has been adopted by all Australian capital cities. Despite strong governmental support, urban consolidation has triggered much academic debate and has often been accompanied by staunch community opposition and complaints from the development industry about barriers to the provision of higher density housing. Greater understanding of stakeholder representations of higher density housing is important for planning, given the strong policy focus on urban consolidation nationally. This paper contributes to existing urban consolidation literature by empirically demonstrating how urban consolidation is represented in Brisbane's newspaper media through the use of metaphors. Its conceptual departure point is Social Representations Theory, drawing on the theory's notion of objectification to illustrate how the media translates the abstract notion of urban consolidation into a tangible and understandable object. The objectification of urban consolidation is identified and discussed relative to four themes: land use conflict; growth; neighbourhood change and apartment living. This paper argues that understanding stakeholder representations is important for planners seeking to promote and negotiate delivery of higher density development. It concludes that stakeholder representations can highlight key areas of contention to be addressed by planners, provide indications on the likelihood of public acceptance of increased housing densities and delineate the boundaries of urban consolidation debates.

Introduction

Australia, in line with many other countries, has increasingly adopted urban consolidation policies since the 1980s (Searle 2007) . These policies have been promoted as solutions to a number of urban ills including traffic congestion, urban sprawl, high carbon emissions, lack of affordability and choice in housing and loss of biodiversity. All Australian capital cities are now actively pursuing consolidation policies that aim to increase population and/or dwellings in existing urban areas (Bunker and Searle 2009) . Despite this, urban consolidation has attracted opposition from scholars, developers and community members. Academic literature has challenged its sustainability, feasibility and acceptability credentials while community groups have mounted significant opposition to the emergence of higher density in their neighbourhoods (Michell and Wadley 2004, Searle 2007, Ruming et al. 2011) . A rich body of research has investigated the process and outcomes of urban consolidation conflicts in Australia (Ruming and Houston 2013, Dovey et al. 2009, Huxley 2002) . However, these studies have tended to focus on the attitudes expressed by passionate stakeholders responding to specific controversial local development projects and do not generally offer broader perspectives and evaluations of consolidation policies and projects (Ruming 2014) . This body of research is not indicative of the entire community and tends to silence other stakeholders such as supportive residents, developers and future residents. Research that acknowledges multiple stakeholder perspectives and takes a broader understanding of urban consolidation as an issue with implications for housing, urban form and local politics is far less common.

This paper aims to address this gap in Australian urban research by identifying and examining four key social representations of urban consolidation in Brisbane: land use conflict; growth; neighbourhood change; and apartment living. It applies Social Representations Theory (SRT) to the analysis of 456 articles pertaining to urban consolidation and associated concepts in five metropolitan and local Brisbane newspapers. While media analysis has seldom been applied to urban studies, media representations are important "because they help frame how planning is appreciated by the public, but also because the policy process is increasingly driven by these perceptions" (Clifford 2006, 428) . While the media applies its own filters and bias to the representation of issues, it also provides a broad cross-section of the ideas circulating in society. Understanding the nature and character of media representations can result in a better understanding of the 'taken for granted' social and cultural assumptions that may be over-looked by urban development and housing experts (Sochacka et al.

2011) . A focus on 'common sense' understandings is central to SRT as the theory is concerned with the communicative mechanisms used to naturalise social thinking and generate collective understandings of a topic (Höijer 2011) . The communicative mechanisms used in newspaper articles provide a fertile source of information about the latent meanings circulating in society about urban consolidation.

Understanding stakeholder perspectives of urban consolidation
Australian perceptions of urban consolidation have often been framed in the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) discourse, representing community opposition as selfish parochialism and protectionist (Ruming et al. 2011) . Reasons for opposition include issues such as: the transitory nature of future residents; expected loss of house value; loss of privacy or sunlight; loss of character; loss of open space, amenities or greenery; fear of 'ghettos' or undesirable social groups; and increased traffic and parking issues (Smith and Billig 2012, Fischer and Gokhan 2011, Kupke et al. 2010) . Cook et al. (2012) demonstrate a correlation between the scale of community resistance and the size of development. A different perspective is offered by Alves (2006), who argues that differences in form, typology, context and style of developments have very little impact on the planning processes they evince. He suggests this is because communities are responding to a "bigger, unarticulated threat or problem of which the specific development becomes symbolic" (Alves 2006, 298) . This occurs, in part, because Australians have little experience of higher density housing (Randolph 2006) .

Understanding the symbolic understandings, or social representations, of urban consolidation becomes important in the context of significant opposition and limited community experience of higher residential densities. Scholars have increasingly sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of opposition, demonstrating the multiple understandings, priorities and justifications used by community members when defining their stances on development (Ruming et al. 2011) . Objection has been alternatively researched as a reaction to changes in neighbourhood character (Dovey et al. 2009) , disturbance of established power hierarchies (Huxley 2002) , threats to concepts of 'home' or 'place' (Massey 1993, Cook et al. 2013) and the discourses of third party rights (Ellis 2004) . Despite the wealth of valuable insights that have resulted from these various research agendas, they all focus on specific examples of community opposition to often controversial development proposals or projects. This prior research does not explicitly provide a broader understanding of stakeholder perspectives on the policies, outcomes and processes of urban consolidation (Ruming 2014) . Moreover, it does not substantively consider the perspectives of other key parties such as planners, developers and politicians. In fact, there is surprisingly little qualitative data comparing residents', planners' and developers' perceptions of different levels of objection and appeal in relation to higher density housing (Cook et al. 2012) . In focusing on highly politicised examples of conflict with extremely invested and localised participants, the prior research also excludes the potential for positive or ambivalent interpretations of urban consolidation. On this basis, it may be argued that it has artificially bounded much of the scope, priorities and relevant aspects of urban consolidation debates.

One stream of literature which provides a wider understanding of stakeholder perspectives considers the ways in which the media and built environment professionals have represented higher residential densities and the values associated with it (Costello 2005, Fincher 2007) . This has traditionally focused on the attributes and consumers most commonly associated with different forms of housing. The presence of a housing orthodoxy which links housing types with certain life stages and social classes has often been identified (Fincher 2007) . The 'mis-match' argument evident in Australian housing scholarship since the 1970s has been identified as a discursive construction which has been pivotal in advocating the development of smaller dwellings to suit smaller households (Batten 1999) despite significant evidence which suggests smaller households have not sought smaller dwellings (Wulff et al. 2004) . Likewise, high density housing has been represented by developers as a playground for the childless wealthy since the late 1990s, a construction which has served to alienate certain social groups and justify a lack of affordable housing and facilities in inner cities (Fincher 2004) . In contrast, detached suburban housing continues to be linked to family and child-rearing activities (Davison 2006) . These narratives are mirrored in recent Melbourne newspaper reportage which link apartments with a lifestyle-focused high life (Costello 2005) and emphasise the glamour of inner city terraces and gated vertical communities for middle-class professionals (Salt 2001) .

Perceptions and values pertinent to urban consolidation as a holistic development process, as opposed to a means to primarily increase housing density, have received far less attention in the literature. In fact, there appears to be little coherence or consensus within the planning and development industries and political circles about how urban consolidation should be applied and whether or not it is a positive or negative feature within a landscape (Sivam et al. 2012) . While there

is significant empirical research designed to test the value of urban consolidation, the different values, political outlooks and priorities of key participants have largely been overlooked in Australia and beyond (Dodson and Gleeson 2007) . Addressing this research gap is a key aim of this paper.

Urban Consolidation Context in Brisbane

Brisbane, located in the South East Queensland metro-region, is a highly relevant case study due its unfamiliarity with higher density housing, its rapid current and projected population and density increases and the neglect it has received in Australian urban consolidation literature to date. Brisbane historically developed as a decentralised low-density urban form (Gillen 2006) without the tradition of regional growth management or higher density living apparent in Sydney and Melbourne or internationally (Michell and Wadley 2004) . Spearritt (2009) argues that this spatial dispersion is a factor of Brisbane's linear settlement, developed to reflect the high dependence on cars and highway systems and a lack of geographical barriers to outward growth. Further, Michell and Wadley (2004) argue that a lack of land in public ownership, few strong statements about growth parameters or urban consolidation and a deficit of explicit, statutory urban consolidation targets by Brisbane City have led to this situation. Brisbane's dispersed settlement pattern presents issues for urban consolidation due to limited public familiarity and acceptance of higher density and a lack of public transport infrastructure capable of supporting transit nodes or Transit Oriented Developments (Searle 2010) . In addition, the spatial structure of Brisbane presents market barriers to successful urban consolidation. Specifically, the outer suburban locations most in need of higher density development and improved transport are unattractive to developers due to lower land values and are therefore unlikely to see investment (Dodson 2010) .

Prior to the 1990s, private sector interests dominated planning and development processes in South East Queensland. The trend, tacitly supported by pro-development governments largely disinterested in metropolitan planning, resulted in piecemeal and unrestricted development of mostly low-density residential estates around Brisbane (Guhathakurta and Stimson 2007) . Prior to the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 the pressure to meet population targets led to the approval of multiple private high density developments (Searle 2013) . While growth rates have fallen since 2009, South East Queensland still experienced an average annual population growth of 2.4% between 2003 and 2013 (Queensland Government Statistician's Office 2015) and Brisbane is currently the fastest growing mature city in the world in GDP terms (Jones Lang LaSalle 2012) . In this context, urban consolidation became a major dimension of planning policy and reality in Brisbane (Searle 2010) . Consequently, higher density housing in Brisbane increased by 34% between 2001 and 2011, exceeding the 26% increase in Melbourne and more than doubling the increase experienced in Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011) .

Urban consolidation has become far more regulated in recent decades, with South East Queensland receiving its first statutory regional plan in 2005 (Spearritt 2009) . That plan was superseded by the current *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031*. The regional plan is complemented by the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*, which replaced the Brisbane City Plan 2000. The *Brisbane City Plan* seeks to advance state and regional policies at the city scale (Brisbane City Council 2014) . Urban consolidation is a central tenet of the *Brisbane City Plan*, as evidenced in provisions designed to concentrate growth in key nodes while retaining 'Suburban Living Areas' in which low density residential forms will remain the norm (Brisbane City Council 2014) .

Applying Social Representations Theory to Media Coverage of Urban Consolidation

Social Representation Theory (SRT) is a theory of collective meaning-making that is interested in common sense understandings of novel concepts or objects (Wagner 1996) . Social representations are a system of values, ideas and practices that serve two key functions. First, they provide a structure that allows people to understand their material and social world. Second, they allow for communication by supplying everyone with a shared set of names and classifications for particular objects or ideas (Moscovici 1973) . SRT has the potential to greatly enhance critical urban studies research agendas as it acknowledges the subjectivity and socially-mediated nature of knowledge (Devine-Wright 2009) . This is significant as it acknowledges the legitimacy of local knowledge and understandings of urban consolidation that may depart from the objective constructions of academic knowledge (Jones 1995) . While still largely unexplored within urban studies, SRT is particularly valuable in explaining social conflict or reactions to urban consolidation as it seeks to understand reactions and interpretations of novel phenomena (Andriotis and Vaughan 2003) .

Two communicative processes generate social representations: anchoring and objectification. These are employed by people trying to understand new forms of information and serve to "ensure core values and norms are stamped onto new events and drive mutations in common sense over time" (Joffe 2003, 63) . They can be identified in everyday conversation and in the media. Anchoring in SRT involves the naming and classifying of encounters, ideas and things in order to furnish social groups with a basic understanding of a novel concept (Wagner and Hayes 2005) . SRT posits that a phenomenon must be socially represented to become an object that may be discussed by a group, meaning anchoring is a universal prerequisite for cognition. Objectification within SRT transforms abstract new ideas into something tangible. It functions to saturate the unfamiliar with something easier to understand (Joffe 2003) . Anchoring and objectification serve to make the unfamiliar familiar and to integrate novelty into a more understandable format (Bauer and Gaskell 1999) . They occur when an unfamiliar phenomenon, such as rapid urban consolidation, threatens the course of everyday practice of a group and forces group members to adapt practices to create a valid and collectively accepted explanation. These processes are often reflected in the media.

The application of SRT to media analysis is designed to illustrate cultural contexts and to explore ideas that reside in structures outside of individual minds (Joffe 2003) . Media portrayals are an important indicator of political context and public discussion and debate as the mass media can shape social perspectives (Clifford 2006) . In addition, multiple studies have found a strong correlation between media agendas and public agendas, indicating that the media acts as a filter for information consumed and a shaping force in the formation of attitudes developed (Tighe 2010) . Consequently, the mass media plays a strong role in the formation and transformation of social representations (Caillaud et al. 2012) .

Methods

The data collection process informing this paper aimed to discover how urban consolidation is represented in 456 newspaper articles published between 2007 and 2014. These articles were published in five Brisbane newspapers: The Courier Mail (CM), the Sunday Mail (SM), the Northside Chronicle (NC) and South East Advertiser (SA) published by News Corp and The Brisbane Times (BT), published online by Fairfax Media. While the Courier Mail, Sunday Mail and Brisbane Times are widely circulated within Brisbane and Queensland, the Northside Chronicle and South East Advertiser are both free local papers with localised readership and a focus on local issues. Local papers can present important insights into stakeholder perceptions as they often communicate a direct challenge to dominant discourses as local actors seek to impose their own values on pertinent issues (Martin 2000) . Together, these newspapers constitute the bulk of newspaper media consumed by readers in Brisbane. See Table One for a further break down of newspapers and articles. Articles were collected from the online repository 'Factiva' using the search terms "high* density" OR "urban consolidation" OR "infill". Articles were screened to remove any that were irrelevant (i.e., high density foam). The chosen timeframe encompasses a number of significant events that impacted on media perspectives and topic salience including the Global Financial Crisis, State government elections in 2009 and 2012, the release of the statutory *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031* and the release of the *2014 Brisbane City Plan*.

Table One: Media Sample

	Readership	Frequency	Area of coverage	Delivery	No of articles
Courier Mail (News Corp)	Average 707,000 per day (combined print and digital)	Daily (Monday-Saturday)	Queensland	Print and online	296
Sunday Mail (News Corp)	Average 927,000 (combined print and digital)	Once weekly (Sundays)	Queensland	Print and online	10
Brisbane Times (Fairfax)	Average 35,065 per day (unique browsers)	Daily (Monday-Sunday)	Principally Brisbane, but available state-wide	Online only	95
Northside Chronicle (News Corp)	Average 68,852 (combined print and digital) per week	Weekly	Brisbane's northern suburbs, Kedron to Carseldine	Print and online	24
South East	54,000 (combined	Weekly	Brisbane's south	Print and	31

Advertiser (News Corp)	print and digital)		eastern suburbs incl. Carindale, Bulimba and Norman Park	Online	

Articles were analysed using semantic textual analysis. The approach draws upon SRT's conceptualisation of objectification to highlight how the media makes the unfamiliar familiar. As previously discussed, anchoring and objectification ensure new ideas or phenomenon are related to a well-known phenomenon or context through a process of cultural assimilation (Wagner et al. 1999) . More specifically, objectification is a mechanism by which socially represented knowledge attains its specific form. It consists of identifying or constructing an iconic aspect for a new and/or difficult to grasp concept, theory or idea (Wagner et al. 1995) . One way in which this can be achieved is through the use of metaphors. A metaphor is a device to make something less familiar more familiar. Metaphors serve this purpose by associating an abstract concept with an object which is closer to the personal experience of the people seeking to define and understand a less comprehensible concept (Wagner et al. 1995) . This process has been identified by a number of studies that reported the use of metaphors in strengthening social representations. For example, Jodelet (1991) found farming communities objectified madness through the use of terms such as 'decay,' 'curdling like butter,' and 'turning off' like milk. Similarly, Stibbe (2001) describes the use of war and military language to justify responses to foot in mouth disease.

Identifying metaphorical objectification in the newspaper media serves to illustrate shared understandings of urban consolidation. According to Wagner et al. (1995), a metaphor must be used in public discourse and appeal to the majority of the target population for a new idea to be diffused in a group. In addition, the metaphor need not be 'true' or 'accurate' in capturing the concept in question as long as it provides a well-understood, well-structured and pervasive construct. This is important as metaphors may serve ideological and legitimating functions as the construction of fact shapes the acceptability of various outcomes (Höijer 2011) . This study used NVIVO and multiple coding passes to identify instances where metaphorical objectification was employed in Queensland newspaper articles to define the concept of urban consolidation.

Examining Urban Consolidation Metaphors and Objectification in Brisbane Media

Metaphors identified in Brisbane media were overwhelmingly negative and can be broadly grouped under five distinct headings: land use conflict; growth; neighbourhood change; and apartment living. Each is examined and critically discussed in the following sections.

Land Use Conflict

Metaphors of war and conflict are common in media portrayals and are used as a way to justify dramatic reactions to issues. For example, Stibbe (2001) identified the way the metaphor of war was used to justify the mass slaughter of animals during the spread of foot in mouth disease in Britain, highlighting the use of military terminology and overt designation of victims and villains. This communicative mechanism was also evident in the social representation of urban consolidation in Brisbane. The metaphor of war was evident in articles that suggest that suburbs have become "battle grounds" (CM, May 15, 2008) as communities "lose the battle against high density housing" (BT, August 23, 2012). The impending threat of higher density has left suburbs and services "under siege" (SA, September 09, 2009). Some articles stretched the metaphor even further suggesting that "waging war against [the suburbs] is self-defeating and anti-human even" (CM, September 19, 2011). This metaphor has actively designated victims and villains. The enemy is sometimes the local government who are depicted as exploitative and unfeeling bodies that communities must "guard against" (SA, June 09, 2010). Sometimes the enemy is simply rapid development, as explained in an article entitled "Future Shock" that suggests growth is occurring at a pace that catches even developers and planners "off-guard" (CM, May 24, 2008). The victimisation of community members is continually reinforced as they are depicted as helpless. They are having "higher density living thrust upon them whether they like it or not" (CM, May 15, 2008). At other times, the enemy is the faceless high density dwellers that threaten to overrun existing communities. This portrayal creates a stark 'us vs them' mentality perhaps best illustrated in the quote "once construction begins I think there will be a mass exodus of people who will leave, because it won't be the same community. There will be a vast difference in values" (SA, December 12, 2007). This quotation continues the war metaphor to suggest existing communities may become refugees in the battle of changing neighbourhoods.

War terminology is not only used by community members but it is also reflected in government discourses. Local government narratives suggested that tin and timber suburbs required "protection from widespread destruction and over-development" (BT, February 11, 2010) (see article in figure 1), while Queensland Premier Anna Bligh created "no-go zones'" in established neighbourhoods to protect them from high-density infill (CM, March 18, 2010). Government discourses even served to continue the conflict between existing and new residents by suggesting that concentrating higher density around specific nodes would help in "protecting the [low density] areas' community values" (CM, November 03, 2010). This assertion that new residents or high density residents threaten community values helps to subjugate them and position them as the 'other'. This use of highly dramatic and negative metaphors is indicative of the 'culture of fear' that is often perpetuated by the media (Nussbaum (2001).

Councils forced to take developers 'on trust': LGAQ

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Cause for concern ... The LGAQ says it will monitor the scheme for approving duplexes to ensure it is not misused.
Photo: Erin Jonasson

South-East Queensland councils will have to take developers "on trust" for the State Government's new tick-the-box planning scheme to introduce thousands of new duplexes in the region.

Local Government Association of Queensland executive director Greg Hallam said the organisation was aware of community concerns about the plan, which was announced by Planning Minister Stirling Hinchliffe on Tuesday.

" We've got concerns. We're worried. We will work with them, but we will be monitoring it to see that the system is properly monitored. "

Figure 1: Example Brisbane Times Article

Growth

Population and development growth is a controversial and value-laden topic that often receives both positive and negative media attention (Molotch 1976, Steele and Gleeson 2009) . Growth in Brisbane is represented as a "complex beast" or "constantly evolving and expanding organism" (CM, May 31, 2014). This uncontrolled or organic view of city growth is further elaborated in the reference to urban sprawl as an "amoeba-like spread" (CM, December 11, 2009), the fear of "opening the floodgates" to

development and the objectification of the city as a "concrete" or "urban jungle" (CM, August 15, 2007). These metaphors highlight a perceived lack of coherence or structure in city growth and view development outcomes as unpredictable. This suggests that the public may predominately view development as planned and controlled and therefore feel they have greater reason to fear it.

Regional growth was frequently depicted as dramatic and dangerous as SEQ dealt with its population "crisis", its "growing pains" and its "swelling" population (BT, August 23, 2012). This imagery serves to dramatise a complex concept that involves natural growth and intrastate, interstate and international migration patterns. These metaphors are employed by local and state governments that emphasise the need to manage and cope with growth. Newspaper articles even go so far as to represent their efforts as heroic, commending the "governments and town planners [who] battle to shield the southeast from ugly urban sprawl" (CM, August 25, 2007). In contrast, the use of metaphorical objectification to portray population growth as "booming" and "sky-rocketing" reinforces a pro-growth agenda. As the "aspirational growth state of Australia"(Steele and Gleeson 2009, p 10), Queensland has tended to accept growth as inevitable and media discourses have often promoted growth as a way of stimulating the economy (Taylor et al. 2014) .

Neighbourhood Change
Negative portrayals of density are demonstrated in the use of the metaphors of death, disease and destruction to describe neighbourhood change in Brisbane. The newspaper corpus contains numerous references to the death of the Aussie dream, lamenting the disappearance of the traditional Aussie backyard or family home. The very use of the terms 'traditional' or 'family' serves to position higher density or apartments as the 'other' and further legitimate the idea that high density is unsuitable for children. The victimisation of the detached home is exemplified in an article that described low density neighbourhoods as a "threatened species" (CM, Janurary 29, 2010). Another article further emphasised the vulnerability of detached homes, claiming that high-rise towers could destroy Brisbane's sense of community and place. This sense of place is objectified as the "uniquely Brisbane feel of Queenslander-style homes in streets lined with jacarandas and jasmine" (CM, May 31, 2014).

The literature also provides graphic depictions of diseased neighbourhoods suffering from over population. Neighbourhoods are personified as ailing bodies being "choked" by high rises (SM, March 11, 2007), having their "hearts ripped out by higher density development" (CM, September 28, 2009) and being "slowly crushed under the bureaucratic iron heel of high density" (CM, January 29, 2010). These metaphors serve to juxtaposition wholesome, 'human,' existing low-density communities with 'inhuman,' parasitic or robotic new high-rise developments. These metaphors draw heavily on the ideas of death or disease in an attempt to foster empathy for the plight of traditional suburbs and subjugate and dehumanise the dwellers of high density.

Apartment Living
Apartments are subject to multiple examples of objectification in the corpus and are subject to contradictory social representations. There is a strong discursive connection between higher density dwelling forms and wealthy, lifestyle-focused occupiers in the media (Costello 2005). However, there remains a strong belief that apartments are sub-standard and unappealing places to live that attract those who cannot afford a detached house (Fischer and Gokhan 2011) . High density dwellings in Brisbane are represented in an extremely negative light, being objectified as "rabbit hutches", "shoe-boxes", "dog boxes" and "poker machines in the sky" (CM, February 14, 2007 ; CM, November 1, 2008). As mentioned in earlier discussion, metaphors do not need to be correct to resonate with a community. Rather, it is more important that they are well-structured and "good to think with" (Wagner et al. 1995) . Metaphors also exist to link less familiar concepts with commonly understood ideas. In this situation, many newspaper readers do not have first-hand experience of living in apartments and so rely on objectification for evaluation and description. This potential for association is pertinent given that "urban citizens may occasionally experience that the imaginative structure of their home territory is not primarily decided by social dynamics in the local setting, but through public mediation" (Jansson 2005, 1671) . Negative portrayals of higher density housing in the media may easily become the 'truth' for those with little individual experience of apartment living.

Despite Costello's (2005) argument that perceptions of higher density have moved from prisons to penthouses since the 1960's, the above suggests that there remains many negative constructions of higher density. In particular, there is a perception of high rise as a "rental ghetto" or a home for "fast livers, welfare recipients and European refugees" (CM, May 5, 2007). Apartments have even been referred to as soulless developments reminiscent of the "Eastern Bloc housing schemes of the 1960s" (CM, March 15, 2011). Perhaps the most commonly cited metaphor was the notion of 'sardine

suburbs', a term used by community members and politicians alike to express a fear of cramming people into existing neighbourhoods. These negative connotations serve to denigrate both high density/high rise housing forms and their occupants.

Conclusion

The mass media is a powerful force, with the ability to shape public awareness through the conscious selection and depiction of news and events. It can generate and actively construct preferred meanings and can discursively frame issues by distilling broad concepts into relatively simple narratives. Understood through the conceptual lens of Social Representations Theory, the ways in which the media renders complex issues recognizable and seemingly comprehensible occurs through processes of anchoring and objectifying. This leads to the use of metaphors, a mechanism through which certain meanings or interpretations can be made to seem like common sense. This paper examined how Brisbane newspaper media transform the abstract planning policy of urban consolidation into more everyday terms by using metaphors. Specifically, it demonstrated how Brisbane newspapers objectify and explain urban consolidation to the general public using metaphors of land use conflict, growth, neighborhood change and apartment living. Dramatic and negative social representations of urban consolidation are common, as evidenced by regular use of extreme metaphors pertaining to war, death and disease. Growth, often the driver of urban consolidation, is regularly depicted as dramatic, unpredictable and uncontrollable. The frequent use of animals in objectifications of apartments is evidenced in terms like "dog boxes", "rabbit hutches" and "sardine suburbs". As well as suggesting that apartment living is a lesser form of tenure, these metaphors also suggest that apartments may be associated with sub-standard design. These examples, as well as others discussed in this paper, highlight the contrasting but mostly negative ways in which urban consolidation is constructed in the Brisbane media.

Planning scholarship focused on urban consolidation has rarely engaged with media representations. Instead, prior research has tended to focus on stakeholder attitudes towards specific, controversial local development projects that may be proposed within wider planning contexts prioritizing urban consolidation. This gap in the literature has affected the discipline's capacity to meaningfully capture and characterize how community sentiment towards urban consolidation may be shaped by the media. Given the increasing emphasis placed on community consultation and inclusive planning practices, the power of the media in shaping and communicating common sense understandings needs to be addressed. Using Social Representations Theory to reveal cognitive shortcuts attached to urban consolidation can provide new and nuanced understandings of stakeholder reactions to the strategy. Planning support for urban consolidation remains strong in Australia, in large part because of the challenge of accommodating near-constant urban growth pressures. Understanding how stakeholder responses to urban consolidation strategies may be shaped and rendered comprehensible by the mass media is of clear value to planning scholarship and practice. This is especially true in Australia where all capital cities are now actively pursuing urban consolidation strategies.

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