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## **AHURI Essay**

# **Moving home: conceptual and policy implications of the housing-mobility nexus**

authored by  
**Rae Dufty-Jones**

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<b>Authors</b>	Dufty-Jones, Rae	University of Western Sydney
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## **ACRONYMS**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Ltd.
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
DWH	Department of Works and Housing
FIFO	Fly-In, Fly-Out
NESB	Non-English speaking background
MTO	Moving to Opportunity

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Australian population is one of the most mobile in the world. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2006), 50.4 per cent of Australians changed their place of usual residence in the 5-year period between 2001 and 2006. While the scale, at which this mobility occurs, ranges from the neighbourhood to the international, the frequency, distance, destinations of, personal motives and structural forces informing these moves have changed dramatically in recent decades. A variety of factors have brought about this change in how population mobility occurs, including technological changes that have facilitated the increase in both virtual and physical movement and the frequency and speed at which both occur. Other changes bringing about an increase in mobility include demographic change (e.g. aging populations and retiree migration, the emerging trend of young Australians to remain in the parental home for a longer period of time), economic (e.g. welfare-led migration as a product of structural economic change, increased mobility of workers such as Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) work associated with mining industries), socio-cultural change (e.g. the role of mobility in the cultural practices of Indigenous Australians, transnationalism and an emerging culture of multiple migrations over an individual's lifetime).

As McIntyre (2006, p.4) explains, housing 'in the industrialized world, lies at the intersection of a global network of information, product and people flows'<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is essential that when we are seeking to understand the issues and implications of the changes to how we move, we also take into account the role of housing in how these mobilities occur<sup>2</sup>. The type, tenure and location of housing can facilitate or impede individuals' ability to move. The home is therefore a key entity from where we launch a range of mobilities be they temporary or permanent, virtual or corporeal.

The link between housing and mobility has been an ongoing concern for policy-makers. This Essay provides an analysis of what contemporary research tells us about the relationship between housing and mobility. It begins with an examination of how social science research has explained the causes and consequences of mobility generally and the housing-mobility nexus specifically. It then goes on to examine contemporary themes and issues in the housing studies literature that are a result of and/or produce mobility. The Essay concludes by advocating for two conceptual shifts in how housing researchers and policy-makers approach the housing-mobility nexus:

1. The need to adopt a broader understanding of mobility.
2. The need to account for a politics of mobility when considering the housing-mobility nexus.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this Essay, I will concentrate on the corporeal or 'people' dimension of the housing-mobility nexus.

<sup>2</sup> While there are important issues to be explored in the relationship between housing and social mobility, this Essay will focus specifically on spatial mobility.

## 2 UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLAINING MOBILITY

Mobility is a fundamental process shaping our urban and regional landscapes. The movement of people plays a central role in how the social, cultural and economic fortunes of an area change over time. As Biddle and Hunter (2006, p.1) explain, a core reason why the study of mobility is important to researchers and policy-makers is that we need to understand at a basic level 'how many people live in an area and what sort of people move into and out of an area'. The population dynamic of mobility has implications for,

... employment, with the consumption of private and public services and other goods, with expressions of political solidarity, with ethnic and racial antagonisms, and with other important phenomena, [population] shifts can be taken as a proxy variable that allows the study of such areas of human behaviour. (Rossi 1980 (1955), p.16)

However, for this Essay, a wider understanding of mobility is also adopted to include not only traditional approaches to mobility but also to understand mobility as more temporally and spatially diverse, and the role that communication and other technologies play in influencing the housing mobility nexus. The following sections offer a review of how researchers in the social sciences have approached mobility and how this has changed. It then goes on to examine how housing researchers specifically have broadly understood and explained the dynamic of mobility in relation to housing.

### 2.1 General approaches to mobility

At a functional level, we understand and classify mobility in terms of the distance of a move, and the level of choice associated with a decision to move (Rossi 1980 (1955); Maher et al. 1996). Why a move has occurred can be attributed to a range of demographic, economic, socio-cultural, technological and environmental features (Davison 2005). However, beyond these classifications of how and why various mobilities occur, researchers and policy-makers have been concerned with broader explanations of mobility and the socio-economic consequences of some types of mobility.

Early sociological understandings of mobility draw on the environmentally determinist approach of the Chicago School. Building on the works of Simmel (1903) and Wirth (1938), mobility is attributed as being the cause of a litany of negative aspects of urban life. At the individual level, mobility was seen to be responsible for experiences of loneliness and isolation (Wirth 1938). At the regional scale, high rates of mobility became synonymous with high incidents of urban 'pathologies' (Rossi 1980 (1955)); from the distribution of rates of admission to mental hospitals (Faris & Dunham 1939), to juvenile delinquency, homicides and suicide rates (Shaw & McKay 1942; Henry & Short 1954).

Sociological explanations also go beyond an 'ecological' approach to more behavioural and economic understandings of why people moved. These explanations of why people move take two forms. The first is a human capital approach where mobility is viewed to be a product of decision making in response to rationally maximising utility (e.g. access to employment, services, amenity etc. (Baker 2002)). The second is the social justice approach. This approach understands mobility to be not only a product of choice but may also be a product of compulsion (Maher et al. 1992; Wulff et al. 1993; Maher 1994; Wulff & Newton 1996a; Wulff & Bell 1997). As Wulff and Newton (1996a, p.428) explain, using 'a social justice framework ... the

decision-making behind mobility can be best viewed as a continuum from voluntary moves through to forced moves’.

More recently the social sciences are argued to have undergone a ‘mobility turn’. This approach to understanding and explaining mobility is, in essence, a response to a social world which, through rapid technological advances, seems to be increasingly globalised, interconnected and mobile. The mobility turn adopts a new critical direction in analyses seeking to account for the role of mobilities in the social sciences more comprehensively in terms of what is researched and how this research is undertaken.

The above general approaches to the analysis of mobility will be returned to throughout the Essay looking at what they variously mean for housing studies and housing policy.

## **2.2 Mobility in housing studies**

Housing studies have had a long-term and ongoing interest in the ways in which housing and mobility intersect. To varying extents, the four approaches described above (ecological, human capital, social justice and mobility turn) have been applied to housing-mobility research interests. Historically, this engagement has primarily occurred through the residential mobility literature and the role of housing (Brown & Moore 1970; Rossi 1980 (1955); Clark & Dieleman 1996; Dieleman 2001; Strassmann 2001; Baker 2002; Clark et al. 2006; Wulff & Reynolds 2010; Alkay 2011). In his review of the residential mobility literature, Dieleman (2001, p.249) argued that the placing of the process of residential mobility into the context of housing studies can be attributed to the seminal text by Rossi (1980 (1955)) *Why families move*. Mobility in this area of housing studies is seen to be ‘the fundamental dynamic of change’ in urban spaces (Dieleman 2001, p.261). Specifically, Rossi (1980 (1955)) saw residential mobility as essentially a phenomenon of the housing market. Using the concept of the ‘housing bundle’, Rossi (1980 (1955)) understood residential mobility to be the result of changing household structure, household income and the opportunities of local housing markets. That is, the demographic, social and economic characteristics of a household combines with the size, type, price and tenure of the dwelling and the dwelling’s location with respect to workplaces and services, to ‘produce’ population shifts, housing markets and urban spaces more widely. While the link between housing and residential mobility was controversial at the time, it has become a taken-for-granted feature of the housing-mobility nexus in housing studies (Rossi 1980(1955); Dieleman 2001).

One of the central understandings of the residential mobility literature is that tenure is a key determinant in the varying rates of mobility between households (Rossi 1980 (1955)). From this perspective countless studies have found that home ownership is seen to be one of the most stable forms of tenure (Rossi 1980 (1955); Oswald 1997; Flatau et al. 2004). Social/public housing, which offers security of tenure, is also seen to produce low rates of household mobility (Hughes & McCormick 1981; Hui 2007). These patterns are also born out in the Australian context. In the 2007/08 *Survey of Income and Housing* (ABS 2010, p.61), it was found that adjustment of housing consumption through ‘wanting a bigger or better home’ (15%) or ‘purchasing a home’ (14%) were the primary reasons for a household moving. Furthermore, it was found that private renters were more likely than owners to have moved, with 80 per cent of private renters having moved in the five years prior to the survey compared with 29 per cent of home owners surveyed (ABS 2010, p.62).

The residential mobility literature has also found that rates of household mobility are also linked to not only the features of the dwellings but also the wider locational context (O’Byrant & McGloshen 1987; Earhart & Weber 1996; Baker 2002; Clark et al.

2006). For instance Clark et al. (2006, p.337) found that 'households frequently make gains in the socio-economic status of the (wider) neighbourhood and in the quality of the direct physical environment surrounding the dwelling when they move'.

Human capital and behavioural explanations have dominated the literature on residential mobility specifically and more generally the literature examining the housing-mobility nexus. Wulff and Newton (1996a) argue that as a consequence other structural explanations and their policy implications have been overlooked to a large extent. A social justice approach to household mobility is advocated as a means of addressing this gap in our understanding of housing and mobility. Social justice explanations view households as not being equally mobile and that this inequality in mobility is in part a product of housing (Alkay 2011). Social justice approaches to household mobility are concerned with how structural forces often beyond the control of the household, such as income, employment status, household structure etc. influence housing choices in terms dwelling structure, location and tenure which in turn narrows mobility options. This constraint in housing choices induces housing and location decisions that exacerbate original structural problems (e.g. a household may be forced to move further away from their job in order to access lower cost housing while raising the time and financial costs of commuting), and/or produce forced mobilities such as evictions. In Australia the social justice approach to housing and mobility emerged strongly during the 1990s and 2000s through analyses of locational disadvantage and welfare-led migration (Flood et al. 1991; Maher et al. 1992; Maher 1994; Wulff & Newton 1996a; Wulff & Bell 1997; Winter & Stone 1999; Marshall et al. 2003; Burnley & Murphy 2004; Marshall et al. 2004; Burnley et al. 2007; Wulff & Reynolds 2010).

In the last few years the mobility turn in the social sciences has begun to influence housing-mobility studies. While such interventions are in their infancy (Dufty-Jones 2012) they are already informing how we understand the impacts of social mix policies (Gwyther 2009, 2011) and second homes (Paris 2009, 2011). The contributions of this approach will be revisited in latter sections of this Essay.

### 3 HOUSING AND MOBILITY IN AUSTRALIA

This Chapter sets out some contemporary housing-mobility issues in Australia. These issues range from how mobility is both a product and produced through the interaction of:

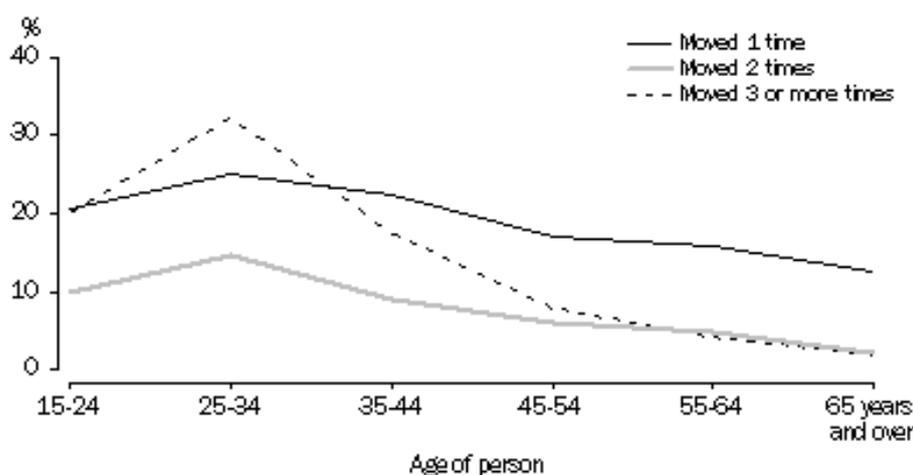
- Demographic, economic, socio-cultural and technological change and concomitant changing housing needs and consumption patterns.
- Housing market dynamics and policy settings.

#### 3.1 Demographic change and housing careers in Australia

As the residential mobility literature extensively demonstrates, the likelihood of a household moving is strongly related to the life-stage of individuals who make up that household. The various changes in how Australian households are structured have both direct and indirect implications for household mobility rates. In Australia age is an important demographic factor when examining an individual's and household's propensity to move. As Figure 1 outlines, the *Survey of Income and Housing 2007–08* (ABS 2010, p.63) found that people aged between 25–35 years were the most mobile age group, with 75 per cent reporting that they had moved one or more times in the five years prior to the survey. Conversely, people aged 65 years and over were the least likely to have moved, with 83 per cent identifying they had not moved in the five years prior to the survey. While this figure indicates the continuation of the trend which emerged prior over the 20th century of high rates of household mobility in younger years tapering off as individuals and households get older, at the beginning of the 21st century two key dimensions of the housing, mobility and age relationship appears to be changing in Australia:

1. The aging of the population and 'aging in place' implications of this demographic shift.
2. A general rise in young persons choosing to remain in the parental home for longer or return to the parental home after leaving it.

**Figure 1: Housing mobility by age, Australia, 2007–08**



Source: Survey of Income and Housing 2007–08, ABS 2010.

### 3.1.1 *Aging populations*

As the baby boomer generation in Australia begins to retire, the relationship between age, housing and mobility is also changing. A number of Australian studies (Olsberg & Winters 2005; Judd et al. 2010) have investigated this change and its housing implications. In particular, it has been found that 'widespread common-sense perceptions that all older people are resistant to change and residential mobility [is] not borne out' (Olsberg & Winters 2005, p.ix). Rather, it has been noted that older Australians approaching or in the early stages of their retirement years are both quite positive about moving as well as having already engaged in a number of moves. In their study on *Aging in place*, Olsberg and Winters (2005) found that one-third of respondents identified as having moved in the previous five years and a further one-third expected to move in the foreseeable future (Olsberg & Winters 2005). Individuals became less inclined to move once they reached their mid-70s. However, even when individuals did identify a desire to 'age in place', this attachment was related more to the neighbourhood rather than the home itself.

Olsberg and Winters (2005) found that tenure was an important factor influencing individuals' attitudes to moving. However, the relationship was more complicated than previously thought. While Olsberg and Winters (2005) found that home owners were most likely to want to age in place, they were also found to be the group most positive towards the possibility of future moves. Home ownership gave individuals the financial capacity to plan whether and under what circumstances they would move in the future. Home ownership seemed to remove an important element of fear often associated with mobility. Older private renters attitudes to mobility were the opposite of those of older home owners. In the case of private renters, Olsberg and Winters (2005, p.viii) found that individuals in this type of tenure were 'most anxious about moving in the future'. In particular, many private renters were 'fearful that they would be forced to move because of financial difficulties as they grew older' (Olsberg & Winters 2005, p.viii). For older Australians, instead of being simply an inhibitor to mobility home ownership may in fact be able to produce more positive experiences of mobility compared to the mobility experiences of private renters.

Another important dimension for housing policy is not just the permanent type of mobility that moving from one home to another involves but also how a home may inhibit or enable more daily forms of mobility, such as accessing health services, shops, family and friends. This dimension of the housing-mobility nexus is particularly important for older persons as they often have lower rates of access to private forms of transport. For example, Judd et al. (2010) found that while aging in place may not present problems for many older Australians still able to use private cars to access social networks and essential services, such access will be more challenging for those reliant on public transport or local footpaths, and for those seeking to age in place in locations where such services are distant or inadequate.

### 3.1.2 *Changing housing careers of young Australians*

Commentators and housing researchers have also noticed the emergence of a change in mobility trends at the other end of the housing career. In particular, it has been noted that there has been an increase in younger Australians delaying moving out of the parental home or making one or more returns to live permanently again in the parental home. Flatau et al. (2004) identify a number of reasons for why this is the case including:

- Longer periods in formal education (Year 12 and higher education rates).
- Rising house prices (e.g. Sydney and Melbourne had lower rates of parental home exit).

→ A more casualised and unstable relationship with the labour market.

It was also found that gender and ethnicity were also moderating factors. Women and Indigenous Australians were more likely to leave the parental home earlier, while young men, individuals from Catholic and non-English speaking backgrounds tended to leave later (Flatau et al. 2004). While a definite trend is yet to emerge in relationship to young people and housing mobility, such a shift becoming a long-trend has implications for housing market demand in both the private rental and home buyer sectors.

### 3.2 Taxation, housing and mobility

The relationship between taxation and housing is often only understood in terms of affordability. However, the recent review of Australia's tax system (Henry et al. 2009; Wood et al. 2011) has vigorously argued the merits of a land tax system versus stamp duty in terms of mobility<sup>3</sup>. The mobility benefits advocated in this debate exist in two ways. First, a land tax is argued to be a more efficient system of taxation, because land is *immobile* and therefore cannot be relocated in order to avoid tax. Henry et al. (2009, p.251) argue that such an approach to taxation is increasingly important in a globalised world where: 'Land is a highly visible and immobile base and the tax is difficult to evade. Indeed, land tax is one of the only taxes that if levied on foreigners, is not shifted to domestic factors of production'. Second, while land tax is argued to be an efficient form of taxation in a global era because of its immobility, this approach to taxation is also argued to be preferable to stamp duties because it also enables greater residential *mobility* between households. For Henry et al. (2009, p.247),

Stamp duties are poor taxes ... they discourage land [and housing] from changing hands to its most valuable use. Stamp duties are also an inequitable way of taxing land and improvements, as the tax falls on those who need to move.

The mobility benefits of a land tax are therefore seen to be central in terms of allowing individuals to respond quickly and without undue financial penalty to changing employment demands and ensuring that existing housing stock is allocated to its best and most efficient use. Last, a land tax is also argued to encourage a better distribution of economic activity across urban spaces. As Maher et al. (1992, p.97) noted, a 'relatively high land tax liability on businesses clustered around the CBD will encourage some business relocation, and hence more employment opportunities in urban growth corridors, where some businesses can be expected to move'. A land tax also has the potential to improve the efficient allocation of economic activity across city-regions by 'promoting a better geographical match between employment sites and places of residence' (Maher et al. 1992, p.97). The relationship between taxation and mobility is therefore an important one when considering the best way of structuring the taxation treatment of land and associated housing on that land.

However, while a land tax approach does offer a range of benefits in relation to mobility and efficiency, there are also some equity considerations. Specifically, a land tax could unfairly burden low-income home owners who find themselves in a gentrifying neighbourhood but without the financial means to pay the higher taxes that occur with the rising value of land through gentrification. As Henry et al. (2009, p.250) explain: 'land tax is not a good tool for achieving vertical equity objectives'. A land tax

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<sup>3</sup> As Henry et al (2009, pp.250–1) identify, a land tax is a tax on the value of land, they are based on the underlying value of land, rather than the cash flow it generates. Stamp duties or property conveyance duties are levied on the transfer of land and buildings. Generally, stamp duties are paid only when the ownership of a property is transferred from one party to another, while a land tax is a more regular payment that reflects the changing value of land.

could potentially have the consequence of creating forced mobilities amongst this tenure class and contribute to the displacement effects of gentrification as low-income home owners (e.g. retired households) are forced to leave an area in order to realise the value of their home and reduce their land-tax burden. A land-tax approach does not accommodate for the way an area can radically shift in value over time. A land tax approach could therefore also have the consequence of undermining social mix and urban renewal strategies and reinforce concentration of poverty processes.

### **3.3 Housing assistance and mobility**

Since the inception of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) in 1945, mobility has been both an implicit and explicit feature of Australian housing assistance policy (Dufty & Gibson 2010). However, despite mobility being a central aspect of early forms of housing assistance in Australia, the mobility dimensions of public housing were generally ignored by housing researchers until the 1990s (Wulff & Newton 1995, 1996b). From a residential mobility perspective, public housing satisfied two key mobility aspirations: a mechanism to repopulate rural regions and the ability to provide affordable housing to low-income households either as a stepping stone into home ownership or with the security of tenure similar to that offered by home ownership that enabled the establishment of relatively stable communities.

These mobility dynamics of public housing are no longer seen to be the positive feature of this form of housing assistance that they once were. Instead since the mid-1980s, public housing in Australia has been understood to produce two problematic residential mobility dynamics:

1. Immobility of public housing tenants.
2. Welfare-led migration away from areas of low unemployment to high unemployment to access low-cost, usually public, housing.

#### *3.3.1 Immobility of public housing tenants*

A key change that produced this shift in attitudes towards public housing residential mobility dynamics was the move away from 'public' housing for low-income households to public housing becoming 'welfare' housing. Prior to the 1980s public housing as a form of housing assistance was envisaged to be part of the housing career ladder for low-income 'working families', providing them with the financial breathing space to eventually become home owners over time. For those tenants who were unable to make this tenurial transition, access to the security of tenure, or tenure-for-life, offered by public housing was seen as a positive and just aspect of public housing. By the 1980s, the impact of severely reduced Federal Government expenditure on public housing that constrained supply, coupled with increasing demand for this type of housing welfare, meant that only the most socially and economically marginal in Australian society were eligible for public housing. Public housing could no longer be a transitional housing resource for low-income households; instead it became available only to those households with limited to no financial capacity to move from public housing into home ownership. As a consequence, turnover of public housing properties decreased significantly and public housing spaces and tenants began to be problematised for the inevitable concentration of poverty and immobility that this shift in allocation policy had produced. Public housing was seen to create immobile behaviours by 'lock[ing individuals] into a marginalised existence' in spaces that were 'pockets of disadvantage' (Burke & Thorns 1992, p.6; Senate Community Affairs References Committee 1997, p.32). This process was argued to concentrate and entrap such

individuals into 'economically depressed regions with few job prospects' (McIntosh & Phillips 2001, p.9).

In response to the problem of immobility, the NSW State Government introduced reforms to public housing that effectively ended the 'security of tenure' feature for all new tenancies created after 1 July 2005. In its place—as recommended by the Industry Commission (1993b)—a range of tenancies were provided from short-term (two years), up to long-term (10 years). Public housing tenants were expected to prove at the end of their tenancy agreement that they had an 'ongoing' need for this kind of housing and, as the then Housing Minister, Cherie Burton (2005, p.18441) explained to the NSW Legislative Assembly, 'If a tenant no longer has the housing need and could be accommodated in the private rental market, it is the public responsibility of the social housing landlord to ensure that the tenancy is not renewed in order to make room for someone in greater need'.

While the problem of immobility associated with public housing has been addressed through reforms removing the security of tenure associated with public housing, state housing authorities have failed to facilitate other mobility capacities for public housing tenants by not introducing the portability of public housing entitlements across state boundaries. In a report for the Australian Housing Research Council, Econsult (1989, p.57), recommended that public housing entitlements become 'portable' to 'lessen the extent of inertia in the ... labour force and to provide freedom of locational choice'. Similarly, the Industry Commission (1993b, p.xxii) argued that public housing waiting lists needed to become more flexible or transferable across state boundaries, which had previously 'unduly constrain[ed] people's mobility'. Failure to introduce these reforms means that mobility in public housing is essentially a punitive concept associated with tenure insecurity rather than locational choice.

### *3.3.2 Welfare-led migration and housing assistance*

The second way in which public housing assistance was problematised in terms of mobility was through the identification of 'welfare-led' migration. The idea that migration could be welfare-led emerges from research in the United States (Fitchen 1994; Frey 1994; Fitchen 1995; Nord et al. 1995; Cromartie & Nord 1997; Rodgers & Rodgers 1997). This concept was adopted by Australian demographers in the 1980s and 1990s when seeking to explain the growing divergence between economic and migration trends (Hugo 1989; Wulff & Bell 1997; Hugo & Bell 1998). In particular, the fact that economic growth was becoming increasingly centralised in the major capital cities, while at the same time an increase in urban to rural migration, especially among low-income households, had also emerged. Housing is argued to be an important factor when seeking to explain welfare-led migration (Marshall et al. 2003; Burnley & Murphy 2004; Marshall et al. 2004; Burnley et al. 2007; Costello 2009). For instance, Burnley et al. (2007, p.287) found that, for social security recipients, housing costs, which take up a significant proportion of a low-income household's total expenditure, were 'crucial in explaining out-movement of low-income households from metropolitan areas'. The general availability of public housing was also attributed as being a 'major drawcard attracting low-income people ... [into] non-metropolitan areas' (Budge & Associates 1992; Hugo & Bell 1998, p.113). As Hugo and Bell (1998, pp.14–5) explained,

A significant proportion of the nation's public housing stock is located in non-metropolitan parts of Australia ... Invariably the pressure on public housing in the major cities is greater than in non-metropolitan areas so that many groups given priority status in access to public housing ... are allocated dwellings in non-metropolitan areas ...

According to human capital theory, migration is an appropriate response to socio-economic change, however, welfare-led migration was seen to be problematic, because it drew low-income household into regions where there were higher rates of unemployment than the regions they were moving away from. Migration decisions based on minimising housing costs alone were therefore discouraged:

1. Through exclusion rules for income support recipients.
2. Through the increased use of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) as the preferred form of housing assistance because of its emphasis on mobility generally.

Rent assistance has been a policy tool of Australian Federal Governments since 1958 (initially paid to aged, invalid and widow pensioners). However, from the mid-1980s, this form of housing assistance expanded considerably, both in terms of the numbers of eligible people (in 1985 CRA was extended to include 'unemployed' and low-income 'working' families) and the size of the payments. The Industry Commission (1993b, p.52, p.66) argued in its report on the inquiry into *Public Housing* that private renting was preferable, because it enabled individuals to 'choose the location of their residence' and because it was 'better able to accommodate the needs of more mobile sections of the population'. Private rental assistance was argued to 'enhance' the 'locational choices' of recipients and also enable greater locational flexibility in how this income-based assistance could be varied geographically (Industry Commission 1993a, p.71).

While CRA does offer greater choice of location, as a policy approach to providing housing assistance to low-income households, it potentially exacerbates the negative impacts of mobility rather than providing these households with an improved level of housing security. Low-income private renting households are already more likely to experience forced mobility whether it moving due to eviction, the need to find cheaper housing or because the owner has sold the rental property (Maher et al. 1996; Wulff 1997; Beer et al. 2006). While private rental has traditionally been viewed as a transitional form of tenure, an increasing proportion of low-income households, who in a previous era would have achieved the stability of secure tenure through obtaining access to public housing, now find themselves as long-term private renters with all the insecurity and uncertainty that this form of tenure involves. As Maher et al. (1996, p.274) point out, the 'unavoidable conclusion is that because of the ease of entry and exit, private renting services a transient population very well, but its very nature is likely to provide problems for those renting in the long term'. The concept of secure occupancy in relation to private rental households has recently been examined by Hulse et al. (2011). Secure occupancy 'refers to the nature of occupancy of residential dwellings and the extent to which households can make a home and stay there for reasonable periods if they wish to do so, provided that they meet their obligations' (Hulse et al. 2011, pp.1–2). Whether it is the ability to form important social networks and build social capital or to enable children to remain in stable educational environments secure occupancy is seen to be a vital element in a range of human wellbeing factors.

While mobility has always been an important feature of Australian housing assistance policy, the way in which certain mobilities or immobilities are valued or stigmatised has significantly changed over the last few decades. Today housing assistance is structured to facilitate greater mobility of low-income households as a means of ensuring these households do not exacerbate their marginal status by moving into high unemployment regions or by trying to ensure that limited public housing resources are allocated to those most in need. While such mobility aspirations are important. they need to moderated by the recognition that low-income households in

both private and public rental accommodation also need access to secure occupancy and should have greater control over how they make their mobility choices.

### **3.4 Mobility and concentrations of advantage and disadvantage**

The residential mobility of households has also been found to exacerbate processes of socio-spatial polarisation creating geographical concentrations of advantage and disadvantage. Concentrations of advantage and disadvantage may be the product of housing markets (e.g. gentrification) or public policy (e.g. the decision to target public housing to highest-need households). Regardless of origin, concentrations of advantage and disadvantage are not only a product of mobility processes but they also produce mobility outcomes of displacement (gentrification) and deconcentration (through policies of renewal, mobility and social mix).

The gentrification of homes and neighbourhoods is in essence a product of processes of residential mobility. Lyons (1996, p.40), for instance, has stated that 'the shared and defining characteristic of gentrification everywhere is socio-economic change through migration'. Gentrification involves the residential mobility of one income group out of an area to be replaced by another higher-income group. In particular, it is the selective character of who moves and why that is seen to be most problematic. Gentrification in essence ultimately results in concentrations of advantage in areas that are usually well resourced in terms of publicly and privately provided services. However, while the displacement effects of gentrification are widely acknowledged, they remain understudied (Atkinson 2000; Smith 2002; Van Criekingen 2009; van Ham & Clark 2009). As Van Criekingen (2009, p.825) argues, 'exploring the migration dynamics associated with gentrification is particularly important in order to shed light on the nature and contested effects of such processes'. By not investigating these impacts, housing researchers are only getting one side of the story when it comes to how concentrations of (dis)advantage emerge in our urban areas.

Just as gentrifying areas have become increasingly wealthier through residential mobility processes, poor areas have also become poorer through the in-migration of poor unemployed households and the out-migration of those who are better off (Wulff & Bell 1997). Residential mobility processes that have produced these concentrations of disadvantage, particularly in public housing areas in Australia, have been reinforced through the aforementioned policy shift in public housing to become welfare housing available to only the most disadvantaged in Australian society. A number of policies have developed in Australia that seek to address concentrations of disadvantage that have emerged due to structural economic change, gentrification and changes to allocation policies of public housing (Baker 2008). Deconcentration policies draw directly on an ecological approach to urban problems viewing the negative qualities of some areas (e.g. high rates of unemployment) as being responsible for the emergence of concentrated poverty (Varady & Walker 2007, p.5). These policies are premised on the rationality that by moving households and individuals away from these negative environments and placing them in contact with more positive environments and role models, household and individual opportunities are vastly improved. Ranging from regeneration and renewal strategies, to social mix and housing voucher policies, all deconcentration policies involve responding to and addressing issues of 'concentrations of disadvantage' through residential mobility. However, unlike the displacement effects of gentrification, the impacts of deconcentration policies have been extensively researched in housing studies.

There is a vast amount of literature available that already evaluates the considerable literature on deconcentration policies (Galster & Zobel 1998; de Souza Briggs et al.

2010; Ware et al. 2010). Many of these evaluations already conclude that a clear 'evidence base' endorsing policies of deconcentration does not exist and that such policy approaches should be treated with extreme caution (Galster 2002; Varady & Walker 2003; Clark 2008; Bolt et al. 2010; Goetz 2010). It is not the purpose of this Essay to provide an exhaustive analysis of these approaches. Instead, this Essay will examine one aspect of the literature analysing deconcentration policies that has received less attention. This literature employs the critical lens of a 'politics of mobility' approach to the residential mobility expectations built into many deconcentration programs.

A 'politics of mobility' approach to housing-mobility research stems from the mobility turn in the social sciences. This approach argues that research on mobility generally needs to be aware of and account for the ideological dimensions of mobility and the politics that are enabled or silenced through the various understandings, practices and mediations of mobility. David Imbroscio (2004b, 2004a, 2008) applies a 'politics of mobility' approach to critique the mobility 'choices' of participants in the US housing program 'Moving to Opportunity' (MTO). The MTO involves providing residents living in inner-city public housing with the opportunity to move out of these neighbourhoods. Using rent subsidies (usually in the form of vouchers or certificates), these households were assisted to find suitable housing in 'low-poverty' areas, usually in the suburbs (Imbroscio 2004; de Souza Briggs et al. 2010). Imbroscio (2004, p.458) critiqued this program principally arguing that,

... although household mobility advocates strongly imply that program participants—actual and prospective—are exercising freedom of choice, many may instead be acting in response to a coercive situation rooted in the lack of choice.

For Imbroscio (2004, 2008) residential mobility/dispersal policies, like MTO, offer a narrow field in which participants can practice choice and exercise their 'right to place' usually involving 'merely the ability to exit current neighbourhoods' (Imbroscio 2008, p.123). Following Imbroscio's lead it would be useful to assess deconcentration policies in Australia in terms of to what extent these residential mobilities can be considered the result of 'free' choices or actually the result of very narrow mobility options as structured by these policies.

Similarly, Gwyther (2009, 2011) argued that the idea that community is inevitably created through face-to-face, door-to-door interactions, fails to recognise the socio-spatial distancing that constitutes the mobile society. In particular, policies of social mix fail to accommodate the role of mobile technologies in supporting the formation and maintenance of social ties in the digital age. Such an approach demonstrates that the structural inequalities often attributed to the static nature of housing are in fact mediated and exacerbated through other mobile technologies like internet access and private car ownership, which enable some individuals and households greater mobility than others. Gwyther (2009, 2011) argues that housing policies that seek to achieve greater social mix may actually result in the further isolation of low-income households, as they generally have more limited access to a range of mobile technologies that will allow them to maintain distanced social networks. While, at the same time, high-income households with better access to mobility resources are able to employ these resources so that they are more able to 'avoid communities and neighbourhoods with which they have little in common' (Gwyther 2009, p.154).

There is no doubt that residential mobility is reshaping the landscape of advantage and disadvantage in Australia. Indeed when it comes to processes of gentrification, there is still much foundational and critical research to be done (Wulff & Reynolds 2010). Furthermore, while we have a wealth of information on some of the practical

aspects and outcomes of deconcentration policies, we need to also be aware of how such policies may constrain the mobility choices of low-income households and through dispersal potentially increase their social and economic isolation.

### **3.5 Temporary mobility and housing**

An emerging area of concern in mobility and migration studies is the role of temporary mobility. The introduction of the concept of temporary mobility tries to accommodate a more temporally and spatially flexible understanding of migration and mobility, which have become increasingly important in a globalised era<sup>4</sup>. This Essay identifies two key areas of interest that relate to the issue of temporary mobilities and housing:

1. mobile homes and second homes
2. Indigenous housing.

#### *3.5.1 Mobile homes and second homes*

One of the most representative dwelling structures of temporary mobility is the mobile home. As houses that are transportable and therefore able to be located almost anywhere, mobile homes have become an increasingly prevalent form of housing (Blunt & Dowling 2006). The mobile home is viewed to be a positive dwelling structure if used in a temporary way (e.g. for holidays). However, when employed as a long-term source of shelter, the mobile home has become synonymous with 'negative portrayals of residents of mobile homes as inferior 'trailer trash', and the perceptions of mobile homes as an inferior dwelling form because they are not permanent' (Beckwith 1998; Blunt & Dowling 2006, p.122).

Importantly, there is little documented information regarding the mobile home and caravan park sector as a form of accommodation. Yet, mobile homes and caravan parks have become an increasingly popular form of affordable and community-oriented housing, especially for retiree populations. As both Severns (1998) and Beckwith (1998) identify mobile homes and caravan parks contribute to the range of housing choice available, particularly for low-income households. Yet government policies and business practices can contribute to the marginal status of mobile homes. For instance, Beckwith (1998, p.131) noted that land use planners 'typically view caravan parks are "under developed" properties'. Similarly, Blunt and Dowling (2006, p.123) pointed out that until the 1980s purchasers of mobile homes in the US were unable to obtain bank financing. Such attitudes pose a threat to the future viability, both socially and economically, of this type of housing.

At the other end of the temporary mobility and housing spectrum is the increasingly important role of and rapid growth in second homes, particularly among highly mobile, transnational and affluent societies (McKenzie et al. 2008; Paris 2009, 2011). Much of the research on second homes has come from tourism, rural and cultural studies (Gallent & Tewdwr-Jones 2001; Hall & Müller 2004; Gallent et al. 2005; McIntyre et al. 2006; Rye 2011).

Second home ownership is a decades old tradition in Australia. Beginning initially as semi-permanent holiday 'shacks' and later becoming the far more permanent markers of affluence that they are today (Murphy 1977; Burnley & Murphy 2004; Frost 2004; Selwood & Tonts 2004, 2006; Paris 2011). Paris (2011) argues that the high levels of home ownership in Australia over the last 60 years has enabled the consolidation of the second home tradition in the nation, with the equity in primary residences being used to purchase the second home. While precise figures are impossible, today it is

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<sup>4</sup> However, as Bell and Ward (1998) explain the ability to do this is limited by the available data sets that tend to focus on more long-term and permanent forms of migration.

estimated 21 per cent of households own other properties including second homes. Out of this 21 per cent, it is further estimated that 4–5 per cent of all Australian households own a second home.

The impact of the growth of second home ownership has been noted to be controversial internationally. While second homes are argued to boost seasonal tourism and the value of housing in potentially depressed rural and coastal markets, they are criticised for placing additional economic, infrastructure and environmental strains on communities. While not seen to be as controversial in Australia (Frost 2004; Paris 2011), the high rate of second home ownership, the increasing rate of sea and tree-change migration into traditional second home regions and overall increase in mobility of Australians for a range of socio-economic reasons means that governments at all levels will be challenged in terms of how to plan and resource locality-based infrastructure, housing and services for these mobile communities (Selwood & Tonts 2004; McKenzie et al. 2008).

### *3.5.2 Indigenous housing*

An ongoing interest of housing-mobility research is the implications of mobility and the effective delivery of housing to Indigenous Australians. As Biddle and Hunter (2006, p.1) explain, 'Indigenous Australians have distinct patterns of mobility ... [In particular] Indigenous Australians are ... a relatively mobile population who are more likely to change residence over a given period of time'. The mobility patterns of many Indigenous Australians generally fit within the definition of temporary mobilities, in that they involve short-term geographical movements (Habibis et al. 2011). There are a range of factors that inform the temporary mobilities of Indigenous Australians, including (Memmott et al. 2006; Habibis et al. 2011):

- kinship maintenance
- sporting events and recreation
- hunting and bush resources
- employment
- accessing traditional country
- health services
- weather events.

Both Memmott et al. (2006) and Habibis et al. (2011) group the literature on Indigenous mobility into two categories: anthropological and demography/social policy. Importantly, Habibis et al. (2011, p.4) argue that social policy analyses start from the premise that Indigenous mobility is a problematic cultural practice that 'creates difficulties for service providers and contributes to adverse outcomes within Indigenous populations'. Habibis et al. (2011) and Memmott et al. (2006) argue that policy constructions of Indigenous mobility as problematic need to be rethought. For example, Memmott et al. (2006) advocates that housing policy should accommodate temporary mobility practices rather than seeking to try to make Indigenous cultures fit housing policy expectations of stability. That is, housing policy needs to be more flexible and wide-ranging in how it defines the relationship between housing and mobility. As Habibis et al. (2011, p.5) points out, 'temporary mobility is a largely overlooked area of housing need, disappearing into the space between provision of permanent, affordable housing and range of homeless services'. Yet temporary mobility is an area of housing policy concern that goes beyond the temporary mobility of Indigenous Australians, as outlined above temporary mobility includes mobile homes and caravan parks, second homes and tourism. Furthermore, temporary

mobility is likely to become an increasingly important feature of Australian social and economic landscapes through seasonal work like FIFO mining work which also has implications for housing policy (The Coordinator General 2011). Instead Habibis et al. (2011, p.4) argue that the,

... real 'problem' of Indigenous temporary mobility is that much of it is [due to] forces, arising from, and being maintained by, an unenviable mix of severe housing shortage, structural disadvantage, cultural difference and poverty, mixed in with substance use, and vulnerability to the vagaries of government policy. Overall, ... Indigenous people are actually very stable in their attachment to location.

Temporary mobility does not present an easy issue to unravel and build into housing policy. However, if not adequately recognised and accounted for in these policies temporary mobility becomes a major contributor to other housing issues such as homelessness.

## **4 MOBILITY AND HOUSING POLICY: FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

As the above analysis, demonstrates the dialectic relationship between housing and mobility has been an ongoing focus of both housing researchers and policy-makers. Furthermore, contemporary changes in both how we move and how we consume housing means that, while there has been extensive research and policy development around this nexus, further work is required to ensure that recent changes are accounted for and appropriately accommodated. In this Chapter, I propose two key conceptual directions for research and policy to develop around when considering the housing-mobility nexus, followed by some proposed future research directions.

### **4.1 Broader understandings of mobility**

As this Essay has outlined, whether we are considering demographic change such as retirees becoming more mobile or young people remaining in the parental home longer, economic changes like globalisation and mining booms, or socio-cultural influences such as the increased transnationalism of migrant populations or the culture of mobility that has been a feature of Indigenous Australian lives for millennia, the housing careers of Australians are far more complex than the housing ladder model, which has informed much housing research and policy on residential mobility, represents. Instead, following Paris (2009 p.305), this Essay advocates for ‘the abandonment of linear models of standard life cycles and “housing careers”’. The core message of this literature is the need to conceptualise the use of dwellings as fluid, changing and often highly transient’.

For housing researchers and policy-makers, the ‘mobility’ turn approach offers one way of conceptualising a wider understanding of mobility. The mobility turn approach provides a means of understanding and analysing the interplay of different mobilities that go beyond the corporeal to include the communicative, imaginative, virtual and non-human in relation to housing. Whether we are looking at the way housing impacts on internal migration into south-east Queensland, the temporary movements of FIFO mining employees, or the increasing daily commute of many residents in Australia’s major metropolitan regions. The mobility turn also recognises that mobilities are increasingly occurring in more ‘virtual’ ways, such as the role that technology has played in enabling public housing tenants in Australia to take a greater role in negotiating their own tenancy transfers through the website Our House Swap (<http://www.ourhouseswap.com.au/>). Technology has the ability to establish important linkages for individuals often outside mainstream networks of employment or dependent on complex government administrative systems. However, the cost of access to such technologies means that as a mobility resource it can also create greater inequalities and isolation (Gwyther 2009, 2011). A broader approach to how we conceptualise and define mobility will enable policy-makers to develop policy approaches that both respond to and potentially harness the opportunities of this varied approach. Last we also need to be cognisant that the ability of research and policy to develop these understandings remains constrained by current data collection methods that do not recognise and accommodate this diversity in how Australians move (Bell & Ward 1998; McKenzie et al. 2008; Paris 2011).

### **4.2 The need to account for a politics of mobility when considering the housing-mobility nexus**

The second conceptual direction housing researchers and policy-makers should re-engage with is the recognition that there is a politics to mobility generally and the

housing-mobility nexus specifically. Our understandings of mobility need to be attuned to the political constructs and consequences of movement. First, both research and policy, should be built around the recognition that the ability to direct our mobility choices is actually a fundamental dimension of individual citizenship rights. For instance, Wulff and Bell (1997) caution that, 'from an ethical perspective ... attempts to restrict the locational decisions of households and individuals, whether directly or indirectly, would contravene one of the prime tenets of individual freedom of choice that characterise liberal democracies'. Similarly, Memmott et al. (2006, p.5) argue that,

Issues of control over mobility are central to government policy consideration. Should people have freedom of movement and access to country and urban centres? If so, how can policy facilitate such freedom? Or should policy influence where people move and constrain mobility in other directions?

However, a politics of mobility in housing policy and research should not stop at a concept of 'mobility as a right' but also recognise the factors that make an individuals' access to mobility as differentiated, structured and unequal and that such differentiated access produces further inequalities.

A politics of mobility also means that housing researchers and policy-makers should be cognisant of the 'politics'/ideologies that informs how we explain the causes and consequences of mobility. Over different points in time societies have differently valued mobility and stasis usually lauding one and demonising the other. Such simplistic approaches to how we understand the housing-mobility nexus often has the consequence of reducing complex situations and potential policy solutions into basic and binarised value judgements. For example, Crump (2002, p.581) critiques contemporary federal public housing policies in the US as being based on:

... a conceptually inadequate understanding of the role of space and of spatial influences on poverty and on the behaviour of poor people. The use of spatial metaphors such as the 'concentration of poverty' or the 'deconcentration of the poor' disguises the social and political processes behind poverty and helps to provide the justification for simplistic spatial solutions to complex social, economic and political problems.

While it is impossible to avoid such value judgements, housing researchers and policy-makers should still seek to be aware of the consequences of such judgments.

Last, we need to be aware of the policy limitations of mobility. Rossi (1980 (1955), p.46), the 'founding father' of research on the links between housing and mobility, is first to make this point, arguing that,

It is much more important that the relationships between mobility and the direct concerns of planners and policy makers be more clearly and pointedly articulated ... The critical questions centre around the impact of specific programs and policies on the ability of population subgroups to maintain and/or improve their housing situations.

This Essay notes that while mobility is an important dynamic both influencing and informing housing processes, policies that aim to solve larger structural issues of inequality and poverty by targeting effects, such as mobility, and not their root causes are extremely unlikely to solve these issues over the long term.

### **4.3 Future research directions**

This Essay points to a number of areas, where both housing researchers and policy-makers knowledge about the housing-mobility nexus remains incomplete including:

- Development of new methodological approaches that enable housing researchers to record and analyse more temporary forms of housing mobility.
- Augmenting the traditional housing ladder approach to accommodate the increasingly complex housing careers of Australians in the 21st century.
- Role of mobile forms of housing in Australian housing markets and their increasing importance in providing low-cost housing for different groups in Australia.
- Role of technological change in producing new forms of housing mobility.
- Role of mobile technologies (e.g. internet, access to transport) and their relationship to housing.
- Housing needs of more mobile groups in Australia such as:
  1. FIFO and other seasonal workers.
  2. Immigrants (temporary and permanent), particularly refugees.
  3. Indigenous Australians.
- The displacement/mobility effects of concentrations of advantage.
- Contemporary barriers to the mobility of recipients of different forms of housing welfare,
  1. In the context of changes to the provision of social housing and increasing role of the community housing sector.
  2. The role of new technologies in enabling greater control of mobility decisions.

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Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Level 1, 114 Flinders Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000

Phone +61 3 9660 2300 Fax +61 3 9663 5488

Email [information@ahuri.edu.au](mailto:information@ahuri.edu.au) Web [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au)