

Thursday 12 August 2021 | 11:00am – 12:30pm (AEST) | #AHURIwebinar

AHURI Research Webinar Series

Learning from public housing renewal evaluations

Speaker

Assoc Prof Andi Nygaard, Swinburne University of Technology

Respondent

David Islip, Office of Victorian Government Architect
Department of Premier and Cabinet

Welcome

Dr Tom Alves
AHURI (facilitator)



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Evaluation and learning in public housing urban renewal

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Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which Swinburne's Australian campuses are located in Melbourne's east and outer-east, and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We are honoured to recognise our connection to Wurundjeri Country, history, culture, and spirituality through these locations, and strive to ensure that we operate in a manner that respects and honours the Elders and Ancestors of these lands.

We also respectfully acknowledge Swinburne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, alumni, partners and visitors.

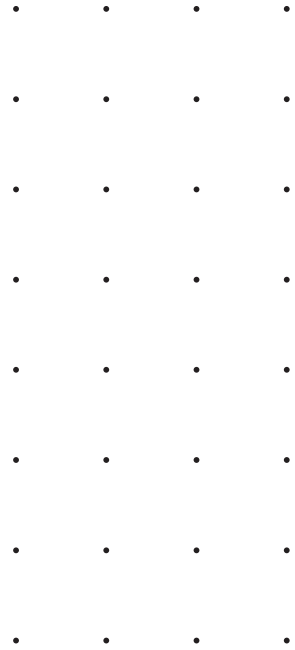
We also acknowledge and respect the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia, their Elders, Ancestors, cultures, and heritage, and recognise the continuing sovereignties of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

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Outline

1. Introduction and context
2. Perspectives on policy formation (conceptual foundations)
3. Evaluations and public housing renewal
4. Learning in a multi-actor perspective – an advocacy coalition perspective
5. Going forward – policy innovations?



“The important thing for Government is not to do things which individuals are doing, and to do them a little better or a little worse; but to do those things which at present are not done at all”. John M. Keynes – The End of Laissez-Faire (1926)

Introduction

Centre for Urban Transitions:

- Actionable policy for just, healthy and productive urban transitions
- Australia's housing challenges requires transformative policy development.

Context:

Public housing (PH) renewal provides an opportunity for policy makers to give direction to urban reconfiguration processes and housing systems.

- Since 1990s growing emphasis on 'unlocking' latent value related to the positioning of PH estates (Pawson and Pinnegar 2018).
- By giving direction to urban reconfiguration processes public housing renewal is also urban renewal, i.e. a (potentially) transformative process.
- But public housing renewal is only a component of urban reconfiguration & embedded within political settings emphasising need to be 'cost neutral' or 'cost-minimised' to governments.
- This creates a **dual-dependency** that fundamentally shapes policy formation and the role evaluations can play.

Why focus on evaluation and learning processes?

Perspectives on policy (de Bruijn et al 1993):

- Policy as top-down command and control: Analysis of formal rules, regulations and laws → public-private interaction in goal implementation.
 - Policy as a market (bottom up): Analysis of financial incentives (e.g. subsidies and taxes) → public-private interaction through constrained self-organisation.
 - Policy as networks: Analysis of learning processes and network management → public-private interaction through information and resource exchange.
-
- A key finding of our work is that a number of 'understandings' of how public housing renewal works are widely shared across key stakeholders. Central here is the role of latent land values in reconciling some physical, social and economic estate/urban reconfiguration objectives.
- Lends itself to a advocacy coalition framework perspective of policy formation and evolution.

Advocacy coalition framework

- The ACF perspective centres on the role that shared, or common, beliefs among stakeholders in the policy formation process play in articulating problems and the ways to solve them (Weible and Sabatier 2007).
- Belief systems are hierarchically organised. Higher level beliefs are less prone to change:
 1. Deep core beliefs are at the top of the belief system: broad / often normative beliefs, such as liberal or conservative values. Prioritising fiscal neutrality / minimising public sector expenditure / risk.
 2. Policy core beliefs: specific to policy subsystems (e.g. housing, public housing renewal). Policy core beliefs are shared beliefs around causal relationships in a specific policy area – glue around which coalitions form.
 3. Secondary beliefs, in comparison, are narrower in scope often more empirically based, and can relate to specific aspects of implementation, funding and/or delivery. Space for innovation.
- ACs consist of core members (strong influence) and other members (less influence).
- Core coalition members bring resources and competencies to public housing renewal without which the policy core belief cannot be sustained.

Policy core beliefs

(renewal shaping or shaped by urban reconfiguration?)

- Many interviewees – inside and outside government – shared a view that land value (change) is a critical enabler of public housing urban renewal.
- *I think more and more our renewal projects are about minimising the exposure and the risk for us [→ Deep Core Belief], and maximising and leveraging off the value of the land (→ Policy Core Belief) (GovOff, SA).*
- Within the Core and Policy Core beliefs, tenure mix and residential density are the instruments (causal mechanisms) to extract latent land value. Mixed tenure has been guiding feature over the past two decades.
- *The market response sort of led to that 30/70 sort of split. Unfortunately, also by introducing the private element – it's not unfortunate, it's just market forces – the market is telling us that about a 25 to 30 per cent social proportion on the site is about what the private market's willing to live in and around (GovOff, VIC).*
- Mix tenure achieves:
 1. De-concentration of existing resident profile;
 2. Instrumental (causal) in 'unlocking' latent land value in strategic sites.

Evaluation and public housing renewal

Definitions of public policy evaluation assumes that policy programs are based on outcome-producing theories.

- E.g. how can mixed-tenure developments produce (even maximise) financial and socio-economic returns assumes that either of these outcomes is causally linked (not necessarily in a simplistic way) to financial and/or socio-economic returns.

Vedung (2017): “Retrospective **assessment of the merit, worth, and value of administration**, output, and outcome of government interventions, which is **intended to play a role in future**, practical action situations”.

- **Summative**: data collection for the purpose of making summary and descriptive assessments of value (benefits).
- **Formative**: data collection for the purpose of modifying/improving future policy (policy iterations) → concerned with testing the validity of assumed program logics (strength of causal relationships).

Both forms are integral to learning, formative role integral to transformative capacity of policy,

Evaluations: key actor interviews

One: awareness and appreciation:

- Relatively large number of government commissioned, independent, evaluation in each of the three states.
 - Relocation experiences and (describing) community outcomes (e.g. Minto, NSW; Kensington, VIC; Mitchell Park, SA) → social mix, sense of belonging, satisfaction; health/life satisfaction; property values.
- Almost universal awareness and value placed on insights provided by past evaluation activity.
- Summative findings critical to mapping outcomes (although causal inference is variable).
- Past (published) evaluations provide less insight into which processes of public housing renewal are causally tied to economic restructuring (e.g. financial returns, or outcomes relative to wider urban reconfiguration processes).

Evaluations: key actor interviews

Two: carry-through and institutionalisation of learning not very clear:

- Individual awareness does not equate to institutional embeddedness.
 - *We've always undertaken an analysis of our projects during and afterwards in the evaluation process, but generally speaking, they collect dust in the cupboard (GovOff, SA).*
 - *I had a role around research and evaluation [...] and one of the things that we did was commission a number of studies on aspects of redevelopment projects. [...] No one took any great interest in them (GovOff, NSW).*
- Individual awareness and lack of institutionalisation not necessarily contradictory. It does, however, alter the way in which information enters the policy formation process.
- Institutionalisation can also take time: Despite learnings from Kensington 50:50 mix/design & loss of social/economic diversity and reduced connectedness, the Carlton redevelopment project (which commenced in 2006) was shaped in a very similar way to the Kensington project in terms of its financial, physical and social design and therefore resulted in similar outcomes. Ongoing commissioning (2019/20) particularly cognisant of this issue.

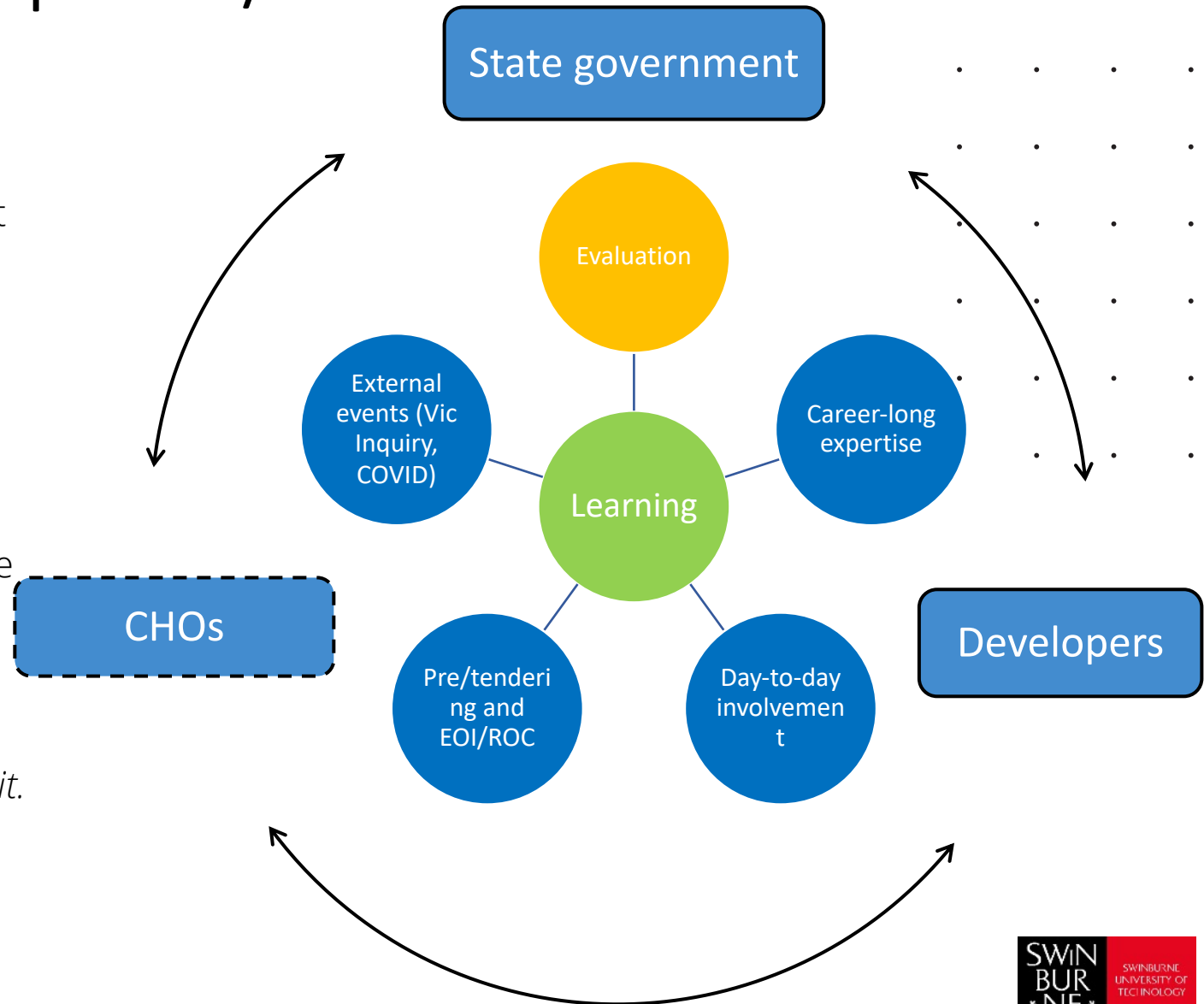
Evaluations: key actor interviews

Three: but also examples of evaluation activity shaping policy evolution:

- A number of evaluations focused on relocation (during and after renewal) outcomes, resulting in institutional learning and process change.
- *And I think that because a large part of the focus of those studies was on relocation, that was actually fed back into different parts of the organisation to change the way that they work (GovOff, NSW).*
- *A lot of this stuff [findings] around the tenant relocations has changed policy internally around things for redevelopments (GovOff, VIC).*
- Past program and estate evaluations provided considerable evidence on impacts/perceptions of relocation practices, mix, connectedness → some show impact on current practice.
- A key issue is thus what is being evaluated / remit of evaluations. Victorian PHRP Inquiry critique (2018):
 - Any sale of public housing land [...] should be properly justified and provide a large benefit to public housing tenants and the State.
 - There is no public analysis on the optimum ratio of public-to-private housing on the sites.

Learning in a multi-actor perspective/ACF

- Learning informed by multiple factors
- Notwithstanding organisational restructuring, many key actors involved over long periods, multiple roles → institutional memory → frequent referencing of involvement in previous renewal programs/projects.
- Transfer of expertise across key stakeholder organisations → facilitates partnership working, and shared knowledge diffusion.
- Broadening expertise through secondments / consultancies (project management, infrastructure delivery, architecture/people-centred design).
- EOI/ROC: 'testing the market' → identification of potential market constraints.
- *I certainly had not anticipated the negativity around it. I think that drove us – we were constantly having to adapt (GovOff, VIC).*



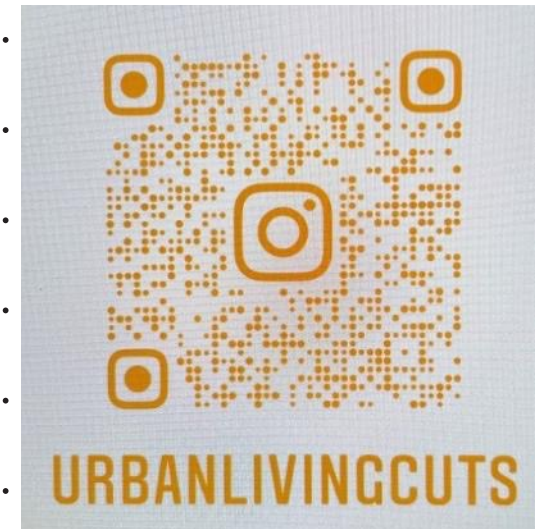
Policy innovation necessitates evolving beliefs

- Public housing renewal policies evolve through the multiple learning mechanisms of the advocacy coalition – evaluations only capture elements of this learning process, and may be member-specific.
- The accumulation of individual and shared experience tends to reinforce specific processes rather than challenge fundamental program logics of public housing renewal.
- A change of direction would require that beliefs around how renewal works and delivers across multiple objectives are updated across the advocacy coalition – or the emergence of a competing advocacy coalition championing an alternative policy core belief.
- Policy formation in ACs also evolve through reconfiguration or extensions of memberships:
 1. Emphasis on land asset and property development skills within policy teams over time → deepening and reinforcing asset-based approach to renewal (minimisation of financial risk).
 2. The emergence of CHOs (in some cases) as members to the AC provides an impulse for innovation, both in terms of property yield but also people-based outcomes.

Going forward – policy innovation basis

1. Internal learning in the AC: Recognition amongst key stakeholders of (potential) value of more systematic [testing of renewal assumptions and outcomes](#).
 - E.g. C+ / step change by the NSW Government: moving beyond useful but partial external evaluation activities constrained to people- and community-focussed outcomes/perceptions → more systematic and layered interrogation of fundamental cost-benefit considerations and delivery of wider urban policy objectives.
 - Trend towards more detailed (& formative evaluations) also evident in ongoing (2019/20) Victorian policy / tendering development.
2. Internal learning and/or alternative AC: dominance of land considerations a function of Deep Core Beliefs (minimise expenditure/risk). Potential to 'unlock' non-land related value in public housing renewal (and build more generally) through a [social infrastructure approach](#). Requires innovation around how to channel public sector cost-offsets & other societal gains into the evaluation or financing of renewal/new build.
 - This perspective already informs public housing renewal in New Zealand.
 - It is also evident in Infrastructure Australia's 2019 infrastructure audit.
3. Internal learning and/or alternative AC: cities are where most Australian's will experience and live with the consequences of [climate change](#). The housing mission must be to transform Australia's housing stock into infrastructure for carbon reduction. There are solutions for this – there is

- <https://www.swinburne.edu.au/research/centres-groups-clinics/centre-for-urban-transitions/>
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Upcoming webinar:
**Improving transitions from rehab
into stable housing**

Wednesday 1 September 2021 | 11:00am – 12:30pm (AEST)

Presenter



Dr Cameron Duff
RMIT University

Respondent



Sue Grigg
Unison





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