

Report

# **Housing markets and socio-spatial disadvantage: an Australian perspective**

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## **PREAMBLE**

This Critical Perspectives paper (one of two) was written at the beginning of the AHURI Multi Year Research Program into Addressing Concentrations of Social Disadvantage. The paper sought to build an understanding of socio-spatial disadvantage in Australia's major capital cities through an exploration of the role of the Australian housing system, the housing markets which structure and define the dynamics of that system, and associated government policies (or absence of policies). The paper was intended to be provocative and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the processes that contribute to socio-spatial disadvantage in Australia's major cities and the scope for policy interventions to prevent and ameliorate such disadvantage.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, we seek to provide a distinctly Australian perspective on socio-spatial disadvantage, in respect of major metropolitan cities in which the drivers are primarily market based not just the result of past government housing policies. In particular, we consider housing markets, which reflect high demand as a result of household growth through migration and other factors, and underpin the processes which sift and sort households through residential and other types of mobility. Following Castells (1996), we view cities as comprising not just 'space of places' in which people have common experiences due to living in the same location but also 'space of flows' in which people are not bounded by place but move around in relation to jobs, technology, transport, and information. The paper seeks to make a contribution to understanding socio-spatial disadvantage in terms of flows and movement through a more nuanced understanding of housing markets.

The paper argues that we have been 'borrowers', using concepts based on patterns of socio-spatial disadvantage in other contexts that do not accord with Australian conditions. From the US, we have imported ideas about 'concentrations of disadvantage', referring to neighbourhoods in which people are 'trapped', and 'neighbourhood effects' which suggest that such neighbourhoods exercise an independent effect on people's opportunities over and above their individual characteristics and circumstances. From the UK, we have taken ideas about deep, place-based social exclusion, referring to circumstances in which residents are thought to be disconnected, or excluded, from mainstream economic and social life. In both these contexts, socio-spatial disadvantage is associated with living in poor quality housing and degraded environments, characterised by low housing demand and in extreme cases abandonment. Many of the places which feature in these accounts are large public housing estates in which governments have played a key role in the creation of place and hence have a moral and political responsibility to develop policies to mitigate socio-spatial disadvantage.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we outline briefly the conceptual framework for the paper inspired by Castells but also engaging with what has been called the 'new' 'mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry 2006). The second section examines two aspects of borrowing of ideas from the US and the UK, referring to concentrations of poverty and place-based social exclusion respectively, finding that addressing socio-spatial disadvantage in both cases is predicated on working with improving flows of people. In the third and fourth sections, we explore how housing markets have contributed to the suburbanisation of socio-spatial disadvantage in Australian cities, and the implications for 'personal mobility', residential mobility and social mobility. The conclusion to the paper reflects on the contribution and potential pitfalls of developing

this approach to enable a deeper understanding of socio-spatial disadvantage in Australia which is necessary before considering possible policy implications.

# 1 FRAMING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIO-SPATIAL DISADVANTAGE: PLACES AND FLOWS

The paper is framed within an understanding of a tension between 'space of places' and the 'space of flows' developed by Castells (1996) in his hugely influential work on 'The Rise of Network Society' (vol 1). We often understand socio-spatial disadvantage in terms of the 'space of places', referring to common experiences of living in physical places. However, increasingly people's lives are not bounded by place and there is an increasing disassociation between spatial proximity and aspects of daily living such as going to work, shopping, entertainment, healthcare and education. Castells terms this the 'space of flows' pointing to the growing importance of electronic communication and information systems as well as other types of flows including images. He suggests that dominant managerial elites create spaces of flows, engaging in the same lifestyle practices wherever they are physically, but does recognise, however, that many people do see their space as being based on place, particularly if they are not part of elites; they live in places in physical contiguity with others who engage in similar social practices.

A contemporaneous and complementary set of ideas about the 'weightless world' (Quah 1996) suggests that economies increasingly comprise transactions that use information technology rather than the physical manufacture and exchange of goods, which suggests a distinction between the virtual and the physical world. This distinction between virtual flows and physical place has implications for considering socio-spatial disadvantage. For example, Coyle (1997, p.192) suggests that the weightless world will reinforce the concentration of economic activity in cities rather than disperse it and lead increased competition for urban resources and greater inequality.

This (re)thinking of ideas about the extent to which people are bounded by physical place has contributed to what is sometimes claimed to be the 'new' mobilities paradigm (Scheller & Urry 2006). Whilst there is a long history of research into 'moving', such as migration research and transport research, a mobilities approach promises to enhance understanding of space through considering 'all forms of movement from small-scale bodily movements, such as dancing or walking, through infrastructural and transport-aided movements, to global flows of finance or labour (Cresswell 2010, p.552). As suggested by Cresswell (2010, p.551), this requires not taking certain kinds of fixity and boundedness for granted but instead starting with the fact of mobility. Put simply, a mobilities approach focuses on people's movements, the ways in which they construct and use space, and the use of time (Cresswell 2012). It appears that the 'mobilities' turn has had relatively little traction in housing research, perhaps because housing as a physical entity is firmly located in place even though the residents may not be Dufty-Jones (2012, pp.211–12). There is, however, a long-established literature on residential mobility and investigation of the displacement effects of gentrifications, both of which centre on mobility, as well as work on the mobilities of home across national borders.

Of particular relevance here is residential mobility that has been the subject of much research since the 1950s (e.g. Rossi 1955; Speare et al. 1975). Typically this research has investigated why households moved from one dwelling to another, finding that residential mobility is associated primarily with life cycle changes and events and changes in economic circumstances. Residential mobility is the driver of housing markets; however, as argued by Rosenblatt and DeLuca (2012, p.258), we know little about why people moved to the *place* that they moved to, and the factors they take into account in making decisions about place. Nor do we know much about

how residential mobility, particularly if it is highly constrained, affects ontological security, stability, connection to community, identity, belonging and other aspects of psychological and social wellbeing. Thus, we know relatively little about decisions that people make in moving into, or out of, areas of socio-spatial disadvantage and how much either place or the people who live in that place matter in these decisions as compared to many other factors, ranging from size/type of housing to proximity to family and other social connections. This is an important omission since, as indicated earlier, where people live sets a central node for considering mobility, and reflects both preferences and practicalities in the context of housing markets.

Housing markets are a critical mode for mobility in conjunction with other modes such as transport systems, labour markets, social networks and technologies. Thus, we would expect that residential mobility is connected to personal mobility (adults and children moving around a city in the course of their everyday lives, to visit friends and family, to child care and school, to work, to shopping centres, etc.); occupational mobility (capacity to move between jobs having regard to factors e.g. wages, conditions, location, intrinsic satisfaction) and social mobility (being able to improve one's material circumstances and social status). The interconnection between these types of mobility was raised in a seminal 1970s book, *'Whose City?'* (Pahl 1975, pp.205–06).

The role of housing markets and residential mobility in relation to labour market opportunities and social mobility was also the subject of a rich housing and urban policy research tradition in Australia from the 1970s to the 1990s, in which there was critical exploration and articulation of the interplay between the social and spatial in our cities, and the fundamental role of housing and housing markets within this (e.g. Stretton 1970; Sandercock 1976; Kendig 1979; Badcock 1984, 1994; Maher 1994). Arguably the 'new' mobilities paradigm provides a stimulus for re-engaging with these issues and asking some more critical questions about socio-spatial disadvantage, as we outline later in this paper.

In summary, we have argued in this section that, while physical contiguity in place is likely to be important, so too is the space of flows, or to use another language, mobilities. This includes residential mobility—understanding who is moving into and out of disadvantaged places and why they make these moves. It also includes understanding the extent to which residents in such areas are able to construct mobilities so that they can access jobs, resources and facilities of other parts of the city. In this sense, mobility itself could be regarded as a resource (Urry 2007; Duffy-Jones 2012). We argue that understanding the housing market is central to understanding mobilities at different scales.

## **2 BORROWING OF IDEAS: CONCENTRATION OF DISADVANTAGE AND PLACE-BASED SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

We start by examining how Australian policy-makers and researchers have viewed socio-spatial disadvantage in the 2000s, arguing that we have been predominantly borrowers in importing concepts from overseas, taken out of their context and applied with little real understanding of the drivers and outcomes of disadvantaged landscapes in Australia. This is often referred to as policy transfer, which has been defined as the process by which 'knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting' (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000, p.5). In this section we are concerned about borrowing of ideas.

We focus on two sets of ideas: 'concentration of poverty' and relatedly 'neighbourhood effects', imported from the US, and deep 'place-based social exclusion' imported from the UK. Tellingly, increasing mobility has been seen as a means of addressing these 'problems'. We also reflect on the partial nature of our borrowing, and in particular the notable absence of engagement in and contribution to international debates regarding 'market-led', 'market-shaping' policy where the Australian experience clearly has some significant import.

### **2.1 'Concentrations' of poverty**

Ideas about the problems associated with the 'concentration' of poverty and disadvantage in particular places have become embedded in the public policy lexicon in Australia. The perceived problems of concentration are often deployed as a rationale for the renewal and redevelopment of public housing estates, as illustrated by the following examples in respect of NSW and Victoria:

... estates have many strengths [but] they are often burdened with more than their share of social problems and many, particularly the larger ones, have become concentrations of disadvantage, with high levels of unemployment and crime and low levels of community integration (Coates & Shepherd 2005, p.1 cited in Darcy 2010, p.12)

Evidence shows that disadvantage has become increasingly concentrated in neighbourhood pockets. (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2008, p.8 referring to public housing estates in Victoria).

Conceptualisation of concentration of poverty and disadvantage centred on public housing has been heavily influenced by ideas which have been central to US policy and research since the 1960s. Concentration of poverty in the US context refers to poor, minority (particularly African-American) and female-headed households living in inner city public housing projects. Such areas were viewed as containers in which people lived bounded lives disconnected from mainstream economy and society and in which cultural norms supported social pathologies such as being unemployed, teenage parenthood, drug taking and crime. The problem was construed as a lack of mobility by residents: personal, residential and social, and the favoured policy intervention was 'assisted mobility', using housing vouchers to enable poor households to move out of areas of large inner city public housing estates. The most well-known of these was the 'Moving to Opportunity' experimental program (de Souza Briggs et al. 2010). These problems have been much discussed although it is important to note that, whilst concentration of low income, minority household in many

in US inner cities is still evident (see Galster 2012a for an analysis of Detroit as an extreme example), there is also some concern about new concentrations of poverty in suburban areas, such that 'the new metropolitan reality is that poor places outside of the central city are now becoming part of the metropolitan landscape' (Hanlon et al. 2010, p.120)

Concentrations of disadvantaged people in inner cities have also been long seen as problematic in the UK, with an association with overcrowding, degraded housing, environmental concerns and threats to public health, crime and deviance. The policy prescription for decades was to encourage mobility to less crowded areas with better housing and environmental conditions, from the 'garden cities' of the 1920s and 1930s, interwar and post-war council estates on the urban fringe, new high rise estates in inner cities in the 1960s and 1970s, and moving people to overspill towns adjoining large cities in the 1970s and 1980s (Power & Houghton 2007, ch. 3). Unlike the US, not all these mobility schemes were about de-concentrating people from public housing and the ethnic composition of poor households more complex. However, public housing was a key part of a strategy to move people from inner city 'slums' to other areas or house them in better conditions.

What is most important for our purpose is the theories that developed to explain the social problems associated with concentration of disadvantage in inner city public housing estates. Influential theories included ideas of a 'culture of poverty' and 'moral underclass' (Lewis 1966; Auletta 1982; Murray 1984) and about the moral hazards associated with welfare systems such that poor people were not able to improve their situation without correction and guidance, termed 'welfare paternalism' (Mead 1986, 1997). A further set of explanations is based on social capital (Putnam's 1995, 2000). Residents in disadvantaged areas are often thought to have high levels of 'bonding' social capital (with other residents) but low levels of 'bridging' and 'linking' social capital which mean that they are marginalised socially and disconnected economically (Hulse & Stone 2007). Whilst these explanations have had some traction in Australia (particularly those of Mead and Putnam), arguably ideas about neighbourhood effects have been most influential. Stemming from the highly influential work of Wilson (1987) came the idea that the social and environmental aspect of living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods has an independent effect on people's life chances over and above the characteristics of people (e.g. labour market outcome) (van Ham and Manley 2010). In other words, poor people living in areas of concentrated poverty have fewer opportunities in life than poor households who live in other types of areas.

Policy-makers and researchers in Australia have adopted ideas about neighbourhood effects:

Living in these pockets [disadvantaged neighbourhoods] compounds the level of disadvantage experienced by residents; there is a negative neighbourhood effect. (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2008, p.8)

For example, it has been suggested that when social disadvantage becomes entrenched, 'a disabling social climate can develop that is more than the sum of individual and household disadvantages. (Vinson 2009, p.2)

Further, a connection is often made between the neighbourhood effects associated with living in areas of concentrated poverty and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (blocked social mobility).

There is mounting evidence that different kinds of disadvantage—lower incomes, poorer housing, poorer health, lower education attainment, higher unemployment and higher crime rates—tend to coincide for individuals and families in a relatively small number of particular places, and that these

concentrations of disadvantage tend to persist over time. (Australian Government 2009, p.57)

In some places, different kinds of needs cluster together, reinforcing each other in a negative cycle that has proven difficult to break. For example, one of the greatest challenges of public housing estates is the high incidence of unemployment and people at risk of poverty that is often carried through generations of families (Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet 2011)

There are, however, a number of reasons to be cautious about borrowing ideas about concentration of poverty and neighbourhood effects as well as some key learning from both the US and the UK.

Firstly, Australia does not have places that are anything like the 'war zones' of inner city public housing 'ghettoes' in the US with associated racial segregation, nor the large 'sink' public housing estates of some UK cities. The inner areas of Australia's major cities have been extensively gentrified through housing market processes over the last 25 years, and inner city public housing estates are relatively small 'islands' in now advantaged areas. Most public housing is in low and medium density housing in suburban and regional areas (Burke 2012). As less than 5 per cent of all housing in Australia is public housing, whether or not 'concentration' is identified depends entirely on the spatial scale selected. As argued by Darcy (2010, p.13) designating a public housing estate as a concentration of disadvantage is largely tautological since public housing residents are selected on the basis of indicators of disadvantage. If a larger spatial scale is selected, it is unlikely that there will be a concentration of public housing due to the large numbers of home owners and private renters in any locality.

Secondly, whilst there has been some excellent work on the potential causal mechanisms for neighbourhood effects (particularly Atkinson & Kintrea 2001; Galster 2012b), and despite obvious enthusiasm for the concept by both scholars and policy-makers, empirical evidence for neighbourhood effects outside of the US is very patchy and is open to a critique about 'selection effects' (see van Ham et al. 2012 for the most recent overview of the evidence). This does not mean that living in areas where many people are poor is not very hard for residents (see Peel 1995, 2003) but empirical evidence for neighbourhood effects in Australia is at present strikingly absent. The main exception is work on stigma associated with living in some public housing areas (Jacobs et al. 2011) which results from the attitudes of non-residents which may affect, for example, attitudes of potential employers (Saugeres & Hulse 2010).

Thirdly, and more specifically, there is good reason to question explanations of neighbourhood effects based on cultural norms and social relationships. The evaluation of the Moving to Opportunity Program in the US found that unsafe and impoverished neighbourhoods (physical places) rather than neighbours (social connections) had the most important influence on participants. Most social connections were with families and a few friends rather than neighbours such that physical congruity in place did not lead to meaningful social relationships either in high poverty or lower poverty areas (de Souza Briggs et al. 2010, ch 6). In the UK, whether mobility programs are detrimental in breaking up working class communities has long been an issue of contention. From Young and Wilmot's classic study of Bethnal Green in the East End of London (1957) to Allen's (2008) study of the Kensington in Liverpool (UK), researchers have documented the importance of social relations which enable mutual dependence and mutual support in a context of income poverty and insecurity in work. Recent research into lower income neighbourhoods in the UK confirms that for many people their primary connection is with family and friends (not based on place) although in some places neighbours matter as a means of 'getting by'

and dealing with the challenges of poverty and disadvantage (Bashir et al. 2011, pp.20–22). Studies of lived experiences in Australia (Peel 1995; Warr 2005) also suggest that residents of such areas have contact with family and friends but the extent of their social networks may be affected by the effects of stigma, in the context of broader economic factors such as de-industrialisation (Bryson & Winter 1999).

Fourthly, the idea that that people get ‘stuck’ in disadvantaged areas has become pervasive, construed at various times as a lack of personal mobility, residential mobility and social mobility to use the framework developed earlier. Whether this is the case or not is an empirical question, as are the mechanisms that underlie mobility. The evaluation of the Moving to Opportunity experiment referred to earlier found, for example, that a market shortage of affordable housing in lower poverty areas in the US led to instability, involuntary mobility and sometimes a move back to higher poverty areas (de Souza Briggs et al. 2010, ch 4). However, these areas also sometimes provided the support that enabled them to deal with the consequences of poverty. Recent research in the UK found that residents often did not plan on moving and did not feel ‘trapped’ in their neighbourhoods. Rather they were able to ‘get by’ because of the support from family and friends who provided support where they are living (Bashir et al. 2011; Robinson 2011). There is limited evidence on this point in Australia, a gap which the Multi-Year Research Program will address.

## **2.2 Place-based social exclusion**

A second set of ideas imported from overseas revolving around a conceptualisation of deep place-based ‘social exclusion’ has had particular traction in Australia. Again this has centred mainly on public housing estates and has been less overtly about outward movement of low-income households and more about bringing in households on higher incomes and different circumstances. Some well-known examples of this approach are redevelopment projects at Kensington (Victoria) and Bonnyrigg (New South Wales) as well as a number of examples in Queensland (as well as other states). In a climate of constrained funding, the idea of bringing residents on higher incomes who are either home purchaser or private renters into former public housing estates is attractive on a number of counts. These include bringing about positive change for current residents and attracting private finance to enable physical improvements to occur, as highlighted in the following:

... [an aim of the redevelopment was] to develop a community with greater socio-economic diversity and thereby reduce the concentration of poverty. (Kensington Management Company 2004)

... reducing social housing in the area by offering opportunities for home ownership at affordable prices to create a more balanced community profile. (Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works 2012)

These ideas about addressing deep place-based social disadvantage through ‘mixed tenure’ and inward movement of residents in paid work and on higher incomes also appear to be largely borrowed from overseas, as least in the current policy context. In the US, attempts to redevelop inner city public housing estates into higher quality, mixed income communities from the 1990s have involved not only ‘vouchering out’ poor households through mobility programs as discussed early but also a mixture of demolition, modernisation, redevelopment, changes to housing management, introduction of households on higher incomes, and some privatisation of the projects (Dreier & Atlas 1995, 1997). The best known of these is the HOPE VI program which has contributed to the revitalisation of some inner city neighbourhoods in the US, along with an end to planners’ blight from road schemes and an increase in private investment (Popkin et al. 2004; Goetz 2010).

In the UK there is a long history of strategies to improve living conditions and opportunities for residents through improving disadvantaged places, dating back to the 1960s and known as Area-Based Initiatives (ABIs). All involved spatially targeted programs, often bypassing local government, to improve places for existing residents (Power & Houghton 2007). These programs were taken to a new level by the UK Labour Government (1997–2010) as part of a strategy to address the then newly adopted concept of ‘social exclusion’. A new suite of ABIs was implemented to address place-based social exclusion, including the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Power 2009, ch. 6). There has been a good deal of borrowing of the social in/exclusion concept from the UK (the concept was not mentioned in major metropolitan newspapers in Australia prior to 1997)<sup>1</sup> and also of specific initiatives. For example, the Neighbourhood Renewal Program in Victoria in the 2000s was clearly modelled on UK programs.

Of importance here are the theories which underpin policies to introduce people on higher incomes into social housing estates to break up ‘concentrations of poverty’. The rationale is often based on ideas about ‘social mix’ which is assumed to stem from introducing ‘tenure mix’, that is a hope that by introducing market housing, higher income households will move into the area who have ‘valued’ characteristics such as being home owners, in employment and with social connections beyond the area (Hulse et al. 2004). The idea of social mix has been embraced enthusiastically by Australian policy makers in part to release residual value in publicly owned land and to finance improvements to housing and place which are not possible in an environment of declining investment in public housing.

The inclusion of some private and community (not-for-profit) housing provides an opportunity to broaden the social mix on the estates while accessing the investment required to upgrade existing housing, improve facilities and build much-needed new housing. (Victorian Department of Human Services 2011)

Whether explicitly stated or not, the expected benefits of encouraging inward mobility of such households hinges on neighbourhood effects for which, as discussed earlier in this section, in this case positive rather than negative effects. Incoming residents are expected to provide role models for current residents in respect of employment, social participation, care of housing and the environment, and other ‘acceptable’ social behaviours. (Arthurson 2012)

There are a number of reasons to be cautious about ‘borrowing’ ideas about addressing place-based disadvantage through a combination of physical renewal and bringing in new residents.

Firstly, despite the rhetoric, redevelopment of public housing into mixed communities does not benefit many of the original residents who are displaced through forced or constrained mobility. This is evident in the US where HOPE VI projects did not benefit many of the original residents (Fraser & Kick 2007), who were simply displaced and ‘live in equally or even more precarious circumstances today’ (Popkin et al. 2004). An influential report in England cautioned that few of the original residents end up living in the newly redeveloped and ‘mixed’ area, ‘despite part of the rationale having been to help the lives of those residents’ (Hills 2007, p.180). The same applies in a number of Australian examples, where existing residents are displaced for a variety of reasons including moving out to uncertainty prior to the redevelopment (e.g. Minto Residents Action Group 2005); moving people off the site ‘temporarily’ so that demolition and

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian newspaper 28/12/2012 article on ‘The rise and rise of social inclusion’ has a graphic showing how many times social inclusion was mentioned in major metropolitan newspapers from 1995 to 2012

redevelopment can proceed; or because they are often offered better housing and/or a move to a 'better' area in order to (Hulse et al. 2004). There does appear to have been some learning about disrupting existing tenants as the public private partnership at Bonnyrigg in south west Sydney has retained the majority of the existing residents on site during the redevelopment.

Secondly, most of the hopes for the benefits of social mix rely on incoming residents providing positive role models through being in paid employment and better connected to mainstream social and economic life than current residents. This often revolves around a 'hope' that around incoming residents will be home owners with a particular stake in the neighbourhood. In practice, market housing is often sold to landlord investors, particularly where the redevelopment is in an inner suburb with high land values; and the incoming residents are private renters (Hulse et al. 2004). Further, there is little evidence that the idea of positive role models is effective since research in Australia suggests that contiguity of residence may result in little mixing in practice and can result in hostility and lack of social integration (Ruming et al 2004; Gwyther 2009; Arthurson 2010). Further, a recent review of the relevant evidence suggests that social mix policies can change the scale of stigma from the whole neighbourhood to a narrower focus on individual households (Arthurson 2012).

Thirdly, there is growing evidence that the priority for residents is in creating safer and more liveable places rather than living in social mixed communities. In the US, the most significant achievement of the Moving to Opportunity experiment was in enabling some households to move to safer places rather than to 'opportunity' (the latter referring primarily to jobs and education). Being in a safer place was particularly important for women and girls (de Souza Briggs et al 2010, ch 5). In the UK ABIs do not appear to affect the life chances and prospects for people living in such areas in terms of education, employment and income (Beatty et al. 2009, p.30). However, they do provide a better environment for people to live in in terms of environmental quality, general cleanliness and tidiness, care and upgrading of existing homes and open spaces, and resident involvement (Power 2009, p.127). The evaluation of the neighbourhood renewal program in Victoria also found that place matters in terms of how people feel about their neighbourhood, in addressing concerns about safety and crime, and in improving the local environment in areas such as vandalism and graffiti (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2008).

Finally, the assumption that residents of disadvantaged areas are bounded by physical place in terms of not only relationships (as discussed earlier) but also their daily lives more generally can be questioned. Indeed a post hoc analysis of some of ABIs in the UK commented that the Labour Government was seduced by the idea of 'captive communities' that could be fixed, but in reality they are fluid, mobile and unmeasurable'. (Toynbee & Walker 2010, p.148). The extent to which people are 'bounded' by place can only be established through empirical investigation. A recent example of such a study low income neighbourhood in the UK, for example, found that peoples' daily routines, although highly individualised, extended beyond the neighbourhood for work, education, shopping, leisure, access to public services and social networks, concluding that:

This is a simple but important finding which challenges the 'container fallacy' (Macintyre et al 2008) inherent in policy discourse and academic debate about place effects, that assumes poor people lead tightly bounded spatial routines rooted in their local neighbourhood. (Robinson 2011, p.129).

The limited number of studies of lived experiences of disadvantaged areas in Australia also suggests that whilst people are affected by place, particularly in respect of

stigma, they are not bounded by local neighbourhood in terms of their daily lives (Peel 1995; Warr 2005).

## **2.3 Re-engaging with the ‘spaces’ of the market in housing and urban policy**

In focusing on ideas, ideologies and frameworks for considering socio-spatial disadvantage that can be ‘applied’ to public housing, (which houses just over four per cent of Australian households), we argue that other strands of academic and policy debate from overseas have been ignored and that some of these offer a greater degree of resonance regarding the interplay between housing markets and spatial disadvantage in Australia. This is despite an enhanced spotlight in other advanced economies in the 2000s on the ways in which housing and planning policies are increasingly responsive to, shaped by, and structured to work within, the dynamics of the housing market, whether in terms of determining responses to supply/demand imbalances or for providing solutions to the imperfections that the market itself creates (Bramley et al. 2004; Smith 2006).

Interest in working ‘with’ housing markets, whether viewed as conceptually and politically appropriate, or out of necessity, was associated with the unswerving faith in markets encouraged by an unbroken period of house price growth in many countries after the recession in the early 1990s. Rather than this growth channelling the benefits of asset-based welfare generation to a greater number of households, the boom years pre-GFC cemented the changing role of housing, from one where it provides spaces of redistribution to spaces of inequality (Lee & Murie 1997; Ferrari 2010; Stephens 2011). This is particularly the case in Australia where home ownership was for a long time, a force for greater equality in cities (Burke & Hulse 2010). However, the progressive shrinking of housing policies and reliance on the market for the mid 1980s onwards has been associated with greater difficulties in getting on the ‘home ownership ladder’ and a dramatic restriction of places in which low-moderate income households are able to buy as demonstrated by Hulse et al. (2010) in respect of Melbourne. Differential access to asset building through home ownership is also a critical key to prospects for intergenerational advantage and disadvantage and hence social mobility (Yates et al. 2008).

Academic engagement underpinning (and some have argued, in cahoots with) these pro-market policy shifts (Allen 2008, 2010; Webb 2010) acted to consolidate interest in spatial drivers and outcomes, and, in particular, the significance of mobility of households in, out, between and within disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Explanations of concentrations of poverty have taken on an explicitly spatial hue. Research by Robson et al. (2008) for England’s Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) focused on building a better understanding of in- and out-migration flows from the bottom quintile of areas based upon the UK’s Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (comparable to Australia’s SEIFA). The research identified four types of deprived neighbourhood (‘transit’, ‘escalator’, ‘improver’, ‘isolate’), defined in terms of mobility characteristics, housing market/functional context and potential policy responses. Transit and improver areas had highest rates of mobility whilst isolate areas had the least churn and were the main areas in which people could be said to be ‘trapped’ in place. Thus neighbourhoods differ not so much in terms of degree of disadvantage but in the differing functional roles that different neighbourhoods play in the housing market (Robson et al. 2008). Evaluation of a major ABI in England suggested that although ‘mobility is an intrinsic feature of deprived areas; it varies across localities; it is primarily driven by demographic factors; and there are no simple associations between mobility and outcome change’ (in areas

such as fear of crime, lawlessness, environment, mental health, quality of environment, etc.) (Pearson & Lawless 2012, p.2032).

Through this re-engagement with space and scale in housing and urban policy overseas, the problems of neighbourhoods or 'parts' of cities have been positioned within the 'wholes'; the challenges faced thereby becoming relational, dynamic and changing, articulated in terms of relative housing market positions and function at the subregional or metropolitan scale. Detailed market analysis has illustrated the challenges and indicated that getting that market 'working' again has become inherently tied to addressing spatial disadvantage. Such thinking, and certainly flow through into policy responses, has been largely absent in the Australian context despite, one would think, having far greater resonance with the market-led reworking of the spatial dynamics of our cities. This is despite the broader, structural concerns experienced elsewhere affecting our larger cities, including high levels of affordability constraint and housing stress and declining levels of home ownership.

To summarise this section, we argue that partial borrowing of ideas, explanations and theoretical positioning from elsewhere has blurred our vision. We have selected some ideas around concentrations of disadvantage and place-based disadvantage, with an implicit belief in neighbourhood effects, both positive and negative, and applied these to public housing estates which accommodate barely four per cent of households, albeit some of those with the most extreme personal disadvantages. Even worse, preoccupation with these ideas has diverted attention from the majority of households faced with the outcomes of spatial disadvantage who live in the private rental sector or are home owners in de-industrialising middle suburbs and new outer suburbs. These households are left largely bereft of policy interest, as we discuss next.

### **3 HOUSING MARKETS AND SOCIO-SPATIAL DISADVANTAGE**

Notwithstanding the critique above, there have been some encouraging recent signs of an evolving reconnection and re-engagement at the citywide scale, through investigating how increased inequality in income and wealth is reflected and reinforced through housing market processes, and importantly, exploring the contemporary spatial consequences of housing market restructuring. This includes the work of Randolph and Holloway (2005), presenting evidence of the suburbanisation, and cross-tenure nature, of social disadvantage; Baum et al.'s work (2006) in constructing a typology of social-spatial disadvantage; Dodson and Sipe's (2008) research on the vulnerability of suburbs to oil price changes; and Hulse et al.'s (2010) analysis of the diminishing number (and increasingly peripheral nature) of suburbs affordable to low-moderate income purchasers across Melbourne over the last three decades. What becomes apparent through these analyses is the importance of *location* as an increasingly dominant driver or factor in shaping the spatial manifestation of disadvantage in Australia's cities, rather than the concentration of poverty or deep-seated exclusion.

#### **3.1 Spatial filtering through 'market stealth'**

The geographies of disadvantage in our metropolitan areas are less immediately apparent than in the US or the UK. We live with increasingly flexible (and vulnerable) labour markets, and employment and earning opportunities, which consolidate and reinforce the spatial differentiation of our metropolitan geographies. Australian cities have not really seen the social, economic and physical shocks which have impacted upon many international counterparts. Rather, disadvantaged areas here, we argue, have ticked along to a different beat: the spatial contract emerging has led to somewhat hidden, but nevertheless always close to the surface, stresses within our suburban landscapes. Underpinned by strong immigration, robust household growth and recession-free economic growth for 20 years, the pricing and utilisation of housing stock in our cities have been shaped in the context of sustained housing demand rather than the need to negotiate and address the complexities of post-industrial decline and shrinkage. With low vacancy rates in the private rented sector and high levels of housing affordability constraint across tenures for low and moderate income households, the challenge has been a matter of engaging with the stresses of growing cities and the externalities for those not immediately benefiting from that growth.

We argue that the role that housing, and housing market dynamics, play in shaping and exacerbating social disadvantage in Australia has emerged through 'market stealth', referring to the gradual, yet continual and cumulative, spatially defined reworking of our cities. Housing markets respond to employment opportunities and the capacity to earn good incomes. Employment growth sectors in our metropolitan areas, particularly in healthcare and in professional, scientific and technical services, and commensurate areas of decline in manufacturing (Lowe 2012), help consolidate the bifurcated geographies of employment and income in our major cities seen in the past two decades. These shifts have helped reinforce asset value and wealth in the housing markets of the inner core, and have created an increasingly poignant disjuncture between the localities where service and key workers can afford to live, and the predominantly inner-city locations where they are expected to serve and support the 'global city' workforce. Markets also reflect a desire for personal mobility through easy access to, and availability of, public transport. It can be argued that housing markets effectively price in levels of personal mobility, such that outer areas

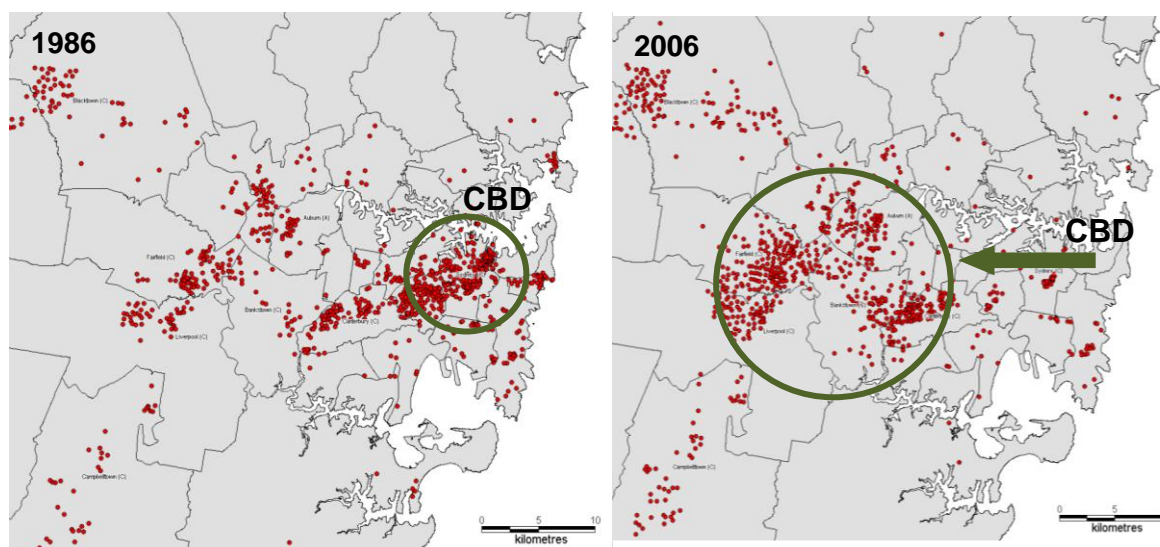
in which households have to rely on private vehicles and inconvenient and inadequate public transport become lower price areas.

### 3.2 The suburbanisation of disadvantage

Analysis of the changing geographies of social disadvantage in our major metropolitan cities over time illustrates the spatial outcomes of these broader macro-economic and societal shifts (see e.g. Baum & Gleeson 2010). Letting go of the 'fair go' functionality of the post-war Australian settlement (Kelly 1992; Gleeson & Low 2000), in Sydney, these disparities divide the city into two: east and west (Randolph et al. 2010; Pinnegar et al. 2012); in Melbourne, it has been a question of the inner, well connected suburbs versus ageing middle and outer ring neighbourhoods (Reynolds & Wulff 2005), a concern which appears to be extending in some circumstances into recently built, poorly serviced, lower value fringe development (Vedelago & Houston 2012), further cementing the strengthening importance of distance in determining spatial disadvantage.

We illustrate the locational shift in socio-spatial disadvantage through reference to Sydney, although, somewhat mediated by the effects of topography, similar changes can be seen in other major Australian cities<sup>2</sup>. The broad, general pattern of change between the 1986 and 2006 periods is highly instructive. As can be seen (Figure 1 below), there has been a substantive decline in inner city areas identified as highly disadvantaged, and commensurate expansion around the existing clusters out in the west over this time. In part this reflects the final stages of what is now the almost complete gentrification of the inner city in Sydney. In parallel, it also reflects, as a result of reinvestment and reclamation by the middle classes of the urban core, the shift in the geographies of arrival, with some established suburbs performing particularly important roles in housing recently arrived immigrants. As such, there is a degree of inevitability to this suburban shift: the housing options, and housing pathways, for new Australians have new starting points.

**Figure 1: Highly disadvantaged Collector Districts (CDs) in Sydney 1986 and 2006**



Source: Andrew Tice, first published in Pinnegar and Randolph. 2013

Note: Analysis is based on CDs as defined by the ABS and using the ABS SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage 1986 and 2006. This Index is a composite, relative measure of disadvantage and there are some small differences in the composition of the index between the two years

<sup>2</sup> Since preparation of this Perspectives Paper, the research from which these figures are derived has been more developed through the MYRP and published. See Randolph and Tice (2014)

## 4 CHANGING THE FLOWS: EXAMINING MOBILITY

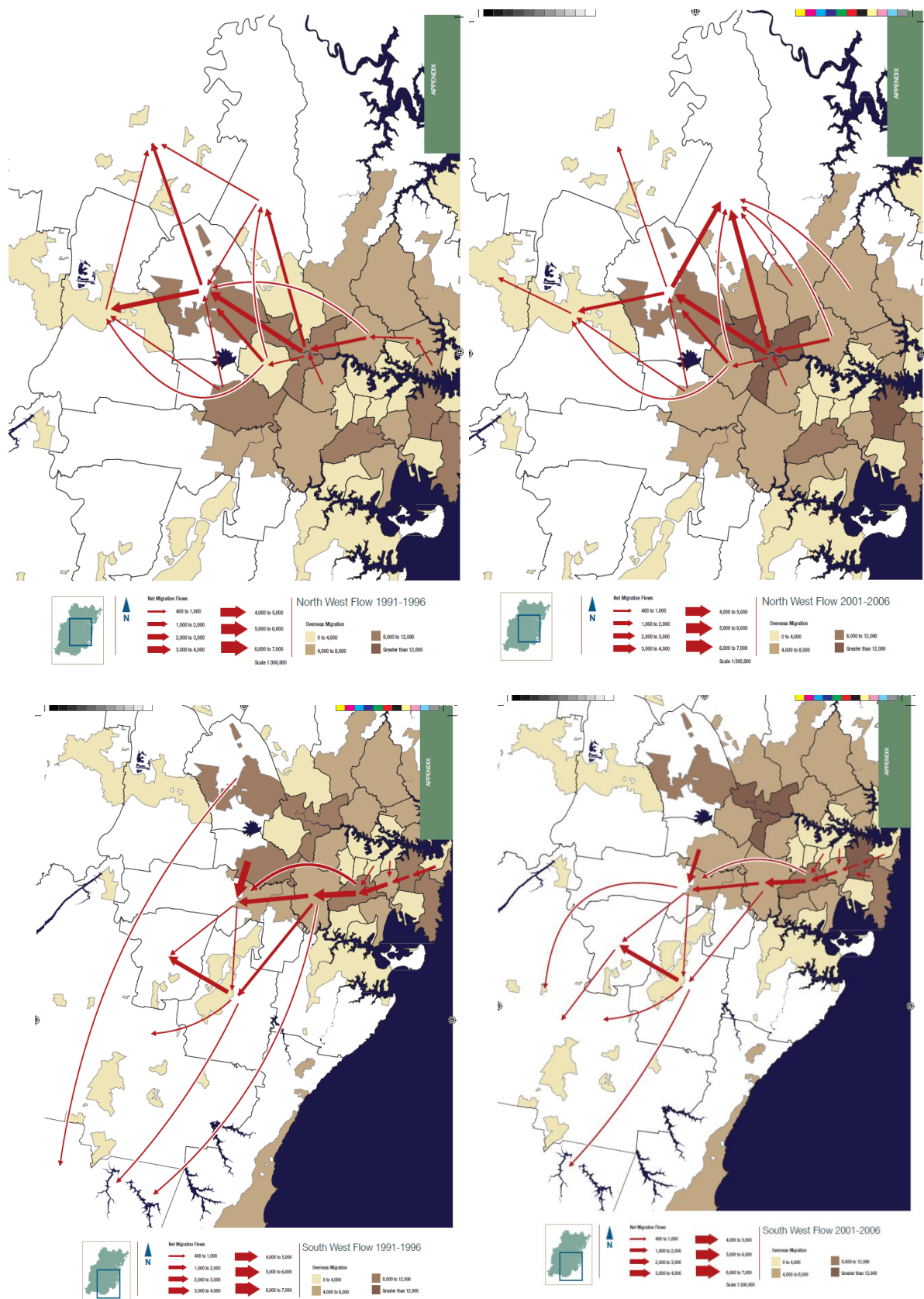
Households in Australia's major cities have traditionally exhibited relatively high rates of mobility by international standards (Maher 1982; Bell & Hugo 2000; Caldera Sanchez & Andrews 2011). Three defining features of residential mobility have historically underpinned, and continue to underpin, the housing market dynamics and evolving 'shape' of Australia's major cities. The first relates to the nature and spatiality of household residential mobility across cities, and how this appears to have moved towards greater levels of 'self-containment' at the subregional level within wider metropolitan markets. The second acknowledges the central importance of migration, and international migration in particular, in driving urban growth and impacting upon key components of metropolitan markets with commensurate spatial outcomes. The third emphasises one of the principal reasons for the relatively high housing mobility amongst Australians, the high proportion of households living in private rented housing and a much higher propensity to move (or need to move) within this tenure.

### 4.1 From conveyors to increased containment?

In the post war years, Australian cities grew through dispersal enabled by low density suburban development which provided 'the major dynamic of urban growth and change (Maher et al. 1992, p.1). As Davison (1997, p.16) notes, 'the great Australian sprawl is not just an unfortunate planning aberration, it is us'. Household mobility had a clear spatial expression through the geographies of housing provision. Historically, as elsewhere in the world, most moves have been local in nature: typically 70 per cent of households move a short, commutable distance (15 kilometres, 20–25 minutes travel time) and this translates into most moves being within the same, or across into a neighbouring, local government area. and essentially defines local or subregional housing market geographies (Brown & Hincks 2008; Jones et al. 2004; MacLennan & Bannister 1995). Nevertheless, intra-urban migration data demonstrated a degree of connectivity across those geographies through a series of 'conveyors' carrying 'net' household numbers in a series of hops away from the centre and towards the urban fringe. This outward mobility to low density suburbs occurred in the context of a post war baby boom, high in-migration, the location of some industries such as car factories and, in some states, Housing Commissions building for sale as well as rent (Berry 1999). Buying a modest house in the suburbs was part of the post-war social settlement and the (male) wage earners welfare state (Castles 1994). The centrifugal flow of households to low density suburbs changed the shape and form of cities significantly.

In recent decades, our cities have continued to see strong population growth, but the drivers and outcomes of household choice and constraint have changed. The significance of housing market dynamics in this regard appears to have similarly altered: sub-regional household flows still clearly exist, but their changing nature highlights the shifting nature of demand patterns shaping different parts of our cities. This can be illustrated by exploring the changing drivers and spatial outcomes of housing demand in Sydney over time to demonstrate changing mobility dynamics across different parts of the metropolitan area (Department of Planning 2010; Randolph et al. 2010; Pinnegar and Randolph, 2013). Figure 2 highlights the differences seen in household flow characteristics between the 1991–96 and 2001–06 Census periods. A weakening conveyor out to the southwest suburbs can be seen, and although still important, a commensurate fading in the role of Bankstown, Canterbury and Fairfield LGAs as household flow 'originators'. By 2001–06, that role was equally being played by Auburn, Parramatta and Blacktown, and the dominant household flows had strengthened towards the northwest of the city.

**Figure 2: Key centrifugal household flows towards NW and SW Sydney, 1991–96 and 2001–06**



Source: Metropolitan Development Program, Department of Planning 2010, pp.148–55

Equally significant is that in certain parts of the city, flows from and to other submarket geographies have declined and therefore the proportion of 'within' submarket moves has strengthened. For example, the outer southwest subregional housing market (Camden-Campbelltown) has, based upon Census mobility data, become more internalised and less connected to intra-metropolitan moves over this period.

Preliminary analysis of 2011 data suggests a continuation of these trends, with a slowdown in movement from one submarket within the city to another. In part, this changing geography of flows can be explained by what would appear to be a *reduction* in mobility amongst households more generally: 37.8 per cent of households (excluding those moving from overseas) had a different address in 2006 compared with 2001; between 2006 and 2011 this had fallen to 35.5 per cent (ABS 2012). One might also speculate that amongst those moving, there has been a growing tendency for moves to consolidate within local subregional markets.

Although further analysis of the drivers and implications flowing from these shifting spatial patterns at the *subregional* scale is required<sup>3</sup>, a number of questions emerge in the context of this perspectives paper. Clearly the changed trajectories of key mobility flows across the city will have, over time, a substantive effect on the future 'shape' of urban form. Housing markets will play their part in driving these shifts, but in turn, changed mobilities reconfigure (or reinforce) local housing market dynamics. A reduction in flows across larger distances may reflect the ability of the local housing market within these subregional geographies to enable households to accommodate their housing pathways. However, for those lower value markets, it may also reflect the cementing of structural shifts which differentiate those markets from the higher value parts of Australian cities.

Accessibility to well-paid employment and therefore household income levels, differentiated across the metropolitan area, is the crucial driver in this regard: it is not just about jobs, but about the quality of jobs. A similar situation applies in Melbourne where Rawnsley and Spiller (2012, pp.140–42) have calculated effective job density across the metropolitan area, finding that effective job density drops quick outside of the urban core and the Monash radial corridor which are both well served by public transport unlike many of the outer suburbs that are not close to Melbourne's radial public transport network. With continuing challenges in terms of infrastructure, transportation and quality of life under neo-liberal agendas, the premium of location has strengthened, not reduced, in recent years, and further exacerbates the spatial manifestation of advantage and disadvantage in our cities.

This reassertion by advantaged groups over 'prime' space has inevitably had the corollary effect of exposing the challenge of *locational disadvantage* in the Australian context, with lower income households 'crowded out' and consigned to poorly serviced, typically car dependent areas distant to higher level jobs, certainly if attempting to get on the housing ladder. For a large proportion of the population, the available, accessible, affordable geographies of the city have progressively shrunk.

## **4.2 Keeping the flows going: migration and Australia's major cities**

Australia is a nation of migrants; 30 per cent of Australians were born overseas in 2011 compared to an estimated 10 per cent born overseas at the end of WW2 (ABS 2012), reflecting different waves of migration over the years: from the UK and northern Europe, Southern Europe, Asia and the Pacific (DIMIA 2009). Migration on this scale

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<sup>3</sup> Given data constraints, most migration and mobility studies tend to limit their gaze to inter-city/State/international moves.

has major implications for the metropolitan housing markets. Partly this is an issue of aggregate supply. A report for the National Housing Supply Council estimated that Australian cities require 80 000 new dwellings to meet housing demand arising from new permanent migrants in 2010–11 (Deloitte Access Economics 2011). However, the effects on flows are more complex than this. Migration flows through to housing markets in different ways depending on the circumstances of arrival. Most new migrants (70%) move into the private rented sector, although over time more move into home ownership. Older European migrants have pursued the ‘great Australian dream’ (Bourassa 1994) through detached housing in low density suburbs but Asian-born residents are far more likely to live in a flat or townhouse than the population as a whole (Deloitte Access Economics 2011), although it is possible that this will change over time.

Clearly migration affects our cities. Australian cities have definite ‘entry point’ suburbs, but these are diverse, geographically diffuse and capture a breadth of income and house price profiles. Some act as a quick springboard to higher value parts of the city, while many serve a traditional assimilation, establishment and ‘step up’ role. Outside international student and higher end skilled and professional visa class arrivals, the lower value parts of our cities, and particularly areas with a high proportion of private rented stock, accommodate much of this additional demand. Although there is a correlation between areas exhibiting high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and high proportions of recent migrants, the significance (both in scope and nature) of recent migration, in contrast to preceding waves throughout the post war period, should not be overstated. Local governments in Western Sydney have some of the most culturally diverse communities in contemporary Australia (e.g. Auburn had the highest proportion of households from non-English speaking backgrounds recorded in the 2011 Census). They have also accommodated a high proportion of refugees resettled under humanitarian programs, particularly in Fairfield (see Table 1), reflective of the support service and community networks in place, but also the availability of (relatively) affordable housing.

**Table 1: Western Sydney’s role in humanitarian settlement numbers settled 2005–10**

<b>LGA</b>	<b>Numbers settled</b>	<b>As percentage of NSW</b>
Fairfield	4,522	19%
Blacktown	2,236	9%
Liverpool	2,979	12%
Auburn	2,676	11%
Parramatta	1,761	7%
Holroyd	1,354	6%
Total	15,528	64%

Source: Western Sydney Housing Coalition presentation 17/8/10, reproduced from [nirimbaproject.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/](http://nirimbaproject.westernsydneyinstitute.wikispaces.net/)

Nevertheless, these locations have long served this gateway role, and the ‘disadvantage’ that accompanies these localities (as recognised by SEIFA in terms of language, education and employment) would have been reflected by most of Sydney’s post-war suburbs during their development. For large swathes of the Australian city, they are the mainstream market. As such, while concentrations of disadvantage appear to have consolidated around locations characterised by a high degree of diversity, a more nuanced assessment is required. The key question, given

the changing mobility characteristics across the city more generally, is whether the function of these entry and 'step-up' areas continues, or whether this too has become increasingly strained. Again, a diversity of pathways is apparent. A significant proportion of immigrants remain within the private rented sector, with few options to move into more secure homeownership. Equally, the mobility of recent migrants continues to feed through into demand in their wider subregions, and in particular new land release areas on the fringe (Department of Planning 2010).

### **4.3 The ambiguous role of the private rented sector in maintaining flows**

Home ownership in Australia peaked in 1971, and has been stagnant or falling back slightly since. The nation's social housing has withered to accommodate barely 4 per cent of households. The private-rented sector has given the housing system its flexibility, now accommodating around a quarter of all Australian households (ABS 2012). Whilst the sector houses people on a range of incomes and in different circumstances, there is a large segment housing low-income households (Hulse et al. 2012). Continued *structural* housing affordability constraints mean that many households remain renters long after previous generations, if they ever leave the tenure (Burke & Pinnegar 2007; Hulse et al. 2011). The geography of provision at the lower end of the rental market has reflected, and indeed represents, a fundamental component of the suburbanisation of disadvantage.

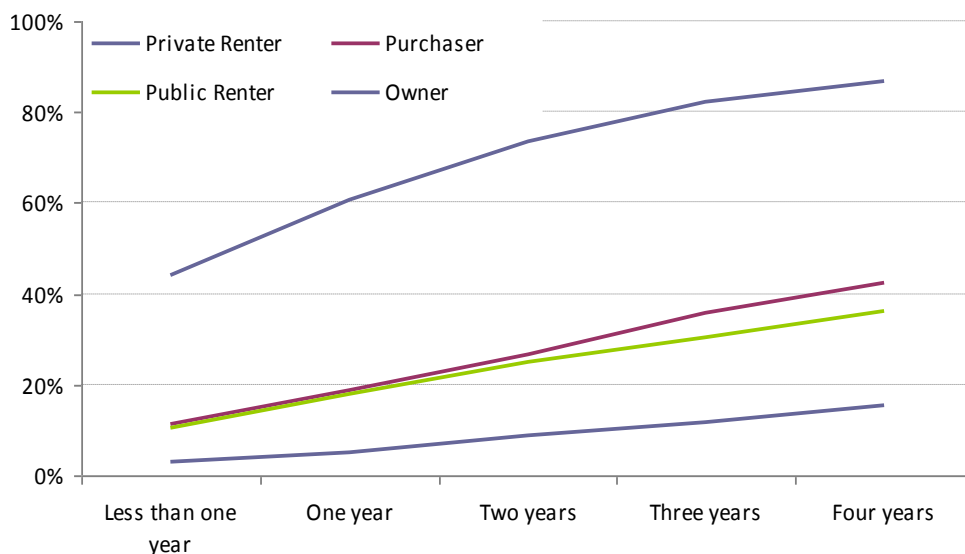
Across Australia, gentrification has seen the inner and middle suburbs take on a new life, with associated impacts on property values and rents. With few effective policy settings for the preservation and retention of affordable stock, alongside the more systematic deferral to the market, the spatial filtering seen has been somewhat inevitable. Randolph and Holloway (2007) mapped concentrations of disadvantage in the PRS for Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide using data on receipt of Rent Assistance, highlighting the increasing presence of lower value stock in middle and outer ring areas. While the spatial unit of analysis used had an impact on which parts of the city were identified, correlations were seen at the neighbourhood level with a high proportion of ageing, walk-up blocks around train stations and suburban centres. In the case of Sydney, the streets of gun-barrel blocks encircling town centres such as Liverpool, Bankstown and Fairfield characterise these concentrations. Hulse et al. (2012) illustrate the changing bid rent/price curve for the eastern corridor of Melbourne between 2000 and 2010, not only highlighting entrenchment of the gradient between inner and peripheral areas, but also how this geographical variation has been exacerbated over this period.

The shifting geographies of migrant entry and evacuation of affordability out to towards the urban fringe coalesce within ageing middle and outer ring suburbs. The PRS provides a particular level of flexibility in our cities, enabling easier entry for newly arriving households and allowing people to move quickly if their circumstances change. With the PRS in certain areas accounting for around half of all housing stock, their role in terms of providing access and aiding mobility is inevitable. Equally inevitable are the negative impacts which accompany flexibility. Firstly, if indeed households are able to effectively 'move through' these areas, those neighbourhoods are defined by these high levels of churn. Secondly, a flipside of ease of movement is instability in housing. Households do not know whether and when they will have to move. What we do know is that households who rent privately move much more frequently than other households, as shown in Figure 3 overleaf, with 40 per cent of private renter households having moved three or more times within the last five years. Whilst some of this mobility is voluntary and reflects choices and constraints relative

to life stage as well as income, a significant proportion is involuntary (Hulse et al. 2011).

Finally, the high prevalence of PRS in many of these middle and outer suburban areas also ensures that a large proportion of local residents have inferior tenancy rights compared to their social counterparts and fail to rise sufficiently up the policy and political radar (Hulse et al. 2011). This perhaps is the crucial concern: these areas 'tick along', underpinned by high demand, but their concerns are longer term, and under the policy radar. Governments do not see a political and moral responsibility to address issues associated with clusters of private rented housing, particularly where these are in disadvantaged locations in terms of transport and jobs.

**Figure 3: Length of time living in current dwelling by housing tenure type, Australia, 2007–08**



Source: Hulse et al. 2011, p.54

Note: Calculated the ABS Survey of Income and Housing, 2007–08, Confidentialised Unit Record File data.

To summarise this section, home ownership was for a long time a force for greater equality in cities (with a strong association between residential mobility, occupational security and social mobility. Many of the policy settings which underpinned this pattern were removed and this, together with broader economic factors such as industrial restructuring and increased concentration of higher paid jobs in inner cities, has resulted in a suburbanisation of disadvantage in Australia. While the rise in house prices has exacerbated the longstanding asset divide based upon tenure, housing market activity has also acted as an 'engine of inequality' between home owners in high and low value localities.

What is of interest is that the constraints seen in those lower value areas reflect the relative 'market positions' of households in those areas. For lower income purchasers, there are concerns tied to affordability, the risk of negative equity, dependency on the car, and long commutes to more vulnerable jobs in the post-industrial labour market. For low income private renters, they are likely to reflect on-going affordability constraints and the realities that for many, this tenure, and the insecurity that accompanies it, is likely to be where they remain for the long-term. Such factors may, and often do, coalesce, around households disadvantaged across a range of dimensions, but the 'concentrations' seen in Australia are characterised by their breadth rather than depth.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This critical perspectives paper has raised and explored a number of key debates regarding the role of the Australian housing system, the housing markets which structure and define the dynamics of that system, and associated policy settings (or their absence) in how we might build a more nuanced understanding of spatial disadvantage in *our* cities. We have argued that we have let ourselves be side-tracked, both within policy and academic spheres, from the necessary critical engagement with the drivers and outcomes shaping contemporary Australian metropolitan cities at the scales at which they operate.

In the last 15 years, we have detached ourselves from a strong tradition of thought and practice that embraced and sought to interrogate critically the Australian context and have instead selectively imported concepts from the US and the UK. We have argued that this is borrowing of theoretical positioning and conceptual understanding from elsewhere. Our contribution to 'social/tenure mix', 'state-led gentrification' and 'neighbourhood effects' debates has complemented, compounded, and in effect been complicit in, shaping the rather narrow parameters we have set up to help us understand Australian cities. We have focused on the social housing system at the expense of the bigger picture and further narrowed to now-problematic housing estates, whether manifest as inner-city high rises (primarily in Melbourne) or low density, isolated peripheral developments (as is the more stereotypical setting in Sydney). This focus has been part of 'here too' narrative rather than critical contribution presenting a distinct Australian perspective, and has, we argue, severely restricted our gaze.

The geographies of disadvantage have been increasingly shaped by our market-led, neoliberal policy frameworks over recent years, where the social and built form outcomes of globalisation, economic restructuring and different waves of migration policy have become imprinted on the urban landscape. The drivers and outcomes of residential mobility have been central to these shifts, and in this regard it has been through the private sector, and the private rented sector in particular, that the spatial dimensions of disadvantage have been most pervasively felt. Rather than a story of concentrated poverty neighbourhoods, disconnection and exclusion concentrated in the public housing sector, the Australian story has been a tale of more incremental, less immediately explicit, sifting of the advantaged and disadvantaged across space.

We also argue that borrowing of ideas and attempting to contribute to debates stimulated by conditions in the US and the UK has hindered the distinct Australian contribution that could be made to international debates about socio-spatial disadvantage. This contribution is both negative in highlighting the implications of relying on the market, and positive in enabling an understanding of the role of lower value markets in retaining pathways (or retaining flows) in high growth, high demand cities. A recent book has characterised Australia's major cities as 'unintended cities', the result of market forces and the indirect result of government policies that are not specifically addressed at housing and urban issues (Tomlinson 2012). This has arguably led to an ongoing, continually reworked and justified functionality to these areas.

Whilst mobility dynamics have shifted, high levels of immigration continue to define our metropolitan areas. Entry-point neighbourhoods often correlate with contemporary geographies of disadvantage (and given the measures used, are inevitably instrumental in their definition as such), yet continue their longstanding, pivotal role at the commencement of future housing pathways. The housing options, choices and constraints of recent migrants have traditionally acted, and will continue to act, as a

dominant driver in the social-spatial dynamic of our cities. However, they appear to be redrawing some of the conveyors that have traditionally captured key net flows within our cities.

Our suburban landscapes reflect, and have become overtly defined by, the ongoing negotiation between housing market dynamics and a hierarchy of positions within those markets. Market-led housing 'policies' have arguably been successful in co-opting a traditional strength of Australian housing and labour market structures—facilitating mobility in the housing system across 'fair and functional' suburbs—but reframed its outcomes towards less socially sustainable outcomes. The importance of mobility has been partially recast from having distributive qualities to driving segregation tendencies. Ironically, once the market has used mobility to filter and sort in a downward direction, it would then appear to be less effective (or willing) to facilitate connectivity in the other direction. In the high growth, high housing demand contexts of our capital cities, the effect has not been 'isolation' (Robson et al. 2008), pockets of 'no go' or collapse. What we do have is a stretching of *cross-tenure* housing affordability constraint, reduced mobility between housing markets within our metropolitan areas, and disadvantage increasingly enshrined and embedded as a function of distance and location.

The dynamics that previously fostered and facilitated social mobility, carrying households out on local-hop 'conveyors' through the middle and outer ring suburbs to the urban fringe appear to have altered and slowed (Department of Planning 2010; Randolph et al. 2010; Pinnegar and Randolph, 2013). As Hulse et al. (2010) demonstrate in the context of Melbourne, lower and moderate income households seeking access to home ownership have been progressively excluded from a wider number of suburbs across the metropolitan area, particularly in the inner and middle ring over time. Alongside efficiency and productivity issues these shifts raise, significant concerns also come into play regarding spatial justice (Soja 2010), social exclusion, and who has the 'right' to live in the city (Brenner et al. 2009; Harvey 2008; Lefebvre 1996[1968]; Marcuse et al. 2009). Contemporary policy frameworks, whether framed in housing, urban or economic terms, show little sign of mitigating, let alone redressing, the spatial inequities at play.

We did flag a more optimistic, nuanced understanding of the spatial trends being seen, and one which retains a more nuanced take on the continued centrality of mobility in shaping the Australian city. The spatial restructuring we have seen is instructive in understanding the responsiveness and function of lower income, (relatively) lower value housing markets in the context of cities where the challenge is accommodating economic and population *growth* rather than seeking to stem decline and stimulate economic rejuvenation. Our frameworks for understanding spatial disadvantage are perhaps better shared with the experiences of cities such as those on North America's Pacific Coast, cities like Seattle and Vancouver, and other Canadian cities such as Toronto, than those facing quite different drivers and challenges. However, it is important to investigate the extent to which investment in public transportation in these cities has been reflected in housing markets that factor personal mobility into price.

While Australian cities do show the effects of post-industrial restructuring, this is but one part of the story. Here the narrative is less about the expressions of social disadvantage. We see a breadth of market-oriented defined disadvantage, rather than depth. In this sense, our academic interest may point to the distinctive questions this raises about scale: rather than 'concentrations' at neighbourhood level, wider, market-defined spaces of disadvantage, albeit not as 'extreme' as in the US or the UK, are

shaping our cities. In the same vein, the policy challenge and possible prescriptions need to be quite different from the debates structuring the response elsewhere.

This takes us back to the space of flows. There has been a tendency to see mobility in and out of areas of concentrated disadvantage as detrimental: those that can, leave, to be replaced by the even more disadvantaged. However, this implies a logical progression of downward filtering towards isolation over time, and does not accord those suburbs, and their housing 'offer', any progressive value in their pivotal, step-up function. The argument here is that we need to work with and understand their dynamic characteristics, rather than continually seek to define, objectify and treat as static tight concentrations of disadvantage based on the space of places. We need strategies for recapturing the positive outcomes of mobility, whilst remaining vigilant that 'our understandings of mobility need to be attuned to the political constructs and consequences of movement' (Dufty-Jones 2012, p.17). In Australia's major cities, this demands approaches that address aspects of locational disadvantage so that people are able to exercise personal mobilities; housing markets which enable residential mobility and ensure that people are not 'trapped in place'; and improving the flows for people in areas of disadvantage such that there is not an intergenerational blockage, and so that people are connected to opportunities which offer the prospect of social mobility.

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