

RETHINKING ESTATE REGENERATION

What can capability theory and social ecology contribute?

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing disadvantage on public housing estates has become core business for social housing authorities in Australia and internationally. Approaches to achieving this goal include tenancy management, social service, community development and physical/asset interventions.

The primary focus of this paper is on large-scale redevelopment projects with a significant emphasis on the creation of 'social mix'. While various names are given to programs and projects of this type, I will use the term 'Estate Regeneration' consistently throughout this paper.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, to argue that the field of Estate Regeneration lacks a coherent framework for planning, delivering and reporting on outcomes for the original inhabitants of estates and secondly, to articulate a conceptual framework that addresses this shortfall.

Using social theory, I will argue that Estate Regeneration has traditionally been founded on the assumption that place based interventions automatically translate into positive outcomes for residents. In essence, the focus on 'place' has displaced 'people' at the centre of the planning equation. A person-centred framework for estate regeneration puts residents into the centre of the planning agenda, shifting the emphasis away from redevelopment as an end in itself, towards being one of a number of means of achieving people-based ends.

BACKGROUND

Policy jurisdictions across the world have witnessed the residualisation of public housing over the past thirty years. That is, they have allowed public housing to decline as a percentage of total housing. This has necessitated increasingly stringent eligibility and allocations criteria to target delivery of the limited housing available to those most in need. One of the consequences of this is that public housing estates have become sites of concentrated or place-based disadvantage. They typically exhibit high rates of: intergenerational welfare dependence, vandalism, poor health, unemployment, crime, anti-social behaviour, mental illness, school failure and tenancy turnover (Department of Housing 2001; Popkin 2004; Woodward 1997). The empirical evidence for this is largely uncontested. However, what is contested is whether such concentrations are 'a problem' and, if so, how best to respond to them.

Positions on this issue are largely determined by whether the commentator subscribes to the neighbourhood effects thesis. The idea of a neighbourhood effect is that living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood leads to or compounds disadvantage at the individual level. Atkinson and Kintrea encompass the debate by asking "whether it is worse to be poor in a poor area or in an area which is more socially mixed" (2001, p. 2277).

Authors such as Cheshire (2007) argue that sifting and sorting processes occur naturally in society, and there is nothing inherently wrong with disadvantaged people living amongst others who are in similar socio-economic positions. Furthermore, there are positives in such situations, not least of which is that it is easier to provide support services when those who require them live in close proximity. Authors who come from this perspective tend to argue that it is ultimately structural inequality that needs to be tackled, not the spatial distribution of public housing residents (Cheshire 2007; Darcy, 2010).

In contrast, proponents of Estate Regeneration tend to assume that neighbourhood effects do exist, and Estate Regeneration Projects are often framed as a response to this phenomenon. At the core of the approach is redevelopment of estates that either increases the quantity of private housing, and/or reduces the quantity of public housing. In either case the objective is to increase the mix of socio-economic and

demographic characteristics of local residents (that is, increase social mix, and therein reduce or eliminate neighbourhood effects).

Many prominent authors have debated the evidence for and against neighbourhood effects, and the impact of strategies for achieving social mix (Arthurson, 2002; Briggs, 2008; Cheshire, 2007; Darcy, 2010; Goering and Feins, 2008; Goetz, 2010a; Goetz 2010b; Imbroscio, 2008; Popkin, 2010). However, the complexity and detail of this broad issue are not the focus of this paper. Given that Estate Regeneration is government policy in Australia (Council of Australian Government, 2008, p. 7) and I work as a social planning practitioner in this field, my concern is with maximising the outcomes that result for the original inhabitants of estates, both those rehoused to make way for new private housing and those who remain in the area during and after redevelopment. Put differently, I am not concerned with whether or not the generation of social mix via Estate Regeneration is 'good' or 'bad' public policy, or with whether it does or doesn't 'work' in some generalised sense. Rather, I seek to optimise the outcomes for public housing residents involved in Estate Regeneration initiatives.

ESTATE REGENERATION

If one begins with a focus on public housing residents, there is a fundamental problem with the way most Estate Regeneration Projects are framed, structured, implemented and evaluated. I am referring here to the emphasis on the 'estate' or 'place' itself, as distinct from the residents who lived there at the commencement of the project. The following three project and program descriptions from three different policy jurisdictions underscore the problem:

1. The Salisbury North Urban Renewal Project in South Australia aims to:

...regenerate the area, creating a balanced sustainable community, whilst providing a better environment and improved standards of housing more suited to the needs of the residents today.
(City of Salisbury, 2011)

2. Elephant and Castle in London:

The development aims to create a new district for Central London, to include thousands of new homes together with a substantial retail offering complemented by a new park, tree-lined streets, high quality green open spaces and a traditional seven-day market, which will provide training opportunities and new jobs for the immediate community.
(Lend Lease, 2011)

3. The HOPE VI program in the United States, a multi-billion dollar initiative covering a diverse range of sites across the country, has the following stated objectives:

- To improve the living environment for residents of severely distressed public housing through the demolition, rehabilitation, reconfiguration, or replacement of obsolete projects (or portions thereof);
- To revitalize sites on which such public housing projects are located and contribute to the improvement of the surrounding neighbourhood;
- To provide housing that will avoid or decrease the concentration of very low-income families; and
- To build sustainable communities.
(Popkin et al, 2004, p. insert)

These descriptions illustrate that Estate Regeneration Projects are generally concerned with balanced and sustainable communities, better environments, improved housing, attractive/desirable neighbourhoods and reduced concentrations of social disadvantage. Clearly there is nothing wrong with these objectives, but the question arises as to if or how the original occupants of the estate benefit. What is the logical and, indeed practical, relationship between Estate Regeneration and reducing the disadvantage of original public housing residents?

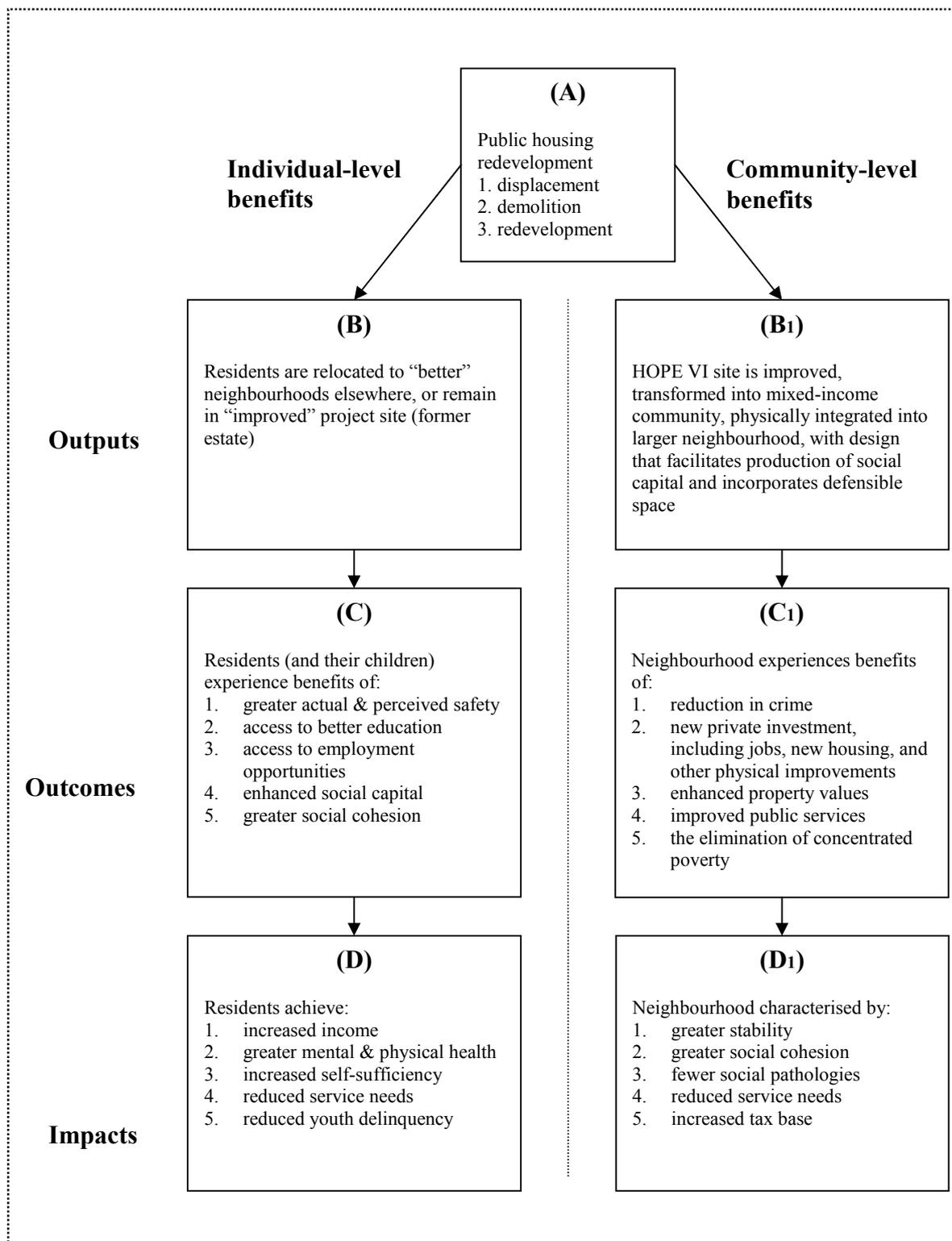
RE-THINKING ESTATE REGENERATION AND DISADVANTAGE

At its core, disadvantage refers to the deprivation of opportunity (Levine, 1995, p. 115). To use deprivation of employment opportunity as an example, deprivation may arise from within the person (e.g. lack of education and skills that inhibit employment prospects) or the living environment of the person (e.g. lack of job vacancies).

Estate Regeneration Projects focus primarily on addressing the living environment of the person. In creating social and economic mix, they address place-based disadvantage, or at least elements of place-based disadvantage. However, this does not automatically mean that disadvantage within the person has been addressed.

The Logic Model developed by Edward Goetz to explain the implicit logic of HOPE VI (see Diagram I overleaf) provides a useful tool for conceptualising some of the issues associated with estate regeneration. Drawing on the concept of neighbourhood effects, housing authorities often assume that if residents are relocated from a disadvantaged public housing estate (A) to a 'better' neighbourhood (B) they will receive a number of benefits/outcomes (C), including increased safety, social capital and social cohesion, and access to better education and employment. This in turn is expected to lead to a series of impacts at the individual level (D), including increased income and self-sufficiency, improved physical and mental health, and reduced service needs and youth delinquency.

Diagram I: HOPE VI Logic Model, adapted from Goetz (2010a, p. 144).



However, these impacts are not necessarily borne out in practice. According to Goetz's synthesis of available evidence and reviews, relocated households do not experience increased employment, earnings, or overall income. Additionally, relocated children do not experience improvement in overall health, and even when relocated to substantially better neighbourhoods they do not end up in significantly better schools (Goetz, 2010b). There is also evidence from HOPE VI, South Australia and Newcastle that assumed benefits from more diverse social relationships (social mix) are flawed because public and private residents do not tend to mix in practice, the relocation process often breaks down support networks, and public housing residents may be stigmatised in mixed neighbourhoods (Goetz 2010b; Arthurson (2002, 2007, 2010); Ruming, Mee & McGurk, 2004).

To help explain these findings, Goetz makes a distinction between passively enjoyed and non-passively enjoyed benefits. Passively enjoyed benefits do not require residents to take any action or engage with neighbours or service providers. They are experienced simply by virtue of living in a different environment. Passive benefits include higher quality housing, an increased sense of safety and reduced experiences of public disorder (Goetz, 2010a, p. 150).

To attain non-passively enjoyed benefits residents "must take active steps, and must engage public and private institutions and social structures that may remain biased in ways that make it difficult for residents to realize benefits" (Goetz, 2010a, p. 150). In other words, for outcomes (C) to be translated into impacts (D) requires resident effort and engagement that may not come about spontaneously. For example, children may attend a 'better' school but no longer have access to the additional teaching resources that are commonly available at schools located on public housing estates. Children in a new school may also find it difficult to fit in and school performance may suffer as a result. Adults may not have the confidence, knowledge, skills or motivation to access local employment opportunities, and so on.

As noted above, the assumption that residents will experience enhanced social capital and greater social cohesion in a redeveloped area or a different community is also problematic, as there is little evidence that public housing residents mix with private residents following redevelopment or rehousing (Arthurson 2002, 2010; Goetz 2010b; Jupp 1999). This brings boxes (C) and (D1) from Goetz's Logic Model into question. In fact, "evidence suggests that the social capital arguments made to support HOPE VI relocation may actually work in reverse: relocation could destroy the useful support networks that lower income families construct to get by" (Goetz, 2010b, p. 9).

The above analysis suggests that there are a number of unfounded assumptions in the relationship between the physical and social changes brought about by Estate Regeneration and the benefits for public housing residents. This raises two important questions: where do these assumptions come from and how can we reconceptualise Estate Regeneration to address these issues?

URBAN PLANNING AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The assumptions made in Estate Regeneration stem directly from urban planning, particularly the social sustainability strand. The fundamental problem is that particular urban forms and urban populations are assumed to facilitate particular individual behaviours and outcomes, more or less universally. However, as Goetz has helped us to see, urban forms and populations constrain and enable different individuals differently.

Two prominent authors in the social sustainability field, Bramley and Power (2009), identify social equity and sustainable community as the two key dimensions of social sustainability. Social equity is concerned with access to services, facilities and opportunities, while sustainable community is concerned with resident interaction, participation in community activities, community pride, and an absence of crime and disorder (Bramley and Power, 2009, p. 33).

The problem is that equitable access is only beneficial if that which is accessible is of equal interest to all individuals and groups, and if everyone is equally well placed to take up the opportunities they have access to. In practice, it may well be that the services required by public housing residents are quite different from those required by other members of the population. Equity may be far less important or relevant than matching services to need (by both type and quantity).

When terms like sustainable community are being used it makes sense to question what is being sustained. Such terms usually refer to residents as a collective and lead to a focus on generating or maintaining social patterns or dynamics that are assumed to be universally beneficial (Bramley and Power, 2009; Cocklin and

Alston, 2003; Colantonio, 2010). However if public and private residents don't mix in social situations, it is unlikely that public housing residents will experience the community as having sustaining qualities. Beginning with a focus on individuals allows for a different focus – on if or how a particular social mix or social dynamic facilitates or constrains outcomes for these individuals.

RETHINKING ESTATE REGENERATION

The challenge in shifting from place-based to person-based planning is to encompass the complex relationship between people and their environment, and articulate a framework that enables original residents to attain both passively and non-passively realised benefits. Drawing on key concepts from social theory such as 'agency and structure', 'capability theory' and 'social ecology', I offer a model that can be used to guide the practical implementation of person-centred planning. The following is an overview of the social theory that underpins the person-centred model.

Agency and Structure

The relationship between human agency and social structure(s) forms the basis of one of the classic debates in Sociology. This debate is concerned with the process through which - and the extent to which - social structures determine individual action (Abercrombie et al, 1994, pp. 9-10; Haralambos et al, 1996, pp.716-720). Returning to the Estate Regeneration projects mentioned above (Salisbury North, Elephant and Castle, and HOPE VI), it appears that Estate Regeneration typically gives a high weighting to the influence of structure. That is, it is focused on changing the physical and social living environments of residents. Goetz's logic model has helped us to understand that such changes do not automatically translate into individual outcomes. If we are to move towards a more comprehensive approach to Estate Regeneration, we will need to grapple with the complexity of agency and its interrelationship with structure.

Capability theory

Capability theory is concerned with what people are able to do and be, stressing the interrelationship between an individual's internal qualities and external environment. For example Anderson (1999, p. 319) states that "one's capabilities are a function not just of one's fixed personal traits and divisible resources, but of one's mutable traits, social relations and norms, and the structure of opportunities, public goods, and public spaces" (Anderson, 1999, p. 319).

Capability theory has been developed relatively independently by two key academics: Amartya Sen in Economics (Sen 1999) and Martha Nussbaum in Political Philosophy (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006, 2011). Despite the differing antecedence, there is a high degree of coherence between the work of Sen and Nussbaum. Both authors are drawn on here to explicate capability theory's central tenets: internal capabilities, external environment(s), opportunity and functioning.

Internal capabilities are the internal attributes required to perform a particular function. For example, an individual with the requisite skills and experience to gain work might be referred to as 'work ready'. However, even with the requisite internal capabilities, the external environment must also allow an individual to perform a particular function. For example, an individual may be 'work ready' but not be able to work due to a lack of job vacancies.

When the environment enables or facilitates the exercising of internal capabilities it may be referred to as a suitable or facilitative external environment. When an individual has the requisite internal capabilities to perform a particular function, and the external environment supports the exercising of this function, the individual is said to have genuine opportunities. This may be represented as follows:

Internal Capability + Suitable External Environment = Opportunity

However, individuals will not (and are not able to) take up all opportunities. Rather, they will consciously or subconsciously choose between different (and at times competing) opportunities. Action upon particular opportunities results in realised functioning. This may be represented as follows:

Opportunity + Action = Realised Functioning

This is complicated by the fact that many capabilities are developed by engaging in the actual activity for which the capability is required. An abstract example is a child learning to talk. They gain the capability by engaging in the activity repeatedly over a long period of time. A more direct example is the work experience required to gain and perform various jobs. It follows from this that living in a disadvantaged environment over a long period of time can limit opportunity by restricting the development of particular internal capabilities. Thus, if we return to the idea that disadvantage can be conceptualised as deprivation of opportunity, the response to disadvantage implied by capability theory is to provide new opportunities (by contributing to

individual capabilities and to various components of their environment), *and* to encourage and support increased functioning.

Social Ecology

Social ecology draws an analogy between human functioning and the biological sciences, particularly the functioning of ecosystems. The pioneering work in this field was undertaken by Lewin (1935), who conceptualised individual behaviour (B) as a function of both the person (P) and their environment (E), such that $B = f(PE)$. Lewin was principally concerned with psychology, as distinct from the outcomes of social or urban policy, but the point is still instructive. To apply Lewin’s concepts to the field of Estate Regeneration, we can substitute outcomes (O) for behaviour (B), such that $O = f(PE)$.

Working in the field of human development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) took these ideas much further by articulating the environment as a set of four nested structures or systems. In Bronfenbrenner’s approach, a micro-system refers to an individual’s immediate setting, including its physical characteristics and limitations, and the roles and relationships experienced therein. This may be the home, the classroom, the workplace and so on. The interrelationship between two or more such settings is referred to as a meso-system, which is essentially a “system of micro-systems” (Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25). Settings that the individual affects or is affected by without being present are referred to as exo-systems. In the case of a parent, this may include their child’s class at school, while for a child it may include their sibling’s neighbourhood friendship group. Finally, the macro-system is the wider society and culture of which the other systems are a part. It includes widely held beliefs, ideologies and patterns.

In elaborating his framework Bronfenbrenner is explicitly clear that settings and environments are not linear variables. They are systems themselves, and they are part of broader systems. Therefore, they must be “analysed in systems terms” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 5). To relate this back to Estate Regeneration, individual outcomes can be expected to vary substantially from one person to another, as they will result from the unique relationship between each person’s capabilities and the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems of which they are a part. To extend Lewin’s formula, we might therefore conceptualise individual outcomes (O) as a function of the person (P) and numerous aspects of their environment (e.g. $E_1E_2E_3E_4$), such that $O = f(PE_{1-4})$.

TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Person-Centred Estate Regeneration

Given the tendency within Estate Regeneration to focus on place, the question arises as to what a more comprehensive response to the disadvantage associated with public housing estates might look like. There appear to be two core issues requiring consideration. First, support needs to be provided during renewal processes, to mitigate against the risk that the processes themselves will contribute to residents’ disadvantage (for example, by disrupting their existing social networks). Second, there is a need to provide residents with new opportunities (via access to services at the individual level and via environmental interventions), to actively address disadvantage. It is important to recognise that service providers cannot force individuals to take advantage of the opportunities they have. Still, by providing opportunities housing authorities are creating the conditions for disadvantage to be addressed at an individual level.

I therefore offer the following ‘working vision’ for Estate Regeneration: Residents will make successful transitions, with access to new opportunities, leading to improved health and wellbeing. This is elaborated via the four diagrams that follow.

Diagram II: Physically Deterministic Regeneration

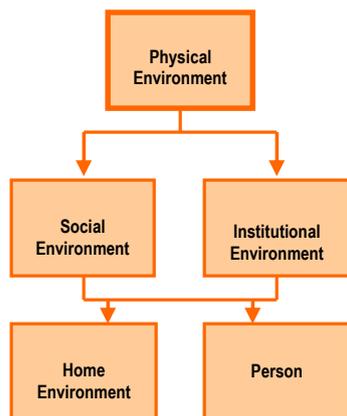


Diagram III: Person-Centred Regeneration

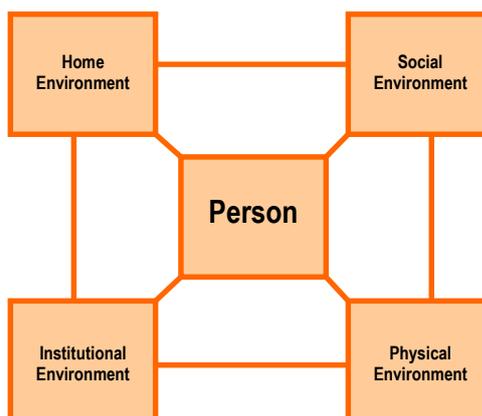


Diagram II depicts traditional approaches to Estate Regeneration, which focus on making changes to the estate or place (that is, to the physical environment). It assumes that changing the physical environment will automatically lead to changes in the social and institutional environments, in turn leading to positive outcomes for all individuals and families.

By contrast, Diagram III depicts a person-centred approach, in which each of the five boxes signifies a domain of intervention. Capability theory makes it clear that opportunity is a product of both the person's external environment *and* their internal capability. Gaining non-passively realised benefits will therefore necessitate the delivery of services and supports directly to individuals, in order to build their capabilities, in addition to interventions targeting their environment.

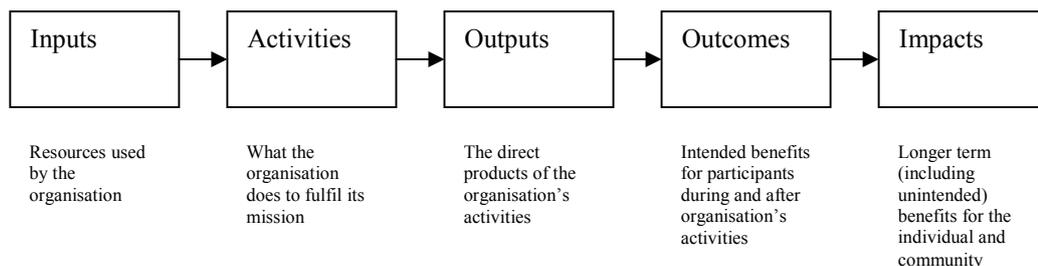
Drawing on ideas from social ecology, the person's environment is disaggregated into four constituent parts. It is important to note that these do not directly overlap with the four systems identified by Bronfenbrenner. The key reason for this is that the diagram/model is intended to articulate environmental components over which Estate Regeneration Projects have a level of control, and therefore form actual domains of intervention in live projects. These include the person's home, social, physical and institutional environments. The sorts of intervention relevant to each domain, and the relationship between the various domains, are articulated in the Ecological Impact Model for Estate Regeneration articulated in Diagram V (overleaf), though a prior overview of impact modelling will assist with the interpretation of this diagram.

Impact Modelling

Over the past 10 years or so there has been significant and growing interest in the term and concept of 'social impact', coming largely from non-government organisations and their funders (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2010, p. 2). For example the Rockefeller Foundation and The Goldman Sachs Foundation (2003, p. 18) discuss social impact as being collection of all results of an initiative, minus what would have happened anyway.

One of the elements that underpins a number of different approaches to planning, monitoring and reporting social impact assessment is their reliance on an underlying theory of change, or logic model (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2010, p. 3). This typically involves placing social impact on a spectrum, to distinguish it from other project elements that may be measured, and to highlight the causal relationship between different project elements. For example, the following diagram is adapted from the Australian Productivity Commission's report on the Contribution of the Not-For-Profit Sector (2010, p. 35).

Diagram IV: Impact Mapping – Levels of Contribution



The Ecological Impact Model

The Ecological Impact Model summarised in Diagram V combines a focus on impact with a focus on the interrelationship between people and their environment. It does this by articulating a logic model for each of five domains of intervention, and by representing project impacts as the result of outcomes in each of these domains.

While this model is offered as a contribution to the way Estate Regeneration projects are conceptualised and planned, a cautionary note is warranted with regard to implementation. In his book 'Seeing Like a State: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed', James Scott (1998) describes a diverse range of large state projects in which there was a disconnect between planners' visions and prescriptions, and their unintended outcomes in real world settings. This is because "any large social process or event will inevitably be far more complex than the schemata we can devise, prospectively or retrospectively, to map it" (Scott, 1998, p. 309).

The solution Scott offers is based on the Greek concept of metis, which refers to the skills and know-how that practitioners bring to practical problems (Scott, 1998, pp. 309-341). In essence, Scott reminds us that no amount of planning can guarantee that we achieve our objectives, as the real world is much more messy and unpredictable than we assume when we develop our plans. This is not an argument against planning per se

Diagram V: Ecological Impact Model for Estate Regeneration

	Component	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
People	Individual	Identify opportunities for improvements in health, skills and capacities (spanning physical & mental health, life skills, education, training and employment)	Services and opportunities are provided to individuals	Improved health, skills and capacities +
	Family/ household	Comprehensive rehousing assessments and plans for each household	Appropriate support is provided to families/ households	Facilitative home environment Reduced stress and anxiety; increased ability to cope with change; and safe, stable and supportive family relationships +
Place	Social	Planning and delivery of local activities and events; and facilitation of connections beyond the local area	Residents meet and spend time with their neighbours; residents are engaged in project; and residents make external connections	Facilitative social environment Bonding social capital, bridging social capital and collective efficacy +
	Physical	Development of concept plan	Implementation of concept plan	Facilitative physical environment New and improved housing, community facilities and public spaces locally; and upgraded housing off-site
Partnerships	Institutional	Joint planning by residents, NGOs, government agencies and businesses	A single, jointly 'owned' social plan and a collaborative governance structure	Facilitative institutional environment Active community groups and a coordinated, efficient, targeted, and responsive service system +

= IMPACT

(successful transitions, with new opportunities, and improved health and wellbeing)



but an argument in favour building flexibility into our plans, involving practitioners in planning, and allowing practitioners to influence plans as they are implemented in real world conditions. Similarly, while the practice of resident participation is not the focus of this paper, the importance of and the benefits that arise from involving residents in all stages of project development and delivery should not be underestimated (Taylor, 1995; Wood et al, 2002).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

Thinking about Estate Regeneration in a person-centred way makes the physical environment (or place) a means to an end, rather than the end itself. This has important implications for project planning, delivery and reporting.

The implication for project planning is that it needs to shift from being an urban planning exercise to a human service planning exercise, of which urban planning is a part.

This in turn has implications for project management and delivery. When Estate Regeneration is primarily concerned with place, it makes sense for Urban Planners to lead the way as Project Directors or similar. However, when people are brought to the centre of the approach, the nature of the project changes substantially. There is an increased need for leadership from those with insight and experience relating to the achievement of individual outcomes. This necessitates a high-level role for social policy practitioners and social service providers.

Finally, when it comes to monitoring and reporting, urban planning outcomes become indicators of success rather than being direct measures of project success. The success of the project as a whole must be judged by the actual outcomes achieved for people, not least the original inhabitants of the estate.

CONCLUSION

Addressing disadvantage on social housing estates is core business for social housing authorities in Australia. One of the key means of doing so is large-scale redevelopment to achieve social mix. However Estate Renewal programs and projects tend to focus on intervening in the estates or places themselves, without explicit objectives relating to outcomes for public housing residents. As Goetz has assisted us to see, approaches based on changing the individuals' environment can only be expected to achieve passively realised benefits such as increased feelings of safety and security. To attain non-passively realised benefits requires that attention be paid to individuals' capabilities, and to the interrelationship between individuals' capabilities and various elements of their environment.

To date the field of Estate Regeneration has lacked a coherent framework for articulating, planning, implementing and evaluating people-based impacts. More specifically, they have confused means such as physical redevelopment with overarching ends. In responding to this shortfall I have offered an Ecological Impact Model for Estate Regeneration, and highlighted some of the implications of such an approach for the field generally. I have also cautioned that planning across a range of domains is insufficient, as there is also a need to include practice wisdom in developing plans and in continually refining them in response to observed progress.

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