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Urban consolidation and its policy design: exploring a policy-centred approach to critical urban analysis

Johanna Mitchell, Curtin University, Australia

j.mitchell1@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

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Abstract

This paper highlights the usefulness of a policy-centred approach to critical urban analysis. Dominant approaches to understanding urban problems have come from a political economy perspective, and have focused on the neoliberalisation of urban policy making as a key explanatory frame. A policy design approach is suggested, and urban consolidation policy in Australia is examined using Michael Howlett's 'multi-level, nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design', which draws out nuance, difference and local agency in the interpretation of its policy design. Using this approach, it is argued that policy advocates may get closer to understanding the real world of constrained policy-making, and in that way gain insights that can prove useful for mobilising positive change.

Key words: policy design, urban consolidation, neoliberalism, development

Introduction

Urban consolidation policies are intimately linked to the production of residential built form within metropolitan regions. While these policies have persisted over a long time frame (since the 1980s), the housing outcomes associated with them are not always optimal for the city or its citizens. While urban development outcomes are highly localised, the urban literature documents similar themes of concern with housing outcomes in urban consolidation contexts. Many authors have reflected on the problems associated with market-dominant governance of urban housing, including issues around equity, access, affordability, and the quality of the built environment being produced (Kadi & Ronald, 2014; Oakley, 2014; Rydin, 2013; Seo, 2016; United Nations, 2017).

This paper represents part of research project that asks the question 'what is the potential role of government in the production of socially sustainable (affordable, diverse, liveable) higher density housing in Australia'? It is argued that policy advocacy in this space is inadequate if it does not first understand the policy-sub-system and governance context in which these sub-optimal outcomes arise for urban citizens. Therefore, this paper presents the findings of the first stage of the research; a critical analysis of the current policy goals and instruments of urban consolidation as they relate to the production of housing and its outcomes.

To date, the dominant analytical framework for critically unpacking problems and governance in the urban realm has come from a political economy background. This has involved a focus on the processes of neoliberalisation of urban governance. These critical accounts of urban policies and their implications for built form are immensely useful for urban studies. They draw attention to the power imbalances that normative practices institutionalise. Despite the continued recognition of neoliberalisation as a prominent explanatory force in urban studies, however, there are growing calls for a wider lens of analysis that allows for the possibility of other structural, political, and cultural forces being manifest in urban morphology and policy design (Jessop, 2013; McGuirk, 2012; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy, 2014; Sager, 2014; Yiftachel, 2016). This is due to a view that the critical lens has been focused too sharply on the forces of neoliberalisation, minimising the importance of other forces shaping our cities in the process.

A policy design framework is brought forward in this paper to unpack the governance of urban development. Specifically, Michael Howlett's (2009) 'multi-level, nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design' is applied to urban consolidation policies in Australia. It is argued that a policy-centred analytical framework adds to existing critical perspectives of urban governance. Urban consolidation is found to be underpinned by layered, multifarious and divergent logics, which feeds into the strategies of instrumentation. At the

micro-level, the calibration of urban consolidation goals into infill targets and specified centres of intensification is found to reflect negotiations of power as well as the divergent views of city shapers.

An argument is presented that the this more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the policy design of urban consolidation provides space to explore the 'room to manoeuvre', providing a future-oriented pathway for the advocacy of promising innovative governance/ practice in the urban realm.

Political economy approaches to understanding urban development

Critical studies analysing the governance of urban housing and its outcomes have largely occurred from a political economy perspective. Stemming from Marxist underpinnings, critical urban theorists provide insight into the assumptions, institutions, norms and structures underlying urban governance rationales, and go some way into diagnosing the structural causes of inequality and injustice that manifest in urban development (such as unaffordability/ sub-optimality/ displacement).

Perhaps the most dominant critique of modern urban governance, and its consequences, is that we have witnessed an ongoing process of neoliberalisation of policy making and practice. Critical theorists understand neoliberalism as a political project that enhances and perpetuates capitalist accumulation (Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2012; Larner, 2000; McGuirk, 2005; Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009). This political project manifests itself into practices and policy, but has also become increasingly embedded in governing logics. The ascendance and subsequent dominance of economic growth rationalities in modern governance is highlighted as a critical, explanatory lens for understanding socio-spatial relations in urban regions and its resultant urban formation. This has involved a preference for market mechanisms for service

delivery, and "a cluster of recurring features" (Sager, 2014, p. 272), including privatisation, deregulation and market reification.

Sager (2011) describes that way that "neoliberalism mobilises urban space as an arena for market-oriented growth" (p.149), emphasising the increasingly facilitative role governments have chosen to promote urban development . This political-economic framing has provided the dominant lens through which to understand the problems emerging in the urban housing landscape. For example, housing affordability in this context has been conceived as being inherently compromised. Urban regeneration and intensification is theorised as leading inevitably to processes of gentrification, displacing working class suburbanites through value uplift, and the associated increase in speculation and investment in regenerated areas (Rosen & Walks, 2014). Some critical theorists go a step further, viewing gentrification as a global urban strategy that accompanies neoliberal urbanism (Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Smith, 2002). In addition, neoliberal urban policy is said to have promoted the homogenisation of urban development. With results described as 'anywhere town' (Rydin, 2013) and 'placeless neoliberalism' (Hackworth & Moriah, 2006), urban policy is said to enable and encourage the maximisation of economic yields leading to sub-optimality of the built form and standardised developments responding closely to proven (predominantly investor-led) market demand (Gurran et al., 2015; Seo, 2016).

Therefore, urban consolidation in these accounts is viewed as a growth strategy in itself due to the facilitative role these strategies have in opening spaces for intensified development within the existing metropolitan landscape. The recipients of neoliberal urban policy are largely viewed to be land owners and the property-development industry. Neoliberal ideology is thus understood as the vehicle for consensus building around increasingly normalised growth imperatives that facilitate maximised profit-generation through private development (Molotch, 1976). Therefore urban development and its outcomes can be seen as a product of

"coalitions of land based elites, tied to the economic possibilities of place, (who) drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth" (Jonas & Wilson, 1999).

Limitations/ calls for renewed lens

Political-economic accounts of urban policies and their outcomes have proven immensely useful for urban studies. They have drawn attention to the underlying norms and rationalities embedded in our urban governance systems. Examining the broader structural forces operating to shape policy is a crucial exercise that ensures goals and instruments are not taken at face value. Policy studies that proceed without this structural approach tend to be limited to analysis of technical 'barriers' and issues occurring with policy implementation, and can lack analytical focus on the goals themselves and their processes of their rationalisation (Jacobs & Manzi, 2017).

Despite the continued recognition of neoliberalisation as a prominent explanatory force in urban studies, however, a growing number of authors are calling for a wider lens of analysis that allows for the possibility of other structural, ideological and cultural forces being manifest in urban morphology and policy design (Jessop, 2013; McGuirk, 2012; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy, 2014; Sager, 2014; Yiftachel, 2016). In other words, the primary criticism of critical theory is that it focuses its lens too sharply on the forces of neoliberalisation and in doing so minimises the importance of other forces shaping our cities.

Critical theorists, such as Brenner and Theodore (2002) with their 'actually existing neoliberalism' do recognise the 'contextual *embeddedness'* of neoliberalisation processes and acknowledge the contradictory and varied ways that neoliberal rationalities have manifested in real urban environments (p. 349, emphasis original). For example, these authors recognise the importance of the "inherited regulatory landscapes" in understanding urban policy design

(Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 349). Despite this recognition of complexity and local contextualism, though, the critical lens of these analyses still focus primarily on the reconstitution of neoliberal logics in practice. This analysis of 'actually existing neoliberalism' is therefore pre-disposed to what Gibson-Graham (2008) describe as "reading for dominance, not for difference" (p.623).

Sager (2014) grapples with this problem when he seeks to analyse the multiple narratives influencing the ongoing support for urban consolidation policies. He describes the way that alternative ideologies, such as environmentalism and participatory governance, have been (accurately) analysed as being tangled up in neoliberal practice and ideology. He questions, however, the apparent hegemonic status of neoliberalism that is pre-subscribed to the analysis and argues that by failing to give analytic power to alternative ideologies "the critic has already taken a stand in the hegemony debate, regarding neoliberalism as dominant" (p.277). For this reason, a number of scholars are sceptical of the 'reification' of neoliberalism to hegemonic status in critical urban studies (Storper & Scott, 2016).

Authors from the Global South have emphasised the need to look for difference as well as dominance, and to recognise the multiple forces that simultaneously act to shape the city (Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy, 2014; Yiftachel, 2016). Yiftachel (2016) emphasises the 'relational' co-production of the city and rejects the idea that neoliberalism is the only force of domination and resistance in a multi-faceted and complex city (in his case in Jerusalem), which has strong political, racial and religious historical trajectories that cannot (and should not) be minimised as subordinate to political-economic structuring.

Similarly, Parnell and Robinson (2012), call for greater analysis of alternative structural forces in the city as important in their own right. In doing so, they insist on a reassertion of local state agency, "as potentially developmental, even progressive" (p.594), in contrast with

the determinism built into dominant political economy approaches. While neoliberal practice and ideals are conceived as being replicated and normalised by coalitions of economic elites, these processes seem to be at least one step removed from human agency. Instead, policy makers, appear to be interpreted as 'agents' of neoliberalism (Davies, 2014), rather than as humans or organisations with multiple, and shifting, motivations.

Similarly, Roy (2014) searches for "new geographies of urban theory" that will lead to critique of the 'flat' or homogenising nature of globalisation that is embedded in Euro-western critical theory. In doing so, she calls for a stronger 'locatedness' of urban studies that sharpens the theoretical lens towards the particularities of cities. In this way, authors calling for a more serious analysis of multiple forces shaping the city, seek a marrying of the micro (particularity of context) and the macro (structural) in new urban theorisations.

In this way, the structural focus of political economy approaches appears to provide limited scope (or hope) for change. Change is conceptualised as occurring slowly, through resistance, contestation and negotiation with neoliberal practice and ideology, however liberal-democratic societies seem beholden to this neoliberal force which will somehow, and eventually, constitute and reconstitute itself in context and assert itself, albeit in varied ways (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Blok (2013) describes the pessimism inbuilt into these critical analyses when he says: "much contemporary urban studies is marked by a universalized imaginary of urban decline, splintering and discrimination – an orientation at odds with a widespread…sensibility toward the contingency and ambivalence of any socio-technical transformation process" (p.8). In other words, there is a hint of inevitability in neoliberal urban analyses that leaves one with little concept of how real change could occur, or how more positive outcomes could be sought.

The dominant critical approaches used to understand urban policies and their outcomes focus on the political-economic system as object of inquiry. The next section argues that a focus on policy design can shift the unit of inquiry onto the *outputs* of political systems (policies) as a unit of analysis that points backwards, allowing greater understanding of that political system in the process. Specifically, it is argued that a 'policy design' framework, drawn from policy theory, can provide a more objective lens through which to understand the policy goals and instruments used by governments in an urban consolidation context and which shape outcomes for higher density housing. Using this framework, the paper gives weight to existing critical perspectives, though attempts to map them out in a way that demonstrates the constrained but contingent process of policy making that occurs in a complex web of motivations and historical trajectories. This will inevitably include processes of neoliberalisation, however this is not expected to be the whole story.

A policy-centred approach

Policy design theorists focus their attention on existing policy goals and instrumentation as a starting point to policy analysis. The process of examining these goals and instruments, it is argued, can reveal a multitude of factors contributing to the logic of decision making (Sidney, 2007). The primary goal of this approach is to improve the process and content of policy design; however, one of its key strengths is its emphasis on critically analysing existing policy designs as a starting point to improvement. As Howlett (2009) argues, "innovative and effective policy design requires that all of these parameters of instrument choice be well understood, both to reduce the risk of policy failure and to enhance the probability of policy success" (p.85). He argues that while there is increasing academic interest in innovative governance possibilities, "the potential for failure of these experiments is high if the logic of constrained policy tool selection has not been made clear beforehand" (p.85).

‘Policy design’ is conceived both as noun (an existing package to be critically analysed) and as verb (the process of crafting policy) (Howlett & Lejano, 2012; Howlett & Rayner, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1988). This paper draws primarily on policy design as noun. The approach has been chosen, however, due to its future-oriented intent in determining pathways towards policy design improvement, and in this way moves beyond critical policy analysis as the sole task (Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987).

As *noun*, policy design has been described as resembling ‘architecture’ (Bobrow, 2006; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). For example, while a building can be architecturally ‘designed’, the process of design, and the content of that design can be theoretically separated (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). This is said to be true for policy as well. A policy or policy mix may have been consciously designed, however, even if this is not the case its content still contains an inherent design. Policy design scholars therefore focus on the architecture of a given policy as an object of analysis that illuminates underlying meaning, power distribution, and political trade-offs embedded within it (Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). This is because, as Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) argue, “every instrument constitutes a condensed form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it” (p.1). The theory therefore offers the analyst a useful object of inquiry that can initiate the quest for greater understanding of existing policy systems.

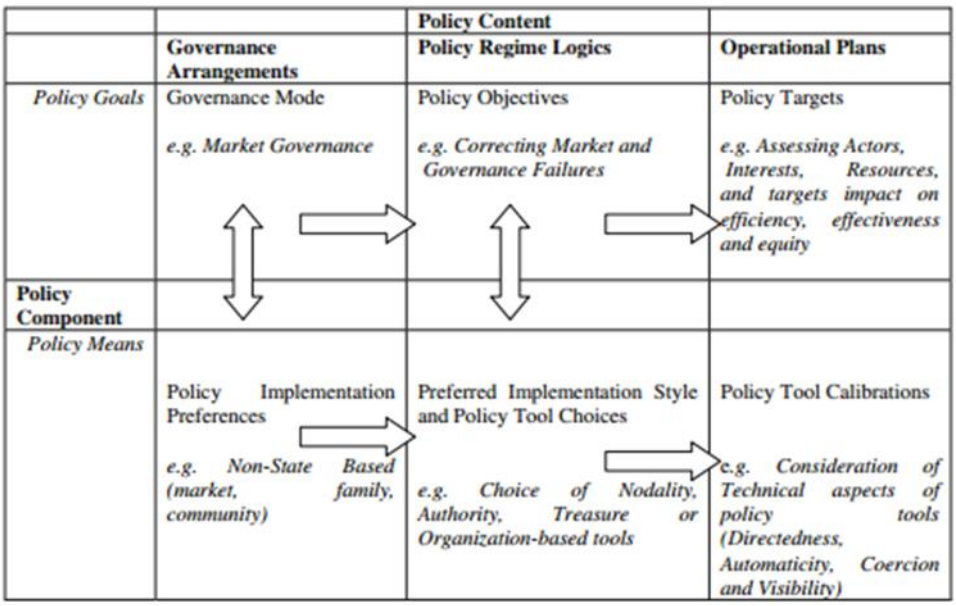
Policy design theories maintain an opportunity for unpacking the structural factors shaping a policy design, including political-economic systems. Theorists in the space, however, also point to other factors influencing the logic and content of policies. For example, pragmatic considerations are highlighted as important in policy contexts, as are local, national and international political factors. For these reasons, Linder and Peters (1984) argued that policy design theories provide the “fabled middle-range…at the intersection of macro and micro approaches” to analysis (p.245-246).

In addition, policy design theorists draw attention to the institutional contexts in which policy evolves. Drawing on Institutionalist literature, policy making is said to have evolved within "historically constructed set of constraints and policy feedbacks" which embed particular pathways of action (Beland, 2005, p. 1). In this way, the choice of instrument has the power to shape sub-sector interactions , setting off a 'chain of consequences' (Bobrow, 2006), not just in the outputs of that policy tool, but in the use of that tool itself. Policy design theory therefore acknowledges the path dependent nature of policy design (Beland, 2005; Howlett, 2009).

This path dependency is reflected in Brenner and Theodore's (2002) 'actually existing neoliberalism'. These authors crucially highlighted the way that neoliberalism has constituted and reconstituted itself in contradictory ways in practice, and has reinforced distributional and power imbalances stemming from policy along the way. It is suggested that this institutionalist element of the policy design approach, with its explicit focus on policy instrumentation, could be utilised by scholars interested in the articulation of neoliberalism in context. However, its key benefit lies in the way it also takes the focus off neoliberalism and the search for neoliberalisation itself, and in taking a policy-centred approach, gains a more nuanced picture of the factors shaping policy design.

Michael Howlett's framework to operationalise approach

This paper specifically draws on Howlett's (2009) 'multi-level, nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design*'* to operationalise a policy-centred critical analysis (Figure 1).



A model of nested policy instrument choices in liberal-democratic states

Figure 1: Howlett's 'multi-level, nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design

As a useful analytical map, Howlett's model breaks down policy design into six parts, separated conceptually into policy goals and policy means. The framework situates policy means as flowing from policy goals and these means can also be viewed at different levels of abstraction: from what level of intervention is deemed acceptable (normative) through to the technical calibration of tools that can be viewed as constrained, or shaped, by the various influences presented. In this way, it provides a way of mapping out policy design that draws out complexity. This is because Howlett's model represents a hierarchy of nested and embedded relationships in which the micro environment of final target and tool calibration is highly constrained but still replete with real-life considerations and trade-offs.

Macro-level: Governance arrangements

At the highest level of abstraction policy goals and means preferences are shaped by the prevailing mode of governance occurring broadly in liberal-democratic states. As Scott (2007)

explains, governance arrangements involve the mediation of "capitalism, group interests and society at large" and take place "within a context of constantly shifting state-society paradigms" (p.15). Macro governing norms are said to "cluster over time into favoured sets of ideas and instruments, or governance modes, which are used over a wide-range of policy-making contexts" (Howlett, 2009, p. 76). These governance modes can be understood to operate normatively at the level of the nation-state, however they will inevitably be shaped by global ideological trends. They are said to be relatively stable, shifting evolutionally over the longer term, and determine the outside boundaries of what interventions will be deemed appropriate or feasible in any given context.

Meso-level: policy regime logics

Where the macro level of normative state-society relations shapes broad preferences for intervention, policy regime logic is located a slightly more applied, sectoral, level. Unpacking this level of abstraction provides insight into how policy problems are framed and the way these logics explain attachment to particular embedded sectoral goals and implementation preferences. As Howlett (2009) describes "there is a distinct tendency for governments to develop an implementation style in various sectors and to stick with this style for quite some time" (p.81). Therefore, in any policy context, a familiarity with certain problem definition and solutions is established and policy design becomes naturally constrained by the normativity of such framing. For this reason, policy regime logic is said to be relatively stable and embedded (Howlett, 2009). Howlett's framework therefore shows that policy design is shaped not only by macro-level structural ideas but also by familiarity with a particular way of doing things that builds up over time.

Micro-level: operational plans

The micro level of policy design is described as the 'operational' scale. This is the space in which particular policy goals are turned into more tangible targets, and policy means are calibrated to generate specific policy tools. While at this scale the policy design is heavily constrained by both the governance norms occurring at the macro level, as well as the embedded regime logics existing at the meso-level, Howlett's model shows that policy design, formalised at this level, is additionally shaped by, for example: the persuasions and motivations of political actors; contextual demographics or trends; and existing relations and characteristics of local institutional networks. Howlett (2009)and Linder & Peters (1989) provide a useful framework for exploring the various and additional factors considered at the micro level that shape the ultimate policy design (Figure 2). All of these factors combined will play out to determine what policy actions are deemed to be "feasible to accomplish given existing and future resources and the presence of the dominant sets of epistemic communities and other relevant actors (Howlett, 2009, p. 83).

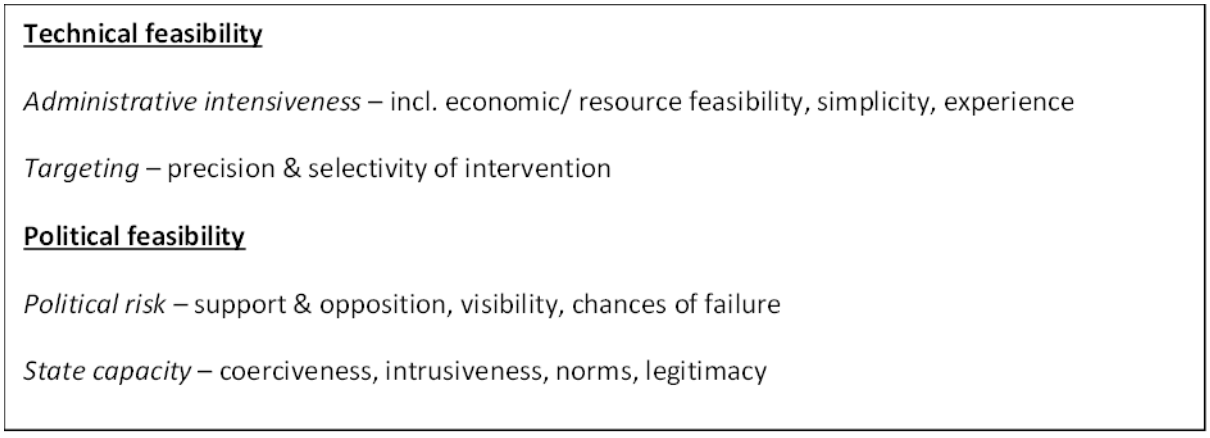


Figure 2: Micro level considerations (Linder and Peters, 1989)

The following section applies Howlett's model to urban consolidation policies in Australia. This will provide a case study of how a policy-centred approach to critical urban studies could

proceed, and will highlight some valuable contributions such an approach adds to existing perspectives.

Applying the framework to consolidation: the case study of Australia

This section of the paper attempts to operationalise Howlett's policy design framework to unpack urban consolidation policies in Australia to provide new insight into higher density housing outcomes. The application draws on existing literature and current urban consolidation policies in Australia's metropolitan areas to flesh out the framework in context. It is recognised that the complexity of each sub-section of Howlett's model warrants extensive research, and therefore, for the purpose of exploring the usefulness of the framework, the application of the model will not be exhaustive. That is, it is inevitable that influential narratives, ideologies and practical considerations will be neglected in the process; however, the author seeks to produce an initial sketch of the logic of urban consolidation in Australia to illicit a suitably nuanced picture of its operation and objectives.

Urban consolidation: the Australian context

In Australia, urban development is largely the responsibility of the state governments, albeit with a subordinate, implementation role for local government agencies. The federal government plays an indirect, but important, role in urban development, and particularly in housing, through policies regarding taxation and welfare. It also provides some funding for state urban development, though this largely revolves around public infrastructure rather than housing.

Urban development policy is an example of the indirect treatment of housing in the Australian context. Urban consolidation strategies exist in all the major cities in Australia in some form. These strategies are devised and implemented by the planning sector, and are articulated through both strategic and spatial planning documents. Planning tools, such as zoning and

regulation, form the dominant approach to achieving the vision set out in long-term strategic plans. While residential form makes up the largest component of the land area of consolidation policies, optimal housing outcomes, including affordability, diversity, and liveability are largely expected to flow naturally from an effective planning strategy that endorses consolidation.

Macro-level governing norms/ preferences

Jessop (2003) argues, "the prevailing 'mode of governance' must be understood before new arrangements can be determined" (p.103). Therefore, in order to understand current urban policy approaches, it is useful to explore the macro level governing norms influencing policy design. Howlett (2009) contends that:

"the contemporary preference in most developed liberal-democratic countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and most of the European Union is currently for a form of market governance whose goal is the efficient delivery of consumer and capital goods and services through the use of market-mechanisms wherever possible" (p.80).

In line with insights from political economists, it has been widely noted that since the 1980s there has been a progressive preference shift away from bureaucratic, government-led service provision across the Western world (Bevir, Rhodes, & Weller, 2003; Dalton, 2009; Peck et al., 2009) Neoliberal ideas have permeated policy arenas across sectors and regions (albeit unevenly and to differing degrees) based on the idea that the market is more efficient and effective than the state at allocating resources and delivering services. These ideas have become entwined in Australian policy making to generate a pervasive 'neoliberal political rationality' or normativity across a range of policy sub-systems (Beeson & Firth, 1998). In this context, bureaucratic processes are regarded with suspicion, and deregulation and the privatisation of assets and service provision are favoured (Larner, 2000).

According to Howlett's policy design framework, the prevailing mode of governance influences the broad policy implementation preferences of the state. Larner (2000) highlights that "whereas under Keynesian welfarism the state provision of goods and services to a national population was understood as a means of ensuring social well-being, neo-liberalism is associated with the preference for a minimalist state" (p.5). Therefore, the dominance of the market-based mode of governance in the modern context can be seen to result in a bias towards minimal state intervention and a subsequent greater reliance on the market and external actors to deliver more efficient and effective services. In this way, the governance mode shapes (constrains) the feasibility and perceived appropriateness of any particular state-society interactions.

Meso level programme logic

Howlett's model reminds the analyst to explore the emergent logics of policy sector goals. This can reveal goals that are layered and/ or multifarious compared with the dominance of politico-economic explanations in critical urban theory accounts (Howlett & Rayner, 2013).

Unpacking the logic of urban consolidation

Several authors have documented the changing nature of discourse and strategies regarding urban growth in Australia (Bunker & Searle, 2007; Dodson & Gleeson, 2007; Gleeson, Darbas, & Lawson, 2004; Gurran & Phibbs, 2013; Yates, 2001). Urban consolidation strategies were initially pursued in response to the economic and social costs arising from low density, suburban urban form. For example, early concerns centred on a situation where land developers in the greenfields were generating substantial financial profits from large-scale housing production but leaving government to fund and provide the necessary infrastructure associated with it (Dodson & Gleeson, 2007). By the late 1990's it was becoming clear that public transport, which would be increasingly required to combat growing congestion, was

difficult to fund and maintain at the low densities being produced (Gleeson, Dodson, & Spiller, 2010). Therefore, governments around the country, for many pragmatic reasons, saw urban consolidation as a necessary strategy ensuring the efficient use of funds for infrastructure delivery in metropolitan regions.

These issues, and more, were increasingly documented by the academic community during the 1990's, strengthening an argument in favour of a 'compact city' model (Hillman, 1996; Newman & Kenworthy, 1999). Alongside the problems associated with low density suburban development, a narrative became established that equated compact cities with vibrant cities, suggesting that higher population densities allow for productivity gains and cosmopolitan lifestyles as well as providing healthier mobility options, such as walking and cycling (Thomas & Cousins, 1996). These ideas aligned with growing concerns in the late 1990's of the impact of climate change. Low density, suburban morphology became increasingly associated with negative environmental and social impacts, predominantly due to the automobile dependence inherent in that style of development (Newman & Kenworthy, 1999). Davison (2006) describes the way that "anti-suburbanism" became intertwined with an ecological sustainability narrative and the way that this logic has remained "stuck in a cul-de-sac" until even the present day, despite some ongoing contestation (for example: (Dodson & Gleeson, 2007; Searle, 2004; Troy, 1996). Therefore, urban consolidation policies were articulated increasingly in environmental terms (Forster, 2006).

Alongside the environmental and economic (cost saving) motivations for urban consolidation was the widespread macro-level shift in state-society relations favouring market governance as described earlier. In the urban policy making realm in Australia, existing (more grounded) motivations for urban consolidation can be seen to have been overlayed and aligned with emerging government motivations including global and national competitiveness between cities, and economic growth for its own sake (Davison, 2006). Urban consolidation, which

had been pursued on environmental grounds, was embraced in this context due to its perceived optimality in promoting urban economic growth (through intensified metropolitan housing supply) combined with ecological harm minimisation. Therefore, Davison (2006) points out that a 'sustainable development' narrative in which urban consolidation was articulated came to fit with the strengthening neoliberal ideas permeating policy sectors in liberal-democratic societies (p.208).

Urban development policy logics: competing (economic) rationalities?

Pierre (2011) describes the modern era of market-dominant urban policy objectives as representing 'pro-growth urban governance', that is, the purpose of urban policy is to generate economic growth in cities in the national interest. Pro-growth governance, however, is not necessarily a unified narrative. As McGuirk (2005) highlights, different motivations have evolved even within the growth narrative. Urban consolidation has been pursued along two similar (though potentially contradictory in practice) economic motivations. First, from an 'entrepreneurial city' perspective urban growth is equated with economic growth. That is, ongoing urban development is crucial and must be promoted to ensure continued growth. This approach leads to urban policy objectives focused on increasing housing supply per se and facilitating private development. On the other hand, 'competitive city' objectives require a more active government role to ensure that liveability and productivity outcomes arising from urban morphology are comparable and competitive globally, even if these factors are measured in economic terms (p.60).

McGuirk argued in 2005 that the 'competitive cities' agenda had reinstated the perceived value of urban planning after a decade of fragmented governance that supported entrepreneurial objectives through regulatory flexibility (p.60). In the years following McGuirk's (2005) analysis, however, both narratives appear to have remained salient and influential in the urban policy logic concerning containment and planning objectives. In a

cabinet reshuffle speech in 2015, the Australian Prime Minister introduced a new cities ministry, and stated "liveable, vibrant cities are absolutely critical to our prosperity", thereby articulating the competitive cities imperative (Turnball, 2015) At the same time, Gurran & Phibbs (2013) found evidence that a "crisis of supply" has emerged as "a new housing orthodoxy in Australia" (p.382) that focuses on planning as the cause of restricted development. This narrative, echoing more entrepreneurial city ideals, has largely been led by the housing industry made up of private development actors (Gurran & Phibbs, 2013), and reflects critical analyses that highlight the power of elite coalitions in building and embedding consensus around growth in ways that suits their own economic pursuits (Molotch, 1976).

Howlett's (2009) framework highlights the importance of recognising the historical, cultural and political-economic basis of policy regime logic and to understand the way that multiple influences impact the objectives of any given policy area. It shows that the logic of urban consolidation has become embedded over the years, even as the primary motivations have shifted. Highlighting the competing pro-growth narratives also provides nuance for understanding contemporary pro-growth urban governance. These narratives are powerful in shaping the articulation of objectives; however, their influence should not be overstated. Contextual factors, including ongoing population growth, changing demographic trends, and land availability, provide the canvas on which these narratives can be overlayed. In addition, the intertwined narratives of ecological sustainability and problematic urban sprawl provide another historical layer of normativity to the urban consolidation logic. Therefore, Howlett's framework assists in unpacking the multiple influences impacting the ongoing support of urban consolidation, and enables a complex picture to emerge of the interplay between historical epistemic knowledge, demographic trends, and shifting governance norms and preferences.

Implementation preferences

Howlett's framework points the analyst not only to policy goals, but also to the embedded nature of instrumentation preferences as key to understanding a policy design and its outcomes. Two implementation preferences in particular are deemed insightful for this analysis; first, the use of planning tools to modify densities, and second, an emergent preference for de-regulation reflecting neoliberal rationalities in the modern era.

Strategic and statutory planning is used to steer and regulate housing development in terms of its locational and physical characteristics and it does this primarily through zoning for particular densities and strategic designation of growth areas. As Ruming and Goodman (2016) argue, "the capacity of the state to frame (to some degree) urban development, represents one of the few policy levers available to the federal and state governments to address urban scale challenges and performance" (p.84). Strategic planning through vision setting and zoning for various densities therefore forms the dominant implementation approach for urban consolidation goals. Implicit in this approach is the expectation that once land is rezoned or made ready for development, the production of desirable built form through market channels will inevitably follow.

Dodson (2007), however, refers to this approach as 'density fundamentalism', in that the continuous regulation of density has been assumed to be a crucial and modifiable component of housing that can be altered to produce desired qualitative outcomes, including social and environmental benefits. He describes the way that the preoccupation with density is not a new phenomenon that is a result of objectives around urban containment, but that the earlier encouragement of low density suburban forms of development was also an attempt to regulate density as a way of reducing social, environmental and economic ills arising from increasingly populated and problematic urban centres. Therefore, the idea that density can be manipulated to generate desired outcomes is a long-held view in planning that has become so

embedded as to be viewed as common sense implementation logic. Alongside Howlett's (2009) conceptualisation of constrained policy design, the use of indirect planning regulation and density levers can also be perceived to be nested within macro level norms favouring market provision of services (in this case housing) as well as minimal government intervention.

Preoccupation with deregulation

One of the more recent implementation logics that have become embedded in urban policy design is a deregulation imperative. As highlighted earlier, since the turn of the millennium, a dominant narrative has evolved that emphasises a crisis of housing supply, attributing causation to burdensome land use planning regulations that restrict new development (Gurran & Phibbs, 2013). According to this urban planning logic it follows that development of new housing supply is essential for economic growth. In this context, the primary policy goal of government in this sector becomes the removal of all perceived barriers to development. Regulation, coined 'red tape', is viewed not as ensuring good social and environmental ends, but as a roadblock to the economic growth essential to the wellbeing of the city. Therefore, the policy response to for example, housing affordability issues, looks to remedy "inefficient performance" of the system to enable development to be rolled out more efficiently and improve this performance. Gurran and Ruming (2015) contend that the deregulation imperative is a strengthening project that continues to be viewed as 'incomplete' in Australia (p.266).

The preoccupation with increasing supply through deregulation fits with dominant neoliberal rationalities operating in the urban policy realm that prioritise urban growth as economic growth. Studies have shown that the deregulation imperative was gradually embedded by the development industry, who pushed this narrative over a long time period as a common sense solution to particular contextual crises, including worsening housing affordability (Dalton,

2009; Gurran & Phibbs, 2013; Jacobs, 2006). The influence of the development industry on policy implementation logic aligns with Linder & Peters (1989) who argue that "think tanks in particular tend to become associated with particular policy instruments and may advocate those as solutions to a variety of policy problems. If such a think tank is included as a significant component of policy community of the public sector organization, then that organization will be under some pressure to adopt that particular instrument" (p.51). This pressure is demonstrated by Gurran & Phibbs (2013) discourse analysis (2003-2012) where they show the deregulation logic strengthening over time through a "growing alignment between government and industry positions" (p.402) to become a dominant instrument in urban policy design in more recent times.

The regulation dilemma

Planning theorists, Savini, Majoor and Salet (2014) describe an inherent 'regulation dilemma' in land use planning practice. They describe the existence of simultaneous objectives in planning practice to flexibly "open spaces for self-management" while also "limiting opportunist action" through regulation. This dilemma goes to the heart of the competing objectives for urban development in Australia that were highlighted above. Neoliberal urban policy making has focused on the 'spaces for open-management' as all important for ongoing economic growth through development. In Australia, Gurran & Ruming,(2015) argue that a market-driven deregulation strategy has been "remarkably resilient" in urban planning systems over recent decades and continues today. This push for deregulation, however, inherently limits the capacity of land use planning to determine boundaries of action for development. In this way the two dominant implementation preferences, deregulation and land use planning, can be seen to be in constant tension.

The regulation dilemma is reflected in Australian metropolitan planning to this day. In Australia, central state governments have constitutional legitimacy (and capacity) to

determine comprehensive infrastructure development and broad land use plans. With the deregulation agenda simultaneously being pursued, the Australian style of implementation can be described, then, as 'centralised deregulation' (Buxton, Goodman, & March, 2012). That is, central state-led planning mechanisms continue to be understood as necessary, and this is evident in the existence of metropolitan plans that articulate infill targets and designate growth areas. However, there is a strong tendency towards deregulation as the implementation strategy for enabling the private sector to deliver the urban development required. It is argued that the recognition of this inherent tension in planning in Australia, and the pervasiveness of the deregulation agenda that bubbles alongside central state control, provides a nuanced understanding of both the design and outcomes of urban consolidation policies.

Micro-level operationalisation

Policy targets

The operationalisation of goals in relation to urban consolidation in Australia has been articulated around the creation of density or infill targets across the metropolitan region. These are set by state governments and are to be met by subordinate local government areas through appropriate zoning, subdivision, approvals processes and performance criteria. At the micro level of policy goal calibration, the evoking of density targets can be seen to evolve from an institutional history of land use planning (described earlier in meso-level rationalities) and particularly from embedded 'density fundamentalism' amongst planners (Dodson & Gleeson, 2007).

Density as institutionalism

Failing the existence of more comprehensive metropolitan governance institutions in Australia, urban policy therefore largely continues to fall to state planning departments (Gleeson et al., 2010). Linder and Peters (1989) draw attention to the technical feasibility of

various operational goals. They highlight the micro consideration of administrative intensiveness, thereby maintaining pragmatism into the theorisation of policy design influences. Therefore, the technical feasibility and resource intensiveness of a particular policy option is influenced by the longevity and embeddedness of implementation strategies that have established familiarity and experience with particular solutions. For example, the historical use of technical land use planning as the primary instrument to influence urban morphology means that resources, including skills, experience, and institutional capacity, are already established around this normative practice. Linder and Peters (1989) suggest that it is "not only the repetitive use of instruments…but the very nature of institutions (that) may limit their choices" (p.42). Therefore, the evoking of density/ infill goals in the pursuit of shaping urban morphology can be seen to arise from within an institutionally embedded planning framework, and a familiarity with density levers that has allowed experience, skills and common-sense policy design to coalesce around its operational goal formulation.

The use of infill 'targets'

Raynor et al. (2017) recently found unanimous support for facilitative policy mechanisms enabling urban housing supply to be provided by developers amongst "city shapers". The use of *targets* in micro goal-setting (as opposed to say, urban growth boundary limits) reflects this finding. The use of targets for infill facilitates intensification of the metropolitan region, and therefore facilitates urban growth through urban development. At the same time, however, it only minimally and *proportionately* restricts greenfields development at the urban fringe. This finding that micro policy goals support facilitative, indirect management of urban morphology and incentives development (by profit-motivated developers) supports the critical urban theorists work about the normalisation of neoliberal governance and the need for government to play a minimal role.

At the same time, the use of targets could also be seen to be reflective of *divergent* and *multiple* views that exist in the community about urban consolidation as a policy goal and strategy. For example, Sydney researchers found that more than half of those surveyed about state urban planning strategies opposed the idea that urban intensification was required or desired (Ruming, 2014). This divergence of views has been recently supported in the work of Raynor et al (2017) and Taylor et al (2014). Raynor et al. (2017) highlighted three sets of 'epistemic communities' of thought within sub-system of "city shapers" (planners, councillors, architects and developers) . The notion of 'good' urban development contrasted radically between the "aussie dreamers" cohort one the one hand who were culturally and ideologically opposed to the merit of consolidation, and who saw government intervention as overly intrusive; and the consolidation supporters who viewed 'good' urban form as being equated with densified urban form. Therefore, from this perspective, the use of infill targets can be considered a trade-off of varying interests of people/ communities at the micro level. That is, it goes some way to pursuing the sustainability narrative that urban consolidation is morally superior, but does not go so far as to limit suburban expansion as this would require a greater consensus.

Policy calibration

Activity centres: selective residential intensification

The calibration of urban consolidation policies at the micro level involves articulating a strategy for *where* urban growth will be accommodated. Urban consolidation has been commonly planned through the identification of 'activity centres', or specific locations where intensified development will be pursued. These activity centres are usually well-located near public transport nodes and/ or employment opportunities which is considered best practice amongst urban designers/ planners. Local governments containing strategically (state) defined

activity centres are expected to align their zoning and planning mechanisms with this direction towards specified intensification.

One way in which the activity centres approach can be interpreted is within the context of the strong, liberal home-ownership culture in Australia. The (typically older) generation of established home owners in well-located inner and middle city neighbourhoods are constructed positively in Australian cultural history and possess strong political influence. Schneider & Ingram (1993) highlight the important role the social construction of target populations play in policy design. Their work suggests that populations who are relatively advantaged as well as positively constructed are more likely to have policy developed in their favour, compared to those who are relatively disadvantaged and/ or are negatively constructed in popular culture. Therefore, Dodson and Gleeson (2007) describe the strategic accommodation of density in activity centres as reflecting the most politically feasible articulation of broader (embedded) goals regarding the need for urban consolidation.

While Howlett's model revealed that urban consolidation through density targets and urban intensification has become embedded and common sense practice over time, the activity centres approach intensifies the urban realm in specific locations in a way that also protects the low density neighbourhoods (and property values) consisting of established home owners in the inner and middle suburbs. The strategy can therefore be seen to respond to micro considerations of political risk, as well as administrative intensiveness (minimal due to institutional embeddedness of density manipulation). At the same time, the strategy facilitates urban intensification in those areas 'ripe' for development; promotes economic growth through value uplift in the metropolitan region; and is facilitative and indirect (through the use of infill 'targets') thereby reflecting low levels of intrusiveness and preferable minimised government role in actual city shaping. Therefore, the calibration of the activity centres

approach can be seen to reflect the constrained nature of policy design, and to reflect the nested constraints explored at the macro, meso and micro scales.

Discussion: what does a policy-centred approach offer to field?

It was flagged earlier that a potential limitation of the dominant analytical approach was its tendency to look for "dominance rather than difference" in policy design, in which neoliberalism is deemed hegemonic from the outset. The operationalisation of Howlett's framework highlights a number of examples in which a policy design framework adds nuance and difference to the interpretations of urban consolidation policy.

At the meso-level, urban consolidation was found to contain multiple layers of embedded logic that have built up over a several years. While urban consolidation policies were found to have been overlayed by neoliberal rationalities and growth imperatives, unpacking the logics apparent in the policy architecture revealed multiplicity even within these economic growth narratives. The logic of the competitive city, in which policy makers intervene to ensure urban centres remain productive, liveable and thus globally relevant (a neoliberal rationality regarding global competitiveness), is not the same as a growth imperative which facilitates housing production for economic growth through development (a neoliberal rationality supportive of de-regulation, market fundamentalism).

We could label both of these logics as classic cases of neoliberal rationalities at play. However, this paper questions how useful that conclusion is for the policy advocate seeking to influence policy design. As Weller & O'Neill (2014) argue, "the role of academic research is to explain the lived world and to develop abstractions to aid that explanation, rather than to design an abstraction (neoliberalism) and then fit the lived world to its contours" (p.105).

It is potentially more useful, therefore, to understand the different growth logics and the inherent tensions between them rather than to describe them as variegated and contradictory 'actually existing' neoliberal rationalities (a la Brenner and Theodore, 2002). In this case, that means understanding the tension at play in the logic of urban governance which simultaneously evokes the need for both government intervention (to aid relative city competitiveness and ensure run-away developments do not negatively impact the productivity or appeal of the region), while at the same time managing preferences for de-regulated planning frameworks that facilitate growth through the intensification of urban development. Howlett's framework highlights the way this trade-off of logics manifests in the policy architecture as 'centralised de-regulation'.

For example, in Western Australia the state government has developed detailed strategic documents which guide where intensified development will (and will not) occur. In order to realise these targets, however, 'Development Assessment Panels' were created to over-ride local community resistance to higher density development in designated growth zones, thereby enabling faster development approval and stimulating urban growth through supply. All of this can be considered classic state-authored neoliberal urban restructuring (Peck & Tickell, 2002); however, unpacking the goals and instruments from a policy design perspective draws out the nuance and difference in the growth logics, rather than seeking out the commonalities in their ideological origins.

The second example highlighting the usefulness of Howlett's framework concerns the calibration of policy design at the operational level. Where dominant accounts of actually existing neoliberalism focus on the constitution of neoliberal logics in context, Howlett's framework grants micro-level considerations explanatory power in their own right, albeit within a broader structuring environment. Drawing on Linder and Peters (1989) catalogue of micro considerations, the analysis of urban consolidation highlights clear negotiations and

trade-offs occurring in the space of urban housing governance. For example, the divergent views of various 'city shaper' groups points to disagreement regarding the apparent common sense nature of urban consolidation imperatives. In this way, while environmental and social goals of consolidation may be rhetorically supported, the instrumentation of those goals is half-baked, with some restriction to unfettered development occurring alongside the ongoing incremental release of metropolitan fringe land.

When political risk is considered, Howlett's framework reveals a trade-off between the growth imperatives, accommodating the required additional housing for the growing population, and maintaining political favour of established land owners in the high value middle ring suburbs. Therefore, this interpretation provides valuable insight into the calibration of consolidation goals as 'targets' facilitated in 'activity centres' as these represent a best case scenario for adhering to consolidation goals while also protecting policy makers from political backlash from powerful constituents (established land and property owners). When administrative feasibility is considered, the framework reveals a cluster of skills and familiarity around planning mechanisms in the policy design of urban consolidation. In this case, simplicity through previous experience suggests that density levers will be the likely instrument choice for any intervention in the housing space.

All of these examples contest the account of policy makers as mere "agents" of neoliberalism. Instead, Howlett's model, within a structuring framework, grants real analytic power to the local context, and provides conceptual space to imagine real people and institutions engaging in a policy-making environment that involves negotiated trade-offs in a contest of ideas, ideologies and political interests. Therefore, critical analysis utilising a policy design approach reveals an element of 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959) in the urban policy process that is limited in the dominant critical approach. It is argued that by granting agency to policy designers involved in calibrating urban consolidation policy one gains stronger

insight into the actual components, players and ideas impacting the space. From this renewed understanding of policy design and instrument choice, innovative housing governance and practice ideas may be able to be developed in a more targeted manner, for example, by generating support for good quality higher density housing amongst the housing elite, rather than just referring to crude density targets that invoke fear and resistance in established communities.

Conclusions

This paper has not sought to provide an exhaustive analysis of urban consolidation policy goals and instrumentation in Australia. Nor has it aimed to articulate where the 'room to manoeuvre' for innovative policy ideas within the existing policy design can be found. Instead, the paper has highlighted the potential usefulness of a policy-centred approach to critical urban analysis for drawing out nuance, difference and local agency in the interpretation of policy design. Using this approach, it is argued that policy advocates may get closer to understanding the real world of constrained policy-making, and in that way gain insights that can prove useful in mobilising support for innovative urban policy ideas and practices.

The key benefit of Howlett's policy design framework is its conceptual ability to capture multiplicity in policy design; including in policy logics amongst 'city shaper' epistemic communities; and in trends in instrumentation preferences. In addition to highlighting multiplicity in the present, Howlett's framework also reveals the *layered* nature of the embedded logic of consolidation, that has evolved over time and been shaped by various governing ideologies and trends. Howlett's framework usefully highlights that when these layered and divergent logics clash with actual context, they are constrained by actually existing pragmatism and politics, some of which may be rhetorically supported by neoliberal

rationalities, but not *necessarily.* Therefore much of the policy design of urban consolidation is better reflected in the description of policy making as 'muddling through', albeit within a constrained political-economic environment.

Returning to the pursuit of future-oriented critical analysis, the reflections in this paper serve to illustrate a potential pathway on which grounded policy advocacy can proceed. It draws on the work of Bobrow and Dryzek who advocated a policy design approach for future-oriented research;

> "We believe orderly examination of such basic (policy) choices can contribute to sound judgement among those who approach public policy from the social sciences. Such examination may not make policy problems more soluble or the work on them less frustrating. But it may make the work more intellectually responsible and give those who labor a clearer compass" (Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987, p. vii).

This paper has argued that Howlett's framework offers the urban policy analyst an operational tool for "orderly examination" from which policy advocacy can proceed with "a clearer compass" (1987). A policy design framework thus has the potential to 'chart new territory in urban studies" through policy-centred analysis, capturing difference, and adding valuable nuance, to existing critical urban perspective

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