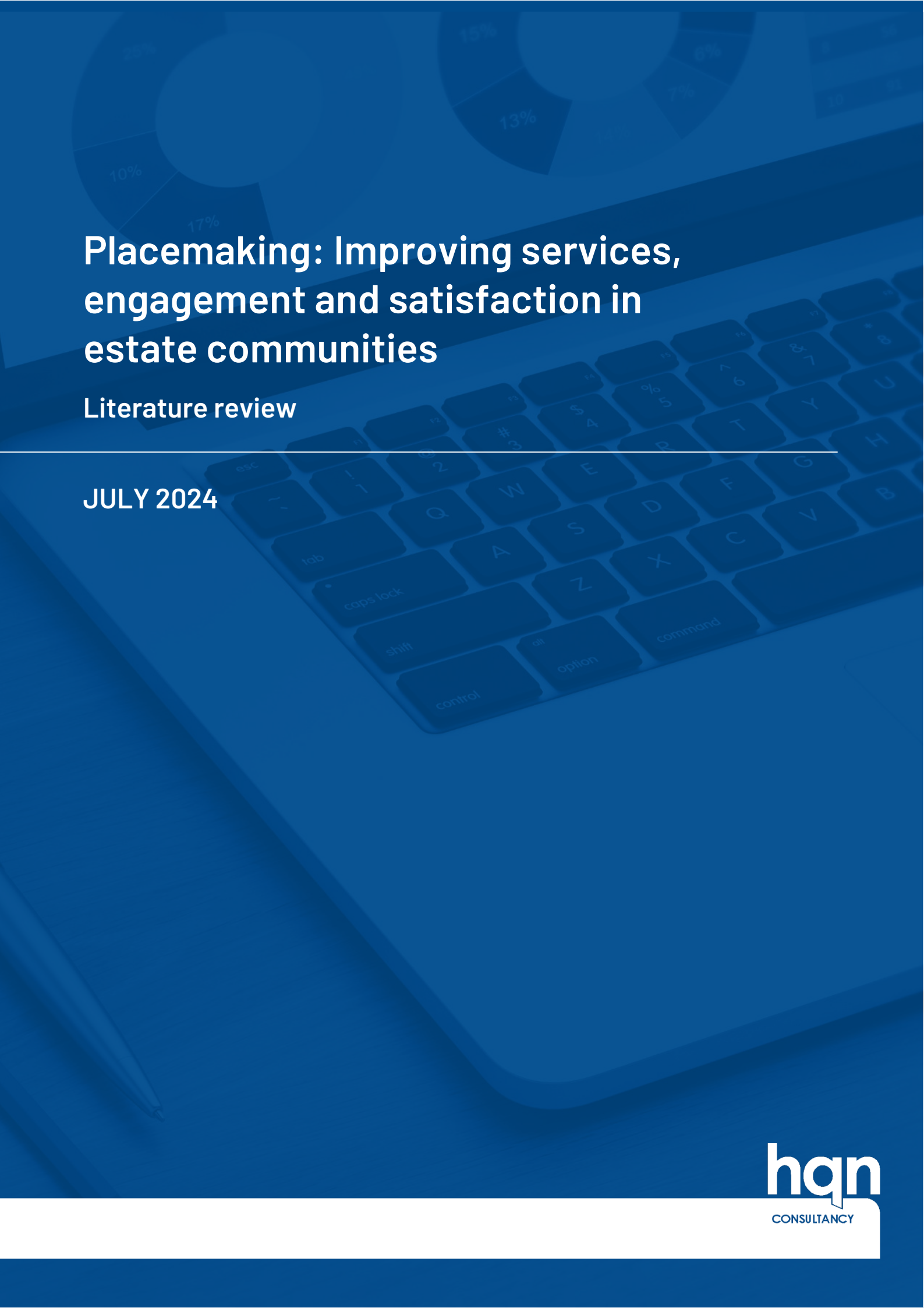




Placemaking: Improving services, engagement and satisfaction in estate communities

Literature review

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Contents

Section	Page number
1 Introduction	1
2 Belonging and placemaking in marginalised communities	4
3 Building resilience through community empowerment	9
4 Balancing physical and social infrastructure	12
5 Concluding thoughts	18
6 References	19

1 Introduction

Acknowledgement of traditional custodians

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands across New South Wales from where our placemaking project is being directed. We recognise the significance of these lands to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their enduring connection to country. This project commits to respectfully incorporating the perspectives and values of Indigenous communities in our approach to improving estate communities.

The project "Placemaking: improving services, engagement, and satisfaction in estate communities" focuses on revamping social housing practices in New South Wales and around Australia. This literature review establishes a theoretical and conceptual framework essential for understanding the complexities and dynamics of social housing communities. Central to this analysis is the recognition of social landlords' pivotal role in shaping community experiences in social housing estates, as noted by Rolfe and Garnham (2020). However, challenges persist in involving residents in developing and improving their communities, a critical element for success yet often underutilised (Symons, 2018; Crow et al, 2019).

This review will explore the relationship between the built environment, resident engagement, and community wellbeing. Drawing insights from Kabus & Dziadkiewicz (2023), who documented the positive outcomes of innovative management in public housing in Poland, this project aims to draw out similar best practices that can be applied in an Australian context. Furthermore, the concepts of belonging, as influenced by physical surroundings (Watson & Dannenberg, 2008; French et al, 2014), and third places (Oldenburg, 1999; Hickman, 2013) are central to understanding how communal spaces and design influence resident interactions and satisfaction.

Incorporating best practices and lessons from global examples, including Power's "Property Before People" (2021), which emphasises the balance between physical infrastructure and community welfare, this review sets the stage for a holistic approach to social housing development. By intertwining theoretical perspectives with practical case studies, the review aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for the project, ensuring that the strategies developed are grounded in effective, resident-centred, and community-focused practices. This approach is vital for creating vibrant, inclusive, and engaging social housing environments beyond mere shelter, addressing broader aspects of community life and resident wellbeing.

Addressing social housing challenges in priority estates

The project's focus on priority estates, characterised by complex housing and social issues, demands an understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in these environments. In these settings, the role of social landlords transcends the mere provision of housing; it encompasses a strategic approach towards community revitalisation and resident empowerment. Rolfe and Garnham (2020) highlight the significant influence these landlords have in shaping the social fabric of social housing neighbourhoods. Their ability to respond

effectively to the evolving needs of residents is crucial for fostering and maintaining sustainable communities.

In priority estates, where socio-economic challenges are more pronounced, the involvement of residents in decision-making processes becomes even more critical. Studies by Kabus Dziadkiewicz (2023) demonstrate that innovative management practices, including enhancing green spaces, security measures, and resident-focused initiatives, can significantly improve community wellbeing. This aligns with the project's aim to transform estates by integrating resident insights and priorities into the development and regeneration processes.

Furthermore, addressing social housing challenges in these areas requires a nuanced approach to community building and engagement. As Symons (2018) and Crow et al (2019) observe, resident participation is often overlooked, yet it is fundamental for the success of community development initiatives. Social landlords can facilitate a more inclusive and collaborative environment by fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among residents. Drawing on the insights and strategies from successful global models, this project seeks to implement best practices in community engagement, ensuring that the solutions developed are responsive to residents' specific needs and aspirations in priority estates. The aim is to create habitable spaces and thriving communities where residents feel connected, supported, and actively involved in shaping their living environment.

Stock transfer of social housing: lessons learned

The transfer of social housing stock to non-state entities, known as Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT), has been a pivotal strategy in reshaping social housing landscapes, particularly in the UK and Australia. This section synthesises findings from key research and evaluations to draw out lessons learnt and principles for best practice.

Best practice:

1. Financial leveraging and investment:

- Successful stock transfers have harnessed the financial viability of housing associations (HAs) to leverage private finance, which is crucial for refurbishing and improving the housing stock. The mobilisation of significant funds has been central to addressing the backlog of disrepair in local authority housing (Pawson & Gilmour, 2010).

2. Governance and tenant involvement:

- Enhanced governance structures, with substantial tenant representation on management boards, have characterised successful stock transfers. Although the balance of power can be complex, tenant involvement is key to fostering a tenant-friendly, customer-driven outlook among HAs (McCormack, 2013).

3. Holistic regeneration approaches:

- Effective stock transfers have adopted a holistic approach to regeneration, linking physical improvements with broader socio-economic development. Initiatives that stimulate local economic growth and protect tenants and

leaseholders have shown promising outcomes (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014).

Lessons and challenges:

1. *Complexity of policy objectives:*

- Transfers that set multiple objectives often face challenges in maintaining a consistent commitment to policy goals. The complexity and multiplicity of objectives, such as debt removal, stock improvement, and community empowerment, can lead to confusion and lack of clarity (Watt, 2009; Smyth, 2016).

2. *Differential impacts and inequalities:*

- Stock transfers have been criticised for not benefiting all demographic groups equally. Initiatives must address the diverse needs of various subgroups within the community, ensuring that the benefits of regeneration efforts are more equitably distributed (Pawson et al, 2010).

3. *Organisational and cultural shifts:*

- The transition of social housing stock involves significant organisational structure and culture changes. Balancing business and social imperatives, managing risks, and maintaining service quality amidst these changes can be challenging (Pawson & Gilmour, 2010).

4. *Financial vulnerabilities and viability issues:*

- Financial vulnerabilities, particularly in the early years of the transfer due to high levels of indebtedness and the obligation to fulfil 'transfer promises,' pose challenges. Ensuring financial viability while meeting the renovation and community development goals is critical to successful stock transfers (Pawson & Gilmour, 2010; Smyth, 2016).

5. *Geographic and political considerations:*

- Geographic and political factors also influence the success of stock transfers. The varying pace of transfer activities across regions and the impact of political changes at local and national levels highlight the need for adaptable and context-sensitive strategies (Watt, 2009; McCormack, 2013).

Whilst stock transfers in social housing have provided avenues for improvement and regeneration, they necessitate a comprehensive, well-structured approach that addresses financial, organisational, and socio-economic challenges. Recognising the nuances of tenant involvement, governance, financial management, and the broader socio-political context is paramount. Future initiatives should draw on these insights, ensuring that stock transfer strategies are effective but also equitable, sustainable, and responsive to the diverse needs of communities.

2 Belonging and placemaking in marginalised communities

The concept of belonging and placemaking is significant in social housing, especially when considering marginalised communities. These communities often face unique challenges that stem from socioeconomic disparities, lack of representation, and historical stigmatisation. Watson and Dannenberg (2008) and French et al (2014) emphasise the profound impact of the built environment on residents' sense of community and individual wellbeing. This becomes even more pertinent in marginalised communities within priority estates, as the design and management of physical spaces can foster a sense of inclusion or exacerbate feelings of isolation.

Creating a sense of belonging in these communities requires a deliberate and thoughtful approach to placemaking. It involves physically constructing spaces and nurturing the social and cultural fabric that binds residents together. Engaging residents in the design and development process, as highlighted in the works of Bailey et al (2012) and Mee (2009), is crucial in ensuring that these spaces resonate with their experiences and aspirations. Such engagement can empower residents, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, giving them a voice and a stake in their community's future.

The challenges relating to placemaking in marginalised communities align with this understanding. The project aims to contribute to wider work that seeks to support registered providers in developing environments that are physically accommodating and socially and culturally inclusive. Drawing on best practices from global examples, the project aims to develop spaces that reflect the diverse needs and identities of the residents. These spaces should serve as platforms for community interaction, cultural expression, and mutual support, thus fostering a robust sense of belonging. By integrating these principles, the project aims to support providers in developing cohesive communities where all residents, regardless of their background, feel valued, connected, and engaged.

In the Australian context, Indigenous communities' intricate cultural heritage and profound history necessitate a sensitive approach to placemaking and housing policies. Recognising and respecting the traditional custodianship of the land is just the starting point. Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives and values into housing initiatives is crucial for fostering truly inclusive, respectful, and empowering environments. This review acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal community control and commits to delving deeper into practices such as walking alongside Aboriginal communities, moving at their pace, and letting those communities lead. By incorporating these principles, the project aims to create spaces that accommodate and celebrate all residents' diverse narratives and identities, fostering a community marked by interconnectedness, resilience, and cultural richness.

The role of 'third places' in community building

As Oldenburg (1999) introduced, the 'third places' concept is pivotal in community building within social housing estates, particularly those earmarked priority estates with multifaceted challenges. These third places – communal spaces such as parks, community centres, and shared green areas – are crucial catalysts for social interaction and cohesion. Hickman (2013) and Jeffres et al (2009) underscore the importance of these spaces in fostering a sense of community, acting as both functional and symbolic epicentres of social life.

In the context of this project, integrating third places is essential for revitalising estate communities, especially in marginalised areas. These spaces allow residents to engage with one another, forming supportive networks and social bonds fundamental to community resilience and wellbeing. Two studies from New Zealand (Banwell & Kingham, 2023; Kingham et al, 2020) identified the importance of 'gathering places' – 'where people went hoping for, but not explicitly planning, social interactions: for example, libraries, parks, primary schools, and pubs'; and 'bumping places'. The latter are unplanned interactions, 'places where people would accidentally bump into their neighbours'. The second study asked residents for their views on when a temporary street closure would allow them to use the space for meetings, recreation, and sports. Residents saw strong community benefits and supported the permanent closure of the road.

Moreover, third places in social housing estates can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and promote mental health, as residents find communal areas to interact, relax, and partake in shared activities. Williams & Hipp (2019) highlight how third places are particularly effective in fostering social cohesion in working-class communities, providing a neutral ground for interaction and collaboration.

The project's strategy to enhance services, engagement, and satisfaction in estate communities involves focusing on developing and revitalising these third places. By emphasising welcoming, safe, and accessible communal spaces, the project aims to encourage resident interaction, strengthen community bonds, and foster a shared sense of identity and belonging. These third places will serve as venues for leisure and relaxation. However, they will also act as platforms for community-led initiatives and events, enriching the estates' social fabric and actively empowering residents to shape their community's narrative and future.

Third place exemplar: Superkilen Park Copenhagen, Denmark

An urban park designed to promote cultural diversity and inclusion in a vibrant but complex area, Superkilen features objects and design elements from over 50 countries, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of the local community. The park is a testament to inclusive placemaking, encouraging interaction and a sense of belonging among residents.

Connection and belonging in challenging socio-economic contexts

In social housing estates facing multiple socio-economic challenges, connection and history can uniquely foster a sense of belonging and community. Memories and histories can connect people to their environment and each other, especially in areas undergoing significant change. Sharing and telling our stories can be an important way for us to make sense of life (Riessman, 2008). History and memory hold additional significance in the Australian context due to the land's rich and diverse cultural and indigenous history. Recognising and honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures is crucial in fostering a comprehensive sense of connection to country and belonging (Harrington, 2004). The deep-rooted connection of these communities to country and enduring cultural traditions enrich the communal narrative and reinforce the identity and continuity of these estates (Langton, 2023).

Storytelling and memory are also important in this context as marginalised voices often go unheard against more dominant narratives, leading to stigma as residents are excluded from practice and policy directly about them (Glucksberg, 2014; McKenzie, 2015). Consequently, storytelling and personal histories help platform unheard voices and inform change through community narratives (Harding, 2004; Hodkinson, 2020).

Furthermore, incorporating elements of the community's heritage into the design and programming of community spaces can develop a deeper connection to places in the present (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2020). This approach aligns with Belotti's (2016) findings on the impact of estate regeneration, where recalling a community's past can inform and inspire its future development.

Therefore, placemaking should incorporate resident and elder stories to create ways of knowing, hearing their truths, and capturing the communities' experience (Harding, 2004). Evidence demonstrates the value of involving residents in broader conversations about social housing policy and the importance of hearing different voices and stories (Bamberg, 2004; McKenzie, 2015). This work is not simply about hearing local stories and hearing voices. However, a much larger piece of community "truth-telling" contributes to a richer national narrative of Australia's history (Barolsky, 2023).

Moreover, community initiatives that involve residents in documenting and sharing their personal and collective histories can strengthen community ties (Blezard, 2021). These initiatives could include oral history projects, local heritage events, and community art installations that reflect the estate's history, including aspects that honour the indigenous heritage and contributions (Langton, 2023). History provides the opportunity to "return to the country," thereby immersing in Indigenous traditions and customs and drawing all residents into their community's dynamics (Palmer et al, 2006). Such projects can preserve the rich tapestry of the community's past and foster a sense of pride and belonging among residents. In this way, memory, history and Country can be transformative, turning challenges into opportunities for building stronger, more cohesive communities deeply rooted in a shared, inclusive history (Langton, 2023).

Belonging and connection exemplar: co-becoming with Jerrinja Country

The Jerrinja Country project exemplifies a profound connection between placemaking and Indigenous cultural heritage. Rooted in the principle of "house-as-home," the initiative underscores the intricate relationship between the Jerrinja people, their dwellings, and the land, known as Country. This project integrates housing designs that respect and reflect the dynamic social structures, spiritual connections, and traditional community practices, offering a sustainable development model deeply attuned to Indigenous knowledge and relational connections to Country (Penfold et al, 2021). The initiative stands as a beacon for culturally sensitive housing policy and community engagement, paving the way for future placemaking endeavours that honour and uphold the unique cultural integrity of Indigenous communities.

Housing incivilities, crime, and belonging in socio-economically challenged estates

In addressing the multifaceted challenges of socio-economically disadvantaged social housing estates, it is imperative to understand the intricate relationship between housing incivilities, crime, and resident belonging. The impact of crime and anti-social behaviour on social networks and belonging is profound, particularly in contexts where socio-economic decline exacerbates these issues.

Housing incivilities and resident wellbeing

Housing incivilities, ranging from minor disturbances to more serious anti-social behaviour, significantly affect residents' perceptions of their community. Brown et al (2003) and Rolfe & Garnham (2020) highlight that experiences of crime and the resultant lack of security can create negative perceptions of an area, impacting residents' wellbeing and sense of attachment. In socio-economically challenged estates, where resources are often scarce and social problems more prevalent, these issues can be amplified, leading to a heightened sense of insecurity and alienation among residents.

The socio-economic context and its influence on crime

Socio-economic decline often goes hand in hand with increased crime and anti-social behaviour, creating a cycle that further deteriorates the quality of life in social housing estates. Lymeropoulou and Bannister (2022) illustrate how poverty and crime are interconnected, with economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods experiencing higher rates of criminal activities. This phenomenon affects not only residents' physical safety but also their mental health, sense of belonging, and overall life satisfaction.

Impact on social networks and community cohesion

The presence of crime and housing incivilities can lead to a breakdown in social networks within communities. Brodsky et al (1999) and Popay et al (2003) point out that these adverse conditions can cause residents to withdraw socially, diminishing the community cohesion

essential for a healthy social environment. In contrast, longer-term residents may rely on established networks to cope, while newer residents, lacking these connections, might turn towards community activities for support. However, in estates where communal spaces and activities have declined, old and new residents may find themselves isolated, cutting off vital support systems.

Strategies for mitigating the impact of crime and incivilities

To counteract these negative effects, it is crucial for housing projects like "Placemaking" to implement strategies that not only address the physical manifestations of crime but also foster a sense of safety and belonging. This involves a multi-faceted approach, including enhancing physical security measures, developing supportive community networks, and providing residents with platforms to voice their concerns and participate in community-building activities (Power, 2017).

One effective strategy is developing and revitalising communal spaces, which can serve as venues for residents to engage in positive social interactions, thereby countering feelings of isolation and fear (Power, 2021). These spaces can be instrumental in rebuilding trust and fostering community among residents. Furthermore, involving residents in the decision-making process regarding security measures and community programmes can empower them, giving them a sense of ownership and control over their living environment.

Inclusive and empathetic community engagement exemplar: FISH co-design and co-build housing project, Kimberley, Australia

The FISH co-Design and co-build housing project in Kimberley sets a benchmark for inclusive and empathetic community engagement. This initiative, deeply rooted in Aboriginal community co-design principles, actively involves local communities in every phase of housing development. The project not only addresses the physical housing needs but also fosters community ownership, enhances mental health, and reduces youth incarceration, demonstrating a holistic approach to community development that respects and uplifts local cultural values and social structures (Rodd et al, 2022).

3 Building resilience through community empowerment

In addition to physical improvements, building resilience in these communities requires actively empowering residents to address their challenges. This includes supporting community-led initiatives addressing socio-economic issues, such as job training programs, educational opportunities, and health and wellness activities, including tackling substance misuse. By investing in the social capital of these communities, housing providers can help mitigate the impact of socio-economic challenges on crime and anti-social behaviour, as advocated in the 'housing plus' approach, Power (2017).

Living in "improper places" and its impact on community engagement

The concept of "improper places," articulated by Popay et al (2003), is highly relevant when considering the challenges residents face in Australian social housing. This notion pertains to the physical housing conditions and the broader context of care, safety, and belonging that defines a community. In Australia, as Mee (2009) noted, the intertwining of care and belonging plays a crucial role in how residents perceive their community and their willingness to become active members.

The decline of care and responsibility

In settings where crime and anti-social behaviour are prevalent, residents often perceive these issues as a reflection of a decline in care and responsibility within the community. This perception can lead to feelings of neglect and alienation. As Mee (2009) points out, residents may feel that others are careless, impacting their sense of security and belonging. This may be particularly relevant in New South Wales following exceptional circumstances created by the series of bushfires in 2019 and 2020, closely followed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This sentiment extends to the perceived responsibilities of social landlords, who are often expected to provide safe and orderly living environments. When these expectations are not met, it can exacerbate feelings of living in an "improper place," further detaching residents from their community. These neighbourhoods can feel "left behind", as evidenced in the research and work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'left behind' neighbourhoods (OCSI, 2019).

Stigma and the perception of "sink estates."

The stigma associated with living in priority estates, often labelled as "sink estates," plays a significant role in residents' experiences and perceptions. This stigma, rooted in societal prejudices and media portrayals, can lead to a 'tainted' perception of these communities. As Slater (2018) discusses, the entrenched narratives surrounding British social housing estates contribute to territorial stigmatisation, affecting residents' sense of identity and belonging. Living in a stigmatised area can result in a sense of shame and a desire to disassociate from the community, impacting residents' mental health and social wellbeing. This is particularly relevant in the Australian context due to the marginalisation of indigenous residents in previous placemaking projects (McGaw et al, 2011).

The cumulative effect of living in stigmatised, neglected, or improperly managed estates can significantly impact residents' engagement with both housing providers and the broader community. The feeling of being undervalued or ignored by social landlords can lead to a lack of trust and a reluctance to participate in community activities or decision-making processes. This disengagement is further compounded by the stigma attached to their living environment, creating barriers to forming constructive relationships with external agencies and even within the community.

Moreover, the challenges of engaging residents in community activities are only partially due to external perceptions. The internal dynamics within these communities, shaped by experiences of neglect and stigmatisation, can lead to a lack of motivation and capacity among residents to participate actively in communal life. This situation calls for a more empathetic and inclusive approach from social housing providers and community leaders, acknowledging residents' lived experiences and actively working to counteract the negative impacts of living in "improper places."

Storytelling to tackle stigma exemplar: 'The role of truth-telling in Australian reconciliation'.

This project, a collaboration between the Alfred Deakin Institute and Reconciliation Australia, epitomises storytelling as a tool for reconciliation. It emphasizes the power of truth-telling in acknowledging the complexity of colonial history and its ongoing impacts. By fostering community-driven truth-telling initiatives, the project aims to redress historical injustices, affirm First Nations sovereignty, and heal relationships between Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and broader Australian communities. Its focus on inclusive, local, and experiential truth-telling processes marks a significant stride toward reconciling Australia's past with its present and future (Barolsky & Berger, 2023).

Geographic boundaries and placemaking

The importance of community-defined geographic boundaries in placemaking initiatives cannot be overstated. Imposing external definitions of 'community' and 'neighbourhood' without involving residents often leads to a disconnection between policy and the lived reality of community members. Involving residents in defining the geography of their estates ensures that placemaking efforts are grounded in the community's authentic spatial and social dynamics.

Involving residents in defining the geography of their communities is not just about rectifying top-down approaches in urban planning; it is about genuinely understanding the essence of 'community' and 'neighbourhood' from those who live there. This approach tackles the barriers that often emerge when policymakers or housing providers impose their definitions of these spaces, as evidenced by the criticisms of neoliberal policy frameworks (Amin, 2005; Warr et al, 2017). Recognising the complexities and paradoxical elements of communities, often overlooked in policy, requires a deep engagement with the residents' narratives and lived experiences (Gedalof, 2018; Glucksberg, 2014).

Genuine resident involvement goes beyond formal decision-making structures, challenging the traditional power imbalances between landlords and residents (Marsh, 2018; Bradley, 2013). By moving into the 'claimed spaces' of residents, providers can engage more meaningfully, acknowledging the unique ways communities see and experience their own spaces (Muir & McMahon, 2015). This shift is crucial for any placemaking initiative, especially when aiming for inclusive and sustainable community development (Brodsky et al, 1999; Tually et al, 2020). It is about crafting policies and practices that truly resonate with the lived realities of the neighbourhoods, fostering a sense of ownership, belonging, and collective identity among the residents.

Towards inclusive and empathetic community engagement

To address these challenges, housing providers must adopt strategies that foster a sense of care, safety, and belonging. This involves improving the physical conditions of housing, actively combating stigma, promoting inclusive community activities, and facilitating open and respectful dialogues with residents. By doing so, social housing initiatives can transform these "improper places" into thriving communities where residents feel valued, supported, and motivated to improve their living environment.

Research from Chile (Otero et al, 2023), where there are sharp socio-economic divisions in housing areas, found that stigma and poor reputation of an estate affected people's sense of belonging, trust in neighbours and sociability. The reverse was true of estates with high prestige. However, the researchers found that an area's poor reputation did not prevent people from developing strong ties with other residents or joining local organisations. Indeed, they speculate that people get involved precisely to reverse the area's negative image and support each other. The work offers pointers toward a platform to build from when engaging with communities to develop social and support networks.

In redefining practices within social housing, especially in the context of this project, it is essential to integrate a perspective that emphasises prioritising resident needs and community dynamics alongside physical infrastructure, as advocated by Anne Power in 'Property Before People' and echoed in Eric Klinenberg's "Palaces for the People." This project's focus on remote estates underscores the need for solutions centred around social and people-based interventions rather than solely on property improvements.

Strategies for mitigating the impact of crime and incivilities exemplar: [The Yiriman Project, Kimberley, Australia](#)

The Yiriman Project was conceived by the elders of the Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri, and Walmajarri language groups, this initiative addresses profound concerns like youth self-harm and substance abuse. By orchestrating back-to-country trips, the project facilitates a profound reconnection of youth with their cultural roots, promoting healing, resilience, and cultural continuity. It employs 'back-to-country' trips, aiming to distance young people from negative influences and promote cultural reconnection. The project prioritises cultural education and land care, intending to cultivate resilience and address issues like crime and incivilities among Indigenous youth (Palmer, 2013).

4 Balancing physical and social infrastructure

The concept of social infrastructure, as explored by Klinenberg, highlights the significance of shared spaces and communal resources in fostering strong, resilient communities. Third places such as parks, community centres, and other communal areas play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for residents. These spaces are not just physical entities but are vital components of a community's social fabric, offering opportunities for interaction, engagement, and the development of social networks. Establishing robust social infrastructure becomes even more critical in remote and isolated estates, where residents might face greater challenges in accessing services and amenities.

Prioritising resident wellbeing and engagement

Adopting a resident-based approach involves recognising the intrinsic value of each individual in the community and understanding their unique needs and aspirations. This perspective aligns with the project's aim to develop solutions grounded in the realities of residents' lives, ensuring their voices are heard and their experiences are reflected in the decision-making process. It also involves creating environments where residents can thrive, not just survive, with a focus on enhancing social cohesion, safety, and a sense of belonging.

Community wellbeing exemplar: Cooperative Housing Model, Catalonia, Spain

Catalonia's Grant-of-Use cooperative housing model exemplifies collaborative solutions by integrating shared ownership, collective living, and democratic decision-making. This model emphasises community solidarity, affordability, and mutual support, promoting a sense of belonging and stability. It effectively addresses housing affordability while fostering community wellbeing, showcasing a model that's adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to the collective needs of its members (Reyes et al, 2022).

Leading to resident involvement

As we discuss the importance of resident involvement, it becomes clear that a people-centric approach is not just a philosophical stance but a practical necessity. By placing residents at the heart of social housing initiatives, the project can cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility among the community members. This involvement goes beyond mere consultation; it empowers residents to shape their living environment actively, contribute to community development, and create solutions that address their needs and challenges. The project will improve the estates' physical aspects and nurture the community spirit, ensuring sustainable and meaningful change in social housing practices.

Resident involvement in social housing transcends mere participation; it fosters a profound sense of belonging and community cohesion. When residents actively shape their living environments, they instil a shared ownership, strengthening the community's social fabric (Preece, 2019; Muir & McMahon, 2015). This involvement, particularly in defining community boundaries and scrutinising housing policies, ensures that residents' voices are heard and

become a driving force in community development, challenging the conventional narratives of power and engagement (Bradley, 2013; Hickman, 2006).

The pivotal role of resident-led scrutiny in social housing emerges as a cornerstone of empowering communities. This approach fosters a paradigm shift from traditional, top-down management to a more inclusive model where residents are stakeholders and active participants in decision-making processes. Drawing from diverse studies and reports, it is evident that genuine resident involvement, particularly in scrutiny roles, offers significant benefits. It enhances service quality and accountability (Central & Cecil, 2014; Tower Hamlets Homes, 2015) and aligns housing services more closely with residents' needs and aspirations (Hickman & Preece, 2016; Alleyne, 2002; Bradley, 2013). By embracing resident-led scrutiny, housing providers can cultivate a more transparent, responsive, and, ultimately, more resilient community structure. This approach resonates with the project's commitment to placemaking, emphasising the importance of community voices in shaping their living spaces and fostering a sense of ownership and belonging (Brodsky et al, 1999; Tually et al, 2020; Muir & McMahon, 2015). It challenges the traditional power dynamics, advocating for a more equitable and inclusive form of community engagement, where resident insights and experiences drive the regeneration and improvement of social housing estates.

Resident engagement exemplar: [Department of Housing in Częstochowa, Poland.](#)

A research project considered residents' attitudes to social innovation in the management of municipal housing. The project evidenced and advocated for a model to ensure residents are involved in decision making and day to day management of public housing. Through initiatives like debt restructuring, counteracting social exclusion, and fostering tenant participation, the innovations not only met residents' housing needs but also strengthened social bonds and enhanced the quality of life for city residents.

Fostering collaborative solutions in marginalised communities

The culmination of this project's focus on placemaking in marginalised communities and estates with socio-economic challenges lies in the pivotal role of collaboration with residents. Authentic engagement with community members, particularly in indigenous communities, is beneficial and essential for developing relevant and sustainable solutions. This approach ties back to earlier discussions on local history and connection to country, recognising the importance of these elements in fostering a deep sense of belonging and community identity.

Residents of social housing in Wales told HQN (HQN, 2019) that the key ingredients for successful engagement were 'listening', 'communication', 'trust', 'transparency' and 'honesty'. Tenants wanted to be properly informed and to have the chance to give their views, object if necessary, and have a genuinely open discussion. Customer-facing staff and senior managers were also interviewed. The report noted: 'Repeated references to authenticity, genuineness, commitment and honesty suggest that residents and professionals alike want to see organisations being open to dialogue, committed to it, and committed to making the changes that residents feel are needed. That will involve some power sharing and compromise.'

Cultural sensitivity and inclusion in placemaking and housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

In addressing the placemaking and housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is imperative to adopt a culturally sensitive and inclusive approach. This sensitivity extends beyond mere acknowledgement, embracing the principles of Aboriginal community control. It involves walking alongside Aboriginal communities, truly listening and responding to their needs, and letting these communities guide the pace and direction of projects (Penfold et al, 2021).

The fundamental role of housing as a contributor to the health and wellbeing of individuals is well-recognised. For First Nations people, housing quality, quantity, and affordability determine living conditions and broader social and economic participation. Historical experiences and the ongoing impacts of colonisation have notably influenced these communities' housing situations and conditions, warranting a dedicated and sensitive approach to policy making and community engagement (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare of the Australian Government, 2023).

Placemaking in the Australian context should recognise the profound significance of "returning to country," understanding the impact of trauma and displacement, and respecting cultural practices in placemaking (Penfold et al, 2021). Communities face challenges from socioeconomic disparities, historical stigmatisation, and a lack of representation, which influence the housing situation and conditions, emphasising the need for a dedicated approach to policymaking and community engagement (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare of the Australian Government, 2023). Therefore, creating a sense of belonging necessitates a deliberate approach to placemaking that respects the rich tapestry of cultural heritage and complex history. This approach is not prescriptive but adaptive, honouring the community's pace and allowing them to shape their environment's physical and social fabric (Proudfoot, 2021; FISH, 2020). Engaging residents as participants and leaders in the design and development process ensures that these spaces resonate with their experiences and aspirations, thus empowering residents, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds (Bailey et al, 2012; Mee, 2009).

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap highlights the importance of aligning housing with the priorities and needs of First Nations people, setting targets to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized, non-overcrowded housing. This approach underscores the necessity of embedding cultural understanding and respect in housing initiatives to ensure they are both physically adequate and culturally consonant (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare of Australian Government, 2023).

The integration of culturally responsive housing policies is paramount. Housing policies and placemaking initiatives must be based on community needs and developed in close consultation with Aboriginal people, recognising each community's unique cultures, needs, and priorities. This involves moving beyond traditional Western nuclear family models in housing design, ensuring compliance with the Building Code of Australia, and embedding social procurement policies to provide meaningful and sustainable training and employment opportunities for local communities. Importantly, the success of any Aboriginal policy should be measured in ways that reflect Aboriginal cultural connections to country and kinship rather

than non-Aboriginal values of individualism and materialism (The Conversation, 2021). The project aims to support registered providers in developing environments that are physically accommodating and deeply attuned to the social and cultural rhythms of the communities they serve. These spaces should serve as platforms for community interaction, cultural expression, and mutual support, thus fostering a robust sense of belonging. By embracing these principles, the project supports providers in developing cohesive communities where all residents feel valued, connected, and engaged regardless of their background.

In conclusion, culturally sensitive placemaking and housing initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are about constructing physical structures and fostering community resilience, hope, and prosperity. By honouring cultural values, engaging communities in decision-making, and addressing broader socioeconomic determinants, such initiatives can contribute significantly to closing the gap and improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life outcomes.

Cultural exemplar: [Budj Bim cultural landscape, Victoria, Australia](#)

The area of Budi Bim is around 30,000 years old which has been returned to its traditional owners, the Gunditjmara. The basis of the current sustainable development began in 2002 through the Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project, the Budj Bim Rangers Program and the Budj Bim Sustainable Development Partnership. The extensive work acknowledges the land management of the Gunditjmara. The site has since achieved a World Heritage Nomination and is managed by the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

Importance of resident-led approaches

Incorporating resident perspectives in the decision-making process goes beyond mere consultation. It involves empowering residents as active agents in shaping their living environment. This is particularly pertinent in indigenous communities, where understanding and respecting local knowledge and cultural heritage is crucial for successful intervention. Engaging residents in a manner that acknowledges their history and experiences ensures that solutions are grounded in the realities of those who live in these communities.

While research explicitly linking tenant choices in their homes to broader community engagement remains limited, insights from Arnstein's ladder of participation and the third-order construct model of community trust suggest a strong foundational relationship. Granting tenants simple choices, such as paint colour or minor environmental works, can build trust and foster relationships (Arnstein, 1969; Greenwood, 2007). This empowerment in decision-making over their immediate living environment may lead to heightened feelings of autonomy and belonging, subsequently enhancing place attachment and neighbourhood responsibility. As suggested by theories of trust and safety, these incremental choices, though seemingly minor, could significantly contribute to reinforcing tenant-provider relationships, thereby catalysing more profound and sustained community engagement (Yuval Davis, 2006; Brodsky et al, 1999; Leviten-Reid et al, 2020; Preece, 2020). Incorporating tenant choice as part

of a 'slow work' approach in community research and development could be instrumental in nurturing trust and fostering deeper engagement. Allowing tenants simple choices in their homes, aligned with the principles of slow community work (Crow, 2000), can gradually build confidence and facilitate more open dialogue. This gradual, thoughtful approach can enhance feelings of autonomy, place attachment, and belonging, potentially leading to more robust community engagement and a sense of shared responsibility in neighbourhood development.

The model below, taken from work with HQN and the Regulatory Board for Wales, depicts the importance of balance between learning, action, culture, trust, and respect in successful resident involvement.

Figure 1: Successful resident involvement wheel chart (HQN, 2019)



Resident voice exemplar: "Tenants at the Heart" HQN for the Regulatory Board for Wales:

The "Tenants at the Heart" review by the Regulatory Board for Wales exemplifies a commitment to ensuring tenant voices are not just heard but also acted upon. The review advocates for a shift from traditional, top-down approaches to more collaborative, tenant-led strategies. By emphasising the importance of genuine dialogue, transparency, and trust, it underlines the critical role tenants play in shaping policies, services, and the overall direction of housing associations, ensuring that their insights and needs are integral to decision-making processes.

Best practices and positive examples

Best practice examples worldwide demonstrate the effectiveness of community-led, resident-focused approaches to placemaking. Initiatives that have actively involved residents in planning and implementation phases have achieved more sustainable outcomes and fostered stronger community ties and a sense of ownership among participants. For instance, projects that have integrated cultural practices and local traditions in their development plans have seen higher resident satisfaction and engagement levels.

Although some examples have been identified through the literature review, the purpose of this document was to provide the project with an understanding of relevant theory and literature. The research side of the project will now aim to draw out more practical and real-world examples to supplement this review.

5 Concluding thoughts

This literature review has systematically navigated the multifaceted dimensions of social housing, underscoring the profound influence of placemaking, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity on the wellbeing and satisfaction of residents, particularly in New South Wales, Australia. The review accentuates the pivotal role of social landlords in not only providing shelter but also in shaping vibrant, inclusive communities. It highlights the transformative power of resident involvement, the significance of communal spaces ('third places'), and the essence of balancing physical improvements with nurturing the social fabric of housing estates.

The intertwining themes of resident involvement, the importance of physical and social infrastructure, and the need for a holistic approach to social housing development were evident throughout the review. By focusing on strategies that enhance the physical conditions of housing and the social dynamics within communities, the project aims to create environments where residents feel connected, supported, and actively involved in shaping their community's narrative and future. It emphasises the paramount importance of culturally informed housing policies and practices that are not merely structurally sound but deeply respectful of the unique cultural heritage, needs, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This perspective reinforces the project's commitment to fostering housing solutions that are physically accommodating, socially empowering, and culturally consonant.

In conclusion, this literature review and the project advocate for a comprehensive, resident-centred approach to social housing. By embracing a synergy of physical infrastructure enhancement, robust community engagement, and a profound respect for cultural heritage, the project aspires to transform social housing estates into thriving, cohesive communities. These communities will provide shelter and foster a sense of belonging, empowerment, and shared prosperity, making them true catalysts for community empowerment and sustainable development.

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