UNDER-SUPPLY OF SCHOOLING IN THE GENTRIFIED AND REGENERATED INNER CITY

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(2016) 56 *Cities* 16
[2018] *UNSWLRS* 66

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Under-supply of schooling in the gentrified and regenerated inner city

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Abstract

Governments and planners in the Global North are increasingly faced with the challenge of providing services for growing numbers of families in the inner city. Rather than quitting the city, couples are staying to raise children in gentrified, working class housing or in new medium and high density developments built pursuant to policies of urban consolidation and renewal. Difficulties have arisen when parents discover that inner city schools do not meet their expectations either in terms of quality or quantity. Problems with quantity are a consequence of government failing to anticipate the presence of families in new high density developments, particularly marked in Australia where apartments have never been considered appropriate housing for families. This article explores the actual and projected presence of children in inner Sydney and the pressure this has placed on school places. The government's ability to anticipate school demand is complicated by neoliberal education policies of rationalisation and 'school choice', which have reduced the number of inner city schools and created unpredictable movement of families between schools. Parent lobby groups have now forced the government to plan new schools, which is proving a complicated and expensive exercise in the high density, high value urban core. The conclusion of the research is that inner urban redevelopment must include sufficient public space and infrastructure not only for schools in the immediate future, but also for adaptive reuse for other, perhaps equally unanticipated, needs in the longer-term.

Keywords: urban regeneration; gentrification; high density housing; education; 'school choice'

Introduction

A significant challenge facing cities in the 21st century in the Global North is the provision of infrastructure and services to meet the needs of increasing numbers of families living in the inner city. Traditional visions of family life centred on the separation of women and children from the overcrowded, commerce-driven city, and their relocation in spacious, safe, quasi-rural suburbs. As a consequence, infrastructure that served families, in particular schools, was constructed in suburban, rather than inner urban areas. From the late 20th century onwards, many cities witnessed the growth in couples eschewing suburbia, and choosing to remain in the inner city to raise families, taking advantage of the city's services, cafes, restaurants, cultural life, and proximity to work (Karsten, 2003; Boterman et al., 2010; Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Rowe, 2014; DeSena, 2006; Gulson, 2011; Lilius, 2014). As these families are a subset of the gentrifying 'creative class' (Florida, 2005), some cities have implemented policies to entice middle-class families back to the inner city to aid urban revitalisation (Van Den Berg, 2013; Goodsell, 2013).

Inner city families are typically residents of two distinct forms of housing; older housing stock in which they have invested time and money improving (Butler et al., 2013; Boterman et al., 2010), or new, often high rise developments, built pursuant to government policies of urban regeneration and consolidation (Karsten, 2003; Boterman et al., 2010; Whitzman & Mizrachi., 2012; Van Den Berg, 2013; Lilius, 2014).

While families who make the city their home value the city's commercial and cultural life, tensions have arisen when middle-class parents discover that services and infrastructure do not meet their expectations in either *quality* or *quantity*. Perceived problems with *quality* often arise in relation to schools, and amongst parents who have moved into established neighbourhoods. There will be existing schools, but middle class parents are anxious about the quality of education, the physical condition of the school, as well as the social background and family values of their children's peers. Middle class parents seek to solve these perceived problems through a range of strategies. Initially, parents opt out of the local school system sending their children to private schools or out of area public schools, but gradually, they 'shop' for schools within their local area (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Butler et al., 2013; DeSena, 2006; Gulson, 2011), engage in collective efforts to change local schools through parent involvement (Butler et al., 2013; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013), and/or work towards the creation of new schools (DeSena, 2006; Davis & Oakley, 2013). As parents' investment in the local area increases over time, they seem more inclined to exercise

a ‘voice’ rather than an ‘exit’ strategy (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Gulson, 2011) to solve the inner city school ‘problem’.

Problems with *quantity*, or the very existence of school services and infrastructure, have typically arisen in new inner city developments because governments and planners have not anticipated that families would choose this form of housing. In Amsterdam, a large-scale regeneration of the inner city occurred with ‘under-planning’ of childcare and schools, with one school resorting to a floating classroom on water to address its lack of space, (Karsten, 2003). In Stockholm, a large, state-led inner city redevelopment became the subject of intense media criticism when the target market, older couples downsizing from the suburbs, did not move into the development, but rather families with young children, leading to belated planning for school places, (Lilius, 2014). Lower Manhattan (MCB1, 2010) has experienced sharp rises in residential development, with corresponding, but not anticipated increased school demand. Like Hong Kong (Chan, 2001), Lower Manhattan has struggled to physically locate schools in an intensely high density, high land value environment. In Australia, the gentrification of inner Melbourne has led to a long-running campaign for a local, public high school (Rowe, 2014), and in Vancouver, poster-child for compact urbanism, many downtown schools are struggling to meet demand. The phenomenon of under-provision of schools in areas of new urban regeneration is illustrated by this admission from the Chair of the Vancouver School Board’s planning and facilities committee:

> The changes in neighbourhood densities caught us a bit off guard. We’ve been surprised by the number of families with school-aged children deciding to stay and live in the downtown core. They used to start in the city and move to the suburbs, but that’s not always the case anymore (Powers, 2013).

This article explores an absence of school planning in the context of gentrification and high density urban regeneration of the City of Sydney, the local council area encompassing Sydney’s Central Business District and immediately adjacent suburbs. The article contrasts developer and government resistance to apartments as family housing and consistent ‘child-blindness’ in planning, with the actual and projected presence of children in apartments in the City of Sydney. It then explores the ‘complexity and messiness’ of education practices in inner Sydney (Gulson, 2011, p94), in the context of neoliberal policies of rationalisation and ‘school choice’, along with education department assumptions about the presence and school preferences of families in medium and high density housing. Finally, it documents two flashpoints of schooling under-supply in the inner city where intense parent lobbying led to

decisions to open new schools, highlighting the logistic and financial challenges of new school construction in high value, high density urban cores.

The article seeks to add to literature on the presence of families in the gentrified and regenerated inner city and the difficulties governments have had anticipating their presence and service needs. In highlighting these challenges, the research establishes the need to accurately acknowledge the presence of families in non-traditional medium and high density housing, inside and beyond the urban core, and to anticipate, rather than retrospectively identify, their needs when building cities.

Methodology

The research was conducted through a review of policy documents, government reports and statistical data on housing development, demographics and school enrolment in the local council area of the City of Sydney over the past 25 years. As Australia has a three tiered system of government – Federal, State and local government – with education in the domain of State government and housing in the domain of both State and local governments, State and local government data and policies were the focus of research. One author attended a community meeting between the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and local parents, and a public, online parent discussion was monitored. This discussion was established by a private research company, Straight Talk, which was engaged by DEC to conduct a community consultation on inner city schooling. Written reports produced by Straight Talk on community, Parents and Citizens and local principal meetings were also read (DEC, 2014a). Both authors attended a meeting with staff of the City of Sydney Council. Media articles on the inner city school 'crisis' were read and the public statements of a parent lobby group, CLOSE - Community for Local Options for Secondary Education, were monitored. International research on the intersection of education, gentrification and urban regeneration was reviewed to identify consistencies between emerging problems in education provision in Sydney and other cities that have experienced gentrification and/or regeneration in their urban core.

Setting the scene: Families will not and should not live in apartments

For the entire 20th century the 'Australian dream' was the freehold ownership of a detached house on a quarter acre block in the suburbs (Davison, 1993). The 'dream' was championed by all governments, so much so that an antipathy to apartment living, particularly for families, developed to a level that bordered on paranoia. Apartments were said to 'destroy family life' and not be 'conducive to morality' (Dwyer, 1909, as cited in Butler-Bowdon &

Pickett, 2007). Although apartment construction boomed, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne in the post-War period (Butler-Bowden & Picket, 2007) and in the late 20th century in Australia's five major cities pursuant to policies of urban consolidation (Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2002; Queensland Department of Infrastructure and Planning, 2009; NSW Department of Planning, 2010; South Australia Department of Planning and Local Government, 2010; WA Department of Planning, 2010), assumptions on the part of governments and developers about the unsuitability of apartments for families persisted (Easthope & Tice, 2011; Fincher, 2004). The vast majority of apartments in Australia are one- and two-bedroom, in contrast to the vast majority of detached houses which have three or more bedrooms (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). As Woolcock et al. (2010, p. 183) note:

> Planners are planning for cities to accommodate singles, couples and the elderly. As far as the planners are concerned, family housing is already oversupplied in this new ageing city and needs little encouragement. As a consequence, contemporary strategic planning has almost become child-blind, with the new higher density centres being built essentially for the childless in mind.

The assumption that family housing is 'oversupplied' is based on an orthodoxy in Australian housing policy that owing to marked increases in smaller households, there is a 'mismatch' between existing housing stock and household size resulting in significant 'underutilisation' of properties; as a result, smaller households should be encouraged to relocate to smaller properties resulting in a more efficient housing allocation (Batten, 1999). The 'mismatch' argument has been criticised (Maher, 1995; Batten, 1999), with evidence that smaller households in Australia do not necessarily want, or choose, to live in smaller dwellings (Yates. 2001; Wulff et al., 2004), and that older couples do not consider their homes 'under-utilised'. They have not 'down-sized', making their homes available for younger families, (Judd et al., 2010), limiting the supply of detached homes in established suburbs. Sydney is also one of the least affordable housing markets in the world, ranking third after Hong Kong and Vancouver, in a survey of 378 markets (Demographia, 2014). Regardless of government and planners assumptions about where families *should* live, many families could not buy or rent a detached house or townhouse, even if they wanted to, pushing them into the apartment market, (Easthope & Tice, 2011, p. 431).

In greater Sydney a quarter of all households living in apartments have children compared to just over half of all households living in a separate house.[1] Some aging apartment stock at the lower end of the rental private market is occupied by recent migrant families with young children (Randolph, 2006), and growing numbers of families now live in Sydney's new apartment stock, built primarily for singles and couples pursuant to policies of urban consolidation and regeneration. For example, in one redeveloped industrial site in Sydney's inner west, the Sydney Olympic Park renewal site, there was a relatively rapid shift in the profile of residents, with the proportion of couple families with children jumping from 13% to 31%, and couples without children falling from 46% to 36%, in the years 2001-2006 (Easthope & Tice, 2011). The income profile of residents dropped, with evidence that many lower income families from surrounding suburbs dominated by older apartments were 'trading up' into the near-new apartments. Easthope and Tice argue that the trend in Sydney Olympic Park is indicative of a broader trend in the apartment market, with important implications for urban planning and service delivery, (Easthope & Tice, 2011). Irrespective of government and developer assumptions about apartments not being appropriate for families, there will be a significant sub-market of lower income families in Sydney's near new apartment stock, who will have service needs that differ from the target market of couples and singles.

Children in the City of Sydney

In the context of state government policies of urban consolidation, the City of Sydney has been described as a 'star performer' (Randolph, 2008, p12). Construction of high density apartments has increased the City's residential population dramatically, from 104,000 in 1991 to 182,000 in 2011 (.id, n.d. a) and 2,000 new apartments are planned to be built every year until 2036 (.id, 2013a), with the City's population predicted to reach 280,964 in 2036 (.id, 2013b). Areas like the Ultimo-Pyrmont peninsular have been completely transformed. At the turn of the 20th century, the peninsular had a population of 30,000, but with the decline of waterfront industry, this dropped to less than 2,000 by the 1970s (Sant & Jackson, 1991). Ultimo-Pyrmont was the subject of a state government urban regeneration project in the

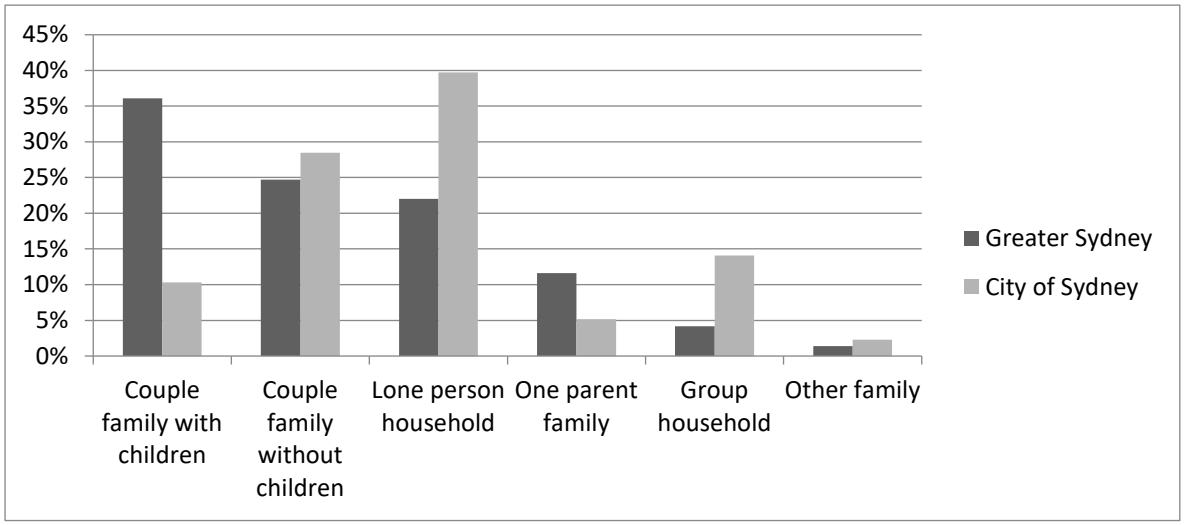
[1] In 2011, 28.0% of all households living in a flat, unit or apartment were family households with children while 55.5% of households in other dwellings (including detached houses and townhouses) were family households with children (Troy et al. 2015, p. 6).

1990s and over 8,000 high density apartments were constructed, along with open space and harbour access (SHFA, 2004), bringing the population back to 20,000.

While 70% of the City's housing is now high density, 25% is medium density, low-rise terrace housing, concentrated around the edges of the City and into the suburbs beyond (.id, n.d. b). Much of this housing stock has been gentrified in the past thirty years (Darcy, 2000; Gulson, 2007; Gulson, 2011). In regards to tenure, 8% of the City's housing is social housing, 33% is owner occupied, and the remainder is privately rented (.id, n.d. c).

Inner-city housing is predominantly occupied by sole persons or couples without children (see Figure 1) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c). However, children are present and their numbers are increasing. In 2011 there were 13,888 children aged 0-17 years in the City of Sydney, making up 8% of the population (see Figure 2)[2], half (56%) of whom were of school age (aged 5-17) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). Families living in the inner city are more affluent than those in Greater Sydney as a whole, with 46 per cent of families in the City and Inner South having a weekly income of $2,000 or more per week, compared to 37 per cent across the entire greater metropolitan area (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).[3]

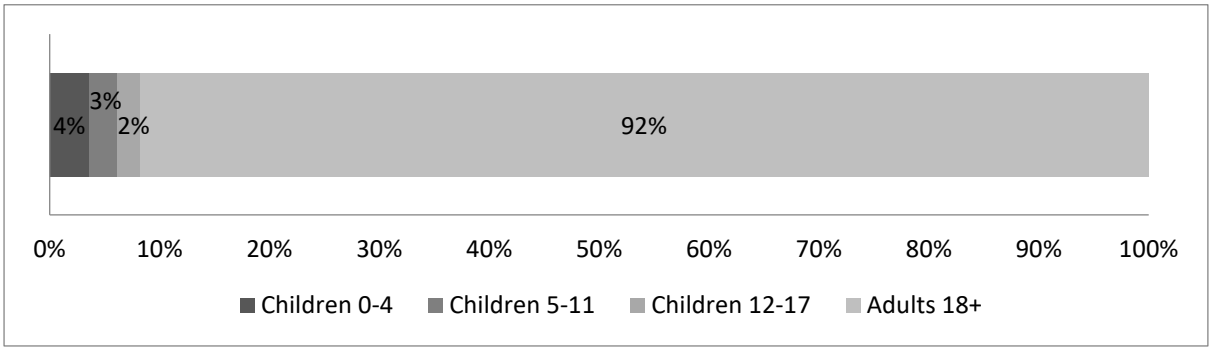
Figure 1: Household Type, Greater Metropolitan Sydney and City of Sydney LGA, 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012c)



[2] Figures in Figure 2 add to 9% due to rounding.

[3] Total Family Income (weekly) is the sum of total personal incomes (weekly) of each family member present in the household on Census night. Family income applies to classifiable families in occupied private dwellings. It is not applicable to non-family households such as group households or lone person households or to people in non-private dwellings.

Figure 2: Age of Residents, City of Sydney LGA, 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b)



However, current Department of Planning and Environment figures predict the number of couples with children to increase by 73% by 2031 and single parent families to increase by 87%. This is in contrast to single person and couple households, which are predicted to only grow by 62% and 41% respectively (see Table 1). While lone person households will still make up the bulk of the growth in new households, households with children are expected to grow faster than any other household type over the period.

Table 1: New South Wales Local Government Area Household and Implied Dwelling Projections: 2014, Sydney LGA (NSW Department of Planning & Environment, 2014)

Household type	Number of households					Total change	Total % change	Household type growth as a proportion of all growth in households
	2011	2016	2021	2026	2031			
Couple with children	7,850	9,600	11,300	12,600	13,600	5,750	73%	12%
Single parent	4,350	5,250	6,300	7,250	8,150	3,800	87%	8%
Couple only	20,550	23,250	25,450	27,150	29,050	8,500	41%	18%
Other family household	1,600	1,650	1,750	1,850	1,900	300	19%	1%
Multiple family household	1,800	2,100	2,300	2,450	2,650	850	47%	2%
Lone person	41,400	48,000	54,800	61,050	67,250	25,850	62%	53%
Group	14,800	15,600	16,600	17,300	18,150	3,350	23%	7%
TOTAL	**92,300**	**105,400**	**118,500**	**129,650**	**140,750**	**48,450**	**52%**	**100%**

It is important to note that these figures may be an underestimation as commercial and government demographers calculate projected numbers of families in the inner city on an assumption that most families will seek housing opportunities elsewhere. Firstly, as noted in the introduction, overseas research has demonstrated a growing class of couples who do not quit the inner city with the formation of families (Karsten, 2003; Boterman, et al., 2010; Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Rowe, 2014; DeSena, 2006; Lilius, 2014), a trend that has also been documented in Sydney (Gulson, 2011). Second, despite developer and government assumptions about household composition in new high rise apartments, research shows that in other areas of Sydney, families are living in these developments, often as a 'second wave' of residents (Easthope & Tice, 2011; Randolph et al., 2007). Finally, the intense tensions around school supply described below are clear evidence of the presence of families in the inner city who have not sought housing opportunities elsewhere.

Intersection of inner city housing choice, school rationalisation and 'school choice'

As a result of the 'child-blindness' in urban redevelopment new apartment construction in the City of Sydney occurred without the addition of a single school. On the contrary, consistent with neo-liberal policies of rationalisation in education experienced in other cities in the same period (Basu, 2007; Gulson, 2011), initial urban regeneration in the City of Sydney coincided with the closure of multiple inner-urban schools, within the City of Sydney and in adjacent suburbs (Gulson, 2011).[4]

In 2001, the then Department of Education and Training (DET) released *Building the Future – An education plan for inner Sydney*, which aimed to address the 50% decline in inner city school enrolments between 1984 and 2001. The decline was partly a consequence of a 30 year, state-wide drop in government secondary school enrolment from 75% to 65% (Legislative Council, 2003, p. 41). Australia traditionally has a much higher proportion of students in non-government schools than the United Kingdom or United States (Campbell & Sherrington 2004; Crump and Slee 2005), and private schools receive substantial public funding. DET acknowledged that there would be strong population growth in the inner city but insisted that 'large population increases in inner city medium density housing lead only to marginal demand for school enrolment, and in some cases a declining demand' (DET, 2001). DET argued that the 'inner city must utilise its capital resources more effectively' and that

[4] Schooling in Australia is provided at State, not local government level, and thus a child's local school will not necessarily be in the local council area in which they live.

closure and sale of schools was necessary to fund schools in other parts of the state (DET, 2001).

The Report resulted in intense public outcry and a Parliamentary inquiry was held in which some of the demographic assumptions of DET were questioned. Evidence was given by Professor Burnley, UNSW and Dr (now Professor) Phibbs, University of Sydney, both of whom stressed the difficulty of predicting future inner Sydney demographics, because of the uncertainty about the amount of development that would occur and uncertainty about who might live in that development, (Legislative Council, 2003, p. 52). Professor Burnley referred to family preference for detatched houses, but noted that preference may be mediated by price.

On the question of rationalising and consolidating school places, Dr Phibbs said that:

> Given that the area under consideration is going to the location of the largest urban regeneration project in the history of the nation, the logic of committing funds to a reconfiguration of schools when the likely school numbers in the year 2015 is at best likely to be an educated guess, does not strike me as prudent planning, (Legislative Council, 2003, p. 153).

As a consequence of the Inquiry, two schools remained open (those with the most vocal middle-class parent support), but in subsequent years, multiple inner city schools merged, closed, or became partially selective specialist schools. Some sites were sold. Further, all schools were profoundly affected by another educational policy change implemented at the same time, on a state wide basis: 'school choice'.

'School choice' policies have been adopted in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia on the neo-liberal conviction that education can be improved by allowing parents to 'vote with their feet'. Schools are forced to compete with each other and theoretically raise their standards accordingly (Goldhaber, 1999; Angus, 2015). School choice has been widely discussed in educational literature (Goldhaber, 1999), and increasingly in housing literature as there is a fundamental connection between where children live and where they attend school (Croft, 2004). School choice theory is open to multiple criticisms, *inter alia* that middle class parents, with financial and social capital, are most able to exercise choice (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Butler et al., 2013; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; Gulson, 2011; Angus, 2015), and that choices are frequently not well informed, but based on inaccurate 'grapevine' myths (Croft, 2004).

To enhance school 'choice', New South Wales implemented a system of 'partial zoning' which entitled parents to send their children to their local 'zoned' public school, but allowed them to apply to other schools 'out of area' (Gulson, 2007). Specialist and academically selective high schools were dezoned entirely, and increased greatly in number, as did junior and senior campuses (Campbell & Sherrington, 2004).

Consistent with overseas experience, school choice in New South Wales has had questionable benefits. Ironically, these policies narrow choice for many families as specialised and academically selective schools are only a choice for families whose children can gain entry. Among comprehensive schools, acceptance of 'out of area' students has led to over- and under-subscription, creating the impression that some schools are 'good schools', while others are 'bad' (Angus, 2015; Stacey, 2015). School 'league' tables lend legitimacy to these characterisations, despite consistent academic criticism of tables both in Australia and overseas (Lingard, 2010; Angus, 2015). However, perhaps the clearest consequences of school choice policies in New South Wales, and overseas, is the generation of widespread parent anxiety, particularly at secondary level, amongst middle class parents (Campbell et al., 2009).

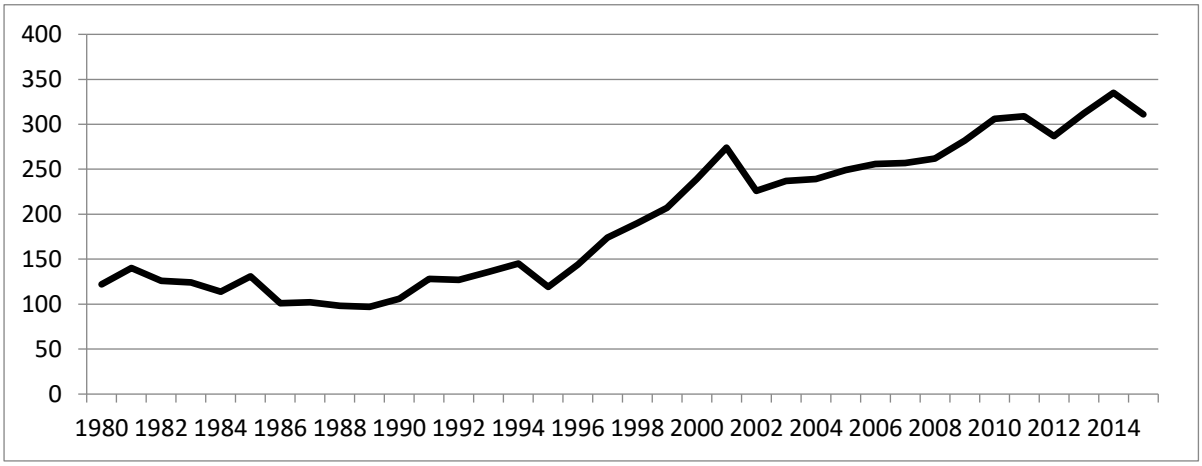
Sydney's Inner City School 'Crisis'

Within this 'complexity and messiness' in education policy processes and practices in inner Sydney (Gulson, 2011, p. 94), two flashpoints in relation to the under-provision of public education have emerged.

The first centres on Ultimo Primary School, the single government school servicing the Ultimo-Pyrmont peninsular. As noted above, the peninsular was the site of a large-scale state government urban regeneration project with the construction of 8,000 apartments, bringing the population of the area back to 20,000 from a low of 2,000 in the 1970s. High density apartments now constitute 80% of housing stock in Ultimo (.id, n.d. e) and 90% in Pyrmont (.id, n.d. f). While the government promoted various aspects of infrastructure accompanying the regeneration, there was no reference to schools (SHFA, 2004), likely a result of long-standing assumptions that children do not live in apartments. For example, *Building the Future* supported its recommendation for the closure of inner city schools with the statement that urban consolidation resulted in 'low levels of student generation…exemplified by…the Ultimo Peninsula [where] over 3,250 units have yielded a net increase of 94 students in primary government school enrolments' (DET, 2001). The difficulty with this reasoning is

that it does not consider raw increases in numbers of children (as opposed to proportion of population), with reference to school capacity. Ultimo Primary School is an older, low-rise school on an approximately 5000 square metre site and a net increase of 94 students was a 34% increase in enrolments. The School's enrolments had been steadily declining until 1989 when they began to rise again; 1989 marks roughly a decade of consistent gentrification of inner Sydney (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Student Enrolments, Ultimo Public School, 1980-2015 (source: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2015)



The high density redevelopment of the peninsular began in 1994 and once the apartments were occupied, the School's enrolments jumped almost every year, with the notable exception of 2002, when the entire school was bussed daily to the other side of the city while the school was refurbished. With just over 300 students, the school is currently at capacity.

Media reports, as well as the School's Annual Report (UPS, 2014), reveal that Ultimo Primary School has been the site of a decade long struggle between parents and DEC over the inadequacy of the School. In 2014 negotiations for the purchase of a new site for a 1000 student school by DEC from the City of Sydney collapsed over an inability to reach agreement on price – the Department had offered $74 million for a site whose market value was close to $120 million (McKenny, 2014a). An agreement was finally reached in early 2015, but DEC subsequently withdrew, citing the prohibitive cost of environmental remediation (Smith, 2015). DEC now plans to redevelop the existing site with a high rise school, a plan that had been floated initially, only to be met with intense parent objection.

If the existing site is redeveloped, the commercial or residential value of the airspace could be exploited. Mixed land use is common practice in high density cities, including public-private redevelopments. As Siemiatycki (2015, p. 232) notes, a 'high rise development boom

generates vast wealth from additional building height and density that may be partially captured by government and applied for public infrastructure'. Although faced with initial community resistance, public schools now occupy podiums below residential towers in Toronto (Siemiatycki 2015) and Manhattan (Ouroussoff 2011). While the management of multi-owned, mixed use sites is complex, New South Wales has specific legislation to assist cost-sharing and regulation of shared space (Sherry, 2013).

The second flashpoint of parental dissatisfaction with school supply has been in the north east of the City in Surry Hills and Darlinghurst where dissatisfaction has centred on the absence of a comprehensive government high school. The area is unusual because it has never had a comprehensive government high school. In the first half of the twentieth century, high school matriculation was limited and needs were met by selective government and private schools. Once high school matriculation increased in the post-War period, inner city suburbs were in decline and comprehensive government high schools were built further from the city.

Unlike Ultimo-Pyrmont, the Surry Hills-Darlinghurst area has a mix of medium and high density housing, although the latter has increased sharply in recent years to over 50%. Without further research, it is not possible to say whether parents lobbying for a new government high school are residents of new apartments or gentrifiers of existing housing, or a combination of the two.

However, two points are clear: between 2001 and 2011, there was a steady increase in couples with children in the area, and a shift in parental preference at primary school level, away from Catholic and independent (private) schools, in Surry Hills (.id. n.d. g) and Darlinghurst (.id. n.d. h). For example, in 2001 the proportion of primary school students in independent schools in Surry Hills and Darlinghurst was 20% and 27% respectively, but by 2011, those figures had dropped to 13% and 15%.The proportion of students in Catholic primary schools remained steady at 11% in Darlinghurst but dropped from 14% to 8% in Surry Hills. Between 2001 and 2011 the proportion of students in government primary schools increased in Darlinghurst from 60% to 73% and in Surry Hills from 65% to 78%. Between 2006 and 2015, Bourke St Primary School in Surry Hills jumped from 57 enrolments to 301, and Darlinghurst Primary from 113 to 286 (DEC, 2012; DEC, 2015).

The historically consistent drain of inner city students out of government high schools continued in both suburbs, but the Straight Talk meetings and online parent forum, the DEC meeting with parents, and the existence of CLOSE, all indicate that some of the current

generation of parents would like to continue using the government system in high school. This potentially runs counter to DEC's not unfounded 2001 assumption that inner city parents prefer to use the private system.

The shift in actual and expressed preference for government education could be a manifestation of phenomena documented in the United Kingdom and United States in inner city areas, where gentrifying parents initially chose the 'exit' option in response to perceived problems with government schools, but as their commitment to an area grows over time, and their critical mass increases sufficiently to allow them to influence local schools, they choose a 'voice' option, remaining in the government system (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Butler et al., 2013; DeSena, 2006; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013). In relation to independent schools, the change may also be a result of increases in school fees at triple the rate of inflation in the 2001-2011 period (Patty, 2011), or perhaps there is a natural ceiling on the proportion of parents who will choose private schools, the majority of which are faith-based. If predictions about the emergence of a sub-market of comparatively lower income families in near new apartment stock (Easthope and Tice, 2011) are proving true in the City of Sydney, this may also be a factor. However, identifying the precise reasons for changes in parent 'preference' was beyond the scope of the research.

The high school preferences of inner city parents are complicated by policies of school choice. Media articles (e.g. Smith, 2014) and the Straight Talk meetings and online parent forum revealed resentment from inner city parents whose children cannot gain entry to locally situated, but academically selective, Sydney Girls High School and Sydney Boys High Schools. These schools are in Surry Hills, but their predominantly first-generation migrant students often travel long distances to attend. The Straight Talk meetings and online parent forum, media reports and the public meeting between parents and DEC also demonstrated dissatisfaction with children travelling across the City and part of the Harbour, to attend their 'locally' zoned high school junior campus, in the culturally similar, gentrified suburb of Balmain. However, possibly more dissatisfaction was expressed with the suggestion that children attend the marginally closer Alexandria Park Community School on the southern side of the City, a school with strong ties to the local Indigenous community. Parental responses to Alexandria Park raise questions about the extent to which race and class are factors in inner city parents' reluctance to use particular schools, (Gulson, 2011), a phenomenon repeatedly identified in overseas research (Karsten, 2003; Boterman et al., 2010; Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013; DeSena, 2006; Lilius, 2014). The

online forum also revealed a tendency of middle class parents to focus on a right to a 'local' school when school choice policies failed to deliver satisfactory options. This same phenomenon has been documented in the United Kingdom (Butler & Hamnett, 2011, p. 40) and the United States (Billingham & Kimelberg, 2013, p. 104). Finally, a complicating factor facing DEC is the marked under-enrolment of two schools in the suburbs adjacent to the south east and south west of the City (DEC, 2014b).

The 'complexity and messiness' in education policy processes and practices in the inner city make the precise cause of perceived supply problems difficult to pinpoint. However, DEC now acknowledges that there is a problem with inner city schooling supply at high school level. In contrast to their 2001 statement that 'large population increases in inner city medium density housing lead only to marginal demand for school enrolment, and in some cases a declining demand' (DET, 2001), DEC now states that there are 'growing numbers of families with school-aged children in the inner Sydney area' and that 'compared with the 2011 Census projections, there is little doubt that actual increases [in public secondary students in the inner city] are running well ahead of the 2011 Census forecasts out to 2026' (DEC, 2014b). The Department projects that there will be between 2,200 and 2,500 additional public secondary students from 2014 to 2026.

In February 2015, the Department announced plans for a 'new', comprehensive inner city high school. The school is not new in the sense that it will be on the site of a former comprehensive school, Cleveland Street High, which became an intensive English language school in 1977. It will cost $60 million to upgrade the site as a high rise school, built to current educational standards and adequate for anticipated enrolment. The school will not open until 2020. DEC has declined to release its report detailing its deliberations, but the school's prime location adjacent to Sydney's Central railway station and fronting a recently upgraded public park with sporting facilities, may have been a factor. With open space at a premium, public parks are an essential resource for inner city schools.

Discussion

The gentrification and high density redevelopment of inner Sydney was accompanied by an assumption that no additional school places would be needed, because small numbers of families would live in the inner city, particularly in new apartments, and school places were already in sufficient or excessive supply. This was consistent with more general assumptions about infrastructure excess used to justify compact urbanism; the theory being that falling

inner-city populations had left infrastructure under-utilized and that as a result, new housing could be built without infrastructure additions.

However, as Searle demonstrated in the context of Sydney (Searle, 2004), these assumptions overestimated the capacity of aging inner city infrastructure such as roads, drainage and open space, and considerable retrofitting costs have been incurred. The same has proved true for schools, like Ultimo Public and Cleveland Street High, whose aging facilities are not adequate for modern educational provision, or the increases in student numbers that actually eventuated, leading to expensive refurbishment and/or replacement. Further, urban consolidation has occurred in some areas where there is no school infrastructure, either because areas were non-residential (Searle, 2004), or because high school completion was not the norm in pre-WWII Australia.

The assumption that urban consolidation would not require additional infrastructure dovetailed with roll-back neoliberalism and austerity programs which increasingly dominated planning from the 1980s onwards, (Peck, 2010, pp134-180). Sydney planning has a complex relationship with neoliberalism, which McGuirk has describes as 'hybrid neoliberalisms', (McGuirk, 2005). Neoliberal principles are clearly present in planning, but planning has remained state controlled, without hollowing out of state capacity. This 'hybrid neoliberalism' is also evident in schooling. It is still accepted that government should provide universal schooling, but public-private partnerships have been used to fund new schools on the urban fringe, (Crump and Slee 2005), and the slide into private schooling was treated with a certain inevitability, particularly in the newly affluent inner city. The government and its own Department of Education appeared to accept neoliberal convictions that private provision of education was superior and that given the means to do so, the new middle class parents of the gentrified core would choose it. Further, to the extent that DEC attempted to stem the flow of students out of the public system, it did so through market 'competition'. That is, parents were treated as consumers who should be free to choose their educational product, and if parents were going to be enticed to choose the state 'product', public schools needed a market edge, such as academic or artistic specialisation.

However, neoliberal theories of school choice have produced unpredictability in enrolments, leading to the over- and under-subscription of schools, complicating the task of place calculation for the Department. As parent 'consumers' are not actually free to send their children to any school of their choosing, school 'choice' has generated considerable parental anxiety and frustration. Finally, although there is a discernible shift back in favour of public

schooling in the inner city, overcrowded and/or absent schools will make DEC's assumption that inner city parents prefer private schooling a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a parent in the north east of the City wanted to send their child to a locally situated, comprehensive high school, a private school is currently their only option, creating the potentially erroneous impression that those parents prefer private schools. Of course this is a class-specific solution as parents who cannot afford a private school simply have to send their children to their locally zoned public school, regardless of where it is situated.

The government now acknowledges that inner city residential growth, including high density development, has affected schools and that places are currently under-supplied. With 1,000 places, the new Ultimo Public School will be one of the largest primary schools in the state, with a small minority of primary schools having enrolments above 600 students (DEC, 2015). The new inner city high school will have a capacity of 1500, making it one of the largest high schools in the state, exceeding the size of many high schools in new suburban areas specifically planned for families (DEC, 2015). While plans for these schools are positive, the provision of basic services such as government schooling should never have to be the subject of protracted community campaigns, particularly in affluent democracies.

Further, while the government has acknowledged that there is a need for new schools, it has struggled to respond in timely manner, partly as a result of the exceptionally high cost of limited land in the urban core. Increased land value is a direct result of the government's own urban consolidation and high rise zoning policies, and was predictable. While open and public space, harbour access and transport were all part of the Ultimo-Pyrmont regeneration (SHFA, 2004), no land was earmarked for school expansion while land values were low. With rezoning, governments can exploit the airspace above existing sites, but parental objection to non-traditional, high rise, shared school sites needs to be anticipated and overcome.

The problem of high land costs has been exacerbated by the decision to sell inner-city school sites on the neoliberalism conviction that the 'inner city must utilise its capital resources more effectively' (DET, 2001). Problems with the sale of government assets have been documented both in Australia (e.g. Crump & Slee, 2005; Davis, 2008; Dovey, 2014) and overseas (e.g. Forrest & Murie, 2011; Peterson, 2009; Anderson, 2013, pp1167-1173; Snyder & Luby, 2013), where short-term financial gain has come at the cost of long-term viability. The sale of school sites immediately preceding or during high density redevelopment also occurred in Sydney's lower north shore and the Ryde area, both of which are now

experiencing serious school overcrowding, (Dovey, 2014). The State government's own Auditor-General has recently issued a warning to DEC that while the high value of metropolitan assets makes them attractive for sale, this must be balanced with the growth in student numbers, most marked in northern and inner Sydney (NSW Auditor General 2015, p31). The benefit of retaining sites is demonstrated by the new Cleveland Street High School. While refurbishment will cost $60 million, this is a fraction of the cost of acquisition of a site in a premium inner city position. In fairness to DEC, it must be noted that it sells assets to fund school maintenance, which is currently backlogged at $732 million, (NSW Auditor Genearl, 2015), raising broader questions about under-funding of all New South Wales public schools.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated an apparent failure in Sydney to adequately plan for public schools in the inner city. The failure initially stemmed from an assumption that families with children would not live in the gentrified or high density, regenerated inner city, an assumption that has proved false. Research to date suggests that similarly erroneous assumptions may be affecting other cities in the Global North. Further research is warranted to accurately document the presence and characteristics of families in the inner core, and to track their experience of education systems, particularly as their children age.

In common with cities in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, the geography of inner city schooling in Sydney has been complicated by neoliberal policies of school choice. Having given parents the 'choice' to attend non-local and specialist public schools, as well as state-supported private schools, DEC now faces a much more complicated task of estimating school places. While Sydney experienced a consistent flow of students out of the public system, most marked in high school and in the inner city, this flow may have peaked. The nature and precise causes of this change need further investigation, but the existence of a demand for public schooling has been documented.

Finally, the research has demonstrated that the government has struggled to respond to community demand for public schooling, partly as a result of the scarcity and high value of land in the inner core. While it is somewhat understandable that planners and bureaucrats were unable to predict the changing housing and school preferences of middle class families, we are much more critical of the failure to anticipate the impact of zoning changes and the sale of public land on the government's capacity to respond to changing preferences and service needs. High land values are a direct consequence of the government's own planning

policies and were predictable. High land values only present a problem for schooling if the government does not own any existing sites on which to build or redevelop schools, demonstrating the importance of retention of public land and assets, as well as the questionable 'efficiency' of neoliberal policies of asset rationalisation.

While the situation is far from ideal, it is not too late for governments and planners to ensure that future development proposals in the inner-city include sufficient public space and infrastructure for use not only for schools in the immediate future, but also adaptive reuse for other, perhaps equally unanticipated, needs in the longer-term.

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