

HOUSING EXPERIMENTS: EVALUATING THE POTENTIAL OF NEW METHODS TO GENERATE HOUSING SYSTEM CHANGE

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purpose. Assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

ABSTRACT

Frustration at the stagnation of an already ‘broken’ housing system has created an environment where experimentation and ‘innovation’ are seen as pathways to solving entrenched policy problems. In this context, experimental governance has gained popularity across government agencies as a method for developing new solutions to longstanding difficulties by encouraging or enabling ‘innovation’. The thesis asks if policy experiments are a productive method for generating housing system change.

This research conducted a policy review of current state housing strategies, released between 2017 and 2021, revealing increasing references and instances of experimentation in Australia. A comparative case study approach was then used to examine three policy experiments, Australian Capital Territory’s *Demonstration Housing Project*, the *Future Homes Project* from Victoria and City of Sydney Council’s *Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge* to assess the impacts each program was having on the housing system. Unexpected barriers to moving from experimental approaches to genuine policy reform were a lack of clarity around experiment lifecycles, scaling and evaluation, and issues around remuneration and participant protection. Benefits outside the formal scope of the projects were identified, providing evidence of the positive impact experimental governance programs can have on the housing system. The research finds that at this early stage, policy experiments are experiments in themselves, with government struggling to rectify how experimental governance programs can exist alongside traditional policy production methods. The thesis will contribute to theoretical conceptions of experimental governance programs by developing a definition of experimental governance programs in the housing space in Australia, as well as providing empirical knowledge to support the existence and operation of the urban hack, as proposed by Maalsen (2021).

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Good outcomes can be achieved by working with community partners and the private sector to test affordable housing solutions and deliver innovative solutions that go beyond current NSW Government housing policy and planning frameworks to better reflect housing need

NSW Housing Strategy (2021, p. 32)

This statement encapsulates current government rhetoric about how the ‘wicked problem’ of housing affordability in Australia might be solved and summarises the starting point for this thesis.

Governments, who position themselves as just one of many players within the housing system, maintain that solutions to housing affordability are yet to be found and that innovation and experimental testing are the pathways towards a solution. This appetite for innovation and experimental methods in the housing space can be seen across all the three levels of government in Australia, at the national or federal level, also referred as the Commonwealth; State or Territory government level; and local government or council level. National Government recognition of the role of innovative approaches more often associated with the start-up sector in Australia was highlighted by the release of the *2016 Smart Cities Plan*, which revealed an interest by the Commonwealth Government to create an environment that allows the sharing of data and the investigation of new “innovative” funding models for affordable housing. Maalsen (2019) has identified this integration of digital disruption logics into government policy as part of the way “smart” has impacted on housing. Since the release of the *Smart Cities Plan*, programs that support experimentation in the housing space have been established by State governments in Australia, such as the Demonstration Housing Project in the Australian Capital Territory and the Future Homes Program in Victoria. Experimental programs also exist at the local government level, such as the City of Sydney Council’s Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge, in New South Wales.

Once the domain of the development and private sector to attempt to “hack” housing as a response to government idleness, a proliferation of housing experiments initiated by state and local governments has been observed. It is interesting that the “hack”, as conceptualised as a method for urban studies by Maalsen (2021), is being utilised by governments to disrupt their own operations. The rise of government led housing experiments provides evidence of the increasing influence of experimental governance on the housing system in Australia and is reflective of the wider turn to innovation in urban governance (McGuirk et al 2022).

The term innovation can be applied to almost any policy reform or new technology in the housing space (see Gurran 2019 for further discussion) and there is an expectation that an experimental process may produce an as yet undiscovered panacea to the affordable housing crisis. The discussion around innovation in the context of this thesis is more nuanced, with innovation being subject to contextual factors and existing planning rules – ideas that may be innovative for a particular jurisdiction. The specific focus of this thesis is not to evaluate the level of “innovation” produced by each of the experimental governance programs. Rather, the focus is directed at asking if these

programs are effective as a method for alternative policy production – do they demonstrate innovations in policy creation?

To answer this question, I have undertaken a series of empirical investigations, to provide insight into innovation in policy creation in practice. Conceptually, I have progressed theoretical work on innovation and experimental governance from the areas of sustainability and climate change into housing. Before presenting this work, this chapter will set the scene. First the research problem is articulated outlining the rise of innovative approaches to housing policy in response to the intractable problem of housing affordability. Despite, or perhaps because of, the variability and novelty of these experimental programs, there is little consensus on how they are defined and a lack of critical consideration on the role of experimentation as an approach to housing policy production in Australia. Next, the aims and questions that guided this research will be outlined before discussing the research methodology and rationale of approaches. Finally, the thesis structure is described before summarising the contributions.

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The provision of affordable housing continues to be a global challenge. Formal planning policy responses in Australia have focused on trying to increase the stock of affordable dwellings through inclusionary zoning, voluntary planning agreements and incentives for developers who include an affordable housing component in their projects (Williams 2015; Gurran and Whitehead 2011). In 2015, Gurran and Phibbs lamented that housing policy activity in Australia between 2003 and 2013 was having limited lasting influence on the planning system. Australian states have often sought solutions to longstanding housing problems through often short term and “innovative” programs. However, some question whether short term “innovative” housing programs can deliver lasting change; or see claims about “innovation” as ways to distract from system level policy failure (Gurran 2019).

Experimentation is not a new concept in the housing space but what makes this new version of housing experiments unique is their status as a new method of policy production; the idea of “hacking policy” established by Maalsen (2021) as a precursor to reform. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the “experimental mood” of governments (McGiurk et al 2021), and this has been evident at the state government level in Australia, demonstrated firstly by the inclusion of experimentation in state housing policies and secondly by the operation of housing experiments outside these policies. The existence of these programs and potential benefits of them to identify gaps in planning policy is not yet broadly recognised by the academic community. The mechanism by which these experimental governance programs hack the planning system needs to be understood.

Experimental governance programs that have a focus on policy reform need to be identified as their own separate category of housing innovations, highlighting that they are a new way of policy production, as opposed to a new topic of policy focus. For example, Gurran (2019, p.211) highlights areas of policy innovation as “(1) construction and development costs; (2) new tenure arrangements; and (3) inclusionary planning, but not policy making methods”. In addition, these programs need to be explored for their potential as a policy production method, as opposed to their role in co-production.

Not all housing experiments are created equal, for example the Boston Housing Innovation Lab, a government led ilab program, has had scope and funding to pilot several housing programs including innovative funding models and new housing typologies, whereas the Queensland Housing Ideas Bank so far has operated as simply a repository for ideas. The design and scope of housing experiments is varied and the criteria for what might be considered a housing experiment varies between projects, even those in the same jurisdiction. There is concern that this new wave of experimental housing “hack” projects may not lead to housing system change due to limitations in scope, jurisdiction and funding. Housing system change in this context could encompass a policy reform, the transformation of an institution’s structure or role, or changes to a housing governance model. The promise of scalability is pivotal to the justification for the existence of such projects but rarely are pathways for this expansion or transferral of a program articulated during the pilot stage. Further research is required to better understand how these experiments operate and what the long-term potential of these demonstration projects might be. Issues around barriers to implementation of the experiments and ongoing goals for experimentation as a method to generate housing system change will also be explored.

Experimental governance programs in housing are varied and there is not yet a definition to conceptualise these programs. These programs can be viewed as a novelty. They can be seen as a discrete opportunity to involve the private sector. They are not seen as a policy making tool, even though there is a group of programs that have this as their aim. The programs may suffer from an over-simplification of the role that these experiments play, with their worth being judged on the specific intervention they might make on the housing space. Their existence and operation is unique and demonstrates a new way of informing planning policy.

The value of these programs goes beyond the formal evaluation of their outcomes. A deeper understanding of why these programs exist – are they a genuine attempt to innovate or is “being innovative” a policy goal in itself – is needed. Pilots and programs are government sanctioned places to play. While there has been academic interest in exploring these experimental governance programs in regard to co-production (see Nesti 2018 and McGann et al. 2019) housing scholars have not yet engaged with these programs to explore the potential impacts housing experiments might have on housing or planning policy. To date, no research focusing on the ongoing policy implications of policy experiments has been conducted. This thesis will examine experimentation as a method of housing policy production in Australia.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this project is to critically evaluate and understand if housing experiments are a productive method for generating housing system change. It aims to produce new empirical and conceptual contributions that will evidence the existence of experimental programs in the housing space, demonstrate the impacts that they have on the housing system and establish the barriers that need to be resolved to allow greater housing system change.

The primary research question of this project is: Are policy experiments a productive method for generating housing system change?

To answer this question, three sub-questions will need to be answered first:

- a) What is a policy experiment in the housing space?
- b) What impact do housing experiments currently have on the housing system?
- c) What are the barriers preventing housing experiments from generating wider housing system change?

To answer these questions, I drew upon a range of methods which I briefly discuss below and in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE OF APPROACHES

This section will outline the scope of the proposed research methodology and provide a rationale for the approaches selected.

Literature Review

A review of existing scholarly work in the areas of housing, experimentation and innovation was undertaken to explore experimental governance programs and to refine the methodological approach for the project.

Policy Analysis

Policy analysis of all available state level housing strategies was undertaken to determine if experimentation forms part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies and if experiments were described as a method of policy creation in these same strategies. Experiments identified in these documents were assessed against the developed criteria for inclusion to determine if they could be used as case studies for this thesis. Gurrán and Phibbs (2015) highlight the extra level of complexity in the Australian context in the area of housing due to the flexible and changing roles that National, State and Local government can play, and this meant that it was necessary to consider how these experiments might play out across these three levels. While aspects of housing experimentation are being explored by researchers, there has not yet been a policy review that records all instances of government making space in policy for experimentation.

Initial policy mapping and review of academic literature revealed that the term “experimental governance programs” did not have a housing specific definition and therefore could refer to a myriad of different housing projects. As such, a key part of the project was to establish a definition of housing policy experiments as a continuation of the literature review, policy review and comparative case study analysis.

Case Study Research

A case study approach was used to explore the existing experimental governance programs. Ying (2014, p34) states “the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., ‘how’ or ‘why’ some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant”.

This project sought to explore why housing experiments were becoming more prominent and how influential these programs could be in stimulating housing system change. The data collected from the housing strategy policy analysis and grey literature analysis informed case study selection for this thesis. For each case study, grey literature was explored to understand the history of the project and how it had been integrated into housing policy or practice in Australia. The observations captured about each program provided the basis for analysing the likelihood of the experiment generating housing system change. On the surface many of the ideas generated in these programs may not seem innovative to those in the housing/planning space. However, these ideas may be disruptive to current local government activity and the controls set by the State government. The motivations of establishing an experimental program, the purpose and desired impact were explored through semi-structured interviews with government departments and housing experiment participants. HREC Approval for this project was granted on 28 May 2021 (Project Number 2021/284). Thematic comparative analysis was then undertaken between each of the case study sites to answer research questions two and three.

1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is structured across nine chapters. This chapter establishes the contextual setting for the research, outlines the research questions and provides an introduction to the research methodology, thesis structure and contributions.

Chapter Two will explore current scholarly literature on housing, innovation and experimental governance programs as a framework to explore the research questions. The objective of the chapter is to provide an overview of existing scholarship at the intersection of housing, innovation, and experimental governance programs. Housing literature was examined to understand why housing issues persist in Australia, despite constant policy reforms. This discussion provided a platform to understand why experimental governance offers such an appealing alternative to existing policy making techniques specific to housing. The concept of “innovation” is then explored through domains relevant to this thesis. Governance innovation literature revealed a shift in government thinking around how to solve complex urban issues. As innovation in housing policy is only emerging in Australia, academic literature from the areas of sustainability and smart cities, where the use of experimental governance programs is established, was used to guide conceptions of experimental governance programs and examine key issues related to these programs. The final part of the literature review focuses on the of the different methods and techniques used to develop innovative ideas, drawing from a variety of fields such as architecture, design and computing. Design competitions, challenges, hackathons and prototyping are explored to develop an understanding of how each practice operates and the specific situations the technique might be most suitable for.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology. A mixed methods design was determined to be the most appropriate to answer the research questions, bringing together findings from policy analysis, comparative case study research and observation. A policy review of state level housing strategies was selected as a way of determining if experimental programs for the purposes of policy production exist in Australia and to aid in the selection of housing experiments inclusion in the study. A

comparative case study approach using grey literature review and semi-structured interviews to explore each case study is then introduced. With a focus on contemporary events and no control over behaviour of the participants or programs, the case study approach was deemed most suitable, as informed by the work of Yin (2014). The chapter concludes by discussing the limitations to the research and how these issues were addressed.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the policy analysis undertaken of the current state housing strategies and related policies in Australia (released between 2017 and 2021). A total of seven housing strategies were analysed to determine if experimentation forms part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies and if experiments are described as a method of policy creation in these same strategies. The research revealed that discourse surrounding experimentation is present in five out of the seven strategies, with experiments being featured in several actions of four housing strategies. Experiments are described explicitly as a method of policy creation in only one strategy, the ACT Housing Strategy. From the policy analysis, only one viable case study, the Demonstration Housing Project. The second and third case studies, Future Homes Project and Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge respectively, were identified from explorations outside state level housing policy.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven provide individual chapters exploring the case study programs. Chapter Five presents findings from the Demonstration Housing Project from the Australian Capital Territory, where a program to introduce new housing typologies, such as co-housing and manor house, though formal variations to the Territory plan revealed a number of unexpected challenges for the government taking on an experimental program for the first time. The Future Homes Project from Victoria is introduced in Chapter Six and highlights a variation to the experimental pathway, where the housing typology already exists in the jurisdiction, for three-storey walk up apartments, but the focus of the program is to test the limits of existing statutory requirements with an innovative planning and approval model that could later be scaled. Limitations of Local Government pilots and questions around future scaling of the model were identified as the major issues concerning the future of this project and experimental approach. Finally, Chapter Seven focuses on the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge from the City of Sydney Council in New South Wales, which was unique as a program established by a local government authority. The broadest in remit, this program highlighted the issue of precarity that is common in the experimental space. Each case study was examined in themes related to the research questions to provide a consistent platform for thematic comparison in the Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight draws together the findings from the previous three chapters to provide a thematic comparison of the case study results. Drawing on the results of the comparative case study and the policy review, a definition of Australian housing experimental governance programs is developed to address the first research question. The impact of experimental program on the housing system, the focus of the second research question, are explored in the case studies across eight themes: identifying the gaps and other barriers; scale of projects allows for new actors and collaboration; wider discussions about housing; experimentation as a new function of government; housing system focus; privileges for those who already own land; adapting architectural design competitions; and new opportunities for program and policy transfer. The third research question, which focuses on barriers to experimental programs generating wider housing system change, is explored across six themes:

precarity of experiments; the importance of champions; paying for innovation; statutory planning protections needed for participants; program lifecycle, scaling and evaluation; and integration into the planning system.

Chapter Nine will present the conclusion. Policy and practice implications will be considered, as well as future areas of research.

1.5 CONTRIBUTION

This thesis provides the following empirical and conceptual contributions:

1. Evidence the existence of experimental governance programs in housing in Australia through the identification of housing policy experiments, and through the review of all available state level housing strategies. The policy review component will provide new evidence of experiments forming part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies and if experiments are described as a method of policy creation.
2. Generate new knowledge about establishment, operation and goals of emerging experimental governance programs in housing in Australia from comparative case study analysis, using data collected through observation and semi-structured interviews.
3. Produce new understandings about the current impacts that these programs are having on the housing system, as well as the barriers preventing experimental governance programs from generating wider housing systems change, through comparative case study analysis.
4. Provide empirical knowledge to support the existence and operation of the urban hack, as proposed by Maalsen (2021).
5. Progress theoretical work on innovation and experimental governance in housing by building upon work in disciplines with established scholarship on governance experimentation such as climate change and sustainability, and applying it to the housing space in order to define experimental governance in housing.

This thesis will evidence the extent to which government rhetoric about innovation has progressed into experimental housing programs and what impacts these novel interventions are having on the current housing system. Barriers to experimental programs making wider changes are also explored, addressing questions about the degree to which innovative programs can address systemic housing issues.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 1, the policy landscape within which this thesis exists is dominated by government rhetoric characterised by the ongoing search for answers to the affordable housing crisis, where testing and experimentation are seen as ways to identify innovative solutions. To understand why housing issues are perpetually unresolvable and positioned by governments as an area where innovation is still needed, this literature review is presented in three parts.

The first part of the review, section 2.2, examines housing literature to understand why housing issues have become a target for experimental and innovative approaches. It is not the objective of this chapter to provide a detailed exploration into each of the drivers behind housing affordability issues in Australia (see Gurran and Phibbs (2016) and Gilbert and Gurran (2022) for more comprehensive examinations of the affordable housing policy debates) but rather to canvas the current situation that has resulted in governments turning to innovation and experimentation to find solutions. Financialisation of housing and current “inaction” of policy reform measures, are explored to understand why experimental governance may offer an appealing alternative to existing policy making techniques specific to housing. The evolving roles that different levels of government could play in the housing space are also examined.

The second part of the literature review, then traces the concept of “innovation” through a variety of domains relevant to this thesis. First, governance innovation literature is explored in section 2.3 to provide an overview of the shift in government thinking and “mood” around how solutions to larger urban issues should be solved. Though only recently emerging in the housing space, experimental governance programs have been operating in the areas of sustainability and smart cities for some time. Therefore, academic literature from these cognate disciplines will be used to guide conceptions of experimental governance programs and examine key issues related to these programs, as well as provide advice on how experimental governance programs might be categorised and evaluated. Secondly, the limited scholarship on innovation in public policy is explored in section 2.4 to provide context to the Australian experience. The term “innovation” is becoming ubiquitous across government functions, so key literature is used to assist in categorising broad housing sector initiatives as either a function of technology or as a response to reforming what is seen as an overly bureaucratic culture. Thirdly, interventions that are considered innovative at a housing policy level are explored in section 2.5, with a focus on advances to inclusionary planning, tenure types and constitution techniques. A key focus of this section is understanding the extent to which new, innovative programs are able to deliver effective housing outcomes.

The third part of the literature review focuses on the of the different methods and techniques used to develop innovative ideas. Drawing from a variety of fields such as architecture, design and computing, section 2.6 will explore design competitions, challenges, hackathons and prototyping to develop an understanding of how each practice operates and the specific situations the technique might be most

suitable for. The potential benefits and identified problems that are associated with these approaches will also be explored.

The concluding section summarises the key findings of the three parts of the literature review. This chapter highlights that despite sustained critique from housing scholars on the current housing situation and clear recommendations on remedies, the next iteration of housing programs have continued to reflect the government's constrained fiscal position but with a new focus on innovation and experimentation as the pathway to solution finding. The importance of exploring these programs is amplified as scholars, such as Bulkeley (2023), predict that the experimental state – the uptake of pilots, demonstrations and prototypes as novel interventions - is destined to prevail. The exploration of "innovation" through different domains highlights ongoing difficulty in firstly defining experimental programs and secondly evaluating their success. Scholars indicate that experimentation requires an evaluation framework that takes into account more diffuse impacts and allows programs to be reviewed again after some time has passed to understand their full impact. The review of techniques utilised as part of experimental and innovative programs provides an indication of the kinds of issues that will need to be explored when evaluating experimental housing programs. The three parts of the literature review work to provide a platform for the examination of experimental housing programs as a productive method of policy formation and ground this thesis in the intersecting areas of housing, governance and innovation.

2.2 A PERPETUAL ISSUE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The dual nature of housing, as both a shelter (home) and an investment good provides the starting point to understanding housing issues in Australia, and indeed in countries with a similar housing system. Conceptions of home range from the structural to the symbolic (Blunt and Dowling, 2006 and 2022) but to most the home is regarded as a "basic foundation for life" (Clapham, 2018, p.174). Housing systems charged with the task of providing people with homes are often described as "broken" (Gurran and Phibbs, 2016), with the issues surrounding housing affordability regarded as having reached crisis point. This crisis is multiple, with Power and Mee (2020) highlighting how these intractable problems illustrate the failure of the housing system to perform as an infrastructure of care, care being a characteristic that we can see within Clapham's (2018) claim above, of housing as foundation of life, when combined with Fisher and Tronto's understanding of care as part of a "life-sustaining web" (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p.40).

Madden and Marcuse (2016, p10) propose that the current housing crisis is a "predictable, consistent outcome" of a system where "housing is not produced and distributed for the purposes of dwelling for all; it is produced and distributed as a commodity to enrich the few". The duality of housing as both a shelter and an investment good (Clapham 2018) can be seen as the unique trigger to the current crisis surrounding housing affordability. This research is positioned within the housing space in Australia, where it is accepted that the "housing market is amongst the most expensive in the world" (Phibbs and Gurran, 2021, p.457) and which therefore gives some context in which the empirical case studies discussed later in the thesis, are working within while trying to address housing affordability.

Housing affordability issues are not confined to Australia. Schnabel and Souri (2024, p. 5) state that government policy focused on affordable housing is a “pillar of the modern welfare state” and demonstrate that affordable housing policies may include supply and/or demand side solutions. The assignment of legislative authority as exclusive, such as in Austria and Germany, or shared, as it is in Canada and Australia, also has an impact on affordable housing policy (Schnabel and Souri, 2024, p.6). This means that the ability to make policy around affordable housing and/or to determine spending is split over two levels of government, adding to the complexity of the issue. The focus of affordable housing policy can also change over time within the one jurisdiction as observed by Bramley and Karley (2005) when examining affordable housing in the United Kingdom. Bramley and Karley (2005, p. 709) conclude that “affordability problems can be viewed as operating at different levels, ranging from narrower direct experience of severe problems of poverty and homelessness, through an intermediate level of risk, to a broader problem of access to the market”. This variability in what might constitute a housing affordability issue results in a range of different reforms and strategies to address the specific definition of affordability of any given jurisdiction. This variability across even geographically and historically linked jurisdictions is examined by Gibbs (2020, p. 236) who found that after 2010 housing policy in Scotland delivered more social housing, whereas “access to home ownership and affordable housing” was the focus of England.

The complexity of housing issues has deemed it one of the “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber, 1973), where no simple solution exists. In addition, one of the key characteristics of wicked problems, is a “distinct lack of agreement on their causes” (McConnell, 2018, p. 165) and this is evident in the ongoing debate between government and academia about the key drivers of unaffordable housing, as showcased by Pawson et al. (2022) in their critique of the Productivity Commission’s 2022 report *In need of repair: The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*. Pawson et al. (2022, p1) argue key factors such as “easy credit, negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount” were not considered as part of the report and that “these omissions skew its recommendations, especially on social housing”.

Determining solutions for a problem when academia and government continue to disagree about the causes of the issue, have made the improvement of housing affordability a constant focus for research and for government policy. Formal planning policy responses in Australia to housing systems in “crisis” have focused on trying to increase the stock of affordable dwellings through inclusionary zoning, voluntary planning agreements and incentives for developers who include an affordable housing component in their projects (Williams, 2015; Gurran and Whitehead, 2011; Gilbert and Gurran, 2022). In 2015, Gurran and Phibbs lamented that housing policy activity in Australia between 2003 and 2013 was having limited lasting influence on the planning system, which is archetypal of wicked problems, where “despite considerable attention being given to understanding and addressing the wicked problems, they persist” (McConnell, 2018, p. 165).

Although there seems to be a background of constant housing policy reform discussion from government (Ruming et al., 2017; Gurran and Phibbs, 2015; Gurran and Phibbs, 2016) this repetition of taking action with no long term influence, can be argued to be an example of what McConnell and ‘t Hart (2019, p. 648) call “inaction”, which they define as “an instance or pattern of policymakers not intervening: not committing resources, not proposing bills, not authorising or undertaking executive

action where such interventions could have been undertaken”. Inactions are further categorised by McConnell and ‘t Hart (2019, p. 650) into calculated, ideological, imposed and reluctant. We can see evidence of this ideological categorisation of inaction play out in the Australian landscape. For example, Pawson et al. (2022, p. 1) comment on the impact of prevailing neoliberalist ideology, as “embedded faith in market forces” as a bias in the direction of housing policy actions are not focused on long term, systemic reform. It is in this context that experimental governance programs will be explored as a counter or continuation of the current “ideological” inaction in the housing space.

The work of McConnell (2018) on political and policy driven responses to wicked problems is important, as it provides a framework to explore the larger purpose of introducing experimental governance programs to the housing system. The definitions of a policy approach to wicked problems, which “incorporates everything from seeking greater clarity and evidence around wicked problems and possible interventions, to examining actors, institutions and networks in the policy space, including possibilities for greater collaboration, working across departmental silos and other such initiatives” versus a political approach, which is “focused very much on issues of reputation and political capital, the politics of managed crowded policy agendas, and the promotion of ideological visions” by McConnell (2018, p. 166) will be used to guide the analysis of the cases studies in this thesis.

The flexible and changing roles that National, State or Local government can add an extra level of complexity to the housing system in Australia, as highlighted by Gurran and Phibbs in 2015 and confirmed as an ongoing, unresolved issue by Martin et al. in 2023. A concise history of the changing government roles in housing in Australia is provided by Morris et al (2020, p. 15), who attribute these fluctuations as the catalyst for “a search for new policy solutions in housing, and the desire to recruit a new range of actors – including local governments”. In their work on the provision of affordable housing, Han et al. (2020, p. 54) identified that one of the key opportunities was at the local level due to “local government’s strong willingness to support affordable housing through various planning strategies”. Morris et al (2020) continue the discussion on the expanding role that local government is playing in the affordable housing space, as a response to a reluctance by state and federal governments to act. However, with local government in Australia a creation of the States, the ability for local councils to expand their role in affordable housing provision can be curtailed by the States, with an example provided by Gilbert and Gurran (2022, p389) who identify that “all states exert legislative barriers to inclusionary zoning”. This means that regardless of how enthusiastically a local council might want to individually pursue a more widespread approach to affordable housing, such as inclusionary zoning plans, they are often constrained by the State. Despite this, larger, more powerful local councils have the ability to implement affordable housing programs, with the work of the City of Sydney, a local government in New South Wales, examined by Morris (2021). Morris (2021, p33) identifies the “overlapping mechanisms”, including inclusionary zoning and the subsidised sale of council land as the innovative way in which the City of Sydney was able to increase the supply of affordable housing in their local government area.

State Government continues to play a key role in the creation of policy around affordable housing, though their role has continued to evolve since Dodson’s 2006 examination of the impacts of neoliberalism on housing policy, where the continued “roll-back” of state activity was observed.

Martin et al. (2023) characterises this new position as part of the global refocusing of governments to mission-based work to solve complex problems, including housing, as explored by Mazzucato (2000), where private sector actors are encouraged to be part of the collaborative search for solutions. Governments purport that solutions to affordable housing are still yet to be found, though scholars such as Phibbs and Gurran (2021), Gurran et al. (2018b) and Rowley et al (2017) argue that stable finance programs, wider adoption of existing measures such as inclusionary zoning with a more coordinated approach to housing between levels of government in Australia are clearly identifiable as solutions to the affordable housing crisis. However, as part of the “roll-back” of state activity “innovative” government programs have been characterised by “fiscal austerity” (Gurran, 2019, p211), minimising expenditure with designs on leveraging affordable housing investment by the private sector (Pawson et al. 2019a, p50).

2.3 INNOVATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE

Innovation in urban governance is the conscious attempt to find new ways to address complex urban issues, as observed by M^cGuirk et al. (2022, p150). In the past, the private sector was seen as the domain of innovation, with the public sector viewed as “rule-bound, bureaucratic silos characterized by red tape, inertia, and stalemate” (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011, p.846), not agile enough for innovation. However, as time has gone on public sector innovation has flourished to the point where Wagenaar and Wood (2018) reject the idea that innovation even needs to be “argued for” in the public sector. The prescription of innovation as the cure for the wicked problem is widespread (see Sørensen and Torfing 2011 and 2018), so it was unsurprising that the issue of affordable housing would become a focus for innovative urban governance.

There is a distinction in innovation scholarship between the outcomes of an innovative program and an improvement program. Hartley (2005) argues that it is possible for a number of different relationships to occur between innovation and improvement – that is to say that a program that focuses on innovation does not necessarily have to result in improvements – and cautions on always assuming or conflating the two outcomes. However, given the pressure to improve housing outcomes across the globe, any innovation in housing is quickly evaluated by its potential to address housing affordability, as demonstrated by the critique of “innovation” by Gurran (2019) discussed in the previous section and in the work of housing scholars such as Gurran and Phibbs (2015) and Ruming et al. (2017) who hold government programs to account. Almost constant rounds of reform with a lack of strategic foresight are characterised by Ruming et al. (2017, p. 106) as “misaligned” with government unclear which of new processes produce faster or better outcomes. While most contemporary innovative programs do include a goal to improve effectiveness and efficacy, during a systematic review of scholarship on public sector innovation by De Vries et al. (2016, p. 160) it was revealed that innovation was becoming considered to be “a value in itself”. That is, the process of innovation and experimentation is valued even if the outputs themselves are not considered successful. However, to be innovative without improvement in the housing space will be at the ire of those in the sector.

Previous scholarship on urban governance innovation is less focused on determining the long-term outcomes of specific programs. Rather, research tends to group experiments by what McGuirk et al. (2022, p 1392) characterise as “industrial form”, “approach” or “technique”. An example is the growth of the “policy lab”, which has tended to dominate academic scholarship, following the global “labification phenomenon” as described by Wellstead et al. (2021, p193) (see also McGann et al. 2017), rather than standalone policy experiments. A policy lab generally involves a focused collaboration between academia, government and industry to work on a specific issue. Wellstead et al. (2021, p. 195) observed that that policy innovation labs were acting as a way to “coordinate efforts between public, private, and academic actors”, with Lee and Ma (2020) extrapolating that the role of policy innovation labs could be classified as agents in the transfer of policy.

Other scholarship on governance experiments follows the form/approach/technique typology outlined above by McGuirk et al. (2022). For example, Sisson et al. (2023), focus on one kind of approach, the “challenge” as an approach to governance innovation, Blomkamp (2018) on co-design as an approach, and Nesti (2018) and Schliwa et al. (2015) on the lab. Within the policy innovation lab scholarship, most academic work is generally focused on understanding how such experiments operate in the context of citizen engagement or co-production. For example, Nesti (2018) includes the Boston Housing Innovation Lab as one of the three case studies used to explore concepts of co-production, an example also highlighted by Maalsen (2023) when discussing housing hacks. The focus of McGann et al.’s (2019) study of Australian and New Zealand labs was to explore concepts of co-production. Neither the Nesti (2018) nor the McGann et al. (2019) works focused on the potential impacts housing experiments might have on housing or planning policy. The summary of the literature above indicates that to date, no research focusing on the ongoing policy implications of policy experiments in housing has been conducted. Partly, we can assume this is because innovative approaches as conceptualised here are relatively nascent in the housing policy space. We can also perhaps attribute this to the temporal constraints of many innovation approaches and techniques – such as challenges which are often run for a short and defined time period – and because of the ambiguity around a successful outcome. As hinted at by Nesti (2018), success in some innovative approaches might be less about material outcomes but rather about the lessons learnt and this is harder to evaluate as housing researchers. Nevertheless, this project endeavours to evaluate the potential of policy experiments to generate housing system change by looking less at commonalities in the technique or form of the experiment and approaching it from an angle that conceptualises it as a pathway to policy reform.

Experimental programs in housing are only beginning to emerge and thus scholarship is limited. However, the rejection of traditional policy making methods in related urban policy areas, namely sustainability and smart cities, is well documented and is drawn upon in this review as a basis for understanding the nature and concerns around experimental governance, to guide examination of the emerging trend in the housing space.

2.3.1 DEFINITIONS AND KEY CHALLENGES IN URBAN GOVERNANCE INNOVATION

With limited existing work in housing and experimental governance to act as a guide, literature from sustainability and smart cities was explored to understand characterisations and critiques of experimental governance programs, to provide a framework of key issues and themes to explore

newer housing focused programs. In their work on experimental governance in the smart mobility space, Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2020, p. 120) conclude that experimental governance can be classified as one of the “new public policy instruments” described by Lascoumes and Le Galés (2007), due to the “temporary, ephemeral character and emphasis on opening up action space for (often private actors) to test solutions”, moving away from the “command and control” (Lascoumes and Le Galés, 2007, p.13) of traditional instruments. When considered in the context of the quote that opens Chapter 1, which saw the New South Wales government looking to find new ways of working with the private sector and community to “test” solutions, the shift towards innovative urban governance is clear.

Though experimental governance has been operating in the sustainability space for some time, the definition of what constitutes experimental governance is still contested. Kivimaa et al. (2015, p12) assert that a lack of a consistent classification “is inhibiting cumulative understanding across case studies”. A contemporary definition of experimental governance is proposed by Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2020, p. 120) “experimental governance is conceptualised as an instrument employed to promote or accelerate innovation through testing and development of new types of solutions, technologies and services”. This definition will be used to guide the identification of examples of experimental governance in the housing space.

Literature examining experimental governance in sustainability provides insight into how new programs have struggled to legitimise their practice. At the outset, the core aspiration of experimental governance is to offer something distinctive to the old way of operation, as discussed above when examining the work of Lascoumes and Le Galés, (2007, p.13). The first challenge faced by many experimental governance programs is clarified by Schliwa et al. (2015, p5), who when looking at living labs as an example of experimental governance in sustainability, states that a key concern is “how to stage experiments that stretch and transform existing practice rather than simply reproducing business as usual”. A clear distinction between traditional policy making methods and the outcomes of new experimental methods in the housing space is yet to be described by housing scholars and will be a focus for this thesis.

Once seen as distinct from previous practice, the next challenge for experimental governance programs are questions about future program expansion. One of the key characteristics of experimental governance is the trial or piloting of ideas before they are scaled up, as defined by Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2020). Schliwa et al. (2015, p5) argue that one of the major challenges still facing experimental governance is “how to upscale successful experiments from the micro-level to achieve a broader change”. Although this research is from a parallel context, with government’s referring to a need to test housing solutions, a future expansion of programs is therefore implied, suggesting that scalability will be a key issue for housing innovation. Lessons from related studies into living labs, such as McGann et al (2017) highlighted the limited life span that the labs had, indicating that a precarity of overall program lifespan could also be a key issue of interest in the housing space.

The acceptance of experimental governance as a legitimate way to find solutions is a key challenge debated in academic literature. Here, research on climate change and sustainability experimental

governance provides insight into how an innovative approach might become more accepted once more programs adopt a similar method. There has been a rapid growth of innovative programs in this area. Indeed, Bulkeley (2023, p. 1) claims, that “perhaps one of the most surprising things about the evolution of climate governance over the past three decades has been the growth of experimentation as a mode of response.” Experimentation is seen as a contrast to approaches that focus on targets and taxes as a means to address climate challenges (Bulkeley 2023, p.1). After the growth of experimentation in relation to urban climate change was tracked by Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2012, p. 372) they were able to conclude that experiments are not “some side show” but “rather they are a critical means through which governing is accomplished”. Cowley and Caprotti (2019, p. 428) also reported the “growing valorisation of the “experimental” over strong policy commitments in urban governance” in the area of smart cities. Such research suggests that experimental approaches in governance need to be taken seriously. While this new form of experimentation as a method of policy making is nascent in the area of housing, there is support for this approach. In their seminal book, *In defense of housing*, Madden and Marcuse (2016, p. 208) argue that we “let a thousand housing alternatives bloom”, by which they mean more alternative approaches to housing policy and provision should be explored and encouraged. The work of Durose and Lowndes (2021) looking at institutional incompleteness in urban governance explores some of the potential benefits of deliberate incompleteness can bring in policy. Building in space into a policy making process where “incompleteness is designed-in” to allow institutions to be dynamic and adaptable (Durose and Lowndes, 2021, p. 9) helps to explain why the flexibility and openness of an experimental approach might be so enticing.

2.3.2 EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Understanding the scope and process of experimental governance programs on producing housing system change in Australia is important. Public policy instruments (PPIs), which may include those produced via experimentation, are not neutral, and Lascoumes and Le Galés (2007, p.3) observe that PPIs “produce specific effects, independently of the objective pursued (the aims ascribed to them)”. In the context of experimental approaches to produce policy this means that the final outcomes of the policy may be even more difficult to regulate. To aid in assessing the potential scalability or transference of experiments, Schliwa et al. (2015, p4) proposes utilising a “threefold typology of direct, indirect and diffuse impacts” to categorise all possible outcomes, identifying that the most important outcome is often the diffuse impact. Schliwa et al. (2015, p2) elaborate on the issues around evaluating wider project outcomes. Namely that the impact of experimentation frequently is found, “beyond the direct scope of living lab projects, and is difficult to measure as it can often only be detected retrospectively”. Based on this, they suggest that evaluating forms of experimental governance must account for “outcomes outside the formal remit of each program” and that “time must be given to understand fully the impact of experimental governance” (Schliwa et al 2015, p. 2). Similarly, Kivimaa et al. (2015, p12) echoes the need for time to have passed before transformative effects can be fully understood and offers this as a self-critique of their own work, stating that in many instances the analysis of the programs occurred so close to the end of the project “no definite results on the transformative effects” could yet be determined. This suggests the need for additional research, where programs are revisited after some time has elapsed.

The direct and indirect impacts of experimental governance programs must also be evaluated. Borrowing again from research on climate change governance experiments, Schliwa et al. (2015, p2) suggests measuring direct impact of climate change experiments under an economic, ecological and social impacts framework. Though the direct impact causes the most “tangible outcome” Schliwa et al. (2015, p2) noted indirect impacts that are “beyond the scope of the project but inspired by it” can create large scale changes such as policy reforms. Kivimaa et al. (2015) conducted a systematic literature review on climate and sustainability experimental governance programs and found that changes to discourse were the most common type of change generated by experimental governance programs. The work of these scholars in related disciplines, suggests that experimental governance programs need to consider the examination of impacts outside the direct, formal outcomes of the projects.

The concerns surrounding the likelihood of policy experiments to stimulate housing system change, as discussed in Chapter 1, are supported by the sentiments of Evans et al (2016, p1) who state “the ability of urban experiments to be radical in ambition while limited in scope underpins a vibrant debate in both the policy and academic worlds with respect to their ability to prompt genuine change”. The desire for alternatives to stagnant government housing policy explains anecdotally why experimental governance has entered the housing space but further work will need to be undertaken to understand the continued impact this form of governance might have on housing systems. What can be extrapolated from this work to inform analysis on the rise and impact of experiments in the housing space? The above literature highlights some key arguments to consider: 1) that there is a documented turn to experimentation which suggests it appeals to policymakers and that it should be taken seriously; and 2) that evidence of its impact is often difficult to identify, but that evaluation of impact needs to consider effects beyond the program remit and that time needs to be given in order to properly assess program outcomes.

2.4 INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

With urban governance structures evolving to refocus towards innovation, government practices and functions more widely have also had to change. The work of M^cGuirk et al. (2022) brings urban political geography and public sector scholarship together to explore innovation in urban governance at a broad, global scale. In this section, a more specific focus on the Australian experience of innovation in the public sector in the area of housing is explored.

Though the goal to innovate has become commonplace, public policy scholars see Australia to be “lagging on innovation policy” (Lewis and Mikolajczak 2023, p1). M^cGuirk et al (2020, p1) reflect on innovation as the “new normal” and the COVID-19 global pandemic acting as a “trigger” to accelerate this trend. Lewis and Mikolajczak (2023, p13) examine how innovation has been understood by the Australian Government over the last 40 years, concluding that there are two dominant definitions of innovation: “innovation as technology” and “innovation as culture”. Both versions of innovation are already seen in the housing space in Australia. For example, “innovation as technology” is described by Lewis and Mikolajczak (2023, p13) as “the science-push version of innovation”, whereby the “lack of use of technology” is identified as the problem. This diagnosis was presented by the National

Government by the release of the *Smart Cities Plan* (Commonwealth Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016, p23) which recognised the role of innovation and digital disruption in Australia. Examination of the plan reveals an interest by the Commonwealth Government to create an environment that allows the sharing of data and the investigation of new “innovative” funding models for affordable housing. Maalsen (2019) has identified this integration of digital disruption into government policy as part of the way “smart” has impacted on housing.

The use of “digital tools, e-government, and information communications technology” (Lewis and Mikolajczak, 2023, p14) are commonly promoted as part of the tools utilised in this definition of innovation and can be observed in the housing space, where open data packages, dashboards and other data visualisers sharing housing data have been created by all levels of government in Australia. For example, the New South Wales Government’s Local Development Performance Monitor is a publicly accessible dashboard that provides local development data from across the state. The rollout of these new tools highlights an interest and acceptance in government of the role that data sharing and digital disruption can play in the area of housing. However, there is an uneasy rhetoric surrounding the use of “smart” and “digital disruption” in government policy and there is an attitude that by simply capturing and releasing data, innovative solutions will follow. This sentiment was expressed at the release of the 2016 Smart Cities Plan by the then Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation, Angus Taylor, who stated in his speech “if we measure it then we can do it”. Data is not neutral and caution must be taken when using digital tools, as illustrated by Kitchin et al (2016, p23) who argued that urban dashboards “produce a particular understanding of the city”, with the policies based on the data replicating that view. This means that what is not captured in data sets and visualised, is not “seen” and the lack of visibility means limited policy attention directed to these areas. The extent to which experimental governance programs use digital tools is unknown and will be observed as part of this research to track government acceptance and integration of digital disruption into housing policy in Australia.

Governments have responded to the influence of some forms of digital disruption on the housing system such as online rental and real estate platforms. Academic work in this area focuses on exploring government responses to specific digital disruptions, such as Gurran et al. (2020) and Gurran et al. (2018c) on the need for planning responses to online rental platforms after it was shown that online short-term rental platforms have caused significant impact on longterm rental markets. Public interest in this issue has compelled the government to respond. Rogers (2016a, 2016 b) discusses the need for increased government responses to digital real estate, calling for data currently traded by real estate tech companies to become publicly available. The use of technology to overcome barriers to the development of accessory dwelling units in California, as evaluated by Bennett et al. (2019) highlights the potential of digital tools to aid in affordable housing development. The role of technology in these examples, can be considered illustrative of the “innovation as technology” understanding of innovation as outlined above. However, limited academic work has explored the phenomenon of government-led housing innovations, which exist when the government wants to act as the disruptor to its own operations. It is intended that this thesis will help address this gap by contributing new understandings of the extent to which government is enamoured by concepts of digital disruption.

The second definition of innovation, “innovation as culture” is described by Lewis and Mikolajczak (2023, p14) as a response to contexts “where the problem is seen to be the overly bureaucratic and locked-in organisations of the public service and those who work in them”. The notion of innovation as a means of opening up and making things less bureaucratic e.g. getting rid of red tape, is a common theme in the housing space, with policy capture work undertaken by Gurran and Phibbs (2015, p726) revealing that “rather than reallocating more of the substantial resources expended or revenue raised on housing to directly support new affordable housing production, the idea of state and local planning reform has been presented in Australia, as in other nations, as a way of boosting housing production and resolving affordability pressures”. This trend, where governments seek to address housing affordability by tinkering with regulatory levers to increase supply from the private sector rather than by funding new housing directly, continues to be observed by scholars such as Pawson et al. (2019a) and Martin et al. (2023). Lewis and Mikolajczak (2023, p14) describe the main focus of this kind of innovation as “changing organisational characteristics, removing constraints on new ideas, and opening up the notion of who should be involved in policy decisions”. In Australia, the key to innovating and reforming not just housing but the whole planning system is purported by politicians and industry to be the cutting of “red tape”, as explored by Ruming et al (2017). The implication is that the planning system is too complicated and slow and therefore a reduction in these rules and processes will reduce time and costs.

Public sector innovation in housing related to technology tends to be focused on the collection and display of data or as part of the government’s reaction to technological advances that are acting on the housing system, such as policy responses to digital platforms. Culture based innovation from the public sector is focused on reforms to the planning system, where streamlining of process and the cutting of “red tape” is seen as the pathway to increasing stock to improve affordability. While this section has examined the larger public sector trends in innovation that are seen in the housing sector, the next section explores current areas of specific innovation in housing policy.

2.5 INNOVATION IN HOUSING POLICY

After tracing innovation in governance and the public sector, this section will explore current innovations in housing policy, keeping front of mind the earlier discussions around housing affordability from section 2.2. While the scope for systems level reform in the housing system is vast (see Rowley et al. 2017, Gurran et al. 2018a, Gurran et al 2018b, and Martin et al. 2023), there are particular aspects that have been the focus of recent policy innovation, as explored by Gurran (2019, p. 211) who grouped novel reforms into three key categories: inclusionary planning; tenure models; and construction costs. While inclusionary planning is seen as a traditional rather than innovative tool, it continues to be an important mechanism for governments many countries, including the UK and the US to support affordable housing development (Gurran et al. 2018a), though the application of schemes has been critiqued by scholars as more limited in Australia (Gurran et al. 2018b). Some states in Australia have had widespread inclusionary planning schemes for some time, such as the state of South Australia but in other states, such as New South Wales, work by councils to apply inclusionary zoning in their own local government areas has been prevented by the actions of the state government (see Gilbert and Gurran, 2022). There have been moves by some states in Australia

to increase the application of inclusionary zoning in an experimental way, such as the *Inclusionary Housing Pilot* in Victoria, established in 2018. While the introduction of inclusionary zoning can be seen as a positive step, the target of only 100 social housing homes as part of the pilot program has received criticism from scholars such as Palm et al. (2018, p. 17) who observed that “by itself, this approach is too small-scale to make a large difference in responding to affordable housing needs in Melbourne”. In comparison to the 15% affordable housing policy in South Australia that was introduced in 2005 (see Hallsworth 2015) the Victorian “innovation” seems sluggish. Apart from increasing the application of inclusionary planning in Australia, the greatest innovation identified by Gurran (2019) for this approach is the potential that it offers to support the operation of new housing models. Gurran (2019, p.220) anticipates that there is capacity for inclusionary planning to support “conventional forms of social housing provision” alongside “enabling the models of housing innovating” that are developing.

Innovation in housing models is not a defined term and can refer to any novel approach to housing tenure, typology, or delivery model. Home ownership has traditionally required access to a private mortgage but innovation in tenure arrangements is occurring. Government operated shared equity schemes, which assist low-income homebuyers purchase a home (Whitehead and Yates 2010), are becoming more popular in Australia and the UK. In Australia most states have their own shared equity schemes, and the Commonwealth Government proposed their own in 2023. Co-living developments are being proposed as innovative solutions for young urban singles, though the work of Bergan et al. (2023, p. 691) highlights that this is neither an affordable nor long-term housing solution. Cooperative schemes, identified by Crabtree et al. (2021, p.138) as a “stable component of housing systems” overseas, are seen as an innovative way to provide housing that may combine renting or shared equity with other shared lifestyle and management goals. Other forms of innovation for rental schemes include community land trusts, build to rent development and the impact of online short-term rental platforms as discussed in the previous section.

Innovation in building techniques to reduce construction cost were the final policy innovation area identified by Gurran (2019). The use of prefabricated and modular housing is becoming more popular as they help to reduce construction costs and time and may offer sustainability benefits. While the trend for smaller dwellings and tiny homes has also been observed, Gurran (2019, p. 215) warns that any reforms to planning policy to support cost-saving construction methods must ensure that they “do not result in an overall erosion of housing quality”. This innovation has the potential to be combined with other novel housing model ideas, including flex-housing as explored by Druta and Fatemidokhtcharook (2023) and discussed in more detail in section 2.6.

The withdrawal of government focus and funding in the affordable housing sector, as observed by Gurran (2019) and Pawson et al. (2019b) and discussed in section 2.2 has led to an increase in other actors ideating and engaging in the space. The work of Raynor and Coenen (2022) shows that new hybrid partnerships between government, for-profit and non-profit actors in the affordable housing space are having success in delivering innovative housing projects to a wider range of groups across the housing spectrum. However, existing barriers in the planning system are limiting the ability of these partnerships to scale, with Raynor and Coenen (2022, p. 71) concluding that the “development pipeline is extremely constrained”. While this new business model is providing opportunities for new

actors to provide “diversified product offerings” (Raynor and Coenen, 2022, p. 72) this is not without considerations to how this may be continuing the “marketisation” of affordable housing (see Power and Bergan, 2018).

Innovations that target some of the other key areas of reform in the housing space as identified by Phibbs and Gurrán (2021), Gurrán et al. (2018b) and Rowley et al (2017) and discussed in section 2.2 are sadly lacking. For example, as lamented by Martin et al. (2023), we are still yet to see a National-led coordinated approach to affordable housing. When examining housing affordability policy, Gurrán (2019, p.211) argues that the use of the term “innovation” can be “problematic” as it is a “code” for programs that may be novel but do not provide commitments of funding or structural solutions to address affordable housing. In addition, while there is of course a desire to find solutions, being innovative does not necessarily result in good outcomes. Concerns around the limited impact of innovation in the affordable housing space are examined by Gurrán (2019, p211), who concludes that housing policy innovation “is not inherently beneficial for those at most need of assistance”, and that “claims of innovation must be treated with a degree of scepticism, being aware of potential hyperbole, cost shifting or counter-productive outcomes”. This warning by Gurrán indicates that outcomes of experimental governance programs must be evaluated at a system level, and so the selection of guiding frameworks to carry out the evaluation of housing experiment success will be important to consider in this research.

2. 6 APPROACHES TO INNOVATING POLICY: A LOOK AT COMMON TECHNIQUES

This chapter has so far provided an examination of innovation at the broader governance and public policy level. This section will look at approaches to and techniques of policy exploration and production that are common in innovative governance programs. In particular, the section will trace a trajectory from the long held tradition of architectural design competitions (Seidel 1990), to the computational logics of digital disruption seen through hackathons (Perng et al 2018; Perng and Kitchin 2018; Maalsen and Perng 2016); to the more recent turn to design methods approaches, including techniques such as policy prototyping (Kimbell and Bailey 2017) and challenges (Sission et al 2023). Understanding the approach adopted by governments for their experimental program can help explore some of the larger motivations behind the project, as well as reveal some of the opportunities and specific advantages open to that agency.

Design Competitions

While experimental governance programs can take many forms, the programs adopted by governments to aid in the production of housing policy have often adopted elements of the traditional architectural design competition into their operations: the submission of ideas in response to a brief, judged by a group of experts, often architects, to find a winning concept. This echoes the traditional format of a design competition, which Seidel, (1990, p173) traces back to 488 B.C in Ancient Greece where a design competition was held for the design of the Athenian War Memorial on the Acropolis. The process and outcomes of the design competition are being adapted to meet the

requirements of planning policy development; where an exemplar design was once selected for a specified site, now winning designs are being used to inform planning controls.

It could be argued that the increased adoption of design competitions by planners may come from the design competition being positioned as a design method. If the appeal of adopting design methods is their purported ability “to create alternative ideas and novel concepts”, as stated by Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris (1990, 116), then the enticement to adopt them to solve housing problems is understandable. The use of design competitions in an urban planning arena in Australia has been examined (see Davison et al. 2018) but at the time the outcomes of these design competitions were still focused on a specific site, often for urban regeneration. This latest group of experiments has the added responsibility of directly informing planning policy review.

Seidel (1990), who conducted a survey of design competition perceptions, provides a critique of design competitions that can be compared to observations made about experimental design programs that utilise a design competition as part of their approach. Seidel reported that participants felt that competitions did help to “promote new ideas” but that for a successful competition to take place, rewards needed to be adequate and the program for the competition needs to be well defined. These sentiments echo the work of Sisson et al. (2023, p. 13) who when exploring the use of challenges found that they did “raise attention” to key issues but reflected on the findings of Desouza (2012) who found that entrants were discouraged from participating in similar programs due to cost, including a lack of remuneration, and risks. If a key objective of challenges is to find new ideas from new actors, the finding that participation in such a program may lead to future hesitancy or reluctance to enter is concerning.

Challenges

Challenges are another technique that has gained popularity as a method for finding new solutions to urban problems. Scholars such as Sisson et al. (2023, p. 6) have identified similarities between architectural design competitions and challenges as two techniques for government to engage with industry to “solicit the best available design”. Challenges tend to follow a similar process, as outlined by Sisson et al. (2023, p7-8): the organising body identifies a problem to be solved; eligibility and selection criteria is determined; and proposals are called. Before the final winner is announced, there may be a phase of idea workshopping with participants.

The specific care that should be taken when developing the problem brief or challenge statement is the focus of scholarly discussion. Wagner (2011, p. 36) argues that the problem must be clearly defined but avoiding “overconstraining the problem” is important to ensure that ideas and solutions can flow during the competition. Dobin (2014, p. 11) articulates the complex balance that the brief needs to meet – too difficult a brief to meet and “no one will win the prize”, too simple a brief will result in too many solutions being eligible for the prize and “not necessarily with the optimum solution”. In addition, Dobin (2014, p. 11) argues that the statement needs to appeal to a broad range of possible applicants as this will improve the number of innovative submissions but cautions that appealing to too broad a range of actors has the potential to “erode submission quality”. The need for administering bodies who are establishing a challenge to remain open minded about all possible solutions to the identified problem is explained by Wagner (2011).

As identified in the discussion about design competitions, a lack of adequate remuneration for participants is an identified issue in challenge programs. The amount of prize money awarded to winners of a challenge is generally small, as opportunities to further develop the project are seen as part of the “reward” for participating. Sisson et al.’s (2023, p. 8) examination of Challenges from around the world found that “few of the winning solutions could be delivered in full with the prize money awarded”. This raises considerable questions about the expectations of organising agencies on the outcomes of such programs and the possibility of actual implementation.

Part of the reframing of challenges as a technique of creative problem solving, speaks to the possibilities of urban intrapreneurialism that Phelps and Miao (2020) identify, whereby there is potential for innovation within local government. However, other scholarship on innovation highlights the possible limitations of such programs including work by Sisson et al. 2023, who raise questions around “participation biases and barriers” as an issue of concern. Often it is only the most well-resourced agencies that have the capacity to operate an experimental program. This can lead to the existence of a spatial bias to the geographies of innovation, as observed by with Das (2020) in relation to the entrenchment of power relations in innovative smart city programs in India and Sisson et al. (2023, p.13) who see “perpetuating regional inequality” as pertinent to the experience of challenges. Agencies who are well resourced have the ability to participate in or establish more innovative programs, with the findings from previous scholarship on experimental programs indicating that being mindful of potential advantages and program inequities will be important to consider in this research.

Hackathons

Hackathons are included as part of the range of techniques included in M^cGuirk et al.’s (2022) typology of experimental approaches, as they represent another innovative way for government to collaborate with other sectors to find solutions to urban challenges (Perng and Kitchin 2018). However, as highlighted in previous discussions about design competitions and challenges, fair remuneration for participants is an issue. Perng et al. (2018, p. 196) identify that hackathons “capitalise on the work precarity” of entrants, with the constant need to be prepared for hackathons extending “exploitative practices at work into urban life”. This contributes to the ongoing discussion in this chapter about what might be considered fair remuneration for participants engaging in approaches and techniques commonly used as part of innovative urban governance programs. The intensive nature of hackathons, often occurring at weekends as “ten-hour plus working days” as discussed by Maalsen and Perng (2016, p. 191) therefore excluding those with family or other commitments, is an additional issue and possible barrier for would-be participants. This raises equity and access issues around who gets to “hack” and which groups may be routinely excluded due to program design. Scholars question the ability for hackathons to be fair opportunities for new actors to be engaged in urban issues, with Maalsen and Perng (2016, 191) observing that the lives of residents are “analysed, programmed and reconfigured and potentially altered and disrupted” rather than members of the local community being brought into the decision making process.

The urban hack has been the focus of deeper consideration by Maalsen (2022, p. 459) who positions the hack not only as a “way of thinking through and with urban problems, it is also a way of *doing* these possibilities” (emphasis in the original). Maalsen’s (2022, p. 461) conceptualisations around

hacking policy, where testing of ideas around housing occurs before becoming widespread provides a fundamental point for this research to expand. Like Sisson et al. (2023) when discussing the often limited long term impacts of challenges, Maalsen (2023, p461) recognises that hacks “may individually lack the ability to produce structural change”. While Maalsen’s work evidences the value of the hack in housing to stimulate ideas and produce housing, this research will explore how these programs impact on policy reform.

The existence and potential of the urban hack in housing is already being explored by scholars such as Druta and Fatemidokhtcharook (2023) who apply the concept to the flex-housing movement in the Netherlands. Flex-housing was originally conceived as a way to address urgent housing shortages by allowing homes to be rented or built without needing to engage with traditional social housing bureaucracy or planning authorities. Druta and Fatemidokhtcharook (2023, p.13) found that references to flex-housing continued to categorise it as a “temporary stop gap solution”, concluding after their policy review that “nowhere is there a claim that this type of temporary housing is a structural solution”. However, Druta and Fatemidokhtcharook (2023) demonstrate that over a ten year period the evolution of flex-housing from a pilot program to into a broader policy around affordable housing provision demonstrates the potential of the hack in the urban housing space as proposed by Maalsen (2022). Additionally flex-housing incorporated another innovation in affordable housing as discussed in the previous section, the use of modular and prefabricated materials to save time and costs during construction, highlighting the great potential to stack different housing innovations.

Prototyping

Prototyping, which is identified as a technique in M^cGuirk et al.’s (2022) typology, is seen as providing much needed flexibility in the policy space and allows the introduction of more design thinking methods. Kimbell and Bailey (2017, p. 217) discuss the development of prototyping from a range of fields such as computing, product design and interaction design, as well as early influences from architecture practices. The value and place of prototyping has evolved beyond being seen as just a “working model”, with Stappers (2013, p. 85) discussing that among the many ways prototyping is now viewed, including as a “a way to experience a future situation”. The unique value of prototyping is its ability to provide space for iteration with Stappers (2013, p. 86) concluding that “prototypes are as much about failing and changing course as they are about demonstrating and proving”.

The movement of prototyping to policy making is explored by Hagan (2021, p. 11) who proposes that bringing together aspects from design to policy work has the potential to combine “agile and human-centered development of new things” to systemic problems. Hagan (2021, p. 14) proposes that a greater level of experimentation could be brought into policymaking by introducing prototyping, which would result in “more collaboration, creativity, tinkering, and empirical learning brought into the process of crafting policy”. Prototyping can be used at various different points of the policy making process such as “facilitating discussion” (Stappers, 2013, p. 91) around initial policy ideas; in the early testing phase as a tool for “reconfiguration of proposals” (Hagan 2021, p. 14) as well as tool for “agile, iterative development of an agreed-upon proposal” (Hagan 2021, p. 14). The result of using prototyping in the policy making process, Hagan (2021, p. 14) posits, would be better solutions with

clearer implementation pathways because they “promote exploration and reflection” during the policymaking process. Prototyping has been used successfully overseas to test new housing policy ideas in the Boston Housing Innovation Lab, as well as in Australia to iterate new institutional partnerships that led to the development of unique housing models (Maalsen et al. 2025).

Examinations of labs by Wellstead et al. (2021, p.194) revealed the common use of prototyping in policy innovation labs. While the unique value of prototyping in the policy making space is summarised by Kimbell and Bailey (2017, p. 217) as having the ability to “mediate existing knowledge and anticipates possible futures” these benefits are not without critique. The potential of innovative methods to “reinforce existing power structures” is observed Kimbell and Bailey (2017, 223) when examining the increasing use of design methods by government to “prototype” policy solutions, echoing the sentiments of Sisson et al. (2023) around inequality perpetuation discussed above.

There are a range of different methods that are being utilised by innovative governance programs to explore and develop policy. The benefits to providing space to find new solutions and engage with new actors was observed across the different techniques. However, as revealed by scholars, there are limits to each approach. The issue of fair remuneration for participants was raised by scholars examining each method. As Sisson et al. (2023) and Desouza (2012) discuss, issues around remuneration and risk may deter participants from entering, which is counter to the aim of most methods used in innovative urban governance programs to increase the diversity and number of actors involved in problem solving. Another common barrier observed across the methods explored was the ability of a government agency to engage in innovation at all – existing size and resourcing factors can determine if a challenge, design competition, hackathon or other innovative program can run at all. This indicates that larger questions of innovation bias and equity will be important to explore as part of this research.

2.7 EVALUATION OF HOUSING EXPERIMENTS

Like any other housing policy reform, each experiment or innovation program will have a different housing system focus, depending on the main objective and any jurisdictional limits of the organising body. Common objectives of such program might include increased numbers of housing units (social or affordable housing could also be a focus), measures to improve affordability, or the introduction of new housing typologies. Each program is more likely to focus on one specific area of the housing system rather than address affordable housing as a whole. As discussed in section 2.3.2, while there may be some temporality to seeing the fuller impact of innovative program, the evidence of their impact is often difficult to identify. Evaluation of impact needs to consider effects beyond the program remit, and time needs to be given in order to properly assess program outcomes and how the outcome of experimentation could be evaluated. This evaluation should examine whether programs had a measurable impact on affordability or successfully introduced new housing typologies. Additionally, assessment should determine if the interventions effectively addressed perceived areas of policy blockage that had previously hindered progress in the housing system.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This literature review has revealed the uptake of innovative experimental approaches into the housing space. The opening of this chapter provided background to affordability issues in Australia and that housing affordability issues continue to be unresolved. While housing scholars such as Phibbs and Gurran (2021), Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al (2017) point to the need for clear housing leadership government continues to look for new, “innovative” ways to solve wicked problems that are characterised by programs that limit the need for government spending and leverage private sector investment (Gurran 2019, Pawson et al. 2019b). Raynor and Coenen (2022, p. 71) perfectly encapsulate the government’s current position when they state “Government is reducing its involvement in social housing and celebrating innovation and entrepreneurialism in the sector”. As identified by Sørensen and Torfing in 2011 (p. 848), wicked problems like housing affordability “cannot be solved simply by throwing more money or standard solutions at them; rather, they require innovative policy solutions”.

This points to the first key finding in the literature, that the turn to innovation across urban governance broadly is a result of the failure of business as usual to resolve intractable issues. Despite the recognition of the rise of innovation governance in housing, the academic literature is still limited, and thus this review has drawn upon literature in areas of climate governance and sustainability to inform what may happen in the housing space. Key lessons from this literature point to i) the need to take governance experiments seriously; and ii) that it may take time to witness any positive impacts and that evaluating their success needs to account for impacts that may exist beyond the specific project remit.

In the next section, innovation in the public sector was explored, where government responses to technological innovations in housing have been largely reactionary to the impact of digital platforms, such as online short-term rental platforms or as part of limited data capture and release in the form of dashboards. Culture innovation in the public sector has focused on mechanisms that respond to industry pressure to reduce red-tape, with government reluctant to commit to fund new housing directly.

Finally, the chapter focused on the techniques of policy innovation. While there is a history of architectural design competitions in the housing space, the broader shift to governance innovation has seen a rise in the adoption of other methods that can impact on the housing sector. These include design methods such as prototyping, computational approaches such as hacking and challenges as well as traditional design competitions. Literature examining each of these methods highlights that the existing capacity and resources of an agency may act as barriers to being able to engage in innovation at all. Innovative programs may emphasise existing power structures, biases or inequality.

Overall, this chapter has revealed why innovative urban governance programs are seen as a solution to the wicked problem of affordable housing, how innovation in housing in the public sector has developed so far and what kinds of techniques are common to innovation. Most importantly, the idea

that there can be distinctions between programs that innovate and programs that result in improvements as introduced by Hartley (2005) were contrasted against the work of housing scholars such as Gurran (2019), Gurran and Phibbs (2015) and Ruming et al. (2017) to highlight that in the housing space any claims of innovation would be quickly evaluated by their potential to address housing affordability. Therefore, the focus of “industrial form”, “approach” or “technique” as the driver for previous scholarship on urban governance innovation as observed by M^cGuirk et al. (2022, p 1392), with limited focus on determining the long-term outcomes of specific programs will not be satisfactory. To further understand the impact that such programs are having, experimental governance programs need to be studied to determine their outcomes on planning policy. This thesis will examine if experimental programs are a method of policy production. Literature indicates that this work is timely, with Bulkeley’s (2023, 1) indication that “we increasingly inhabit a condition of permanent experimentation” and Tironi’s (2020, p. 504) characterisation of “ours as an experimental society”, revealing a strong belief that experimentation is not only here to stay but will continue to expand.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of Chapter 2 was to explore the current housing situation and canvass the stagnation in policy reform, which has led to experimental governance programs offering an appealing alternative to existing policy making techniques. Chapter 2 also provided insights from related disciplines, where the practice and study of experimental governance programs has existed for some time, to guide the methodological approach for this thesis. This chapter will outline the scope of the proposed research methodology and provide a rationale for the case study approach selected. A discussion of the policy analysis that aimed, but ultimately failed, to identify three case studies will follow. The failure is a finding in itself – policy experiments are not confined to state level housing strategies. Other policies and political mechanisms can be a catalyst for these programs. Detailed description of the case study approach is provided, with the chapter concluding by discussing the limitations to the research and how these issues were addressed.

3.2 MIXED METHODS DESIGN

This thesis utilised a mixed methods design bringing together findings from policy analysis, comparative case study research and observation to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Yin (2014, p.108) proports the use of mixed methods research when the analysing “complementary data” that “share the same research questions” as is the case with this research. In the following sections each of the research methods will be explored.

3.3 DEFINING POLICY EXPERIMENTS IN THE HOUSING SPACE

Broad inclusion criteria for selecting case studies were necessary due to the emerging nature of experimental governance programs in the housing space. It would be impossible and impractical at this point to try to define an experimental governance program within strict limits. Building on the definition of an experimental governance program provided by Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2020, p120), and discussed in the previous chapter “as any instrument that utilises testing to increase innovation” as new programs from Australia were identified, they were categorised and used to help build a list of inclusion and exclusion criteria for any future case studies. The key limiting factor for inclusion was that the experiment had to have a goal or focus that included policy reform. It was not enough to be demonstrating innovation in other areas (tenure, funding model or construction technique) – the program might include these other innovations but without a policy reform focus a project could not be included. To be considered a possible case study for this thesis, a policy experiment:

- Must be government led or include a government lead. May come from any level of government
- Must have a goal or focus that includes policy reform

- Must focus on housing but this can be any aspect where policy exists (typologies, tenure, funding etc)
- May come from any scale of influence (from ideation to an actual build project)

Once this list of inclusion criteria was established, a policy review of housing strategies was undertaken to explore government appetite for policy innovation in the housing space to identify potential case studies.

3.4 POLICY REVIEW

To determine the extent of inclusion of experimentation as a policy making method, a policy review of housing strategies in Australia was undertaken. The case for more comparative policy housing research was made by Stephens in 2011, who identified the benefits of the approach when looking to inform future policy. While Stephens' original work made the case for an increase in housing policy comparison between one or more countries, the emerging nature of experimentation as a policy making method in Australia meant that it was necessary to undertake a national policy review first, with the hope that international comparisons may be the focus of future work. The aims of the policy analysis were to examine if experiments form part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies in Australia and if experiments are described as a method of policy creation in these same strategies. The results of the policy analysis, which are discussed in Chapter 4, provide the preparation work needed to identify case study policy experiments before the formal research questions could be addressed.

3.4.1 POLICY SELECTION

Housing systems in Australia are diverse and there is not a uniform suite of housing policy documents developed in each jurisdiction. A housing strategy is released by each jurisdiction periodically, which generally provides the broad strategic vision for housing in that state. As a representative example, the current housing strategies from each State and Territory in Australia were the subject for this policy review. Tasmania could not be included in the formal review as Tasmania's state-wide housing strategy was due for release in 2022 but was further delayed and no equivalent document currently exists. The existing *Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-2025* does not provide the broad strategic vision for housing in Tasmania and therefore was not included as part of the review. The *Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper* was examined and is discussed in Chapter 4. Updating the policy analysis presented in this chapter to include Tasmanian would be a suggested area of future research.

Seven strategies were selected for review and are listed in Table. All policies were released between 2017 and 2021.

Table 3.1: Current Australian housing strategies

State/Territory	Name of Housing Strategy	Released
Australian Capital Territory	ACT Housing Strategy	Oct 2018
New South Wales	Housing 2041	May 2021
Northern Territory	A Home for all Territorians 2020 - 2025	Dec 2019
Queensland	Queensland Housing Strategy 2017- 2027	2017
South Australia	Our Housing Future 2020-2030	Dec 2019
Victoria	Homes for Victorians	2017
Western Australia	WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030	Oct 2020

Some housing policies had associated documents that were included in the review as supplementary documents, such as the *Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan* which was released at the same time as the *Housing 2041* in New South Wales.

3.4.2 POLICY SELECTION RATIONALE

Consideration has been made as to which documents should be included in this review. Statutory instruments would be unlikely at this point to include mandated experimental programs. It should be clarified that this research does not intend readers to reason that the use of state level housing strategies as the basis for this policy review indicates that these documents are the most comprehensive documents from each jurisdiction, the main driver of housing system reform in each state or have any statutory weight. The decision to use state level housing strategies as the basis of this policy review was determined for two main reasons:

- A housing strategy exists for each state and territory, ensuring a representative example of policy from each jurisdiction
- Housing strategies provide the overall strategic vision for each jurisdiction – they are the broad, mission statement documents that provide a means for understanding the attitudes and priorities of each state government at that moment in time.

Pawson et al 2019b (p. 6) argue that a study of the influences on the housing system must take into account all interventions “irrespective of whether these are officially or popularly acknowledged as housing policy”. This position underpins my decision to use this policy review of current housing strategies as a starting point for exploration into the impact of experimental governance on the

housing system in Australia. The purpose of this review is to investigate which of the states and territories in Australia are making space in policy to accept experimentation as a policy making method.

It is acknowledged that housing strategies, which form just one part of a larger housing system do not direct all jurisdictional operations related to housing. Housing experiments can and have been introduced as part of other statutory reforms, such as the *Future Home Project* that has been developed as part of the *Better Apartment Design Standards* program in Victoria.

3.4.3 EXPERIMENTATION FOR POLICY REFORM

A 3-point “experimentation for policy reform” scale was developed to assist in categorising the housing strategies in regard to the specificity of their directions around housing experimentation. The scale was initially conceived as a simple yes/no question, where after reading through each housing strategy they could be categorised as “yes, includes experimental action/s that is linked to policy reform” or “no, does not include an experimental action that is linked to policy reform”. However, after reviewing two housing strategies, the *ACT Housing Strategy* and *Housing 2041* from NSW, a middle category emerged, whereby a housing strategy may include an experimental action, but it may not be specifically linked to policy reform. The initial review was also revealed that general sentiments around experimentation and innovation appeared in housing strategies, which should be captured. These initial findings resulted in the development of the experimentation for policy reform scale, as shown in table 3.2 and provides a framework to categorise each housing strategy reviewed.

Table 3.2: Experimentation for policy reform scale

Experimentation for policy reform scale	Description
Level 1: No experimentation	Does not include any action or discourse related to experimentation
Level 2: General inclusion of experimentation	Includes an experimentation action but not linked to policy reform
Level 3: Experimentation for policy reform	Includes an experimentation action that is linked to policy reform

3.4.4 CODING AND CATEGORISING THE POLICIES

Policy analysis of each strategy was undertaken using NVivo software. To establish if housing strategies including experimentation, the following aspects were coded:

- Specific actions
- General sentiments

3.4.4.1 SPECIFIC ACTIONS

For each housing strategy, any specific actions related to experimentation were recorded. Due to the wide variations in how experiments are described, it was inappropriate to conduct a simple key-word search using synonyms for “experiment”, such as “pilot programs”, “experiments”, “demonstrations” or “trials”. Rather, it was necessary for each housing strategy to be read in whole to identify actions related to experimentation by their title and description. Actions that included connections to policy reform or production were also recorded.

For the purposes of this initial review, additional characteristics were recorded and coded to capture variations in the experiments, such as aspect of housing targeted, if the experiment had an identified site etc. However, these additional characteristics were not used as exclusion criteria at this stage in the research. The discussion section of Chapter 4 outlines the possible uses of these characteristics as themes for future research.

Additional characteristics documented for the experiments were:

- Aspect of housing system focus (for example: housing typologies, tenure models)
- Identified site or location
- Specific provisions for social housing, affordable housing, First Nations housing or accessible housing etc

3.4.4.2 GENERAL SENTIMENTS

To determine if a strategy was generally supportive of housing experimentation, phrases that related to experimentation were recorded. As discussed above, key word searches were an inappropriate method to navigate each housing strategy, so each housing strategy had to be read in whole and then coded.

Results from coding the housing policies were analysed and categorised according to the “experimentation for policy reform” scale, the results of which are presented in Chapter 4.

3.5 CASE STUDIES

3.5.1 WHY A CASE STUDY APPROACH?

As identified in Chapter 2, a case study approach is the most used and accepted method of inquiry in the experimental governance program space. Case study approaches are also widely utilised in planning and housing scholarship. To confirm that a case study approach is most appropriate for this thesis, the work of Yin (2014) which proposes three conditions to determine which research method is most appropriate, was applied. The first condition relates to the form of a research question. As discussed in Chapter 2, this thesis is focused on examining the “how” and “why” of experimental governance programs, indicating that an experiment, history or case study approach would be most suitable. How much “control a researcher has over actual behavioral events” (Yin, 2014, p. 40) is the second condition to be considered. As I had no control over behaviour in this thesis, the experiment method is therefore deemed inappropriate, leaving history or case study as the remaining methods.

The final condition offered by Yin is the extent to which the “focus of the research is on contemporary events” (Yin, 2014, p. 40). The focus of this thesis is on contemporary events, therefore, to examine emerging experimental governance programs in housing, a case study approach was selected for this thesis. The relevance of the case study approach is explained by Yin (2014, p34) who states “the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant”. This project seeks to explore the emergence of experimental governance and how influential these programs might be in stimulating housing system change. The case study approach is appropriate for this research for the following reasons:

- The emerging nature of experimental governance programs in housing meant that there were only a limited number of programs that could be examined. Therefore, there was not a critical mass of programs where the analysis of survey results or focus groups would be appropriate.
- The variation in government lead level (and therefore jurisdictional limitations), housing system area of focus, timeline and objectives between projects needed a robust method that would allow thematic comparison of findings

While the case study method can produce a “thick” narrative, Flyvbjerg (2006, p237) argues that this is a positive aspect of the method, with the depth of findings “often a sign that the study has uncovered a particularly rich problematic”. I take a similar stance on the value of detailed examination for this research. As this thesis will be the first research into some of the experimental governance programs it would be pertinent to examine the projects in detail to discover emerging themes. An additional and final factor that supported my decision to use a case study approach is Creswell and Creswell’s (2018, p14) argument that a case study approach is the most appropriate when “evaluation” is to be carried out. Considering one of the aims of this thesis is to assess if experimental governance programs are a productive method of policy creation, a case study approach will allow this examination.

3.5.2 INNOVATING URBAN GOVERNANCE SCHOLARSHIP

Academic literature reviewed in the previous chapter was also used to aid in the development of the research approach. A case study approach was the most commonly used and widely accepted method to exploring experimental governance programs. For example, to analyse and categorise the impact (direct, indirect and diffuse) of living labs, Schliwa et al. (2015) compared four case studies, selected from a larger survey of living labs. The examination of co-production approaches in urban living labs by Nesti (2018) utilised a case study approach.

Larger studies undertook questionnaires to collect data, such as the work by McGann et al. 2018, who completed a large survey of 52 innovation labs, with a case study approach later utilised by McGann et al (2021), who selected five case studies from Australia and New Zealand from the original larger survey to explore co-production. The researchers reflected on the choice of case studies from a larger cohort, the five being selected as they “capture the diversity of labs identified in the survey, they represent the different sectors and jurisdictions labs work within as well as the different methods and approaches they utilize” (McGann et al. 2021, p302). As discussed in section 2.2, each level of government in Australia plays a different role in the housing system and therefore, following McGann

et al. 2021, it will be important to capture jurisdictional variation in the selection of case studies for this thesis.

3.5.3 CONFIRMATION OF CASE STUDIES

The findings of the housing strategy analysis from Chapter 4 resulted in the identification of two potential case studies: the Demonstration Housing Project (DHP) from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT); and the pilot programs from the New South Wales (NSW) housing strategy, *Housing 2041*. Following grey literature analysis, initial interviews were conducted with government representatives from ACT's Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) and NSW's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). The DHP was confirmed as the first case study for this thesis due to the scope and current stage of the project. As the focus and timeline for the pilot programs in NSW had not yet been determined, they could not be included as a case study.

The second case study identified was the City of Sydney's Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge. The City of Sydney is a local council and therefore discussion of its programs would not be included as part of a state level policy analysis. Initial interviews with participants of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge revealed the existence of the Future Homes Project in Victoria (not the inclusionary zoning pilot program detailed in the *Homes for Victorians*), which became the third case study for the thesis.

3.5.4 CASE STUDY JUSTIFICATION

Case study selection for this research was guided by the work of McGann et al. (2021), as discussed in Chapter 2, who sought to capture a "diversity of labs" in their examination of innovation labs in Australia and New Zealand by selecting case studies from different jurisdictions, that utilised different methods. The case studies selected for this thesis come from three different jurisdictions in Australia: the Australian Capital Territory, administered by the Commonwealth Government; the state of Victoria; and the City of Sydney, which is a local government area. The choice to select a case study from each level of government in Australia will also provide an opportunity to explore the fragmented nature of housing in Australia, where all levels of government play a role in housing, as outlined by Gurran and Phibbs (2015). In addition to representing different jurisdictions, the case studies also highlight three different areas where policy experimentation in housing can occur: the Demonstration Housing Project works to make statutory changes to the Territory Plan to test new housing typologies, one lot at a time; the Victorian Future Homes Project has the objective to demonstrate exemplar apartment building design and make changes to a specific planning policy, the Better Apartment Design Standards; and, the City of Sydney's Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge aims to collect ideas to increase affordable housing at a local government level.

The three case studies are all ongoing but are at different stages of the process. The Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge, which began in 2019, has been completed, with three of the winners combining their proposals into a final concept; the Demonstration Housing Project was established in 2017 and has progressed two variations to the Territory Plan to date, with construction work on the first project commencing in 2023; the Futures Homes Project in Victoria held a design competition in 2020 and commenced a pilot program with a local council in 2022 now that the four exemplar designs have been finalised. The varying stages of the programs will provide the opportunity to explore the direct, indirect and diffuse (after Schliwa et al. 2015, p4) influences of the three case studies.

3.5.5 CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Information on each project is available publicly, with most of the documentation being presented online and focused on guiding participants through each program. However, to understand the motivations of establishing an experimental program, the purpose and the hoped impact, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with individuals associated with each project. The interviews also explored the movement of experimental governance programs into the housing space and identified other barriers to innovation in the area. University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval for this project was granted on 28 May 2021 (Project Number 2021/284).

The study used a purposive sampling approach. The housing projects identified as case studies generally have a project website with contact details provided for a project representative or team email mailbox. Using these contact details, housing organisations as a whole or individuals representing housing organisations were directly approached to take part in the study. To qualify for inclusion in the study, participants must be over the age of 18 and working for a government department or private company involved in the hosting of a housing experiment.

Semi structured interviews (n=22) were conducted. To begin the interview collection process, government representatives were approached first via email. Without the cooperation of the government partners, it would have been inappropriate and potentially more difficult to approach individual participants. A snowballing sampling approach was then utilised once it became apparent that government partners were generous and excited about suggesting potential future interviews. A benefit of snowball sampling is that it allows researchers to access “hard to reach populations” (Parker et al. 2019). In this research, this included individuals involved in the review or refinement of finalist’s ideas, often from other government bodies. Broadly the interviews can be divided into five groups:

- Government representatives who oversee the operation of the program
- Individuals who were integral to the establishment of the program
- Individuals who participated in the program and had success in the program (such as being identified as a winner or having a project selected for inclusion in a further stage)
- Individuals who participated in the program but were unsuccessful
- Individuals who were involved in the review or refinement of finalist’s ideas

The table below provides an overview of the individuals who were interviewed for this thesis. In addition, one interview with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and one interview with the Greater Canberra group were undertaken.

Table 3.3: Interviewees across the three case studies

	Demonstration Housing Project (Australian Capital Territory)	Future Homes Project (Victoria)	Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge (City of Sydney)
Government representatives who oversee the operation the program	Two interviews	Two interviews	
Individuals who were integral to the establishment of the program	One interview		Two interviews
Individuals who participated in the program and had success in the program	Three interviews	Three interviews	Four interviews
Individuals who participated in the program but were unsuccessful	Two interviews	Two interviews (unexpected as these individuals were interviewed because of involvement in another case study)	
Individuals who were involved in the review or refinement of finalist's ideas	One interview		

When potential interviewees were emailed, copies of the participant information statement and participant consent form were included. Those that agreed to be interviewed were then sent a suggested time and a request for a signed participant consent form. As the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, twenty interviews were conducted over Zoom or MS Teams, most lasting for approximately 60 minutes. One phone interview was conducted, lasting two hours. Only one follow up interview via Zoom was undertaken.

Interview questions prepared for government representatives focused on the origins and operation of the experiment as well as future goals for each program and ability to repeat the experiment. Participants were asked about the experience of being part of the program and their thoughts about

how the program could be improved. Those involved in the review or refinement of finalist's ideas were asked about their role in the program. In addition, as these individuals were often selected by the program due to their high levels of experience in the housing system, they were also asked about the overall operation of policy experiments in the housing space. A copy of the interview schedule is provided at Appendix A.

Though participants were identified based on their interaction with one specific case study, during the interviews it emerged that two separate interviewees had entered another of the case study programs. This provided a unique opportunity to have the industry briefs of two of the case studies compared from a participant perspective.

3.5.5 OTHER CASE STUDY DATA SOURCES

In addition to the interviews for each case study, press releases, social media posts, government reports and documents were reviewed to understand the origins of each program. Government websites, competition briefs, evaluation criteria and submission panels were reviewed to understand the parameters and operation of each policy experiment. In force legislation, draft amendments, current planning instruments, Hansard Records and parliamentary committee reports were also reviewed to understand the ever-changing policy landscape. Utilising this additional material follows established research approaches to understanding policy and as Baker and McGuirk (2017, p. 434) note, such documents can provide "windows into the creation, mobilization, and application of policy knowledge."

3.5.6 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SUBMISSIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

One of the projects that was part of the Demonstration Housing Project, received the highest number of public submissions on their draft Territory Plan Variation in the history of the ACT. Interviews related to this "case study within a case study" revealed how an experimental process had unexpectedly become politicised resulting in a stressful and uncertain time for the program. In order to understand the issues raised in the submission, a heuristic tool was used to categorise the nature of the submissions:

- Localised concerns about the design (e.g. a neighbouring property raising concerns about aesthetics or parking)
- concerns about the draft variation and its impact on wider ACT
- concerns about the Demonstration Housing Project more generally

The results of the thematic analysis helped to highlight the complexity around the public perceptions and understandings of the role of the policy experiment. Being able to share the results of the thematic analysis with the Demonstration Housing Project participants while the project was still live was a unique experience as it helped to reassure them about the focus of the public submissions.

3.5.7 CASE STUDY ANALYSIS APPROACH

For the interview data, audio files were transcribed and then entered into NVivo. The first stage of manual coding was to separate data into functional categories: background information about each program; operation of the program; and outcomes both formal and informal. Findings that emerged

from this first round of coding were then used to conduct a second stage of manual coding based on observed themes that could be explored across the case studies. The themes were linked to each of the research questions to allow comparative analysis between each of the case study programs.

Each case study will be explored under the following headings:

- Case Study Background
- Program Description
- Thematic analysis related to addressing the three research questions
- Future of the Program

The “case study within a case study” process was necessary to draw out some of the specific experiences of the participants and the experimental governance program. Each case study is the subject of an individual findings chapter: Chapter 5 Demonstration Housing Project; Chapter 6 Future Homes Project; and Chapter 7 Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge. Chapter 8 provides a thematic analysis that compares the three case studies. The final stage of analysis was to reflect on case study findings and outline implications for policy, which is provided in Chapter 9.

3.6 OBSERVATION

Site visits could not be undertaken as fieldwork was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. As most of the projects were still at ideation or planning phase it was appropriate to continue with the selected case studies. However, extra levels of detail and understanding, particularly of the lot selection for some case studies could have been obtained if sites could have been visited in person. The release of site subject maps by the Future Homes Project helped to provide a spatial understanding of eligible lots, lessening the requirement for observational data.

To gain a better understanding of the process of participating in housing innovation experiments and practice of “hacking”, as described by Maalsen 2021, observations as an online participant in the Ivory Innovation Hack-A-House competition in 2022 were recorded. An entry into the housing affordability category with a proposal, entitled “Shared Futures” related to using an experimental governance approach to finding a new model of institutional investment in affordable housing for the United States and Australia was well received. Experiencing the hack-a-thon provided insights into how a short-form experimental program operates and allowed reflection on the depth of experience and knowledge that is required of the actor to participate in such a scheme.

3.7 LIMITATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

As discussed by Schliwa et al. (2015) and Kivimaa et al. (2015) in Chapter 2, the full impact of experimental governance programs can best be understood once time has passed. The limited number of experimental governance programs in Australia that focus on housing meant that it was not possible to only select programs that were complete for analysis. At the time of writing, the Demonstration Housing Project and the Future Homes Project are still “live” and there has not yet been confirmation about how the results of the 2019 Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge might be

formalised into local council programming or policy, apart from a summary of the final winning project included in the latest vision plan. None of the case studies have been the subject of a formal evaluation process, nor are the projects at a stage where a complete assessment could be undertaken. Though the programs were all at different stages during the data collection process, the case study approach was flexible enough to capture initial feedback and critique of each program.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The methodological approach used to address the research questions has been outlined in this chapter. Following a policy analysis of housing strategies released in Australia between 2017 and 2021, a comparative case study approach was used to collect and analyse data related to three experimental governance programs. Data sources analysed as part of the case study material included material specific to each program such as websites, competition briefs, evaluation criteria, press releases, social media posts and government documents. Other government sources that provided the policy context for each program, such as in force legislation, draft amendments, current planning instruments, Hansard Records and parliamentary committee reports were also used as case study material. Though data collection covered a wide range of sources, it was assembled with a structured approach. In addition, 22 semi-structured interviews were completed to gather further insights into the motivations behind the creation of the projects and the intended impact, unexpected barriers and general thoughts around experimental governance programs. Two rounds of coding were undertaken on the semi-structured interviews to develop themes that could be used for comparative analysis across the case studies.

The following chapter, the first of four chapters that present the findings of the research, will discuss the policy review of housing strategies from around Australia.

CHAPTER 4 AUSTRALIAN HOUSING STRATEGY

POLICY ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The shift towards innovation and experimentation in urban governance and the public sector was discussed in Chapter 2, with examples of generalised public sector innovation in the housing space, such as moves to reduce red tape and a focus on housing data presentation. While the proliferation of innovative housing programs can be viewed as evidence of the “experimental mood” (McGuirk et al. 2020) of government in the housing space in Australia, it is unclear if this mode of governance is valued to the extent that it is being included in long-term strategic policies. A systematic tracking of the inclusion of experimentation as a policy making method in housing policies in Australia has not yet been undertaken. This chapter presents the first analysis of current housing strategies from around Australia that focuses specifically on determining the extent of inclusion of experimentation as a policy making method. The aims of the policy analysis were to examine if experiments form part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies in Australia and if experiments are described as a method of policy creation in these same strategies. The results of the policy analysis provide the preparation work needed to identify case study policy experiments before the formal research questions could be addressed.

To complete the policy analysis the current housing strategy of each state and territory in Australia was located. As Tasmania is still in the process of preparing a draft housing strategy, the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper released in 2022 was analysed instead. The “experimentation for policy reform scale” as introduced in Chapter 3 will be used as a basis for assessing the influence of experimental governance on state housing strategies, which are a representative sample of the various articles that constitute housing policies in Australia.

To clarify, the inclusion of actions or policies related to experimentation should not be viewed as either a “good” or “bad” thing. There is no benchmark, standard or research that states that the inclusion of experiments makes a “better” strategy. Rather, this chapter is an exploration of which policies do make references to experimentation as a way to track the influence of experimental governance into the housing space in Australia.

4.2 POLICY SELECTION

As discussed in Chapter 3, housing systems in Australia are diverse and there is not a uniform suite of housing policy documents developed in each jurisdiction. A housing strategy is released by each jurisdiction periodically, which generally provides the broad strategic vision for housing in that state. As a representative example, the current housing strategies from each State and Territory in Australia were the subject for this policy review:

- Homes for Victorians (Victoria, 2017)

- Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 (Queensland, 2017)
- Australian Capital Territory Housing Strategy (Australian Capital Territory, October 2018)
- A Home for all Territorians 2020 – 2025 (Northern Territory, December 2019)
- Our Housing Future 2020-2030 (South Australia, December 2019)
- Western Australia Housing Strategy 2020-2030 (Western Australia, October 2020)
- Housing 2041 (New South Wales, May 2021)

Some housing policies had associated documents that were included in the review as supplementary documents, such as the *Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan* which was released at the same time as the *Housing 2041* in New South Wales.

At the time that the policy analysis was undertaken Tasmania did not have a state-wide housing strategy. The existing *Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-2025* did not provide the broad strategic vision for housing in Tasmania and therefore was not included as part of the review. The Tasmanian government indicated that a finalised Tasmania’s Housing Strategy would be completed by October 2022 (Tasmanian Government, 2021) but the final document was not released until the end of November 2023. In September 2022 the Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper was released. This document was included as part of the review, with the caveat that the actions of the final Tasmanian Housing Strategy may not reflect the topics presented in the discussion paper. Two rounds of industry and community consultation will occur between the release of the discussion paper and the final housing strategy.

As introduced in Chapter 3, a 3-point “experimentation for policy reform” scale was developed to assist in categorising the housing strategies in regard to the specificity of their directions around housing experimentation.

Table 4.1 Experimentation for policy reform scale

Experimentation for policy reform scale	Description
Level 1: No experimentation	Does not include any action or discourse related to experimentation
Level 2: General inclusion of experimentation	Includes an experimentation action but not linked to policy reform
Level 3: Experimentation for policy reform	Includes an experimentation action that is linked to policy reform

As part of the review, specific actions and general sentiments around experimentation were also recorded.

4.3 POLICY REVIEW RESULTS

Whilst undertaking the review of the housing strategies, it was observed that a range of words might be used to describe experimentation, such as “pilot programs”, “experiments”, “demonstrations” or “trials” but these terms might also be used in their generic sense. Therefore, it was necessary to read each of the strategies in full to be able to identify specific actions related to experimentation. Once these had been coded, other phrases that related to experimentation were recorded as indications that the policies were generally supportive of housing experimentation. The results of the policy review were used to categorise the seven housing strategies against the “experimentation for policy reform” scale outlined in Chapter 3 and above in Table 4.1.

Table 4.2 Categorisation of policy review results against the experimentation for policy reform scale

Experimentation for policy reform scale	Description of level	Housing Strategies
Level 1: No experimentation	Does not include any action or discourse related to experimentation	<i>A Home for all Territorians (NT)</i> <i>WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030</i> <i>Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027</i>
Level 2: General inclusion of experimentation	Includes an experimentation action but not linked to policy reform	<i>Homes for Victorians</i> <i>Our Housing Future 2020-2030 (SA)</i> <i>Housing 2041 (NSW)</i> <i>*Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper</i>
Level 3: Experimentation for policy reform	Includes an experimentation action that is linked to policy reform	<i>ACT Housing Strategy</i>

*See Section 4.1 for explanation as to why this document was included

A more detailed discussion of each of the housing strategies included at each step on the “experimentation for policy reform” scale is presented below.

4.3.1 LEVEL 1: NO EXPERIMENTATION

The *Home for all Territorians 2020 – 2025* (Northern Territory), the *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* (Western Australia) and the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* do not focus on experimentation as part of their housing strategies. No specific actions related to experimentation are included in these three strategies.

Northern Territory

Analysis of the Northern Territory housing policy, released in 2019, reveals frequent usage of terms associated with “strength” and “diversity”, epitomised in the strategies vision “A Home for all Territorians: housing that enables social and economic wellbeing and strong communities” (Northern Territory Government 2019, p. 13). The use of terms such as “innovation” and “experimentation” do not appear in the policy.

Western Australia

Similarly, the housing strategy for Western Australia, released in 2020, does not place any emphasis on the use of experimentation in the housing sector. The five key areas of focus outlined in the *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* are: supply; design; housing literacy; access; and housing pathways (Western Australian Government 2020, p.9). Specific actions and targets are grouped under each area of focus. While the term “innovation” does feature, it is only used to describe new housing sector partnerships, not the strategic housing actions themselves. Policy analysis of the strategy indicates a focus on language related to “supply” and “housing pathways”, reflecting the key areas of focus discussed above.

Queensland

The *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027*, released in 2017, does not include any specific actions related to housing experiments. The strategy articulates a commitment to “innovation” in the opening statement from the Queensland Premier, as well as in the vision statement of the strategy: “The Housing Strategy is a long-term plan to embrace innovation and a commitment to make meaningful changes that lead to better long-term housing outcomes for Queenslanders” (Queensland Government 2017, p. 4) but experimentation is not discussed. The four key areas of focus in the strategy are: growth; prosperity; connections; and confidence (Queensland Government 2017, p. 5). Under the “confidence” area of focus, the strategy comments on the Government’s commitment to innovating in the areas of housing design and legislative frameworks for regulated forms of housing (Queensland Government 2017, p. 14). However, it is unclear if experimentation will be a method employed to “modernise the housing regulatory framework” (Queensland Government 2017, p. 14).

Government led housing experimentation may still be occurring in these jurisdictions through other policies or programs outside the remit of the housing strategy.

4.3.2 LEVEL 2: GENERAL INCLUSION OF EXPERIMENTATION

The *Homes for Victorians, Our Housing Future 2020-2030* (South Australia) and *Housing Strategy 2041* (New South Wales) all include actions that are related to experimentation in the housing space but do not make formal links between the results of the experiment and policy reform. Each of these strategies and their relevant actions will be explored individually below.

Victoria

The Victorian Housing Strategy, *Homes for Victorians*, was released in 2017. Actions in this plan are presented under five key initiatives:

1. Supporting people to buy their own home
2. Increasing the supply of housing through faster planning

3. Promoting stability and affordability for renters
4. Increasing and renewing social housing stock
5. Improving housing services for Victorians in need

(Victorian Government 2017, p. 5).

As part of the second initiative, the action “2.4 Inclusionary housing to increase the supply of social and affordable housing” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) is outlined. The first part of the action details an inclusionary zoning pilot program on government land deemed surplus. The strategy claims this “It’s a new and innovative way to think about housing” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) but as discussed in the introduction of this paper, inclusionary zoning is an already established method in the affordable housing space. It is unclear which of the parameters of this “pilot” are innovative but from the description in the strategy it does not appear that the results of this program will be upscaled into wider housing system reform, especially as the target locations are clearly stated as surplus government land. The use of a new “Fast Track Government Land Service” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) to facilitate this pilot also warrants further investigation and scrutiny.

A new framework to better integrate voluntary agreements at a local council/developer scale is the second part of action 2.4. The components of this framework are clearly outlined, such as “a legal definition of social and affordable housing will be put into legislation” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) and there is no indication that experimentation will be used as part of this policy reform.

The current Future Homes Project in Victoria is related to the *Better Apartments* guidelines and is addressed in this research but is not reflected in the above documentation. Action 3.5 of *Homes for Victorians*, does give a general overview of the role of the *Better Apartment* guidelines in improving housing standards but there is no mention of any related experimental project.

South Australia

South Australia’s *Our Housing Future 2020-2030* was released in 2019. Five key strategies, are presented (South Australian Government 2019, p. 7):

1. Create conditions for a well-functioning housing market that meets the housing needs of all South Australians
2. Reduce housing stress through 20,000 affordable housing solutions
3. Create housing pathways to enable people to access housing and services as their needs change
4. Prevent and reduce homelessness through targeted and tailored responses
5. Modernise the social housing system and reposition it for success

Strategy 2 “Reduce housing stress through 20,000 affordable housing solutions” (Government of South Australia 2019, p. 14) includes two specific actions related to experimentation:

Action 2.3 Reviewing and developing underutilised government, private and not-for-profit land to drive innovation and supply of new affordable housing outcomes.

Action 2.6 Encouraging new partnerships and investment through pilots and further development of innovative financing, planning and supply solutions including Build to Rent, innovative design, and shared equity products.

Information provided about each action is limited in *Our Housing Future 2020-2030*. Action 2.3 aims to demonstrate innovation in the areas of “design, construction and financing” but there is no specific link to how the results of this program might influence future policy. Action 2.6 is specifically related to affordable housing innovation but again no specific links to how the results of this program might influence future policy are made.

New South Wales

The NSW *Housing Strategy 2041* was released in May 2021. The strategy identifies five priority areas (New South Wales Government 2021, p. 12): data; regulation; government-owned land; research agenda; and local government and communities. One of the key actions under government owned land is “partner with industry and community housing providers to test new housing typologies on government land” (New South Wales Government 2021 p. 12). The *NSW Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan*, which was released at the same time, provides more detail on this program under action 3.5.1.

Demonstrate innovation through market-leading pilot projects on government land that showcase sustainability, design quality and diversity of housing types, tenures and delivery models. Government developments are to exceed market benchmarks for delivering greater social, economic and environmental benefit.

(NSW Housing 2041 2021-22 Action Plan, 2021, pg. 18, emphasis in original.)

Housing Strategy 2041 refers to the build-to-rent concept as one of the housing typologies they are testing (New South Wales Government 2021, p. 31). However, this is in fact not a pilot program but refers to the *State Environmental Planning Policy Amendment (Build-to-rent Housing) 2021* that was made in February, before *Housing Strategy 2041* was released.

The language of the NSW housing strategy indicates a strong trust in the development of new solutions to housing issues through innovation and digital technologies. The testing of new housing typologies is mentioned several times in the strategy. However, the specific objective related to a pilot program is restricted to government owned land and there is no mention of how the results from this pilot may be used to influence future housing policy. It is unclear which housing typologies will be tested as part of the pilot. Build-to-rent is also indicated as a candidate for testing, however reforms to support this type of development were in place before the strategy was released, thus indicating it is not an experiment.

Tasmania

The *Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper* provides an outline of intent for the future Tasmanian Housing Strategy and therefore does not contain any specific actions that can be assessed. There is a reference to innovative solutions related to “piloting shared tenancy options within social housing” (Tasmanian Government, 2022, p27). As discussed in section 4.1, the Tasmanian Housing Strategy was released in late November 2023, providing specific actions related to housing in the

state. Updating the policy analysis presented in this chapter to include Tasmania would be a suggested area of future research.

4.3.3 LEVEL 3: EXPERIMENTATION FOR POLICY REFORM

The ACT Housing Strategy is the only strategy out of the seven included for analysis that includes specific actions related to housing experimentation and made formal links to how the outcomes of the experiment would be used to inform future policy.

Australian Capital Territory

Released in October 2018, the *ACT Housing Strategy* includes four specific pilot programs across three objectives. The approach of the strategy is presented under five strategy goals (ACT Government 2018, p. 5):

1. An equitable, diverse and sustainable supply of housing for the ACT community
2. Reducing homelessness
3. Strengthening social housing assistance
4. Increasing affordable rental housing
5. Increasing affordable home ownership

The first strategy goal includes the objective 1E “facilitate innovative design and delivery mechanisms” (ACT Government 2018, p. 20) which continues the work of the existing Demonstration Housing Projects program, which was an action from the Minister for Planning’s 2015 Statement of Planning Intent. The key focus of the Demonstration Housing Projects program is to produce demonstration social and affordable housing projects that have a focus on sustainability. Research into alternative housing ownership and occupancy models is also a focus. The strategy outlines the connection between the demonstration program and policy reform: “the initiative will test future policy direction using real projects to deliver more innovative, sustainable and affordable housing” (ACT Government 2018, p. 20).

The fourth strategy goal includes the objective 4B “grow the supply of affordable private rental properties” (ACT Government 2018, p. 38) and states that a home sharing pilot program will be established. The strategy notes that the pilot is inspired by the “HomeShare Australia and New Zealand Alliance Incorporated model” (ACT Government 2018, p. 38), whereby “funding will be made available to a provider to run a service of matching pre-qualified tenants with existing home owners with space in their home that is suitable to share” (ACT Government 2018, p. 38). Objective 4e “target programs to increase supply of affordable housing for vulnerable and disadvantaged households” (ACT Government 2018, p. 40) relates to the provision of funding for two pilot projects, the Affordable Housing Innovation Fund, which “responds to the housing and accommodation needs of families escaping domestic violence” and a “development project for people living with a disability” (ACT Government 2018, p. 40). The *ACT Housing Strategy* does not make implicit connections between these three pilot programs under the fourth strategy goal and policy formation. The purpose of the pilot projects under objective 4e is to “provide government with an understanding of development feasibility with a view to continuing and increasing the provision of this type of accommodation into future years” (ACT Government 2018, p. 40).

4.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This policy analysis has revealed that generally state and territory governments are making room for experimentation as a policy making method in their housing strategies, with experiments forming a part of the discourse and actions of housing strategies. Experiments are being used as a method of policy creation in one jurisdiction in Australia, the Australian Capital Territory. The results of this policy analysis provide empirical evidence to help define what a policy experiment in the housing space is, which is the first research question of this thesis. In addition, the policy analysis has confirmed one project for inclusion in the case study component of this research. A summary of the policy analysis findings are presented below.

4.4.1 EXPERIMENTS AS PART OF THE DISCOURSE AND ACTIONS OF HOUSING STRATEGIES

Experiments are featured in several actions of four housing strategies from Australia. The *ACT Housing Strategy* included four pilot programs as part of its objectives; *Our Housing Future 2020-2030* (South Australia) included two pilot programs; and *Homes for Victorians* and *Housing 2041* (NSW) included one pilot program each. Discourse surrounding experimentation and innovation is present in five strategies (ACT Housing Strategy, Homes for Victorians, Our Housing Future 2020-2030 (SA) Housing 2041 (NSW) and Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027). Two strategies did not include any mention of experimentation (A Home for all Territorians (NT); and WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030).

4.4.2 EXPERIMENTS AS A METHOD OF POLICY CREATION

Experiments are described explicitly as a method of policy creation in the *ACT Housing Strategy*. The connection between pilot programs and policy creation are not made in the housing strategies from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. This suggests that while there is increased appetite for experimental and innovative approaches, as identified by M^cGuirk et al. 2021, it does not always translate into policy and strategic documents. Though Stephens (2011) asserted the value of comparative policy review in modern housing research, this research will need to extend beyond state housing strategies to understand where experimental approaches fit into government programming and future policy creation.

4.4.3 TEMPORAL VARIATIONS

There did not appear to be a distinct temporal aspect to the propensity to include housing experiments. For example, when comparing the two strategies released in 2017, the Queensland *Housing Strategy 2017-2027* though committed to innovation, did not include any experimental programs, whereas *Homes for Victorians* included one pilot program related to inclusionary zoning. This indicates that the inclusion of experimental methods is not exclusively seen in strategies released most recently, following the COVID-19 pandemic. References to experimentation and piloting have been observed across the timeline of state housing strategies in Australia.

4.4.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIMENTS

In total eight experiments were identified across four housing strategies. As discussed in Chapter 3, the additional characteristics of housing system focus; geographic location; and specific provisions for social, affordable, First Nations or accessible housing for each experiment were observed. Analysis of

these characteristics reveal that affordable housing explicitly stated as the focus of six of the pilot programs (Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia). One pilot program focused on housing for people with a disability (Australian Capital Territory). Given the current lack of affordable housing in Australia as discussed in Chapter 2, it is positive to see this as a focus of experimental programs. However, given Palm et al. 2018 critique on the limited scale of a pilot program in Victoria, the lack of details about the target size of each experiment and scaling options make it difficult to assess how programs might help to address the levels of affordable housing needed in each state.

The pilot programs from Victoria and New South Wales are both restricted to government land. However, the focus of each program is distinct, with Victoria focusing on inclusionary zoning and New South Wales focusing on new housing typologies. These findings point to possible geographical locations of initial pilot sites for experiments. The restriction to government land may be necessary to assist in the trail of innovative ideas but raises questions about how programs may scale from a pilot where land procurement may not be a factor to a model that needs to factor in the cost of land.

4.4.5 SPECIFICITY OF EXPERIMENTS

There is distinct variation in the level of detail provided for each of the pilot programs. The South Australia plan provides minimal detail about possible pilot programs. The *ACT Housing Strategy* is very specific in its targets, for example rather than simply stating affordable housing, they indicate targets of affordable private rental properties, affordable housing for vulnerable and disadvantaged households, and “housing and accommodation needs of families escaping domestic violence” and a “development project for people living with a disability” (ACT Government 2018, p. 40). With the majority of the pilot programs lacking in clear detail about who the target group might be, how many dwellings the pilot might achieve, project timelines etc, it is difficult to get a clear sense of how each experiment might be working towards the kind of system wide reforms that Gurrán (2019) calls for.

4.4.6 HOUSING STRATEGIES ARE JUST ONE POLICY TOOL THAT CAN BE USED TO PROMOTE OR ESTABLISH HOUSING EXPERIMENTATION

The inclusion of an action specifically related to housing experimentation is seen in plans from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. However, this does not preclude the operation of housing experiments in jurisdictions where housing strategies have not included specific actions related to experimentation. Government led housing experiments do exist in states where there is no mention of experimentation in that state’s housing policy. As indicated previously, housing programs may exist separate to (or in spite of) the goals and visions of a state’s housing policy. Housing experiments may also be established as part of other policy mechanisms, such as the *Future Homes Project* which will provide policy reform guidance for the *Better Apartments Design Standards* in Victoria. Housing experiments may also be established post-strategy, such as the *Queensland Ideas Bank* which was not outlined in the original *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* but aligns itself with the goals of the 2017 strategy. This policy review explored just one type of housing policy documents, state housing strategies, as a way to determine if experiments are being used as a policy making method in the housing space. This shows us that the absence of experimentation in policy and strategic documents, does not necessitate the absence of experimentation on the ground. This perhaps shouldn’t be surprising, as the role of such documents is

to provide a broad vision for the State which means that they are often general in some of their aims. As discussed in the previous chapter, Pawson et al. 2019 argues that it is necessary to consider all interventions into the housing system.

4.5 “EXPERIMENTAL MOOD” IN HOUSING IN AUSTRALIA

The results from this policy analysis provide evidence that the “experimental mood” observed by (McGuirk et al. 2020) in urban governance has now moved into the housing space in Australia, with discourse surrounding experimentation and innovation included in five of the strategies reviewed: the ACT Housing Strategy, Homes for Victorians, Our Housing Future 2020-2030 (SA) Housing 2041 (NCW) and Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027). In addition, experimental programs were included in four strategies: the *ACT Housing Strategy* included four pilot programs as part of its objectives; *Our Housing Future 2020-2030* (South Australia) included two pilot programs; and *Homes for Victorians* and *Housing 2041* (NSW) included one pilot program each.

However, detailed analysis of each of these experimental programs reveals that the limitations on these programs, such as the kinds of land that they are limited to, such as the NSW pilot on government land, or the target group, such as the ACT program for people escaping domestic violence, mean that they are not necessarily the kind of “innovative” system-wide reform that Gurran (2019) and Martin et al. (2023) identify as necessary to address entrenched affordability issues. The results of the policy analysis present an interesting duality in the government’s position on innovation – the language used in many of the strategies is innovation “positive” but the lack of specific actions or the choice to be very selective about when and where pilots and experimental techniques might be used indicates a level of innovation “hesitancy” by government.

4.6 IDENTIFYING CASE STUDIES

As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it was necessary to complete the policy analysis to assist in the identification of possible case study program. From the results of the policy analysis of seven housing strategies from around Australia, The Demonstration Housing Project (DHP) from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT); and the pilot programs from the New South Wales (NSW) housing strategy, *Housing 2041* were shortlisted for inclusion. Following grey literature analysis, initial interviews were conducted with government representatives from ACT’s Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) and NSW’s Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE). The DHP was confirmed as the first case study due to the scope and current stage of the project. As the focus and timeline for the pilot programs in NSW had not yet been determined, they could not be included as a case study.

The second case study identified from initial grey literature review was the City of Sydney’s Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge. The City of Sydney is a local council and therefore discussion of its programs would not be included as part of a state level policy analysis. Initial interviews with participants in the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge revealed the existence of the Future Homes Project in Victoria (not the inclusionary zoning pilot program detailed in the *Homes for Victorians*),

which became the third case study for the thesis. Importantly, this analytical process highlighted the need to look across all levels of government for the presence of experimentation and innovation in policy making, as a lack of programs at State level did not necessitate absence at the local level.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The results from this policy analysis reveal that experimentation and innovation are a feature in five out of the seven current state level housing strategies in Australia, providing evidence of a shift towards innovative urban governance in housing. While innovation is presented positively, the limitations placed on the experiments, generally relegated to a small area or group as opposed to being the method for a larger state-wide action, indicate some level of innovation “hesitancy”. The innovative programs are also not necessarily targeted at solving larger system failures to address housing affordability. From the policy analysis, only one viable case study could be identified, reiterating the finding that housing experiments may also be established as part of other policy mechanisms or by agencies that are not State Government housing and/or planning departments. The second and third case studies were identified from explorations outside state level housing policy. Results from the policy analysis, grey literature review and semi-structured interviews are presented in Chapter 5 for the Demonstration Housing Project from the ACT, in Chapter 6 for the Future Homes Project from Victoria and in Chapter 7 for the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge from the City of Sydney. A thematic comparison of the three case studies is presented in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5 DEMONSTRATION HOUSING PROJECT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the first of the case studies, the Demonstration Housing Project, which was established in 2017 in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and is an example of a Commonwealth Government level policy experiment. The Demonstration Housing project was the first case study to be identified for inclusion in this research, after analysis of the 2018 ACT Housing Strategy, as discussed in Chapter 4, revealed the use of experimentation as a policy production method in the ACT through the ongoing support of the Demonstration Housing Project. The program is associated with the larger Housing Choices program and is administered by the ACT Environment, Planning, Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD). The Demonstration Housing Project is the longest running of the three case studies and was selected for investigation to understand how the program's unique policy making pathway operates. Drawing on analysis of grey literature and semi-structured interviews carried out in relation to this case study this chapter will begin by providing the context and background to the establishment of the program. A discussion of the operation of the program and its formal outcomes will follow. The final part of the chapter will present a thematic analysis of the main issues identified by this research.

5.2 CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

This section will provide the background to the Demonstration Housing Project (DHP), highlighting a long-standing interest in housing innovation in the ACT that precedes the release of the Commonwealth Government's 2016 *Smart Cities Plan* (see Chapter 2 for discussion). As the earliest of the three case studies, the DHP also pre-dates the influx of experimental programs observed by McGuirk et al. (2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The brief exploration of a previous housing design experiment and key ACT policy documents provides context for the establishment of the DHP, demonstrating various attempts in the Territory to explore new pathways towards housing innovation. This kind of multifaceted approach to housing innovation is seen by Madden and Marcuse (2016) as an important method to find affordable housing solutions.

The Demonstration Housing Project was a program established in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The ACT is unique in that it does not have a local level of government– the Legislative Assembly and the ACT Government are responsible for local level issues. At the last census, the ACT had a population of 454,000 people (ABS 2022a). The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate is responsible for planning and housing policy in the ACT, apart from public housing which is managed by the Community Services Directorate. The DHP was established following a resolution passed in June 2017 in the ACT Legislative Assembly, with strong championing by individual Members of Parliament. The program offered “successful proposals the unique opportunity for individualised project specific and design specific changes to statutory planning rule” (Interview with ACT Government Representative 2022). The project was launched during a period where there was a strong desire and interest in innovation in housing, with the Housing Choices program already

underway. The timeline below highlights the release of key documents and events before and during the Demonstration Housing project:

- 2014 New Experimental Architectural Typologies (NEAT) Competition held
- 2015 Statement of Planning Intent released
- 2016 Canberra: Statement of Ambition released
- 2017 Housing Choices Discussion Paper released
- 2017 Demonstration Housing Project launched
- 2018 ACT Housing Strategy released

Investigations into the history of housing in the ACT reveal the limited impact of a previous housing experiment. The New Experimental Architectural Typologies (NEAT) Competition, held in 2014, was a joint venture between the Australian Institute of Architects, ACT Land Development Agency, ACT Environment and Planning Directorate and Defence Housing Australia (Australian Institute of Architects 2014). Limited media and documentation post-announcement of the four competition finalists is available. However, Hansard for the Legislative Assembly for the ACT from March 30 2017 includes a question on notice from Member Le Couteur, who asked the then Minister for Housing and Suburban Development “where and when; if not, how, if at all, has the ACT Government implemented the results of the NEAT competition?” (Australian Capital Territory, Legislative Assembly, March 30, 2017, p. 1389). Minister Berry indicated that there was still potential for a site to be selected. This example highlights one of the main critiques of experimentation, where ideation during the initial states is successful but the program has limited capacity to make ongoing change. The existence of the NEAT, though it did not lead to any formal planning system change, highlights long-term interest in housing innovation in the territory.

In 2015 the Minister for Planning, Mick Gentleman, released a *Statement of Planning Intent*. As part of the first key action, “creating sustainable, compact and liveable neighbourhoods with better transport choices” (Gentleman, 2015, p.5) three immediate actions related to housing innovation were included:

- Identify a number of demonstration precincts across Canberra to undergo an innovative planning process to guide future change and sustainable development.
- Progress innovative and alternative housing options in partnership with industry.
- Include locations along the Northbourne Avenue corridor and in southern Canberra as the first demonstration precincts.

(Gentleman, 2015, p.5).

This document presents an early example of the narrative of innovation that becomes ubiquitous in subsequent ACT policy and guidance documents. While the statement refers to the testing of innovation precincts, there has been little to no movement on this action to date. The 2016 *Canberra: Statement of Ambition* continues and heightens the innovation narrative, using phrases such as “urban prototyping” (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2016, p.13) to describe the approach to strategic development of the ACT. In 2017 the Housing Choices Discussion Paper was released and reiterated the importance of focusing on innovation, responding to criticism from the community that

the existing planning provisions were “too prescriptive, inflexible and do not encourage innovation” (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2017, p. 29).

5.3 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Demonstration Housing Project was launched in 2017 and accepted submissions that brought new housing designs to the main residential zone, RZ1, in the ACT. The DHP’s website outlines the broad remit of the program, stating “The Demonstration Housing Project aims to test innovative forms of housing to address the emerging needs of Canberrans. Working with the Demonstration Housing proponents, the project will deliver a handful of built homes that showcase different housing types such as co-housing and ageing in place homes to make for a more sustainable and inclusive future for Canberra” (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2022a). In short, the DHP is testing new housing typologies on a single lot in the RZ1 zone. The process aims to cover the full development process from initial ideation, design review and refinement, variation to Territory Plan, development assessment, construction, and open houses to allow members of the public to explore the final dwellings. Former Member of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, Caroline Le Couteur reflected on the aspiration behind the program, whereby constructing a demonstration of each kind of new typology in situ, would allow people to better understand, experience and enjoy housing not yet familiar in the ACT:

So in my innocence, I thought, let us organise demonstration housing projects so that people could see, different things, you know, they could see that it was built, just you know, in the next-door suburb, and it’s probably in the RZ1 area and it doesn't look any, yeah, this looks like the same as the other houses, you can tell it's a new one, but that's about it and it's really actually okay. So that was the idea behind it (Interview with Caroline Le Couteur, 2022).

The Demonstration Housing Project has two streams, one for projects where the applicants have a site and another for concepts without a site. The application process had two steps: an “Expression of Interest” for the project (April – May 2018) where 27 proposals were submitted; and a “Request for Proposal/Tender” stage (September 2018 – January 2019) where 10 proposals with a site and 7 proposals without a site submitted more detailed plans for each project (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2022b). Though the “projects with a site” stream followed the traditional process of preparing a site-specific plan, participants were required to use a site they already owned or had access to, making the adjudication process quite different to most design competitions. The other stream for “proposals without site” was a greater departure from the traditional design brief, where unlike the architectural design competitions explored in Chapter 2, proposals were not focused on a specific site. Participants were required to provide a site-less proposal on the understanding that once accepted into the project there might be an opportunity to purchase a yet unseen government site for the project.

There were six projects accepted into the “projects with a site”:

- Stellulata: a cohousing project consisting of three individual single level dwellings plus a shared space

- Manor house: a four dwelling manor house
- Echo Housing: affordable community based rental housing
- Verdant Developments: multigenerational living
- In Loco O'Connor: aging in place townhouses
- In Loco Forest: aging in place townhouses

Adapted from Australian Capital Territory Government, 2022c.

Six projects have been listed on the “Projects without a site” webpage. However, no specific details about the proposals are available other than they focus on an urban village; a build to rent development model; two co-housing projects and; a project involving sustainable units with affordable dwellings (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2022d). An interview with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate in 2022 indicated that the proposals without a site were progressing.

5.3.1 DECIDING ON THE APPROACH

The Demonstration Housing Project does not identify itself as a design competition. Interviews with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate in 2022 clarify why it was so important to highlight the focus on delivery and feasibility from the outset of the project:

So I got the Legislative Assembly criteria and I was told to build a project out of that, and so we did have some criticism for not holding a design competition, but we designed the Demonstration Housing Project as not a design competition on purpose. Because I have seen all the design competitions in the past not get realised to an actual product in the end and I was like, so right, this is not a design competition, it's a delivery project. So unlike design competitions which don't often get realised, the Demonstration Housing Project is a non-competitive delivery project, so it's focused on the how to of making great ideas a reality by considering feasibility from the very beginning. (Interview with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2022).

Once accepted into the program, applicants worked with the Department to refine their ideas. They were required to present their designs to the National Capital Design Review Panel before a draft variation was exhibited. Once the draft variation was approved, the proponent was then required to submit a Development Application. To date, two draft variations have been approved: Stellulata and Manor House. Only Stellulata has received a development approval.

5.3.2 FORMAL EXPERIMENT OUTCOMES

Demonstration Housing Projects that were deemed to display design excellence in a new model or typology of housing became the subject of a draft variation to the Territory Plan. These variations were site specific and did not provide wide-scale changes to the RZ1 rules. Government indicated that the results of the Demonstration Housing Project would be used to inform future planning policy, but little detail was provided at the time. The Demonstration Housing Project has experienced significant delays, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date only one project with a site has received development approval and participants without a site have now been waiting almost four

years for the formal opportunity to be able to purchase a site. These delays have meant that the Demonstration Housing Project is now running alongside the review of the ACT Territory Plan. It is unclear how the findings of the Demonstration Housing Project will be incorporated into the new Territory Plan, if at all. Participants are keenly anticipating the first draft of the plan but are unsure of the connection between the outcomes of the Demonstration Housing Project and the Territory plan review: “I really don't think there's any kind of real correlation, partly because of the length of time it's taken to even get the first one [Demonstration Housing Project site] approved” (Interview with Demonstration Housing Project Participant, 2022).

5.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section discusses the findings from the case study thematically in relation to the three research questions. *Section 5.4.1 Identifying gaps through experimentation* provides an extended exploration of the Stellulata co-housing project as a way to illustrate the gap identification abilities of policy experiments, as conceptualised by Maalsen (2021). This example helps to broaden understanding of what a housing policy experiment can be, addressing the first research question. The impact that the DHP has had on the housing system is explored in *5.4.2 The curious case of co-housing in the ACT*, which explores the impact of an experimental program running alongside a jurisdiction-wide planning policy review, and in *5.4.3 Experimentation as a new function of Government*, *5.4.4 Confusion over impacts of experimentation on the planning system* the public and *5.4.5 Exemplar design assurance*. Barriers that are preventing the experiment from generating wider housing system change are examined in *5.4.6 Who gets to experiment* and *5.4.7 Lack of protection for participants*.

5.4.1 IDENTIFYING GAPS THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

The Demonstration Housing Project is an example of a federal government program, highlighting that housing experimentation is occurring at a Commonwealth level, as well as state and local, reflecting the discussion by Gurran and Phibbs (2015) about the ever changing roles all three levels of government in Australia can play in the housing space. Testing out new housing typologies in the Demonstration Housing Project before they are introduced at scale is an example of a policy hack, as defined by Maalsen (2021). Though the benefit of utilising policy experiments as a starting point to take new housing ideas all the way through development assessment to construction has provided benefits to the planning policy process and is best illustrated through the specific example of the Stellulata co-housing project. Without the piloting of a small-scale co-housing project through the Demonstration Housing Project, issues related to allowing this new housing typology in the ACT would not have been discovered, namely the inconsistent requirements around shared spaces, including laundries, in the planning variation and National Construction Code. In this example, the “hack” (Maalsen, 2021) has revealed the gaps and inconsistencies between existing regulation and envisaged policy changes. Making amendments to the Territory Plan following a testing or pilot phase has the potential to achieve much better policy outcomes, and therefore built outcomes. It should be cautioned that the positive outcomes of one demonstration project do not automatically transfer when scaled up to wider planning policy. The Demonstration Housing Project provides an Australian housing example of how an experimental approach helps to identify potential issues and gaps in the initial states of policy production. This echoes Maalsen’s (2021, p2) position that “as both a site and

method of research, the hack reveals flaws in existing systems, but it also reveals future possibilities and alternatives". Stellulata Cohousing has been selected for examination in this section as it is the most progressed of all the DHP projects. On 20 April 2022 Development Application 202139685 was approved. A timeline for Stellulata is provided below:

- 2018: Submitted EOI for DHP
- January 2019: Submitted DHP Proposal
- May 2019: Approved as a Demonstration Housing Project
- June 2019: Presented to the National Capital Design Review Panel
- 10 November 2021: Plan Variation 376 approved
- 20 April 2022: Development Application 202139685 approved
- Currently engaging a builder.

Stellulata is a cohousing project located in the Canberra suburb of Ansile. Interviews with one of the applicants indicate that the original members of the group were already trying to develop a cohousing project on a purchased block of land that would allow them to age in place when the DHP was announced. The DHP provided the opportunity for the Stellulata to build three rather than two small dwellings on their site. Only part way through the process, the Directorate identified problems arising related to the need for new definitions in the territory plan:

Noting that I'm in the middle of it, so I think I'll know more at the end – I can already see that the impact may be on what types of housing are permitted in introducing new definitions into our territory plan such as co-housing. There's already broader issues that are uncovered as we progress. (Interview with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2022).

One of the key features that separates cohousing from standard multi-unit dwellings in the ACT is the shared spaces and resources included in the development. The original plans for Stellulata included a shared laundry in a shared space. While the DHP would have been open to such a feature, a shared laundry was not consistent with the National Construction Code (previously Building Code of Australia), resulting in potential misclassification of the development if changes to the design were not made:

So for example, our co-housing proponents – we're not intending to include laundries in each of their homes, but rather have a shared laundry. However, they've already had to revise their plans to include a laundry because under the Building Code of Australia they would have been classed as a boarding house if they didn't have a laundry, which would have had further implications for them. So Building Code of Australia is nothing that I had any influence over because it's for the whole of Australia, so if we want to change things beyond, there's further work that we need to do at a national level (Interview with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2022).

The sharing of resources was integral to the approach and design of the Stellulata project. The shared building at the front of the property was to house a shared kitchen and dining space, two shared electric cars, a laundry and a spare room with bathroom for guests. However, the inclusion of a

bathroom in the shared space resulted in another potential misclassification of the development, with the shared space seen as a “dwelling” under the ACT Building code. A 2022 interview with Stellulata highlights the unexpected nature and resulting frustration of the experimental process:

We came in saying we want to build three dwellings and we want a shared building as well and we want those three dwellings not to have laundries in them, they should be in the front building, one shared laundry, we’re going to share two cars, we’re going to share the workshop, but we want our own fully accessible and sustainable units and here’s our plan and here’s our territory plan variation. In the front building we also decided to put in a bathroom. We had a shower, toilet, sink.

So we got all the way through the territory plan variation process, we were just coming to the end of it and they suddenly realise there’s been a mistake. The mistake is that our design of the front building under the ACT Building Code, not part of the planning system, but the building quality system, the definition of a dwelling is, a kitchen, a toilet and a bath or shower. Therefore our front building was a dwelling. Therefore we had four dwellings and we just spent a year and a half getting approval for three dwellings.

So our TPV was now not good enough to get the design we had built approved because it had four dwellings on it. So we had a choice, start again with the variation process or change the design. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022.)

Stellulata provided an account of their experience with the National Construction Code and the unsatisfactory outcomes for their cohousing development:

Related to that we then got to the point of – so they apologised for letting us go through that whole system without recognising that glitch. We then needed to get our – we hired an engineer to look at the energy rating and the guy said, what class of building is this, bit of a discussion, on the face of it, it’s a Class C building because under the National Building Code, not the ACT Building Code, the definition of a dwelling is it has – a Class 1 dwelling or Class 1a this would normally be, it would have a kitchen, a bathroom, a laundry and a toilet.

We didn’t have any laundries because our laundry was in the front building. So we would now be classified the same as a hostel which needed extra fire rating, extra fire retardant stuff, it was going to cost us thousands more and that raised the question of, would our insurance be different if we were a hostel, a Class C building.

So then we had to redesign our back buildings to put the laundries back in. [REDACTED] didn’t want a laundry at all. They said, we’ve already got plans for what we’re going to do in that space. We redesigned it to put the laundry in. Two out of three of us said, what the hell we’ll have a laundry as well. We’ve now got a laundry in the front building and two out of the three units have got laundries so that we be a Class 1a building at the back, we had to take out a shower at the front so we could be not a dwelling at the front.

So there’s an inconsistency between – and again, the government people were saying, thank you for pointing that out, if we’re trying to do cohousing or anything similar, we’re going to

have that same problem in other places. These people decide they don't want laundries in something, we should be changing our rules to not require that, but that's a National Building Code. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022.)

This extended exploration of the Stellulata cohousing project provides a tangible example of the gap revealing that Maalsen (2021) described as a benefit of policy hacking. Through this experiment, testing the introduction of cohousing as a new housing typology definition in the Territory Plan revealed that changes to planning policy would only be the starting point. The process also revealed that changes will need to be made to the National Construction Code to allow cohousing to occur, which was not anticipated, resulting in a less than optimal outcome for the participants who now have unwanted laundries and less shared resources. The power of the detailed process by which the DHP introduces new typologies to the ACT allows gaps in planning policy and other regulations to be identified concurrently. However, if these other regulations are unable to be reformed that may prevent the introduction of new housing typologies to the ACT.

5.4.2 THE CURIOUS CASE OF CO-HOUSING IN THE ACT – DRAFT VARIATION 365 (HOUSING CHOICES) AND DRAFT VARIATION 376 (STELLULATA)

The second research question focuses on understanding the impact an experimental program has on the existing housing system. The intersection of a traditional policy reform alongside an experimental policy reform is highlighted through the parallel drafting of *Variation to the Territory Plan 365 Housing Choices – Boarding Houses and Co-Housing* and *Variation to the Territory Plan 376 Demonstration Housing Co-Housing – Ainslie Section 25 Block 6*. Part of the critique of “innovative” programs made by Gurran (2019) was that they often failed to address system wide issues related to housing. In this instance, the potential for the outcomes of the experimental program to be used as a platform to iterate policy before jurisdiction wide reforms were derailed, with two variations to one statutory instrument being proposed in the same time period.

The Housing Choices Discussion Paper was released in 2017. *Variation to the Territory Plan 365 Housing Choices – Boarding Houses and Co-Housing* proposed changes to the Territory Plan including defining “cohousing” and boarding houses and making changes to the RZ1-RZ5 development tables. This draft variation was a response to the key recommendations from the Collaboration Hub of the Housing Choices program.

Approval of the *Variation to the Territory Plan 376 Demonstration Housing Co-Housing – Ainslie Section 25 Block 6* was required to allow Stellulata's proposal to continue. Though the focus of DV376 was for only one block, with the allowances not applicable to any other area in the ACT, there were questions as to how the two variations might impact co-housing into the future. There was criticism that boarding houses and co-housing were introduced in the same draft variation. It is unclear how the outcomes of the Stellulata project will be assessed and then used as a basis to make future territory plan amendments.

Both Variations were in draft format during 2021, being debated and DV365 the subject of a Standing Committee. The government was unable to answer key questions about why there were two draft variations about the same housing typology and why the results of the Stellulata project, the

demonstration housing project, were not feeding into the larger proposed changes into cohousing in the ACT. The timing of the experimental program and the larger reforms meant that findings from the Stellulata project could not be incorporated into DV365. As discussed in the previous section there were some significant gaps in other regulations that were identified around cohousing during the Stellulata process, so this was a missed opportunity to address larger systemic issues identified.

5.4.3 EXPERIMENTATION AS A NEW FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

Policy experiments put governments in new positions, where they need to defend the existing policy related to an issue but also support the experimental program. Participants in the DHP remarked on the unusual position that government was in when hosting an experiment:

I think the problem was that again the government and the public servants who were in the system were trying to look as if they weren't using the bureaucracy to support our project. The bureaucracy still had to do their job though if we were a big developer we would have hired this person and that person, they would have written a report and passed it on. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022).

A quiet Department has meant that the majority of messaging on the more controversial aspects of the program have come from the Minister for Planning but has also allowed objections from the leader of the Opposition and media outlets to dominate discourse around the project. The lack of commitment or messaging on how the final outcome will be used to inform the future of the RZ1 zone has allowed speculation about the extent of the Demonstration Housing Project in the media to explode. The Riot Act, a local media organisation led with the provocative headline "Is the Griffith Manor House a densification Trojan horse?" and led readers to believe that the approval of draft variation 375 to the territory plan would set a precedent for housing typologies in the area. A campaign by MP Elizabeth Lee also led the public to believe that the passing of the draft variation would set a precedent for the typology and the zone. The community group was also very active in this space. Though not geographically linked, the Friends of Hawker Village were strong in their opposition.

Stellulata was very focused on community engagement, which they acknowledge was also necessary to help them to find their third party.

There were negative responses from people at a distance, journalists whose career has been made on criticising the government bureaucracies or the government planning system. People in other suburbs, the only negative comment put in against our TPV was from a community group in Belconnen, which is 10 kilometres away and I got to hear their presentation to the 365 variation and clearly they are people who got traumatised by a bad experience 15 years ago, motivated to create their local group. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022).

The public sentiment around Stellulata was generally positive, as demonstrated by their extremely low number of negative comments related to their Territory Plan Variation. However, as discussed in the next section, Manor House received very different treatment from the media and had the highest number of submissions ever received on a Territory Plan Variation. If experimentation is, as Bulkeley

(2023) suggests, destined to become more prevalent, governments will need to resolve the narrative they present around the practice. Clearer delineation of how the experimental program fits within or alongside the existing planning system is needed. While the final approach may not be known until the experiment is over, explicit messaging about how the outcomes of the project will be evaluated and fed into system reform is important.

5.4.4 CONFUSION OVER IMPACTS OF EXPERIMENTATION ON THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Specific issues around the future and scale of the DHP itself will be discussed later in this chapter but it was observed that during the project, there was confusion from the general public about how the outcomes of the program would be scaled across the territory, in regards to possible changes to density. Approximately 80% of the ACT's residential land is zone RZ1 (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2017, p13). Proposed changes to this zone are unpopular with many residents, who wish for the zone to be restricted to low-density development. However, with the spatial limits on how Canberra may expand and a desire to limit urban sprawl, more infill development within the RZ1 zone will be necessary to accommodate the housing needs of residents. As discussed previously, the Housing Choices Discussion Paper, which set the vision and tone for housing reforms in the ACT was released in November 2017. The paper states that retaining the existing "character and amenity of Canberra's suburbs is fundamental to maintaining Canberra's reputation as a garden city, and as such, proposed changes to the RZ1 zone are expected to be modest. The majority of change is expected to occur in the RZ2-RZ4 zones" (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2017). There was no clarification on what a "modest" change might mean.

Public submissions related to the Demonstration Housing Project were reviewed as part of this research and reveal a general confusion about how the results of the program might be scaled up or apply to a greater part of the Territory. Anger around the changes to the RZ1 zone were evident from the submissions made against *Draft Variation to the Territory Plan 375 Demonstration Housing Manor House Griffith section 31 block 6*. A government representative recounted the community response to the Manor house project:

So community reaction has been mixed, so there has been support and opposition. So the Manor House proposal in Griffith had the most objections ever to a territory plan variation. The Griffith-Narrabundah community association also started a petition opposing the project, which was presented to the Legislative Assembly (Interview with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2022).

Despite the backlash from community groups, participants still recognise and respect the role that they play:

I will say that despite everything they have a role and it's important that we have residential associations and community groups who can examine and speak up and question government about their planning rules. I think their role is very important. So whilst I might not have appreciated some of their commentary and the way they've run their campaign I still support the role of having residents associations and community groups because it is

important that you have the ability to question government about what they're actually implementing in terms of rules and regulations. (Interview with Manor House, 2022).

One unexpected outcome of the public outcry surrounding draft variation 375 was the formation of a new community group of young Canberran's looking to support programs and proposals that encouraged greater housing diversity in the Territory, including RZ1. During four separate interviews with government representatives and program participants, the formation of Greater Canberra was seen as a positive thing. The opportunity policy experiments provide to stimulate discussion about housing, as well as encourage new actors into the process is important.

5.4.5 EXEMPLAR DESIGN ASSURANCE

Program aspects that embed the Demonstration Housing Project in the existing ACT planning system were not limited to the application of variations to the Territory Plan. Though evaluated as demonstrating excellence in design quality, successful Demonstration Housing Project applicants were referred to the existing National Capital Design Review Panel (NCDRP). The requirement to present to the NCDRP highlighted the integration of the DHP into the existing planning framework in the ACT. Catherine Townsend, the Government Architect for the ACT, reflected that the NCDRP was involved early on in the planning process for the DPH: "I knew right from the get go. And they, the Demonstration Housing team involved me very early on" (Interview with Catherine Townsend 2022). The benefits of having successful applications presented to the NCDRP was explained by Catherine Townsend, Chair of the NCDRP.

There's there's a trigger for developments, which is five storeys and above and then various things that are referred and say demonstration housing is something that is well it's it's written into the conditions of demonstration housing that it will come to the NCD RP and that's that's very useful because the fundamental intention of demonstration housing is to experiment with achieving typologies and outcomes that are not possible within the current planning overlay. So the the intentions are fabulous you know, that's that's really great. That and I think I think the mechanism for this exploration is is really good that you know, this this the NCD RP is almost the it's not the quality assurance but it's a safety net, it's you know, government saying well, if it's if it's okay by the NCD RP, and, and it's okay by the DA team, your development assessment team, then it'll it'll get through It'll be supported. (Interview with Catherine Townsend, 2022).

Generally, participants reported this to be a positive experience but were not expecting the financial implications:

The other thing that they did ask us to do was present to the government architect panel, which I didn't mind. Free architectural advice is always handy. But we were put through a considerable amount of our own time and effort and expense, at our expense to fund - in effect, we funded part of their program. (Interview with Demonstration Housing Project Participant, 2022)

The reports from the NCDRP are made available to the public once the proposal goes to the development application stage, helping to improve the transparency around this stage.

Sorry, we did divide the community. I think [REDACTED] spoke to you about it before. What was fascinating was as the residents association pushed back against the proposal and sped up the campaign against this proposal suddenly the younger community suddenly voiced an opinion and said, well, hang on, we don't believe what the traditional residents association is saying represents the entire community.

What we've done is had a generational split in the area where the younger community members are saying, well, we actually think we should support urban infill and ideas to give us an opportunity to get affordable housing. But they've recognised in the first instance it won't be affordable but if it succeeds perhaps in the future you might give opportunities for the younger ones to get into urban infill areas. (Interview with Manor House, 2022).

Experimental programs can struggle to demonstrate the legitimacy of their novel process but the inclusion of the established NCDRP as part of the DHP helped to improve transparency around design advice and outcomes for members of the public. The public availability of the NCDRP report during the development assessment stage is of great benefit. The inclusion of the NCDRP as part of the DHP process highlights a new role for design review panels. State level design review panels are a common feature in planning systems in Australia, with Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia all having bodies that provide independent design advice on more complex developments. This indicates that there are possible pathways to ensure design excellence in other Australian states if they choose to adopt an experimental housing program similar to the DHP.

5.4.6 WHO GETS TO EXPERIMENT?

The third research question focuses on understanding the barriers preventing experimental programs from making wider impacts on the housing system. The Demonstration Housing Project focused on bringing new housing typologies to the RZ1 zone. There were no restrictions from where the entrants could be located but there was also no assistance to help support entrants from lower socio-economic areas. The work of Sisson et al. (2023, p.13) and Das (2020) discusses that programs of innovation are only available to the most well-resourced agencies, this research highlights that innovative programs like the DHP are also only available to the most well-resourced residents. While it was not possible to control where the entrants were from, by the nature of requiring entrants to have their own sites, the DHP inadvertently placed a limit on who was able to participate. The Government Architect of the ACT, Catherine Townsend reflected that “the missing middle exists everywhere” (Interview with Catherine Townsend, 2022) but opportunities for different groups to participate in the scheme were not included. This research observed that though there were two streams in the competition, the most progressed entrants at the time of writing were those that had their own site. Participants were able to select the typology that they would like to “demonstrate” but this research questions if it is equitable that for entrants with large blocks in very affluent areas are able to access such programs where “the multiplication of the benefit factor is so extreme” (Interview with Catherine Townsend, 2022). While the DHP has provided new opportunities for residents to engage with the housing system, the design of the program has reinforced some of the existing inequities, where only those further along the housing continuum are able to participate.

5.4.7 LACK OF PROTECTION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Not only is the Demonstration Housing Project an example of a housing experiment but the process of a government department running such a program is also a new experience. This is the first time that the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate have been asked to deliver this kind of project. The experience of the participants raises questions around legal protection for participants around time delays, public scrutiny and program completion. These issues present a barrier to the sustained scaling Evans et al (2016) foresee for these kinds of experimental programs.

Time Delays

When interviewed, participants indicated that they had previous experience working with government, so were prepared for unexpected delays as it was a new program. Participants were understanding of COVID-19 delays but overall found that the program timelines were outrageously long. Where time delays in the project were extensive, participants acknowledged that this reduced the amount of time for the policy refinement part of the project.

No this is the first time they've done something like this I think and the trouble is, this experiment was supposed to run fairly quickly and then have five years to see how it went before we made changes. Well we've blown another three years on top of that, so I don't know what they're going to do. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022).

The space for iteration and reflection that experimentation is supposed to bring was diminished because of time delays at the beginning of the project. These delays combined with a lack of clear updates from government left participants feeling frustrated and upset:

All that is true, but we have not had one single communication with the department over the program. We actually don't know what's happening. So it's one thing to use us as a blunt instrument to reform policy. It's another to fail to communicate with us, and that's disappointing because it's not demonstrating that we're doing this as a united team. It is evident to us that they're, again, being - lazy is not the term but they're being opportunistic in asking the private sector to suggest their reforms and they will um and ah and take their time at our expense, and that's what I find disappointing about it. It is their responsibility. (Interview with Manor House, 2022)

Participants indicated they would have valued updates on the status of the project.

Again, another point of annoyance, which goes back to, yeah, we get it but where was the email, the phone call, the letter to say, please be patient with us. It's processing. This is where we're up to. You should expect this in the future. But there's not a word. (Interview with Manor House, 2022).

Reflecting on the overall process, the frustration of being part of the project had grown to a point where participants felt stuck. While the work of Sisson et al. (2023) and Desouza (2012) highlighted that participants in other innovative programs were often discouraged from entering other programs, most of those examples did not involve entrants using their own homes and personal finances as part of the submission:

As an individual I'm not overly stressed about it because we're professionals working in the area, but when you start adding up all the bits and pieces and around the rebuff from the local community, the distress with the neighbours, the perception of discomfort and insecurity, the delay by the government, the fact that it actually has cost us - I don't know - \$20,000 so far of our own money and we're still - over four, five years we still don't have a clear outcome and in that period the economics have changed, construction prices have gone up, land values have gone up and all of a sudden the moment of opportunity has well passed for the government to make this one a success. Then right at the end of it, failure to communicate with participants. (Interview with Manor House, 2022).

Participants' designs need to be reviewed by the National Capital Design Review Panel and have their draft variation approved before they were able to progress to the more familiar steps of development application and construction. Inter-departmental clarifications on this new process caused additional delays and participants endured delays. Participants reflected on what it was actually like being part of a new policy hacking, gap testing process:

The Demonstration Housing team were supposed to guide us through the project and they did their best but like every other person that comes across a massive complex bureaucracy that they don't know about because they're amateurs like we are, you don't hit a problem until it's there and you then need to go through the same delays and processes in convincing this part of the bureaucracy who's responsible for protecting trees or plumbing or the solar envelope or the definition of a dwelling. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022)

The above quote highlights some of the general frustrations experienced with a new process but the participants from Stellulata went on to describe larger, more significant errors and delays that were made as a result of the experimental program trying to interact with the existing planning system:

We were told all along, the best idea was to submit the variation and the development application at the same time so that they were out for public view at the same time, so the public was well informed. Turns out we were only the second people in the history of the ACT to try and do that and we had the wording slightly wrong. The wording on our DA made reference to the variation but didn't clearly explain that this DA was written as if the variation had already been put into force.

We had simply made reference to it and therefore it could be seen as – first of all technically it wasn't correct and secondly it could confuse any average reader as to what the hell it meant. So we had to withdraw our DA. We had to get special approval to the Chief Minister to get our money back on the DA fees we'd just paid and – actually maybe that was the one where they put in the big apology, the other ones were less of an apology (Interview with Stellulata, 2022).

The need to withdraw a development application represents a significant error in the advice given to participants. Considering all the time delays and costs on entrants, questions must be asked about a possible time delay protection mechanism for participants. Unlike other parts of the planning system where time limits or response timelines are set on assessing authorities, there are no such

requirements on the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to respond or progress applications. The process is new and participants were prepared for delays (plus allowed for COVID-19) but a lack of updates made the process more difficult and at times distressing. To ensure that residents continue to participate in such programs, time delay protections of some kind must be put in place.

Public Scrutiny

Participants were aware that there would be additional interest in their projects (more than a standard DA) and as part of their applications a community consultation strategy/proposal was required. However, the amount of interest in the Manor House project was unprecedented, with it receiving the largest number of submissions for a draft territory plan variation ever. A campaign hosted by the MP Elizabeth Lee on her website plus negative media articles linked the single proposal to a greater debate around density in the RZ1 zone. The participants were caught between a department and government who would not clarify how the outcomes of the project were going to be used – and without this clarification it was assumed by the public that the approval of the draft variation would set a precedent for the typology and zone across the ACT.

As [REDACTED] alluded to, the community groups, we've had to tell 600 neighbours through letterbox drops that this block of land is receiving a development. So we now have 600 at least and substantially more because of the community group's behaviour and their sign the petition days up at the shops. So we now have the entire community as well where this block of land and whoever is inside - they wouldn't know it's necessarily us - nothing has happened yet but our security concerns are - we're mindful of them. I can't imagine what's going to happen when we eventually put a stake in the ground and put up a sign that says, subject to development.

The other thing we're exposed to now is confusion. Because we're having a builder coming in doing the bathrooms the builder is in due course likely to put up signs of his own on the verges protecting the trees. Now, enough of the neighbours will assume that that is the development that is progressing and then I don't know what conflict will come out of that but just, again, we're exposed through the government's behaviour and we've been exposed for a substantial period of time. It's one thing to be exposed for a few months and you get over and it and you move on. We are now perpetually exposed until this is resolved. (Interview with Manor House, 2022).

The level of public scrutiny over a whole new typology was, because of the design of the demonstration project, unfortunately placed on one lot and therefore one family. While the work of Sisson (2023) and Desouza (2012) around challenges highlighted that the experience of participating often discouraged participants from entering other competitions, participants in these studies would have been in a professional capacity, such as architectural firms with a pitch or concept. In the case of the DHP, participants were residents entering with their own family homes as the project site and therefore a different level of protection from exposure needs to be considered.

Program Completion

Balancing the opportunity to be part of the Demonstration Housing Program and being able to build something they would not normally be able to versus the uncertainty and personal stress and cost was an issue that was raised by a number of participants. When asked about the experience of being part of the Demonstration Project, participants acknowledged the unique opportunities presented to them but that the time delays and uncertainty had soured the experience.

Appalling. Sorry. If [REDACTED] was here there'd be a lot more swear words [laughs].
Frustrating. Confusing. Sorry, starting at the beginning. We would not have got approval to do what we wanted to do on that block of land if we weren't part of the Demonstration Housing Project. (Interview with Stellulata, 2022)

Questions must be asked about the guarantee that the program needs to get to reach the build outcome. The government is able to test the community appetite and interest in new typologies through the initial stages of the program, including the presentation at the National Capital Design Review Panel and the draft variation to the Territory Plan. The "gaps" can be tested at these stages for the means of policy review or production. If the program ended suddenly the government would have its desired outcomes but the participants would not have had the opportunity to build. If the exercise is designed to identify gaps or inconsistencies, then the program could finish once a draft variation has been approved. What guarantee or protection is there for participants who have used their own time and money to join the program? If the program does not continue, who holds the IP for the designs.

The implementation of certain protections for participants who engage in experimental program could improve the experience and provide some assurances for applicants. As discussed by Sisson et al. (2023) and Desouza (2012), negative experiences often deter participants from entering subsequent programs.

5.5 FUTURE OF THE DHP

Of the three case studies explored in this thesis, the Demonstration Housing Project presents a clear model for testing variations to a statutory planning instrument, in this case, the Territory Plan. Under the DHP, the parameters for new housing typologies can be tested all the way through a variation to the Territory Plan and Development Assessment. A program of community consultation, as well as presentation to the National Design Capital Review Panel were part of the process. However, how the final outcomes of the DHP will be used has yet to be determined. Government has not indicated how the program might be scaled up, either through the introduction of other typologies or by allowing these "demonstrated" housing projects to be allowable more widely in the RZ1 zone. Government has also not indicated how the results of the DHP will be used to inform the impending draft Territory Plan.

5.5.1 DHP AS A STANDALONE PROGRAM

During the consultation period for the Manor House project, the submissions reveal a confusion over how the draft variation for the single lot, allowing the manor house to be built, would impact future allowances in the RZ1 zone. Much of the anger surrounding the proposal, as well as the focus of the MP Petition indicated that concern was around the precedent the DHP would set. A clearer indication about the scalability intentions of the project would have aided in the overall understanding of the future of the DHP.

5.5.2 DHP AND THE TERRITORY PLAN REVIEW

During the time this research was carried out but beyond the scope of the project, the ACT released a new draft Territory Plan. Time delays have meant that the evaluation of the demonstration housing project will be later than expected. Interviews with government representatives in 2022 acknowledged that even then it was too late for the results of the DPH to be incorporated into the new Territory Plan:

So there's a review of our planning system that's currently underway. So it's a bit too early in our process to feed the results into it because we haven't got the built form out yet, but we will do an evaluation of the results of the demonstration housing projects that are built, and we'll provide this evaluation to the government with recommendations.

No, it'll be too early to feed into planning [unclear], because that's underway now. But that doesn't mean that we can't feed the recommendations when it's done [into] and there can't be further changes made afterwards. It's not a static – there's always changes that can be made over time. (Interview with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, 2022).

However, there is no consistency to this approach as the typology of cohousing already had a variation to the previous Territory plan before the DHP cohousing project did. In regards to the new Territory Plan, key aspects that would indicate a the status of the DHP would be:

- How the objectives/results/status of the DHP will be integrated or acknowledged in the new draft Territory Plan
- How the program will be specifically evaluated and flow into the new draft Territory Plan or other policies
- What the future status of the DHP will be – unclear if the project will finish, continue as a rolling entry system or have different cohorts.

The Territory Plan review process indicates that the ACT is moving towards a more outcomes-based planning system.

A new outcomes-focussed Territory Plan would be clear. Rather than focus on a prescriptive rules and criteria system, it would encourage innovation and high-quality design. The new Territory Plan will outline expected outcomes and identify ways of achieving those outcomes. This doesn't mean there won't be set measures, but the connection between those measures

and an outcome will be clearer and may allow for more than one solution or way of achieving it. (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2022e)

This raises a potential new application for experimental programs as a way to test outcomes based planning systems, given the gap identifying qualities they offer.

Gurran (2019) warned of the use of “innovative” programs that fail to deliver systemic change. In the case of the DHP, the mechanism to test new housing typologies has had planning system change. However, the scale at which this change will occur is still to be understood.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The Demonstration Housing Project provides an example of how a housing program in Australia can be used to identify gaps in new policy and test the introduction of changes to statutory planning instruments. The establishment of the DHP in 2017 in the ACT, where there has been a history of housing experimentation interest, highlights that this Commonwealth Government program was not part of the increase of experiments observed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic by M^cGuirk et al. (2020). The process undertaken to introduce new housing typologies to the Australian Capital Territory under this program provides a tangible example of the potential that Maalsen (2021) identified of policy hacking to identify gaps before policy changes are scaled.

While the program had the amicable aim of providing real life demonstration homes for ACT residents to experience before larger scale changes were made to the planning system, a combination of time-delays and a lack of clear messaging around how the outcomes of the experiment would be implemented instead added to the public’s confusion about how the planning system worked and what the future of the RZ1 zone would be. Using experimentation as a pathway to ensure the system wide response that Gurran (2019) calls for has been tested, did not go as planned for the DHP. The absence of a clear and consistent messaging about how the outcomes of the project would be used, and now how they would feed into the formal Territory Plan review, allowed community groups, media and the Opposition to fill the space with their own speculation about what precedents the Demonstration Housing Project might set. Scalability questions surrounding the outcomes of the project need to be answered at the beginning of the experiment to allay concerns or confusion about the process. Without this clarification, the specific features of each of the DHP test sites were interpreted to be the singular, final version of each new typology that would be rolled out as part of a system-wide reform. This misunderstanding has the potential to damage the already fractured and fragile rhetoric surrounding future housing change in the ACT.

On the surface there appears to be clear direction from the Minister for Planning in the ACT about the inclusion of demonstration projects in the 2015 Planning Statement. It has taken time for the projects to develop but there is a very clear process that has been undertaken each time a draft variation to the Territory Plan is made. The model provides an opportunity to really test the potential of a specific zone, other planning/building regulations, financial feasibility, and public appetite. However, a lack of government commitment to the project and a refusal to provide clarification on how the outcomes of

the project will be scaled in terms of planning reform are emerging as the main barrier to the project's long term success.

CHAPTER 6 FUTURE HOMES PROJECT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Future Homes Project is the second case study to be presented and is an example of a state level housing experiment. In Australia, states hold the residual power under section 51 of the Constitution to legislate on environmental and planning matters. Each state has its own planning system, guiding the process for development. Statutory and strategic decisions around housing are also made at this level of government, meaning that state governments already have the ability to make the system wide changes to housing policy that Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al. (2017) call for. Taking into consideration the power of state governments to reform the housing system, it was important to include a state program to understand how experimentation might occur at this level of government. The Future Homes Project is a two-stage program run by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) in conjunction with the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OVGA), that forms part of the Victorian Government's Better Apartments Program. The focus of the Future Homes Project is specific and focuses on demonstrating exemplar apartment design for three-storey apartments as a form of infill development in metropolitan Melbourne. Unlike the Demonstration Housing Project, as discussed in the previous chapter, which focused on experimenting beyond what was allowed in the ACT Territory plan, the exemplar apartment designs of the Future Homes Project do not experiment beyond the zone restrictions of any Victorian Planning Scheme, the existing Better Apartment Design Standard (BADS) or the Residential Development Standards (ResCode).

While the experiment does aid in examining what the limits of the BADS and the ResCode for apartment design are, the main experimental feature of the program is the unique model being tested to encourage infill development, which comprises a design completion to find exemplar apartment designs, combined with an implementation program, where development is expedited through use of pre-approved plans of the exemplar designs, an adaptation guide and a fast-tracked approval process. Overall this policy experiment tests if adaptable designs under a fast-track planning process can increase infill development. The results of the case study analysis reveal an experiment that does not attempt to push the boundaries of the existing planning regulations. The inclusion of a state level case study was important as it clarifies the extent to which a government level who has the power to make wider scale reforms in the area of housing might engage in experimentation.

This chapter begins by providing the background and description of the program. Thematic analysis of the findings from semi-structured interviews and grey literature analysis are then presented. The chapter concludes by discussing the future of the Future Homes Project.

6.2 CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

The Future Homes Project was a state level project led by a department of the Victorian Government. Victoria is the second most populous state in Australia, with 6.5 million residents (Australian Bureau

of Statistics, 2022b) with the majority of the population, approximately 4.9 million people, living in the state's capital city, Melbourne (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). As outlined in the *Homes for Victorians* Plan, as discussed in Chapter 4, the existing housing challenges in Victoria are related to a lack of affordable housing: increasing home prices, difficulty for first home buyers to enter the market, rising rents and rental insecurity, and insufficient social housing. The Future Homes Project focuses on "high-quality development" in response to Victoria's projected population growth to "10.2 million by 2051" (Victorian Government, 2025), which will further intensify housing demands

The Future Homes Project was established following a 2018 election commitment made by the Victorian Labor Government to develop plans for apartments as part of their approach to addressing Victoria's housing issues:

We will invest \$4 million for Victoria's architects to work side-by-side with the State Architect to produce better apartment blueprints that support the building of developments that become world-leaders in design, sustainability and liveability. (Victorian Government, Minister for Planning, 2018).

A Facebook Post by then Premier Daniel Andrews, stated that if re-elected his government would "fund the State Architect to create plans for apartment buildings that are world-leading in design, sustainability and liveability" (2018, October 27). The accompanying images states "We're famous for all our Californian Bungalows and art-deco brink homes that stand the test of time...and many thousands of them were built from plans designed and supplied by the Victorian Government" (2018, October 27), referencing historic programs such as the Small Homes Service. The bottom of the image contains the slogan "It worked then. It will work now" (2018, October 27). Messaging around the program evokes nostalgic memories of the Small Homes Service, which provided affordable architectural plans in the post-war period. The Small Homes Service was not a system-wide affordable housing program. The focus on introducing a streamlined approval process, echoes other government programs explored by Gurran and Phibbs (2015) and Ruming et al. 2017 which are focused on increasing housing supply to improve affordability. The main features of the program highlight a desire to reduce red tape and speeding up approvals:

- Demonstrate exemplar apartment design through the establishment of a design competition
- Provide pre-approved plans and an adaptation guide based on the winning competition designs
- Reduce time delays and streamline the process with the fast-track approval process

The Future Homes Project was designed to showcase exemplar designs for apartments, specifically three-storey walk-ups. The focus was on three storey walk ups because this is the maximum height limit in the general residential zone, with design standards for apartments contained in the Better Apartments Design Standards (BADS). BADS was first released in 2016 to improve apartment design in Victoria, with planning schemes amended in 2017 to include the standards. BADS is used in conjunction with the ResCode (it does not replace it). The Future Homes Project works within the existing limitations for three-storey apartments, with the main experimental part of the program the pre-approved plans, adaptation guide and fast-track approval process, reflecting the three main features outlined above. As a case study, therefore it provides a perfect opportunity to look at what

aspects of the housing system a state government in Australia may experiment with, given the policy reform powers they already hold . The following sections will take a closer look at how the program was developed and eventually piloted.

6.3 DELIVERING THE PROGRAM – TIMELINES AND STAGES

The first stage of the program was an industry design competition to find innovative designs for three-storey apartment buildings. The second stage of the program, referred to as the implementation stage, used the winning designs from the design competition to create a set of apartment plans that would be available for landowners to adapt, using the adaptation guidelines and enter a fast-track planning process. “Middle suburban Melbourne environments” (Victorian Government, 2020, p.5) were the focus of the program, targeting the general residential zone, which is the largest zone type in Victoria. The program also tries to align itself with the goals of *Plan Melbourne*, released in 2017, to create 20-minute neighbourhoods.

A timeline of the key aspects of the project is presented below:

- 2018: Election commitment
- 2019: Budget commitment
- 2020: Industry competition
- 2020: Student competition
- March 2021: Four winners announced
- April 2022 : Community consultation on Future Homes Pilot with local government
- October 2022: Amendment VC224 to Victorian Planning Provisions passed, allowing two-year Future Homes Pilot to commence

The timeline illustrates the extended time it took for the program to develop. No homes under the program had yet been built when semi-structured interviews were undertaken in 2022. The stages of the industry competition, the student competition and pilot program will be discussed below.

6.3.1 INDUSTRY COMPETITION – FINDING AN ADAPTABLE SOLUTION

The initial stages of the industry competition were similar to a traditional design competition. However, the refinement requirements at later stages of the competition were frustrating to participants, echoing some of the frustrations with innovative techniques explored in Chapter 2. The industry competition was launched in March 2020. The competition was run in two parts:

- From March to May 2020, entrants had six weeks to prepare a conceptual design response. OVGA indicated that more than 100 submissions were received.
- From June to October 2020, shortlisted entrants from the first round, had ten weeks to adapt their original submissions for the Stage Two site. This part of the competition also involved participating in a series of workshops with technical experts (Victorian Government, 2020)

The requirements for the Future Homes Project submissions to be adaptable represent a departure from the more traditional site-specific brief, where the more common use of a specific site for

response has been tinkered with to aid in broader ideation for the use in site-less projects that will undergo design adaptation in the future. Though the Future Homes Industry Competition provided participants with the option of a two-block site or three-block site as the focus of their submission during stage 1 of the competition, the sites were de-identified, with the brief stating:

another important aspect of the Competition is that it deliberately does not ask for one-off bespoke design responses to unique locations. The reverse is the case. The Competition explicitly invites design responses that are prototypic, replicable and scalable (Victorian Government, 2020a).

Eight entrants were shortlisted from the first stage of the competition and moved onto the second stage.

6.3.2. REFINEMENT OF IDEAS

The second stage of the competition focused on the refinement of the participant's original submissions. The refinement process involved a program of workshops with industry and key consultants for the participants was organised by OVG, as well as jury sessions where participants presented their developing ideas. The kinds of consultants that worked with participants included traffic, structural, landscape, sustainability and financial experts. Though participants indicated that the workshops and feedback received were very helpful in the refinement of their designs, there was frustration that issues such as viability and compliance with ResCode requirements, which were of less importance during stage one of the competition, were now of greater importance during this second round.

Some participants reported that the program of workshops with consultants to be a very helpful and rewarding process:

Well, I should say, during the competition, one of the really great things about the competition was during the second stage, we had workshops with the consultants during that stage so before we even submitted the design, we had an opportunity to test our designs with those consultants and we got their feedback and we actually got sort of interim reports from them during the second stage of the competition (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

However, there was frustration about changing requirements, resulting in ongoing refinement of ideas from stage to stage. Participants reported that they were able to gently experiment beyond the restrictions of the ResCod, "There wasn't a strict compliance to the Res Code. There was a strict compliance to the height though" (Interview with LIAN 2022) in their initial submissions, but through the later stages of refinement, any "innovation" or "creativity" was lost. Viability and compliance with ResCode dominated the second stage of the competition:

Yeah, we did submit some feasibility work on our competition entry but I think the judges – like, the viability aspect of the judging was, like, five per cent whereas sustainability was 30 per cent and then as soon as you get through the next round and viability is suddenly 100 per cent. (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

And because the competition has just three parts. Three parts, so that the first one is like, like, just be happy, enjoy and go crazy. Kind of almost felt like that. The second part is like, whoa whoa woah whoa, not so fast. You know, just think about this. Think about that. Yeah, like the third part is like was like the final part of like, you will have to comply, no matter what, you have to comply. (Interview with Spiral Architects Lab, 2022)

Some participants found the incremental increase in restrictions to be a frustrating limit on their creativity, stating “it's a difficult process because, like, if you come with all these great ideas, I guess we are a victim of our choices” (Interview with Spiral Architects Lab, 2022) indicating that the more creative a team was in their initial submission, the more refinement was required as the competition progressed. Participants thought that the refinement process should have been more collaborative between the winners and the government agencies who would ultimately approve the designs.

Other participants were happy that they had more freedom at the beginning of the competition, with a refinement process to follow:

Yeah, so in some ways, it was painful, but actually also pretty great that we were able to just come up with ideas and then tested it. And of course, as we tested them, the ideas got hardened and then we had to kind of make our like, reduce the sort of non-used space, the free space that we had in our initial design. So the, so the of large voids, we have to definitely make them smaller and try and find more sellable apartment plans. (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

In March 2021, the four winning teams were announced: Design Strategy Architecture in collaboration with IncluDesign, LIAN, McGregor Westlake Architecture and Spiral Architects Lab (Victorian Government, 2022a).

6.3.3 STUDENT COMPETITION

Alongside the industry competition, a student competition was held. The student competition was not only a unique opportunity for future practitioners to develop ideas, but also helped to promote the Future Homes Project more widely. The student entries were displayed as part of Melbourne Design Week in 2021 and provided an important contribution to the discussion about housing in Melbourne. While the student's brief was adjusted to a complexity that could be achieved in a university studio setting, some of clearest acknowledgements of the need of housing to be adaptable during a person's life stages came up from the student designs. The winning submissions of the student competition were not utilised in any further stages of the industry project but it is hoped that the student program may run again, under the carriage of the various universities involved in the 2020 round.

6.3.4 FUTURE HOMES LOCAL GOVERNMENT PILOT

The four designs from the winners of the Future Homes Project in Victoria have now been through two more stages of refinement. The next stage is a two year-pilot program, which was originally planned for three Local Government Areas (LGAs). The pilot is now limited to one LGA, the City of Maribyrnong and will test the new adaptation of design guidelines, as well as the proposed fast-track planning process. The process to test before further roll-out to the rest of metropolitan Melbourne

was an important component of the Future Homes Project, “and we're deliberately implementing this through a pilot program with three councils so we can really test and iron out any issues before a broader program roll out” (DEWLP representative, Melbourne School of Design 2021).

Community consultation was undertaken on the Future Homes Pilot from 4 April to 6 May 2022, with a survey of ten questions hosted on the Engage Victoria website. The survey asked respondents to rank 13 mandatory controls (such as solar access; car parking; sustainability) in order of most importance; questions about design and material preference; and questions about interest in living or building a Future Home. There was an opportunity to comment on any other design or planning issues. 177 survey submissions were received, with 40% of respondents from the proposed pilot Councils of Monash and Maribyrnong; and 60% from other local government areas. Feedback on the fast-track planning process or the removal of third party appeal rights was not collected under separate questions – feedback could be given in the final survey question “Are there any features of Future Homes project, both design and planning, that you feel could be improved?” (Victorian Government, 2022c). The results of the community consultation reveal that less than 3% of submissions expressed concerns about the fast-track planning process (approximately six submissions).

The process an applicant will follow is described below (adapted from Victorian Government 2022b and 2022g)

- Proponent chooses one of the four designs and uses adaptation guide to prepare plans and application for their site
- Application reviewed by DELWP and the OVGA – resolve any planning or design issues; consult with any required professionals
- Application lodged with council
- Neighbouring residents notified and may make a submission on the DA
- Third party appeal rights have been removed, meaning that once a council decision is made, it cannot be appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

The removal of third-party appeal rights for fast track approval processes is not uncommon but what remains to be seen is if the process and the removal of rights will be the subject of further community consultation if the Future Homes project is scaled to more LGAs. The limited number of submissions on the matter could be interpreted that the fast-track process and removal of third party appeal rights is not an important issue to the community but the lack of specific questions about the topic during the community consultation could also have led to the matter being overlooked.

6.3.5 FAST-TRACK PLANNING PROCESS

The Future Homes Project acknowledged that the process to take up the exemplar designs needed to be incentivised. DELWP has outlined the need to include incentives to ensure uptake of the Future Homes designs:

We had to find that right balance between making plans attractive, ensuring that there was going to be some time and monetary savings for those that were part of the process, making sure the planning and the quality design outcomes weren't lost or watered down through

whatever process we created, and ensuring adequate community participation (DELWP representative, Melbourne School of Design, 2021).

The use of the fast-track planning process is designed to reduce approval times, as well as give applicants some assurance on their modified designs being approved. DELWP estimates that planning permission for a Future Homes Project could be granted more than four times faster than the traditional planning process:

If an exemplar design is adapted correctly, a proposal could be granted a planning permit within four months of purchase. This compares favourably with the current processing time of a standard planning application for an apartment development, which could take between 12 and 24 months. (Victorian Government, 2022g, pg3).

DELWP has indicated that this would be the pathway to approving a Future Homes design:

- Phase 1: Applicant selects and purchase an exemplar design
- Phase 2: Applicant adapts the exemplar design using the adaptation guide for their site
- Phase 3: Applicant submits adapted design.
- Phase 4: Design Adaptation Panel
- Phase 5: Approval

The adaptation guide provides an estimate of the time required for each phase of the process. Time taken to complete phases one and two is at the discretion of the applicant. DELWP has indicated that phase three will take 30 days, where they will assess the design for compliance with clause 51.06 of the VPP and refer the application to the relevant local council, the OVGA and the sustainability consultant (if required). As part of phase three, the local council will consult with neighbouring properties and appointments to the Design Adaptation Panel commence. Phase four has a timing of four business days, where at the commencement of the phase the Design Adaptation Panel is required to make a recommendation for certification. Approved applications will be certified by DELWP within five business days; and any proposals requiring minor or major changes will have 15 business days to submit amended plans. If a proposal is deemed not suitable for certification, applicants return to phase two. Phase five is timed to take 15 business days, with DELWP to issue a Statement of Certification to the applicant within five business days of receiving a recommendation from the Design Adaptation Panel. During phase five, neighbouring properties are notified, and the relevant local council will issue a planning permit within ten business days.

As part of the fast-track planning scheme, the external referral process has also been expedited through process of consultation:

We've also had input for some of our typical referral authorities. Now the benefit of doing this is that the typical plan requirements and standard conditions that you might receive from a referral authority like Transport Victoria or Melbourne Water are now known up front and can be included into someone's adaptation rather than post an application being launched with the responsible authority. (DEWLP representative, Melbourne School of Design 2021).

DELWP also stated that “to provide that added certainty these referral authorities have also committed to expediting all referrals of future homes applications they receive another way of reducing time frames” (DELWP representative, Melbourne School of Design 2021).

On 28 October 2022 amendment VC224 to the Victorian Planning Provisions was approved, with the requirements of the Future Homes program, including the fast-track planning scheme, now included under Clause 51.06, provisions that apply only to a specified area. Following on from the October announcement, the Future Homes pilot with the City of Maribyrnong was able to commence.

6.3.6 BRAYBROOK

The use of the exemplar designs was also tested in a pilot program in conjunction with HousingVic (part of the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing). The four winning teams were invited to tender for the HousingVic project. In April 2021 it was announced that LIAN’s designs would be adapted to develop 12 public housing apartments in Braybrook. This first application of the exemplar designs represents a departure from the Future Homes model in that the fast-track planning process is not being tested and adaptations to the exemplar designs were required due to the HousingVic’s specific requirements as the landowner. The process has revealed issues related to intergovernmental confusion, design revision, and loss of design innovation.

As HousingVic is the landowner, the fast-track planning process, which will be tested as part of the two-year local council pilot, could not be tested at Braybrook. Participants helped to clarify the different objectives of the two programs, stating that:

the Future Homes initiative is about the amendments to the planning scheme to get these developed by developers and the [Braybrook] demonstration project is more a demonstration of delivering this scale of development within the suburbs because it’s not using the same planning scheme really (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

During the Future Homes Project, participants were guided through the process by DELWP and OVGA. However, once the and additional government department was on board, plus a different assessment team from DELWP, navigating the various stakeholders became more difficult:

well, I guess one of the frustrations with working on this Project was that it was suddenly working with four different departments ... we had four different contacts. We had to work with, well OVGA and DELWP were common stakeholders in the Project. The client was the Department of Housing and then the planning authority was a different group within DELWP (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

Through the purpose of the Future Homes Project is to develop exemplar designs that can be adapted by the proponent, in this instance, HousingVic required greater alterations to the designs, which were carried out by the original architects. The participants were familiar with the Braybrook site, as OVGA had used it as the competition site “Yeah, so the Braybrook site was actually the same site as the competition site, so we had kind of familiarised ourselves with that site during the competition” (Interview with LIAN, 2022). However, having the HousingVic as the client meant that there were

changes that were required that extended outside the scope of what would be contained in the adaptation guide.

Then also the brief did change slightly given that it's not being built by a developer, the viability calculation is different and it actually would be a bit less dense. Then there was some public housing land changes so we had to kind of – we used the principles of our competition entry and then adapted them again for this public housing project which had some specific public housing requirements. (Interview with LIAN, 2022).

One of the public housing requirements centred around the removal of the innovative mezzanines that the participants had included as part of their designs, that had to be removed in favour of balconies to meet the HousingVICs requirements “You weren't able to have sort of mezzanines because of the specific requirements of the public housing brief, so we had to come up with a strategy for having balconies for level one, which is sort of an adaptation” (Interview with LIAN 2022).

The intersection of an innovative government project and existing approval processes were tested in this project. Though DELWP was one of the co-organisers of the project, different sections within the department were not able or aware of the innovative remit of the program.

There's some of the things like some of the planning authority side of DELWP, were probably questioning things that we were doing based on what other projects they've worked on, weren't acceptable, but for us, they should be acceptable because we're sort of supposed to be challenging the status quo of things, so providing really clean sort of three storey massing and we're intentionally trying to reduce how many kind of formal sort of steps there were, we wanted to reduce how much opportunity for defects there would be, really kind of quite a clean kind of a cladding detail. And for then the planning department, though, they sort of said, you know, that's a sheer wall with no articulation. And for them, they actually wanted to see more steps. So we kind of have to explain what the premise of the whole future homes competition was to the planning authority after we've done all this work. (Interview with LIAN, 2022)

The frustrations of working in a program that was unfamiliar to parts of government departments that Future Homes participants felt echoes the experience described by Demonstration Housing Program applicants in the previous chapter. When it came to presenting the design, it became clear that the innovations that the team had included in their Future Homes exemplar design were viewed less favourably by the landowner and by the consent authority.

And so that was a bit of a frustrating sort of process. But and then there were other things that were acceptable during the the, I guess the, the consultancy with like, sort of some stepping some slight ResCode, kind of deviation, which was not viewed as favourably during the demonstration project planning process.

The adaptable designs of the Future Home Project are intended to be adapted by individual applicants (landowners). However, in this instance, the original design team was employed to make the adaptations to suit the government client. The use of adaptable designs is promoted as a way to

improve efficiency, however, in this case the savings in terms of time and cost were reduced as the original design had to be adapted. It is unclear if another government department wishes to use an exemplar design in the future but has its own design requirements, will the adaptation be made by the original design team, what are the limits of the adaptation and who will pay for the work.

6.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section discusses the findings from the case study thematically in relation to the three research questions. The first research question, which focuses on defining the extent of experimental programs, is discussed in *Section 6.4.1 State level experiments may not offer statewide solutions*. *6.4.2 Narrow focus of the program* explores the selection of three storey apartments as the only typology for the Future Homes project, which aids in understanding the impact that experiments are having on the housing systems, which is research question two. Two further themes exploring the impact of the Future Homes Project on the wider housing system follow: a discussion of the need to balance design excellence and project incentivisation is presented in Section 6.4.3, and then Section 6.4.4 which details the importance of paying for innovation and the opportunity the program offers for new actors. The final theme to be explored in section 4.6.5 are the limitations that occur when pilot programs are reduced, contributing to understandings of the barriers that prevent policy experiment generating wider housing system change

6.4.1 STATE LEVEL EXPERIMENTS MAY NOT OFFER STATEWIDE SOLUTIONS

The Future Homes Project was an example of a State level policy experiment. Although all three levels of government in Australia can play some role in housing, it is the States that have the power to legislate in the areas of environment, planning and development control. This case study has demonstrated that despite the Victorian government's ability to introduce a statewide innovative housing policy, they instead chose to focus on one existing housing typology in a restricted setting. In addition, the juxtaposition between the innovative positive narrative of the state housing policy, *Homes for Victorians*, and the announcement of the Future Homes Project as an election promise, provide further evidence for the innovation positive but innovative program hesitancy observed in Chapter 4. The Future Homes Project demonstrates the specific use of a pilot to test an idea before the possibility of scaling, following the necessary amendments to statutory planning instruments, again providing evidence of the possibilities of the Maalsen's (2021) housing "hack".

6.4.2 THE FOCUS OF POLICY EXPERIMENTS: TOO NARROW?

The aim of the Future Homes Project is to increase the number and quality of three-storey apartments being built in metropolitan Melbourne, as part of a greater push by government to find infill development solutions, often referred to as finding the "missing middle". The focus typology of the program was set, with the three-storey walk up model being determined by the height limits of the ResCode. While the initial competition brief did allow for the inclusion of a townhouse component, the key focus of the program was on apartment design. Competition participants reflected on the narrowness of the program scope, with some surprised that affordability was not included as a focus.

The focus of this housing experiment is the use of pre-approved plans and an adaptation guide, combined with a fast-track planning process to increase the development of apartments in middle suburbs around Melbourne. The focus is not on the exploration of typologies currently not allowable in a zone (which is the focus of the Demonstration Housing Project in the ACT); nor is the focus an opportunity to greatly expand on the current limitations of the Residential Development Standards (ResCode) or the Better Apartments Design Standards (BADs). A representative from the OVGGA reflected that experimenting outside the limits of the ResCode and the BADs was considered but it was decided that this would not form part of the program and the limits of the existing zones would still apply:

And we did. We talked about like do we push that a little bit, you know like is is one of the trade offs that if you use these really good designs you're allowed to go a bit higher. But it was it was we decided pretty early on like that's not on the table like we don't wanna we have to pick and choose the things we're gonna sort of push and some things we're gonna you know keep respecting and there's a bit of a history of how the zones came in in Melbourne and there was, you know, we didn't want to sort of rock the boat with state government kind of telling local councils things. (Interview with Cara Wiseman,2022).

Whilst it was understood that the project was part of the Better Apartments Program, the decision to restrict the competition to three-storey apartments has been questioned by some participants, who felt an opportunity to explore other typologies may have resulted in better “missing middle” solutions. Participants who had hoped to solve broader housing affordability issues in the state were frustrated with the program focus on three-storey apartments, with no scope to explore other typologies:

But the answer to the problem they were seeking was not apartments. Basically, the answer is they needed to look at light weight domestic construction townhouses and how to improve them, or they need to look at four storey apartments. Three storey apartments are dead. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022)

There was also surprise that the brief did not include a commitment to affordable housing, though participants acknowledged this was not the focus of the program “the Future Homes competition was never really about affordability, it was always about housing supply and demonstrating what their Better Apartments Design Guide could do” (Interview with Eddie Ma 2021). However, participants still thought there was a responsibility by government to include an affordable or social housing component:

And kind of making the argument that if you are going to unlock housing supply, you should try and at least promote more equitable or more socially conscious housing models. It wasn't part of the brief, I just slid it in there (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

The use of planning incentives to increase housing supply have been shown to be unsuccessful in delivering affordable housing in larger scale programs, as demonstrated by Gilbert et al. (2021) and therefore, although the Future Homes Project encourages an increase in densification, this strategy may not lead to an affordable housing supply. The focus of the program cannot be categorised as

testing one of the affordable housing solutions identified by Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al (2017), as there is no mandated inclusionary zoning provision.

The strict brief has resulted in four similar designs, with one participant commenting “Interestingly – and I don’t know if you’ve noticed – that a lot of the entries ended up being very similar in their approach” (Interview with Eddie Ma 2021).

It’s not because everyone had similar ideas. It’s really about the brief and the brief was very specific in what the requirements were. I think when that happens, you kind of run into the fear that you might be eliminated before you even get the chance to present if you don’t meet all the requirements. So you tend to play it a bit safe and even I played it a bit safe in my submission, just trying to tick off these submissions, but at the same time trying to stay true to my intentions and the message I was trying to communicate. (Interview with Eddie Ma 2021).

While understandable that the Future Homes Project, which is part of the Better Apartment Program, would focus on apartments, participant interviews revealed a need for there to be a broader discussion about other typologies that could be used for infill development. While an adapted design from the Future Homes Project is being used by HousingVic for the construction of public housing apartments, the notion of including an affordable or social housing aspect was noticeably absent from the original brief. Participants questioned the ability for the designs to be used for affordable housing projects “I think the whole conception of the project was flawed and the outcomes of it, none of them are viable unless it's built by government” (Interview with Andy Fergus 2022).

Initial information about the competition indicated that there would be the opportunity for participants to assist in the reform of planning regulations, “winners will undertake further work with DELWP and OVGGA to inform potential planning reforms” (Victorian Government, 2021). However, interviews revealed that participants were asked to assist in the development of the adaptation guide only, with no specific focus on commenting on current planning policy or the fast-track planning process: “we also worked with the Department of Planning on helping them – on kind of embedding our design principles into a guidebook which would help prospective developers be able to see appropriate ways of altering the designs to meet specific sites” (Interview with LIAN, 2022). The research identifies this as a missed opportunity in the project, as the participants, given their professional backgrounds and experience working in Victoria, could have provided unique insights into potential areas of policy reform.

6.4.3 BALANCING DESIGN EXCELLENCE AND INCENTIVISATION

The aim of the Future Homes project is to demonstrate exemplar apartment design. However, as this is the first time that such a program is running in VIC, there was an acknowledgement by DELWP that there needs to be some incentives to encourage uptake of the program.

we've also been very mindful that viable high quality designs won't necessarily get the take-up if there isn't a program or a process in place to facilitate their use, and so whatever process we create it also needed to balance the competing interests of all players involved (DELWP representative, Melbourne School of Design, 2021).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, one incentive was to introduce a fast-track planning scheme as part of the approval process. Part of the fast-track planning scheme included the removal of third-party appeal rights. This is not an uncommon feature of fast-track planning schemes and provides assurances for applicants into a new program, as well as helping to ensure shorter approval timelines can be achieved. However, the need to balance uptake in the scheme with the rights of the community are important. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the community consultation on the matter of third-party appeal removal could be interpreted as inconclusive. It is also unclear if third party appeal rights have also been removed when the consent authority is no longer the local council.

As discussed in the previous chapter, issues of access and equity into the scheme are also relevant. The foundational requirement to take up a Future Homes exemplar design is the ability to amalgamate at least two lots of land. This means that entry is limited to developers or individuals who are already far along the housing continuum. As discussed in the previous section, the narrow focus on three-storey apartments, means that many other housing typologies are not being considered as solutions to the “missing middle”.

6.4.4 PAYING FOR CREATIVITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW PLAYERS

The Future Homes Competition was unique among the case studies examined in this thesis, as the four winners received remuneration for their work by entering into government contracts, rather than the more traditionally awarded prize money. The issue of reliance on unpaid work in design competitions being perpetuated into housing policy experiments was discussed in Chapter 2, where the findings of Seidels (1990) and Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris (1990) on the issues of insufficient prizes or payment resulting in a lack of remuneration for winners or finalists in traditional design competitions were discussed. Though the Future Homes Project offered remuneration for winners, not as prize money but as a contract for work, participants still reported high levels of unpaid work. While the nature of the competition allowed for smaller firms to compete, more established firms identified possible inequity of fixed contracts on these less experienced participants.

The OGVA has previous experience running large design competitions. When asked about their decision to engage winners under contract, the OVGA drew on their previous experience with the Frankston Station competition. The OVGA also acknowledges the need to pay for design excellence, in an industry where not being paid for work is seen as an acceptable part of the process.

It's that funny thing in architecture and also quite a few of the arts where it's sort of seen as more acceptable that you don't pay people for their expertise and time, whereas I could never see lawyers or accountants agreeing to yeah, do it. So that's very much, you know, that's as the OGVA, we're about championing quality design. So that was always our very strong position. And that and that's why we designed the competition in that two-stage way and there's precedence for all over the world of doing that and other competitions I've run in the office like one for Frankston Station, when they were building a new train station quite a few years ago, we did, we designed the competition the same way first. (Interview with Cara Wiseman, 2022).

Future Homes Victoria restricted entry to those teams who had a member that was registered as an Architect in Victoria and thus winning submissions were generally submitted by those who has professional background in architecture, planning or a related field and experience in previous design competitions. The complexity of the initial Future Homes brief meant that entrants spent a large amount of unpaid time working on their submissions. Though this is usual in design competitions, this brief appears to have been particularly complicated:

It was always a commitment to build something. It was about - purely about design. It was the most cumbersome ridiculous brief I had ever seen for a free competition, which is highly, highly problematic in terms of time. (Interview with Andy Fergus 2022)

Participants indicated that they were pleased that the Victorian government engaged winners under contract to pay for work and that it was a good model for a competition. It was noted that that the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on travel allowed allocated money to be spent more fairly.

Yeah, they set it up very cleverly and I think very strategically, to have a single pool of money to contract us to then develop the schemes and feed into that planning scheme [unclear] and in fact, of the four winners, we were the only team that was fully in Melbourne. Two of the other teams were fully in Sydney and one of the teams was split between Sydney and Melbourne and I think is really one of the things that came out of the pandemic, the fact that the competition happened during the pandemic enabled - at that point, everyone was only communicating via zoom even if you're in the same city. So it meant that the money that the other teams got – the Sydney-based teams got – they could put purely into, you know, staff to source the consultancy at the project. They didn't have to travel to Melbourne so that was really good and I think [unclear] unnecessary travel will be cut out a bit more. (Interview with LIAN 2022).

If the COVID-19 pandemic had not restricted travel and required all the participants to engage online, there may have been issues with equity over the use of the contract funds, as interstate teams would have been at a disadvantage. Funds would be used to cover the cost of travel to participate in workshops.

Winners from smaller or newly established firms reported that the programs provided an opportunity for them to participate. Small operations may find it difficult to compete in other government projects, so the scale of these policy experiments provides new opportunities. LIAN was able to form a brand-new, small practice to enter the competition. Found that this competition provided an opportunity for them even as small players.

Yeah, I think also the fact that the competition was anonymous and allowed for Lisa and I to establish a practice is just phenomenal, that's a pretty rare opportunity within Australia, I think, because Australia - so often in competitions are not blind and I think it's more something that happens in Europe where it's like legislated that public projects have to be anonymous competitions (Interview with LIAN 2022)

The OVGA indicated that the competition was designed to allow the flourishing of new ideas, acknowledging the limitations of traditional government procurement processes that often result in the same established firms winning contracts again and again.

So because and that was also, if you have a first stage that's anonymous and about ideas, it's also a really great way for people who aren't typically working in those spaces to, to yeah, to invite fresh thinking. And you know, and because then on the flip side, you're working with government procurement processes, which are really risk adverse, out of a necessity, but you know, so we wanna see so on the station one, you know they are procuring all these tons of new stations and they all look exactly the same. Because it's the same people doing them because they say, you know, EOI show us other stations you've done. So if you haven't done before, of course, it's hard, impossible to get into that space. So that was the idea with the Frankston one. Show us your ideas first. We'll Judge you on that and then we'll work with you. And if you need other people to work with you, we'll supplement you. (Interview with Cara Wiseman, 2022).

However, fellow participants in the completion, who had an older, more established architecture practice, felt that it was unfair for the government to rely on the goodwill of a small, new architecture practice to absorb the costs of time delays:

Which is just from, from a business point of view is a huge risk. They are small, young practice, just completely focused on one only that is taking all their time and is not being it's not like the architect, that I'll be right. They have a fixed fee. The fixed fee, at most can last, let's say three months, and then it's been six months. And they can't look for more work. So yeah, how are they surviving? It's unfair. Unfair for the government to put a young practice, like them through that. (Interview with Spiral Architects Lab, 2022)

Participants in the competition felt that teams that had limited experience with government contracts needed extra support in understanding the potential issues:

When you go into a contract with the government, you really need to know what to you're getting into. And just be aware of the risks and the benefits. And you need a little bit of experience, or a little bit of guidance. (Interview with Spiral Architects Lab, 2022).

The payment model used in the Future Homes project can be seen as a positive evolution of the system for remunerating design work. However, interviews reveal that more experienced participants still had concerns about the possibility of newer teams being taken advantage of and working extra unpaid hours.

6.4.5 LIMITATIONS OF PILOT STUDIES

Initially the Future Homes two-year pilot was to involve three Local Government Areas. At the start of the community consultation period in April 2022, the LGAs of Monash and Maribyrnong were identified as the pilot sites. However, when the pilot was launched following the approval of VC224, only the Council of Maribyrnong was part of the program. At the time of writing the pilot has been open for only six months and as such no indication of the level of interest in the Future Homes

Program has been reported. For this program there are requirements for eligibility, such as location and ability to amalgamate two or three lots, which may limit the number of possible participants. The involvement of only one LGA will further reduce the number of possible applications of the exemplar designs. This may have an impact on the ability to evaluate the success of the program.

6.5 FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

At the time of writing, the Future Homes Project is still underway and thus it is difficult to ascertain the future of this program. The two-year pilot program with a local councils has commenced but DELWP has indicated their ambitions for the pilot program, stating that they “would love to be able to build at least one of each of the four designs over the next 12 months” (DELWP representative, Melbourne Design School, 2021). The results of the two-year pilot will be evaluated and used to determine the next steps in the project. The most immediate opportunity to scale will be to extend the Future Homes Project out to other local government areas in metropolitan Victoria. When considering the longevity of the program, external factors, such as a change of government, may ultimately determine the lifespan of the project. The formalisation of the Future Homes Project into the strategic housing directions for the State may also aid in ensuring the endurance of the experiment.

6.5. 1 SCALING THE PILOT PROGRAM VS SCALING THE MODEL

There are two ways the Future Homes Project could be scaled: firstly, the permissibility of the existing set of four exemplar designs could be extended to other parts of metropolitan Melbourne, as well as regional areas of Victoria. Secondly, the process by which the exemplar designs were developed could be extended to include other “missing middle” typologies, such as townhouses. The Victorian Government has indicated that the first scaling pathway is the aim of the pilot program and once the two-year pilot has finished and the results evaluated, the future rollout of the program will be determined. DELWP, during their “The Future of Future Homes” presentation as part of *The 2021 Housing Assembly: Creating Socially Valuable Housing Conference*, indicated that alongside their local council pilot and their project with Homes Victoria, they were also “open to facilitating more partnerships with other councils social housing providers and others” (DELWP 2021). Given the issues related to time and remuneration discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the amendments needed to adapt one of the exemplar designs for use by a different government department, it is unclear if this approach will be sustainable. At this stage, government has not indicated if a request for larger scale amendments to one of the exemplar designs by a housing provider would be possible or viable as part of the project.

The option to scale the unique Future Homes Project model (design competition plus staged implementation) has not been committed to by the government. There is potential to expand the model to focus on other housing typologies that would constitute part of the “missing middle”. Though this project is part of the remit of the Better Apartment Program, if the Future Homes Project model is determined to be a successful pathway to encouraging new infill development, then its application should be explored beyond three-storey apartments by government.

6.5.2 A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

As discussed in Chapter 2, experimental programs are often founded by political agendas than strategic directions, as Kimbell and Bailey (2017, p. 215) observe experimental policy development “touches more directly on organisational capabilities in government, democratic commitments and political agendas”. The Future Homes Project established as part of a 2018 election commitment made by the Victorian Labor Government, thus the political nature of the program’s announcement means that its lifespan could be determined by a political term.

In May 2022, during the Future Homes Project, significant funding cuts to the Victorian Office of the Government Architect’s office were announced “The cuts of \$600,000 for the Office of the Victorian Government Architect (OGVA) slashes nearly 50 per cent from the office’s budget of \$1.3 million a year” (Petrass 2022), indicating that even within the same government term, programs can face uncertainty. While it is unclear how the funding cuts specifically affected the Future Homes Project, the news made participants in the project feel uneasy and nervous.

6.5.3 FORMALISATION INTO STRATEGIC HOUSING POLICY

The Victorian housing strategy, *Homes for Victorians*, was released in 2017, previous to the Future Homes Project being announced. As discussed in Chapter 4, Action 3.5 of *Homes for Victorians* does provide a general introduction to the role of the Better Apartment guidelines in improving housing standards but there is no indication of a forthcoming pilot or experimental program. *Homes for Victorians* does indicate an “experimental mood” from the state government, with references to “new and innovative” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) approaches to housing, as well as the use of pilot programs. For example, the action “2.4 Inclusionary housing to increase the supply of social and affordable housing” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) includes an inclusionary zoning pilot program on government land deemed surplus, combined with a new “Fast Track Government Land Service” (Victorian Government 2017, p. 22) to facilitate the project. While the target is on inclusionary zoning, the use of a pilot plus fast-track program as a mechanism to test outcomes, echoes the approach taken in the Future Homes Project. While the inclusion of the Future Homes Project in the next integration of the Victorian housing strategy gives no additional security to the lifespan of the program, it would be beneficial to see the project formalised as part of the wider state goals.

The future of the Future Homes Project is unclear. Even if the results of the two-year pilot program are favourable to a larger scale rollout, political and budgetary priorities may have the greatest impact on the lifespan of the program. The use of the Future Homes approach (design competition plus staged implementation) as a model for other typologies or housing projects should be explored.

6.6 CONCLUSION

The Future Homes Program is a unique example of a policy experiment in the Australian housing space, where exemplar designs and a fast-track planning process are being tested as a solution to increasing infill development. The Future Homes Project demonstrates the specific use of a pilot to test an idea before the possibility of scaling, following the necessary amendments to statutory planning instruments. However, the remit of the program echoes the findings of the policy review of

Chapter 4, where the government outlines that they are keen to innovate in housing but in practice the scope of the program is limited - the Future Homes Project does not experiment beyond the existing statutory limits of apartment design in Victoria. As discussed by Gurran (2019), a “novel” approach to housing is presented, this time in the form of adaptable plans and a fast-track planning process but not the innovative, system-wide solution needed to address affordable housing.

The focus of the typology on three storey apartments requiring the amalgamation of two or three lots, leads to questions about “who” is able to access this program and benefit from the opportunities of adaptable plans and the fast-track planning process. While Future Homes aims to align itself with the 20-minute neighbourhood goals outlined in Plan Melbourne, perhaps the Future Homes project could be part of a larger, more coordinated approach to infill development so wider opportunities to address the “missing middle” could be offered. The absence of a specific focus to address social or affordable housing was observed. The possibility of scaling the unique Future Homes Project model (design competition plus staged implementation) has not been committed to by the government. Though this project is part of the remit of the Better Apartment Program, if the Future Homes Project model is determined to be a successful pathway to encouraging new infill development, then its application should be explored beyond three-storey apartment typology by government.

Future Homes was established as part of an election commitment, rather than as a policy action from a State Department. As initially observed by McGann et al. (2017) when studying policy labs, the issue of precarity is of concern in relation to this program, with no clear pathway beyond the two-year pilot. During the writing of this chapter, the Labor Government, who first announced the program, were re-elected for a third term. However, this does not necessarily guarantee ongoing budget or support. A change of government may also limit the future of this program.

The aim of the Future Homes Project on stimulating infill development in Victoria, when compared to the focus on introducing new housing typologies to the Australian Capital Territory in the Demonstration Housing Project highlights the diversity of what might be defined as a policy experiment in the housing space. The Future Homes Project demonstrated the iterative approach to policy as outlined by Maalsen (2021, p.8), with amendments to the Victorian Planning Provisions to allow a local government pilot to be undertaken before the program scaling was considered. Ironically, there were two other key policies that this program could have provided an experimental space for – changes to the ResCode and the Better Apartment Design Standards. However, the opportunity to explore beyond these existing statutory limits with the participants, industry experts and government departments was not utilised.

CHAPTER 7 ALTERNATIVE HOUSING IDEAS CHALLENGE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge (AHIC) was established by the City of Sydney (CoS), a local council in New South Wales (NSW), in 2019. This case study highlights a rare example of what is possible in regard to policy experimentation at a local government level, with an acknowledgement that the City of Sydney is a large, powerful and well financed Local Government Authority (LGA) in NSW. The AHIC focused on ideation around affordable housing solutions. The brief was broad and there were no entry restrictions on participants in an effort to encourage a wide range of submissions. While there were no specific outcomes, the results of the AHIC have been included in the most recent vision for the Council, indicating that there is some hope of future strategic application. Overall, this case study provided the most open brief for policy experimentation but lacked a clear direction for project outcomes. The first instance of inter-governmental experiment iteration and learning occurred with this case study, with the Future Homes Project seeking input from AHIC participants about their experiences. This chapter begins by providing the background and description of the program. Thematic analysis of the findings from semi-structured interviews and grey literature analysis are then presented. The chapter concludes by discussing the future of the AHIC.

7.2 CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

The City of Sydney local government area is located in the state of New South Wales and covers the inner suburbs and central business district of Sydney. The City of Sydney local government area has a population of 218,096 (City of Sydney, 2023) and has a density of 8176 people per square kilometre compared to 429 people per square kilometre for Greater Sydney (City of Sydney, 2023). In Australia, local government exists as a statutory creation of state governments. The NSW government mandates that all local councils develop their own local housing strategies. These strategies analyse existing housing types and address future housing needs in accordance with the relevant state level strategic plans and guidelines. While these strategies consider future demand for affordable and social housing, local authorities are not required to develop specific programs or projects to address these affordable housing issues. The City of Sydney has exceeded standard housing strategy requirements by establishing independent affordable and social housing targets, while acknowledging the ultimately primary responsibility for affordable housing provision remains with the New South Wales government.

Frustration at the limits of existing mechanisms such as inclusionary zoning and planning agreements led to the championing of a program to investigate new ideas around housing that might help the CoS meet its targets around affordable housing. The policy landscape leading up to the establishment of the AHIC is explored to contextualise the limits CoS was working within.

Affordable housing is a focus for the City of Sydney (CoS), as demonstrated in their 2015 Housing Issues Paper, which included the following housing target for 2030: “7.5 per cent of all city housing will be social housing, and 7.5 per cent will be affordable rental housing, delivered by not-for-profit or other providers” (City of Sydney, 2015, p7). The CoS were open about their critique of the State and Federal government in response to affordable housing provision stating, “there is no clear vision and no targets for diverse and affordable housing at federal or state level” (City of Sydney, 2015, p 7). The CoS acknowledged their jurisdictional limitations, stating that “state planning laws affect the ways that local governments can supply housing”(City of Sydney, 2015, p7) but have still been able to put in place a number of mechanisms, such as inclusionary zoning and planning agreements (see Morris 2021 for detailed critique) to increase affordable housing across the LGA.

By setting their own targets for increasing social and affordable housing percentages, the CoS needed new strategies to develop housing. The CoS has experienced significant State Government limitations on its ability to increase inclusionary zoning, and it was becoming apparent that the success of working with community housing providers (CHPs) under the current model of subsidizing or selling land would be finite. Councillor Philip Thalís reflected on the affordable housing percentages in the CoS in 2016 when he was elected:

When I was elected to council in 2016 the percentage was terrible, it was the worst metric in terms of any of the 2030 metrics. So the affordable housing was only in the order of one per cent. Even if we got everything that we’ve got planned at the moment, and we’ve got lots planned, we only get up to two point three per cent. That’s with all the planning incentives, with the city selling sites at discounted rates, with years of advocacy for inclusionary zoning, which is only a tiny percentage, three per cent in Green Square and Ultimo Pymont. (Interview with Philip Thalís, 2021).

Though, as detailed by Thalís, the percentage of affordable housing in the LGA was approximately 1% in 2016, the release of the 2017 CoS’s *Sustainable Sydney 2030: Community Strategic Plan 2017–2021* reiterated Council’s commitment to the 2015 7.5% social housing and 7.5% affordable housing targets, as well as provide some indication of how challenges associated with affordable housing might be tackled, “Secure resources to innovate, trial and implement a range of measures to directly increase the supply of affordable housing in the local area, and where barriers to supply exist, advocate for policy or regulatory reform” (City of Sydney, 2017, p99). While the AHIC is not named specifically, the language used in this position statement provides some indication of the innovative program yet to come.

The sale or subsidy of council land to community housing providers (CHPs) was one way that the CoS was able to provide affordable housing in the LGA. However, two Councillors, Jess Scully and Philip Thalís, could see that this model was not sustainable as the council would eventually run out of land. Wanting to increase the flow of affordable housing without diminishing council assets was a goal. They described the situation in the following way:

So we kind of saw either diminishing pool of opportunities for us to provide those interventions, but then we also saw a lack of innovation in providing smaller scale or more fine grain alternatives to affordable housing (Interview with Jess Scully, 2020).

So rather than simply selling sites at a discounted rate, which is great for the affordable housing providers, actually terrible for the city, we thought, well, there must be another way forward. We were very keen on not disposing of land, that the city's long-term financial position, we are responsible for that so we wanted to shore that up (Interview with Philip Thalís, 2021).

Addressing the need for innovation, the Councillors were able to gain support for the AHIC with Council. The AHIC was run by the City of Sydney Council in 2019 and focused on finding new ideas to increase the flow of affordable housing without relying on the sale of council land. Details of the program will be discussed in the next section.

7.3 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This section will explore the various aspects of the AHIC program, from the brief to the project outcomes. The AHIC was keen to self-identify as “not a design competition”, though the process up to the workshop stage was similar to traditional design competitions. The call for entries was opened in March 2019, with a brief that was left deliberately broad. The seven winners were announced from a pool of 230 submissions in June 2019 and embarked on a six-month program of meetings and workshops to assist in refining their ideas. As discussed in the previous section, the AHIC was a new program for the CoS and the operation of the project could be considered an experiment itself for local government.

7.3.1 AHIC BRIEF

The call for entries for the AHIC was posted on the City of Sydney website in March 2019 and is quoted below. The brief is broad and is very deliberate in its use of the word “ideas” to describe the focus of the program. No limitations are made on who may participate, though suggestions of who the program might appeal to are included.

Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge

We're calling for ideas to boost the diversity of housing across the city, with a focus on identifying and developing new models to increase affordable housing supply.

The Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge will be open to anyone with new ideas for the housing sector, including property professionals, financiers, lawyers, community organisers, policy managers, planners, designers and students. Encouraging new ways of thinking about housing, 6 participants will receive \$20,000 each to further develop their concepts following consideration by a jury.

The challenge will reframe the future of housing supply in Sydney to be more diverse, exploring creative tenancy arrangements like shared or cooperative living, new funding and delivery models.

Alternative housing is a category of structures that are built or designed outside the mainstream norm and affordable housing provides housing for very low to moderate income households.

Ideas will need to be as creative as possible and reflective of how our increasing population will need to live, work and play in Sydney in the future.

Proposals should:

- demonstrate innovation in at least 2 of these areas – planning, design, ownership type, tenancy type, management (including sharing of facilities), construction, urban land supply and financing
- result in cheaper housing or meet the City’s definition of affordable housing
- be financially viable, and socially and environmentally sustainable
- be liveable for residents
- be scalable and replicable.

The community will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the short-listed concepts as part of the City’s consultation to shape Sydney 2050.

The Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge will open on Tuesday 26 March and close on Wednesday 8 May 2019.

(City of Sydney, 2019a)

The brief for the AHIC was deliberately broad, with no prerequisites for entry. This is in direct contrast to the entry limitations of the Demonstration Housing Project, where participants needed to own a site they could engage with or have the ability to finance a project on government land, and the Future Homes Project, where again participants will need to have the ability to develop on two or three lots. The lack of clarification of scalable and replicable would come to be an issue later. The broadness of the brief also meant that some entries were not necessarily suitable for a local council level intervention.

7.3.2 ANNOUNCEMENT OF WINNERS AND PROGRAM OF WORKSHOPS

In June 2019 the seven winners were announced and then began a six-month program of meetings and workshops. A summary of the seven winning entries are illustrated in Table 7.1 below. The final column provides a summary of what this research has determined are the key planning considerations.

Table 7.1 Summary of seven winning AHIC entries

Shortlisted Proposal Name	Description	Planning considerations
Sydney Smart Home	A Health monitoring smart home	Relies on links with government services outside CoS remit
Equity Housing Model	Projects with a mix of tenure	Supply - reliant on supply of public land
Metropolitan Land Trust Policy	Community lands trust	Widespread rollout of inclusionary zoning
Pop Up Shelters	Crisis or transitional housing	Utilise vacant buildings
Rightsize service	Finance, management and design guide	Secondary Dwelling support
The Third Way	housing is delivered and managed by housing cooperatives	Supply - reliant on supply of public land
Pixel Pilot	Flexible “pixel” owned and shared space	Company title; meets SEPP65 requirements

Following the announcement of the winning entries, finalists entered the workshop component of the program. Teams were able to gain access to different sections of council and other external experts to aid in the refinement of their ideas. While this would be seen as a positive approach, participants had different experiences of being part of the workshop process. For example, one participant reflecting positively on the iterative nature of the workshops:

As part of that there was a, I think it was monthly or six week, every six weeks there were meetings, workshops where all of the teams came together. There were different representatives from council that would come in and we'd workshop through ideas and keep developing them. Because there were seven different ideas and they were quite different, it was a way of us learning from each other's development, but also this process of iteratively developing the ideas was to try and mature them. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

Conversely, other participants felt that workshops were not curated to the goals and focus of the AHIC:

The panel of people week to week was a waste of time. That was - the focus was too heavily geared to CHPs when that wasn't the focus of the overall plan. There wasn't a clarity of purpose of what we were doing and what the output would be at the end of it. The fact that the output was a presentation at the architecture festival, to me there needed to be funding available to produce reporting and outputs. They needed to specifically provide consultants that would give us targeted finance, legal, et cetera, advice. We needed to go through a start-up bootcamp. That's what should have happened once we'd won. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

The lack of clear outcomes for the completion as described by this participant would end up having implications on the success of the project. However, the process also encouraged novel ways of working together. During the workshop process the teams also had the unique opportunity to work together, which ultimately resulted in the unique combination of three of the designs, Metropolitan Land Trust Policy, The Third Way and Pixel Pilot into a final submission. This combining of ideas was not part of the original plan for the AHIC but the workshop programs allowed this to occur. To collaborate like this is rare.

The teams presented their ideas at the Sydney Architecture Festival at the end of 2019 and were due to present their ideas to Council in 2020. Issues related to the lack of clear outputs and outcomes of the project were already becoming apparent, so when government priorities changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, progression of the AHIC simply stalled. The next section will discuss issues related to AHIC program outcomes, along with other themes related to the impact and barriers that the AHIC has experienced in regards to housing system change.

7.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section discusses the findings from the case study thematically in relation to the three research questions. Section 7.4.1 Experimentation at a local level explores the AHIC as a rare example of a local government led policy experiment, in a jurisdiction that is often constrained in Australia in the housing space. Following this, the impact that the AHIC has had on the housing system is explored through themes 7.4.2 new roles and ideas for local government; 7.4.3 opportunities for new players in the space; 7.4.4 unique opportunities for collaboration; 7.4.5 opportunities beyond the competition and 7.4.6 learning from experiments. Themes 7.4.7 broad brief: help or hinderance for local level housing innovation; 7.4.8. again, the domain of champions; 7.4.9. issues with outcomes; and 7.4.10 paying for innovation explore the third research question which looks at the barriers that might prevent this policy experiment generating wider housing system change.

7.4.1 EXPERIMENTATION EXISTS AT A LOCAL LEVEL

The AHIC from the CoS highlights that policy experimentation is occurring in Australia at a local government level. This project was established before the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that experimental governance was already operating in the housing space by government before 2019. It

is important to note that the experience of CoS is unique and that not all local councils in Australia have the opportunity or funding available to hold a program similar to the AHIC. Council involvement in state-led projects is one other way that local government may be involved in experimental governance, as seen in the Future Homes project.

Recent research indicates that there is interest from local governments to increase their role in housing (see Morris et al., 2020 and Han et al., 2021). As discussed in section 7.2, the CoS is unique in that it has a clear commitment to affordable housing provision. In the past, the use of inclusionary zoning methods were used to increase affordable housing in Green Square and Pyrmont Ultimo (see Morris, 2021) as well as the sale of lands to community housing providers. CoS has stated that inclusionary zoning policies should be increased and expanded geographically but this request is limited by what the State Government will allow. Though there are limits of what can be achieved at a local government level due to jurisdictional restrictions, this case study demonstrates how ideation and policy change can occur.

7.4.2 NEW ROLES AND IDEAS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT HOUSING

Though the formal outcomes of the project are yet to be resolved, the AHIC has already achieved two key changes in the housing space in regard to redefining the aspirations and achievements of local government. Firstly, the AHIC has helped to engage people at the local level about affordable housing issues; secondly the AHIC has helped to demonstrate how a local council can operate outside established planning mechanisms related to affordable housing.

The AHIC has helped to engage the public about issues around affordable housing. This was reflected in the sold-out event, where participants were invited to present their ideas to the public as part of the Sydney Architecture Festival in 2019 at the Sydney Town Hall, indicating a high level of interest in the AHIC. The Sydney Architecture Festival highlighted the uniqueness of the Council led program, describing it as bold in the face of unprecedented challenges:

Sydney is facing an unprecedented housing availability and affordability problem unlike ever before. To address this issue, the City of Sydney made a bold move. They invited the public to put forward their best ideas to re-imagine housing in the future. (Sydney Architecture Festival, 2019).

The commitment by the CoS to run a program around housing ideation helped to highlight the additional role that local councils could play in the affordable housing space. The council led project meant that the public could be engaged at a local level in broader discussions about housing. In addition, the AHIC also helped to demonstrate that innovation and ideation around affordable housing, beyond the formal avenues was possible. One participant in the AHIC reflected on how the program was received:

So that was really, really productive. So yeah, City of Sydney should really be commended for that and I think also as a city government driving that, as opposed to some of the other organisations which were State government. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021)

The AHIC has demonstrated how policy experiments are able to reframe the role of the organising body. The idea that winners of the competition would “partner” with the City to further develop their ideas around housing provides evidence that urban intrapreneurialism, as observed by Phelps and Miao (2020) as a reframing of roles within local government, is occurring in the housing space in Australia. In this case study, by establishing the AHIC, the CoS was able to demonstrate how a local council might expand its influence in the affordable housing space. In addition, the AHIC was able to encourage and promote new housing ideas through the openness of the competition brief. The benefits and drawbacks of this broad brief will be discussed in section 7.4.7.

7.4.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW PLAYERS IN THE SPACE

Requirements for entry into the AHIC were minimal, allowing for a diverse range of applicants to participate, with the brief stating that the competition “*will be open to anyone with new ideas for the housing sector, including property professionals, financiers, lawyers, community organisers, policy managers, planners, designers and students*” (City of Sydney, 2019a). Unlike other competitions where participants tend to be, or were required to be, registered architects, the AHIC attracted entries from participants with a wide range of backgrounds but most with some experience in the housing sector.

The focus on ideation, while some might critique as problematic, was relished by participants. Two interviewees for this case study indicated that they had entered both the AHIC and the Future Homes Project and were able to provide some comparisons between the scope and brief of the two projects. Both participants found the Future Homes Project brief too limiting, with one participant having particular concern over the decision to restrict the typology to three storey apartments. The other participant was disappointed that the Future Homes Project did not include an affordable housing component. The participants enjoyed the freedom that the AHIC provided and the focus on affordable housing. The blind entry process also allowed smaller, newer teams to enter on what they felt was a more equitable space.

So I think that the brief and [the intention] of the competition itself is very important and also it was a blind entry. So I think that also helped in coming from someone who doesn't have a lot of reputation [laughs] in the industry, like you wouldn't ever have the recognition of your work unless you're a researcher or you had previously built a reputation and are seen as a specialist. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

Findings from the previous two case studies found that the requirements of the project brief could be overwhelming. The less onerous submission requirements were appreciated by entrants, as reflected by one participant who noted that they liked “how limited it was in terms of the level of submission and effort” (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

As discussed in Chapter 6 and the experience of participants in the Future Homes program, policy experiments are emerging as a way for new, often younger, individuals and teams to work on government led housing projects. This is an unexpected and unique contribution that policy experiments are making on the housing system.

7.4.4 UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

The six-month program of workshops provided an opportunity for winning teams to refine their ideas in a group setting. Participants enjoyed this part of the process immensely and found it to be a unique and rewarding experience.

So for us, it gave us, one, the excuse to do that exercise, which we wouldn't have otherwise had time to do, that was great, it allowed us to collaborate as a group who hadn't collaborated before, and allowed us to kind of document knowledge that have been in our heads, but otherwise hadn't, as a non-academic I don't have time necessarily to document my thinking and so, that was a really great opportunity. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

For the many architect-based teams, they had not experienced this kind of collaborative process as part of a competition:

It was great. I mean I think just having – like I think knowing the other contestants makes it less of a competition and more of a collaboration. I know we had seven winners, but nobody felt like we had to compete to win and I think they made it very clear from the very beginning that there was no final winner. There was the seven of us and we were all going to be equally represented and equally given the chance to present our ideas. I think they made that clear from the first workshop, because the original brief did mention a final winner after the Phase 2 and then they just decided no, it's – you guys are so different, there's no point in choosing a winner. (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant, 2022).

The collaborative process ultimately led to the final winning design to be a combination of three teams – an outcome that was unexpected. The unique collaboration and workshop phase was of great interest to the Future Homes project and will be discussed further in theme 7.4.6.

7.4.5 OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND THE COMPETITION

While the City of Sydney clarifies how the outcome of the challenge will be scaled up or operationalised, the participants have experienced other positive outcomes from being part of the program. This shows that the reach of the AHIC extends beyond the formal limits of the competition. One participant reflected on the special status they had as a winner of the AHIC:

Yeah, I'd say definitely having the winner title helped me to connect better with [community] groups, because they're always a bit conscious about who they talk to. But then once I said oh, I'm in this competition, I won City of Sydney, they're like oh yeah, totally we'll talk to you. So that was great, because I love community consultation. I think we need to do more of it. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

For some interviewees, participation in the AHIC had a transformative effect on their careers:

Other benefits, I don't even know. This is – I don't even know if it's a benefit or [laughs] a drawback, it's a bit of both. I think once you win this competition, or win a competition like this, it's very difficult to go back to your day job. [Laughs] It's very hard to have this experience and then go back and say, oh I'm just going to design apartments for private

developers again and I did end up quitting [laughs] my job because of it and I don't regret it. I think it was just the push I needed just to change the trajectory of my career. Obviously that came during COVID, but I hope more people who are – like more of these competitions do provide some sort of prize pool, so that people have the opportunity to make a change to their career and have the resources to do that if they so wish to. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

Other participants reflected on their ability to progress their entries and ideas into other projects:

I think the Sydney project was really great, because it was a first that really did that thing where it would develop with council. That really, really helped those ideas and they've now – a lot of those have gone up into other ways. So Andy's team, they've since got funding from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne's Charity Foundation program and they're developing that idea up with churches. Some of the other projects have gone in different directions.

Damian and I developed ours up further and it went into the City of Los Angeles Low-Rise Competition and was a finalist there...so yeah, so there are a couple of the projects that have since gone on and developed and keep developing and that's because of that program. So I think that it was a really worthwhile program. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

The ability of winners to advance their ideas or to make a major career change were unexpected positive outcomes of the AHIC. However, the unclear status of the results from the AHIC, where winners are still unsure about what the next stage for them is or how the outcomes of the 2019 project might be implemented is hugely problematic. One participant reflected on the reluctant pathway that they felt was necessary to progress their ideas from the AHIC:

It felt like we got in this process and floated around a washing machine and then a few of us were smart enough to work out where the exit was and actually use the process to prosecute our own agenda to try and get a prototype up. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2021).

Though the experience of being part of the AHIC led to some positive opportunities for participants, these do not replace or reconcile the lack of clear outcomes from the formal competition. Government bodies that run policy experiments that are unable to demonstrate a formal outcome will struggle to justify to progress the ideas of the current competition and there may be limited appetite for a second iteration of a program (see section 7.5 for more discussion on the future of the AHIC).

7.4.6 LEARNING FROM EXPERIMENTS

Concepts and considerations around experiment and policy transfer were a constant theme during data collection for the three case studies. When speaking to AHIC participants it was revealed that the Future Homes project from Victoria had been watching the progress of the AHIC closely and had spoken to AHIC participants about the experiences, hoping to implement lessons learnt into the Future Homes project.

Then of course the findings, the Victorian government really closely watched that competition as well. Then when they rolled theirs out they'd learnt a lot from that process of having the

six months and developing ideas, but also allocating it to a group. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

So I think that it was a really worthwhile program and then of course, yeah, the Victorian program has also taken off and it's learnt – they really spoke to a lot of us about our experience in that program and built upon that. So that was really, really productive. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021)

As discussed in section 7.3, there had been some criticism of the narrow range of areas initially covered by the workshops organised by the CoS. The reflections of participants in the Future Home project about the workshops were generally positive (see section 6.3.2). Participants spoke about the careful curation of consultants for each workshop, which perhaps was a lesson learnt by the Future Homes team after speaking to AHIC participants. This demonstrates a positive impact that policy experiments are having on the housing system, beyond the actual production of housing as by their very collaborative and experimental nature, the programs have allowed intergovernmental learning to improve the operation and outcome of subsequent experiments.

7.4.7 ADDRESSING HOUSING ISSUES BEYOND THE SCOPE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the AHIC provided a unique opportunity for the CoS to extend its potential role in the housing space, which reflects a broader interest by local government to expand their role in housing as observed by Morris et al., (2020) and Han et al., (2021). The AHIC brief was deliberately broad to encourage the widest range of ideas to be submitted. However, in practice this broadness led to issues for some winners and the final outcomes of the project, as the existing power and regulatory limits of local government meant that scaling of some ideas was not practical or feasible. While the winning entries demonstrated great diversity in the part of the housing system they focused on, which was a celebrated part of the AHIC, it also meant that there were issues with some submissions in relation to their ability to be implemented or expanded by the Council. For example, the Sydney Smart Homes project would require integration of health services that were not under control of the CoS, as a fellow participant reflected, “it relied on a lot more than just Council” (Interview with Alysia Bennett 2021), making it a challenge for this project to be developed further with only local level support. Participants became keenly aware of the jurisdictional limits that the CoS were facing and reflected on the process:

They're [CoS] a city government, but it's ruled by a State planning policy. That was also interesting as well, because you could see how they were negotiated on the ground, but also being aware that they were limited by the State government, so there wasn't much they could really change. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021)

Many of the entries into the AHIC still relied on the use or sale of subsidised land from the CoS. The ability for models to not rely on CoS land was not a requirement in the original brief, perhaps to not place limitations on ideas, which is problematic as the issue of depleting CoS land resources was the catalyst for Councillors Scully and Thalys to champion the AHIC. Winners became aware of the issues related to CoS land as the competition went on:

I think through the competition I've slowly realised that even City of Sydney wasn't in a position to just give away free land anymore. They just didn't have enough and they still had to report to the treasurer, the finance team or their land management team and get their approval for land. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

Entries that relied on subsidised land found it more difficult to progress their ideas within the limits of the competition.

and then I just kind of realised that, you know, if the land was the issue, like just needing to find land that allows you to make the model feasible, it probably wasn't going to be in the City of Sydney. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021).

Although participants accepted Council's position that the AHIC was not a design competition, 'I definitely didn't sense that it was a design competition at the time, and I was confused about the tone,' (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022), participants commented on the disconnect between the housing focus of the brief and the make-up of the judging panel, which was dominated by architects. This confused participants as to the focus of the competition with one participant reflecting, 'The person that was running it should have been Peter Phibbs or Nicole Garran [Professors of Planning with a research focus on affordable housing at the University of Sydney]. It should have been someone who is a housing nut who could really help with that'. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2021).

The broadness of the brief also resulted in a wide range of submission, not all of which were suitable for council implementation. In addition, the lack of specification that proposals should not rely on subsidised council land meant that many proposals would never be able to progress beyond ideation. The assessment by a panel dominated by architects rather than housing experts was also viewed as problematic. To aid participants to develop concepts that fit within the remit of the responsible governing body, briefs that allow a broadness of ideas should be developed but with clarity on any known limitations. Without these parameters, policy experiments will struggle to produce ideas that will be feasible for implementation.

7.4.8 AGAIN, THE DOMAIN OF CHAMPIONS

Similar to the experience of the Demonstration Housing Project, champions who believed in the project were key to the success of the AHIC. In this case study the AHIC was championed by two Councillors, Jess Scully and Philip Thallis, which ensured that the program was made a priority, even though it had not been identified in council documents as a key action. However, when external events occurred, the precarity of the program was exposed. One participant reflected on the status of the competition:

Yeah, look, it was really ambitious and it had really great intentions. I think there were a few things that complicated it, so firstly it was really an initiative of Jess and Philip Thallis I think, so councillor led which was really great, so politically it had a lot of momentum. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

This political momentum helped to establish the AHIC and make it a CoS priority even though it was not one of the projects identified in previous council plans "because again, it was politically driven by

the councillors, it was made a priority” (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021) and “Basically, it was a councillor initiative outside of the council plan that was administered by a single tier directly answerable to the councillors” (interview with Andy Fergus, 2022). However, similar to the experience of the Future Homes project, a project that is championed by individuals rather than being part of core government policy is extremely precarious. One participant discussed the benefits and the precarity of the AHIC being a councillor-led program:

So those meetings – and they could pull in whoever they wanted for those meetings and we could get information. The one limitation that it did have was that because it was tied to a very short competition and it wasn't tied to a budget item, like aligned within council or a department, that made it a bit trickier. So it didn't necessarily – you haven't seen the results of that competition because basically what happens is the bushfires happened [2019-2020 catastrophic bushfire season in Australia, ‘Black Summer’, where all government functions and public attention were understandably refocused].

That put an end – that kind of shifted the priority of the team that was looking after the competition, because again it wasn't allocated to a particular line item, or a deliverable. So you know when there are council reporting things, six months or annually, they have to focus their attention to that because the council's so under-resourced. So that was a bit of a limitation, but certainly we did have access to people and we've made those connections and it was also connections across the teams as well. Then of course COVID happened after that (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

The influence of external events on the functioning of the program demonstrates the precarity of the AHIC, though the extreme nature of the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic impacted on many established functions of government. The same participant outlines the impact COVID-19 had on the final stages of the program:

There was supposed to be a big exhibition at the very end of it and what ended up happening instead was we had that – there was a presentation for Architecture Week at the end of 2019 and that's when we publicly shared the ideas. I think they've all been recorded, so I can – I only came across our recording last week actually. But they're all recorded so – that was the public presentation, but they were a kind of five-minute presentation. It was intended that there was going to be something that would be out there for public comment, but it just didn't get to happen. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

Even without the influence of external events, participants still experienced issues related to the disconnect between the Councillor’s objectives for the program and the core functions of council, as outlined by one AHIC participant:

We know essentially there was not an understanding of how it fitted within the City of Sydney so that was definitely a problem, but then also could have been a strength if it was organised in a way that engaged the right people from the City of Sydney, at the right stage in the process, had clear deliverables, had a clear build up et cetera. It was just a soup of time and

space for us to do whatever we wanted, and even some people did nothing with that. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

Once Philip Thalís finished his term on CoS, Jess Scully was seen as the solo champion of the program and respondents reported good faith with her continuing the project. In late March 2023 Councillor Scully announced that she would be resigning from the CoS due to lack of parental leave entitlements (Bowring, 2023). There has been no further comment on the project, apart from what was included as part of CoS latest vision. How the status of the AHIC will be maintained without a champion is yet to be seen.

Champions in housing space are vitally important – without the work of two councillors, Jess Scully and Philip Thalís, the AHIC might never have been established. However, the creation of a program that is not a core function of council policy places the program in a precarious position, meaning its ability to be prioritised is insecure. AHIC participants also indicated feeling that the operation of the project was hindered by the disconnection between the AHIC “champions” and the council staff tasked with administering the program. If policy experiments become more accepted as a way to explore new housing ideas, it is hoped that they will be established through key policy documents, which will ensure they are a government priority.

7.4.9 ISSUES WITH OUTCOMES

Scaling and integrating the results of each design competition into planning policy is the most unique aspect of policy experiments but this research has found that for each of the case studies there are aspects that have not yet been resolved. The final outcomes from the City of Sydney’s Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge are still yet to be clarified or realised – it is unclear if the combination of winning designs will be used on a specific City of Sydney site. The latest vision for the Council discusses the ideas, stating “We must test this proposal to see if it is financially sound and can be provided at scale to help supply affordable housing in Sydney” (City of Sydney 2022, p. 84) but participants themselves are unaware of the next step for their designs in regard to Council collaboration: “I haven't been formally briefed. It's all informal” (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant, 2022).

The lack of clarity around the outcomes of the program resulted in two very different experiences of the AHIC. One participant was positive about the explorative possibilities the program offered, pleased that the AHIC went beyond the traditional boundaries of the design competition, as discussed in Chapter 2:

But I think there were a few issues in terms of actually rolling it out, or having any follow through with some of the projects. So I think some of the projects have had success and they're still ongoing and some of the others less so. But I think it was always intended that not all projects would be seen to, or wouldn't actually result in outcomes, it was more of an exploration. So I should take a couple of steps back in that it was a bit different to a normal competition, so quite often there's an ideas competition and you put forward an idea and it gets an award and that's kind of the end of the story. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

For another participant, who was keen to see the ideas presented in the AHIC develop into built form outcomes, they had clear ideas about how they would change the format of the program to improve the process towards this goal:

If I were to change it, I would not change the amount, I would not change the length, I would not change the title. I would still have the presentation, but I would have a prescribed format output of a booklet with contributions from each project clearly articulating the outcome so there's a clear deliverable. I would provide resources to support the production of that. I would have more clearly articulated who needed to be in the room at what stage in the process to support the groups and peer review them. I would have had more independent peer review and advice provided on the models by experts in a way that was facilitated through the City of Sydney. Just more intentionality through that workshop process, and I would not have had architects on the jury, it's just not relevant. The architecture can come later. (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

The lack of clear direction for the results of the AHIC is problematic as it confines the impact that the AHIC could have on the housing system in regards to both the specific ideas developed in 2019 and for the AHIC style program to continue into the future. For participants there has been no clear direction about the next steps to take with their submissions, though as discussed in section 7.4.5 many have been able to find other avenues to progress their ideas. In regards to the future status and operation of another program in the style of the AHIC, without defined outcomes, it is impossible to evaluate the project, limiting opportunities for new iterations of the policy experiment.

7.4.10 PAYING FOR INNOVATION

The issues surrounding a lack of remuneration for work in design and policy competitions is a theme that has appeared in the previous two case studies and will be examined as a larger theme in Chapter 8. The AHIC rewarded finalists with \$20,000 in prize money, which was intended to help participants further refine their ideas:

They were interested more in how they could actually take these ideas and develop them up further, so the prize money that was allocated for it was actually intended to cover time to develop these ideas further. (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

However, in practice there were other factors that influenced how the money was spent and if it was equitable. Winners from interstate were at a slight disadvantage, with participants revealing that their competition prize money was spent on flight and accommodation needed to attend the refinement workshops that were part of the program: "Our \$20,000 went on flights and accommodation and then we just spent a lot of personal time doing this" (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant 2022). In addition, the competition did include some international winners, meaning that it was not feasible for them to attend the workshop programs. One participant reflected that the benefits for the overseas teams may have been lessened by their inability to access the same level of support from CoS during the idea refinement stage:

Yeah, I would definitely like to know whether the Kansas team, the Smart Homes team, felt like they got the same benefits that we did, because not being here and not having direct

access to the resources I talked about, not having City of Sydney, you know? I think that really changes their experience of it. (Interview with Eddie Ma, 2021)

Without clear outcomes there was no clarification around how much work was expected of each of the teams. There were no minimum or maximum expectations. Participants reflected that the amount of work to refine ideas was not equal and there was no obligation to spend \$20,000 worth of time working on their submissions:

“That was really beholden to us and we didn't need to do it. We could have got away with doing nothing. So, I think that's another problem, there should have been clear deliverables out of the whole project” (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2021).

The prize money was not enough to get teams past the workshop stage, “also really the funding went into the time to develop the ideas and that ran out by the end of the six months” (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021). This, combined with the lack of clear outcomes for the program may have contributed to the need for participants to find alternative avenues to progress their ideas, as discussed in section 7.4.5.

Issues of remuneration around design competitions were explored in Chapter 2. While the AHIC offered opportunities for new players into the housing space (see section 7.4.3), it is also an example of where the level of remuneration did not match the work that was required in the six months of idea refinement. Similar to the findings of Seidels (1990), and Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris (1990) on the issues of prizes and payment, the issue of remuneration for winners or finalists can be a barrier to outcomes in current policy experiments, or act as a deterrent for future competition entrants.

7.5 FUTURE OF THE AHIC

The future of the AHIC is unclear. As discussed in section 7.4.9, how the outcomes from the 2019 Challenge might still be refined and implemented with the City of Sydney are still yet to be determined. It is also unclear if another iteration of the Challenge will be run in the future.

7.5.1 INTEGRATION OF OUTCOMES INTO COUNCIL POLICY

Since the end of the AHIC there have been a number of key policy documents released by the CoS, including their revised vision for the city, *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision*, and the *Housing for All: City of Sydney local housing strategy*, providing an opportunity to determine if the results of the experimental program has resulted in any long term policy impacts. The City of Sydney's *Housing for All: City of Sydney local housing strategy*, released in June 2020, acknowledges the establishment of the AHIC as part of their priority to diversify housing delivery but no specific outcomes related to the ideas presented during the AHIC were included in the documents. The timing of the release of this document, only 6 months after the end of the competition may indicate why the CoS could not yet include any specific AHIC actions.

In July 2022 *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision* was released. *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision* confirms CoS commitment to the 7.5% affordable housing target set in earlier documents (see section 7.2). The AHIC is featured as “Project Idea #8 Building on housing for

all” (City of Sydney, 2022, p 82) in *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision* also includes reference to the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge. Further details of how this proposal will be “tested” have not as yet been released. During an interview with one of the AHIC participants, I mentioned the inclusion of the AHIC in the draft version of the *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision* document. Though the participant’s project was included as part of the draft plan, they told me that they did not realise they were included and had not yet been briefed by CoS as to the next stages of the AHIC. See section 7.4.9 for more discussion on this issue.

In 2022, the Cos Operation Plan 2022/23 was released. Under *Strategic Direction 10: Housing for all*, the plan includes *Objective 10.3 An increased supply of affordable housing supports diverse communities and the economy*. Action 10.3.2 *Planning controls to encourage affordable rental housing* includes the specific operational plan deliverable to “Facilitate affordable housing through the planning system, optimising programs, leveraging site specific opportunities and investigating opportunities for innovative approaches” (City of Sydney 2022c, p68). Responsibility for the deliverable is given to the City Planning, Development and Transport departments. This highlights the strong importance that innovation is given by the CoS in regards to affordable housing, with a specific action and responsible department being identified.

In addition, the CoS Delivery Program 2022-26 was updated. As in the Operational Plan, under *Strategic Direction 10: Housing for all*, the plan includes *Objective 10.3 An increased supply of affordable housing supports diverse communities and the economy*. Action 10.3.2 *Planning controls to encourage affordable rental housing* includes the specific operational plan deliverable to “Encourage supply of affordable rental housing through planning controls” (City of Sydney 2022d, p52). Again, responsibility for the deliverable is given to the City Planning, Development and Transport departments. This is a rare occurrence of the possible introduction of a specific, jurisdictional wide planning mechanism into the CoS, the kind of response that was expected at a state level from scholars such as Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al (2017).

In summary, the AHIC is identified as a project idea in the *Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision* plan but without clear indication of how the ideas might be integrated into council programming. The AHIC is not named specifically in either the Operation Plan 2022/23 or the Delivery Program 2022-26, but it is clear that the CoS intends to expand its work in the affordable housing space, as predicted by Morris et al (2020) and Morris (2021).

7.5.2 AN UNCLEAR FUTURE

There is no indication from the CoS that the AHIC might run again. Participants in the 2019 Challenge were asked to comment of how they saw the future of the Challenge, with one interviewee remarking that it would not be pertinent to run the Challenge again at the moment: “To run it again right now is a waste of time without implementing the findings, so I wouldn't advise a Canberra or a Hobart to do it. I would advise them to take the lessons as an outcome of it and test them themselves” (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

7.5.3 IMPROVEMENTS TO THE AHIC

Participants had specific feedback on how the AHIC could be improved if it was to run again. The main issues that they felt needed to be resolved included confirming that it was a housing competition, not a design competition:

I think that's pretty straight forward in terms of how I would redesign that process. I would also make it much clearer that it's not - like it's not about design solutions. That it was more heavily focused towards solutions that had a clear financial, legal, organisational, et cetera, kind of basis and that if design proposals are not suitably accompanied by a financial idea, it cannot be considered. There was just that clarity that it's not about designing small houses or something like that. So yeah, I think that's my thoughts (Interview with Andy Fergus, 2022).

Though the original idea for the AHIC stemmed from a desire to increase affordable housing percentages in the CoS without a reliance on council assets, the program was presented as a broader opportunity to allow housing ideas to flourish, speaking to sentiments of Madden and Marcuse (2016, p. 208) who encourage housing alternatives to “bloom”. Suggestions to redesign the process from participants would have aided in ensuring that entries were focused on ideas that were in the remit of the CoS and did not rely on the need for subsidised council assets in the competition entries and ultimately aided with future scaling but much of the diversity of the entries would have been lost. This connects to the work of Sisson et al. (2023, p. 13) who discuss balancing the dual role of challenges as a highly public promotion and procurement act – if the AHIC was too specific and restrictive to enter it may not have received the high number of submissions, including international interest, that it did.

7.6 CONCLUSION

The existence of the AHIC highlighted that local government was involved in policy experimentation before 2019 and not part of the increase of experiments observed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic by M^oGuirk et al. (2020). The use of the challenge to position themselves as a larger player in the affordable housing space was not unexpected, with Morris (2021) outlining the history of CoS’ unique affordable housing focus and targets. The unique position of the CoS to undertake a housing challenge at local council level was applauded and the freedom of a program focused on ideas and with little to no participant requirements opened up a new avenue for people in the housing space, speaking to the hope placed in “assemblages of actors” (M^oGuirk et al. 2022, p.1392) as part of innovative urban governance programs to bring about solutions to complex urban problems. This chapter has provided a third, unique example of policy experiment in the Australian housing space, ensuring that an example from each level of government has been examined, following the work of policy lab scholars such as McGann et al. 2021 who outlined the importance of capturing jurisdictional variation.

While this chapter presented some critiques of the program in regard to the format and links to outcomes, the ability of experimental programs such as the AHIC in revealing gaps in process and regulation is one of its most unique features. One participant reflected on the importance of pilot programs like the AHIC, “I think pilots are really productive, not just for communication but again, to demonstrate how to get through all those steps in regulation” (Interview with Alysia Bennett, 2021).

The AHIC demonstrates the concept of “hacking policy” as established by Maalsen (2021), where experimental programs are used to identify gaps as a precursor to reform. This combined with the CoS continued focus on affordable housing, as revealed in the final part of this chapter where policy documents released following the challenge, indicate that the AHIC essentially provided funding and a space for more creative thinking in the housing space at a local level, which should be seen as an important contribution to housing system change in Australia. The specific focus of the Commonwealth example in Chapter 5 and the State example in Chapter 6 did not allow for the broadness of thinking around housing that the AHIC did. In addition, though the specific outcomes of the AHIC have not yet been resolved, the cumulative response of the CoS as a local authority in regard to affordable housing, by setting specific targets and including specific actions in policy documents means that in this research, it is the local government authority who is unexpectedly making moves towards the systematic changes towards reforming affordable housing provision. Work by scholars such as Martin et al. (2023), Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al (2017) tends to be dominated by federal and state approaches but perhaps local government should be a larger focus.

CHAPTER 8 THEMATIC COMPARISON OF CASE STUDIES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of each of the previous three chapters, analysis of the case study material was presented in themes. This chapter draws together the individual case study findings to present a thematic comparison, exploring the three research sub-questions posed in Chapter 1. A discussion of the various forms of experimental governance programs opens the chapter, exploring the first research question which was to define policy experiments in the housing space. A dialogue with current literature about the impending nature of experimentation is then presented, where evidence gathered for this thesis demonstrates that policy experiments are already operating in the housing space.

Drawing on the findings from the three case studies, analysis of the impact of experimental governance programs on the housing systems, as asked by the second research question, is presented through the discussion of eight key themes. Evaluation of the program influence is broad, with the results of this discussion highlighting areas of impact beyond the formal outcomes of the experiment.

The final part of the chapter explores the six barriers identified across the three case studies that currently limit their ability to generate wider housing systems change. The precarity of experiments, the lack of clear program outcomes, plans for scaling, program evaluation and integration into the existing planning system are identified as some of the biggest challenges facing experimental governance programs in housing in Australia.

8.2 DEFINING POLICY EXPERIMENTS

The first research question aimed to define a policy experiment in the housing space. In this section, the results of the research are developed into a definition of housing policy experiments. Findings from the research also reveal how these policy experiments are being established as part of political agendas and that they have existed in Australia since 2019, predating the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.2.1 DEFINITION OF A POLICY EXPERIMENT

Conceptualisations of experimental governance outlined by Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2020, p. 120) from their exploration of smart mobility experiments were used as a guiding definition at the beginning of this research and discussed in Chapter 2. While the three case studies, which represented a range of jurisdictions as suggested by the work of McGann et al. (2021), were observed to be diverse in regards to scope and operation, each experimental governance program is broadly consistent with the definition of a policy experiment as an “instrument employed to promote or accelerate innovation through testing and development of new types of solutions, technologies and services” (Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2020, p. 120). The work of these programs is also

consistent with the concept of the hack as an “object of empirical inquiry”, as proposed by Maalsen (2021, p.8) who identified “hacking policy” as one way of ways in which the hack was being used in urban policy. The premise of each of the three case study programs examined fit within Maalsen’s (2021, p.8) definition of this kind of hack as “iterative and experimental approaches to policy and regulations that are tested in small sections of the city before being scaled up if successful”.

The programs selected for examination in this thesis were required to include a goal or focus that included policy reform as part of their outcomes. The results of the case study analysis are brought together with the definitions discussed above to develop a new definition specific to housing experimental governance programs. Contrary to Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren’s description, the use of the word “instrument” will not be used as in the housing and planning context in Australia as the term has associations with statutory environmental planning instruments, such as Local Environment Plans, and so the term “program” will be used instead. Program also encapsulates the separate and identifiable nature of experimental governance projects. Maalsen’s definition of hacking policy highlights the mechanics behind the method – the experimentation and iteration of ideas. A housing policy experiment in Australia can therefore be defined as:

A standalone program established to identify and test housing policy innovation opportunities through the use of experimental approaches to examine how new ideas in the areas of housing typologies, ownership models and associated services could be introduced to a specific jurisdiction

This definition describes the work of all three case studies: the Demonstration Housing Project, where new housing typologies to the ACT were to be tested one project at a time before amendments to the Territory Plan were made to introduce widespread change to zoning rules; the Future Homes Project, where four winning apartment designs were released along with an adaptation guideline and a fast-tracked planning process to test the limits of the Better Apartment Design Guide before reforms were made; and the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge, where new ideas for affordable housing in the local government area were refined to assist Council in making decisions about their future vision and projects. The definition is broad enough to encompass the different outcomes of housing policy experiments, with some programs having specific built outcomes and others being more focused on the ideation around housing.

8.2.2 EXPERIMENT ORIGINS: NOT HOUSING POLICY BUT POLITICAL CHAMPIONS

This research has revealed that experimental governance programs in housing in Australia are not established through formal housing strategies but are the product of political championing. Results from the policy review of housing strategies from around Australia released between 2017 and 2021, as discussed in Chapter 4, and observations from the case study research, as detailed in Chapters 5 to 7, were analysed to determine the origins of these programs. In the example of Future Homes Victoria, the idea to work with the Government Architects office on a project came from a 2018 Labor election commitment; the idea for the ACT Demonstration Housing Project came from a Ministerial Commitment made in 2015; and the City of Sydney Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge was championed by two Councillors but not part of core Council functions. The finding that the establishment of experimental governance programs are politically motivated aligns with the work of

Kimbell and Bailey (2017) who identified that experimental and prototyping programs are often associated with political agendas. While state level housing strategies do demonstrate an openness and appetite for experimentation, innovation and data driven solutions, policy experiments that are currently in operation in Australia were established by other political or ministerial commitments. The need to continue tracking experimental governance programs establishment is discussed as a future area of research in the following chapter. The related impact of experiments being established as part of a political agenda on the longevity of programs, the importance of champions and the future status of experimental governance programs will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

8.2.3 POLICY EXPERIMENTATION IS HERE. COVID WAS NOT THE CATALYST BUT HAS IMPACTED THE OPERATION AND POTENTIAL OF PROJECTS.

This research is centred around the emergence of experimental governance programs in housing in Australia. Results from the policy review of housing strategies from around Australia released between 2017 and 2021 and observations from the case study research were analysed to determine any temporal or spatial patterns of program establishment. This research has revealed that experimental governance programs in housing have existed in Australia since 2019. The case studies examined as part of this thesis were not part of acceleration in experimental programs catalysed by COVID-19 and observed by McGuirk et al. (2021) as all three programs were in operation when the pandemic occurred: the Future Homes project in Victoria was announced as a 2018 election commitment; the City of Sydney's Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge was announced in 2019; and the ACT Demonstration Housing Project stemmed from a Ministerial Statement made in 2015.

Semi-structured interviews revealed that even though COVID-19 was not the catalyst for these experiments, the pandemic impacted on all programs in a significant way. The winners of the City of Sydney Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge were announced one week before the Ruby Princess COVID incident, resulting in a complete pause of the program. The Future Homes Project industry brief was announced days before the first COVID lockdown in Victoria. The Future Homes student design competition, with its planned face-to-face cross-institutional studio and workshop program, had to move online in line with lockdown requirements. Interviews with program representatives and participants reveal two specific impacts of COVID-19 on the case studies: for some programs certain components were delayed; for others the program immediately stopped being a priority. This research has identified that long program delays are a barrier to experimental governance programs generating wider housing system change.

8.3 IMPACT OF POLICY EXPERIMENTS ON THE HOUSING SYSTEM

As discussed in Chapter 1, policy experiments have been established as a novel response to the issue of affordable housing in Australia. The second research question sought to understand what impact policy experiments are having on the housing system, following concerns from Gurrán (2019) who reflected that previous "innovative" programs failed to address deeper, structural issues in the housing system. Examinations of the impact of the three case study programs on the housing system have been guided by the work of scholars in sustainability and smart cities, who provided frameworks and definitions around observation and impact of other experimental governance programs. The

exploration of program impacts as direct, indirect or diffuse, as suggested by the work of Schliwa et al. (2015) has been incorporated into this research. The impacts of the case study programs on the housing system have been explored through eight key themes: identifying the gaps and other barriers to implementing housing ideas; the specific scale of experimental projects allowing for new actors into the space and new collaborations; promoting wider discussions about housing; experimentation as a new function of government; the housing system focus of programs; issues of equity and privileges for those who already own land; the adaptation of architectural design competitions; and new opportunities for program and policy transfer.

8.3.1 IDENTIFYING THE GAPS AND OTHER BARRIERS

This research observed that one of the great benefits of running an experimental governance program was the ability to identify policy gaps and other barriers to implementing a housing idea. During semi-structured interviews both Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge and Demonstration Housing Project participants indicated that it was necessary to “run” a project through the planning system to see what the pinch points were. This finding is supported by the work of Maalsen (2021, p. 8) who stated “as an intervention, hacking is useful in helping to envision different possibilities within the constraints of the existing system”. This research suggests that the extent of variations and inconsistencies between different regulations can only be discovered when a pilot project is executed.

The use of design competitions as a starting point to take new housing ideas from concept to development assessment to construction, was observed to provide unique insights into the planning policy process. Without the piloting of a small-scale co-housing project through the Demonstration Housing Project issues related to allowing this new housing typology in the ACT would not have been discovered, namely the inconsistent requirements around shared spaces, including laundries, in the planning variation and National Building Code. Making amendments to the Territory Plan following a testing or pilot phase has the potential to achieve much better policy outcomes, and therefore built outcomes. It should be cautioned that the positive outcomes of one demonstration project do not automatically transfer when scaled up to wider planning policy. The two-year local council pilot of the Future Homes Project hope to test the new site-less designs before scaling up to state-wide reforms. Experimental governance programs are providing a unique opportunity to test new housing ideas in real time, using real sites, providing an in-depth and formal example of how these changes might appear if they were to be scaled up.

8.3.2 SCALE OF PROJECTS ALLOWS FOR NEW ACTORS AND COLLABORATION

A key feature of experimental programs is increased involvement with new actors, including the private sector and academia (Wellstead et al. 2021). Three key benefits related to the scale and operation of Australian housing experimental governance programs have been identified in this research: the opportunity to submit to government projects, outside of large-scale tenders; the opportunity to collaborate with other competition winners, which is unusual for design competitions; and the opportunity to change the direction of participant careers.

Experimental governance programs, due to their scale and entry requirements, can offer a unique opportunity for smaller, younger teams of practitioners to enter the government housing space. Winners from smaller or newly established firms reported that the programs provided an opportunity for them to participate. Contracts for larger scale projects tend to be awarded to established firms, who have a reputation and track record that is recognisable in the non-blind process. Winners from two of the case study programs were from smaller or newly established firms and reflected during interviews that the programs provided a unique opportunity for them to participate. As discussed in Chapter 6, LIAN was able to form a brand-new, small practice to enter the Future Homes competition.

The three programs provided an opportunity for actors already working in the housing space to think more broadly about housing, outside the scope of client projects in their day job. Analysis of the background of participants across the three case studies found that entries were generally submitted by those who had professional experience in architecture, planning or a related field. Future Homes Victoria restricted entry to those teams who had a member that was registered as an Architect in Victoria. Participants were attracted to the opportunity to use their knowledge and expertise to solve broader housing issues.

In addition, though the semi-structured interview participants were approached to discuss a particular program, it was revealed that two of the two participants in one case study were involved in another of the case studies. This highlights that there is a unique opportunity factor in these programs that attracts similar actors looking for opportunities to find new housing solutions. These actors, as discussed above are generally already working or studied architecture or planning, revealing that these programs may exclude some parts of the community who are interested in housing but may not have formal training.

An unexpected benefit of experimental governance programs revealed in this thesis was the opportunity for program participants to collaborate and share ideas. This was a unique experience that was part of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge and was received positively by both participants and program organisers – so positive that the final winning design was a combination of three team's ideas, as discussed in Chapter 7. While there may be criticism of the lack of defined outcomes of the case study projects, winning one of the programs bestows a special status on the participant. Seidel (1990, p. 177) found competitions were a "powerful means of gaining public recognition for architects" and one of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge participants interview reflections echoed these sentiments. The participant found that the Challenge provided opportunities for them to build their network in the housing space, firstly because they were introduced to a lot of industry players as part of the workshops but also because they were able to use their status as a winner to introduce themselves to new people. For some interviewees, participation in an experimental governance program had a transformative effect on their careers. As discussed in Chapter 7 and repeated here for emphasis, one participant reflected on the profound effect being part of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge had on their future.

Experimental governance programs in housing in Australia are providing new opportunities for smaller, emerging actors to participate in government projects. The impact of being a finalist or winning one of these programs has transformative impacts on teams and individuals who are able to

use their status or experience to change their future careers. This indicates that housing experiments are increasing the inclusivity of actors into the space with new opportunities for those working in housing to expand their roles or providing program types that can be accessed by new participant groups.

8.3.3 WIDER DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HOUSING

Experimental governance programs were observed to provide a unique opportunity for people to explore and think about housing outside of the formal planning system entry points of commenting on a larger strategic document or making a submission for a specific development application. This is consistent with the findings of Sisson et al. (2023) who found that challenges did help to draw attention to particular issues. Across all three case studies, interview participants were positive about how programs provided a platform for broader discussion about the future of housing in the public sphere. Public events, such as the panel at the 2019 Architecture Festival for winners of the Alternative Housing Ideas Competition and the exhibition of the Future Homes Project at Melbourne Design Week 2021, helped to increase the dialogue around housing and the project in the wider community. The experience of the Manor House Project from the Demonstration Housing Project, however, indicates how a lack of clarification about larger program aims and connection to existing planning processes can cause public confusion and anger. Considerations about program narratives are especially important in housing as experimental governance programs are established to assist political agendas, meaning already precarious projects can be abandoned if they are unpopular with the voting general public.

An unexpected outcome of the ACT Demonstration Project was the formation of a new community group, Greater Canberra, whom after observing discussions about the Demonstration Housing Project, decided to formalise themselves into an organisation. The group represents the interests of young Canberrans who feel that densification and new typologies should be part of the future of housing. Four interviews conducted in relation to the ACT Demonstration Project referred to the work of the group in advancing and broadening discussions about housing in the ACT. An interview with a representative of the Greater Canberra group confirmed that it was the public campaign against the Manor House Project that propelled them to formalise. Greater Canberra has continued grow their presence and became an important supporter of the Territory Plan Variation 375 for the Manor House Project. The interaction between YIMBY groups and experimental governance programs demonstrates the roles these projects play in widening discussions about housing.

This research acknowledges the inherent tension between the scale of the housing experiments examined and the systemic nature of housing affordability challenges. Experimental governance initiatives have been shown to operate at fixed, often local scales, raising questions about the efficacy of these policy innovations in addressing complex systemic housing issues. However, these approaches serve an important function beyond their immediate impact—they operate as an experimental space for novel governance arrangements, financing models, and planning mechanisms that may inform wider system transformation. Rather than positioning these models as comprehensive solutions, this research contends that such experiments contribute to systemic change through their capacity to demonstrate alternatives and challenge existing policy assumptions, that could influence future, broader housing policy development.

8.3.4 EXPERIMENTATION AS A NEW FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

This research found that across all three case studies, experimental governance programs were a new function of all levels of government – the term “an experiment within an experiment” has been used in this thesis to describe this new position. The frustration at needing to explain the experimental program to different government departments, or even different sections of the department who were running the program was expressed by participants across all three case studies. Part of the benefit of experimental governance programs is the ability to identify the gaps in the planning process for new housing typologies, as discussed previously in this chapter but as the above quote highlights, this process can be challenging and frustrating for the participants involved. The research identified perceived difficulties by government departments to defend existing planning instruments and rules whilst at the same time promoting an experimental governance program. Semi-structured interviews revealed the additional use of consultants to verify work to ensure that government departments were able to maintain independence from the experimental program but with monetary and time costs. Participants reflected on the tension, stating “I think the problem was that again the government and the public servants who were in the system were trying to look as if they weren’t using the bureaucracy to support our project” (Demonstration Housing Project Applicant 2022a).

It was also observed that members of the public were often confused or unaware about how the experiment functions or how the program fits into the wider government policy framework. This is highlighted through the results of the thematic analysis undertaken as part of the investigations into the Manor House Project, where public submissions revealed confusion about the Demonstration Housing Project as a whole. Though some of the programs explored in this thesis have engaged in community consultation, this research identifies that there needs to be more detailed and specific information about program lifecycles and evaluation, as well as clarification as to how the outcomes of each program might be integrated into the existing policy framework. These two issues will be discussed as barriers to generating wider housing system change later in this chapter.

8.3.5 HOUSING SYSTEM FOCUS

There is variation in the area of the housing system that each experimental governance program focuses on. Though not explicitly stated in their project descriptions, this research considers that the Demonstration Housing Project and the Future Homes Project will both support future infill development – the Demonstration Housing Project, a pathway to introducing medium density housing to the RZ1 zone; the Future Homes Project a model, using adaptation plans and a fast-track planning process to bring more three-storey apartments to the general residential zone. Conversely, the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge focused on affordable housing, with the brief allowing ideas related to new tenure types, housing typologies and inclusionary zoning. Importantly, the Demonstration Housing Project, through individual variations to the Territory Plan allows access to planning provisions that are not currently available. This was highlighted during interviews with Demonstration Housing Project participants: “So we were very lucky that that [Demonstration Housing Project] came up because there was no way we would be able to build three dwellings on one block in the RZ1 zone”. The use of the term “innovative” is subjective and varies from context to context. The introduction of the manor house typology to the ACT is innovative in that context, though neighbouring states such as NSW may have allowed that housing form for some time. Many of

the concepts submitted were built on existing ideas, introducing them to a new time period and/or jurisdiction. For example, the Future Home Project builds on the concept of the Small Homes Service. The Right Size Service, which was one of the finalists in the CoS AHIC was also inspired by the Small Homes Service.

When considering the wider housing system issues, such as a lack of clear leadership and funding, that Phibbs and Gurran (2021), Gurran et al. (2018a) and Rowley et al (2017) point to as the most needed areas of housing reform, the focus areas of experimental programs examined in this thesis seem limited. However, it would be premature to dismiss the impact that these programs do have, such as their ability to highlight gaps in the planning system that are preventing reform (as discussed above in relation to the Demonstration Housing Project and their ability to stimulate discussions about doing housing differently.

Through the examination of three case studies, this research considers that the greater potential of experimental governance programs has not yet been explored in relation to housing in Australia. It is too early to determine if there are patterns emerging in regard to which areas of the housing system are being targeted for policy experiments. The Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge demonstrates the potential of the experimental governance programs, where there is scope to explore and develop housing ideas outside of a more rigid brief. If experimental governance programs continue to be deployed as part of political aims with a narrow focus such as infill development, the fuller possibility of these kinds of programs will never be explored.

8.3.6 PRIVILEGES FOR THOSE WHO ALREADY OWN LAND

Observations in this research regarding the housing system focus of the Demonstration Housing Project and the Future Homes Project highlight potential issues of equity around who can participate in experimental governance programs. To participate in either program, applicants would need to have access to or ownership of land within the jurisdiction as the programs target infill development. As discussed in the previous section, the housing system focus of experimental governance programs is currently limited in Australia. Semi-structured interviews with individuals who were involved in the review or refinement of finalist's ideas, who had generally been selected by each program because of their position or experience in housing, provided a unique opportunity to discuss the wider equity and accessibility of experimental governance programs. The scale of potential uplift gains for participants in the Demonstration Housing Program if selected lots were large blocks in wealthy areas was hypothesised as a potential equity issue due to the large windfall that would be experienced by an individual property owner, though interviewees did acknowledge that the potential for infill development was widespread, with one noting "On the one hand, I mean, the missing middle exists, everywhere, even in Toorak" (In this quote Toorak is being used as an example of a well-known wealthy, established suburb in Australia. None of the case study programs examined in this thesis included sites in Toorak specifically). The issue of inequity perpetuation was raised in previous work in the area of innovative programs, where the work of Das (2020) on smart city programs and Sisson et al. (2023) in their examination of challenges. Equity concerns need to be considered as part of any future programs to ensure greater access to experimental governance programs, to prevent them from benefiting only those who have already been able to progress along the housing continuum.

8.3.7 ADAPTING ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COMPETITIONS

The programs examined also have potential impacts on architecture practice, in particular the way the traditional design competition is viewed. Though some of the case study programs self-identified as “not a design competition”, examinations of the three case study programs has identified that each case study program includes some adapted elements of a traditional architectural design competitions for use in a governance experiment, specifically: departure from the use of a specific site as the competition focus; multifaceted period of design refinement; and adapted deliverables to reflect planning policy outcomes.

Departure from a site-specific brief

Adaptions to site specific briefs were the most common departure from the traditional design competition structure observed across the three case studies. In the past, architectural design competitions have focused on soliciting design ideas for one specific site, which can range from one building to a defined precinct. The use of a specific site for response is being tinkered with to aid in broader ideation or for the use in site-less projects that will undergo design adaptation in the future. Though the Future Homes Industry Competition provided participants with the option of a two-block site or three-block site as the focus of their submission during stage 1 of the competition, the sites were de-identified, with no requirement to develop a design solution for a specific location. The final focus of this project was to provide site-less designs that could be altered to fit any future site using an adaptation guide. During the second stage of the competition a Department of Housing site was the focus of the brief.

The City of Sydney Alternative Housing Ideas Challenged also altered the traditional design competition brief by not including a specific site. The focus of the AHIC was on ideation around housing, with the call for submissions stating that the AHIC “will be open to anyone with new ideas for the housing sector” (City of Sydney, 2019a). The brief asked that applications “demonstrate innovation in at least 2 of these areas – planning, design, ownership type, tenancy type, management (including sharing of facilities), construction, urban land supply and financing”. (City of Sydney, 2019a).

The Demonstration Housing Project was launched in 2017 and accepted submissions that brought new housing designs to the main residential zone, RZ1, in the ACT. Though the “projects with a site” stream followed the traditional process of preparing a site-specific plan, participants were required to use a site they already owned or had access to, making the adjudication process quite different to most design competitions. The other stream for “proposals without site” was a greater departure from the traditional design brief. Participants were required to provide a site-less proposal on the understanding that once accepted into the project there might be an opportunity to purchase a yet unseen government site for the project. The reframing of experiments to focus on site-less proposals provides opportunities to collect less constrained ideas that could be applied to a wider range of applications.

Multifaceted period of design refinement

A period of design refinement may occur in any design competition but for these experimental governance programs, the refinement process often involved a program of workshops related to aspects such as feasibility, sustainability, or financing. Refinement programs that were more curated and clearer were preferred. Participants in the City of Sydney Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge reflected that the program of workshops was not very clearly set out, with one participant providing insight into how the refinement stage could have been improved:

I would have had more independent peer review and advice provided on the models by experts in a way that was facilitated through the City of Sydney. Just more intentionality through that workshop process, and I would not have had architects on the jury, it's just not relevant. The architecture can come later. (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant 2022)

Future Homes Participants went through three stages with the competition, each requiring more and more refinement towards the existing planning controls. Participants reported loss of enjoyment in the project as the stages went on and wished there had been acknowledgement of the requirements earlier on, stating “so we present a big idea and then they say it must comply, ok, now put it on this site with these dimensions and try to get a yield we think the market wants” (Interview with Future Homes Participant 2022).

Though evaluated as demonstrating excellence in design quality, successful Demonstration Housing Project applicants were also required to present to the National Capital Design Review Panel. Generally, participants reported this to be a positive experience but were not expecting the financial implications:

The other thing that they did ask us to do was present to the government architect panel, which I didn't mind. Free architectural advice is always handy. But we were put through a considerable amount of our own time and effort and expense, at our expense to fund - in effect, we funded part of their program. (Interview with Demonstration Housing Project Participant 2022)

This indicates that while the site-less brief, as discussed above, originally allows a wider, less constrained range of ideas to initially flow, as programs moved closer to implementation, the requirements of the existing planning system that they operate within became much more important. The loss of creativity as programs progressed was identified as a source of frustration for many participants who had initially been attracted to the innovation and creativity of the programs.

Adapted deliverables to reflect planning policy outcomes

Scaling and integrating the results of each design competition into planning policy is the most unique aspect of these experimental governance programs, and often the justification for their operation, but the research found that for each of the case studies there are aspects that have not yet been resolved. The final outcomes from the City of Sydney's Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge are still yet to be clarified or realised and it is unclear if the combination of winning designs will be used on a

specific City of Sydney site. The latest vision for the Council discusses the ideas, stating “We must test this proposal to see if it is financially sound and can be provided at scale to help supply affordable housing in Sydney” but participants themselves are unaware of the next step for their designs regarding Council collaboration, as discussed in Chapter 7 and in section 8.4.5 of this chapter.

Demonstration Housing Projects that were deemed to display design excellence in a new model or typology of housing became the subject of a draft variation to the Territory Plan. These variations were site specific and did not provide wide-scale changes to the RZ1 rules. Government indicated that the results of the Demonstration Housing Project would be used to inform future planning policy, but little detail was provided at the time. The Demonstration Housing Project has experienced significant delays, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date only one project with a site has received development approval and participants without a site have now been waiting almost four years for the formal opportunity to be able to purchase a site. These delays have meant that the Demonstration Housing Project is now running alongside the review of the ACT Territory Plan. It is unclear how the findings of the Demonstration Housing Project will be incorporated into the new Territory Plan, if at all. Participants are keenly anticipating the first draft of the plan but are unsure of the connection between the outcomes of the Demonstration Housing Project and the Territory plan review: “I really don't think there's any kind of real correlation, partly because of the length of time it's taken to even get the first one [Demonstration Housing Project site] approved” (Interview with Demonstration Housing Project Participant 2022).

The four site-less designs from the winners of the Future Homes Project in Victoria have now been through two more stages of refinement. The Project is about to embark on a two-year pilot program in two Local Government Areas which will test the new adaptation of design guidelines, as well as the proposed fast-track planning process. These unique deliverables were required to aid transferring the outcomes of the design competition to a policy-based program. In time, the evaluation of these adapted outcomes will be possible.

One final consideration in relation to the use of architectural design competitions in experimental design competitions is their public facing nature. As Seidel (1990, p. 173) notes, publicity is one of the key goals of the architectural design competition as it “increases public awareness to encourage political and financial support for the project”. As discussed, the experimental governance programs in housing in Australia have been established as part of political agendas, thus making the publicity aspect of design competitions a desirable feature. The adoption of the traditional architectural design competitions for use in experimental governance programs focused on housing policy reform was first recognised by this research and should be an area of future exploration.

8.3.8 NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM AND POLICY TRANSFER

This research has revealed that there is a culture of ideas sharing between existing experimental governance programs, providing a potential pathway for future policy transfer. For example, some participants of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge revealed that they were approached by the Future Homes Project team to share their experience of being part of the Challenge, so that the Future Homes Project could refine and inform their own process. The Future Homes Project indicated that the team from the ACT Demonstration Housing project had discussed details of their approach.

Though these findings do not demonstrate evidence of policy transfer per se, they do highlight interest and willingness to learn from other similar projects. Interviews also revealed that all three case studies had looked to overseas examples to inform their own program. Interest in the potential of programs to be adapted for other jurisdictions or contexts was one of the key themes that emerged from the interviews. While it was not within the scope of this thesis to explore how programs could be transferred, this research did reveal a number of key considerations that should be taken into account for any future program adaptation including attitudes towards innovation of the host organisation, time and resource considerations, and contextual factors. Further research into how experimental governance programs might be adapted and transferred to new contexts should be the focus of future research and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

8.4 BARRIERS TO GENERATING WIDER HOUSING SYSTEM CHANGE

The research has revealed six key themes relating to the third research question's aim to understand what the barriers preventing housing experiments from generating wider housing system change were. The themes are not ranked by level of importance. All six themes should be considered and resolved to demonstrate best practice and provide the greatest opportunity for programs to generate wider housing system change.

8.4.1 PRECARIETY OF EXPERIMENTS

One of the greatest barriers to policy experiments generating wider housing system change is the precarity of the experiments. Policy experiments are highly precarious due to the way that they are generally established outside of key department policy and often suffer from unclear lifecycles. In the case studies examined, all three policy experiments were established outside of the formal housing policies from the state in which they operated. Scholarship examining the lifespan of policy innovation labs (Wellstead et al. 2021) and innovative "challenges" (Sisson et al. 2023) identified precarity and program longevity as issues of concern. This is of particular concern as policy innovation labs are generally more formalised than the programs examined in this thesis. In addition, all three case studies suffered from a lack of clarity about the program's lifespan, as well as limited indication whether the policy experiment might run again. Part of the reasoning behind the uncertainty of most experimental governance programs is the belief that if the program is not a "success", it will not run again. This sentiment is at odds with the true iterative nature of experimentation – the method to find ideas should not be abandoned but rather, adjustments should be made to improve the innovation finding process.

The impact election cycles and changing governments cannot be ignored – the Future Homes Project was itself a 2018 election commitment of the Labor Party. A change in government often heralds a change in departmental priorities, which may impact the focus and funding of individual projects. While in office government can also make changes to its focus, as demonstrated by the May 2022 funding cuts to the Victorian Office of the Government Architect's office announced by the same government that established the Future Homes Project. Part of the evaluation of the Future Homes Project will be its success during the two-year local council pilot which began at the end of 2022. It is unclear if and how the program might run again. As discussed in Chapter 6, this research has

identified the potential for the Future Homes model to be scaled both geographically and across other housing typologies. The competition part of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge has now concluded, with the final status of the winning design unclear. The ACT Demonstration Housing project has suffered from major time delays and as such no individual projects have been completed. It is unclear if and how the program might run again or be converted to a rolling program, especially now that a larger, formal Territory Plan review has commenced.

Though the precarity of individual programs may be recognised within their own context, this research presents the first evidence that this precarity is a common feature of experimental governance programs in housing in Australia. If such programs become more popular and widespread, which if the trends of using experimental governance to find solutions to wicked problems in other related disciplines suggest they might, then issues of precarity must be addressed to prevent a potentially powerful policy making method to from being relegated because of short lifecycles.

8.4.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF CHAMPIONS

The importance of champions in the establishment and operation of each program was a key finding and as it was a sentiment that was expressed in interviews across all three case studies. The City of Sydney's Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge would not have been established without the championing of the program by Councillors Jess Scully and Philip Thalys. However, participants in the program reflected on difficulties faced by council staff in providing support for a program that was not part of Council's core functions. The lack of clarity around how the outcomes of the program might be fed into Council's future housing plans left the participants feeling confused and unsure as to the next step for their designs. Neither Jess Scully nor Philip Thalys are currently serving Councillors, which raises questions as to the future of the AHIC. Similarly, the Demonstration Housing Project, though initially announced as part of a Ministerial statement, may not have been established if not for the championing of key members of the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2017. Discussions with the ACT Government Architect, Catherine Townsend about experimental housing projects more widely, confirmed the importance of champions in this space. The need for ongoing support from champions for experimental programs highlights their uniqueness but also their precarity.

8.4.3 PAYING FOR INNOVATION

Unclear outcomes and a lack of fair rewards were identified by Seidel (1990) as key issues related to architectural design competitions and this appears to be the same for housing experiments. Observations recorded about each program through the exploration of project briefs and competition rules revealed great variation in the kinds of "rewards" that are offered to participants. Those involved in the Demonstration Housing Project, which did not identify itself as a design competition and thus had no "winners", were not offered any prize money or financial assistance once they were included as part of the program. The winners of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge received \$20,000 to assist them with refining their ideas. The finalists in the Future Homes Project were given government contracts and remuneration to develop their ideas, an example of a clear acknowledgment of the need to pay for innovation.

Semi-structured interviews with participants in each of the three case study programs provided further details about how work for the project was remunerated. As discussed, the Demonstration Housing Project did not offer any prizes or remuneration for participants. Participants reported that they incurred the time and cost associated with the initial design, much like a usual design competition or development application process, as well as any refinements pre/post presenting at the National Capital Design Review Panel, and any additional work required before development application lodgement. While the ability to access development opportunities that were currently not available within existing planning controls can be seen as a financial incentive for participating in the scheme, participants still ran the risk of committing personal time and finances for an outcome that required a Territory Plan variation and then development consent.

Interviews with participants in the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge revealed that the funds were insufficient to cover the costs related to completing the idea refinement requirements of the competition. Chapter 7 provides more insight into this issue but in summary, there was inequity in how the money could be spent depending on the geographical location of each winning team. For interstate teams, the travel costs to attend the series of workshops held in Sydney expended all prize money, meaning that there was no remuneration for time spent working on the project. A quote from one participant, first discussed in Chapter 7 is repeated here for emphasis: “Our \$20,000 went on flights and accommodation and then we just spent a lot of personal time doing this” (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant 2022). Winners in the Future Homes Program signed government contracts to be paid for their work on design refinement, illustrating the only instance of clear payment for innovation in this research. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, different teams had different reactions to the level of remuneration offered, with more established teams concerned about the potential pressure newer teams were under to accept less money to avoid missing out on opportunities. An interesting observation recorded from the Future Homes Project participants was that the COVID-19 pandemic brought some equity to the teams who were not from their project’s home state: during lockdowns everyone was working online.

The issues around remuneration in architectural design competitions discussed by Seidel in 1990 are in some instances being perpetuated in new housing focused experimental governance programs in Australia. There are parallels here too with the outsourcing of ideas and free labour within the innovation economy, start-up culture and smart cities. Seidel’s (1990) argument that adequate remuneration for participants was necessary to make competitions successful, is advice that should be considered in future competitions. Participants cannot be expected to put so much unpaid work into being part of the competitions, especially when there is an intensive and prescriptive idea refinement stage. The ability of winners to keep participating in future projects is dependent on a proper funding scheme.

8.4.4 STATUTORY PLANNING PROTECTIONS NEEDED FOR PARTICIPANTS

Perceived imbalance between the rights of applicants and the community are a potential barrier to experimental governance programs generating wider housing system change. For example, the Future Homes Project utilised a fast-track planning approval scheme that guaranteed approval within four months if the proposal met the established criteria. Though this protection, in terms of time and money, is provided for participants, it has meant that other parties have lost their third-party appeal

rights. The removal of third-party appeal rights has precedent with other fast-tracked development assessment, yet issues around the depth and timing of the consultation on the removal of third-party appeal rights in the Future Homes Program was of concern, as discussed in Chapter 6. Building in protection for participants into experimental programs and balancing them with protection for the local community needs to be considered in future programs.

The extensive time delays experienced by participants in the Demonstration Housing Project highlighted the need for some protections to be in place for participants. When interviewed, participants in the project were pragmatic about the possible unexpected time delays in a new government program and the COVID-19 situation but were unprepared for the extensive delays and lack of clear updates from the government about the progress of their proposals, as discussed in Chapter 5. The planning system generally includes protections for applicants at the development assessment stage, such as deemed refusal periods, but for experimental governance programs there are no such protective mechanisms to ensure proposals will be assessed in a timely manner. Statutory mechanisms to better protect participants need to be improved for future programs.

8.4.5 PROGRAM LIFECYCLE, SCALING AND EVALUATION

The need to remain open and be directed by the outcomes of the pilot program is one of the great opportunities of experimental governance programs, however the lack of clarification about a program's lifecycle and evaluation points across all three case studies was observed to cause confusion for participants and the general public. In part this was due to the uniqueness of the programs, with government bodies tasked with the role of running each project still working out how to operationalise this new function of government. For example, interviews with participants of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge revealed confusion about how the results of the 2019 program were going to be utilised. As discussed in Chapter 7, and repeated here for discussion, when asked about their inclusion in the latest vision document for Council, a participant responded "I haven't been formally briefed. It's all informal" (Interview with Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge Participant 2022). The lack of clarification about how program outcomes of the Demonstration Housing Project were going to be evaluated and when the program might end were a source of confusion and frustration for the general public, as observed in public submissions received in relation to the Manor House project, as discussed in Chapter 5. There is also no confirmation if the project will run another iteration, will continue on a rolling basis or has a particular end date. There is limited information currently available regarding how the outcomes of the Future Homes Project will be evaluated but there is an indication that the timing for this will be at the completion of the two-year pilot program.

Difficulty in conducting program evaluation may be intensified in the case of the Demonstration Housing Project and the Future Homes project if the number of individual builds is limited. Semi-structured interviews across these two case studies, revealed that before determining how program outcomes could be assessed, the Future Homes Project was waiting on the two-year local council pilot to be completed and in the case of the Demonstration Housing Project, the Department was waiting for individual builds to be completed. The Future Homes Project had originally hoped to include three pilot Local Government Areas but when the pilot launched at the end of 2022, only the City of Maribyrnong was a pilot partner. Government material about the project revealed a hope that one of each of the designs might be built, which may be less likely now there is only one participating

LGA. It is unknown how the reduction to a one LGA pilot might impact on the number of builds available for analysis. Similarly, the Demonstration Housing Project is piloting different housing typologies in the Australian Capital Territory, including manor house and co-living. This research questions if it will be possible for housing typologies to be assessed on just one instance of each build. In addition, there is also a large variation in what a co-housing development might entail, with a single case study able to influence the entire narrative of community sentiment around one typology. Without detracting from the experimental nature of such programs, clarification about the program life cycle and evaluation process is needed to provide clarity and assurances for participants and the general public. There is also a strong need to clarify how the evaluated outcomes of the project will be integrated into the current planning system. This issue will be explored in the subsequent section.

8.4.6 INTEGRATION INTO THE PLANNING SYSTEM

While experimental governance programs are designed to operate outside the boundaries of the existing housing system, in order to reduce confusion and increase understanding of how the initiatives work, there needs to be public clarification around how the outcomes of the program will interact within the existing housing framework. This is particularly important for the case study programs identified in this research as they were all established as part of political agendas, rather than from formal, department-led strategies. As discussed in the previous section, a lack of clarity around program lifecycle and evaluation was identified as one of the main barriers to experimental programs generating wider housing system change. Experimentation still needs certainty.

Experimental governance programs were seen as a possible antidote to the public backlash faced by governments when announcing any housing policy reform. In the case of the Demonstration Housing Project the program was catalysed by the idea that giving people a tangible example of a new housing typology that they could physically walk around during open days, would help the public to understand and hopefully accept new housing typologies. The issues experienced during this experiment, as discussed in Chapter 5, have resulted in confusion about how the results of the demonstration homes will be scaled up. This uncertainty made residents confused and unhappy about the program. There needs to be a way for policy experimentation to occur that provides it with the freedom to explore and iterate but also clarifies how program findings might flow into, work in parallel with or at least not contradict the existing planning system.

The clarification of how program outcomes will interact with the housing system is particularly important when traditional planning policy reforms may occur in parallel to an experimental governance program. This situation was observed during this research, with the Planning Bill 2022 and Territory Plan Review 2023 occurring at the same time as the Demonstration Housing Project in the ACT. Semi-structured interviews in 2021 with participants in the Demonstration Housing Project revealed a lack of clarity around how the two processes would intersect. The example of bringing cohousing to the ACT helps to highlight the complexity and confusion around how policy experiments connect to wider planning reforms.

One final consideration is how agile the planning system is to allow for government led experiments to iterate the method that they are testing. Traditionally, if a housing program is unpopular with the public, it may be abandoned (Gurran and Phibbs, 2015). However, for experimental governance

programs, the opportunity to further refinement methods and program outcomes is part of the appeal of the approach. For example, in the Future Homes Program, once the two-year pilot program over, will space be made to allow the unique model that the program is testing, namely adaptable designs coupled with a fast-track planning process as discussed in Chapter 6, to be refined? If the planning system is not flexible enough to allow this iteration to occur, then much of the potential of this policy making approach will be lost.

8.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a thematic comparison of the findings from the three case studies. The findings have demonstrated that there is great variation in the operation, focus and impact of experimental governance programs in housing in Australia. Drawing on the findings of the comparative case study research and extending definitions from experimental programs in other disciplines, a definition of what a housing policy experiment in Australia was developed. This definition assists in providing clarity on what a housing policy experiment is, drawing together understandings about an emerging group of programs. In addition, developing this definition will provide a platform for future comparative work in the area.

Analysis of the three case studies, in conjunction with the policy review, has provided clearer understandings of the impact that these experimental programs have had on the housing system. While the outcomes of the program will not provide the system-wide changes called for by Phibbs and Gurran (2021), Gurran et al. (2018b) and Rowley et al (2017), such as a national agenda and funding, each experimental program provides some movement forward in housing in each of the respective jurisdictions. Importantly, the research reveals the potential for local government in the innovative housing space, as well as the hesitancy of the State government, who have the potential to be key drivers of housing reform in Australia, to experiment more widely.

Common issues observed across all three case studies that form barriers related to the expansion of program impact have been observed across all three case studies. Program precarity and unclear scaling options, as well as protection for participants were some of the key issues that require consideration if experimental programs are to flourish. The following, final chapter will reflect on the primary and sub-research questions posed. The chapter will then draw on the findings of the research to provide some lessons for practice and discuss potential further areas of research.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction of experimental governance programs to the housing space in Australia demonstrates the continued desire to “find” innovative solutions to systemic housing system problems. This research has revealed that while state governments are making space in key policy documents for housing innovation and pilots, the three existing experimental governance programs interrogated here have been established from political championing rather than through any direct policy action from a larger housing strategy. It was observed that there is large variation in how each of the program operates, the area of the housing system targeted and the program outcomes.

This chapter will address the research questions, reflecting on the research findings. Implications for wider uptake of experimental governance programs are explored, followed by discussion of future areas of research.

9.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

9.2.1 DEFINITIONS OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS IN HOUSING

The first research question asked: what is a policy experiment in the housing space? To address this question, definitions of experimental governance programs from the related disciplines of climate change and sustainability, as well as conceptions of the urban hack were explored as part of the literature review presented in Chapter 2. This was necessary as there is little existing work on experimental programs in the housing context. In Chapter 8, thematic observations from the three case studies were drawn together to progress existing characterisations of experimental governance programs to produce a definition for the Australian housing experience:

A standalone program established to identify and test housing policy innovation opportunities through the use of experimental approaches to examine how new ideas in the areas of housing typologies, ownership models and associated services could be introduced to a specific jurisdiction.

This definition seeks to clarify the unique nature of experimental governance programs in housing in Australia and is intended to be used in further research as a basis for jurisdictional comparisons, both nationally and internationally.

This research also provided some temporal and structural observations, revealing that experimental governance programs have existed in the housing space in Australia since 2019. All three case studies were already in development before the COVID-19 Pandemic, so it cannot be said that they were part of the COVID-19 pandemic driven innovation mood as discussed by M^cGuirk and Dowling (2021). The research also observed that it is at the state level where the impact of experimental governance is most explicit, with both state housing policies and state-led programs exhibiting experimental

features. Though these state housing policies do show evidence of openness to innovation and experimentation, they do not establish experimental governance programs. These programs are the product of champions, often as part of a political agenda.

9.2.2 IMPACT OF HOUSING EXPERIMENTS ON THE HOUSING SYSTEM

The second research question asked: what impact do housing experiments currently have on the housing system. The experiments, including those focused on ideation only, explored in this thesis are observed to be making a number of impacts on the housing system. As discussed previously, the marker of impact for these projects is not limited to just the number of new houses built. The influence of these programs extends beyond the formal boundaries of the project, as discussed in relation to the work of Schliwa et al. (2015). Experimental governance programs provide a unique opportunity for idea development around housing. This research observed experimental governance programs provided a unique opportunity to identify policy gaps and other barriers to implementing a housing idea. With public facing elements, such as talks and exhibitions, included as part of these programs, members of the public are engaged in a discourse about housing outside the formal planning system. In addition, it was observed that these programs provide a new opportunity for younger or smaller teams of housing practitioners to engage in government projects, a pathway that is sometimes closed to them due to the scale of other government tenders. The experience of taking part in an experimental governance program has had a transformative effect on the career trajectory of some interview participants, who found they could not return to their usual day job and used their new status as a housing innovator to focus on projects related to affordable housing solutions.

Experimental governance programs explored in this thesis were observed to earnestly be trying to solve a specific housing issue in their jurisdiction, such as the Demonstration Housing Project which trialled a new method that gives more space for understanding and experiencing new housing typologies before they become permissible across a jurisdiction. However, due to longstanding sensitivities to housing system change, this space required for experimentation and the need to wait for the outcomes of the experiment to be assessed before the next step is taken, can lead to confusion or speculation around the final intent of the program. This is most evident in the case of the Manor House proposed as part of the Demonstration Housing Project, where a record number of public submissions were received. This does not, however, excuse the use of “experimentation” as a reason for why a lack of clarity around most experiments exists. Most policy experiments have issues with outcomes and commitment. Sometimes this is the nature of experimentation, but at other times experimentation is used as an excuse for time delays and lack of clarity.

This research has shown that the two larger policy experiments are ultimately focused on stimulating infill development. The Demonstration Housing Project from the ACT showcases new typologies in the most common residential zone, and the Future Homes Project is concentrated exclusively on three-storey apartment buildings on amalgamated lots. This research found that social and affordable housing was not the focus of two of the programs, confirming the work of Gurran (2019, p211), as discussed in Chapter 2, who argued that innovation in the housing space may not be “inherently beneficial for those at most need of assistance”. Examination of the case study programs raised questions of equity, identifying that the people who have the most to gain from such programs are those who already own land and have the capacity to redevelop. Programs offer opportunities to

those who are already advanced along the homeownership continuum. This was recognised by participants, who raised the questions as to why there was not a component of each program that focused on affordable or social housing.

The case study programs were observed to be making three key adaptations to traditional architectural design competitions to suit their programs: departure from a site-specific brief; a multifaceted period of design refinement; and adapted deliverables to reflect planning policy outcomes. These adapted design competitions offer opportunities to garner ideas beyond a specific site, having implications for wider urban or housing policy issues. This research has identified that this has the potential to change the nature and public perceptions of design competitions, which is an issue not yet being discussed by the programs or industry.

9.2.3 BARRIERS PREVENTING HOUSING EXPERIMENTS FROM GENERATING WIDER HOUSING SYSTEM CHANGE

The third research question: what are the barriers preventing housing experiments from generating wider housing system change. This research identified six main barriers to experimental governance programs generating wider housing system change. The precarity of programs was the first barrier to be identified, with the case study programs established outside of formal housing strategies, as part of political agendas. Programs required the interest and persistence of champions to secure their establishment, as in the case of the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge and the Demonstration Housing Project. The need for champions and the potential impacts on programs when those specific individuals are no longer involved were identified as the second barrier. Concurrently it was observed that the fifth barrier was that all case study programs suffered from unclear program outcomes, lifecycle and evaluation pathways. This fuzziness around project outcomes combined with the need for political championing for programs that exist outside formal housing strategies has a cumulative impact on the longevity and security of programs.

Paying for innovation and the need for statutory protection for participants were identified as the third and fourth barriers to programs generating wider housing system change, as these issues focus on the factors that need to be resolved to ensure ongoing attraction of new actors to these programs, and the fair and equitable treatment of participants. This research identified that the issues surrounding remuneration in traditional architectural design competitions, as discussed by Seidel (1990), as well as observations about challenges by Sisson et al. (2023) were being perpetuated in experimental governance programs that included adapted design competition elements. If the variation and inequity in the level of remuneration received by participants in these programs is not resolved, the capacity to attract applicants and their capacity to expand and refine good housing ideas will be limited, acting as a barrier to the potential impact a program may have. Statutory protections need to be put in place to protect participants in experimental governance programs to ensure that they are protected from unreasonable delays.

Previous discussions around statutory protection also include protection of the rights of the community. Though one of the positive impacts of experimental governance programs identified by this research was the ability for members of the public to engage in housing discussions outside the limited opportunities currently provided by the planning system, and the case studies included

programs of community consultation, the removal of third-party appeal rights for proposals assessed under a fast-track system were an issue of concern due to the limited way this aspect was consulted on. In addition, it is unclear across the case studies examined, if and how additional community engagement will occur when programs are scaled. There is a general acceptance of programs by the community when they are announced as projects to find new solutions to housing. However, once programs have begun and the first build projects are announced, this is when the community may become more engaged and often concerned about the larger program. This was observed in the manor house project within the Demonstration Housing Program. The strengthening of community engagement during programs and deeper engagement on changes to third-party appeal rights need to occur to improve understanding and ultimately better acceptance of experimental governance programs. Negative narratives around these new programs have the potential to unsettle the progress of governance innovation in housing.

The final barrier identified by this research is the need to clarify how program outcomes will be integrated into the existing planning system. As discussed in the previous chapter, though the opportunity and benefit of experimental governance programs is that they operate outside the silos and boundaries of the existing housing system, when they are government led there needs to be clarification around how the outcomes of the program will interact within the regulatory framework. The cumulative effect of the six barriers could be detrimental to the progress of experimental governance programs, whereby an already precarious program, sustained by the work of champions, when offering an opportunity for discussion around housing does not provide protection for participants or the community is unable to clarify the lifecycle of the program, how the program might be evaluated or how the outcomes might be scaled into the existing planning system.

9.3 ARE POLICY EXPERIMENTS A PRODUCTIVE METHOD FOR GENERATING HOUSING SYSTEM CHANGE?

The work of this thesis considers that experimental governance programs do elicit influence on the existing housing system in which they operate but the ability of the programs to generate wider housing system change is impacted on by the way the programs are established, their key focus, the jurisdiction in which they operate, and the specific program model used. Experimental governance programs are in their infancy in Australia but case study comparison of three programs has revealed the following impacts on the housing system in Australia:

- New policies, programs and models
- New ideas, discourse shift
- New players/actors
- New roles for an organisation or government body
- Changes to planning legislation
- (future) new housing

Currently, experimental governance programs are limited in number in Australia, with two programs focused on infill development and one on broader affordable housing ideas. The full potential for an

experimental governance program has not yet been explored in Australia, where the objective would be to break away from a narrow focus and explore wider level housing ideas. A state-level program that focused on the greater exploration of new housing affordability models would be ideal. The establishment of programs as part of political agendas, rather than as part of state housing policy actions, increases the precarity of already vulnerable experimental governance programs in housing.

9.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS

The movement of experimental governance programs into the housing space in Australia has continued since the case studies were selected for inclusion in this research, including one program focused on strategic planning emerging. The reputation and success of these programs will play into the narrative surrounding this approach. As discussed, there is already inter-jurisdictional interest in these programs, as demonstrated by the unexpected finding that later case study programs had looked to earlier programs for inspiration and feedback on the participant experience. The programs explored in this thesis highlighted the “experiment within an experiment” stage that the government is currently in. However, the barriers identified in this research need to be resolved to improve the potential for individual program longevity and for the future of experimental governance programs in housing.

These housing policy experiments perform work beyond their explicit objectives. They function as laboratories for governance innovation and testing novel decision-making processes. The Demonstration Housing Project created unique spaces for civic engagement, as evidenced by the formation of the Greater Canberra group. While this case revealed difficulties in understanding experimental processes among government and the public, it still amplified previously unheard voices and generated insights about participatory approaches that extend beyond housing policy. Experimental governance programs have not replaced traditional policy making methods and their “touch” can be limited given the kinds of land they are applied to. While their quantitative housing contribution may be modest, they perform critical work in reimagining governance approaches. This research posits that if such programs demonstrate a positive systemic influence, the use of experimental governance eventually become a policy goal in itself.

Future programs that focus on ideation should not be discouraged. As demonstrated by the Alternative Housing Ideas Challenge, ideation introduced new housing ideas to the jurisdiction, allowed new players to the local housing space and highlights potential roles for local government. Understanding of the variation of experimental governance programs and their different impacts helps us to appreciate their productivity beyond direct housing outcomes.

9.5. READINESS OF PLANNING SYSTEMS TO INCORPORATE EXPERIMENTAL INSIGHTS

Planning systems currently demonstrate limited readiness to incorporate insights from policy experiments. For this to change, governments would first need to genuinely embrace the process of experimentation. As evidenced in the Demonstration Housing Project, experimentation remains relatively unfamiliar territory for government entities, often resulting in challenges articulating how experimental processes function and how outcomes will integrate into existing policy frameworks. Successful experimental programs require governments to recognise that identifying mistakes and failures constitutes an inherent part of the process and is fundamental to iterative policy development. Furthermore, public engagement opportunities continue to be predominantly restricted to formal development assessments and strategic plan consultations, suggesting the need for more adaptable consultation frameworks specifically designed for experimental governance. Governments would also need to commit to respecting the natural timeline that experimentation demands. Currently, experiments are rarely afforded their full developmental cycle, as illustrated in the Future Homes Project where subsequent program iterations were implemented before complete evaluation of initial experimental results. This pattern raises significant questions about the genuine commitment to experimental learning versus politically expedient implementation.

9.6 FURTHER AREAS OF RESEARCH

Policy Transfer Exploration

During the interviews the issue of policy transfer was raised several times. Participants were keen to know more about similar projects, hoping that good projects could be transferred into their jurisdiction. Future research should focus on exploring the opportunities, constraints and areas of caution around policy transfer of these programs.

Revisiting the case studies

As discussed in Chapter 2, Schliwa et al 2015 identified that the diffuse impact is often the most important outcome for experimental governance programs. When the work of Lascoumes and Le Gale's (2007), who argue that public policy instruments are not neutral, is also considered, the timing of the three projects indicates that the impacts of the programs cannot yet be fully evaluated. More time must pass before making a fuller assessment of their diffuse impacts. In addition, revisiting the case study programs may provide an opportunity to identify new interview participants. For example, new interviewees might include landowners who are taking part in the Future Homes pilot program.

As discussed above there is a high level of interest in policy transfer around these programs, so future research must include considerations for the movement of these programs between jurisdictions before a fuller evaluation can be undertaken.

Deeper exploration into experience of the ACT

Since the data collection was completed for this research, the ACT draft Territory Plan has been released and community consultation has been completed. Future research would be undertaken to complete a policy review of the draft Territory Plan to identify impacts of the Demonstration Housing Project on the reformed zoning allowances, particularly focused on new housing typologies including co-housing and manor house. The work of Schliwa et al. (2015) supports the revisiting of case studies once some time has elapsed to explore program impacts. The release of a major plan reform would trigger a review of a case study. Similar methods employed to look at the content of the public submissions received during the Manor House Territory Plan Variation in this thesis would be used to analyse the submissions received in relation to the draft Territory Plan.

International Case Study Comparison

Experimental governance programs in housing are known to exist overseas, such as the Boston Housing Innovation Lab. After presenting the initial findings from this research at the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, I was approached by scholars in Canada who revealed that similar housing programs to the case studies presented were in operation in Canada. Utilising the same methods used in this research, experimental governance programs in housing overseas could be explored as new case studies, providing insights into how different contexts, roles of government, housing system focus and program applications produce different outcomes.

Experimental governance programs as way to navigate outcomes-based planning rules

Expanding on the ability for experimental governance programs to identify gaps and other barriers to implement new housing ideas could be explored as a potential mechanism to resolve outcomes-based planning rules. As shown in the co-living example from the Demonstration Housing Project, before new planning policy variations are enacted, an experimental governance program could be used to explore various interpretations of a set of outcome-based planning rules and identify other regulatory limits or inconsistencies.

9. 7 CONCLUSION

This research has identified and defined experimental governance programs in housing in Australia. It has revealed the precarity of these experiments but also highlighted the impacts that these programs are already having on the housing system, even though it is considered that housing experimental governance programs are in their infancy in Australia. The research also suggests that experimental governance programs are not being used to their full potential, as their application in Australia is constrained by a narrow focus on infill development briefs, which may be a result of their establishment as part of a political agenda, rather than part of a larger strategic and policy direction at a state level. The impact on individual participants in these programs has been observed to be positive and transformative but can also be stressful and upsetting. Work is needed to improve program evaluation, statutory protections for participants and clarification of how program outcomes integrate into the planning system to ensure greater and more sustainable impacts can be achieved from these programs.

The search for solutions to affordable housing issues is ongoing, and with no indication that governments will relax their fiscal approach to policy reform, the observed experimental programs are a contribution to the “thousand housing alternatives” that Madden and Marcuse (2016, p.208) ask us to let bloom. Experimental programs are predicted to increase in popularity with Bulkeley (2023, p1) concluding that in the near future it will be “neither possible nor even desirable to abandon experimentation”.

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