'Diversity in Density: Encouraging multicultural participation in higher density living'.

[For section "Delivering for Diversity"]

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Introduction

Australian society is becoming more culturally diverse (ABS 2012a). In contrast, it is also becoming less welcoming in many ways. Research by the Scanlon Foundation (Markus 2016), for example, has documented an increase in racism in Australia over the last ten years, including verbal abuse, physical violence and worsening local relations. This shift undermines the country's social cohesion and political stability, and the health and wellbeing of individuals, particularly migrants (Dunn et al. 2016).

Australian research on everyday multiculturalism has demonstrated that local neighborhoods are important sites for tackling racism and fostering intercultural understanding (Ho et al. 2015; Wise & Velayutham 2009). Increasingly cities are places where large proportions of the population live in apartments (ABS 2014). At the same time, most migrants to Australia settle in cities and migrants are over-represented as a proportion of dwellers in private apartments (see below). This trend suggests the importance of apartments as key elements of urban neighborhoods and the specific roles they may play as sites of intercultural interaction. These roles have not yet been properly recognized, even in very recent research (see e.g. Harris 2016; Fincher et al. 2014; Neal et al. 2013).

This oversight is particularly important because apartment buildings are not just vertical local neighborhoods; at one level they are sites for close physical living conditions and shared facilities, increasing the likelihood and frequency of informal social interactions (Easthope & Judd 2010) while at another level their management operates like an additional tier of government which collects taxes (levies), sets rules governing behaviour (by-laws) and elects representatives (volunteer committee members) (Easthope 2009). Apartment buildings are therefore crucibles where both formal (joint decision-making) and informal (everyday social encounters) interactions occur, both potentially

important to preventing conflict and isolation. Apartment buildings therefore provide an important, but so far neglected, site for investigating and improving multicultural relations in cities.

While the potential for easing relations among residents and beyond is clearly there, in practice many difficulties arise. Our research suggests that intercultural tensions are a concern at the local apartment building scale in Australia. In 12 interviews with Sydney-based strata managers, we found that apartment living can become plagued with problems that can be exacerbated by language barriers and cross-cultural misunderstandings, from owners not paying levies to residents leaving shoes and laundry in inappropriate places, or holding noisy gatherings that undermine the harmony of the building.

In this chapter, we provide a brief review of the literature on diversity and community and demonstrate that apartments are important, but so far neglected, sites in which diversity and everyday multiculturalism are played out. We then provide some findings from our preliminary research on diversity in density before highlighting several international examples of programs that encourage and facilitate intercultural harmony among residents of the same apartment building. The chapter concludes with a call for greater understanding of the central role that apartment living plays in the everyday multiculturalism of our cities.

Diversity and community

Over several decades in Australia much scholarly attention has been paid to examining different aspects of the growing diversity of cities (see notably Fincher & Jacobs 1998; Sandercock 2000; Young 2011). In Australia, 33% of residents were born overseas and of these 83% lived in a major urban area in 2016, compared to only 61% of Australian-born people (ABS 2017). Overseas-born migrants are also over-represented amongst apartment residents in Australia. While overseas-born migrants make up 46% of apartment residents in Australia, they make up only 24% of the population living in other dwellings (ABS 2012b).

Around the world scholars are divided about whether intercultural contact strengthens or weakens communities. On the one hand, observers drawing on contact theory, including scholars of 'everyday multiculturalism,' argue that increased intercultural contact results in improved intercultural relations, including acceptance, understanding and tolerance of others (Anderson 2004; Ho et al. 2015; Wise & Velayutham 2009). Scholars of everyday multiculturalism emphasize the opportunities for cross-cultural understanding generated by social settings where people from diverse backgrounds are compelled to routinely interact and work together. Amin (2002: 959) calls these spaces 'micropublics of everyday social contact and encounter.' Other scholars focus on the more formal dimensions of interaction, based within and between community associations (Cantle 2005; Michael 2013; Phillips et al. 2014), examining the potential to enable cross-cultural engagement at an institutional level, which can develop naturally from the interaction inherent in the participatory process. In contrast, other scholars, drawing on conflict theory, have claimed that increased cultural diversity has a negative impact on social cohesion, neighborly exchange and tolerance of ethnic others (Leigh 2006; Putnam 2007; Wickes et al. 2013). Differing cultures, languages and beliefs can prevent culturally diverse neighborhoods from forming strong bonds and encourage social withdrawal or 'hunkering.' This is most pronounced in neighborhoods with recently arrived migrants.

Diversity in density

Large and increasing proportions of city residents worldwide live in apartments as a result of rapid urbanization and the widespread adoption of planning processes that encourage urban consolidation (OECD 2012). In Australia, over 1.2 million people (14.5% of the population) live in apartments (ABS 2017). This proportion will increase rapidly in coming years with construction commencements for multi-unit housing exceeding those for detached housing in Australia for the first time in 2016 (ACI 2016). Almost all of these new homes are private, multi-owned properties (i.e. strata schemes) with shared assets and community spaces. Many Australians will live in apartments their whole lives, living in close proximity to others for many years. Such close proximity can contribute to increasing tensions between neighbors or challenge negative stereotypes through personal experience. International evidence so far gives few clues as to which effect is more likely or the trajectories that

lead to different outcomes. Residents are also required to jointly manage their properties, essentially being forced to make collective decisions with co-owners and co-residents who they have not chosen to live with. This form of living environment presents a major shift in the nature of urban life and urban governance. Apartment buildings under multiple ownership have even been described as a new tier of government sitting below that of municipal governments as they elect representatives, have the power to collect levies and set by-laws governing behavior (Easthope 2009). US-based academic McKenzie (2003) suggests that 'common-interest developments' like strata schemes, condominiums and homeowners' associations play an important and unique role in society, sitting at the intersection of the three critical sectors of liberal democratic society: the state (control), the market (profit) and civil society (volunteerism).

Apartment buildings are important sites of both formal and informal interaction. However, in buildings where residents have diverse cultural backgrounds, poor common language competency and varying cultural practices may act as barriers to individuals interacting harmoniously and participating in joint-decision making. This can result in people feeling disenfranchized from important decisions made about their homes, feeling alienated and isolated, and ultimately result in these properties being poorly managed and maintained (Cancellieri 2017; Clapham 2010).

Despite the importance of formal and informal interaction in apartment buildings, these sites are neglected in the literature on cross-cultural engagements, which has instead focused on the larger scale of local neighborhoods or other institutions such as workplaces, schools and clubs (e.g. Harris 2013; Ho 2011; Noble 2009; Wise & Velayutham 2009). Programs and public policies that encourage civic participation in formal and informal settings among culturally diverse groups have also traditionally targeted local communities and institutions, including neighborhoods, schools, clubs and associations. Few have focused on many people's most immediate community: their residential building.

Inter-cultural relations in apartment buildings: Strata managers' perspectives

In late 2016, we undertook a small research project to explore the subject of diversity in private (strata titled) apartment buildings in Sydney, Australia. This research was funded by the peak body for the strata industry in our home state – Strata Community Australia (NSW) – in response to calls from their strata manager members for more guidance in how to appropriately and effectively respond to tensions and challenges that can occur in the management of private apartment buildings as a result of cultural difference. As part of the research, we undertook in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 strata managers. We asked the managers about what types of buildings were the easiest and most difficult to manage generally, what tensions they experienced between different groups of residents, and specifically whether and how they managed tensions between residents from different cultural backgrounds. We asked whether those tensions were related to language, cultural preferences and practices, previous experiences of strata living or other factors. We also asked about barriers to formal participation in strata schemes (e.g. becoming committee members) as well as informal participation in the social life in the schemes that they managed, such as if they felt that particular (age, cultural, tenure) groups had been excluded by others in their buildings. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour each, were fully transcribed, and then were thematically coded using open, axial and selective coding by a member of the research team (Strauss & Corbin 1994).

The results demonstrate that apartment buildings are certainly important sites in which everyday multiculturalism is performed and that cultural background can play an important role in mediating both the formal and informal participation of residents within their buildings. The interviews also provided examples of effective strategies for dealing with these issues and helping to facilitate the participation of residents in the life of their building. Most importantly, they highlighted the general lack of guidance for strata managers and residents in Australia on how to negotiate the formal and informal relationships within their buildings.

One particular barrier is differences in cultural practices and preferences, especially those relating to previous experience of strata living overseas. As one strata manager explained, recent migrants may bring with them different rules and practices of strata living from their previous country of residence,

some of which may be quite different to Australian practices. They may not necessarily know if some of these practices are not acceptable in the Australian context if they had not been provided the information (by their strata manager, real estate and sales agent when purchasing, and/or their landlord); there may also be adjustment periods especially if they had only settled in Australia recently:

> "People don't understand what is and isn't allowed … It's difficult when people come from a country where they were allowed to do these things and then they don't realize that our rules are different and you can't do those things" (Rebecca[1]).

These can range from installing decorations on common property, leaving shoes in corridors, and hanging washing on balconies, to over-crowding apartments and offering bribes to building managers.

This lack of information upfront may cause tensions later on, potentially leading to misunderstandings, including people mistaking that they are being targeted because of their cultural background:

> "in one of my buildings they think they're being targeted because they're Asian and the committee don't like Asians. They seem not to want to acknowledge that they're doing the wrong thing and that other people who've done the wrong thing are being treated in the same way and they're not Asian, and it's not because you're Asian that you're getting these letters. It's because you've put up a CCTV without asking permission …" (Rebecca).

Another strata manager explained that lack of English competency may make it more difficult to communicate rules and practices, leading to tensions and delays in adjustments; it can also be prohibitive to more formal participations such as in meetings, or in socializing with other residents of the scheme:

> "I find people who have English as a second language, they struggle to communicate at meetings just purely because they can't get their point across" (David).

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

This means that owners and residents from non-English speaking backgrounds tend to be under-represented on strata committees and in other leadership roles within strata schemes. Phillip mentioned a recent forum in which his firm had invited all committee members those who attended were typically middle-aged and Anglo-Saxon:

> "looking around the room of 350 people the [main] demographic was Anglo-Saxon, between 40 and 65 [years]" (Phillip)

Cultural barriers can exacerbate a perception of exclusion around committees that have been in place for a long time and an attitude that:

> "I'll just leave the people who've always done it to do it" (Sarah).

Yet, having someone associated with the committee who can translate for other residents and owners can be a simple means of enhancing communication within a scheme.

Tensions may also arise beyond differences in cultural backgrounds and practices. As this strata manager notes, tensions may arise between residents of different life stages or tenure (owner-occupiers as opposed to tenants):

> "So it might be an ethnic group here but it'll be age related there. It'll be investors vs resident owners somewhere else" (Sarah).

While some overseas-born residents and owners were often unfamiliar with strata living, this could also be the case for many local Australians with little experience of living in apartments. As Josie stated, sometimes:

> "one of the biggest cultural problems is people understanding what the culture of the strata is. I don't think it actually comes down to race".

On some occasions, the tensions may escalate and pose physical dangers to residents and, in this case, also the strata manager:

> "I've had some eye openers. I find the tension lies amongst cultural backgrounds in some buildings. If you've got a mixture of cultural backgrounds in one building it can be quite tense in the fact that people might not see eye to eye. One of the experiences I had … at the

AGM [Annual General Meeting] that we organized, the people were actually fighting each other in the meeting. We had to call the meeting off because it just went too far" (Paul).

Incidents like this may not only harm neighbourly relations, they can also impede important decisions about the management and maintenance of the building from being made.

While some strata committees are quite active in engaging with other residents of their scheme – such as by setting up and maintaining Facebook groups, WhatsApp group chats, and holding regular social activities – these were predominantly done on their own accord and goodwill. Some strata managers and firms are also active in promoting training opportunities, particularly for committee members, on aspects such as governance and management; on rare occasions this may include sensitivity and inclusivity training. As one strata manager recalled, such training may be beneficial to more committee members and residents:

> "trying to explain to a chairperson or executive committee member, hey, you can't communicate like that, you will end up with an anti-discrimination case and litigation occurring, and making them more culturally aware of their community and the diversity" (Stephen).

Having learnt from experience, strata managers mentioned that uniform application of rules was imperative in maintaining harmony in culturally diverse strata schemes, to prevent perceptions that any groups were being favorably or unfavorably treated. For example, Sarah recounted a building which allowed Christmas decorations on front doors, but then cracked down on Chinese New Year ornaments. She emphasized the importance of:

> "applying the rules uniformly… It's either all or nothing. So, no Christmas, no Chinese New Year. Or yeah, Christmas and Chinese New Year. But you can't have one and not the other".

Other managers mentioned that having pictorial signage was another way to create culturally neutral communication, especially helpful if many residents had poor English language skills.

In other instances, strata managers have learnt to downplay the 'cultural' dimension of a dispute and identify its root cause. As Chris stated:

> "You've got to remove the fact that they are Muslim or it's a prayer, religious ceremony or whatever with the noise. Just go okay, what's the issue here?... It's the noise".

In a similar case, Laura recounted a case where residents were concerned about Muslim residents using the common area garden for prayers, but assumed they could not stop the practice.

> "But when we honed in on what was the real issue, it was while the adults were praying, the kids were running around and creating a lot of noise and disturbance".

So, the communication with the Muslim residents became not an objection to the prayers, but a request to keep the children quieter.

Facilitating participation across cultures in dense residential environments

A desktop research exercise was conducted to discover Australian and overseas programs and policies that aim to facilitate positive multicultural relationships in existing residential settings. That is, once the buildings have already been delivered and residents have moved in. This exercise yielded a number of such programs and policies that can be categorized under three approaches: language sensitivity, encouraging participation more generally, and community building at the small scale.

Allowing for language diversity in information dissemination was found to be a main practical approach to supporting cultural diversity in property management. In Sydney for example, select strata management companies boast multilingual staff (e.g. Sydney Strata 2013; ProCare Strata Management 2017; All Suburbs Strata Management 2016), and the New South Wales Government in Australia has released various factsheets explaining key changes to strata laws in Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese alongside English (NSW Fair Trading 2016). Some websites, for example LookUpStrata (2017) in Australia and Multilingual Living Information in Japan (CLAIR n.d.) provide automatic translators to provide information to residents of non-English speaking backgrounds. The Multilingual Living Information page is a particularly interesting approach to aiding linguistic diversity. The website presents a series of factsheets on living in a Japanese community in 15

different languages. The page was designed specifically for overseas migrants, and provides information on finding a place, moving in, courtesy in the common living space and moving out (CLAIR n.d.). While information provided on the page is not designed specifically for strata or condominium living but rather any housing situation more generally, it nonetheless provides important guidelines in encouraging inclusive community living within relatively close confines. Beyond these approaches supporting language diversity, practical approaches on how to encourage participation beyond basic communication are seldom advertized or readily available.

Other programs typically aimed to encourage and/or facilitate participation of residents in building governance and management, though sensitivity to culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) residents was often not emphasized. Most of the approaches to encouraging participation in governance and management were through educating residents on strata or high density living. A key example is the implementation of Strata Skills 101 Workshops by the City of Sydney in Australia. The workshops are free and open to the public, aimed at providing practical information on various strata related topics (City of Sydney 2016). The Housing and Development Board in Singapore also provides many programs, including the Heartland Beat website created by the Board that provides information on how to avoid and manage disputes in high density living through 'Harmonious High Rise Living' information, 'Good Neighbor Guidelines' and 'Tips on Neighborliness' (Housing and Development Board 2016). Notably, however, this resource is targeted at public housing residents in Singapore (where the majority of the population lives in public housing apartment blocks), rather than at residents of private strata-titled buildings in the country. In Australia, the 'High-Density Liveability Guide' (QUT Institute for Sustainable Resources 2017), and the 'Living Well in Greater Density' report (Easthope & Judd 2010) have been released to aid residents and stakeholders within high density environments with managing and living in strata. The Canadian Condominium Institute has also released educational video series, with Season One regarding general condominium management information, and Seasons Two and Three providing information on community development in condominium schemes, with videos such as 'Fitting In' and 'Balancing the Needs of the Community'

(CCI 2016). There was a strong emphasis on educating residents in order to help them manage and govern their strata schemes in this particular approach.

The last approach – community building on a small scale – concerned less formal connections within buildings as opposed to the formal governance and management as discussed above. This approach has been undertaken by both government and non-government organisations. A government example is the City of Vancouver's Vertical Block Party pilot, which is a part of their wider Building Neighborhood Social Resilience project (Chia 2014). The pilot involved hosting block parties in August 2014 for two rental buildings of around 30 units. Around 20 people from the associated buildings attended each event (Chia 2014). As a collaboration between non-government and government organisations, the City of Vancouver's innovation hub CityStudio, the Gordon Neighborhood House and Westbank Corporation piloted a community concierge project called Ask Lauren. Volunteers acted as concierges to greet residents of the Lauren rental building, and got to know them by name to create a friendlier environment in the building (CityStudio 2016). This was a method to create personal connections with people in the building, and the volunteer concierges acted as facilitators to introduce people who might benefit from the connection. At the end of the project, almost all residents wanted the service to continue (CityStudio 2016). The creators of the project drafted a toolkit for residents that might want to start their own community concierge service. While neither of these examples explicitly addressed multicultural relations in buildings, the methods of community building could be applied to managing diversity in buildings.

There were also examples of non-government approaches to small-scale community building and social cohesion found in the desktop research. In 2009, The Transition Network launched the Caring Collaborative in the US, and one component was the creation of the 'Creating a Vertical Village in a High-Rise Building' manual. The manual follows a case study of an eight-storey building in New York City, and discusses how a sense of community was developed within the building through implementing a buddy system for residents in need and creating a contact list of residents, 'go bags' (pre-packed emergency kits), staff training, and a plan for responding to building and city-wide

emergencies (The Transition Network's Caring Collaborative 2011). The manual also outlines potential issues in implementing these programs, such as balancing communality and privacy, liability concerns, communication and encouraging membership from young residents.

Despite the diverse and widespread practical approaches to encourage participation and social cohesion in high density environments, cultural diversity was rarely specifically considered in the identified examples. There were few direct examples sensitive to, and supporting, culturally and linguistically diverse residents to engage in community development, management and governance. In general, practical approaches in encouraging engagement and building community were usually in relation to other social issues, such as greater help for aged residents, building and city-wide emergencies, and mental health. Efforts at promoting engagement in high density living are often piecemeal, bespoke to specific schemes or situations, and lack wider level policy encouragement and facilitation beyond information and educational workshops. It is also possible that practical approaches used to encourage participation and communication in multicultural schemes occur informally, making them difficult to identify without direct consultation with strata communities. There is an opportunity to explore practical approaches to encourage participation and social cohesion in culturally and socially diverse multi-owned properties, and provide best practice examples for local communities and for broader public initiatives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that private residential apartment buildings are an important, but so far neglected, site for examining everyday multiculturalism. Existing research has documented the opportunities and challenges of intercultural relations in local communities and institutions but almost no research (with the notable exception of Cancellieri 2017) has examined the residential environments of the fastest growing cohort of urban dwellers – apartment buildings. If our aim is to find ways to unlock the potential of urban neighborhoods for smoothing rather than exacerbating intercultural interactions and ultimately broader community relationships, then we need to consider what is happening within the vertical streets of those neighborhoods, within private apartment

buildings. This information is essential to inform more effective policies and strategies for enhancing social cohesion at the building, neighborhood and city scale, such as local dispute resolution policies, training for strata managers and committee members and community development activities.

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