How intersectoral policy networks in Melbourne, Portland, Vancouver and Toronto are attempting to shape affordable housing outcomes

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Affordable housing policy is increasingly formulated and delivered through complex policy networks comprised of state, not-for-profit and for-profit actors. While these arrangements may generate new ideas and create space for more democratic decision-making, international case studies have shown that the devolution of policy responsibility has resulted in increasingly marketized housing solutions and reduced support for low income households. Policy network literature presents a valuable lens for analysing the degree to which state and non-state actors are capable of and willing to shape policy discourses and outcomes. Drawing on 54 interviews conducted with members of affordable housing policy networks in Melbourne, Toronto, Vancouver, and Portland, this paper provides a longitudinal, comparative analysis of policy networks in these cities. The paper also presents a new conceptual framework for interpreting policy networks, based on integrated vertical governance, advocacy coalitions and agenda setting and shared understandings across four cities of the Global North. We provide insights into the implications of ‘hollowed out’ governance structures characterised by limited internal capacity and steering power. We also comment on the relative success of each city’s network in advocating for increased affordable housing outcomes.

Keywords: policy networks; affordable housing; urban governance; agenda setting; non-speculative housing

Introduction

Scholars have noted, with varying degrees of delight or dismay, the transition of policy-making from top-down direct government provision to multi-sector governance networks over the past two decades (Lefevre, 1998; Milward & Provan, 2000). Focusing on the metropolitan scale of governance in the 1990s, Lefevre (1998) posited that policy issues increasingly require more complex systems of actors and actions due to the spatial extension of urban areas, emergence of new technologies, and a financial and intellectual crisis in the welfare state. More recently, the need for cross-sectoral policy networks has been framed as a mechanism to effectively access critical competencies distributed across sectors, harness efficiencies from outsourcing services to the private sector, and attain equity through indirect relationships with the most marginalized populations assisted by non-profit organisations (Andrews & Entwistle, 2010).

In the context of housing policy, this transition has been accompanied by, and many argue has facilitated, inequitable outcomes. Gurran & Phibbs (2015, p. 712) argue that both Australian researchers and agencies have been engaged in fruitless policy “busy work” while the proportion of low-income renters in housing stress has increased to 60%. This situation is not unique to Australia. A strong degree of policy transfer has facilitated a growing international consensus away from direct provision of public housing, towards a set of regulatory, taxation and mortgage securitization measures intended to increase homeownership and cut the ‘red tape’ that allegedly harms private sector responses. This policy turn has led to greatly increased housing disparities in the US, Canada, and Australia, including decreased rates of homeownership amongst younger households, increased proportions of low-income renters paying over 30% of their income on housing, and greatly increased rates of homelessness (Aalbers, 2015; Austin, Gurran, & Whitehead, 2014; Kadi & Ronald, 2014).

In line with Aalbers (2015, p. 57), this paper takes as its starting point the notion that a “de-commodified housing alternative is needed more than ever before.” By de-commodified housing, we mean an alternative to considering housing development and exchange as simply profit extraction, which has the result of excluding those with limited resources. This definition of de-commodified housing would include: regulating rent increases, security of tenure, and quality of private rental dwellings; halting conversions of affordable rental to private ownership; preserving and greatly expanding public and not-for-profit community housing through mechanisms ranging from construction and renovation subsidies to inclusionary zoning; and promoting homeownership options that limit re-sale price increases (Kadi & Ronald, 2014).

Given the ubiquity of policy networks in the creation of housing policy, the question asked in this paper is: How can housing policy networks at the metropolitan scale steer just policy towards de-commodified housing alternatives? We answer this question through examining affordable housing networks in four mid-sized cities that all face strong speculative housing pressures and feature severely unaffordable housing markets (Demographia, 2018): Melbourne, Australia; Portland, the United States; and Toronto and Vancouver in Canada. We use two sets of interviews – in 2015 and 2018 – with key housing actors to explore how local policy networks can develop shared understandings, set agendas, and in two cases, successfully advocate upwards to senior levels of government. We conclude by outlining a new typology of elements central to housing policy and outcomes: integrated vertical governance; coalition-building and agenda-setting; and a shared vocabulary and data set.

Introducing a Policy Network Conceptual Framework

The policy network field of research, emerging predominantly from public administration and policy studies disciplines, focuses on actors, their motivations, the resources available to them, and the institutions that shape the suite of actions open to them. In this paper, we use policy networks as an analytical tool to focus attention on “the universe of individuals and organisations who actively attempt to influence policy outcomes within a particular policy subsystem” (Henry, 2011, p. 363). We define policy networks as a “set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors who share common interests” (Börzel, 1997, p. 1). It is based on the notion that policymaking occurs in sectors and takes place within as well as between public and private policy actors through processes including advocacy, coalition building and policy-framing (Smith, 2000).

Several scholars have attempted to ascertain the elements of influential policy networks and the factors that support network formation, often using case studies of specific policy areas to predict attributes of successful policy networks. For example, Sandstrom and Carlsson (2008) posit that policy networks with a heterogenous set of actors that are centrally and densely integrated are more likely to be efficient and innovative in creating policy. Börzel and Buzogay (2010) highlight the importance of relatively balanced power dynamics between state and non-state actors while Mullins (2018) draws attention to the importance of agenda-setting and access to appropriate data resources in shaping policy outcomes. Commenting on the institutional context of policy networks, Gurran et al. (2018) suggest that consistent national level policy and consistent funding mechanisms help build capacity. Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012) conclude that policy networks are more likely to succeed when the following conditions exist: principled engagement characterized by open, fair and representative communication; shared motivation based on trust, mutual understanding and

interdependent interests and capacity for joint action supported by supportive institutional, knowledge, leadership and resources.

We extend this literature by building a new typology of pertinent policy network elements, based on interviews in the four case study cities and a review of the policy network literature. We focus on three elements that emerged frequently across our interviews in four cities, summarised in Table One.

<i>Element Title</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Advocacy Coalitions, Partnerships and Agenda Setting</i>	Advocacy coalitions are groups of policy-participants and stakeholders with shared interests who engage in coordinated activity over time to influence policy. They often engage in agenda setting, or the active process of promoting their particular framing or definition of problems and potential solutions.
<i>Integrated Vertical Governance</i>	Integration between different organisations and/or levels of government. This includes awareness of policy implications across scales and consistency in objectives, funding arrangements, legal imperatives and delivery mechanisms.
<i>Shared data and understandings</i>	The presence of trusted, shared data sets to measure baseline conditions and monitor change and shared definitions and measurement conventions for the topic of policy interest.

Table 1. Summary of Policy Network Elements

Our conceptual starting point is that these three elements are important elements in predicting the success of a policy network, and further, a successful policy network is likely to affect, but not entirely determine, policy outcomes at various scales.

We take a historically grounded middle-range ‘divergence’ approach to comparing cities (Kemeny & Lowe, 1998), recognizing that the four cities we compare have different political trajectories, governance structures, and institutional actors. We do not conclude with a simple formula for success across different regimes, but rather with a menu of choices for policy networks seeking fundamental change in affordable housing, along with an agenda for further research.

Identifying Policy Networks in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada, Portland, the United States and Melbourne, Australia: methods

This article derives from an action research partnership based in Melbourne, Australia, a metropolitan area of five million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019), which since 2013 has sought to scale up the quantity and quality of affordable housing. As part of the initial phase of research, the partnership organized a study tour to Portland and Vancouver in 2014, two cities often included in the Global North circuit of ‘best practice’. These are two cities where, despite precipitous housing and land cost increases and lack of national policy support, there was a relatively high proportion of affordable housing developed in the past 10 years (with ‘affordable housing’ defined as housing costing no more than 30% of household income for lower-income households earning 80% of Area Median Income or less) (see Table 1). Round table discussions during the 2014 study tour suggested that metropolitan governance in Portland and Vancouver appeared to have had a positive impact on developing partnership consensus. As Melbourne’s metropolitan governance had ended in 1992 (Gleeson, Dodson, & Spiller, 2012) a matching city that, like Melbourne, had abolished metropolitan governance in the 1990s (Boudreau, Keil, and Young, 2009) was chosen for the next phase of research: Toronto.

In 2015, one of the co-authors undertook interviews in these four cities. In each city, six to eight key matched housing actors were interviewed in person, with all interviews transcribed. In addition, policy documents were analysed to determine definitions, targets, and mechanisms, and comparative statistics on affordable housing developed (name redacted, 2015). Three years later, the same co-author returned to these cities to re-interview informants, with a focus on policy innovation in the previous three years, and reviewed any new policy documents. The 54 interviews have been analysed for narratives (how

partnerships developed and their impact on affordable housing) and also for discourses (e.g. differing understandings of ‘affordable housing’ or ‘the right to housing’). By 2018, the focus on metropolitan governance had shifted to a greater focus on integrated vertical governance between local, provincial/state, and federal governments (name redacted, 2018). The four cities featured in this paper are mid-sized cities of the Anglosphere Global North with comparable rates of renting. As Table Two shows, they feature a range of proportions of social housing and differing levels of affordability.

The four cities represent four divergent housing trajectories over the three-year time frame in which research was conducted, partially due variations in the policy networks functioning in each city. Vancouver had introduced several ‘game-changers’ between 2015 and 2018: local government land being developed by a coalition of non-profit providers for non-speculative housing; that same coalition influencing new provincial and federal government policy shift; and strong backing for innovation in non-speculative models from the largest banking institution (a credit union) in the region. In Portland, a strong coalition involving local and regional government, non-profit providers, and researchers were developing new sources of state funding under an extremely challenging federal regime. In Melbourne, stakeholders had helped create new sources of state government funding and policy commitment, but there were still policy network weaknesses. In Toronto, a similar action research coalition was failing to capitalise on a nascent federal government return to affordable housing policy-making, while facing a daunting new right-wing provincial government. The following section will describe the housing policy networks within the four cities, focusing on key themes that emerged from the interviews: vertically integrated governance, shared understandings, and advocacy partnerships. Because of different definitions of affordable housing in these four cities (see Table Two), we imposed a standard definition to compare outcomes: housing supplied at a rent or mortgage payment equal to

30% of the income of a household earning less than 80% of Area Median Income, including utilities and property tax.

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Toronto</i>	<i>Vancouver</i>	<i>Portland</i>
<i>Population</i>	4,500,000	5,900,000	2,500,000	2,400,000
<i>Annual population growth rate 2017</i>	2.7%	1.9%	1.1%	1.2%
<i>Median household income (in \$AUD)</i>	\$80,184	\$84,665	\$86,450	\$96,245
<i>Median dwelling price (in \$AUD)</i>	\$720,433	\$845,759	\$1,175,974	\$596,333
<i>Median dwelling price to income ratio 2019</i>	9.7	8.3	12.6	5.2
<i>Increase in median dwelling price to income ratio between 2014 and 2019</i>	15%	34%	22%	8%
<i>Proportion of private rental housing</i>	30%	33.5%	34.5%	37%
<i>Proportion of subsidised housing</i>	3.5%	7.0%	8.2%	12.0%
<i>Median rent to income ratio</i>	27%	35%	39%	20%
<i>Amount of affordable housing created 2012-18</i>	2,668	net loss of 1,000 units	5,653*	2,539*

*amount of housing created in central cities with approximately 650,000 residents, as compared to the Melbourne figure, which is for the metropolitan population

Table 2. Melbourne, Toronto, Vancouver, Portland- comparative housing data (data sources: see names redacted, 2015 and 2018)

Vancouver

Vancouver is often celebrated as a ‘poster child’ for progressive governance and planning innovation (Hutton, 2011). The city is the third largest city in Canada and the largest city and dominant economic centre of the province of British Columbia (BC). Vancouver is also renowned for its extremely unaffordable housing market, becoming the second least affordable major housing market in the world in 2018 (Demographia, 2018). Despite this, in the years between 2012 and 2018 5653 units of affordable housing were produced in the City, largely through purpose-built affordable rental housing and rented laneway homes (City of Vancouver, 2018).

Integrated Vertical Governance

When the first set of interviews were carried out in Vancouver, in 2015, the Canadian federal government had been Conservative since 2006. Their involvement in affordable housing policy and finance was limited to federal-provincial agreements committing a declining amount of funding, maintaining existing affordable housing operating agreements, and supporting a small amount of new construction. Most of the responsibility for affordable housing policy had been downloaded to provincial governments in the early 1990s by a federal government deeply committed to neoliberalism. Many 30-year operating agreements from an earlier and more active era of social housing construction in the 1970s and 1980s were coming to an end, and the future viability of the entire sector was at risk (Suttor, 2016).

However, whether governed by right- or left-of-centre parties, the BC government had one of the most interventionist provincial affordable housing support systems in Canada. When the federal government downloaded affordable housing policy to provinces, the BC government decided to replicate many formerly federal functions: low cost mortgages and other loans to non-profits, a relatively large subsidy pool, research support, and strong policy direction. This shielded Vancouver from some of the worst depredations suffered in Toronto over the subsequent decades.

Furthermore, the City of Vancouver, with 650,000 residents as part of metropolitan government with 2.3 million residents, took policy leadership in the area of affordable housing. In doing so, the City profited from 10 years of relative political stability under a centre- left party from 2008 to 2018. In 2015, all informants across sectors referred to the City of Vancouver's housing targets, broken down by household income need, and were contributing, in various ways, to Vancouver's ambitious 2012-20 Housing and Homelessness Strategy (City of Vancouver, 2012)

Despite this, the lack of integration between levels of government and the highly devolved and entrepreneurial approach to securing affordable housing was a significant cause for concern in the 2015 interviews. As one City of Vancouver representative explained,

“The fact that we don’t have a federal affordable housing program is the reason for this complexity [in securing affordable housing]. We used to be able to say: ‘set aside these three pieces of land’ and give us an option to buy them at some point in the future when the federal money comes through. Now what we want is 20% affordable housing, but we can’t afford to directly fund it. Every negotiation becomes picking through a menu, trying to find the best possible recipe, without making the project unfeasible or putting it at risk and ending up in court.” (City of Vancouver representative, 2015)

There was evidence that this was beginning to change by 2018. Five interview participants called attention to a ‘Stonehenge moment’ in 2017, when federal, provincial and local government policy became aligned for the first time since the early 1990s in response to a new national housing plan. Vancouver was able to capitalise on this policy alignment in order to posit a future where non-speculative housing was a significant proportion of the housing stock, and speculative development was limited.

Advocacy Coalitions, Partnerships and Agenda Setting

Despite very high land costs, caused by increasing speculation by both local and international investors in the housing market, the City of Vancouver has made considerable inroads in meeting identified affordable housing needs. These successes emerged partially because productive policy networks, already notable in 2015, were able to scale up remarkably by 2018. The substantial linkages between not-for-profit housing organisations in Vancouver evolved partially as a response to the need to combine asset bases, skills and capacity to competitively respond to development opportunities. According to interviews, the

request for proposals for over 1,000 new affordable units across seven large inner-city sites owned by the City of Vancouver necessitated collaborative bids. The Cooperative Housing Federation of BC had been working for several years to consolidate the collective asset base of dozens of small non-profit housing cooperatives, mostly constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2015, they decided to share offices and collaborate with the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, another coalition made up of over 200 small non-profit housing providers. Together, they developed a successful bid to redevelop these seven sites with a mix of below-market and high subsidy non-profit housing. This success appears to reinforce the neoliberal logic of competition in generating partnerships and efficiency in the social housing sector. However, the competitive bid was also critiqued by respondents who referred it to “the prisoner’s dilemma in affordable housing” (financial institution representative, 2018); expressing concern that the winning consortia had undercut others by promising impossibly low construction costs.

Vancouver, more than any other city, reflected the importance of broad coalitions of politically activated actors, ready to respond when a window of opportunity emerges. In Vancouver interactions between coalitions of not-for-profit housing providers, financiers and two levels of government (local and provincial but not necessarily metropolitan or federal) were able to capitalize on government shifts. As one respondent from the Cooperative Housing Federation of BC explained:

“The provincial election was a game changer for us. Because the NDP adopted [the CHFBC-led advocacy] plan as their campaign platform – they said ‘if we get elected, we’ll implement that’. So far they have committed an investment over 10 years of \$7 billion across the whole housing spectrum.” (Cooperative housing representative, 2018)

Vancouver also provides insight into improved bargaining positions held by empowered actors who have resources as well as expertise to contribute:

“When they first introduced me to the CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Finance Corporation officers visiting Vancouver], they said ‘here is [housing finance leader] who is requesting matching funding for a fund she is building.’ And I said ‘I need to clarify that, I am not requesting anything. I’m actually inviting you to partner with us on a fund which we are going to do whether you participate or not.’” (Housing finance representative, 2018)

Shared data and understanding

The research revealed the importance of having a shared language and data set as an evidence base to inform policy and advocacy. Interviews also revealed the political and empowering process of developing data and the ways in which the creation of data sets became a mechanism for building partnerships, credibility and mutual understanding. For example, interview respondents referred to the Canadian Rental Housing Index (BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2019). With funding from a range of supporters including VanCity, the largest provider of individual private market mortgage finance in BC, this map-based research tool provided evidence that fuelled advocacy at all three levels of government.

Based on this successful project, VanCity funded An Affordable Housing Plan for BC, referred to above, which formed the basis for the new provincial housing strategy after a change of government. With increased provincial and federal money, the City of Vancouver was able to create an even more ambitious 10-year strategy. For the first time, a local government in Canada is providing housing targets for all income levels, including targets for luxury housing for the 15% of households earning more than \$150,000 a year. Speaking of the process of developing a plan to quantify the level of housing shortfall in BC, one participant said;

“That planning process we went through brought in all of the stakeholders. It galvanized a movement around the needs so that we could get beyond dickering over the numbers... and

ultimately becoming the platform that got the NDP-Green Coalition elected. (Financial institution representative, 2018)

Toronto

Toronto is the most populous city in Canada. It has experienced dramatic increases in downtown housing prices, rampant gentrification and growth in high-rise condominium development since the 1990s (Horak, 2013). Over the study period 2012-2018 the city experienced a net loss of affordable housing units, despite rapidly increasing need.

Integrated Vertical Governance

When the first round of interviews occurred in 2015, most respondents referred to Toronto as a cautionary tale of how not to do housing policy; by 2018 this situation had further deteriorated. Toronto has experienced multiple efforts to shift the spatial contours of urban governance, in part due to the federal government devolving responsibility for affordable housing to provinces in the 1990s. Unlike BC, the Ontario government was unwilling to take over responsibility for steering and funding equitable housing outcomes. In 1995, following a deep recession in Toronto, a conservative provincial government imposed amalgamation of six former municipalities previously linked through a metropolitan governance structure into one large City of Toronto (Horak, 2013). The ‘new’ City of Toronto had a lower proportional property tax base and responsibility for much poorer people, due to gentrification-induced displacement from the central city that had occurred since the 1960s (Boudreau, Keil, & Young, 2009). Amalgamation allowed the provincial government to hand over a large stock of aging and poorly maintained public housing to the City of Toronto. Overnight, the City of Toronto became the third largest public housing landlord in North America. Toronto found it impossible to maintain aging public housing

stock (most units were between 25 and 55 years old by 2000) on the base of very limited revenue sources (Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis, 2015, p. 10).

Many respondents felt that the vacuum created by the fuzzy roles and responsibility in devolved governance was a large barrier to achieving better housing outcomes:

“In Ontario, there isn’t a step of governance that can anchor the advocacy. The Ontario government could truthfully say: ‘Sorry, we’ve given away any policy function to 47 municipal managers.’” (Financial institution representative, 2015)

As for the provincial government, in 2015, a senior provincial housing policy officer was blunt, saying “there is no one steering this [housing policy] ship”.

The Provincial Government’s Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy, updated in 2016, provides \$178 million over three years, mostly in increased subsidy for low income households. There was no definition of affordable housing and considerable discussion of ‘local autonomy’ in use of funds. The targets were modest: helping 4,000 families through \$100 million in housing subsidies, and another 3,000 women and children escaping family violence through a much smaller \$17 million subsidy, as well as allowing local governments to institute inclusionary zoning. Unlike BC, it appears that policy networks have been unable to develop institutional strength to sustain a government change, nor are they flexible enough to focus on a progressive scale of government while waiting for their ‘Stonehenge moment’ when policies are relatively vertically integrated.

Advocacy Coalitions, Partnerships and Agenda Setting

As was the case in BC, the non-profit housing association and co-operative housing body collaborated on an Affordable Housing Plan as part of the 2018 election campaign. But unlike the BC Coalition’s alliance with private rental landlords and the Vancouver Board of

Trade, this report did not get wide media coverage, business support, or win over any political parties. The absence of effective advocacy coalitions in Toronto created a vicious circle, where the political momentum for housing policy improvement never seemed to take hold, particularly given a long period where a left-of-centre provincial government seemed reluctant to provide policy leadership to local governments struggling with the downloading of social housing.

Partially because of an absence of political support or vision, the City's Affordable Housing Office works primarily with private sector developers. In one arrangement, the Province is releasing 32 hectares of formerly industrial publicly held waterfront land, the West Don Lands, to private developers, in return for 20% of units being affordable. However, the definition of affordability is 50% of these units at 100% of average market rate, 40% at 80% of average market rate, and only 10% of the units at 40% of average market rate. That is 600 units of the projected build out of 6,000 dwellings, with only 60 being possibly affordable to those on government assistance (City of Toronto, 2019). In contrast, in the 1970s, the City of Toronto developed the nearby St. Laurence Neighbourhood with 3,500 units, 57% of which were non-profit housing, with over half of those rent geared to income (Hulchanski, 1990).

Shared Data and Understanding

Toronto appears to suffer from a lack of shared understanding of housing need. This was attributed by one respondent to a “frustrating lack of coordination” (local government housing representative, 2018) across the Greater Toronto region and by another by “massive data gaps and things we just don't know” (financial institution representative, 2018). The modicum of need appears to have grown so large that measuring need had become moot for some. One respondent stated “my argument is ‘don't get lost in numbers’. Because we can't

even do 5,000 a year. We are so far off what we need.” (financial institution representative, 2018) There was a similar lack of satisfaction with the definition of affordable housing in Toronto where rental housing is generally defined as affordable if it is rented at 80%, or even 100% of market rent. One respondent explained the history of fuzzy affordable housing definitions as a result of individual operating agreements between not profit providers and legacy government programs that applied affordability levels inconsistently.

The lack of consistency is also a function of weak provincial steering. As one respondent explained;

“[There is a] lack of an integrated strategy. Each service manager has their own 10 year housing and homelessness strategy which they file with us, and that is a good start. But there is limited cross-jurisdictional discussion, and no overarching provincial housing and homelessness plan.” (Provincial housing representative, 2015).

Portland

Like Vancouver, Portland has an international reputation for its emphasis on environmental and social sustainability, achieved through relatively stable and consensual metropolitan planning and governance. Portland is the most affordable city of the four case studies, with median dwelling prices 5.2 times higher than median household incomes. Portland, which has the strongest and most studied land supply controls in the US, and whose population and median household income growth rate is higher than Vancouver, has been able to resist housing speculation better than many less regulated cities, such as Toronto and Melbourne. Between 2012 and 2018, 2,539 units of affordable housing were created in Portland.

Integrated vertical governance

Portland has an urban growth boundary that has been only marginally expanded over 40 years. Development is influenced by a Metro Regional Framework Plan and shaped by Metro, an elected metropolitan government (Horak, 2013). However, as is the case in Vancouver, Portland's metropolitan government has been remarkably absent in recent years as a strong steering force in linking affordable housing to public transportation and community service planning. In both Portland and Vancouver, strong central local government steering of affordable housing policy, abetted by advocacy networks involving non-profits, investors and researchers, has driven senior governments to do better.

Despite the celebration of Portland's integrated governance in the literature (Cotugno & Seltzer, 2011), many respondents critiqued the lack of strategic vision embedded in the City of Portland's local housing policy and implementation. Respondents argued that local government lacked strong and consistent leadership on housing. As one respondent argued;

“Here's what we really lack in Portland. I blame the commission form of government, which removes a strong mayor creating a vision we can all work towards. It disperses the responsibility to elected officials, who become CEOs without any background in their bureaus.” (Non-profit affordable homeownership provider, 2018)

Recent changes in Portland may begin to resolve issues of vertical integration across scales of government. Respondents in 2018 referred to the creation of the Joint Office in Portland that brought together staff and resources at the City and County level focused on homelessness. Interviewees acknowledged the importance of this integration, saying “That's been the big innovation over the past two years – integrating bureaucracies, which is important and hard and not very visible to the public eye” (Regional government housing coordinator, 2018).

A tentative integrated approach is reflected in the decision of the Oregon Government to test various new revenue sources through a series of bills and bonds enacted between 2015 and 2018, before providing an overarching strategy. When asked about ‘what has changed’ since 2015, all interview participants in 2018 were unanimous: the Oregon State and Metro Portland Governments have invested in affordable housing in ways that were hitherto unimaginable. These measures mean that \$225 million has gone into affordable housing delivery from the state government over the study period, with a projected additional \$90 million through a new Document Recording Tax. While not at the same scale as the Canadian or BC investments, the state and metropolitan governments’ approach does have the advantage of testing out new forms of ongoing revenue, rather than being treated as a one-off investment.

Advocacy Coalitions, Partnerships and Agenda Setting

Interviews in Portland also revealed stories of effective advocacy coalitions, and examples of co-production of evidence being used as a coalition-building tool. According to interviews, Welcome Home, an advocacy coalition consisting of over 40 non-profit organisations, has been particularly effective. Like the partnership research on affordable housing need in Vancouver, Welcome Home produced easy to understand data on housing need. It then focused on particular State tax revenues that could be either created or re-purposed for affordable housing. These included; a new construction excise tax, equivalent to 1% of the value of a permit, that local governments could apply to affordable housing construction; extending short term lodging taxes to AirBNB and other short-term rentals and using that revenue to support affordable housing; and allowing local governments to issue bonds, implement rent control, and trial inclusionary zoning.

The Oregon State Government, like the BC Government, appeared to listen to a broad-based advocacy coalition with good data and a suite of reasonable solutions. Like the BC Government, the Oregon Government started its work with transparent information on housing needs that would inform its goals and targets. In 2015, it estimated 103,000 ‘missing units’ for extremely low-income households earning less than 30% of AMI across the state (State of Oregon, 2015). Calculations were provided based on income, size and type of household, and included consideration of household’s special needs. Four of six interview participants referred to this estimate of housing need, suggesting that it has helped build a shared understanding within the housing network.

Shared Data and Understanding

The Department of Housing and Urban Development in the US calculates income limits for extremely low, very low, and low income households and also publishes Fair Market Rent limits linked to household size and location (HUD, 2019). The consistency of affordability metrics has created a standardized basis for calculating housing need across the US and greater cross-sector understanding of the meaning of ‘affordable housing’. Local jurisdictions seeking HUD funding must produce a Consolidated Plan to provide a framework for the allocation of HUD funds and these plans are designed to ensure meaningful goal setting in local jurisdictions. While imperfect, these systems appear to have created a shared vocabulary and set of metrics in Portland. When asked about the definition of affordable housing, respondents would refer to ‘the standard definition’ and position their focus based on the segment of Area Median Income (AMI) band they target. Further, interview participants tended to quote the same figures when estimating the degree of affordable housing shortfall in Portland, something that did not occur in the other three cities.

Participants accessed a variety of sources for their housing data including, State, Federal and University data sets. As one participant explained;

“All of us rely on the imperfect federal data available. We use the same numbers. So if there are inaccuracies, they run to all levels of government.” (Regional government housing coordinator, 2018)

Melbourne

Melbourne is the second largest city in Australia and the capital of the state of Victoria.

While it markets itself as the world’s most liveable city, it suffers from a lack of affordable housing, particularly in inner-city areas. Only 2,668 affordable dwellings were produced in metropolitan Melbourne between 2012 and 2018. Vancouver produced 15 times as much affordable housing per capita, and Portland six times as much.

Integrated Vertical Governance

Both the federal and Victorian State Governments have a long history of directly developing and supporting social and affordable housing. After World War Two, the first Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement resulted in almost 100,000 public housing dwellings being built nationally over ten years in a nation of less than 10,000,000 people, to respond to a housing deficit and projections of a growing population (Hayward, 1996). But by 2015, when the first set of interviews took place, those days were long past. There was considerable optimism at the state government level, where a new left-of-centre government had promised policy action on affordable housing. The federal government, which had been right-of-centre since an election in 2013, was not considered as promising. One of their first actions was to end both the Social Housing Initiative, direct funding for rent-geared-to-income housing, and the National Rental Assistance Scheme, which was a below market

rental program that had been taken up by private as well as non-profit developers (Austin, Gurran & Whitehead, 2015).

Unlike Portland and Vancouver, which have strong central city governments within metropolitan governance structures, Melbourne has 32 weak local governments, and most housing policy functions (other than development approval) are controlled by the state level of governance. This poorly coordinated situation was exacerbated by what multiple interviewees argued was a lack of competent actors. While affordable housing actors are rapidly upskilling in the increasingly competitive and financialized realm of social housing delivery, it would appear that policy networks are still struggling to negotiate the changing levers for housing and Melbourne is failing to attract, train or retain sufficient skilled housing actors.

Advocacy Coalitions and Agenda Setting

There were considerable successes between 2015 and 2018 in Melbourne, at least partially due to advocacy by non-profit housing providers, local governments and activist researchers. Over the period 2015-18, a new infrastructure advisory body recognized affordable housing as priority infrastructure in its 30-year strategy. The new 30-year metropolitan plan projected the need for 1.6 million new homes by 2050 and made provision of affordable housing a priority action. A new affordable housing strategy pledged almost \$2.7 billion in direct financing and loans for more affordable housing. Perhaps most significantly, the Victorian State Government defined affordable housing incomes and price points for both Greater Melbourne and regional Victoria, and enshrined ‘affordable housing’ as an explicit aim in the Planning and Environment Act in 2018 (Department of Housing and Human Services, 2018).

Shared Language and Data

The Melbourne case study is particularly indicative of the challenges of developing policy in the context of a lack of mutual definitions and data surrounding housing targets in a state that only recently implemented an enforceable definition of affordable housing. Definitions of affordable housing differed widely across interviews. Quantum of need estimates ranged from “a shit ton” (financial institution representative, 2018) to complex ‘rule of thumb’ calculations that used social housing waiting lists, estimated overall future housing construction numbers and numbers of people presenting to homeless services as proxies for an official number. As one participant explained:

“I don’t have a number that I typically use. What I’ve observed is that different campaigns and agencies are plucking palatable targets and talk about that. Or some people talk about much too big a number without talking about the sub-sets... We haven’t got ourselves lined up.” (Not-for-profit housing representative, 2018).

The lack of data and vocabulary surrounding affordable housing advocacy is reflective of the lack of consistency at all levels of government. For example, the metropolitan plan has no overall targets for affordable housing, let alone any specific spatialized direction as to the use of well-located government land for development of non-speculative housing. Likewise, the state government department released an analysis of housing need after its state affordable housing strategy and did not reference that analysis in their targets. Such inconsistency in the use of data suggest an ad hoc and poorly coordinated housing policy approach (names redacted, 2018).

Discussion

The opportunity to undertake matched interviews three years apart across four cities has yielded a number of important insights into the impact of policy networks in shaping housing policy and delivery outcomes. Our research has identified a significant divergence in the trajectories of

Portland and Vancouver on one hand, and Melbourne and Toronto on the other. We argue that the presence or absence of integrated vertical governance, existing partnerships and shared definitions and data are key factors influencing these variegated outcomes.

Integrated Vertical Governance

According to Underdal (1980) truly integrated governance involves three elements: comprehensiveness (an awareness of the broader implications of policy across scales); aggregation ('overall' evaluation of policy alternatives); and consistency (penetrating all policy levels and agencies). We find that integrated vertical governance requires both complementary policy goals and directions, based on respectful dialogue between levels of government, and access to appropriate funding and resources to implement these goals. This level of consistency is also important in creating and retaining competent and experienced actors in the policy networks.

This research has identified a 'hollowness' in the capacity or willingness of governments to develop evidence-based policy. In particular, a separation between decision-making, funding and management of housing is evident in Toronto and Melbourne. A lack of consideration of the broader implications of policy decisions in Toronto resulted in the devolution of responsibility for social housing from a provincial to a local government with a reduced tax base, crippling a housing system's resilience for decades. These conditions have resulted in increasingly complex, market-based solutions to delivery that are failing to generate sufficient affordable housing to counteract gentrification pressures. Melbourne has similarly been affected by stop-start federal and state policy that has not allowed it to build up competency, capacity and consensus, along with a critical mass of experienced housing actors.

The same frustrations were apparent to a lesser degree in Vancouver and Portland. Strong and consistent policy at the local government level in Portland and Vancouver, aided

by relative consistency at the provincial level in the latter case study and higher proportions of subsidized housing in the former (see Table Two), allowed competency, capacity and consensus to develop in those two cities. Such conditions, along with organizational funding and support in Vancouver from provincial government and financiers, and to a lesser extent in Portland by philanthropies, may explain why Portland and Vancouver featured policy networks with key actors with over two decades of experience. However, in Portland, the dizzying array of different requirements from various levels of government, as well as limited federal support, were seen as barriers. Similarly, despite the quality of governance in Vancouver, the city remains the least affordable housing market of all case study locations (see Table Two), suggesting that policy networks do not have the capacity to entirely counteract the impact of market forces.

While devolution of services to private and not-for-profit partners, weakly steered by local government has often been framed as a way to generate efficiency and innovation in service delivery, our research finds such actions often create complex negotiations designed around placating developers, without sufficient funding to secure genuinely housing outcomes. Instead, participants across sectors called for consistent senior government housing policy and funding.

Advocacy Coalitions, Partnerships and Agenda Setting

The four cities highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral advocacy-focused partnerships, built and maintained over long periods of time. What was most apparent in Vancouver and to a lesser extent in Portland was the capacity to develop advocacy-based coalitions that moved from an assessment of need to a counter-narrative of opportunity, influencing political leadership. In these two cities, policy networks were able to bring together non-profit housing providers, local and regional/provincial government, supporters

from the private sector, and perhaps most importantly in the case of Vancouver, providers of housing finance, to create momentum and direction for change.

In contrast, in Melbourne and particularly in Toronto, local policy networks were unable to reach a consensus on concerted action based on a needs assessment and a clear vision of non-speculative housing potential. As mentioned earlier, the limited presence of experienced actors, particularly in Melbourne, appeared to limit innovation and collective advocacy efforts. Lack of political leadership in these two cities was both a cause and an outcome of weak advocacy coalitions, who created good data but were not able to get buy in from media, supportive businesses, or specific politicians or parties. They did not benefit from a strong 'hub' institution characterised by stability, good leadership, and ongoing commitment to non-speculative housing.

Shared Data and Understanding

The hollowing out of government capacity and competencies presents challenges for the continuing delivery of public services. Our research found a concern that opportunities were being missed, due to absence of clear data, shared definitions or internal skills and capacity. While it is not the 'job' of non-profit organizations and the researchers associated with them to undertake research on housing need, providing the information 'for' government can be a powerful organizational tool, increasing knowledge across various sectors and helping to build coalitions with a common understanding. This research identified the importance of both creating 'evidence' and then embedding it in policy processes.

Melbourne and Toronto again appear to reflect cautionary tales in this area, as both suffer from inconsistencies in definitions and data that have stymied affordable housing delivery and policy formation. In the case of Toronto, the lack of effective partnerships between industry and not-for-profit actors and local government meant that, even when data and targets were generated it gained relatively little traction. Similarly, the case of Toronto

illustrates the legacy of one-off contracts between state and not-for-profit providers responding to changing targets and resulting in a large diversity of housing outcomes with little consistency. In Melbourne, data gaps flowed through to advocacy efforts, with participants significantly challenged by vastly different understandings of affordability across the sector.

In contrast, the generation of housing data and its application served as coalition-building and political tools of great power in Vancouver and Portland. The BC government's use of the housing coalition's plan in Vancouver was referred to as a 'game changer' for that city. Similarly, the consistency of housing definitions and data was a common motif in Portland, reflecting long histories of consistent affordability measurement in this jurisdiction. Unlike in Toronto, where providers decried the shifting expectations of housing delivery, providers in Portland discussed clear strategies for their organisations, linking their delivery to specific income bands within the population.

While data and definitions do not generate housing on their own, this research has highlighted their power as advocacy, policy-formation and delivery tools. They provide consistency for providers and create opportunities for both goal-setting and measurement of outcomes.

Conclusion

Over the three-year time period from 2015 to 2018, Toronto, Melbourne, Vancouver and Portland had four very different trajectories in meeting their citizens' housing needs. Their divergent narratives suggest implications for understanding how policy shift towards non-speculative housing might be assisted by, but not entirely influenced by, smart policy networks.

Our research reveals a set of mutually reinforcing factors: advocacy coalitions set agendas which influence senior government, aided by local-level consistency in funding regimes. These, in turn, build up competency, capacity and consensus around shared definitions of affordable housing need, along with preferred mechanisms to meet these needs. The need for ambitious national affordable and social housing policy in the US, Canada and Australia has never been greater, and these in turn require listening to experienced, competent and capable local area policy networks.

Our research suggests that even within a context of rapidly increasing housing disparities caused by weakened housing policy structures under neoliberalism and the financialisation of housing, it is possible to create a modest amount of good, well-located affordable housing. To move towards a desperately needed alternative future where non-speculative housing is a substantial proportion of total stock, scaling up these successes will require a better understanding of how policy networks can work most effectively and efficiently towards the basic social justice goal of adequate affordable housing.

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