DIFFERENTIAL APPLICATION OF PLANNING POLICY DEEPENING THE INTRACITY DIVIDE:
THE CASE OF GREATER SYDNEY, NSW, AUSTRALIA

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Urban planning policies in New South Wales (NSW), Australia are continuously being reformed, in order to make them more economic development friendly. These reforms are concerned with making development approvals easier and faster. The implementation of these reforms and their outcomes in Greater Sydney, NSW, vary according to the local socio-economic conditions. The affluent communities in Greater Sydney are very concerned about these reforms and actively resist their application in their areas. They are successful in avoiding the application of reformed urban planning policies. However, the lower socio-economic parts of Greater Sydney in the outer areas are not able to engage with these urban policy issues. The reformed urban policies are fully applied in the poorer areas, often resulting in excessive and poor-quality urban development. Past research on urban planning policy development, application and outcomes in Sydney has not investigated selective planning policy application and its differential outcomes. This paper analyses the selective application of some recent urban planning policy reforms as they relate to socio-economic division in Greater Sydney. The research argues that the selective application of urban planning policy in Greater Sydney is reinforcing socio-economic division there.

Key words: Divided city; inequality; Sydney; urban planning policy.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian urban planning system has been shifting over the years in response to economic growth, urban development and suburban expansion (Searle and Bunker, 2010). Urban ascendency in Australia is different from other countries, as the state governments are unswervingly responsible for urban planning, major infrastructure and service delivery (Davidson and Gleeson, 2018). The majority of people live in urban areas, and speedy urbanisation brings opportunities as well as social difficulties (Davidson and Arman, 2014). Consequently, the social order has become more complicated in terms of population growth pressures and increasing community responsiveness (McFarland, 2011). Moreover, Forster (2006) argues that regardless of economic growth, the levels of social polarisation, exclusion, residential differentiation and access

to urban opportunities have transformed into a complex system and have certainly deteriorated.

The social order of Australia is heading for increased socio-economic inequality (Berry, 2014; Pusey and Wilson, 2003; Cox, 2011). Uneven outcomes of the discriminatory application of planning policy are significant contributors to the ongoing inequality. International literature points out that the dominant class of socio-political groups uses planning in order to facilitate and retain control in a society (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1979). At the root of neoliberalism, the driving force behind planning reforms is exploitation, inequality, and domination (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2003). Australian market-driven policy practices have shaped divisions in cities (Freestone and Hamnett, 2017), and unequal access to opportunities created by urban amenities favours the needs of some groups above those of others (Whitelegg, 1997).

In Australia, state governments (including that of NSW) have complete constitutional authority over urban planning. Local

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government is not recognised in the Australian constitution. Local planning is entirely governed by state legislation, policies, regulations and instruments. In Australia, local councils or municipalities have very few functions. They provide basic services such as stormwater drainage, waste collection, and they take care of local libraries and parks. They have some say in local urban planning matters, but it is the state government that sets planning frameworks, provides strategic planning direction and approves all local plans. On average, local councils are very small too: in Greater Sydney alone there are 33 local councils. All urban planning beyond the very local area, such as metropolitan planning, is directly done by the state. Larger development projects are also directly approved by the state. The EPAA (Environmental Planning and Assessment Act) 1979 is the main planning legislation in NSW. The New South Wales (NSW) urban planning system has been reformed over the last two decades through the inspiration of fast-paced urban development and economic growth. The state government has also enacted a wide variety of urban policies and programmes to administer the planning and development of Greater Sydney. Searle and Bunker (2010) define these features of the urban planning system as the 'Australian style of metropolitan planning' (p. 163).

The NSW state's urban planning arrangements are complex (Brunner and Glasson, 2015) and in a constant state of reform (Piracha, 2015). Khan *et al.* (2015) assert that numerous reforms were initiated in the state planning systems over recent years. The NSW planning reforms aim to centralise, speed up and privatise the planning systems (Piracha, 2010). The urban planning reforms in Australian states are informed by various theoretical political approaches (Legacy *et al.*, 2014). Neoliberalist economic efficiency is a strong motivation underpinning the reforms in NSW (Gleeson, 2017; Piracha, 2010, 2015; Rogers, 2016; Troy, 2018).

The EPAA 1979 was enacted to increase community engagement in urban planning. However, the Act has been reformed several times in the past two decades by the state to limit local participation (MacDonald, 2018; Piracha, 2015). NSW urban planning has been criticised for not ensuring desirable community engagement (Gurran, 2007). In fact, in the process of planning reforms inspired by the neoliberal framework, community engagement has become compromised (Schatz and Rogers, 2016). The reduced scope for community engagement has not affected all parts in Greater Sydney uniformly, since in some (affluent) parts of Greater Sydney, there has been significant community engagement in the form of community opposition (Gurran and Phibbs, 2013). There is a difference in the implementation and outcomes of the urban planning policy reforms between the affluent and poor parts of Greater Sydney.

The application of planning policy in Greater Sydney is unequal, and there is an increasing gap between the higher and lower socio-economic parts of the city. Even when urban policy is applied uniformly across Greater Sydney, the outcomes are not the same everywhere (Piracha, 2016). The disparity in planning policy application could be partially explained by vigorous local opposition in affluent areas. A typical case of opposition would be very high resistance

to the provision of any additional dwellings. On the other hand, on occasions when the state is under pressure from local communities, it exempts affluent areas from specific urban planning policies. Recent examples of this in Greater Sydney are the council amalgamations and medium-density housing code policies.

The NSW state government initiated local council or municipality mergers in 2016-2017 to increase economic efficiency. The council mergers, or amalgamations, were implemented in the less affluent parts of Greater Sydney, where local councils were already very large. Due to resistance, including challenges from influential local communities, the state abandoned its planned council amalgamations in the higher socio-economic areas. After partial application of the amalgamation policy in Greater Sydney, there are very large councils in the west and south-west and small councils in the north and the east. It is much easier to influence local politicians and local councils in a small council setting. Selective application of the medium-density housing policy in 2018 (Saulwick, 2018a) is another recent example, whereby the affluent councils have secured delays in policy implementation. The policy facilitates subdivision of existing houses into two or more, thus increasing the dwelling density. There is a need to explore the unequal application of urban policies and the exercise of power, through which the participatory process is managed and articulated towards particular outcomes that may lead to further division in the community.

Though NSW urban planning policy has been acknowledged as an essential topic for research, there is a shortage of contemporary studies on the selective application of urban planning policy and its consequences. Various urban scholars have highlighted how power relations and differently positioned actors operate in cities (Bengt and Per Gunnar, 2017). Numerous Australian studies (Brunner and Glasson, 2015; Bunker *et al.*, 2017; Gleeson, 2017; Gurran and Phibbs, 2013; MacDonald, 2015; Piracha, 2010, 2015; Rogers, 2016; Ruming *et al.*, 2014; Ryan and Woods, 2015; Troy, 2018) have investigated the urban planning policy process, outcomes, and community participation in planning, using various theoretical constructs such as neoliberalism, managerialism, post-political theory, and agonism. None of that research identifies or acknowledges that planning policy reform and the selective application of the same are creating cities within a city in Greater Sydney.

In addition, Australian planning literature seems not to fully acknowledge that community engagement in or community resistance (NIMBY- Not-In-My-Back-Yard) to urban planning policy can be a vehicle for self-interest. Affluent areas are successful in resisting planning policies and exerting a strong influence over the NSW planning system (Urban Taskforce, 2018). The literature often assumes communities to be benign, noble, and altruistic. In reality, however, community opposition can seek selective urban policy application in affluent parts of Greater Sydney (Piracha, 2016). This study aims to analyse discrimination in the application of urban policy and its consequences in Greater Sydney. It also aims to examine and resolve the following questions: how are current urban planning policies being applied differentially in Greater Sydney? How is the differential application of

policy producing uneven outcomes? And how is the formal planning process creating gaps between various parts of Greater Sydney?

The following sections describe the theoretical framework, outline the research methodology, explain the Greater Sydney divide, and analyse the impact of NSW urban planning policies and practices on the socio-economic divide in Greater Sydney.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

Planning is often treated as an upholder of public interest. However, some scholars argue that planning represents the interest of capitalism (Allmendinger, 2009). Allmendinger (2009), citing Hay (1999), stated four broad Marxist conceptions of the state, that it: exists as an expression of the repressive might of the ruling class; is the instrument of the ruling class for enforcing the class structure; provides necessary capitalists interventions; and forms class domination in a society (p. 84). Thus, the unequal situation and antagonistic relations in cities are not imposed, but rather they are the outcome of capitalistic policy (Harvey, 1973). The state tries to convince the subordinate classes by claiming that the policy progression is for the interest of the state (Allmendinger, 2009).

Brenner and Theodore (2002) argue that cities have become the dominant political and ideological vanguards through which the supremacy of neoliberalism is being cemented. Thus, neoliberalism indicates new forms of political-economic ascendency grounded in the extension of market interactions (Larner, 2006). Neoliberal strands of the theory are well-traversed for planning in Sydney, NSW (Piracha, 2010, 2015; Rogers, 2016), in fact, Randolph and Tice (2017) argue that in the background of the Sydney divisions is neoliberal political hegemony.

Foucault (1980) also tackled the concept of hegemony arguing that urban and regional planning has a broader notion of power and domination in modern society. His argument is also supported by Richardson (1996), who contends that the influence of any policy depends on the wider undercurrents of power. Foucault (1990) argued that power is not imposed on individuals, but instead, individuals exercise it over themselves and others through widely accepted forms of organised behaviour. Consequently, power is utilised to serve the interest of vested groups, thereby enabling inequalities (Richardson, 1996).

Bent Flyvbjerg, taking the Foucauldian perspective on the role of power relations in planning, argued that power defines the physical, economic, ecological and social reality (Allmendinger, 2009). Social power is unequally distributed, and the dominant social, political and economic structures determine who shouts and who listens (Allmendinger, 2009).

The community opposition to planning and development has typically been referred to as the process of NIMBYism. NIMBY is defined as anti-development community opposition to the introduction of public facilities in urban areas (Barlow, 1995). Dear (1992), citing the 1989 Daniel Yankelovich Group national survey, outlined the NIMBY advocates as high-salaried, educated, skilled and homeowners. Petrova (2016) labelled NIMBY resistance as the egoism, ignorance, and craziness of some residents interested in defending their greensward and placing private benefits at the forefront instead of public benefits.

Dear (1992) also argued that undue opposition inspires selective application of urban policies and regression of the urban community into a new feudalistic society. In the same vein, this research argues that the NIMBY opposition of affluent communities in Greater Sydney pushes exclusion from the application of planning policies. The intention of these policies is to provide more dwellings and related infrastructure to accommodate the growing population. Affluent NIMBY communities typically do not want more people to come in even when their inner-city suburbs are the most suited for a population and density increase. The above-discussed theoretical concepts of power, neoliberalism and NIMBYism can help in an analysis of the planning policy application differences in Greater Sydney.

METHODOLOGY

To critically explore NSW urban policy application and its consequences, a qualitative research method was applied in this study. Qualitative research data characteristically rely on opinions, concepts, and understandings (Bolderston, 2012). Qualitative data can be collected in many ways, such as orally (primarily interview-based), textually (creative, documentary and landscape) and observationally (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). This article conducted a textual study or content analysis of the relevant documents. Content analysis allows for compelling explorations of the research questions by studying documents (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). The study analysed textual materials from leading Australian newspapers, books and journal articles, reports, websites and other materials from NSW government sources.

This research also extracted data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in order to produce evidence on the spatial discrepancy in the demographics and socio-economics of the Greater Sydney areas. The ArcGIS mapping software was used to visualise and present the demographics and socio-economic statistics.

This research argues that along with the existing socio-economic divide, Greater Sydney's urban policy practices are also spatially divided, which is adding to the socio-economic divide between parts of Greater Sydney. It emphasises the need to search for unbiased planning practices and appropriate community engagement mechanisms for the disadvantaged communities in Greater Sydney.

THE GREATER SYDNEY DIVIDE

There is a significant spatial division in Greater Sydney in terms of socio-economic opportunities and urban amenities. Residents of Sydney experience place-based disadvantage (Pawson and Herath, 2015), and the growing suburban inequality has been a concern (Forster, 2004). The division of Sydney has been characterised by an oblique line extending from northwest to southeast. The line separates the well-off and well-served north and east from the less well-off south-west and west. Piracha (2016) has characterised this as the

NIMBY Land and Bogan[2]-Land divide. Figure 1 depicts the imaginary line that separates the two parts. Buxton *et al.* (2012) have described the two parts typical of Australian cities: higher income, educated, professionally employed residents are in affluent areas of the inner and middle-ring suburbs, and the lower-income and less-educated residents are in the outer suburbs. Bangura and Lee (2019) demonstrate that the affluent northern and eastern regions of Greater Sydney have higher income growth and lower unemployment, whereas the less affluent western region has lower annual income growth and higher unemployment.
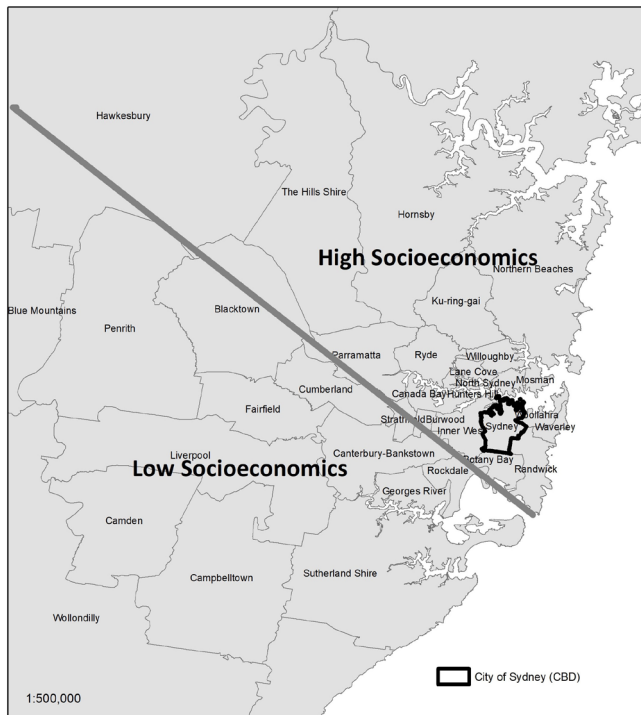

Figure 1. The line dividing Greater Sydney into higher and lower socio-economic areas
(Source: Drawn by authors using ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) digital local government boundaries)

The aforementioned dividing line separating the two parts of Sydney has also been characterised as the "Latte Line" (Saulwick, 2016) and the "Goat Cheese line" (Chrysanthos and Ding, 2017). Almost every conceivable social, economic, cultural, political and ecological indicator would confirm the existence of this have and have-not divide.

The managerial and professional jobs, indeed, employment in general, is concentrated above the line (Lee *et al.*, 2018), in addition to which the health outcomes are much worse below the line (AURIN, 2019), the rental stress is much higher below the line (Lee *et al.*, 2018), and the HSC (Higher School Certificate) results of the schools above the line are much better (Ting and Bagshaw, 2016). The canopy cover and rainfall above the line is much higher. The summers are cooler, and winters are warmer above the line (GSC, 2018). The density

is much higher below the line and has been growing much faster (Committee for Sydney, 2018; GSC, 2018), with the less advantaged areas in Greater Sydney accommodating the bulk of additional housing (GSC, 2018), too. The list of indicators demonstrating the divide is as long as one's imagination; however, only housing affordability will be explained in detail.

A study by Koziol (2018) has pointed to Sydney as the most unaffordable city in Australia. Figure 2 shows the housing price divide in Sydney. Property prices in advantaged areas are growing faster than in the have-not disadvantaged areas of Greater Sydney. This is because the supply of new dwellings is very low in affluent areas and the amenities and job opportunities are very high (GSC, 2018). The residents of lower-income areas are increasingly shut out from areas with good access to jobs, transport, and services (Troy *et al.*, 2017). According to Irvine (2019), if the government spent $7.3 billion to provide 125,000 affordable dwellings closer to the jobs and transport (in affluent areas), it would return $19.8 billion to the economy.
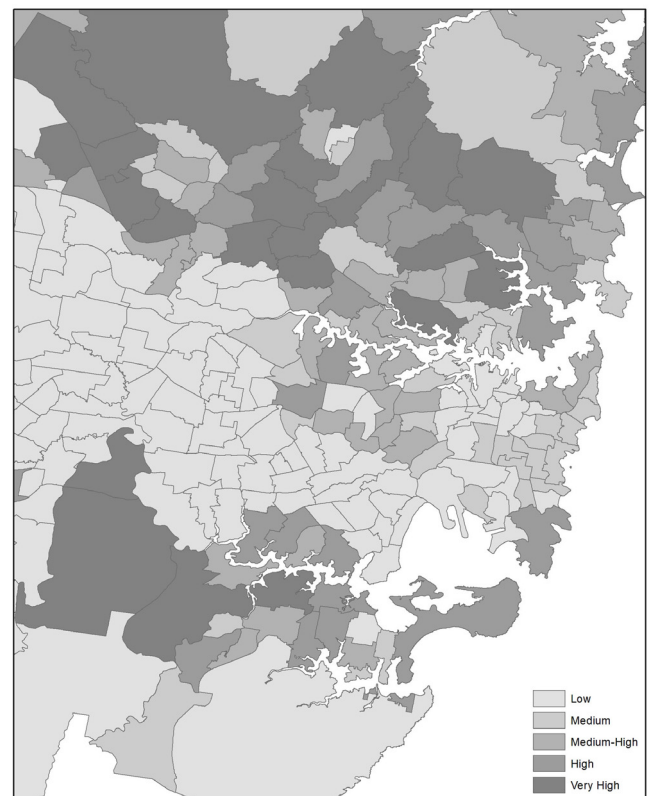

Figure 2. Sydney Metropolitan housing prices
(Source: Drawn by authors with ABS Census 2016 data at SA2 (Statistical Area 2) level)

In NSW, many lower-income residents are being displaced from the neighbourhoods in the east and north of Sydney (Troy *et al.*, 2017). A four-bedroom house in the west is lower in price than a studio flat in the east of Sydney (Gladstone and Hanna, 2018). Lee *et al.* (2018) have analysed the spatial distribution of average rent across Greater Sydney (Figure 3).

By the early 2000s, lower-income households had effectively been displaced from inner-city locations, mainly through urban renewal (Randolph, 2004). Cities are facing new

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[2] An uncouth or unsophisticated person regarded as being of low social status. Source: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bogan

ghettoisation, as the affluent residents are keeping themselves exclusive (Harvey, 2003). Southwest and western parts of Greater Sydney are also transforming into lower socio-economic ethnic ghettos because of the state government planning policy divergence (Pike, 2018). The planning policy is pushing people to live far away from the affluent suburbs that are closer to jobs. Lee *et al.* (2018) argue that living in the west is associated with longer commute times. Gleeson and Randolph (2002) termed this as 'transport poverty', which is a widespread problem in western and south-western Sydney. In addition, the white-collar jobs are positioned in the north and east of the city, while the blue-collar jobs are concentrated in the south and west (Lee *et al.*, 2018).

Figure 3. Greater Sydney average rent
(Source: Drawn by authors using ABS 2016 census data at SA2 (Statistical Area 2) level)

The NSW State Government proposed council amalgamations in 2015. It aimed to reduce the number of councils from a total of 43 to 25 in Greater Sydney and 152 to 112 in the whole of NSW. By September 2016, the NSW government had created 20 newly merged councils in NSW and eight of them were in Greater Sydney. The councils that were merged in Greater Sydney were mostly in the western and south-western lower socio-economic areas. Five proposed mergers in Greater Sydney were first postponed due to community resistance and then abandoned by the state government on 27 July 2017 (Nicholls and Saulwick, 2017). The state did not persist with the remaining mergers involving 14 eastern and northern affluent councils due to resident antagonism.

The NSW State government introduced the Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code (Housing Code) on 06 April 2018

to ease the housing shortages and to increase affordable housing (NSW DP&E, 2018b). The new Housing Code was executed in 82 councils of NSW on 06 July 2018; however, the Housing Code was deferred until 1 July 2019 for 50 local councils due to the local opposition (NSW DP&E, 2018a). In June 2019, the NSW Department of Planning formed an expert panel to revise the Housing Code for implementation by the end of 2019. In September 2019, the Department of Planning further deferred the application of the Housing Code until July 2020, and the exemption of councils from the code continued till July 2020. In response to the review panel advice, slight adjustments were completed on 01 July 2020 to the Housing Code, which includes changing the name to 'Low Rise Housing Diversity Code'. Finally, from 01 July 2020, the housing Code was applied to all local government areas in NSW.

The postponement of the council amalgamation and Housing Code in some councils was due to robust community opposition. Affluent and smaller councils in the advantaged east and north of Greater Sydney were able to resist policy reform implementation, whereas the bigger councils in the poor south-west could not resist it (Farid Uddin, 2018), thus leading to planning policy differentiation in Greater Sydney.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Cities around the world have experienced a great deal of change in their sociodemographic geographies for decades. These transformations also have complex effects on the neighbourhoods within metropolitan areas (Foote and Walter, 2017). Historically, a divided city is indeed nothing new (Marcuse, 1993). Forster (1999), in his analysis of the evolution of Australian cities, cited the example of Britain where the city authorities did not impose minimum standards of facilities in working-class areas, and certain places were left neglected. Pike *et al.* (2016) explained the uneven development and diverging social conditions and opportunities in cities in the UK. Gleeson (2017) argued that the recent urban policy practices of Australia are 'econometric characteristics of contemporary neoliberal urbanism (p. 206)'. New directions in planning and policy-making emphasise relationships between rational processes and the normative 'chaos' they are surrounded by (D'Aoust and Lemaire, 1994) that leaves behind 'rationalistic' policy-making (Richardson, 1996). In a neoliberal urban system, hidden forces of power, politics, and the market, are responsible for bringing about urban changes (Farid Uddin, 2019).

Sydney, like other cities, has been experiencing socio-economic changes for a long time (Stilwell and Hardwick, 1973). Urban expansion of Sydney in the disadvantaged west and the south-west has large swaths of low-income housing, rapid densification and poor quality development (Forster, 1999; Piracha, 2016). Sydney is somewhat different from other cities, though, as its urban planning policies seem to be reinforcing the socio-economic divide through somewhat unusual mechanisms.

The following sub-sections analyse some recent planning policies as examples of unequal urban policy application in NSW and differential outcomes for the have and have-not parts of Greater Sydney.

Council amalgamation

In the process of council amalgamation reform, the residents of the eastern and northern councils exercised consolidated NIMBY opposition against the proposed amalgamation plans and utilised all forms of engagement opportunity to halt the reform (Farid Uddin, 2018). However, the less affluent councils and their residents failed to actively engage and oppose the mergers. For example, lower socio-economic status Canterbury City Council, with a 34 square kilometre area and a population of 145,100 (2011), generated 14 submissions related to the council's merger proposal, but was merged, whereas higher socio-economic status Hunter's Hill Council, that avoided merger, with 6 a square kilometre area and population of 13,900 (2011) generated 23 submissions on the amalgamation proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of NSW (IPART, 2015). In addition to community activism and NIMBYism, the affluent councils of Botany Bay, Hunters Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Mosman, North Sydney and Strathfield also started legal action against the reform. The state government abandoned merger proposals for some councils. The councils that avoided mergers were Burwood, City of Canada Bay and Strathfield Municipal councils; Hornsby Shire and Ku-ring-gai councils; Hunter's Hill, Lane Cove and City of Ryde councils; Mosman Municipal, North Sydney and Willoughby City councils; and Randwick City, Waverley and Woollahra Municipal councils (NSW Government, 2018). All councils that avoided mergers were from the northern and eastern affluent parts of Sydney (Figure 4).
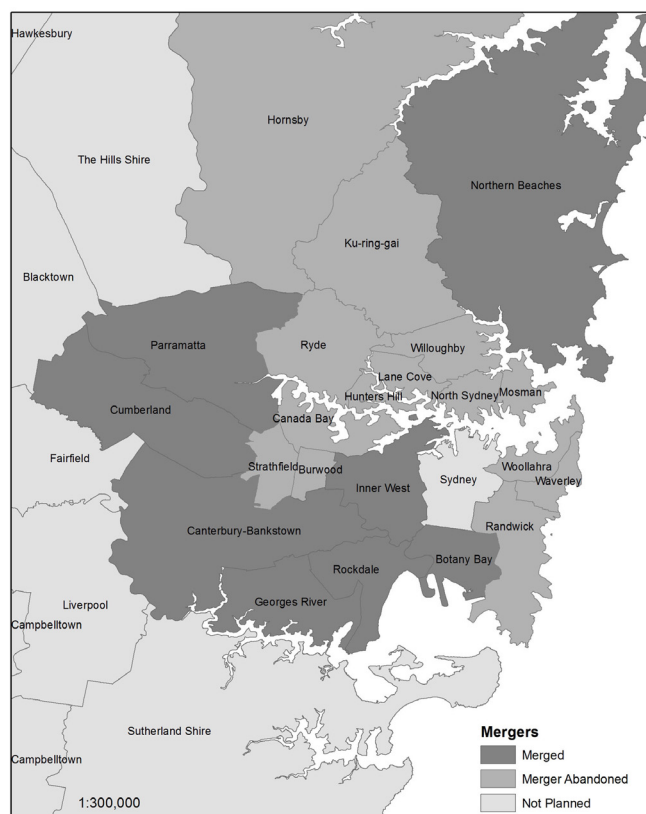

*Figure 4. The Greater Sydney council mergers
(Source: Drawn by the authors using ABS standard
local councils digital boundaries)*

The state government's failure to fully implement amalgamations has caused enormous inconsistencies in the size of the councils in Greater Sydney. For example, the forced amalgamation of lower socio-economic south-western Canterbury and Bankstown councils created a mega-council of 360,000 people, and by the abandonment of amalgamation policy for affluent areas, the Hunters Hill Council persisted with 14,000 people (Saulwick, 2017). Piracha asserted in Pike (2018) that 'small councils mean small neighbourhood/community groups can easily pressurise or influence councils to stymie any proposals to increase density.'

Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code

The Low Rise Medium Density Housing Code allows the subdivision of individual houses into more dwellings to increase the housing supply; however, the new Housing Code was not implemented uniformly in all councils. There was some strong resistance from affluent communities in the application of the policy, who argued it would lead to over-development. They argued it would cause traffic problems and destroy the local character. The Housing Code deferment started for the affluent Ryde Council. The reason was pressure from the local government and politicians (Saulwick, 2018b). Other affluent Sydney councils emulated the Ryde tactic so that they could also avoid NSW planning policies related to medium density development (Urban Taskforce, 2018).

The Housing Code was applied in some councils while others were granted an exemption from the new rules. The state government permitted the inner and middle-ring suburbs and their councils to resist the urban planning policy for more medium-density housing provision. It thus hindered people who strive to live closer to jobs and amenities (Gittins, 2018). This is another example of where urban planning reform is contributing to division and inequality in Sydney.

The exercise of power

The areas that exercise power to exclude themselves from the urban planning reforms are the highly advantaged areas located mainly in the north and east of Greater Sydney (Figure 5). More than 90% of the residents in the dark grey areas in the map fall in the top three deciles of the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage - IRSAD.

An example of the power of local activism in affluent areas is the case of the redevelopment of a club building. The local community in the affluent eastern Sydney suburb of Bronte successfully prevented the increase in height and bulk of a proposed redevelopment of a mixed-use building in an area that is close to the Sydney CBD. The residents utilised their socio-political power and used social media to effectively lobby, involving media, politicians and other influential actors in their opposition to the redevelopment (Williamson and Ruming, 2015). In the Bronte RSL case, the residents' group submitted 1,100 objections against this relatively small redevelopment (Property Observer, 2017). Thus, the plan to provide extra units and space was unsuccessful in the light of active community involvement and opposition. The amount of community engagement in

Bronte is very significant, considering its low population of 6,733 (2016 Census). In the case of the Ryde Low-Rise Medium Density Housing Code deferment, socio-political power was the dominant force in obtaining an exemption from the policy reform (Saulwick, 2018b). In the case of the merger of Auburn, Holroyd and Parramatta councils to form the new City of Parramatta and Cumberland Councils, the policy reforms were applied in order for political elites to gain party-political benefits (Munro, 2017).

Figure 5. The most advantaged areas of Greater Sydney (Source: Drawn by authors using ABS SEIFA-IRSAD (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas - Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage) data)

Uneven policy – uneven outcomes

Richardson (1996), citing Bachrach and Baratz (1962), contended that power not only relates to decision making, but also extends to the creation or reinforcement of social and political values and institutional practices in agenda-setting, to protect the interests of particular groups. An example of such an exercise of power is the redrawing of Parramatta Council's boundaries. In 2016, local council amalgamation policy merged Auburn and Holroyd councils, which have a lower socio-economic position, with the poorer southern parts of Parramatta, to form the new Cumberland Council. On the other hand, Parramatta Council received the affluent Olympic Park area from Auburn council. Other affluent areas to the north were also added to Parramatta. These areas were extracted from the Hills Shire and Hornsby councils. The whole exercise led to a thorough separation of communities of lower and higher socio-economic levels in Cumberland and Parramatta Councils, respectively.

The newly formed Cumberland council has a low base rate and no trade or industry (Kembrey, 2015; Munro, 2017). The newly amalgamated Parramatta Council to the north has a much higher socio-economic level. This redrawing of the local councils has consolidated a much stronger conservative vote bank for state and national constituencies in Parramatta.

Rise of exceptionalism

Exemption from the planning rules has promoted exceptionalism in Greater Sydney. Exempting affluent parts of the city from medium-density planning policy has set a precedence and has opened the floodgates of affluent councils demanding exemptions from various long-existing state planning policies. The affluent Northern Beaches Council (June 2018) requested an exemption from the Affordable Rental Housing and Housing for Seniors or People with Disability NSW state planning policies (Northern Beaches Council, 2018). Similarly, North Sydney Council (July 2018) asked for an exemption from planning proposals from the private sector until July 2020 (Urban Taskforce, 2018), and Lane Cove Council (February 2019) requested a change in the planning rules to permanently prohibit the operation of the housing code in its R2 low-density zone (Lane Cove Council, 2019). Affluent areas are now capable of manipulating and avoiding urban planning policies (Urban Taskforce, 2018).

NIMBYism of the affluent

Numerous studies have confirmed that people of higher social and economic class are more likely to become active in neighbourhood engagement with the urban planning process, whereas those on lower-income have not always had their community interests represented (Greene and Pick, 2012). Unsatisfactory and spatially differentiated community participation in implementing urban planning policy has led to unpopular changes (Thorpe and Hart, 2013). The ability to participate in planning activity is different in different regions of Sydney. The residents of affluent areas are very vocal and active in matters related to planning. According to Piracha (2016), "among the NSW planning apparatus, the community engagement philosophy for Sydney seems to be 'NIMBY land' is too hard," and if you "dump" excessive development on BOGAN land (a euphemism for have-nots) "they will not even notice it."

The Sydney affluent neighbourhoods' NIMBY residents, who vigorously opposed council amalgamation, are also actively opposing the new Housing Code. They also claim a suitable place for new housing in Sydney's west (Bull, 2019). In any case, it is easy to add a new development in western Sydney due to the lack of community engagement in planning issues. Bull (2019) also points out that:

> "Lack of density and population growth in posh Sydney is now becoming an established fact that is hiding in plain sight in the Greater Sydney Commission's[3] metropolitan policies".

NIMBYism enables resistance to the implementation of urban change in a neighbourhood (Esaiasson, 2014). NIMBY

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[3] Greater Sydney Commission is the agency responsible for allocating additional dwellings and population to different parts of Sydney Metropolitan.

resistance is positioned against social equity as it is the opposition of a small number of people. It is argued that community opposition is higher in the affluent areas (Davison *et al.*, 2013). By means of the active opposition, NIMBY areas allow less new housing development than those in the west and south-west of Greater Sydney (Taylor and Gladstone, 2018). That results in the adverse outcome of the high density and low amenity ethnic ghettoisation of the south-west and west, and low density and high amenity leafy east and north of Greater Sydney.

The above-discussed council amalgamation reform and housing code policy analysis, as well as the examples cited, show that the state advances the interests and aspirations of the social elites. Affluent groups have social and political control on planning policies, and consequently, they are becoming more privileged in the urban system. On the other hand, certain groups can effectively be excluded from the negotiating and bargaining game by institutional barriers or by the maneuvers of other groups (Harvey, 1973). The shaping of any policy depends on the inclusive, dynamic forces of power (Richardson, 1996). Indeed, state-led reinforcement of urban renewal has become prototypical of neoliberal urban planning policies that support the preferences of an explicit class of people (Hochstenbach and Musterd, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Inequality in Greater Sydney is growing; consequently, Sydney's standing as a global city is declining (Vogel *et al.*, 2020). In Greater Sydney, the urban planning system and its reforms are reinforcing the city division by exempting well-off areas from planning rules, in particular, those related to accommodating additional dwellings or population. The NIMBY groups of active, vocal and connected residents are avoiding the application of urban policy (Williamson and Ruming, 2015). The unequal and selective application of urban policies leads to a more divided city. After the implementation of the amalgamation plan, a western Sydney council moved all of its waste facilities into the private sector and closed down some of its community amenities (Sansom, 2016). The development of new dwellings is greater in disadvantaged western Sydney than in the affluent inner west, eastern, lower north or northern suburbs (Saulwick and Wade, 2016). Due to the lower availability of housing closer to jobs and urban amenities, housing prices and rent are exclusively higher in the affluent suburbs compared to Sydney's western suburbs (Gladstone and Hanna, 2018). Lee *et al.* (2018) argue for the expansion of affordable housing in the north, and provision of more white-collar jobs in the west and south, as well as improved public transport connectivity in Greater Sydney, in order to reduce the have and have-not division. This paper has shone a light on the contribution of urban policy changes to Greater Sydney's inequalities. It has described how community resistance in affluent parts of the city is leading to the unequal application of urban policies and thus deepening the urban division. The scenario of the Greater Sydney situation is not necessarily exclusive; this sort of inequity in applying urban policy might also exist in others parts of the world. This paper can serve as a template to study the urban policy divisions in other cities.

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