Housing, Theory and Society ›

Volume 25, 2008 - Issue 3: Theoretical Concerns in Australian Housing and Urban Research

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Shaky Foundations: Moving Beyond “Housing Tenure”

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Pages 202-219 | Published online: 18 Sep 2008

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/14036090802117572

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Abstract

Housing tenure retains a “taken for granted” status in much writing on housing, despite some previous critical analysis. This article reviews theoretical perspectives on housing tenure, and re-examines the construction of housing tenure in Australia as it relates to changing land tenure arrangements and institutional settings which affect housing occupancy. It asserts that the construction of housing tenure as a series of unchanging and mutually exclusive categories, centred on “usual residence”, creates a barrier to understanding changes in how households occupy and buy/sell housing, using the examples of increased investment in residential property and a proliferation of market housing arrangements for older people. A suggested way forward is to distinguish questions about housing occupancy, which affect the daily life and circumstances of households, from questions relating to investment in residential property as an asset

and potential generator of capital and income for households, particularly as they become older.

Keywords:

Housing tenure | Land tenure | Housing occupancy | Residential property

Notes

1. In 1992, the High Court of Australia recognized that the Meriam people of the Torres Strait Islands held native title over some of their traditional lands, overturning the notion of terra nullius, recognizing systems of occupation and use of land prior to European settlement in 1788. The federal government's Native Title Act 1993 and subsequent legislation clarified these rights and processes for claiming them.

2. Strata titles were first introduced in New South Wales in 1961 and subsequently extended to other Australian states, Canada and some countries in Asia.

3. ABS, Census of Population and Housing, Data Dictionaries (various years). The term “tenure type” was not used by the ABS until the 1996 census. Prior to that date, the derived variable was “nature of occupancy”.

4. The RBA (2004b:53) suggests that this group could include households receiving rent from lodgers or letting non-residential properties, but could also include an additional group of investors in residential property.

5. Data used with permission from research by Burke and Pinnegar (2007). The data are from a sample of 396 households who had purchased the home that they are living in within the previous five years (2001–2006).

6. The renter data are from a sample of 1,726 respondents in selected areas chosen according to indicators of socio-economic disadvantage who answered “Yes” to the question “Do you currently own a residential property that you do not live in?” See Burke and Pinnegar (2007).

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