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## **Resident Involvement in Urban Development in Sydney: The New Politics of the City**

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## **ACRONYMS**

AHURI Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

NIMBY Not In My Backyard

NSW New South Wales

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Blue Sky study explores a new conceptual approach to community involvement in planning that responds to contemporary critiques of participatory planning. Blue Sky projects are focused on exploring innovative ideas and concepts. This research explores a new conceptual approach that rethinks how local citizenries are involved in the politics of urban development.

We focus on the New South Wales (NSW) planning system to explore five key research questions: (1) What are the structural constraints of the NSW state government's planning systems that prevent people from getting involved in urban planning? (2) What does the community know about the planning system? (3) Do members of the community want to be involved in urban planning and development matters? (4) How do people actually participate in urban development and the planning of their city? (5) How should we design community participation in the planning of the city in light of the previous four questions?

In terms of individuals, the findings demonstrated a general lack of knowledge about the formal planning system. Many people get their information from local government and local newspapers and tend to focus on local-level urban development issues and concerns. While individuals in Sydney often focus on local-level urban development, some see a role for metropolitan-level planning in urban development. Individuals reported that gaining media attention, attending public meetings and even engaging in public protests were the most effective means of influencing planning and government decision-makers. They also preferred to use traditional rather than social media to engage with urban development issues. People in the east and in the west of the city had similar views and concerns about urban planning and development.

In terms of local resident action groups and other community organisations, we found that these groups locate critical social, political and urban knowledge with a few key individuals. Transferring knowledge between members and across the generations, and bringing younger people into these groups, was a problem for succession planning and management for these groups. Different rhythms of membership affect the efficacy and long-term viability of resident action groups and other community organisations. Retirees were over represented as stable members of these groups, and younger person membership was less stable but important for long-term political viability. The groups were also important political training grounds for future community leaders, including the next generation of young community leaders.

Therefore, these groups and organisations are important sites for building future cultural and political capital within the city.

Drawing on these findings, this study builds on critiques of the Habermasian consensus politics that currently frame contemporary models of citizen engagement. We explore alternative ways of thinking about community engagement in urban development. Unlike consensus politics, we argue that recent work on agonistic pluralism acknowledges the enduring disagreement of different stakeholders, and accounts for the unequal power relations that underpin moments of agreement. It therefore provides an alternative way of conceptualising the conflicts that exist in the urban environment as ongoing agonistic politics, which might prove to be more responsive to changes throughout the development process in the long-term. Thus, the three key political ideas explored in this report are:

*Consensus Politics – Working toward a general agreement through engagement*

*Antagonistic Politics – Active hostility mobilised through opposition*

*Agonistic Politics – Agreeing to disagree through action, dialogue and debate*

We show that different strategies and tactics are utilised by individuals and resident action groups in their attempts to influence planning and urban development processes. We outline the different levels of success of these approaches, and the ways these informal processes might better interface with the formal planning system. The groups that networked and brought together smaller short-term 'single-issue' groups reported that they were more effective political actors when they operated as 'multi-issue' and 'big-picture' groups.

We conclude the report by providing an alternate conceptual pathway that might be pursued to create more meaningful community participation in the planning and development of the city. We set out a suite of conceptual issues by asking how we might account for the fundamentally different goals of individuals and groups in the urban development process. In particular, the data from this study shows that the actions of urban citizenries are motivated by the values they bring into their urban political projects. However, for a shift from a rigid antagonistic stance to be moderated, the urban actors and politics groups have to shift from a rigid and non-negotiable set of values that are guiding and informing their action. They need to be open to a wider range of ways to understand how they and others value their city.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to explore a new conceptual approach to community engagement in planning that responds to contemporary critiques and provides a pathway to more effective democratic involvement in urban development in contemporary Australian cities. In this study, we focused on the New South Wales (NSW) planning system. In order to achieve the broad aim, we established five subsidiary research questions:

1. What are the structural constraints of the NSW state government's planning systems that prevent people from getting involved in urban planning?
2. What does the community know about the planning system?
3. Do members of the community want to be involved in urban planning and development matters?
4. How do people actually participate in urban development and the planning of their city?
5. How should we design community participation in the planning of the city in light of the previous four questions?

Community participation in planning was introduced under the EPA Act 1979 (Cook 2011). Recent trends guiding community engagement in planning have sought to include a broader range of stakeholders in the decisions that shape the planning of the city. This shift to engage the public reflects the so-called *communicative turn* in planning theory. Based on theoretical planning scholarship informed by Jürgen Habermas (1984), politicians and professional planners are increasingly institutionalising processes of engagement and participation in the formal planning system in an attempt to make urban planning and development more effective and to legitimate local voices.

In NSW, as in other Australian states and territories, the planning system now includes an explicit commitment to community engagement and participation in planning matters. Community stakeholders are invited into the formal planning process in an attempt to achieve consensus, often among dissenting voices, through a process of rational argumentation that is framed by conceptual ideas such as *communicative rationality* (Habermas 1984). However, these attempts to produce a more inclusive *consensus politics* in planning have been criticised by some scholars because it fails to adequately take into consideration the asymmetrical power relations that exist between different players in urban development (Legacy, Curtis and

Scheurer 2017; Legacy 2017; Legacy and March 2017; Rogers 2016; Schatz and Rogers 2016).

Despite commitments to engagement and participation, the power of government and developers to implement particular visions of the city is typically only marginally influenced by views from community stakeholders and other citizen and civil society groups (Rogers 2016; Schatz and Rogers 2016). Recent attempts to shift community participation to up-front strategic urban planning processes in NSW have been criticised as producing a *post-political* condition whereby dissenting voices are neutralised through inclusion (Schatz and Rogers, 2016). This process mirrors conditions in other sites where participation in planning has become an end in itself rather than a means through which meaningful changes might be incorporated in the planning process (McClymont 2014).

In order to respond to these conditions, this study starts from the position that the city is political and that community participation in the planning of the city needs to be conceptualised beyond the boundaries of the formal planning system. We are moving away from the view of urban planning as the sole site through which the city is planned, and toward a view of the city – that is, the urban environment itself – as the site and political mechanism through which the planning of the city occurs. By including the informal practices through which different actors seek to influence the planning and development of the city from outside of the formal structures of the planning process, this research investigates how individuals and groups respond to the actual and perceived limitations of the formal processes of urban planning, participation and engagement. Further, this research seeks to build on critiques (Legacy and March 2017; Rogers 2016) of the Habermasian *consensus politics* that dominate contemporary models of citizen engagement by investigating alternative approaches to participation and engagement in planning. Specifically, this research investigates new ways of applying the politics of agonistic pluralism – based on the work of Chantal Mouffe (2013) – to the politics of community engagement in urban development. Unlike consensus politics, agonistic pluralism acknowledges the enduring disagreement of different stakeholders, and the unequal power relations that underpin moments of agreement, and therefore provides a way of conceptualising the conflicts that exist in the urban environment as ongoing *agonistic politics* that might be responsive to changes throughout the development process. The three key political ideas that are explored in this report are outline below in Box 1 overleaf.

The findings from this study further unsettle the contemporary post-political moment of democratic planning in NSW by providing a possible alternate pathway towards more meaningful community participation and engagement in the planning and development of the city. The term 'post-political' is used here to describe a way of governing society in which political values and differences are replaced by a shared moral value system. Mouffe (2013) is

#### **BOX 1 - KEY IDEAS**

##### **Consensus Politics**

*Working toward a general agreement through engagement*

##### **Antagonistic Politics**

*Active hostility mobilised through opposition*

##### **Agonistic Politics**

*Agreeing to disagree through action, dialogue and debate*

Figure 1 - Key Conceptual Ideas

critical of this modality of democracy, which she calls a politics of morality whereby citizenries are called upon to cast aside their differences and come together within a politics of consensus. In the urban planning realm, the dominant value and moral systems often include the marketisation of infrastructure delivery alongside the aim of getting the citizenry to come to a consensus, often through participatory planning processes, about the plans for large-scale urban change in their city.

Within the context of the current post-political condition of planning in NSW, we explore three key themes in the discussion of the findings in Section 5, which are organised under three headings:

1. Engagement with planning and urban development (Section 4.1)
2. The space between antagonism and agonism (Section 4.2)
3. Negotiating the politics of different values in urban development (Section 4.3)

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

To develop a more democratic approach to community engagement in planning and urban development, it is first helpful to briefly outline some of the broad historical shifts in planning thinking, as seen through Australian planning and urban development. The temporal evolution and merits of various planning theories have been explored by several researchers since the 1970s (see Faludi 1973; Healey 1992; Yiftachel 1998; and Allmendinger 2009). Here, we will limit our review to tracing some of the broad strains of thought in planning theory, before turning to a discussion of the approach taken in this research.

### **2.1 Advancing Planning Theory**

Systems of rational planning traditionally privilege the rationality of the technocratic planning system over the voices of the wider community. Theories of participatory and deliberative democracy that seek to give voice to a plurality of stakeholders in democratic processes have been influential in the emergence of more democratic and participatory approaches to planning. This research follows this post-rational planning turn to pluralism, investigating the pluralist ontology of community participation in urban development. To achieve this, this section first turns to a discussion of the rational roots of the planning system before engaging with the emergence of pluralist approaches to planning – first in the form of the plural politics of Habermas based on his theory of communicative rationality, which has gained increasing prominence as a politics of consensus in planning. The argument then turns to the recent emergence of agonistic pluralism as a possible guiding approach for a new plural politics of community participation and engagement in planning. A more agonistic approach to incorporating plurality in the politics of community engagement responds to some of the limitations of the consensus politics that dominates contemporary approaches to participatory planning.

Following this discussion of political pluralism in community participation and engagement, the argument then turns to an extension of this plural ontology through consideration of ethical pluralism. Whilst consensus politics and agonistic pluralism both espouse a plural politics, they do not deal as well with the underlying and complex sets of values people bring with them when they attempt to influence urban development and negotiate with many stakeholders. The more plural and relational approaches to ethics, in the form of relational ethics and the ethics of care, offer new ways of thinking through and engaging with the plural values that underpin and influence the negotiation of plural politics. In this argument, we draw on the work of

anthropologists and their scholarship on the politics of value (and values) in order to think through the different ways stakeholders approach the ethics of participation, and the way their values influence the negotiation of the plural politics of community participation and engagement in urban development.

In short, we set out here to connect political pluralism with ethical pluralism, and our chief objective is to support a more comprehensive plural ontology of community participation in urban development. This approach, we argue, not only has implications for the way we think about democratic forms of community engagement in the planning system, but has the potential to be extended to the consideration of other 'wicked' urban problems.

### *2.1.1 Planning's Rational Roots*

Urban planning emerged in the early twentieth century as a product of modernist thinking that was linked to the concepts of democracy and progress and steeped in scientific rationality. As a response to the problems caused by rapid growth in industrialising cities, planning was an attempt to impose a 'rational mastery of the irrational'. The scholarship of the Chicago School on rational decision making, inspired by Mannheim (1960), set the intellectual basis of rational planning (Friedmann 1973, 1989; Healey 1992; Green 2009). Rational planning is the process of grasping a problem, constituting and evaluating planning criteria, and creating and implementing alternatives while monitoring the progress (Faludi 1973). Rational planning held sway in industrialising economies throughout the early twentieth century due to the explanatory power of scientific rationalism, and its utilitarian commitment to the public good. However, the intellectual dominance of rational planning came under critique in the 1960s and '70s as it became increasingly apparent that rational planning was unable to adequately respond to the needs of minority stakeholders in urban development. The earlier emphasis on the challenge of finding ways in which citizens, through acting together, could manage their collective concerns (Healey 1992, 145) shifted towards a consideration of the rights of citizens based on the democratic ideals of social justice (Rawls 1972; Harvey 1973/2009; Fainstein 2010). Further, the post-structuralist critique of modernity by Foucault and others drew attention to the ways in which rational democratic instruments and institutions of the state operated as hegemonic forces. Planning, itself, was now associated with the 'dominatory power of systematic reason' that was pursued through state bureaucracies (Healey 1992, 145).

Despite the broader critique of Chicago School positivism from the 1970s onwards (Healey, 1992), rational planning continues to dominate planning practice in Australia. Rational planning in Australia has been supplemented in more recent times by the shift to embrace neoliberal modes of urban governance and investment that privilege divestment of state control to the efficiencies of the free market. In NSW, in addition to the impact of the ideological shift to neoliberal rationales for urban development, the persistent dominance of rational planning leading up to the present can also be attributed to political imperatives, pragmatism, and even in rare cases to corruption (Schatz and Piracha, 2013; Piracha 2014; Piracha 2015).

### *2.1.2 The Communicative Turn in Planning*

The intellectual critique of rational planning has seen attempts to incorporate more representative and democratic elements into planning theory that could better account for the divergent perspectives of different stakeholders in urban planning and development. One dominant critique of rational planning that has made inroads into planning practice has its intellectual roots in the work of Jürgen Habermas. In his theory of communicative rationality, Habermas (1984) argues that reason should continue to serve as an informing principle in contemporary times. However, he also suggests that we ought to move on from the conventional subject-object conception of reason to reasoning formed through inter-subjective communication. Habermas (1987) asks us to consider practical reasoning as a shift beyond an understanding of reason as pure logic and scientific empiricism. In response to the earlier critiques of rational planning, Habermas sought to expand the realm of rationality beyond scientific 'truth' to include the thoughts and perspectives of diverse community stakeholders. His notion of 'communicative rationality' as a form of practical reasoning in his theory of communicative action (1984) has been utilised as a kind of "planning through debate" (Healey 1992, Forester 1992) whereby different stakeholders achieve consensus on planning matters through rational argumentation. By coming together and taking part in an 'ideal speech situation', governed by the norms of sincerity, truth-telling and rationality (Putnam 2002, 113), divergent views can be rationally discussed in order to produce the best possible outcome for all parties (Habermas 1984). At this moment, when the ideal speech situation is achieved, all the extant power relations that have the potential to skew a democratic outcome fade into the background as a liberal democratic consensus emerges through a process of 'communicative rationality'. Working within this expanded view on rational reasoning, Habermas posits a society where the emphasis shifts from an individualised, subject-object conception

of reason to reasoning formed within inter-subjective communication (Healey 1992). Habermas' communicative rationality has served as the basis of discursive/deliberative democracy and communicative/collaborative planning, and his ideas have been central to what is widely recognised as the 'communicative turn' in planning theory and practice (Healey 1992; 2006; Allmendinger 2009; Allmendinger & Haughton 2012; Huxley & Yiftachel 2000; McGuirk 2001).

'Consensus-seeking' modalities of community engagement, drawn from Habermas (1984), assume that a very diverse group of social actors can come together and agree on certain short and/or long-term planning visions for the future. Whilst Habermas' intention is to provide an empirically valid philosophical account of social action, one that brings together philosophy and the applied focus of the social sciences, there is growing recognition that ideals of consensus built on truthful communication, which are at the core of new models of participatory planning, are inadequate (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Fainstein, 2010).

By the early 2000s, McGuirk (2001: 198) was arguing that the communicative rationality of participatory planning was in conflict with the instrumental rationality (Horkheimer, 1974) that underwrites the technocratic power of planning professionals. Maginn (2007a) outlined tensions between deliberative democracy – the theories of which began to influence models of participatory planning (Dryzek, 2000) – and representative democracy for participatory planning. MacCallum (2008) showed the problematic relationship between participatory planning consultation data and the technocratic planning processes that are required to translate these data into planning instruments. Then turning to the emerging hybridity of neoliberal metropolitan planning in the mid 2000s, McGuirk (2005: 67) argued that there were “resilient elements of a social democratic project” within the increasing entrepreneurialism of planning governance in NSW.

Habermas himself did not argue for consensus (Habermas 1994), a point that is often lost in debates about Habermasian politics. After defining the ideal speech situation as the conditions for consensus, Habermas then goes on to note that under contemporary conditions this ideal situation cannot exist. Rather it is an ideological position at the extreme of the many possible communicative outcomes. According to Susan Fainstein (2010), in her book *The Just City*, Habermas uses the ideal speech situation as a critical standard against which processes are evaluated, as it is for many of the scholars who have attempted to use communicative action as a guide for practice (2010, 34). The ideal speech situation cannot be achieved because of what

Habermas calls the limiting effect of *complexity on democracy*. For Habermas, the complexity of modernity precludes consensus, and efforts to institutionalise consensus can only ever be partial.

Habermas' communicative rationality has also been criticised for failing to adequately account for differences in the power of different stakeholders to influence the outcomes of democratic engagement. For Fainstein (2010, 30), faith in the efficacy of open communication, which is at the core of communicative rationality, ignores the reality of structural inequalities and hierarchies of power. As she notes, the power of words depends on the power of the speakers (Fainstein 2010, 34). Mark Purcell (2009) is similarly critical of the inability to adequately account for unequal relations of power, pointing to the complicity between participatory planning processes built on communicative rationality and contemporary modes of neoliberal governance. As he asserts,

“What the neoliberal project requires are decision-making practices that are widely accepted as ‘democratic’, but that do not (or cannot) fundamentally challenge the existing relations of power. Communicative planning, insofar as it is rooted in communicative action, is just such decision-making practice” (2009, 141).

The models of participatory planning that are built on the ideals of consensus often fail to adequately account for the different levels of cultural and political capital that the various actors bring into these discussions, as well as the existing power structures within which these discussions take place. Through incorporation into formal planning processes, institutional forms of participatory planning routinely valorise consensus over diversity, and normalise the power of institutional outcomes over broader forms of social and political negotiation. Rather than resulting in more democratic planning, these processes of participation have been criticised as failing to adequately incorporate minority concerns, instead privileging the intentions of powerful actors. In the worst cases, dissenting voices have been marginalised through inclusion, in processes that treat participation as ‘a step in the development process’; a democratic step that needs to be completed before the ‘real work’ of ‘urban development’ can continue. This tick-a-box mentality treats participation as an end in itself (McClymont 2014) rather than as a means to a more democratic planning outcome, and has led to widespread disillusionment with formal participatory planning mechanisms.



### 2.1.3 *Political Pluralism: From Consensus to Agonism*

More recent scholarship on participatory planning has drawn on Chantal Mouffe's (1992, 2005) concept of agonistic pluralism to challenge, from a number of angles, the consensus-seeking epistemology of communicative action within participatory planning (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). Mouffe (1998, 1) presents agonistic pluralism as,

“A new way to think about democracy that is different from its traditional liberal conception as a negotiation among interests in which we must always allow for the possibility that conflict may appear and to provide an arena where differences can be confronted. The democratic process should supply that arena”.

We have found Chantal Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism a useful way of thinking through the limitations of contemporary consensus politics in community engagement and participation in urban development. Where consensus politics is ultimately concerned with eliminating antagonisms between different actors, through rational argumentation, to reach the best possible agreement between parties, Mouffe's agonistic pluralism contends that antagonism cannot be eliminated from social relations. These antagonisms are fundamental and persistent, and the basis of 'proper political questions' that always involve decision-making between conflicting alternatives.

A key goal of her pluralist politics is to transform antagonistic positions, which she presents as an unproductive contestation 'between enemies', into more productive agonistic positions 'between adversaries', to produce a more meaningful democratic politics. The object of Mouffe's politics is thus to transform antagonisms into agonisms. Those who remain in the antagonistic dimension remain outside of 'politics', unable to effect change. Whereas, agonism is the dimension of contestation between 'adversaries' or 'friendly enemies', where plural positionality is bent towards a negotiated outcome. It is the commitment to determine social order from divergent positions that recognises the persistence of plurality.

A central tenet of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism is the contingent nature of the negotiated outcomes of democratic processes. For Mouffe, any social order is the product of the arrangement of power relations between antagonistic parties and as such is a temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Drawing on a Gramscian notion of hegemony (see also Laclau and Mouffe 1986) any negotiated

social outcome remains susceptible to challenge from counter-hegemonic discourses and practices, which attempt to disarticulate it in an effort to install another form of hegemony. The contingent nature of hegemony underpins the need for parties to remain 'in the politics' even if they disagree with the current social and/or political outcome. By committing to ongoing agonistic engagement, a stakeholder may be able to play a more substantive role in the articulation of any subsequent rearrangement of relations of power which leads to a new hegemonic outcome.

Thus, agonistic theory has been reintroduced to theories of urban governance in an attempt to account for the inherent conflicts that frame complex planning issues (Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; McClymont, 2011; Mouat et al., 2013). These debates have traced the subtle changes in the political authority of planning departments and the technocratic power of planning professionals, and the much more significant changes in the participatory and neoliberal governance practices that have been deployed to set the planning agenda and to guide planning decision-making. In these debates, the dissident epistemology of agonistic pluralism is re-emerging to challenge the consensus-seeking epistemology of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; Mouffe, 2005). Critiques of consensus-seeking participatory planning by McClymont (2011), Legacy et al., (2014) and Rogers (2016) have shown that conflict, change and uncertainty should not be viewed as analogous with planning failure. Rather, citizen action in planning matters must be integrated into planning theory in a way that accounts for the combative relationships between stakeholders and the hybrid governance structures that make up contemporary planning systems (McGuirk, 2005; Rogers, 2016). Agonistic theory has refocused our scholarly attention to the power games and conflicts that develop between the stakeholders, as well as the communicative, economic or technocratic management processes of planners (Hillier, 2003; Mouffe, 2005).

Agonistic community engagement in planning, as we broadly understand the concept in this report, is deployed as a way of conceptualising the difficulties in achieving true consensus within participatory processes. This understanding of the concept frames the informal urban politics that might intersect with formal planning matters in a way that accounts for the different levels of cultural and political capital that the various actors bring to their urban politics; as well as the existing power structures within which this urban politics take place.

#### 2.1.4 *From Antagonism to Agonism*

Mouffe points to the transition from antagonism to agonism as a way of achieving a more effective democratic politics. As a part of this research we sought to trace the transition from antagonism to agonism as a way of testing Mouffe's argument empirically. There is currently little empirical knowledge about the conditions that might precipitate such a transition from antagonism to agonism in the urban development political sphere.

In order to better understand and analyse the transition from antagonism to agonism in urban development politics, we introduce three analytic categories: rigid antagonism; soft antagonism; and, strategic antagonism. Taking these three modalities in turn, *rigid antagonism* reflects a position typically underpinned by a moral intransigence, where antagonism denies plurality and privileges a political position based on non-negotiable moral values. The example of 'NIMBY'-ism (i.e., not in my backyard) whereby individuals and groups resist urban change as an imposition on the status quo may conform to such a rigid antagonistic modality. In such cases, any change to the status quo, whether negotiated or imposed, comes to be perceived as normatively negative because it interrupts a rigid sense of local community.

*Soft antagonism*, in contrast, reflects an antagonistic position that accepts a plurality of different views but remains unable to effect political change. Like agonism, a soft antagonistic modality stresses a commitment to the shared ethico-political values that inform political association and underpin negotiated urban development outcomes. What renders soft antagonism distinct from agonism is that this expressed commitment to shared ethico-political values is not matched by substantive involvement in the 'politics'. That is, despite having a commitment to negotiate in good faith, the soft antagonistic position remains outside of the negotiations of power relations that will underpin the articulation and disarticulation of hegemony. It is thus a transitional position between rigid antagonism and a true expression of agonism.

Finally, *strategic antagonism* is the performance of antagonism from within 'politics'. It is more correctly seen as a modality of agonism, as it seeks to bring into being a counter hegemony, but does so by moving outside of existing formal political institutions and protocols. That is, it is a strategic intervention that takes place outside of the formal political process that nevertheless aims to further negotiations taking place within the formal political processes that have been self-consciously designed to effect an urban development outcome.

These modalities of antagonism extend on Mouffe's presentation of antagonism and agonism to provide a measure of analytical clarity in the empirical analysis of the transition from antagonism to agonism in urban development politics by allowing the positionality of individuals and groups in urban development politics to be more clearly articulated.

### *2.1.5 Ethical Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Value*

The approaches of both Habermas and Mouffe provide ways of responding to the limitations of rational planning. Their commitment to political pluralism accounts for the presence of divergent voices in the politics of urban development. In this research, we wish to extend this plural ontology through consideration of ethical pluralism. Whilst consensus politics and agonistic pluralism both rely on a commitment to political pluralism, they deal less well with the underlying complex of values that influence the negotiation of outcomes among different and divergent stakeholders in urban development. The attempt here is to connect political pluralism with ethical pluralism – to support a more comprehensive plural ontology of community participation in urban development.

More plural and relational approaches to ethics, in the form of relational ethics and the ethics of care, offer new ways of thinking through and engaging with the plural values that underpin and influence the negotiation of plural politics. In this argument, we draw specifically on anthropologists' work on the politics of value (and values) in order to think through the different ways stakeholders approach the ethics of participation and the way their values influence the negotiation of the politics of community participation and engagement in urban development.

Continuing the focus here on Mouffe's agonistic pluralism, in order to better understand what might precipitate the shift from antagonism to agonism in the politics of urban development, it is helpful to discuss what we mean when we talk about 'value' and 'values'. Theories of value are surprisingly under-explored in the social sciences, with discussion often limited to classical and neoclassical debates about the fundamental worth of something that can be universalised in markets of exchange. In this report, we draw on alternate theories of value, particularly from the work of anthropologists Appadurai (1986) and Graeber (2001; 2005; 2013) who have theorised a more 'cultural' response to economic theories of labour value, use and exchange, in order to think through the ways in which we can respond to multiple, diverse and incommensurable valuations of urban phenomena. Through investigation

of different regimes, or spheres, of value, and the nature of the 'universes' within which these values and valuations makes sense, their analysis helps us understand the nature of antagonism in processes of community engagement and participation in planning and urban development. By identifying the plural values that drive community mobilisation and the politics of community engagement we can observe and map how values are tied to the transition from antagonism to agonism.

Value pluralism, as first put forward by Isaiah Berlin, determines that there is a plurality of radically distinct or incommensurable values. This stands in contrast to universalist, or monist, value systems that profess to form the basis of all other values (e.g., justice within rational consensus). With regards to the question of the conditions under which mutual respect can be observed, value pluralism allows for a kind of meta-respect through the realisation of what Crowder calls *the principle of respect for plurality* (Crowder 2014; see also Nussbaum's 2000 capabilities approach). That is, rather than seeking a shared ethico-political position between radically different groups as the basis for mutuality, it is possible for an individual or group to respect the values of another group, even if they are different from their own. When this occurs between groups, the possibility for mutuality is realised.

Fainstein appeals initially to value pluralism in the form of the ethics of care as the way to progress towards a more just city. The ethics of care, derived from the work of Carol Gilligan (1977), Nel Noddings (1982) and, more recently, Virginia Held (2006), unsettles universal notions of justice that are at the core of consensus politics by appealing to relational values – that our relationships to others (other things, or other people) impact upon our ethical standpoints in order to produce plural value frames.

In order to analyse the values of resident action groups/community groups in our case study sites we have turned to these ethnographic or anthropological theories of value. Here the discussion of value is not about accounting for or deducing the absolute value of urban phenomena. This has long been a project of classical and then neoclassical theories of value, where the aim has been, ultimately, to find universal and comparative frameworks through which value could be understood, and through this render with clarity the processes of use and exchange which mark fundamental economic relations. Ours is not an economic argument about value (although economic considerations provide momentum to the argument). Rather, this is an argument about the subjective and incommensurable nature of value as it is deployed and realised, and how we might utilise value (and values) to produce a better understanding of the arrangements of power at work in urban development contexts.

The discussion of value mobilised here follows on from Appadurai's (1986) notion of *regimes of value*, which resists the reductive imperative of classical and neoclassical value theories in order to provide a theoretical container for different and incommensurable valuations. That is, Appadurai commits to a value pluralism in contrast to other universalist and monist approaches to value. He does this not to disable comparability, but to enable a new way of thinking about the way we value phenomena that is not reducible purely to its 'worth' in a system of exchange. One aim of this research, then, is to not only identify a range of ways value is deployed in particular contexts, but also to try and make use of these, sometimes incommensurable, valuations to better understand urban decision making, without feeling the need to reduce the value of urban phenomena to some universal currency.

Identification of the different regimes of value in operation and the different audiences that variously subscribe to these regimes of value associated with community participation in urban development processes provides empirical insights into the entrenched antagonisms and successful agonistic engagements in the politics of urban development, and, importantly, provides new ways of understanding the moments of transition from one to the other. Having outlined the conceptual basis for this study, we now move on to positioning the regulatory environment and the more applied planning practices that shape urban development within this conceptual framing.

#### *2.1.6 Participation Beyond the Planning System*

In this report, we conceptualise formal and informal community action in the urban politics of the city as a civic process that acknowledges and accounts for the structural constraints of the NSW planning system, but also includes the many informal planning processes and actors that contribute to planning governance and the broader planning of the city. Planning practice is shaped as much by regulatory frameworks and planning decisions as it is by the diverse interests and ideologies of planning professionals, interested citizens, advocacy groups, politicians and other social actors (Rogers and Schatz, 2013; Schatz and Piracha, 2013; Rogers, 2016). For planning to be more inclusive of diverse community interests, the planning process must be conceptualised as a dynamic governance system, a negotiable set of formal and informal planning agendas and regulatory practices, rather than a formal and stable governance system that is managed from the top down (Gleeson, 2006; Grant et al., 2011; McGuirk, 2005; NSW Government, 2013b; Pillora and McKinlay, 2011; Prior and Herriman, 2010; Ratcliff et al., 2010). Planning, understood as a set of

contestable technocratic regulatory practices, which considers formal and informal external community and business input, manifests through the activities of an entire civic-political system. Conceptualising the contemporary planning system as 'always provisional' and as a contested political process goes some way in accounting for the high frequency of regulatory planning change in NSW. Indeed, the NSW planning system has been in a perpetual state of regulatory transformation and any model of community engagement must be compatible with the regulatory provisionality (NSW Department of Planning, 2005; NSW Government, 2005a; 2010; 2011; 2013b).

Community members participate in planning governance through a very diverse suite of political processes. It is not only through formal strategic planning or development assessment consultation that community members seek to contribute to the planning of their cities and neighbourhoods. It is also through more informal political lobbying and political party activities, engagement with the media, local resistance and other variegated political activities that members of the public and the private sector use to seek planning change (Rogers, 2016). Urban planning scholars have argued that a broader suite of empirical data is needed to understand the diverse methods that community members and industry actors use to influence planning when it is understood as a contested political process. For example, Rogers (2014; 2016) argues that community involvement in planning has been enabled in Sydney via local-level citizen-driven activist spaces, which local residents create and support in the name of realising localised planning benefits for local residents. Studies in other Australian states have found similar extra-government political processes are at play (Maginn, 2007b; Mouat et al., 2013). There are certainly limitations and contradictions in these approaches to planning intervention. Self-interest, such as entrenchment of privilege (e.g., of low-density living close to the city) by the locals, is a common example. However, they also require us to reconsider the possibilities of citizen-driven action that holds powerful urban actors, politicians and professional planners to account (Legacy, 2015; Rogers 2016). Local-level citizen-driven action unsettles normative assumptions that fix the role of government in participatory planning and begs the question, *who is best placed to create participatory planning political spaces?* This question needs to consider formal and informal political action. It also needs to consider the underlying theoretical assumptions about the power and politics of negotiating agreement and difference in the city.

Recent studies have shown there can be a utility in more informal, citizen-created political processes, and this forces us to think about the more informal political spaces

that can be opened up by citizens to engage with urban development and planning issues. These spaces are not only to be defined by the state, or structured by citizen-state relations; they can also be assembled in extra-state spaces and through new configurations of citizen, state, media, business and academia relations (Rogers 2016). The more informal political spaces that citizens create for themselves can operate alongside the formal political spaces that are created by government planners (see the following publications from this project for extended discussions about these points; McAuliffe and Rogers forthcoming; Schatz and Rogers, 2016; Rogers, 2016). This study is innovative in the way it conceptualises community engagement as a broader civic process that acknowledges and accounts for the structural constraints of the NSW planning system, the apparent apathy and/or misunderstanding of planning concerns and processes by citizens, and the many extra-planning system (i.e., informal) actors that contribute to planning governance in NSW (Rogers, 2013; 2016). Rather than focus on an analysis of the existing suite of formal participatory planning models of governments, this study analyses the civic, political and social context within which these tools of community engagement and/or participatory planning have been developed, deployed and practised. The aim is to establish a set of conceptual themes that need to be considered before designing and developing participatory planning *within* the complex civic, political and social contexts that exist in NSW. Central to this framing is the acknowledgement that much planning agenda-setting and decision-making is influenced by factors that originate from outside of the formal planning system, such as industry and citizen pressure groups, local resident action groups, politician intervention and even corruption (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; Legacy, 2015; McClymont, 2011; McGuirk, 2001; Rogers, 2016; Rogers and Schatz, 2013; Ratcliff et al., 2010; Albrechts, 2006; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Meadowcroft, 2001).

Having briefly outlined the broad conceptual landscape and its relationship to the more applied planning practices, this section ends with a consideration of the practical structural conditions that frame the NSW planning system to further demonstrate the need for new ways of approaching participation in urban development.

## **2.2 Community Participation in the NSW Planning System**

As we noted above, the NSW planning system is in a perpetual state of regulatory transformation and any model of community engagement must be compatible with this provisionality (NSW Department of Planning, 2005; NSW Government, 2005; 2010; 2011;2013). Despite increasing political rhetoric about the benefits of both citizen and



private sector participation in planning, it remains unclear how technocratic, participatory and private sector (i.e., neoliberal) planning might work together as an intersecting set of governance processes in planning practice (Schatz and Rogers, 2016).

In their theoretical forms, each of these governance processes dictates a different source of power in terms of planning agenda-setting and decision-making. While different interests are involved in all three, in simplistic terms: in a technocratic system elected politicians defer some of their power to planning professionals; in a participatory system power is redistributed to local citizens; and in neoliberal planning the private sector has a formal role in infrastructure delivery and seeks to influence planning agenda-setting and decision-making (Maginn, 2007a; 2007b; McGuirk, 2001; 2005; Meadowcroft, 2001; Rogers, 2016; Schatz and Rogers, 2016). As we have outlined in greater detail in other places (Rogers, 2016; Schatz and Rogers, 2016), these three governance processes do not fit neatly together. The fundamental theoretical tensions amongst them means that efforts to recruit the private sector and local citizens as key actors in the planning system have been problematic in practice in NSW (Rogers, 2016; Schatz and Rogers, 2016).

Since 2005 in NSW, there has been a sustained effort by the state government (NSW Government, 2005c; 2005a; 2005d; 2005b; 2005e; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2013b; 2013a) to reframe planning policy in terms of ideals around participatory governance. Documents such as the 2010 *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy Review* and the 2011 *NSW State Plan* marked the utopian plateau in the discourse about the involvement of local citizenries, with the *NSW State Plan* calling for the returning of “planning powers to the community and giv[ing] people a say on decisions that affect them” (NSW Government, 2011: 6). It was unclear if the government was suggesting that they planned to delegate some of the technocratic agenda-setting and decision-making powers of their professional planners to the local ‘community’. And if they did attempt such a transfer, how this might work in practice was also unknown. The *NSW State Plan* states that “Essential to our strong democracy...[is] enabling citizens to critique government services, and finding more ways to involve people in government decision making... Making it easier for citizens to interact with government through modern, innovative and engaging tools” (NSW Government, 2011: 55-58). Each of these suggestions (that is, critiquing government services, involving citizens in decision-making and interacting with citizens via new media tools) is underwritten by different ideas about the potential agenda-setting and decision-making power of citizens.

'Critiquing' the government – by, for instance, citizens monitoring government planning decisions through freedom of information (GIPA) legislation – does not necessarily require a fundamental restructuring of technocratic planning governance. Governments 'interacting with citizens via new media tools' equally does not necessarily involve the devolution of agenda-setting and/or decision-making power to citizens (NSW Government, 2011: 55-58). In short, governments can implement both of these governance processes without undermining the technocratic power of their planning professionals. However, 'involving citizens in decision-making' would require a fundamental restructuring of the representative system of government that currently frames planning governance in NSW (NSW Government, 2011: 55-58).

The latest round of planning reforms in NSW highlights that, despite the State Government's rhetoric about 'involving citizens in decision-making,' the government is amending the structure of the planning system to favour the input of private sector actors over local citizens. In the proposed planning legislation, an emphasis has been placed on streamlining the planning process in the name of stimulating economic development. For example, planning reform has been heavily focused on 'speeding up' development assessment in order to increase the supply of housing. This is accomplished, in part, by limiting the ability of the public to have input on an increasing number of 'lower impact' complying and code-assessable developments. For instance, after the NSW State Government's recent attempt to increase the number of code-assessable developments through an overhaul of the planning system failed, it instead expanded the categories of so-called 'complying developments' under the existing *State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Development Codes) 2008*. For complying developments, neighbours are 'notified' of a proposed complying development, but they have no input into whether or not a complying development certificate is ultimately issued.

The assumption is that any public 'input' happened when the standards against which complying developments are assessed were adopted. Expansion of complying development, which would have happened to an even greater degree under the failed overhaul of the planning system, illustrates the NSW State Government's desire to confine the bulk of public participation 'up-front' during the creation of long-term strategic plans. Once these plans become law, a proposed development that meets the agreed-upon standards must be approved as of right. While many have applauded the government's commitment to public involvement in long-term strategic planning, little attention has been paid to the structural constraints that may limit the efficacy of

'front-end' public participation in the new planning system. It is not clear whether the public will have the capacity – for instance, in terms of prior or current knowledge – or even the desire to engage in long-term strategic planning exercises, as their only option for input. Furthermore, this very narrow conceptualisation of community engagement is not reflective of the diverse methods that are drawn upon by community members, pressure groups and others to influence planning and urban development matters. Having discussed the broad theoretical, political and planning context the next section outlines the methodology that was developed for the study.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

To identify some of the pathways to a more effective democratic involvement of stakeholders in urban development in contemporary Australian cities we need a better understanding of the contemporary experience of these different stakeholders in urban development processes. As noted above, the assumption that urban development is a product of rational planning fails to consider both the limitations of rational planning and the actions of stakeholders beyond the formal planning system. As such, to understand the dynamic nature of community engagement in contemporary urban development, we need to investigate community participation in urban development both within and outside of the planning system. This research is distinctive in that it is not limited to an investigation of formal planning engagement processes. Instead, it seeks to gain knowledge of the workings of the broader politics of community engagement in planning and urban development, involving both government initiated community participation through the planning system and the actions of individuals and groups from outside of this system. In both cases their actions are taken in order to influence or achieve particular planning and/or urban development outcomes.

For the purposes of this research, this study was limited to the investigation of community involvement in urban development in the NSW context. There is limited current empirical data about general public knowledge of the NSW planning system or their willingness to participate in planning matters. Schatz and Piracha (2013) completed a small pilot study in 2012, which randomly surveyed 35 Sydney residents about their knowledge of, experiences with and attitudes towards the NSW planning system in six Sydney suburbs. Only 21% of respondents correctly identified the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* as the legislation governing planning in NSW. With respect to when they would want to participate, the vast majority of respondents (88%) indicated a desire to be involved in the development assessment stages of planning. These findings, amongst others (see: Schatz, 2013), raise concerns that the NSW State Government's 'front-ending' of public participation may in fact be relegating the efficacy and impact of citizen participation to the background. More empirical data is required to better understand the needs of the general public in relation to the governance of urban planning in NSW.

To develop this understanding, we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to address the project aims. A representative survey of NSW residents was undertaken to gain insight into community knowledge of planning matters and urban

development more generally, as well as their actions taken in response to this knowledge. The survey was developed to collect data on how the community wants to participate in urban development matters, including both formal and informal engagement methods, from non-standard government channels – such as direct lobbying of councils and politicians – and through to citizen-initiated actions, such as protests and other coordinated resident action.

In early November 2015, we commissioned a research company to distribute an online survey to a representative sample of the NSW population. Through this survey, we determined the respondents' knowledge of the planning system, how they would like to be involved in urban development matters – including developments that were proposed inside and outside of the respondent's immediate neighbourhood – and how they currently participate in planning, both within and outside of the formal planning system. We received 1000 responses from respondents evenly spread across age, gender and postcode. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was comprised of 25 questions, including a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions. With the exception of questions aimed to gain information about the respondents' knowledge of the planning system, we intentionally avoided crafting our questions around experiences with and desire to participate in the formal planning system. Instead, we formed our questions around how respondents participated in urban development at various scales and the types of urban development in which they would want to have a say. We used plain English and everyday 'real life' scenarios, where we could, to develop the survey questions, rather than rely on technical urban planning language and formal questions about the regulatory structures of the planning system. Therefore, the overall rationale for the survey was that more empirical data was needed about: whether the general public in NSW is willing to be involved in planning and urban development matters; how and why they would like to be involved; and the level at which they see their involvement as being most effectively directed (e.g. one-off or ongoing, strategic or development assessment level).

The second phase of the research involved a series of focus groups with community groups and local resident action groups engaged with planning and broader urban development issues in NSW to determine how their individual members, and the groups as collectives, participate in planning and urban development matters. The rationale for the focus groups was that more empirical data is needed about how members of the general public participate in planning matters both within and outside

of government-sanctioned community engagement processes. The focus groups were intended to provide insights into the way individuals and groups operate in and around the formal processes of participation and engagement, which often fail to adequately acknowledge and address the concerns of minority dissenting stakeholders in urban development processes. A focus group methodology allowed for the collection of qualitative data about the decision-making and agenda-setting processes of individuals and groups who commented that their formal pathways for engagement were inadequate. This data was an important supplement for the qualitative survey data, and the focus groups were designed to identify the presence of community politics beyond the formal planning system. With respect to the desire to identify and develop a new conceptual approach to community engagement in planning, the focus groups were designed to elucidate the different strategies and tactics used by resident action groups in their attempts to influence the urban development process, their reported levels of success with these different approaches, and the ways these informal processes might better interface with the formal planning system.

Finally, an expert panel comprised of 20 participants was convened in Parramatta in April 2016 to further analyse the focus group findings in relation to the structural capacity of the NSW planning system for incorporating general public input. The rationale for this stage in the methodology was that more empirical attention needs to be placed on the structural constraints of the planning system. This builds on the participatory planning scholarship that has been directed toward analyses of the efficacy of participation tools, the events and electronic spaces that are created to facilitate community participation, and how this fits within or forms a part of the planning system. The expert panel took the form of an investigative panel that was designed by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), which "...bring[s] about direct engagement between experts from the research and policy communities (and potentially practitioners from industry and community sectors) to interrogate a specific policy or practice question" (AHURI, 2013: 1 and 39). The expert panel, consisting of planning academics, peak planning professional body employees, professional development assessment and strategic planners and community group members, was presented with the preliminary findings from the survey and focus groups. The analysis presented to the expert panel included preliminary synthesis of data into a set of key ideas that might underwrite a new model of community engagement, which moves beyond consensus-seeking and intra-planning system participatory planning. The research team used the outputs from the investigative panel discussions to further develop the analysis of the focus group and survey data

in order to begin to theorise a new conceptual approach to community engagement in urban development in contemporary Australian cities.

Table 1 - Summary of research aims, data sources and analysis

Research Aim	Data Sources	Analysis
What are the structural constraints of the NSW state governments' planning systems that prevent people from getting involved in urban planning?	Representative survey Focus groups	Computer assisted analysis of the survey material. Computer assisted qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts.
What does the community know about the planning system?	Representative survey Focus groups	Computer assisted analysis of the survey material. Computer assisted qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts.
Do members of the community want to be involved in urban planning and development matters?	Representative survey Focus groups	Computer assisted analysis of the survey material. Computer assisted qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts.
How do people participate in urban development and the planning of their city?	Focus groups Investigative panel Planning legislation and state planning policy documents	Computer assisted qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts. Desk-based analysis of the planning legislation and state planning policy documents to determine the legal constraints on community participation. The preliminary findings from the survey and focus groups were analysed by an investigative panel.
How should we design community participation in the planning of the city in light of the previous four questions?	Investigative panel Findings and data from the survey, focus groups and Investigative Panel	Desk-based analysis of the investigative panel notes. Desk-based analysis that applied agonistic pluralism theory to the participatory planning and community engagement data that was generated in this study.



Table 2 - Summary of research methods, cohort selection and delivery

Research Method	Cohort	Recruitment and/or Delivery Methods
Representative survey of NSW population	1000 persons	Randomly sampled by a research company. Undertaken by Internet survey.
Focus groups	4 × 2-hour focus groups: At least 8 persons per focus group Total = 36 persons	We recruited members from local community groups engaged in planning matters in two locations: Central Sydney (2 × focus groups) Western Sydney (2 × focus groups)
Investigative panel	20 participants including: - 4 planning academics - 4 professional DA planners - 4 community group members - 4 peak planning professional body employees - 4 professional strategic planners	The preliminary findings from the survey and focus groups will be presented to and analysed by an investigative panel.
Desk-based analysis	Survey, focus group and investigate panel data.	All the empirical data.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This discussion draws on the research findings from the resident action groups, the survey of the NSW population and the expert panel that was outlined above.

### 4.1 Engagement with Planning and Urban Development

In broad terms, the participants in our study suggested that planning reforms in NSW were reinforcing neoliberal practices in the planning system. This was one of the factors that led to the proposal that large proportions of the community participation process associated with urban development projects should be pushed to the initial strategic planning phase (NSW Government, 2013b). In the context of the increasing emphasis on upfront community participation processes, our participants reported that the treatment of community voices relied on the centrality of consensus politics within participatory planning regimes. A common concern expressed by participants was that by providing an ‘upfront’ consultation process that is far removed from the actual development outcome, many powerful actors in the city, such as property developers, have effectively rendered less palpable, even silenced in some cases, large sections of community opposition and critique. So even though in many cases these residents and community groups had the opportunity to participate in numerous upfront, online, or regulatory community planning processes, they felt they were effectually being excluded from the politics of urban development through the offer of inclusion in a tightly scripted ‘upfront’ consensus process of community engagement.

As outlined above, Mouffe’s critique of Habermasian communicative theory, in the form of her theory of agonistic pluralism, is useful for this discussion. Mouffe’s suite of conceptual tools allows us to look beyond the consensus community engagement political moment in NSW planning and to recognise more fully the differential role of power relations in this politics. To achieve a productive agonistic urban politics, the rigid antagonisms that exist in urban politics need to be moderated, to some degree, to more mutable and dynamic adversarial positions. However, as we noted above, there is little knowledge about the conditions that might precipitate such a transition from antagonism to agonism in the urban development political sphere.

In the discussion that follows, we explore the potential role that agonistic, rather than purely antagonistic, positions to urban politics might play in the rearrangement of power relations in urban development. Doing so allows us to trace some of the transitions that resident action groups and their members undergo in order to influence urban development politics. Here we follow Mouffe’s conception of politics

as the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order (Mouffe 2012, 2). This includes actions and discourses that take place both within and outside of the formal consensus-seeking politics that are typical of contemporary community engagement practices. Value theory provides one way of analysing the transitions from rigid antagonisms towards the potentially more productive adversarial politics of agonistic pluralism. To explore these themes the discussion of the findings is divided into three sections:

- 1 Engagement with planning and urban development
- 2 The space between antagonism and agonism
- 3 The politics of values in urban development

#### 4.1.1 Knowledge of the Planning System

Presumably, to be able to participate fully in formal community consultations, residents need to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the planning system. When the NSW State Government asks residents for their views on the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act*, as they did in the recent attempts to overhaul the planning system, this assumes that the public are familiar

with that Act and the planning system it establishes. However, it appears that this is not an accurate assumption. Overall, respondents to our online survey demonstrated a poor understanding of the details of the NSW planning system, including its governing legislation. Echoing findings from Schatz and Piracha's (2013) pilot survey, only 15% of respondents identified the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* as the most relevant legislation for town planning in NSW. Fifty three percent were unsure, while 32% thought the most relevant legislation was either the *Local Government Act, 1993* or the *New South Wales Planning Act, 1984* (a fictitious act invented by the survey team). In contrast, members of resident action groups in the focus groups described the necessity to improve their knowledge of the formal planning instruments of the state in order to improve the efficacy of their engagement around planning and development concerns. According to one member of a resident action group in a disadvantaged area of southwest Sydney,

#### BOX 2 - KEY FINDING

Individuals reported a general lack of knowledge about the formal planning system

Figure 2 - Knowledge of the Planning System

*“So the Council had one consultation and some of the resident action group couldn't attend that meeting but residents did attend and it was very clear to all of us that we didn't really know what - well I mean some of us knew about the differences between, for instance a development application and a zoning decision, but there were some people there who didn't know the difference. Now there was no reason why they should know the difference because until you're involved in it in some way, then there's a million other things in your life”*  
(Participant M, Focus Group in Western Sydney).

In terms of knowledge about who the key decision-makers in the planning process are, which in turn might influence a resident's knowledge of the appropriate 'scale' at which to direct their input, while 32% of respondents to the survey correctly identified local government as the main level of government responsible for strategic planning at the LGA level, 35% were unsure and 33% identified either the Federal or State government. In the area of development assessment, when asked to select from a range of options (and participants could select more than one option): 53% identified local government as having the primary responsibility for assessing developments within the respondent's LGA; 32% were unsure who has primary responsibility; and 43% identified a mix of local government and other bodies, including the Commonwealth Government. These findings indicate that there is a general lack of knowledge about the formal planning system on the part of NSW residents that could, in turn, negatively impact both the quantity and quality of participation in formal consultation processes. Many of those more directly involved in citizen advocacy and action through resident action groups described a necessary process of self-education in order to allow them to better engage with local government on development issues. Through a process of self-education and networked sharing among members of different groups, individuals perceived that they had increased their ability to 'cut-through' the red-tape that many saw as a barrier to effective community engagement. Importantly, these community 'representatives' recognised that through this process of education in the workings of the formal planning system, they were accessing and interrupting systems of knowledge and privilege that are not well-understood by other people.

More research is needed to understand the barriers to effective knowledge sharing concerning Local and State planning processes. The survey findings might be the result of people seeing the planning system as overly complex and ever-changing (i.e., provisional). In addition, they might reflect people's concerns about being largely

limited to local and immediate urban developments that are threatening their property values and living environments (see below). Equally, these findings could indicate a general disinterest in the formal processes of planning. When people identified a desire to learn about the planning system, as was the case with resident action groups who participated in the focus groups, the technocratic nature of the system was identified as a significant barrier for the general public; a barrier that was overcome through gaining planning system-specific expertise.

#### 4.1.2 Different Scales of Gathering Knowledge

In our online survey, in order to shed light on where people source information about 'changes' to their urban environment the respondents were asked to rank the importance of a number of methods (neighbours, local

newspapers, metropolitan newspapers, talk-back radio, television, lobby groups, local government and state government)

they use for gathering information about changes in the city (1= least important; 5=most important). The data shows, respondents tended to gain their information about citywide urban development from local sources as opposed to broader information sources. The most important source of information for respondents was local government (average value = 3.51), followed closely by local newspapers (average value = 3.44) and state government (average value = 3.40). The least important source was talk-back radio (average value = 2.68). When the question was changed to ask where respondents gain information about changes in their immediate neighbourhood, local newspapers (average value = 3.66) and local government (average value = 3.53) again emerged as the two most important answers, followed by neighbours (average value = 3.25). It is perhaps unsurprising that people would turn to local sources of information about neighbourhood-level issues. It is more revealing that they also tend to turn to local sources for metropolitan-wide issues. Respondents might be assessing metropolitan development issues in relation to the impacts these developments could have on their local areas. As shown below, several local resident action groups frequently contacted journalists and targeted local news outlets (see, for example, Section 4.2.4: *Performances of Antagonism*), and one group even fed information to other urban actors with the stated intent to diversify the

#### BOX 3 - KEY FINDING

Individuals reported that they get their urban development information from local government and local newspapers

Figure 3 - Different Scales of Gathering Knowledge

discussion beyond their own organisation (see Section 4.2.5: *Agonistic Networks and Arrangements of Power*).

#### 4.1.3 Preference for Local Involvement and Local Concerns

Our survey found that, in terms of scale, people tend to focus on local-level concerns and they are more motivated to participate in planning and urban development matters at the local level. This indicates that it will be difficult for government in terms of conducting formal consultation processes for metropolitan-level long-term strategic plans that

‘represent’ the views of the entire metropolitan area. In terms of

respondents’ previous experience with

urban development matters, over half (56%) of respondents had contacted local council about proposed changes to their home/property and a quarter of respondents had submitted a development application to a council or a private certifier. In terms of ranking what would motivate respondents to participate in an urban development campaign, respondents were most strongly motivated to participate in matters impacting neighbourhood character. For example, 53% of respondents chose “local community’s concerns” over the metropolitan-level, and “accommodating a growing population” as the more important consideration in deciding what should get built. It seems the “local” neighbourhood level is the scale of predominant interest for the people of NSW in matters related to urban planning and development, likely reflecting a level of self-interest. They also seem to largely associate planning matters with local councils.

#### 4.1.4 Metropolitan Level Developments Still Important

Although nearly half of respondents to our online survey (48%) favoured local council being the decision-maker for a contested proposed development, over one-quarter

#### BOX 4 - KEY FINDING

Individuals reported that they get their urban development information from local government and local newspapers.

They were also concerned about local matters.

Figure 5 - Local Involvement and Local Concerns

#### BOX 5 - KEY FINDING

Individuals tend to focus on local-level development, with fewer seeing a role for metro-level planning decision making.

Figure 4 - Metropolitan Level Developments

of respondents thought that this task should fall to a metropolitan planning authority. Notably, only 1% chose “politicians” as the desired decision-makers, possibly suggesting that people want planning decisions to be made by experts, divorced from party politics. Therefore, over a quarter of respondents see some role for the metropolitan level in development assessment. In addition, when asked to choose which types of development – for instance, a house being constructed, a few apartments being built, a new warehouse being constructed, etc. – respondents were asked if they wanted to have a say at the local, LGA and metropolitan level. The results varied between, at the low end, 20% wanting to have a say about a ‘group home’ being constructed in the wider metropolitan area and 65% wanting to have a say in a new form of transport being constructed in the wider metropolitan area. In fact, the majority of respondents indicated that they want to have a say in transport issues at all scales, but the desire was strongest at the metro scale. Transport, like local urban development, touches people’s lives directly. We surmise that people understandably take notice of and interest in the urban planning development matters that relate to their lives directly, again reflecting a level of self-interest.

#### 4.1.5 Modes of Engagement

The results of our survey show that the public sees more ‘antagonistic’ forums as being the most able to influence planning and government decision-makers. This may reflect a level of frustration with the ability of citizens to influence decisions through formal consultation processes. As mentioned above, over half of

respondents had some experience with either contacting a local council about proposed changes to their home/property or submitting a development application to a council or a private certifier. Therefore, many of the respondents had previously “engaged” with the planning system as a potential developer. However, when asked to rank the ability of various methods to influence how governments build cities (1 = least influence; 5 = most influence), media attention (average value = 3.39), public protest (average value = 3.38) and public meetings (average value = 3.38) were chosen by respondents as being the most effective at influencing government decision-makers. Importantly, two of these (media attention and public protest) involve

#### BOX 6 - KEY FINDING

Individuals reported that gaining media attention, attending public meetings and even protesting were the most effective means of influencing planning and government decision-making.

Figure 6 - Modes of Engagement

participation outside of the formal planning system. Social media was ranked last (average value = 3.09) in terms of its ability to influence government decision-makers.

The data indicates tacit and widespread understanding that the politics of urban development extends beyond the formal politics of community participation and engagement. The public thus demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the role of strategic antagonism in the politics of urban development. That is, there is recognition that in order to influence the politics of urban development stakeholders may need to operate both within and beyond the formal political process in order to achieve their desired goals. Again, people's preferred modes of community engagement may reflect their lack of confidence in the formal engagement mechanism related to planning and development processes. This data supports the position that the public believe that formal engagement is tokenistic and ineffective.

#### 4.1.6 Social Versus Traditional Media

In trying to determine how people participate in discussions about urban development, either within or outside of formal engagement processes, we wanted to assess how the public uses social media. We deemed this important given that it is a tool that is increasingly used by the government and by lobby groups to engage with the public around planning and urban development issues. As discussed above, traditional media

#### BOX 7 - KEY FINDING

Individuals prefer to use traditional rather than social media to engage with urban development processes.

Those who did use social media preferred to use Facebook.

Figure 7 - Social Versus Traditional Media

was ranked highly by respondents in terms of its perceived ability to influence government decision-makers, while social media was ranked least able to influence government development decisions. It is not surprising, then, that when asked whether respondents had used social media to discuss city development issues, 61% of respondents had not. Of the remaining 39% who had, 51% turned to Facebook as their preferred social media platform, while 49% used either Twitter, Instagram, commented on articles, or chose "other". Therefore, while social media is not seen to be as effective as more "traditional" media in influencing planning and urban development outcomes, Facebook is where our respondents placed most of their discussion about urban development issues.



#### 4.1.7 Spatial Analysis of the Survey Responses

In attempting to gauge whether people's views on participation in urban development varied according to where they lived, responses to a number of the online survey questions were mapped spatially. The mapping was carried out for the mean (strength) of responses at the

postcode level. The mean responses for each postcode were calculated as a weighted average of the number of

responses and their preferences (1 to 5). Mapping was carried out to see if there was a marked spatial difference in response in various regions of the metropolitan area. We were particularly interested in any spatial differences between the east and west of the city because these two spatial regions are often assumed to have different levels of social, cultural and political capital, which they can bring to bear on planning and development issues. Little variation was evident in these maps. However, the eastern, inner-central and other more affluent parts of the metropolitan area seem to have a much stronger belief in and preference for using media and lobbying politicians as effective methods to influence how governments build cities. This perhaps reflects a higher level of confidence and connectedness with power and influence in those parts of the city, and therefore challenges the assumption that everyone can and does participate in urban politics with similar levels of skills, knowledge and power. The relatively higher preference for use of mechanisms outside the formal politics of community engagement in areas of assumed higher social capital (in terms of a range of education, language and labour market measures) indicates that the ability to take part in strategic antagonism may be linked to social capital and perceptions of the right to access politics.

#### BOX 8 - KEY FINDING

Individuals in the east and in the west of the city had similar views and concerns about urban planning and development.

Figure 8 - Spatial Analysis of the Survey

#### 4.2 The Space between Antagonism and Agonism

Shifting focus from the context-setting results of the online survey, this section of the analysis draws primarily on the results of the focus groups and expert panel to delve deeper into how local resident action groups and other community organisations work within the consensus politics environment that has been established by the NSW State Government. These data call into question the consensus politics approach to engaging with local communities on urban development and planning matters. Most

significantly, the data demonstrate that some groups and organisations have neither the desire nor the interest in working toward a general agreement with government and other urban actors through a formal engagement process. The data shows that some groups are working in the space between antagonistic politics – which they mobilise as an active hostility toward some urban development and planning processes – and agonistic politics, whereby they actively and willingly disagree with government and other urban actors through action, dialogue and debate. We outline these data under the following themes; residents as knowledge bearers, the different rhythms of membership of the resident and other groups, the role that these groups play as political training grounds, the groups’ performances of antagonism, their agonistic networks and arrangements of power, and the different modalities of antagonism in the city.

#### 4.2.1 Residents as Knowledge Bearers

We found that succession planning and management, and bringing younger people into the resident action groups and advocacy organisations, was a significant problem for many groups at the local level. There was strong evidence across the focus groups and expert panel that the expertise of the groups and organisations was often vested in the individuals themselves, and in

several cases within a small selection of individuals within the local group or organisation. In many cases, it was the chairperson who was a key knowledge bearer, as shown by this statement:

*“We require one person to actually control things and to watch them come and go. In our society it's pretty much [name removed]. Without him I don't know how well we would function because we need to have someone who is across all the issues... But this is very important for these kind of groups because you have to have someone who is across everything and who can keep going. As the politics increases and decreases you need to have someone that can*

#### BOX 9 - KEY FINDING

Specific members of the local resident action groups and other activist organisations are key knowledge bearers for these groups.

Transferring knowledge between members and across the generations, and bringing younger people into the groups, was a problem for succession for some

Figure 9 - Residents as Knowledge Bearers

*continue with that or constantly be trained to pick it up and go with it”.*

(Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Many local resident action groups had members with formal expert knowledge (e.g., professional training) of the planning system and informal expert knowledge (e.g., knowledge acquired through engagement with the formal planning system), such as knowledge of the politics of urban development. Both of which proved important in their dealings with urban planning and development. One local resident action group member reported on their own planning knowledge by stating:

*“I’m an architect by training... I get involved looking at developments that are proposed around [suburb name removed] and I can read through them in a little bit more depth and comment on them for the [group]”* (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

Another participant reported on the way they used the skills of a journalist member within their group’s political actions:

*“We’ve tried to get stories in the newspaper through one of the ladies that’s a journalist...”* (Participant D: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

In terms of specific knowledge of the formal planning system, several groups included members who had formerly been employed in roles as planners at Local and State Government in NSW. One resident action group member from southwest Sydney described his professional life at the very top of NSW planning bureaucracy before listing the many action groups he had initiated since he had retired, and his views of the actions of the formal planning system had ‘soured’ (Participant H). Another participant, described how he left his role as a State Government planner before moving into community organising:

*“I’m a town planner. I worked with the [State Government] and I found that the most brilliant time of my life until the end. Because we did so many positive things for the low income. But unfortunately, politics got involved and decisions were made ... So I decided to give them a miss”* (Participant L: Western Sydney Focus Group).

Several described their transition out of roles in the formal planning system and into leadership roles in resident action groups and other organisations, such as local branches of the National Parks Association and the National Trust. Other groups and organisations took explicit steps to diversify and cover a very broad range of individual

knowledge within their groups. One group actively sought out and recruited people with specific skills and interests in relation to their political projects, as outlined by this member:

*“... in terms of the diversity of people on a committee and that's something we've worked quite hard at, so that we have people that come from different parts of the community, different perspectives, both politically but also people that might be involved in human services or it might be public housing tenants or it might fit into a particular part of the community. That then means that you've got an ability to be able to go back through those into their networks.”*

(Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Some groups and organisations were very conscious of the knowledge that was vested in their individual members. Several groups had worked strategically to record and document this knowledge with the view of passing it on to the next generation of community activists. For example, a member of a local environmental organisation stated:

*“We've got an older group. We're very fortunate. We've got a chap called [name removed] who's a botanist and he has written up a 50-year history, yes, being green. We've just celebrated our sixtieth anniversary so he's just two days ago sent me a version of the last 10 years where he's actually been able to pick out - because he's a writer as well - the salient points. That's been very important. Because we're a local regional group focused on our particular suburb I suppose a lot of our members have continued to be on the committee for a long time. Yes, nowadays with electronic versions, it's very handy for me if I'm writing a letter to actually just go back through the electronic files to pick out, as you say, the date or the time and things like that. I think that we've got quite a good archive and that does help to - yeah, because you want to sound as though you know what you're talking about and I think having that background information is helpful.”* (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

One group in particular had developed a sophisticated rationale and method for recording the information and knowledge that was not only invested in the individuals within their group, but with the broader government, non-government and private sectors. Using language that was reminiscent of late 1990s management and business theory (Brooking, 1999), they called the process of collecting, recording and

disseminating this broad collection of information *creating a corporate memory*, and they used this corporate memory strategically in their urban political projects. One member of this group described the politics of the corporate memory as follows:

*“It’s a corporate memory question as well. I was today digging out something that we wrote to [the local] council in 2006 because it’s pertinent to what’s happening today. If you didn’t know that existed, and people who come in later don’t know it existed, you’ve got real problems. I think it’s not just the succession - getting activist succession - it’s how do you replace the corporate memory? How do you transmit the corporate memory? There’s stuff that’s happened before my time that I know very little about and I have to keep going back to old papers still and saying, what was going there? What was that particular story?”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

This member went on to suggest that the issue of keeping records of what has happened at a particular local site was important because of the rhythms of membership and employment, not only within the resident action groups and organisations, but also within the broader government, non-government and private sectors:

*“I want to say out of that, in terms of corporate memory, it’s not just a problem for corporate memory for the groups. Our experience is that it’s a problem with councillors, it’s a problem with council, it’s a problem for the [state government planning bodies].”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

These knowledge transfer processes are important for resident action groups and organisations because they allow these groups to maintain a consistent form of political action over an extended timeline. This knowledge can also be used to draw in other residents and interested parties into the group’s political projects, as suggested by one resident action group member:

*“The other thing that we do, is we do help residents, when they have planning issues. When they have concerns and it’s mostly around planning issues, really. ... We help them and tell them what they can do; what they can’t do. And also, we provide a greater source of information about what’s happening, in terms of planning and everything in [suburb name withheld] than [the local] council itself.”* (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

These knowledge recording and transferring processes are especially important within the context of the rhythms of membership and employment discussed below.

#### 4.2.2 *Rhythms of Membership*

Participants reported that different rhythms of membership and employment affected the efficacy and long-term viability of their groups and organisations.

Participants in the focus groups and expert panel reported that different rhythms of membership and employment were evident in the resident action groups and

organisations as well as the government, non-government and private sectors. Many groups and organisations reported that their membership base consisted of older, often retired, members. Retirees seemed to be over represented in the focus group discussions. One resident action group member stated that his

*“...story goes back to the late 70s when I started writing letters to politicians...”*  
(Participant K: Focus Group 2)

Another talked about the problems with recruiting younger people into these groups and organisations, saying that,

*“It's more difficult these days because - yeah, it's the old ones that are - older people are normally members and not a lot of young members...”* (Participant B: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Some groups and organisations used membership metrics – such as the number of paid-up members they had – as a form of political capital within their urban politics. The following local resident action group member stated his group used their membership numbers as a form of political power and influence:

*“We actually like to be seen as threatening. We make sure they know how many members we've got and it's very interesting, politicians look at you quite differently when they know you've got 350-400 members. They think, that*

#### **BOX 10 - KEY FINDING**

**Different rhythms of membership and employment affect the efficacy and long-term viability of resident action groups and organisations. Retirees were over represented as stable members. Younger members were less stable but important for the long-term viability of these groups.**

Figure 10 - Rhythms of Membership

*could actually influence something. I think we are always polite, courteous and all of that but there is a sense of we want to look impressive and a little bit threatening” (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).*

For some, small membership numbers were augmented by other forms of networking, which could be used to demonstrate the degree to which they represented the concerns of a wider community. Noting the limitations of the social media findings above (see: Section 4.1.6 *Social Versus Traditional Media*), Facebook was one social networking platform that had provided recognition and validated individuals as representing legitimate community concerns:

*“I was getting up every month, nearly every month [in Council] ... You know, they would agree with what I had to say and they would seem to listen but they wouldn’t answer the emails that I sent and stuff like that. ... So I realised that it was necessary to get the public onside. Even if all they did was send a little email with one or two sentences. Just to let them know that it wasn’t [two people only] and it seems to have worked. We’ve got this 150-metre-wide buffer zone which is about three times as wide as I thought we’d get” (Participant K: Western Sydney Focus Group).*

At the same time, converting Facebook ‘likes’ into ‘feet on the ground’ to attend Council meetings and contribute to other face-to-face advocacy activities was often difficult:

*“I can’t get people to come. I don’t know what it is. I think people are just too busy to be involved in this sort of thing. They like what I do. I get good reports all the time. People say, thank you, thank you, thank you. But I think life’s too busy. Well it is, because my life’s busy too. ... I’ve looked recently on the 4,300 people that are on my page and the majority of them are in [the local government area]. But I’ve got people all over the world. I’ve got people in Germany, Italy, you name it, I’ve got it” (Participant N: Western Sydney Focus Group).*

The rhythms of membership that shaped the makeup of the resident action groups and organisations also intersected with the rhythms that shaped the membership of different media organisations and the government bureaucracies. These rhythms of membership are linked to the importance of creating a corporate memory that we discussed above (see Section 4.2.1 *Residents as Knowledge Bearers*). For example, as one local resident action group member stated:

*“In some [government] departments and for some periods of time, say like with journalists, the turnover is quite rapid. You can cultivate a contact and have some effect but it doesn't last for very long so you really... That means it's terribly, terribly variable. Our local newspaper, if we can find a journalist who stays for two years we've done well. Usually by then we've got them picking up stories”* (Participant C: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

They added to this comment that the rationalising and streamlining of media organisations also means that there are fewer journalists to cover local stories:

*“There's less journalists. What we've found is there used to be a journalist that would always come to a council meeting but now they don't...”* (Participant C: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

We found that certain members of these groups and organisations were key knowledge bearers and that transferring this knowledge between members and across the generations can be difficult and requires strategic planning. While there was a reported need to bring younger people into these groups and organisations, the different rhythms of membership within these groups, especially the reported membership patterns relating to younger people, created a barrier for the long-term viability of these groups. In the next section, we build on these findings to show how the resident action groups, community and other organisations are political training grounds for future community leaders.

#### 4.2.3 Political Training Grounds

Participants in the focus groups and expert panel reported that there were many political training grounds within which their members had built their cultural and political capital. Some acquired their skills and knowledge directly through their work within the group or organisation. Other focus group participants, as outlined above, acquired their cultural and political capital through their vocational training and employment in the

#### **BOX 11 - KEY FINDING**

**Resident action groups and other organisations are important political training grounds for future community leaders. They are important sites for building political capital in the city. This was particularly the case with:**

- (1) the older members who very often held leadership roles; and**
- (2) within the membership of the seemingly more effective 'multi-issue' and 'big-picture' groups.**



public or private sector. For example, a member of a local resident action group stated:

*“I kept up my membership of the group because now I still work for [the state government] and what's happening - there's two issues in the area...”*

(Participant P: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Other members had built their cultural and political capital through their involvement in long-standing activist groups as younger adults in the Trade Unions, Environmental and Feminist groups from the 1960s through to the 1980s. One member outlined his training pathway as follows:

*“Just to sort of give you my experiences, when I joined - and I'm just not too sure when it was - I actually was executive president of a union here in New South Wales so I was fulltime there, and when I retired in 2009 about that time”* (Participant M: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

What became clear during the focus groups and expert panel discussions was that groups with a demonstrated longevity were able to draw on their members' political and cultural capital, and at times their planning expertise, to develop complex political strategies. The long-standing political activist groups provided a training ground within which the older and/or more politically knowledgeable members could bring their skills and knowledge together to develop 'multi-issue' and/or 'big-picture' political campaigns. Many of the groups reported that their political campaigns had been successful also reported that they had moved from thinking in local terms about their planning and development issues to thinking more regionally and 'big picture'. Therefore, the groups that could bring diverse knowledge, skills and issues together reported that they were better able to mount effective political campaigns, and the fact that different political training grounds were used appeared to be central to this process. Many of the contemporary leaders of the groups and organisations reported having strong ties to their old political training organisations, and this was especially the case with the environmental groups. Interestingly, some of the political party alliances, which had provided members with access to training in the past, had broken down. For example, two life-long Liberal Party voting participants indicated that they had 'left the party' due to their local political work. This is an interesting shift toward the 'local' in relation to state and perhaps even federal politics. It also means, that local 'issues-base' politics is not just a phenomenon that drives young people into political action.

One long-standing environmental group sought to redeploy the political capital they had developed through their community engagement and education activities as a 'political instrument' within their local political campaigns:

*"One of the things that [our environmental group] have is that we do an awful lot in our communities and that is kind of service stuff - showing people bushland, taking them on walks, leading talks, taking them on kayak trips up the river, all those kinds of things which provide a community activity. I think that's one of the big strategies of [our environmental group] is community activity. Community building is a large part of what we do and of course there are times when you want to turn that community building into something of a political instrument where you can..."* (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

There were also cases where young people were leading political campaigns:

*"There was one young fellow who's very knowledgeable and he started up [a regional action group]. But he is very, very good. So he's trying to bring the whole thing together under one banner that we are more united and have more of a voice..."* (Participant M: Focus Group in Western Sydney).

The networking of different political training grounds proved to be an important activity for drawing on the knowledge of the key knowledge bearers in the groups and organisations, and for transferring this knowledge between members and across the generations. However, the historical political training grounds, such as Trade Unions, the Environmental Movement, and Feminists groups, have changed radically over the last 30 years. Several groups and organisations reflected on how this affects their succession planning and management, and their strategies for bringing younger people into the groups. In the next section, we move onto the way the focus group and expert panel participants discussed their performances of antagonistic political engagement with planning and urban development issues.

#### *4.2.4 Performances of Antagonism*

Historically, a strong discourse of antagonistic community activism has framed the way many groups discussed and engaged with, and at times acted against, powerful social actors in the city. Within these types of political actions, the different parties engaged in oppositional politics, which are often framed by rigidly demarcated interest positions. This is how we defined *antagonistic politics* in the literature review above,

as *active hostility mobilised through opposition*. We found that the discourse and practices of antagonistic engagement with urban politics and development remains a strong suite of political tools in many of the local resident action groups and organisations in Sydney.

Certainly, some groups identified with a more rigid antagonistic position. For these groups, this rigid antagonism was demonstrated through a single-minded resistance to development (i.e., NIMBYism).

Discursive statements in the focus groups about their antagonistic engagement with the planning system and planners were common, especially, but not always, from the newer, smaller or more locally focused groups. One example is the following:

*“[We] formed in 1984, primarily to fight the original [large-scale transport project]. We’re still fighting”* (Participant B: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

For these more rigidly antagonistic groups, fighting the oppressive power of the state was central to their action. Mouffe problematises antagonism as leading down the path to violent confrontation. The battle laid out in this case, to ‘fight’ urban development, was typical of comments by groups that demonstrated a zero-sum game mentality in contestations over planned urban development.

Yet for other local resident action groups and organisations, antagonistic engagement with urban politics and development were important *political* tools, reflecting a shift towards a more agonistic politics. That is, for these groups, operating outside the formal politics was a way of being political – of being ‘in politics’. In contrast to the rigid antagonism of some groups, as expressed by individuals in the focus groups, this commitment to the political process through oppositional politics that was mobilised from outside of the formal urban development politics appeared a more strategic form of antagonism.

Some groups undertaking actions from a rigidly antagonistic position were surprised that their antagonistic actions appeared to be effective in the political sphere. One group member stated:

## BOX 12 - KEY FINDING

Discourses about and practices of antagonistic engagement with urban politics and development remain important political tools within many of the local resident action groups and organisations.

Figure 12 - Performances of Antagonism

*“It was just that I was a bit surprised when the announcement for parts of the [large-scale transport project], the [motorway] extensions, that they actually - in the press release they mentioned that it wasn't going to be damaging to the [local environment]. I thought, well there it is. That means we had an impact, some effect”* (Participant C: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

Another stated that their group's political campaign,

*“...started in February last year and very quickly had a petition of over 4,200 signatures, which Council sort of let go into the deep black hole. We had a rally of over 1,500 attendees”* (Participant G: Focus Group in Western Sydney).

Indeed, there were many reports in the focus groups and expert panel of so-called 'effective opposition' to urban development and planning issues. In many of these cases these instances of effective opposition were pointed to as zero-sum game victories:

*“We've had six campaigns over the years ... and we've won five of them and we've not lost the other one yet”* (Participant K: Western Sydney Focus Group).

Where rigid antagonism met success, this opened up the possibility of moving into the politics of urban development in a more strategic manner. For some, this involved shifting from a singular oppositional stance to a mode of political engagement that recognised that there were many players at the table – that they had power in the politics of urban development.

It is therefore not simply enough to write-off antagonistic politics as outside of politics. We identified transitions from action that started from a more rigid antagonistic position, which led to more sophisticated engagements with the politics of urban development. In these cases, strategic opposition to the formal politics could be effective. This indicated to us that this strategic antagonism, undertaken from outside of the formal processes of citizen engagement, could impact 'the politics' of urban development.

Participants' engagement with the media was a common entry point into our discussions about antagonistic politics. We summarise some of the discussions around media engagement below in an attempt to briefly flag some of the diversity in the forms and intensity of the antagonistic urban politics the groups reported on.

The resident action groups and organisations engaged with the media as a form of political action in very diverse ways. Some groups took a rigidly antagonistic and oppositional position. As one group member put it, writing

*“... a very nasty letter to the paper...”* (Participant F: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

Other groups were more sophisticated and strategic in the way they approached the media. One group remained antagonistic but sought to build a more productive relationship with journalists and media organisations. They suggested that,

*“... over a period of time we have fed stuff into the paper”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

Similarly, another stated,

*“We feed quite a lot of stories to our local newspapers and, for the most part, they run them but if it's one where a little bit of criticism of the local council or a government department is involved they will go, as part of the story, and get a comment”* (Participant B: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

In a far more dynamic case of media engagement, one group's email and newsletter was reportedly being used by journalists to source stories, as this participant explains:

*“What we find at the present moment is that... part of the Murdoch press will pick up things from the normal email that we send round to supporters. They've just got onto that and then if they find something that's of interest then they will ring us up and say, we see you've said something about this [in our newsletter or email list]. Do you want to make a comment?”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

When asked if they thought that this type of less direct media engagement was an effective form of urban politics, another group member responded by saying:

*“... even though I don't think we've ever talked to [NSW state government politician] - but somehow or other [the NSW state government politician] is being advised that it would be just as well not to antagonise this group. It would be more trouble than it's worth”* (Participant C: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

What is evident here is that some of the resident action groups and organisations are very conscious that a course of political action – in this case media engagement - can drift on a continuum between antagonistic and agonistic action. In some cases, the members of the groups reported that they consciously and purposely moved between these two political engagement strategies. The following statement by one local resident action group member best exemplifies this political versatility. He stated:

*“We want to be involved in there in the discussions inside the [government] team. But we also reserve the right to actually go outside [of the governments’ consultation processes] and if they come out and say stuff that is not acceptable or they don’t talk to people in the community then they won’t be surprised that we actually go out and attack them in the media and make a noise about some of that. I think you’ve got to be prepared to do both”*  
(Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

What these examples demonstrate – and there are many more examples from the focus groups – is that some local resident groups and organisations are very competent and thoughtful political actors in the city. They not only understand the political efficacy of antagonistic and agonistic action, they can competently draw on and drift, perhaps even linger, between the two. This strategic antagonism, which is a more fluid form of political engagement in urban development and planning, is a problem for the dominant consensus politics approach to engaging local citizenries around planning and development issues. Consensus politics, as we defined it in the literature review, is a position that assumes that diverse urban actors and interests can come together and *work toward a general agreement through engagement*. The next section moves more centrally onto the discussion of a suite of new agonistic networks and arrangements of power.

#### 4.2.5 *Agonistic Networks and Arrangements of Power*

As noted above, we found that many of the larger and/or longer running resident action groups and organisations had started out as single-issue and often local groups. In particular, there were several cases of environmental groups, many with ties to the feminist politics that were ascendant in the 1980s and early 1990s,

#### **BOX 13 - KEY FINDING**

**There is strength in networking short-term ‘single-issue’ communities with the seemingly more effective ‘multi-issue’ and ‘big-picture’ groups.**

Figure 13 - Agonistic Networks and Arrangements of Power

maturing into far more complex organisations in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For example, we hear this in the following comment by a long-standing member of an environmental organisation:

*“We’ve been going for 60 years [as an environmental action group]. It was established initially to protect and prevent destruction of our local bushland reserve. And we’ve broadened our perspective since then. So we tend still to focus on local issues, but we are quite prepared to get involved in local issues throughout NSW, where they’re relevant. We are particularly concerned at the moment about water quality. We are also concerned about vegetation, because of our flora and fauna conservation. So we are looking more for the natural environment... We joined [the] Better Planning Network about 2 years ago because we felt that it was an opportunity to contribute to a larger group. So we thought our group, which represents about 300 members, not all of them adults ... That by joining the Better Planning Network we were bringing strength to them. We were also putting them in a better position to speak on behalf of a larger group.”* (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Taking a more agonistic approach to the political formation of their groups was a common feature of how the group members reported on the evolution of their group. *Agonistic politics*, as we defined it in the literature review, is about *agreeing to disagree through action, dialogue and debate*. It is about being open to other interest positions and to different possible membership cohorts; and it is about seeking broad political change by looking at a bigger view of the urban political landscape, and planning as a civil society concern. The larger and more integrated groups appeared to have a more reasoned and complex set of values that were informing their political actions. Many groups and organisations outlined their understanding of the limitations of rigidly antagonistic NIMBY positions. For example, one member of an established multi-issue resident action group stated:

*“NIMBYism will not get you anywhere.”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

This member followed by saying that the political capital that was generated through an initial performance of NIMBYism in their area was recruited, harnessed and converted into other forms of agonistic political capital by their group:

*“I think [NIMBYism is what] gets people going. Our experience is that gets people going and then suddenly they realise that there is a much bigger issue*

*around. That's happened recently in our area where they were re-zoning some land and the neighbours - I guess maybe we probably told everybody that this re-zoning is going on – got all the people together. It's really interesting. With a specific issue like that the resources do come out from the community so well.”*

(Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

For these groups, with scale and hindsight came perspective and the possibility of a much more fluid *plurality of moral frames* (see the discussion below on values and morality), with which they could negotiate complex or seemingly ‘wicked’ urban development issues. Unlike the bulk of the newer single-issue action groups, where evidence of persistent, rigid antagonism was present, through their testimony in the focus groups some of these larger groups articulated a willingness to enter more agonistic arrangements and discussions. For example, one large organisation member stated they were

*“...struggl[ing] with how you give voice to all these groups around the state with a diverse range of interests in a climate where the government doesn't want to talk to you because you messed up their nice legislation.”*

(Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Some focus group participants reported that their multi-issue and big-picture groups had been successful at drawing in 'single-issues groups' to bolster their broader political objectives and capital. They reported that they understood and accepted that the people who were interested in single-issues – many of whom were pursuing their own political interests through a binary antagonistic politics – would very often be in it for the short-term. This did not seem to matter to many of the multi-issue groups, and they appeared to be politically opportunistic in that sense. Their approach was to draw in the political capital of other individuals or groups as a short-term political strategy. This aligns with the points made above about the rhythms of membership of the more established groups. These larger, more agonistic multi-issue groups brought greater levels of cultural and political capital together with their longer-term strategic thinking to create often-short-term alliances. As one member explains:

*“The networking so that you're working in co-operation with other groups. For instance, we belong also to the Nature Conservation Council as one of the groups. We have close connections with the National Parks Association. I think this networking, you're feeding information to each other and I think that helps.”*

(Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)



People from the smaller, more antagonistic single-issues groups brought 'people and passion' to these alliances reported one focus group participant; which was viewed as a valued form of political capital. Together these groups, if only for short periods of time, formed and engaged in politically powerful *moments of action* or *events of action*. We argue that they are strategic but opportunistic in that sense. The scale of the formal arrangements of power at which the political action was being mobilised were important too, as suggested by this participant:

*“Then we realised that they've got no power whatsoever. It's the state government, the planning department that has the power.”* (Participant F: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

The multi-issue and big-picture groups seemed to work with whatever political tools they could pull together for their political purpose. This could be formal engagement with the planning system or informal antagonistic or agonistic action mobilised from outside this system. As noted above, some groups developed a political strategy that simultaneously included applying political pressure from outside the formal processes of the planning system combined with a commitment to work through the formal processes. This strategic antagonism was designed to influence, or where necessary, subvert, the formal development processes. In these cases, interjections in the media, or other forms of informal political interventions, were seen as more than expressions of antagonism to a particular urban development. They were expressions of agonistic commitment to a negotiated outcome through the formal process; a political intervention that was made from outside the formal process, but was nonetheless designed to further the politics of the urban development. Some of the representatives of the larger groups pointed out that this politics was larger than the formal process, and that influential players, such as developers, could gain direct access to political decision makers to exert their influence. In response to these perceived inequities in power and access, these groups mobilised a suite of approaches that ranged across formal and informal engagements in their attempts to level the playing field.

In contrast, single-issue groups tended to use either formal or informal antagonistic action in an all-or-nothing approach to political intervention, in part because they had less capacity to develop, deploy and maintain a political strategy that includes both formal *and* informal action. Members of these smaller groups stated in the focus groups that they felt they were unable to counter the, often assumed, higher degree of political power of 'the developers'. Through engagement with larger groups, these

smaller groups could become the beneficiaries of access to information and networks that were previously beyond their own capacity. For example, one large group talked about how they diversified their media engagement strategy, from a singular antagonistic interest position toward an agonistic discussion between different urban actors, as follows:

*“I think one of the other things that we've done that's also helped is that we do a lot of backgrounding of media and mainstream media but we won't necessarily comment ourselves. We will refer them to other people. The last thing we want is to look like that [our resident action group] is the only voice in the area so we will refer it to other people so that you get, depending on what the story is, you'll get a range of different voices.”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

In these cases, the larger groups' existing cultural and political capital tended to inform, and in some cases drive, the actions of the smaller groups.

Some groups even moved beyond advocating for a predetermined planning objective or course of action. One group was organised around a what might be called a *post-consensus* discourse of community action, as this participant's statement shows:

*“We've tried to work across the political spectrum rather than go into it. But we've also basically been aiming to try and find ways of keeping government accountable for what they do in the area. We have a charter, which is very much aimed at ensuring that a diverse community ... a diverse range of voices are heard rather than prosecuting a particular view. Our interests go across human services as well as across planning.”* (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney).

This group's political strategy was a unique case in our study. They had become a networking organisation and a collector and distributor of information, as further outlined by this group member:

*“Well I guess we're in a different situation in part because when the Premier's Department came in and started doing stuff in [our local area] one of the big issues was transparency. We have a lot of non-government organisations that were scared off commenting very early in the piece. One of the things that [our group] did was it became the collector of information about what was*

*happening and a disseminator of that.” (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)*

Some local resident action group members were very conscious of the formal political division and politics between elected representatives and planning bureaucrats. One stated that,

*“... often we'll gauge who - we can gauge who - often we'll go to meetings. Say Land and Environment might be having a hearing about a particular development in [a Sydney suburb] and we often go there and we'll be witnesses in the proceedings and everything. [The planning bureaucrats] often appreciate the fact that we're there supporting and they'll say things like, without you being there it would make our job a lot harder - and things like that.” (Participant B: Focus Group in Central Sydney)*

When asked if it was a more effective political strategy to go to an elected representative or an urban planning bureaucrat, one local resident action group members stated that,

*“... whether to go and talk to the politicians or to talk to the bureaucrats. It depends on the issue and what relations you've got.” (Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)*

Several local resident action groups reported that they decided to get a member elected to the local council with the view that they could exercise direct power at the local council level. Discussing this political strategy, one participant stated:

*“... we've had at least one councillor, on the Council, for those 15 years. One time we had two, but normally just one.” (Participant A: Focus Group in Central Sydney)*

Timing was also important for the bigger and more strategic groups. As one member reported:

*“One of those that's been important for us is actually getting into discussions early. Quite often we're not that interested in putting together a submission. Normally by the time the submission stage is reached everything's been locked up. We're keen to try to get into those conversations well before that happens and have had some success in that sort of space. One of the ways that we have done that has been - we have some round table discussions on*

*particular issues... That actually allowed us to have a conversation about stuff we knew that they were looking at but that they weren't in a position to come and talk to us about. There are things you can do in terms of getting in early."*  
(Participant E: Focus Group in Central Sydney)

Therefore, temporality and scale are important, with many groups moving from local to metropolitan concerns over time and aiming to get into the political discussion early. For example, this could be a move from local to metropolitan planning issues, which has followed the new regionalism that frames much urban planning and development in Sydney (such as the creation of the Greater Sydney Commission). As some groups matured and they diversified their membership base – bringing in new members – their rigid single-issue positions were diluted into multi-issue positions. In several cases, this was often accompanied by a shift in focus from single local concerns and action to broader regional concern and networked action across several sites.

#### 4.2.6 Modalities of Antagonism in Resident Action

From the data collected across the survey, focus groups and expert panel, we observed instances of intransigence that resembled antagonism and moments of genuine negotiation and engagement that represented agonism. The data also shows the persistence of entrenched political positions across the

#### BOX 14 - KEY FINDING

Some individuals' and groups' approach to political engagement included a sophisticated multi-stakeholder position that accepted, and in some cases encouraged, political difference within the group.

full range of experiences. This provides us with some evidence of the salience of

Figure 14 - Modalities of Antagonism in Resident Action

Mouffe's approach of agonistic

pluralism. However, in response to our empirical findings, we have refined Mouffe analytical categories through the introduction of three far more nuanced modalities of antagonism, which we have termed: rigid antagonism; soft antagonism; and strategic antagonism. This allows us to better recognise the way antagonism and agonism play out in the urban politics of city with respect to the formal processes of community participation and engagement in urban development politics.

A primary observation drawn from the focus groups and expert panel is that there are more established resident action groups and community coalitions operating in Sydney, which operate to influence urban development politics through a range of

political interventions. These groups operate both within and beyond the formal community engagement mechanisms of urban planning. These groups, which we encountered in both the Western Sydney and Central Sydney focus groups, demonstrated a nuanced approach to the complex multi-stakeholder politics of urban development, which included an appreciation of the plural nature of urban development politics. These groups maintained an antagonistic position in the politics of urban development, but demonstrated their ability to negotiate some of the terms under which their urban development might proceed. In the pursuit of what we identify as an agonistic democratic politics, they demonstrated a broad respect for plurality (Crowder 2014).

In contrast, other groups and individuals described a far more rigid antagonism to urban development, which often manifested in an 'us versus them' polemic. For single-issue groups, this often distilled down into an adversarial binary of 'the community versus the developers'; in a kind of 'all or nothing' politics. In this zero-sum game of urban politics, success was often described as the blocking of a development, and any development that proceeds, whether the product of a process of refinement through community action or not, was deemed a failure. This oppositional politics of success and failure tied to whether or not an urban development proceeds appears to provide little to no room for recognition of the impact of community action on changing the conditions of a development. Such a rigidly antagonistic position desires nothing but complete success, where no ground is given. Any concession is equated to a loss for the individual, the group and the imagined community.

Reflecting on Chantal Mouffe's ideas, the rigid antagonism demonstrated by some groups places these types of resident action outside of the urban development politics. Politics, here, is understood as "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organise human coexistence in conditions which are potentially conflicting" (Mouffe 2014: 3). In line with Mouffe, the inability of these rigidly antagonistic actors to shift from their particular perspective on urban development – for example, in framing any development that is not blocked as a 'failure' – appeared to result in their own marginalisation from the decision-making processes around these urban developments. That is, a persistent rigid antagonism led to them being placed outside of the politics of urban development, where decisions were made.

Alternatively, groups and individuals who professed a more strategic antagonism – where they took a contrary position but were more sensitive to the complexities of multiple stakeholders and were more willing to negotiate the terms of a specific instance of urban development – appeared more likely to be included in the politics of urban development by more powerful political gatekeepers, such as politicians and local government bureaucrats (and, on occasion, the developers themselves). For example, larger groups pointed to cases of being invited into consultations or being contacted by politicians or their proxies as a part of the informal political processes that swirl around and inform the outcomes of the formal urban planning processes. The potential to use the media, and the consideration of this potential by politicians and bureaucrats, as discussed above, are examples of informal political engagement that contributes to the negotiation of an agonistic political outcome.

Finally, some groups recognised the plurality of voices in this politics and desired to be a part of the negotiations within the politics of urban development, but felt that they remained outside of ‘the politics’. This soft antagonistic position meant that even when included in the formal politics of community engagement these groups, as represented by individuals in the focus groups, felt that their voices were not heard; that they were in effect marginalised and co-opted through their inclusion in the formal processes of community engagement with their contributions passing into a post-political void.

### 4.3 Negotiating the Politics of Different Values in Urban Development

This section returns to the conceptual framing of the study to test Mouffe’s theoretical ideas around agonistic pluralism against our empirical data. We suggest that Mouffe’s more abstract conceptual ideas need to be rethought and moderated to be suitable for analysing the politics and practice of urban development in the city. We proposed above, three empirical data driven modifications to Mouffe’s broader theoretical ideas of agonistic pluralism, which we defined as; (1) rigid antagonism, (2) soft antagonism and (3) strategic antagonism. Therefore, this part of the analysis is concerned with identifying the conditions that might lead to a transition from a more

#### BOX 15 - KEY FINDING

We propose three modifications to Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism:

- (1) *Rigid Antagonism*
- (2) *Soft Antagonism*
- (3) *Strategic Antagonism*

Figure 15 - Rigid, Soft and Strategic Antagonism

rigid antagonism to a possibly more productive agonistic urban development politics. In order to do so, we focus on the value statements that underpinned the antagonistic positions of the individuals and groups in the focus groups and expert panel testimonies.

As we noted in the literature review, this research seeks to advance a more plural and post-foundational ontology of community participation in urban development through engagement with both political and ethical pluralism. Whilst the consensus politics of Habermas and the agonistic pluralism of Mouffe both present a plural politics that advances the ideas around rational planning, they deal less well with ethical pluralism. In both cases, they subscribe to a foundational ethics. For Habermas, consensus is produced from rational argumentation between divergent political positions in the ideal speech moment. The basis of this rationality is a universal ethics in the form of a shared commitment to a liberal conception of justice. Justice, universally understood, provides the moral basis on which a consensus might emerge. For Mouffe, her agonistic pluralism relies centrally on the conception of “the ‘adversary’, the opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of ‘liberty and equality for all’, while disagreeing about their interpretation” (Mouffe 2014, 7). She has no room for the consideration of moral questions. Her ‘agonistic struggle’ relies on the confrontation of democratic political positions, rather than concerns over divergent ethical stances. If this political struggle is missing, “there is a danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identification” (Mouffe 2012, 7). For Mouffe, a focus on values detracts from the democratic political contestation, which she sees as being based on a foundational ethics of liberty and equality for all. She views non-negotiable moral value systems as outside her agonistic politics, primarily because she frames moral value systems as persistently immutable, and as such, not open to negotiation. For Mouffe, invoking moral values ensures persistent antagonism, a position that is beyond her notion politics.

However, through our empirical work, we observed a form of ‘persistent antagonism’ that we have termed rigid antagonism. But this form of antagonism is not necessarily ‘persistent’. What we found through our detailed discussion in the focus groups, is that individuals and groups who demonstrate rigid antagonism may shift towards less rigid and more strategic forms of antagonism in a progression towards more agonistic democratic engagement. Of course, other single-issue groups in our research remained rigidly antagonistic. But what concerns us is that by conceptualising values

within a plural ontology and paying attention to the values that form the basis for the political positions that individuals and groups take, we might better understand the *transition* from antagonism to agonism.

Thus, our focus groups show that some of the community action groups and other alliances involved in our research operated with complex plural value systems in place. This is evidenced by some of the larger groups drawing in small resident action groups who hold different ideas and views – i.e., values – about the appropriate course of political action and an acceptable urban outcome. We might say that they are drawing upon and make use of different regimes of value (Appadurai 1986) to move from less productive antagonist engagements in the city to perhaps more productive agonistic action, even if it is only short-lived action. Indeed, perhaps it is the temporal nature of these loose alliances and their sporadic action, their tenuous associations and ephemeral nature, that renders these political formations less visible in the everyday urban politics of the city. Therefore, we conclude in the next section that this ‘politics of value’ is perhaps a useful way for dealing with wicked social and urban problems and rendering more visible the complex political formations of community groups and other urban actors.

#### 4.3.1 *Towards a New Politics of the City*

New work on the ethics of care provides insight into a different understandings of morality, and hence values. The ethics of care, derived from the work of feminist ethics (Gilligan, 1977; Noddings 1982; and Held, 2006), presents a model of relational plural ethics that contrasts foundational approaches to ethics. This plural ethics relies on the notion that our caring relationships interrupt universal moral codes, and provide the basis for a lived *plural morality*. Drawing on anthropological theories of value, for example in the work of Arjun Appadurai (1984; 1986) and David Graeber (2001; 2005; 2013), an ethical pluralism allows for the simultaneous adherence to a range of value positions, or regimes of value, which can be used to form the basis of a politics of value. Value theory provides an innovative window through which to analyse the political workings of urban development. We analysed the data recorded

#### **BOX 16 - KEY FINDING**

**Maintaining a rigid antagonistic stance typically leads to individuals and groups feeling frustrated with the urban development politics they were engaged with, and unable to effect change.**

Figure 16 - A New Politics of the City



in our focus groups with the members of resident action groups and the expert panel discussions to identify some of the 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986) that underpinned and motivated the thoughts and actions of individuals, and the moral framing of the groups they sought to represent.

The rigid antagonisms identified in the focus groups, particularly in the smaller and more recently formed single-issue resident action groups, were typified by reductive moral intransigence that framed urban development as an encroachment on the normative landscapes of the local community. As noted earlier in the discussion, the moral resistance to urban development demonstrated by such actors in our research was evidenced by references to these new developments as 'bad' or 'wrong'. There were several instances across the focus groups in both urban locations where newer single-issue groups, typically involving one or two primary residents who were directly impacted by the proposed development, framed the contestation as a zero-sum 'fight' or 'battle'. For these resident action groups, giving any ground in the battle against the imposition of change in the form of new urban development would unsettle the normative construction of the local community. It would be an affront that ran counter to their understanding of the moral geographies of the local community. As such, their rigid antagonism reflected their moral intransigence.

The rigid antagonism of these single-issue groups privileged a singular moral framing of the local community and denied the legitimacy of alternate values and valuations that might be held by other stakeholders. The result that we observed in the focus groups, was an inflexible denial of the plurality of voices and an insistence that their position was 'right' position and that the impending urban development was 'wrong' – whether that mean morally 'wrong' for the local area, or simply an inappropriate model of urban development *per se*. In line with Mouffe's conceptualisation of antagonistic politics, these actors tended to frame the politics of urban development as an incursion of 'enemies'. Their rigidly antagonistic position placed them outside of politics of urban development, and saw them collapsed into the stereotypical NIMBY.

However, as we noted above, a rigidly antagonistic stance may not persist. Some groups demonstrated a shift from narrowly defined values toward an acceptance of plural values. One inner suburban resident action group developed a plural political stance over time that fostered a plurality of voices and values.

*“We have a charter, which is very much aimed at ensuring that a diverse community ... a diverse range of voices are heard rather than prosecuting a particular view.”* (Participant E: Focus Group Central Sydney)

They saw themselves as a disseminator of information with the primary aim of government transparency, and they developed a broad remit that would account for a, as they describe it, a ‘diverse range of voices’.

Another well-established group from Western Sydney demonstrated a progressive shift from a narrowly defined set of values towards a broader engagement with urban development issues. In this case, the group was originally tied to an ‘environmental’ regime of value, but had developed in recent times into a group more concerned with urban development more generally framed. This group’s transition toward a more plural set of values led to a split within the group’s members, with some remaining tied to the original value framing of environmentalism and splitting off to form a new group, whilst the core self-described ‘experienced members’ widened the purview of the groups’ concerns.

Some rigidly antagonistic groups were drawn into alliances with larger groups, where their singular perspective and voice was drawn into a plural coalition that was operating within the broader politics of urban development. In these cases, we observed a nested set of antagonisms, where a political action (e.g., a media intervention, or a protest) might have different meaning for different members of the larger coalition – with some seeing it as a performance of rigid antagonism, whilst others ascribing a more agonistic reading to the event.

In some cases, single-issue groups with a rigid moral framing could obtain a wider perspective via their exposure to different groups, shifting towards an appreciation of other perspectives in the process. The transition in this case was from a more universal framing of ethics bound to a sense of moral affront that was a response to the potential development, towards the recognition (and in some cases acceptance) of a plural set of values that were at work in the operation of urban development politics. Bringing single-issue resident action groups into engagement with larger groups with a more nuanced appreciation of the complexity of urban development could, in some cases, lead to a shift in the understanding of the competing values at work in urban development. This, in our view, is an essential move in the transition from rigid antagonism towards more strategic antagonism. But this was not evident in all the single-issue groups in our research, with some resisting the recognition of the

legitimacy of other political positions in the politics of an urban development throughout the study. For these smaller groups, a sense of moral outrage continued to fuel their rigid antagonism. Maintaining a rigidly antagonistic stance, what is often called NIMBYism, typically led to these actors feeling frustrated with the politics of their urban development because they were unable to effect change; they remained outside of what Mouffe's calls 'politics'.

Finally, some individuals and groups expressed a desire to be involved in a more democratic process of engagement, and used statements that suggested they understood the implications of being open to a shared ethico-political set of values and what this would mean for negotiating outcomes among plural actors. Yet some also felt they were not able to effect change in the current political environment. These actors inhabited Mouffe's conception of the political, but remained outside the politics of urban development. However, they did not demonstrate a rigid antagonism, but instead a soft antagonism, which we define as a commitment to an outcome that is underpinned by shared ethico-political values, and an inability, despite their desire, to impact the politics of urban development through agonistic discourse and practice.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this Blue Sky study was to explore a new conceptual approach to community involvement in planning that responds to contemporary critiques of participatory planning. Blue Sky projects are focused on exploring innovative ideas and concepts, and this research draws upon Chantal Mouffe's ideas to rethink how local citizenries are involved in the politics of urban development.

This concluding section outlines one possible pathway to a more effective democratic involvement in urban development in contemporary Australian cities. Planning theorists such as Allmendinger and Haughton (2012), Taşan-Kok and Baeten (2012) and Bylund (2012), and political economy scholars such as Swyngedouw (2011), have shown that a form of neoliberal spatial governance is underpinned by a variety of post-politics that has sought to replace antagonism and agonism with consensus. Conflict has not been removed from planning, but it is instead more carefully choreographed (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012: 89). Therefore, this study was framed around three key theorisations of community engagement with urban development and planning: (1) *Consensus Politics – Working toward a general agreement through engagement*; (2) *Antagonistic Politics – Active hostility mobilised through opposition*; and (3) *Agonistic Politics – Agreeing to disagree through action, dialogue and debate*. The findings further call into question the contemporary post-political moment of democratic planning in NSW. The key themes that emerged from the study, which we summarise below, could be used to retheorise and possibly creating alternate pathways for more meaningful community participation and engagement in the planning and development of the city.

In broad terms, the participants in our study suggested that the planning reforms in NSW were reinforcing market-centric practices in the planning system. The political rationale for moving community consultation toward the initial strategic planning phase was deemed to be counterproductive to the ongoing debate about urban change that many of our participants deemed as necessary in NSW. The participants in this study reported that the centrality of consensus politics within the government's upfront community participation processes does not give enough voice to community in the long-term.

In more specific terms, there is a general lack of knowledge about the formal planning system amongst the general population of NSW. These findings are in keeping with other studies, which demonstrate that the complexity and the ever- and fast-changing nature of the planning system could be a barrier to engaging individual citizens. This

highlights the tension between the calls for a more responsive and flexible planning system that will allow city actors to get things done, and the need for a stability and predictable planning system that local people can understand and engage with. Equally, these findings could simply indicate a general disinterest with the formal processes of planning at the level of the individual. Individuals' concerns are often initially framed around local and immediate urban development issues, and can be more pronounced when urban development threatened their homes, property values, living environments and local amenity.

By comparison, at the level of community coalitions and resident action groups, there was a good understanding of the formal planning system amongst some of the members of some of the groups. There were key members within some of the local resident actions groups and other activist organisations who were key knowledge bearers for these groups. In some cases, these groups had members with explicit urban planning training and skills. However, transferring this knowledge between members and across the generations, and bringing younger people into the groups was a problem for succession planning and management for these groups and organisations. Different rhythms of membership and employment affected the efficacy and long-term viability of the resident action groups and organisations. For example, retirees were over represented as stable members of the resident action groups and organisations, and younger membership within these groups was less stable but important for long-term viability. Furthermore, resident action groups and other community organisations were important political training grounds for future community leaders, including young emerging leaders. These groups and organisations were important sites for building cultural and political capital within the city. This is particularly the case with: (1) the older members who very often held leading roles in these groups; and (2) within the membership of the seemingly more effective multi-issue and big-picture groups.

In terms of the scale of the urban politics and concern, for individuals there was a heavy focus on local-level urban development issues. Indeed, at the level of individuals, local-level issues appeared to be given more gravitas than metropolitan or city-wide issues. However, there were some key exceptions, as you might expect, especially around key infrastructure such as transport planning. Individuals in the east and in the west of the city had similar views and concerns related to urban planning and development. The community organisations and resident action groups from the east and west were often very engaged and knowledgeable about where to source

information about the debates that surround their urban development and planning concerns, with many examples from both areas where the group looked well beyond the local media and government.

Individuals reported that gaining media attention, attending public meetings and even engaging in public protest were the most effective means of influencing government decision-makers and urban development. By comparison, the community organisations and resident action groups were much more dynamic and sophisticated in their political thinking, planning and action. These groups and organisations discussed and put into practice, both antagonistic and agonistic political campaigns, and at times they did both at the same time. Indeed, political campaigns that seemed to drift between antagonistic and agonistic engagement with the urban politics of the city were important for many of the local resident action groups and organisations. Some of the larger groups and organisations viewed the smaller single-issue groups, or even vocal individuals, as a possible source of political capital. These groups and organisation reported that there was a real strength in networking short-term single-issue communities into their supposedly more effective multi-issue and big-picture groups. Some groups were even organising themselves around a *post-consensus* discourse of community action where many different people and voices were welcome and encouraged. Their approach was to draw in the political capital of other individuals or groups as an often-short-term political strategy. These larger, more agonistic multi-issue groups brought greater levels of cultural and political capital together with their longer-term strategic thinking to create often-short-term alliances. Together these groups, if only for short periods of time, formed and engaged in politically powerful moments of action that were strategic but opportunistic.

Therefore, in these groups and organisations, we saw evidence of political and value pluralism across a range of individuals and group organisational structures. This supports the view that a *post-consensus* approach to community engagement is possible, such as one that might be based on a revision of Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism. Such an approach to community engagement with urban development and planning represents a shift away from rigidly antagonistic positions toward a more flexible agonistic politics. Our study shows that some of the individuals, groups and organisations are already demonstrating that the shift from a rigid and non-negotiable value position to a more plural and complex moral and ethical stance is workable in the urban development politics of the city. However, to make this work within the current political environment, community engagement in urban development and

planning needs to be retheorised. We suggest a value pluralism approach might provide one way of identifying and analysing the shift from antagonism to agonism that is necessary for a *post-consensus* agonistic model of community engagement.

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