

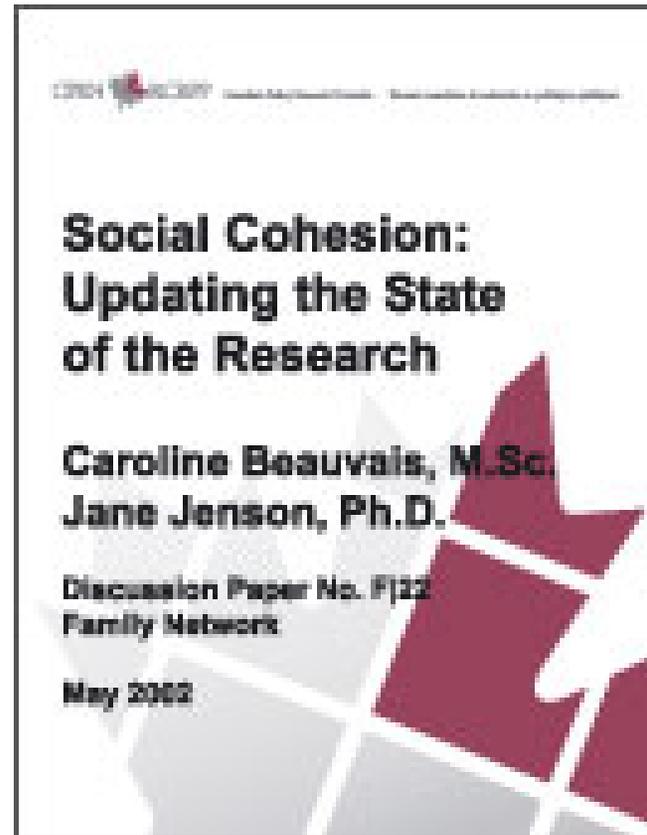
Housing and Social Cohesion
Do housing policies and housing assistance
make a difference to Australian
communities?

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Social cohesion in policy context

- 'Social cohesion' old concept with extensive academic lineage (Durkheim onwards)
- Historically, interest in concept ebbs and flows, increasing in times of unrest & change
- Internationally, social cohesion seen as counterpoint to economic policy emphasis
- In Australia (and US) greater interest in social capital
- Governments now interested in how public policy promotes/weakens cohesive society



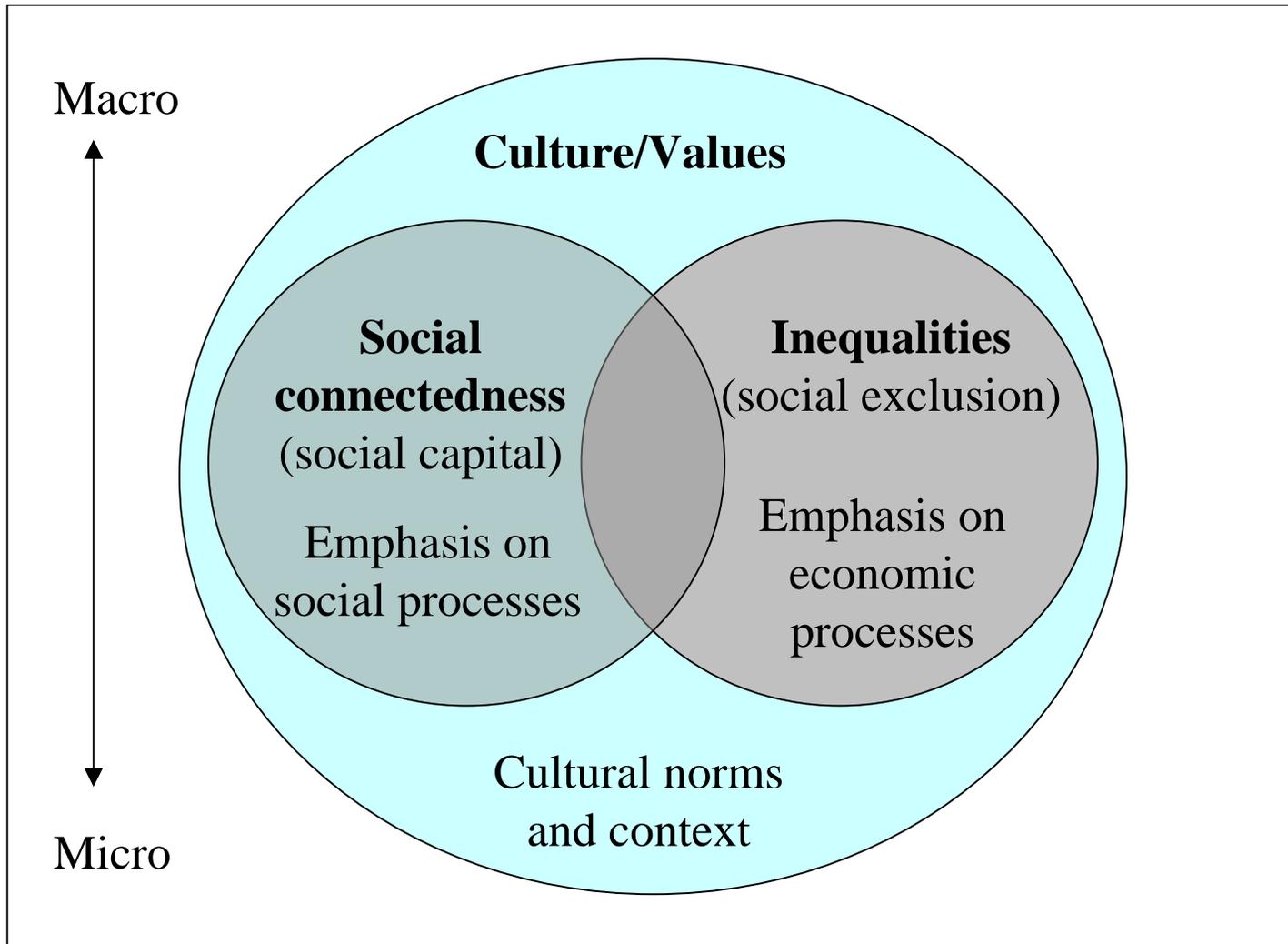
Social cohesion, housing & place

- Within housing policy it is often assumed housing policy and housing assistance impacts positively on social cohesion, e.g. via:
 - ➔ Neighbourhood renewal programs
 - ➔ Tenure and social mix
 - ➔ Land release promoting mix of occupancy types
- ...but does housing policy and assistance affect communities in this way?
- Existing evidence is disparate, patchy and mixed

This research

- AHURI funded project 2005-2007:
‘Housing, housing assistance & social cohesion’
- Dual aims:
 - ➔ Clarify conceptually the relationship between social cohesion, housing and place
 - ➔ Undertake exploratory empirical investigation of these relationships in the Australian context

Social cohesion as a policy concept



Housing and social cohesion

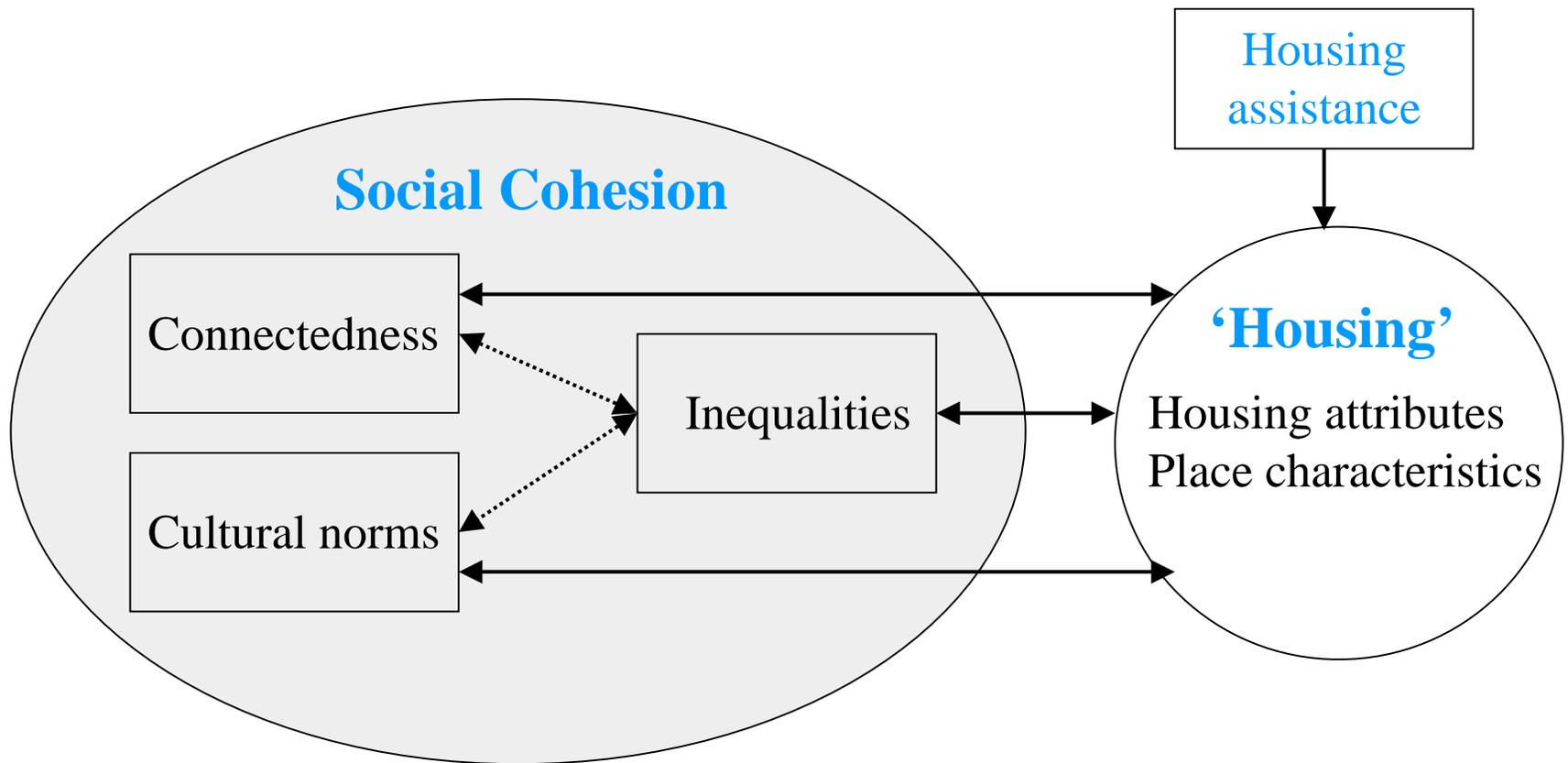
- Housing generally conceptualised as an indicator of the inequalities dimension
e.g. Berger-Schmitt and Noll (2000)
- Or as having greatest impact on inequalities e.g. Czasny (2002); Forrest and Kearns (2001); Berry (2003)
- Relationships between housing, social connectedness and cultural norms less extensively researched

Key empirical question:

Is there a direct
relationship between
housing and social
connectedness
dimension of social
cohesion,
or
is this relationship
always mediated by
inequalities?



Potential relationships between housing and social cohesion



Data and Method

- Exploratory statistical approach
- 2 data sets used:
 - ➔ HILDA Wave 4 (N=10,565)
 - ➔ AIFS Social Capital Survey (N=1,506)
- Regression models predicting 5 key indicators of social connectedness:
 - ➔ *'Perceived social support'* (HILDA)
 - ➔ *'Voluntary work'; 'Civic action'* (AIFS)
 - ➔ *'Perceived neighbourhood interaction'; 'Feel part of community'* (HILDA)

Key findings

1. There *is* a direct relationship between housing and social connectedness

This relationship is stronger for some aspects of social connectedness and some housing/place attributes than others

- Aspects of housing most conducive to social connectedness include: *security of tenure, especially home ownership; stability; living in ‘untroubled’ neighbourhoods & rural areas*
- Aspects of social connectedness most likely to be influenced by housing policy and assistance include: *support networks; neighbourhood ties*
- Aspects of social connectedness least likely to be influenced by housing policy and assistance include: *‘vertical relationships’ such as volunteering and civic action*

Key findings

2. There is **also** a direct relationship between inequalities and social connectedness
 - ➔ These relationships *sometimes* more powerful than the housing-connectedness relationship
 - ➔ Most influential aspects of inequality on social connectedness include: *financial hardship and poor health (education has mixed results)*
 - ➔ Hence in *some cases* housing/place attributes may be considered as proxy for inequalities

Qualified conclusions from exploratory research

- Housing policy aimed at ‘strengthening communities’ is on right track
- However housing still has a critical role to play in reducing household inequalities, which can in turn influence other aspects of socially cohesive communities

Implications for housing policy

- Increasing opportunities for home ownership and other forms of housing security
- Decreasing non-chosen mobility resulting from policies such as renewal schemes
- Decreasing clustering of disadvantage and its contribution to 'problem' neighbourhoods
- Increasing locational choice

Publications to date

- Hulse, K. and Stone, W. (2006) *Housing, housing assistance and social cohesion*, AHURI Positioning Paper No 91, AHURI, Melbourne
- Stone, W. and Hulse, K. (2007) *Housing and social cohesion: an empirical exploration*, AHURI Final Report No 100, AHURI, Melbourne
- Hulse, K. and Stone, W. (2007) Social cohesion, social capital and social exclusion, A cross cultural comparison, *Policy Studies* 28 (2), pp 109-128

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