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Part Two

Diverging Housing Solutions

The Case Study Evidence

Chapter 6 Explaining divergent tenure patterns and urban form– The Australian case of low density home ownership

6.1 Introduction

In Australia, the social relations mediating housing provision have promoted and reinforced the production and consumption of highly privatised, low density, residential environments, dominated by the tenure of home ownership. Whilst a wide consensus exists about this description of outcomes, *explanations* for the Australian housing solution vary markedly, reflecting the distinctive ontological, theoretical and normative positions held by different researchers.

As argued in Chapter 5, it is considered that the most fruitful path to explanation lies in the historical analysis of a specific cluster of social relations in the property, saving and investment and labour and welfare relations integral to any housing system in their contingent economic, political and social contexts. Different phases in housing history may be explained by the different packaging of relations in their dynamic, contingent context. When interdependencies between emergent relations breakdown (due to materially and socially constructed contingent conditions), a crisis of provision may occur, only to be resolved by adaptation leading to new forms of coherence, which may generate continuing housing outcomes. This Chapter provides an illustration of these dynamic shifts under different conditions. It identifies phases of emergence, acceleration, deceleration and decline of the Australian 'solution' (Berry, 1998). Each phase incorporates periods of adaptation, coherence and crisis in the revision of emergent relations in a dynamic contingent context. For each phase an attempt is made to explain the housing and urban development outcomes as mediated by the synthesis of emergent housing relations and the contingent conditions that sustain or undermine them.

6.2 Observable outcomes of the Australian housing solution

This section provides a brief overview of the main features of Australian housing solution and recent trends. Most Australians reside in large coastal cities, with the perverse exception of the nations capital.[23] Detached dwellings with a front and back yard, predominate low-density, land use segregated, socially differentiated, and car dependent residential communities. In the scattered hinterland towns and coastal communities, home ownership is even more dominant. By the middle of the 20th century, home ownership was established as the leading tenure in all capital cities (Table 6.1). It was the most popular housing choice during the 1920s and the long economic boom that immediately followed the Second World War.

[23] The nations capital Canberra, located inland and midway between the rival cities Melbourne and Sydney, emerged from an exceptional set of property and financial relations. These included a public leasehold system, public rental housing, and a strictly planned hierarchy of land uses.