

WHY PROBLEM FRAMING IS POWERFUL IN UNDERSTANDING HOUSING SUPPLY AND AFFORDABILITY IN NEW ZEALAND

Introduction

Housing supply and affordability have become the two most prominent strands of discourse in understanding the pressures of supply and demand in the New Zealand context. The framing of these arguments has contributed to the ways in which government, the media and in turn the public frame the causes for the housing problem. We explore some of the logics of housing supply and demand in the New Zealand context and how framing influences the shape of the housing debate.

Methods

Framing has been used in research worldwide to understand zoning and schooling (Goetz, 2008), housing and transport (Lock, 2000), as well as climate change policies and government's preparedness to respond to climate-related disasters (Fuenfgeld and McEvoy, 2014; Bosworth, 2015). In New Zealand deploying framing as a tool to unpack and understand the logics of housing policy can provide insight into the ways government functions and often why there appears to be a discrepancy between what governments say they want and what they actually do. As Goetz (2008) writes, 'words matter', and therefore, how one chooses to use those words to frame an argument can persuade legislators, builders, developers and others in to action (or inaction). We deployed a critical discourse analysis approach to analyse ministerial speeches and housing reports from the last two National-led governments (2011-2014; 2014-2017).

Preliminary Findings

On the demand side of the housing coin, the primary frame is home ownership and its expression as a cornerstone of the Kiwi dream. While government finds it important for Kiwis to own their own home, the rates of home ownership in New Zealand have been steadily declining (Bourassa and Shi, 2017).

Quality of housing was the secondary demand-side aspect but has been almost invisible in the data as compared to the discussions addressing the quantity of housing. This dismissal of the quality of housing argument is detrimental to future planning of residential dwellings.

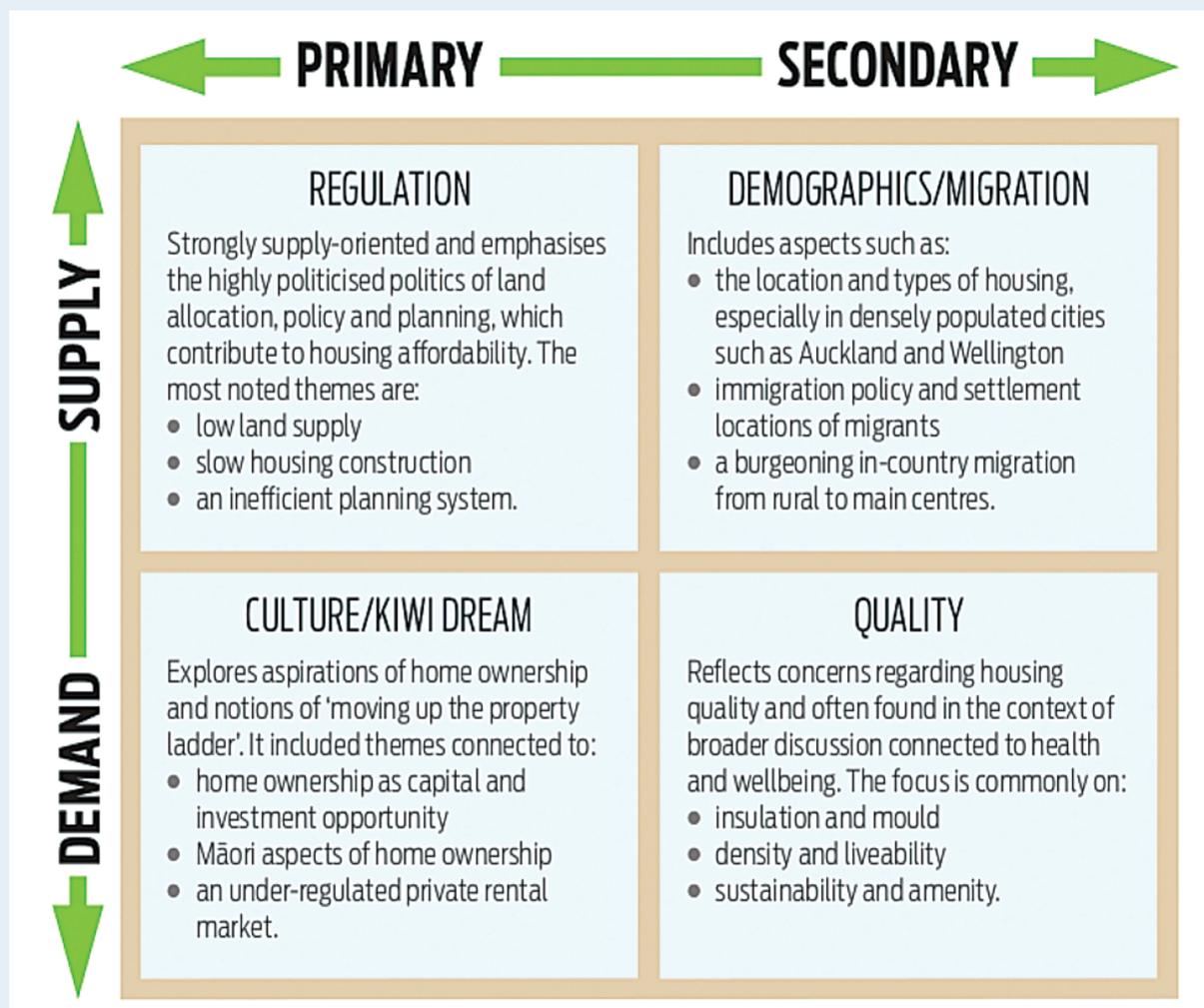
Next steps

Now the frames are developed, they will be used to better understand:

how they may contrast with frames operating at the city scale of politics, the decision outcomes in practice, and how this may vary spatially.

The complexity in framing housing supply and affordability as an issue, therefore, requires a multi-faceted, contextual response to better balance the various agendas of better homes and liveable spaces for every New Zealander.

Four key messages



Preliminary Findings

As a result of the analysis, four frames evolved to explain the overarching themes prevalent in the discourse of housing supply and affordability. These frames were 'regulation'; 'demographics/migration'; 'culture/kiwi dream'; and 'quality' and may be categorised as primary and secondary frames in a larger analysis of housing supply and housing demand.

In the regulation framework argument, the primary culprit in the cause of a strong supply-side oriented housing deficit is an outdated resource management act (RMA) in conjunction with inefficient decision-making. A secondary less well-publicised but not insignificant supply-oriented frame that emerged revealed tensions in demographics and migration. If the population continues to increase, which according to most estimates it will, then a renewed vision of city planning (Auckland) is required to accommodate in-country and foreign migrant inflows.

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