

**Housing policy in Australia: A case for system reform ,
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Review of Pawson et al (2020) *Housing Policy In Australia: A Case For System Reform*: Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature.

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Anyone with a keen interest in housing studies will be well versed with the complexities of national housing policy systems and specifically the interrelated factors which create them. When the housing system itself is inherently fractionalised, as it is in Australia, then these challenges are compounded significantly. 'Housing Policy in Australia' rises to these challenges with great aplomb. This text is timely. It has been some 25 years since the last major review of Australian housing policy was published (see Paris, 1993). In this new book, Pawson *et al* provide a much needed critical account of the systems of governance which underpin Australia's housing policy landscape, highlighting key policy deficits along the way. Pawson *et al* deconstruction of Australia's fragmented housing policy systems, enables the reader to assign meaning to the country's prevailing approach to housing provision to date. But crucially, the authors take this one step further by setting out a clear agenda for urgent reform across all housing tenure groups. The call for reform alone distinguishes 'Housing Policy In Australia' from other texts which characterise national housing policy processes. The robust and far reaching evidence base which is deployed skilfully throughout the text gives credibility and gravitas to the flawlessly written narrative. Key terms of reference are defined and critiqued throughout the work. A further strength of this meticulously researched text is the way in which the nature of Australia's housing systems are placed in the comparative housing context, exemplifying how Australian housing policy instruments have converged and diverged in recent years relative to other nations, notably the UK and USA. A pressing strategic priority for governance systems is confronting the reality of unaffordable housing and the profound social, economic and fiscal problems it leaves in its wake. The political tensions which have contributed to the ebb and flow of social housing and related concerns about homelessness are critically reviewed in Chapter Four. The innate failure of the private rented sector to respond to an increasing need for flexible and affordable housing forms the basis of Chapter Five. Given that some two thirds of the

Australian population live in owner occupied housing and that house prices have risen more than three times the rate of wages during the period 1993 - 2018, this issue warrants urgent attention. The extent to which housing policies of the past have conspired to discriminate against Indigenous Australians (Chapter Seven) is a welcome addition to the text, highlighting the structural disadvantage experienced by this group on multiple levels. As the housing circumstances of Indigenous Australians are often neglected in existing scholarship, this theme warrants further research. Given that much of the data used to give credibility to the narrative was quantitative in nature, qualitatively driven accounts of the lived experiences of all Australian residents were conspicuous by their absence throughout the text. Any future research in this area may wish to consider drawing on residents' narratives of place to exemplify the policy action gaps identified so effectively by the authors.

Overall, 'Housing Policy In Australia' provides an authoritative critical examination of the key interrelated policy measures and the accompanying systems of governance required to transform the country's prevailing approach to housing provision. The scope of this book extends far beyond the housing studies community. In addition to scholars of housing in both Australia and the international housing context, it is likely to appeal to policy makers, politicians, social housing providers, housing market analysts and advocates of housing equality. For the housing system to service the population of Australia, a clear road map needs to be identified for the future. This excellent book does just that. The text succinctly and persuasively lays out the case for strategic leadership and political required to ensure Australia's population are well housed both now and in the future. Housing policy may well be best understood by reviewing the past. By speaking to an unified housing agenda informed by optimism, pragmatism and realism, the lessons identified in 'Housing Policy In Australia' are critical in safeguarding the housing and related interests of the population for current and future generations.

References

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