Whose Dividend? Diversity as a Selling Point in Urban Development Projects in Auckland

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Abstract

As a result of new policy initiatives that aim to address Auckland's housing shortage and unaffordability, the city has seen a large number of recent housing development projects. This paper critically discusses the discursive role that the idea of a diversity dividend plays in such urban development projects with a focus on the Auckland neighbourhood of Northcote. The Northcote Development is exemplary of current large-scale developments in Auckland: it takes place in a socio-economically deprived neighbourhood with a large area of land owned by Housing New Zealand. In the course of redevelopment, this land will be intensified as well as partially privatised by offering a mix of affordable and market homes alongside public housing.

Based on a content analysis of planning documents, website content and community publications pertaining to the Northcote Development, the paper argues that diversity is explicitly mobilised to justify processes that amount to state-led gentrification. This is particularly evident in discourses that frame tenure mix and a likely influx of higher-income earners as a way of achieving greater socio-economic diversity that is said to benefit all neighbourhood residents. While existing ethno-cultural diversity is portrayed as a core strength, it is increasingly transformed into a commodity, especially as part of a food culture attractive to new residents. The discussion situates the findings in critical scholarship on the diversity dividend to argue that such discourses of socio-economic diversity ultimately benefit developers and gentrifiers, while risking direct and indirect displacement of low-income residents.

Keywords: diversity dividend, gentrification, urban development, Auckland, Northcote

Auckland is a globalising and rapidly growing city. Over the three most recent years that data are available for (2015–2017), the city has been growing by approximately 800 new residents every single

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week (ATEED, 2018). At the same time, the city has experienced steep increases in inequalities that play out spatially in residential segregation (Terruhn, 2020). In response to both a housing shortage and considerable housing unaffordability, a large number of small and large-scale housing development projects are taking place across the city, which will result in immense change to the urban landscape of many communities, especially those that have been earmarked to accommodate large numbers of new residents. The neighbourhood of Northcote is one of these. Described as one of the most important regeneration projects in Auckland (Isthmus, n.d.), this neighbourhood will, as explained in more detail later, undergo significant population growth and a major transformation of its built environment.

At the metropolitan level, Auckland Council has developed visions of Auckland as the "most liveable city" (Auckland Council, 2012) and, more recently, a "world-class city" (Auckland Council, 2017). Much of this narrative is geared towards economic growth, competition and diversity. The notion of a *diversity dividend* is a central element of the city's branding. However, the Auckland Plan 2050 also specifically recognises inequalities and their spatial patterning, housing unaffordability and structural discrimination as key challenges for the city (Auckland Council, 2018, p. 13). As Ross, McNeill, and Cheyne (2017) argue based on their analysis of policy documents including multiple versions of the Auckland Plan, Auckland Council promotes fairness and urban justice but does so rather implicitly within discourses of quality intensification. Conversely, as Haarhoff, Beattie, and Dupuis (2016) show, justifications for densification now revolve primarily around liveability rather than environmental considerations of sustainability.

This paper examines how these aims translate at the level of planning neighbourhood regeneration projects such as the one in Northcote. Panuku Development Auckland (referred to as Panuku in the remainder of this paper), is a Council Controlled Organisation tasked with leading these redevelopments. It states that it aims to build "great places to live" and improve residents' "quality of urban living" in the context of extensive regeneration and densification of housing (Panuku Development Auckland, n.d.(a)). But what does this look like, and what role do diversity and equality play in the visions for Northcote? This paper reports on a qualitative analysis of the discursive use of diversity and equality in planning documents that guide the Northcote Development and other publicly

available texts that disseminate information and promote the development. The analysis demonstrates that whilst diversity discourses are central to how the neighbourhood is described and imagined, terms that suggest a consideration of the need to address inequalities is entirely absent from the documents. Furthermore, the documents instrumentalise diversity as an asset. Current ethno-cultural diversity is described as a core strength of the existing neighbourhood, but at the same time, the documents claim that the Northcote Development will create greater diversity. This new diversity primarily refers to income diversity. Social mix rhetoric and references to greater lifestyle diversity are mobilised as beneficial for revitalisation. In this context, diversity becomes a vehicle to justify the wholesale transformation of the neighbourhood in order to attract diverse newcomers. This ultimately obscures the likelihood of gentrification as an outcome of the Northcote Development and revitalisation project.

The following section canvasses the role of diversity in critical scholarship on cities and in urban policy and planning. The remainder of the paper focuses on the Northcote Development, providing context and detailing the research design, before outlining key findings and discussing implications.

Urban regeneration and the diversity dividend

Diversity as a concept, value and discourse has gained much traction in urban policy and planning practices and has also been a key concern in urban studies scholarship. For some, diversity is a core value in scholarly visions of urban justice. For Amin (2006), for instance, diversity is a crucial element of "the good city". In urban centres, he notes, diversity is a demographic fact that needs to be accounted for in policy and planning in order to ensure universal access and equitable outcomes for all urban residents. Speaking against the grain of current discourses of cohesion that are based on calls for assimilation, he calls for the recognition of "the right to difference that contemporary urban life demands" (Amin, 2006, p. 1012). In the good city, diversity is not just about a right to difference but forms part of an "ever-widening habit of solidarity" that works towards a common good for all, and especially for marginalised social groups. Diversity is equally important in Fainstein's (2010, 2014) work on "the just city". For Fainstein, diversity, defined in terms of recognising difference and the existence of discrimination of particular social groups, is one cornerstone of

urban justice alongside equity and democracy. Recognising the potential for tensions between these three concepts, she argues that neither one on their own is sufficient for achieving urban justice because, for instance, greater equity alone may not be enough to address issues of recognition nor will greater inclusiveness of difference necessarily lead to a more equitable city.

Critics, however, have argued that the concept of diversity is not only an inadequate tool for achieving urban justice but worse, one that perpetuates persistent and growing inequalities. Such critiques rest on observations that the notion of diversity has been increasingly appropriated to serve economic growth agendas. In the context of the US, de Oliver (2016) argues that diversity used to be a social value employed to counter racism and widespread spatial segregation but is now largely a commodity far removed from considerations of justice. Raco and Kesten (2018) further argue that diversity diverts attention away from growing socio-economic inequalities and that diversity is used in a way that only benefits a few, rather than those communities most in need. Similarly, Steil and Delgado (2019) propose that instead of a diversity perspective, urban policy and planning need to adopt an "anti-subordination" approach that actively counters the effects of racism and historical discrimination as well as of contemporary policies that will further disadvantage specific social groups even if they may seem neutral.

Indeed, over recent decades – which have seen cities turn into neoliberal entrepreneurial entities in competition with each other – the notion of a diversity dividend has gained traction in urban policy and with it, diversity has become a policy goal. Seen as a catalyst for innovation, creativity and economic growth (Florida, 2002), diversity is desirable and sought after and is, conversely, a marketable asset that signals the city's attractiveness to potential young, affluent, highly skilled migrants and investors. As such, cities tend to promote "cultural diversity without social justice" (de Oliver, 2016, p. 1312) for the benefit of those who are already privileged.

Especially in the context of urban regeneration, diversity itself – and particularly culture (Miles & Paddison, 2005) – is mobilised to create the "diverse, vibrant, urban environments" that make cities attractive to talent, capital and investment in the context of global interurban competition (Syrett & Sepulveda, 2011, p. 495). As Ahmadi (2018) argues based on research in Toronto, regeneration projects often involve central areas of

cities, especially those that attract businesses and tourism, rather than deprived neighbourhoods (see also Vormann, 2015). She further argues that such politically and economically motivated mobilisations of diversity entail the social construction of hierarchies and dichotomies, such as that "between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' diversity" (Ahmadi, 2018, p. 65). The difference between the two is determined by whether this diversity can be turned into profit or not (Ahmadi, 2018). Especially in the context of competition, diversity is tied to discourses of liveability. Within such liveability discourses, cities "market … themselves as being built on a foundation of 'inclusive' neighbourhoods capable of harmoniously supporting a blend of incomes, cultures, age groups and lifestyles" (Rose, 2004, p. 281).

Increasingly, diversity is also mobilised in development projects that involve the regeneration of public housing areas. Projects, like the Northcote Development, that involve turning public housing areas into a denser mix of public and private dwellings have become prevalent in attempts to supply a great number of housing through public–private partnerships (Arthurson, Levin, & Ziersch, 2015). These mixed developments usually offer a range of housing and tenure types as well as price points. Aiming to increase the housing supply for rapidly expanding urban populations and to address housing unaffordability, these developments also explicitly claim to promote greater diversity. The benefits of this diversity are said to emanate from improved neighbourhood amenities, a boost in local business activity as well as opportunities for 'social mixing' between residents of different socio-economic backgrounds. Social mixing has been widely adopted as a policy and planning objective in many Western cities (Bridge, Butler, & Lees, 2012). Even though, like diversity more broadly, social mix approaches were at one time tied to considerations of "spatial equity" (Rose et al., 2013, p. 445), they are now rooted in widely criticised yet continuously hegemonic theories of neighbourhood effects (Slater, 2013). According to these theories, the environment people live in affects their life chances. Subsequently, improving deprived neighbourhoods and attracting higher-income residents is regarded as a way of addressing poverty and deprivation. Greater diversity is seen as a tool to uplift low-income residents through building bridging capital and, by extension, as a way to remedy issues of socio-economic deprivation through diluting areas of concentrated poverty. Rose et al.'s (2013) multi-sited study of how social mix was conceptualised by local policy actors in locations as dispersed as Canada, France and the UK,

showed that while there was some variation based on local histories and urban conditions, similar neoliberal discourses were guiding the implementation of mixed-tenure projects. These included discourses of individual choice and boosting the local economy as well as arguments for positive gentrification based on neighbourhood effects arguments (Rose et al., 2013).

Many scholars have cautioned that developments that are based on social mix perspectives amount to state-led gentrification because the rhetoric of social mix refers to an influx of higher-income earners into deprived communities, rather than the other way around (Bridge et al., 2012; Cole, 2015; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). Concentrations of poverty are seen as problematic while concentrations of wealth are not. As such, an influx of higher-income earners, hidden behind a rhetoric of diversity and mix, is tasked with breaking up concentrations of socio-economic deprivation. Regardless of whether there are any merits to the social mix perspective, research has shown that in neighbourhoods that have undergone such redevelopments, social diversity is temporary, and over time, communities become more homogenous. In an edited collection that revolves around the question of whether mixed communities constitute "gentrification by stealth" (Bridge et al., 2012), Shaw (2012) argues that while gentrification may not necessarily be the overriding objective, mixed housing is nevertheless a "Trojan horse" for it. Importantly, Fergusson (2018) has recently shown that not all redevelopments of public housing use a social mix approach but that they are predominantly employed in areas with high land value that, therefore, have the potential for gentrification. This observation strengthens the claim that social mix rhetoric is actively used as a vehicle for gentrification.

In policy and planning, the diversity dividend has become a buzzword. Even though diversity is also seen to pose challenges (for instance to cohesion), it is largely portrayed as beneficial for everyone. However, the notable shifts from justice to amenity just described raise the question of who benefits from these contemporary diversity discourses. Diversity – in its desirable, commodified incarnation – satisfies what Butcher (2019, p. 390) refers to as a "desire for conviviality from a position of privilege" that has become the basis of a "new kind of social distinction" (Tissot, 2014, p. 1193) for middle-class residents (see also Blokland & Van Eijk, 2010). These phenomena also underlie Steil and Delgado's (2019) main criticism of

diversity, which rests on its prevalent use as "a characteristic of urban life that may help dominant individuals overcome irrational prejudices through the free flow of ideas when exposed to diverse peers" (p. 42). As such, diversity benefits those already privileged.

Context

The suburb of Northcote is situated on Auckland's North Shore,[1] just beyond the Harbour Bridge which links the area to Auckland City. Northcote is typical of Auckland's suburban landscape insofar as it largely features standalone homes in a residential area serviced by a local town centre. Its resident population of approximately 9000 can be described as diverse with respect to socio-economic and educational backgrounds, professions, age groups and ethnic profile. Northcote is a medium-income community but there is significant variation. Especially in the Census Area Unit (CAU) of Tuff Crater, which is the site of the Northcote Development, the median personal income (NZ$23,600) is considerably lower than that of the neighbouring CAU of Ocean View (NZ$28,600) and for Auckland as a whole (NZ$29,600) (Statistics New Zealand, 2013a, 2013b). This reflects the strong presence of public housing in this part of Northcote. With a deprivation index score of 8, Tuff Crater is an outlier on Auckland's North Shore where deprivation scores otherwise do not exceed 5 and are often lower. As housing has become less affordable, home ownership among Northcote residents has decreased from 56 per cent to 44 per cent between 2001 and 2013. Northcote's population is age-diverse but there is a higher-than-average presence of residents aged 65 and over. With respect to migrant populations and ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity, at the time of the last available Census in 2013, more than 40 per cent of all Northcote residents were born overseas. Since the 1990s, Northcote has become home to a growing number of migrants from Asia. The share of residents under the broad category 'Asian' has increased from just over 20 per cent in 2001 to 28.5 per cent in 2013. The largest ethnic group within the broad 'Asian' category were people identifying as Chinese, who made up 17 per cent of residents. The neighbourhood is also home to many Pasifika (nearly 10 per cent) and Māori (8.5 per cent) residents, many of whom are low-income public housing tenants.

Northcote is currently undergoing a large-scale housing development programme and the revitalisation of the neighbourhood's town

centre is scheduled to begin in two years' time. As part of the housing development, approximately 300 public housing dwellings on Housing New Zealand-owned land have been demolished and will be replaced with up to 1500 new dwellings on the same land. The planned town centre will include an additional 750 homes. As a result of these two projects, Northcote's resident population is expected to increase by approximately 4500–5000 people within the next few years. To illustrate the extent of this population growth, the local primary school, which currently has a role of 71 students, expects to enrol nearly 1000 students in 10 years' time (HLC with Panuku, 2018, p. 4).

The Northcote Development is one of several large development projects currently taking place in Auckland. Alongside many smaller projects across the city, these housing developments are designed to address the city's housing shortage and growing housing unaffordability. Like the other large-scale developments, the Northcote Development forms part of the Auckland Housing Programme, an initiative by Housing New Zealand (HNZ) and its subsidiary developers Homes.Land.Community (HLC). The Unitary Plan, a document that guides Auckland's growth strategy, identified areas that were amenable to densification and the Northcote Development area is one of many designated Special Housing Areas that enable swift developments within the current urban boundaries in a move towards a more compact city. This means that existing communities are undergoing significant changes to their demographic make-up and built environment. In concert with densification of housing, there are also moves towards post-suburbanisation in Auckland, which means that traditional residential suburbs are gradually turned into higher-density, mixed-use centres (Johnson, Baker, & Collins, 2019).

Notably, all large-scale brownfield developments in Auckland take place in neighbourhoods that rank highly in the index of relative deprivation.[2] In part, this is because these neighbourhoods have large areas of HNZ-owned land that is available for extensive development. The Unitary Plan has predominantly earmarked low-income communities, including Northcote, as zones for mixed housing while high-income communities have largely been "protected under heritage rules" (Cole, 2017, p. 7). This means that disadvantaged communities are more likely to carry the effects of dramatic neighbourhood change than affluent neighbourhoods are.

As is the case for the other large-scale brownfield housing developments in Auckland, the Northcote Development is characterised by a mixed housing approach. Of the 1500 new dwellings built on HNZ land, 400 will be retained for public housing tenants while the remainder will be privatised and offered to buyers as a mix of 'affordable' and market homes. All 750 homes that will be part of the new town centre are for the private market. This means that, overall, 80 per cent of all new housing will be for the private market. This approach to redevelopment reflects the origins of the Auckland Housing Programme under the National Government and a strong emphasis on encouraging both housing supply and home ownership. However, as Gordon et al. (2017) have pointed out in their discussion of the redevelopment of the Auckland neighbourhood of Glen Innes, the privatisation of land in the face of the city's housing unaffordability crisis is concerning. Even though affordable housing is included in these developments, the mixed-tenure approach directly and indirectly threatens to displace low-income residents and primarily benefits people on higher incomes. In light of these processes, a recent OECD report has suggested that more resources should be allocated to "assist low-income renters, whose well-being has suffered most from declining affordability" (OECD, 2019).

Alongside the housing redevelopment sits the planned revitalisation of the neighbourhood's town centre. Known as Northcote Central, the area consists of a mix of 90 retail and food outlets, services and community organisations. The Northcote town centre reflects the neighbourhood's ethno-cultural and socio-economic make-up in that it caters to a low-income population and a large Asian migrant population, to the extent that Northcote Central is described as an ethnic precinct (Fichter, 2013; Spoonley & Meares, 2011). Northcote Central was the first publicly owned town centre and continues to be owned by Auckland Council, making it amenable to redevelopment. Even though there is currently little indication as to what will happen to existing businesses and services, the imagery on the Town Centre Masterplan (Panuku Development Auckland, 2019b) suggests a wholesale transformation of the area that leaves few traces of what has come before. The documents analysed in this study suggest that there will be significant disruption to the retail landscape. In 2010, the North Shore Council warned that any "rigorous redevelopment could result in higher rents, which could drive out some of the shops that add to the local character and provide valuable daily services to the community" (North Shore City

Council, 2010, pp. 31–32). However, in 2016, plans included references to Panuku's mandate to "negotiate the surrender of the leases with the existing leaseholders or acquire the leasehold interests using its compulsory acquisition powers to give effect to urban renewal" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016b, p. 15).

Research design

This paper draws on a qualitative content analysis of documents pertaining to the housing redevelopment and town centre revitalisation of Northcote as a valuable source for a close examination of the discursive role diversity plays in policy, planning and developers' visions of 'the new Northcote'. I selected publicly available policy and planning documents as well as website content from organisations and corporations involved in the project (such as the Council Controlled Organisation Panuku, HLC and Isthmus Group) as well as five issues of *Everyday Northcote*, a biannual neighbourhood magazine published by HLC with Panuku. The policy and planning documents include the Northcote Town Centre Plan (2010) and all those plans Panuku lists as "the plans guiding Northcote's regeneration" (Panuku Development Auckland, n.d.(b)): the Northcote High Level Project Plan (2016), the Northcote Framework Plan (2016) and the Northcote Town Centre Benchmark Masterplan (2019).

The website www.northcotedevelopment.co.nz addresses current as well as potential future residents and visitors. Initially, sections on 'How does it affect me?' with subsections on 'I am a tenant/neighbour/local resident' and 'What is the area like?' focused primarily on current residents. In June 2019, the website content was updated to showcase new apartments and include a 'For sale' tab. By October 2019, a new 'Visit' tab had been added to promote the neighbourhood as a visitor destination. The *Everyday Northcote* magazine is designed to keep current residents informed of the development and, according to Isthmus (n.d.), "to hero the people of Northcote and their stories".

Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the interpretive process consisted of several stages. After an initial close reading of all documents to establish a broad sense of authorship, audience and message of these texts, I systematically searched the documents and recorded all instances of terms relevant to the analysis. The result of the search is

documented in Table 1. I then analysed all appearances in context and re-read all documents in order to examine the discursive role diversity plays in descriptions and visions of the neighbourhood.

The following section outlines the findings of the content analysis. Following an initial overview of the prevalence of terms related to diversity and equality in the canvassed documents, the section highlights key aspects of the work diversity does in planning and marketing the housing development and transformation of the Northcote town centre.

Diversity and equality in the Northcote Development

The search for and tally of terms for the qualitative analysis proved very insightful, insofar as this mere initial count conveys a clear sense of which concepts are foregrounded and which ones are marginalised or entirely omitted in descriptions of the existing community and visions of the new Northcote. As Table 1 shows, the term 'diversity' itself appears recurrently (39 times), alongside notions of 'difference' (52 times) and 'mix' (85 times). Mentions of culture were particularly frequent, appearing 111 times across the documents.

In stark contrast, terms related to socio-economic status and inequalities were almost or completely absent from these texts. Given that Northcote, and the development area in particular, is home to large numbers of low-income residents and public housing tenants, this is surprising. Further analysis showed that the few (16 times) appearances of 'income' reflect the anticipation of greater income diversity in visions of post-development Northcote. While 'poor' is mentioned six

times, these appearances refer exclusively to the built environment and the related noun 'poverty' was not mentioned at all. Particularly striking is the complete absence of the terms 'inequalities' or 'equality'.

Overall, these figures indicate that diversity, and more specifically cultural diversity, plays a prominent role in the descriptions and visions of Northcote, whilst considerations of socio-economic disparities are not only sidelined but entirely absent from the planning discourse guiding the development. The roles culture, diversity and mix played are explored in detail below.

Table 1: Frequency of search terms in analysed documents

Terms	Number
Culture(s) / cultural(ly)	111
Mix / mixed	85
Different / difference(s)	52
Diverse / diversity / diversities	39
Income(s)	16
Ethnic / ethnicity / ethnicities	11
Poor	6
Deprived / deprivation	2
Poverty	0
(Un)equal / (in)equality / inequalities	0

Diversity now and then: From culture to income and lifestyle

The findings discussed in this section demonstrate a notable shift in depicting diversity from descriptions of the existing neighbourhood that foreground its ethno-cultural diversity to visions that centre on a diversity of incomes and lifestyles as a positive outcome of the development.

The analysed documents portray diversity – and more specifically ethno-cultural diversity – as a longstanding, important and positive characteristic of the existing neighbourhood and as a feature that constitutes a key strength of the local community. The texts contain manifold references to Northcote as a "culturally diverse community", "multicultural" and made up of "culturally diverse groups" of people or of "different cultural groups". With reference to the most prominent ethnic groups, the documents variously describe Northcote as a multicultural community with a "truly multicultural" or "truly multi-ethnic" town centre.

References to other facets of diversity are much less frequent in these documents and often the focus ultimately remains on ethnicity and culture, as the following quote illustrates: "The centre is also well used by a cross-section of people: the young, elderly, families, professionals and people from different cultures making it a truly multi-ethnic centre" (North Shore City Council, 2010, p. 18). References to residents' socio-economic backgrounds are especially rare and hardly occur beyond a mention of the neighbourhood's median household income. However, one occurrence stands out. Under the heading of 'Diversity', The Northcote Town Centre Plan

states: "The Northcote population with its strong mix of cultures contributes to a truly multicultural centre. The presence of a large number of HNZC properties further contributes to a strong identity and a unique community in Northcote" (North Shore City Council, 2010, p. 30). Notably, this passage does not refer to a diversity or mix of incomes but to the presence of public housing, and therefore by implication low-income residents (which are hidden behind "properties"). What is more, this passage presents culture and class as two separate entities, thereby obscuring the intersections between them. Consider the above extract together with the following text from the Northcote Development website. A tab labelled 'The Local Community' revealed the following description:

> Northcote has a strong community spirit, aided by the many families that have lived in the area for a long time. The ethnic make-up of the suburb of Northcote differs from the Northcote Development area. Within Northcote, 66% of residents are of European heritage, 24% Asian and Maori and Pasifika residents make up 7% of the population each. In the development area, Pasifika are the largest group (41%), followed by European (27%), Asian (21%) and Maori (17%).
>
> (https://northcotedevelopment.co.nz/about-us/community/)[3]

In line with the analysis so far, this description also puts ethnicity front and centre and in doing so fails to point to the fact that the difference in demographic profile that they chose to highlight reflects the stark overrepresentation of Pasifika and Māori amongst public housing residents in Northcote (and elsewhere).

Importantly, analysis revealed that whilst ethno-cultural diversity was explicitly upheld as a key strength of the neighbourhood, the presence of low-income residents was portrayed as a challenge. Under the heading 'Northcote Strengths and Challenges', The Northcote Framework Plan (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a) explicitly bullet points as one key strength that Northcote is one of "the most culturally diverse residential and business communities on the North Shore, with strong Chinese, Korean, Māori, and Pacific presences" (p. 32). In the same section, the plan states that one of the challenges Northcote faces is its "contrasting and sometimes polarised communities in terms of levels of home ownership, income and backgrounds with pockets of concentrated socio-economic deprivation." Even though this statement implicitly speaks to tenure and income disparities, the mention of the concentration of socio-economic deprivation suggests that the challenge is posed by low-income residents. In the only other mention of

the phrase socio-economic deprivation, the same document notes that "the town centre remains a focal point for its increasingly diverse community, but there has been a lack of investment over the years in the buildings and immediate surrounds and socio-economic deprivation issues have become evident across parts of the community" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a, p. 30).

Even though strength is explicitly attributed to ethno-cultural diversity, for instance in references to a "strong mix of cultures" (North Shore City Council, 2010, p. 30), the specific powers that this kind of diversity harbours for the neighbourhood are often left unsaid. The 2010 Town Centre Plan refers to the neighbourhood's multicultural centre and presence of a variety of ethnic groups as a sign of distinction and the Northcote Central website refers to these as a source of uniqueness. With reference to its wider work as place-makers across Auckland, Panuku refers especially to Māori culture as "a point of difference" for Auckland as a whole. The paucity of clear statements as to the benefits of diversity reflect a wider established orthodoxy that ethnic diversity is a value in and of itself but the three instances that speak directly to the point suggest that diversity is regarded as a selling point for marketing the neighbourhood and wider Auckland. Such tropes mirror the hegemonic understanding of diversity as a marketable asset and generator of profit identified in international research (see, for instance, Ahmadi, 2018).

In visions of Northcote's post-development future, diversity remains an important feature. However, there were notable differences in comparison to the descriptions just discussed. For one, diversity is portrayed as an outcome of the redevelopment, rather than something that already exists. Secondly, whilst ethno-cultural diversity remains important, this new diversity is framed primarily around income. Thirdly, discussions of the new diversity are tied to discourses of improvement that, the analysis suggests, aim to create a more desirable diversity geared towards attracting new middle-class residents and consumers.

Analysis showed that the texts that advertise the development depict diversity as an anticipated outcome. Bearing in mind that ethno-cultural diversity was also seen as an established characteristic and strength of the neighbourhood, this is somewhat surprising. For instance, in a promotional video (Hobsonville Land Company & Housing New Zealand, n.d.) the featured developers claim that as a result of the development, "a

wider range of people will be able to live in and enjoy Northcote". Similarly, the magazine *Everyday Northcote* (HLC with Panuku, 2017, p. 21) emphasises that the many newcomers will "bring greater breadth" to Northcote's resident population. Despite such verbal assertions of increasing diversity, much of the imagery used to illustrate the new Northcote seems to contradict this prediction. Analysis of imagery used in the promotional video as well as in renders used to depict Northcote's future population shows that these images are dominated by whiter, younger and ostensibly affluent people. Whilst images of the current population reflect the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood adequately, in visions of the future, people of ethnic minority background are much less visible.

Even though the discourse of diversity as strength permeates descriptions of the existing neighbourhood, documents addressed at current residents also explicitly aim to make diversity palatable. The following paragraph, which appeared in the first issue of *Everyday Northcote* as part of an explanation of why Northcote had been selected for this extensive programme of housing and town centre redevelopment, illustrates this well.

CHANGING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Overseas research points to diversity being a key factor in the strength of a community. People feel happier and more satisfied with where they live when their community includes a mix of people of different ages and stages, incomes and ethnicities. Over the next six years the immediate neighbourhoods affected by the Northcote development will grow and change as new people move into the 800 new homes which will be sold to a cross-section of Aucklanders. These new people will bring greater breadth, and therefore strength, to their neighbourhoods.

(HLC with Panuku, 2017, p. 21)

This passage not only highlights diversity as an anticipated result of the Northcote Development, it also makes a case for it, claiming that the diverse newcomers will make the neighbourhood stronger and improve neighbourhood satisfaction.

Most notably, in visions for the future of the neighbourhood, income diversity plays a more prominent – and a positive – role. As discussed above, descriptions of the current neighbourhood refer to income only in descriptive statistics and otherwise as a challenge, with particular reference to pockets of socio-economic deprivation. In the plans laid out for the future of the neighbourhood, income diversity is an explicit goal of the development. For

instance, the key performance indicators formulated in the Northcote Framework Plan 2016 state that one goal of the development is to "create a place that supports a diverse mix of people (and incomes) who are actively engaged in and enjoy the benefits of living, working and playing in a successful and culturally rich place". A similar goal is articulated for attracting visitors who are hoped to be diverse with respect to "age, ethnicity, income, [and] origin" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a, p. 111).

Whilst the term 'income' itself appears infrequently, the notion of income diversity most strongly resonates in housing-related discourses of mixing. As outlined earlier, the Northcote Development is based on a mixed housing approach, offering private affordable and market homes alongside accommodation for public housing tenants. The documents repeatedly draw attention to the greater choice the redevelopment will offer. Importantly, this choice is presented as bringing with it a "mix of lifestyles" that, conversely, attracts more newcomers to the area.

Despite the social mix rhetoric, there is ample evidence to suggest that the development is geared towards higher-income earners and the private market. The High Level Project Plan openly refers to "increasing demand and values in Northcote [which] have created a new market context, with the area's market attractiveness deriving from close proximity and views to the CBD and an established cultural hub" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016b, p. 14). The development is further portrayed as "a catalyst to the private sector" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a, p 49) and HLC explicitly state that including market homes in neighbourhoods with social and affordable housing will make the neighbourhood more vibrant and diverse. Echoing neighbourhood effects theories, this discourse explicitly promotes the notion of positive gentrification, which means that rather than diversity being beneficial for everyone, it is the presence of higher-income earners that is beneficial for the neighbourhood (Fergusson, 2018; Rose et al., 2013). Indeed, "helping address social issues" is explicitly referred to as one key aspect of the development. Increasing the lifestyle mix – which appears to stand in for gentrification – will mean that "Northcote's people will have a strengthened sense of community and pride in the area. More people will want to move to and visit Northcote, attracted by the lifestyle mix, the renowned Asian food and easy connections to wider Auckland" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a, p. 49).

New, improved and vibrant: Attracting diversity

The discourse of attracting diverse newcomers to Northcote is intertwined with narratives of improvement. International research has identified discourses of decline and blight as typical tropes that justify regeneration and gentrification (Slater, 2018). In a similar though perhaps less pronounced vein, the analysed documents variously describe Northcote as "underperforming" or as "a dormant suburb in the process of reawakening" (Isthmus, n.d.). Describing Northcote as a suburb whose time has come, HLC proclaim "we're … building a bigger and better community than exists at the moment" (Hobsonville Land Company & Housing New Zealand, n.d.). This is explicitly done in order to make the area more desirable. This discourse of improvement entails assumptions that the area is not currently desirable, which begs the question of who HLC and Panuku aim to attract.

Alongside the upgrade of public housing, discourses of improvement revolve particularly around the town centre. Even though the reviewed documents praise the existing town centre for its multicultural atmosphere (a point I will return to shortly), they also decry aspects of it that relate to class and income. The fact that the town centre predominantly offers "low value retail" – which arguably caters to its current residents – is given as one reason that the neighbourhood is "hard to love" (Panuku Development Auckland, 2016a, p. 32). The imagery of the Northcote Town Centre Benchmark Masterplan (Panuku Development Auckland, 2019b) leaves little doubt that Northcote Central is bound to undergo wholesale transformation with respect to the built environment, as well as its retail and hospitality landscape. Most of all, the town centre is imagined as the "vibrant heart" of the community, "a lively and welcoming heart that celebrates culture, and where business thrives and everyone's needs are met". As the Isthmus website states, "[A]t the town centre, reimagined for the future, there will be improved retail amenity that will accommodate a wider demographic, so the town centre caters to many, while holding onto identity and food culture as a way of bringing people together" (Isthmus, n.d.). Panuku and the Isthmus design studio re-envision Northcote as vibrant at day and by night, with retail, al fresco courtyard and laneway dining, events and festivals, and as a destination for visitors.

As the above quote shows, diversity is drawn on to argue that the new town centre will cater to a "wider demographic", mirroring narratives about housing mix. However, the text and visual analysis suggests that the

centre will cater to a different rather than a wider demographic. The activities the plans refer to and depict in their visual renders cater to a middle-class aesthetic and leisure and consumption practices: the images show night-time activities in a central plaza with a market atmosphere, al fresco dining in a laneway lit by fairy lights, and, in the case of the HLC promotional video, a farmers market offering organic produce. In all the images, the majority of people are white. Ethno-cultural diversity re-enters the conversation here in the form of food culture as a thing to "hold on to" (see above) as the town centre is reimagined and transformed into a space for middle-class consumption. Upmarket cultural diversity – a new and improved, high-value diversity, or "a gentrification-tailored exoticism", as Huse (2016) calls it – becomes a selling point for newcomers and a drawcard for visitors. The most recent news item on the Northcote Development website, called "Live in and Dine out in Northcote", advertises the neighbourhood and its surrounds as a foodie destination. It says, "[W]ith a host of multicultural eateries in the town centre, and in close proximity to some of Auckland's chicest restaurants and eateries in nearby suburbs, it's little wonder so many people want to live here" (Nortcote Development, 2019.). Beyond food culture as a drawcard, this extract is also notable for being perhaps the first instance that describes the process of attracting newcomers as achieved. No longer is Northcote spoken off as a suburb that "should be desirable" but as one where "many people want to live".

Whose dividend?

In this conclusion, I consider the findings of this study in light of debates about the place of diversity in working towards urban justice. The findings show that much like at the level of cities more broadly, the texts guiding and promoting the neighbourhood development in Northcote present an image of diversity as entailing a dividend for everyone. Both ethno-cultural diversity as well as the socio-economic and lifestyle diversity that purportedly results from the redevelopment are said to strengthen the community as a whole.

However, the analysis has also demonstrated that these claims are problematic because the ways in which diversity is discursively employed suggest that it is geared primarily towards benefitting newcomers while current residents, especially those on low incomes, are hardly considered. For one, the shift in what kinds of diversity are promoted in the documents

can be interpreted as a deliberate sleight of hand on the part of planners and developers. Referring to imminent demographic changes simply as a greater mix of incomes and lifestyles diverts attention away from the fact that newcomers are likely to shift the demographics of the neighbourhood substantially towards a higher-income profile. In other words, it obscures state-led gentrification in ways that echo local (Fergusson, 2018; Gordon et al., 2017) and international research findings. As outlined earlier in this paper, 80 per cent of all new housing built as part of the Northcote Development is for the private market, and given the current pricing and eligibility criteria of KiwiBuild, the share of affordable housing included in these 80 per cent will largely cater to mid-income professionals and remain unaffordable for low-income households. While the upgrade of HNZ dwellings may be commendable because it will provide healthier homes to public housing tenants, the partial privatisation of HNZ land is problematic in the face of a growing wait list for public housing. Latest figures show that the number of people on the housing register has tripled over the past five years, reaching more than 12,000 in June 2019 (Brunsdon, 2019). Research into an earlier and similar, though even larger, housing development in the Auckland neighbourhood of Glen Innes demonstrates that such mixed housing developments amount to state-led gentrification with vast ramifications for low-income residents (Cole, 2015; Fergusson, 2018; Gordon et al., 2017).

Within narratives of aiming to attract and cater to a wider demographic, diversity is a veneer for inclusion and justice. Social mix discourse and narratives of improvement are prime conductors for claims that diversity benefits everyone. For the most part, these claims mask gentrification although, at times, the documents explicitly refer to the potential of market housing (rather than diversity) to enhance the neighbourhood's vibrancy. Indeed, enhancing vibrancy is a key goal of the town centre revitalisation. This involves a transformative process of replacing the current low-value retail landscape with improved amenities and consumption choices. As I have shown, these discourses of improvement are guided by assumptions that low-value diversity is undesirable, echoing Ahmadi's (2018) observations in Toronto. As Turner et al. (2019) have shown in their study of property advertisements on Auckland's North Shore, the notion that suburbs appeal to particular lifestyles has become an increasingly common sales technique that we also observe in Northcote.

Importantly, these images are "socially and economically exclusive" (Turner et al., 2019, p. 10) and particularly problematic vis-à-vis growing inequalities and housing unaffordability.

One aspect of particular concern that emerged from this analysis is the striking absence of any references to inequalities, or equality, in the documents guiding the Northcote Development. While Panuku and HLC are developers, which means a pro-development discourse may be expected, Panuku is also a Council Controlled Organisation that aligns its work with local government plans and strategies. Panuku identifies as a primary contributor to the Auckland Plan's stated outcome of 'Belonging and Participation' (Panuku Development Auckland, 2019a) which clearly features strong imperatives to serve those communities most in need and address inequities associated with increasing housing unaffordability, such as disparities in access to opportunities and participation and intergenerational wealth (dis)accumulation. Yet, the only phrase that implies attention to questions of equality in the documents guiding the Northcote Development is the vision of Northcote as a place "where everyone's needs are met". This means that the consideration given to addressing inequalities in rhetoric at the municipal scale does not translate at the level of neighbourhood regeneration. Instead, the plans, read against extensive research into the effects of gentrification, further disadvantage low-income residents (public housing and private tenants) by putting them at risk of direct and indirect displacement through rising property values and an imposition of a gentrification aesthetic in the neighbourhood's public and consumption spaces that reflects the lifestyles of its new middle-class residents (Kern, 2016; Langegger, 2016).

On the whole, then, it can be argued that diversity as envisioned in the plans benefits developers, home owners who will see property values increase, and those affluent enough to be able to afford one of the new Northcote homes. More important, perhaps, than the question of who benefits is who does not benefit. These are people and households that may no longer be able to rent in the area and people who will not be able to afford the improved neighbourhood amenities and retail options. As such, it can be concluded that diversity discourses in the Northcote Development contribute to further disadvantage already marginalised communities.

Notes

1   For the purposes of this study, Northcote is defined as comprised of the
        two Census Area Units Tuff Crater and Ocean View.

2   The term brownfield refers to sites that already have infrastructure in
        place and are inhabited; in other words, they are already existing
        neighbourhoods. By contrast, greenfield developments take place on
        previously undeveloped land. Other sites of current large-scale brownfield
        developments in Auckland are Tāmaki, Māngere, Mt Roskill and Oranga.
        In addition, there are a number of large-scale greenfield developments
        under way in Auckland.

3   Retrieved 30 July 2019. The tab and text have since been altered because
        the website is undergoing continual updates.

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