Introduction

Susan Thompson

The delightful original painting by Helen Goldsmith which adorns the cover of *Planning Australia* captures the essence of this book's hope for the theory and practice of the planning discipline: the creation of environmentally sustainable and well-designed places where everyone can find a sense of belonging. Goldsmith's painting shows the planning environment in Australia as dynamic and interactive, extending from the inner city to the suburbs, and beyond to the countryside.

Planning is a continuously evolving process, at times chaotic and often contested, difficult and frustrating. Even its name is debated. Historically referred to as 'town and country planning', it has more recently been described as 'town planning' or 'urban and regional planning', and in some quarters, 'environmental planning'. Here we use the term 'planning' to encompass these varying descriptors and to avoid any omissions which they may inadvertently imply. At its best, planning is respectful of the built and natural environments, encompassing people and the interactions they have with these surroundings. Good planning respects current and evolving Australian ways of life, meeting the needs of diverse communities by acknowledging their histories and the challenges facing them as they grow and change. It facilitates appropriate and good development, ensuring that economic, social and cultural prosperity is in balance with environmental and species protection. Planning is mindful of the richness that can emerge from community involvement in its processes and recognises that, ultimately, everyone has a connection to the places they inhabit and use every day.

Conceptual structure

The book is divided into two parts. Part I defines and contextualises the theoretical, ideological and professional foundations of planning. The history of the discipline and its relationship to broader governance structures in Australia are also included here. Against this backdrop, Part II explores

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specific themes and concerns central to Australian planning practice today. Although presented in separate chapters, these key issues interconnect and are most usefully considered in relation to one another. The topics covered by the authors reflect a collective view of contemporary planning focuses: growing concerns about the state of the environment, creating appropriate places for socially and culturally diverse communities, conserving what is valued, and the shifting influences of governance and legislation.

Part I Frameworks

The initial chapter in Part I engages with a big and unavoidable question: what is planning? This has been debated for a long time, with practitioners and theoreticians often arriving at different and sometimes conflicting conclusions. For those who are out there 'doing it', such debates can go unnoticed or simply be ignored. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge and accompanying techniques used by planners are built on a multidisciplinary foundation of evolving ideological and theoretical themes which this chapter seeks to illuminate. From this discussion a pattern emerges that is used to build a definition of planning for Australia today – a definition that speaks to planning as a responsive agent in the light of changing socio-political situations, environmental needs and community expectations. This in turn sets the scene for the chapters that follow in revealing the diverse dimensions of contemporary Australian planning.

In Chapter 2, Peter Williams outlines the broad geographical, environmental and population characteristics that frame the challenges faced by contemporary Australian planners. Australia is simultaneously one of the most sparsely settled countries on earth and one of the most highly urbanised, with its population gravitating towards cities and towns, both on the coast and inland. Williams argues that this 'expanding human settlement' presents key challenges for planners, particularly in relation to balancing growth in a sensitive environment. He also describes how planning decisions that deal with these challenges are made within government and administrative structures. He notes the ongoing declining role of the federal government in urban issues, and the continuing tension between state and local jurisdictions. Increasingly, states have shored up competitive advantage and facilitated development through the use of public–private partnerships (PPPs) and the establishment of urban development authorities. This has generally been at the expense of planning at the local level, where communities can find themselves disenfranchised and alienated. Ultimately, Williams is critical of the centralisation of planning powers because this undermines participatory democracy and shared planning responsibilities. From this chapter, it is clear that achieving a balance between crucial public policy outcomes and appropriate public consultation is set to be an ongoing challenge for Australian planning.

The debates about the professional nature of planning and its quest for professional recognition are the subject of Chapter 3. Contextualised by a discussion of the history and theory of professions, Nancy Marshall evaluates the professional status of planning. Much of the discussion focuses on the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and its recent moves to strengthen the professional standing of the discipline. These changes need to be considered in relation to the nature of planning practice – that is, what planners do – and whether planning can claim unique knowledge and discipline-specific theory. Marshall argues that Australian planning is closer than ever before to establishing a strong identity but notes that questions about professionalisation remain. Essentially there are two positions: that professionalisation is necessary to guarantee planning's power and legitimacy in society; and the alternative, that the work of planners can be just as effective without such recognition. At this point in time Australian planning's professional status is at a crossroads; its future practitioners will decide in which direction their profession goes.

Set against the broad sweep of Australian urbanisation, the history of planning presented in Chapter 4 spans over 200 years from the foundations of government land settlement and planning in the colonial era, to the more market-driven flexibility and neo-liberalism of the present day. Planning is portrayed as an historical process and a product of its time, contrary to its typecasting as a futuristic activity. Robert Freestone argues that planning has been continually redefined to serve new challenges, and not always with outstanding success in the capitalist economy. Planning has been characterised by continuities and discontinuities, conflicts and cooperation across levels of government, constant redefinitions of the public interest, and an evolving mix of targets and tools. Planners across the generations speak to each other in their 'expectations of a better world', as suggested by the title of Bruce Wright's 2001 history of the Planning Institute of Australia. But whereas the early pioneers took a didactic approach, contemporary conceptions of planning are much more inclusive, layered and messy.

The chapter tracks the evolution of the theory and practice of Australian planning in relation to several key themes, including the influence of international ideas that connect the Australian experience to the globalisation of planning thought. Another theme worthy of note is the on-again off-again intervention of national government, which has left Australia today as one of the few advanced western nations lacking a sustained commitment to a national spatial policy. Community input to planning theory and planned development is another important historical thread in the chapter.

The legal statutory framework in which planning occurs across Australia is explored by Peter Williams in Chapter 5. Legislation has a pivotal role in determining the administrative and governance context of planning, although the prominence of this role varies across the nation. Having explained key terminology, Williams provides a comparative analysis of the different federal,

state and local legislation currently operating in Australia. This reveals a unifying theme across the varying statutes and regulation: greater centralisation of decision-making and increasing involvement of the private sector. Williams focuses on significant planning legislation in the key areas of strategic planning, statutory plans and plan-making; development assessment; environmental impact assessment; appeals and review; and public participation. Closely related to the picture of Australian governance presented in Chapter 2, Chapter 5 provides the legal background for understanding the key issues discussed in Part II.

Part II Key Issues

This part of the book identifies and discusses the fundamental concepts or themes at the forefront of planning practice in Australia today. The analyses of central concerns, responses and ongoing challenges are illustrated by different examples drawn from across the nation. The aim is to give readers new to planning a rigorous launching pad for further exploration of contemporary issues in Australian planning.

Chapter 6 focuses on the impact of human activity on the natural or bio-physical environment and the ways that Australian environmental planning and natural resource management systems have responded. Peter Williams presents the diverse range of environmental and resource management tools that are currently available to Australian planners. These include the principles of ecological sustainable development (ESD) and environmental impact assessment (EIA). He discusses how these are used in land-use decision-making processes, noting that outcomes are also inevitably shaped by social, economic and political inputs.

Environmental indicators and state of the environment reporting are in place across the nation to assess performance in ESD, as well as other areas of environmental management and resource allocation. The conservation of biodiversity, as a key measure of ESD, has become an important planning responsibility. Williams engages with some of the debate around the effectiveness of planning in this area, arguing that traditional approaches are inadequate and must be replaced with more integrated methods as well as with self-regulation, voluntarism, education and information disclosure, economic instruments and free-market environmentalism. The chapter concludes with reflections on how environmental concerns have changed the agenda of planning, broadening its remit and, one hopes, its effectiveness in protecting the fragile Australian landscape.

Metropolitan plans provide a general framework within which more detailed plans for smaller areas and infrastructure developments are located. This theme is taken up in Chapter 7, where Peter Murphy argues that

metropolitan plans are needed to ensure that policy prescriptions for small areas are coordinated, thereby avoiding negative side effects for the metropolis as a whole. Metropolitan plans also help to ensure that infrastructure planners align their plans with broader visions of metropolitan development. Contemporary plans of this type focus on the major structural elements of cities: residential population densities; commercial and community activity centres; areas of new urban development; areas of redevelopment in the existing city; balance between houses and jobs; transportation, hydraulic infrastructure and other forms of infrastructure. Murphy asserts that too much should not be expected of metropolitan plans. He believes that investment decisions, detailed implementation plans and pricing of urban services will determine the evolution of the metropolis, as well as the extent to which it evolves in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way.

In Chapter 8, Ian Sinclair and Raymond Bunker make the point that rural lands cover almost the entire continental landmass of Australia, noting that remote and sparsely populated areas are little affected by planning controls as such. Rather, planning for these areas should aim to balance rural production, usually extensive in character, with the sustainable use of relatively meagre natural resources. In areas of population growth along the coast and near to metropolitan cities and country towns, these land-use issues become particularly complex and must be guided through the planning system. The most significant issue in these 'peri-urban' areas is reconciling agricultural and pastoral production with the growth in rural residential living, taken up by people attracted to the rural or coastal environment. This is particularly important because the nation's scarce resources of productive land and water are concentrated around these centres of population growth. An additional imperative is the need to safeguard nearby sources of fresh food for urban populations. To achieve balance between rural production and other land uses, the planning system uses information about agricultural land quality and capability, existing land use, and subdivision and ownership patterns to develop appropriate policy responses and control measures.

Paul Collits opens Chapter 9 by declaring that 'regional planning, regional policy and regional governance are contentious topics' and, in Australia, typically not well regarded. This seems ironic given the need for regionally based considerations of complex and integrated planning issues demonstrated in several other chapters. Collits advocates regional planning in the form of spatial planning rather than land-use regulation because the former is an activity that endeavours to integrate planning across the environmental, social and economic matters that are experienced in common by inhabitants of a particular region. With terminology defined, Collits moves to an overview of Australian regional governance, which is often 'characterised by complex and divergent objectives, funding bases, personnel and power structures'. Despite such impediments to regionalism in Australia, there are numerous examples

that show how different levels of government have attempted to address the needs of regions, with varying degrees of success. Although the difficulties remain, there are ever more compelling reasons for regional approaches in contemporary Australia. These include globalisation, spatial inequities, and the complex and interrelated planning issues that arise in relation to regional Australia.

The central tenet of Chapter 10 is that people are at the heart of planning. I argue that all good planning is about the integration of physical land use with socio-cultural considerations in the quest to build sustainable environments for everyone. It follows that social and cultural concerns are not supplementary or subservient to other aspects of planning practice. That said, it is an increasingly difficult task to address the needs, hopes and aspirations of the individuals and groups who live in the diverse communities for which planners have responsibility. Not only must planners accommodate diversity across gender, age, ethnicity and ability, for example, but they must also understand the spatial and socio-cultural implications of new markers of difference such as lifestyle, generational aspiration and work patterns.

In the past, issues of difference and diversity were undeniably poorly handled, but more recently, holistic and qualitative methodologies have been embraced, typically under the rubric of 'social planning'. With foundations in the principles of social equity, social planning is an interdisciplinary and integral part of all good planning, engaging with complex socio-cultural conditions and community change. Through both strategic and statutory planning processes, social planning can help to build community capacity and ensure that development decisions thoroughly consider social impacts, creating safe, healthy, culturally rich and accessible towns and cities. There are, however, many contemporary challenges for social planning, including the growing disparity between rich and poor, increasing fear of crime, conflict between new and old communities, and the protection of local distinctiveness in the face of globalisation.

In Chapter 11, Ed Wensing shows that Australian planning practices have been slow to respond to the challenges arising from the belated recognition in Australian common law of the occupation and ownership of the nation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prior to British colonisation. The ramifications for contemporary planning practices have only recently become clearer following significant amendments to the *Native Title Act 1993* in 1998, as well as several high-profile cases in both the Federal and High Courts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the oldest continuing system of land tenure in the world, and this chapter argues that it is no longer appropriate for planners to ignore their ongoing connection to country, regardless of whether that connection can be legally recognised. There are strong moral and ethical imperatives for new approaches to planning that are more inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights, interests, needs and aspirations. Other jurisdictions such as New Zealand

have already made such changes, and it is incumbent on Australian planning law and practice to follow a similar route.

As a process for involving the public in planning decisions, community participation is undeniably one of the most fraught and contentious aspects of the planner's work. Not only must there be a consideration of who the 'public' might be, but there are questions and controversies associated with how each citizen is rightfully represented in a contemporary multicultural democracy. This is the setting for Chapter 12, where Robert Zehner and Nancy Marshall engage with the complexities of public involvement in Australia today. They begin by addressing the difficulties of defining the 'public' in a diverse community. An overview of the historical background of public involvement follows, together with a perspective on its theoretical framework. The chapter discusses why community engagement is an integral part of the decision-making process in good planning. Essentially it enables governments and private industry to work closely with communities and produce the best planning outcomes for a policy, plan or development. Generating effective public participation processes can be confronting and not always welcomed by the planners themselves. Busy modern lifestyles provide further challenges to get people involved, but there are opportunities as well in the new Internet technologies. With appropriate techniques and a willingness to ensure participation, individuals and communities can be given a genuine voice in planning's decision-making processes.

According to Alexander Cuthbert in Chapter 13, urban design creates the habitat for civil society. Urban design is not about designing buildings; rather, its subject is the public realm and public space, and it signifies a fusion of different elements such as design principles, creativity, regulation and technology to form spaces that are symbolic representations of culture. History, ideology, politics and economics all play a part in the spatial products of design, as do professionals and non-professionals. Cuthbert dispels the myth that there is a formula for designing good urban places. Rather, good design, while embodying aesthetic and spatial principles, also embraces creativity and responds to the broader socio-cultural and political context in which the designer is working. And despite the fact that good urban design cannot be specified, bad urban design can be prevented. Cuthbert further argues that urban design can reflect national identity, but in Australia this has yet to be established. Nevertheless, awareness of good urban design is increasing, as evidenced in different urban renewal projects and inquiries, most notably the Urban Design Taskforce. The chapter concludes by engaging with different iconic spaces, both abroad and in Australia, as a way of illustrating how the processes and principles of urban design create spaces for public life.

Chapter 14, by Robyn Conroy, shows how heritage conservation is a contested aspect of planning. This is partly related to the complexity of identifying which aspects of the built environment should be retained for future generations, as well as reconciling conflicting opinions about how to do this.

It can also be difficult to establish definitive meanings for heritage value and significance, partly because the meanings of 'heritage' have shifted from a narrowly aesthetic understanding to one that includes social and cultural components. These shifting understandings are reflected in changing community expectations and perceptions of heritage protection. Conroy provides a brief history of heritage conservation and planning, showing how this has evolved alongside the changing nature of the relationships between people and their past and present cultural landscapes. Definitions of heritage conservation and planning, drawing on international, national, state and local sources, are set out. The chapter outlines the statutory and non-statutory systems that regulate heritage conservation planning in Australia and within which the heritage conservation planner works. The chapter concludes by summarising the challenges that confront planners who work in this dynamic and interesting area. These challenges include urban consolidation development pressures, layering of building fabric, and the loss of significant curtilage around historically significant buildings.

In Chapter 15, Brendan Gleeson, Nicholas Low and Jodi Dong present urban infrastructure as a complex and rapidly evolving area within urban management. They begin by debunking the idea that infrastructure consists only of large objects made of concrete or steel; rather, it comes in many forms, including 'softer' networks of human services. In recent decades, Australia's urban infrastructure has undergone major changes, both in its technological forms and in the nature of its ownership, management and financing. These changes are integrally linked to everyday planning practice because they reflect, and in turn shape, the evolution of key urban services, including water and energy provision, waste management, transport, and human development (health, education, welfare, recreation). This chapter illustrates how the visible and not so visible aspects of urban infrastructure fit together to underpin our cities. First, it describes the many types of infrastructure present in Australia's urban regions. Second, it discusses how and by whom it is planned and financed. This is followed by an examination of contemporary economic, social and political issues that relate to urban infrastructure, with a spotlight on water infrastructure.

Planning Australia concludes by drawing together the different chapters with a series of reflections on the present state of Australian planning and a consideration of its future direction and shape. The book gives particular attention to the likely effects of contemporary political, social, cultural, economic and environmental trends on planning practice. It also includes some optimistic 'crystal ball gazing', envisaging what might be possible through a planning practice that is environmentally sensitive, socially equitable, economically responsible, ethically driven and creative.

PART I

Frameworks

What is Planning?

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

At the heart of planning is the community, and the education, research and practices relating to the planned use of land, its associated systems, and of the natural and built environmental, social and economic impacts and implications of the use of land.

(PIA 2002, p. 1)

Key terms: planning; town and country planning; physical planning; land-use planning; strategic planning; zoning; rationality; modernism; postmodernism; capitalism; communicative turn; stakeholders; ethics; hope; interconnections.

It is no easy task to define planning precisely, nor indeed to find a definitive term to describe it (see Introduction). This difficulty has a long history. For example, in 1951, Brown & Sherrard cautioned that there were dangers in attempting to 'compress so comprehensive a subject into one short sentence' (p. 3). Keeble in 1959 remarked that 'town and country planning is not an easy subject to define' (p. 9). More recently, Campbell & Fainstein (1996) have declared that planning is a 'messy, contentious field' without a single foundational paradigm. Today, the multitude of books, journal articles and

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