

Introduction

Susan Thompson

Welcome to the second edition of *Planning Australia*. The first – published in 2007 – was adopted by many Australian universities for their planning students and shortly after its release, was honoured by state and national Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) awards. *Planning Australia* has been well reviewed and at last count was held in 144 libraries worldwide (University of NSW 2011). These outcomes are testimony to every one of the contributing authors, as well as those who assisted with research, formatting and editing to produce the most up-to-date, comprehensive and cohesive overview of the major issues and concerns dominating Australian planning theory and practice available at the time.

So when Cambridge University Press approached me in 2010 to consider a second edition of *Planning Australia* I have to confess that I was not totally surprised. Delighted to be asked – of course – if not a little daunted at the prospect of producing a second edition. With the help of some positive critiques from our publisher’s market research, and the enthusiasm of different authors, I needed little persuasion to take on this task. I was also very pleased that Paul Maginn accepted my invitation to be co-editor. Paul is a Western Australian colleague with whom I have collaborated on other writing projects (Maginn, Thompson & Tonts, 2008a, 2008b), and is well known to the academic planning community across the country. One of his most recent achievements was hosting the 2011 World Planning Schools Congress in Perth (<<http://www.wpsc2011.com.au>>). He has brought a fresh set of eyes to this edition, and in particular his knowledge of Western Australia has been invaluable. Together we have sought to ensure revisions to the book embrace a wider geographical breadth of planning initiatives from across Australia.

With Paul on board we set about the tasks of recruiting authors, highlighting the required revisions and considering the inclusion of new chapters. We have been very fortunate that most of the authors from the first edition were available to take up the challenge of revising their chapters. And we have

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been equally fortunate in recruiting several other authors, including those who have written two new chapters for the book – ‘Transport planning’ and ‘Healthy planning’.

So what’s different in this second edition? In 2007 *Planning Australia* opened with a statement about the essence of planning: the creation of environmentally sustainable and well-designed places where everyone can find a sense of belonging. The second edition is no different in this fundamental goal. What has changed is the governance landscape of the discipline, with one of the most exciting initiatives being the release of Australia’s first national urban policy (MCU 2011). Environmentally, concern over climate change and the need for action has reached new heights. We have also seen escalating rates of chronic disease and increasing involvement by planners in issues related to human health and well-being. These challenges have implications for planning theory and practice, and include the urgency of adopting more joined-up thinking and working practices across the profession. We have embraced these shifts in the revised book and offer new insights, case studies and reflections to advance understanding and ways of addressing these complex issues.

Planning continues to evolve as it has in the past. 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’ or ‘spatial planning’. We use the term ‘planning’ to encompass these varying descriptors and to avoid any omissions that 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

As with the first edition, the revised 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 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 issues: growing concerns about the state of the environment, particularly in relation to the impacts of climate change; creating appropriate places for socially and culturally diverse communities; conserving what is valued; and the ever-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 that this chapter seeks to illuminate. And while Paul Maginn and I have updated the different definitions of planning, we show that the fundamentals remain the same, albeit with some shifts in emphasis. These embrace a growing sense of urgency about action on climate change, responsiveness to local diversity and equity, and a questioning of the centrality of the economic growth model in an era of unprecedented environmental degradation and challenge. We have added a new discussion point about key skills for planners that emphasise the integrative nature of the discipline and its practical perspective. This leads into our 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 is joined by Paul Maginn in outlining the broad geographical, environmental and population characteristics that frame the challenges faced by 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 and Maginn note significant changes to regional variations in population growth, arguing that they present key challenges for planners, particularly in relation to balancing growth in a sensitive environment. They also describe how planning decisions that deal with these challenges are made within government and administrative structures, many of which have undergone change since 2007. The ongoing

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declining role of the federal government in urban issues lamented previously has been halted with the work of Infrastructure Australia on national urban issues, specifically through its Major Cities Unit. The growth of state-based public-private partnerships (PPPs) and urban development authorities continues to shore up competitive advantage and facilitate development. This is illustrated in a new case study, that of the Barangaroo Delivery Authority in New South Wales. Controversial from the outset, this demonstrates, along with other examples, that local communities can find themselves disenfranchised and alienated from the planning process when large development is at stake. Ultimately, Williams and Maginn are critical of the centralisation of planning powers because this undermines participatory democracy and shared planning responsibilities. Achieving a balance between crucial public policy outcomes and appropriate public consultation continues 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 this focuses on the Planning Institute of Australia and its ongoing moves to strengthen the professional standing of the discipline. This needs 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. As in the first edition, Marshall argues that Australian planning is close to establishing a strong identity but notes that questions about professionalisation still 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. In reflecting on the culture of the profession, a new discussion point offers insight about how planning practitioners balance the art of their practice – related to its communicative, collaborative and subjective qualities – with the provision of objective and impartial expert opinion. Marshall concludes that the professional status of Australian planning is yet to be resolved. Its future rests with an ethical, legal and inclusive practice underpinning the achievement of environmentally sustainable, sociable, economically viable and liveable communities for the 21st century.

Set against the broad sweep of Australian urbanisation, Robert Freestone once again presents a history of planning spanning over 200 years from the foundations of government land settlement and planning in the colonial era to the present day. Chapter 4 has undergone a significant set of revisions in portraying planning as an historical process and a product of its time, contrary to its typecasting as a futuristic activity. Freestone argues that planning has been continually redefined to serve new and emerging 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.

The chapter tracks the evolution of the theory and practice of Australian planning in relation to key themes, including the influence of international ideas that connect the Australian experience to the globalisation of planning thought. Each theme in the chapter has been embellished and augmented with new case studies throughout. The most recent developments in planning – termed ‘Neo-liberalism and beyond’ – are discussed at length, with Freestone noting that the ‘environmental content of plan-making at every scale has increased notably’. This includes responding to climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the need to reduce energy consumption. The final case study in the chapter examines the Commonwealth’s involvement in urban matters. And while there are encouraging signs, manifested by the formation of the Major Cities Unit (MCU) within Infrastructure Australia, there are ongoing uncertainties. As Freestone notes, ‘the MCU is a tiny player in the federal bureaucracy and national government funding will remain dependent on budgetary constraints and other political priorities’. Only history will show just how successful it is and the extent to which it is able to enhance urban life in Australian cities.

The legal framework in which planning occurs across Australia is explored by Peter Williams in Chapter 5. Legislation continues to play 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 an updated 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: continuing centralisation of decision-making and involvement of the private sector. Noting state-based reforms, 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

The second 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

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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 biophysical environment and the ways that Australian environmental planning and natural resource management systems have responded. Peter Williams is joined by Rosemary Smart in revising this chapter. Together, they present the diverse range of environmental and resource management tools that are currently available to Australian planners. These include the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) and environmental impact assessment (EIA). They discuss 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. The chapter 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.

Climate change is afforded its own section, reflecting its importance in contemporary planning. Williams and Smart give us an overview of the fundamentals of climate change, providing essential data about Australia's greenhouse emissions. Climate change adaptation along the Australian coastline is the subject of a new case study in the chapter. Two other case studies – both new to this edition – also relate to climate change issues: management of the water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin and the treatment of environmental sustainability issues by the Commonwealth's MCU. 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; and transportation,

hydraulic infrastructure and other forms of infrastructure. Murphy includes an overview of new and revised metropolitan plans adopted across Australia since the first edition. The federal moves are also covered inasmuch as they relate to spearheading urban policy formulation in the metropolitan context. Murphy ultimately asserts that too much should not be expected of metropolitan plans. Investment decisions, detailed implementation plans and pricing of urban services all have an ongoing role in determining the shape of the metropolis, as well as the extent to which it evolves in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way.

Ian Sinclair and Raymond Bunker have once again joined forces, revising Chapter 8 on rural planning. The fact that rural lands cover almost the entire continental land mass of Australia, and that remote and sparsely populated areas are little affected by planning controls as such, has remained unchanged. Planning for these areas is still focused on balancing 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 are increasingly complex and must be guided through the planning system. One of the most significant issues in these 'peri-urban' areas is reconciling agricultural and pastoral production with the growth in rural residential living, taken up by people attracted to rural or coastal environments. This is particularly important because the nation's scarce resources of productive land and water are concentrated around these centres of population growth. To balance rural production with 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.

An additional imperative is the ongoing need to safeguard nearby sources of fresh food for urban populations. This is reinforced by the authors' updated figures for perishable vegetables grown on the metropolitan fringes of cities across Australia. Sinclair and Bunker also provide a new case study on food security – an important theme in healthy planning covered later in the book. Future global scenarios are frightening, with food scarcities, high prices and adverse environmental impacts on arable land all predicted to occur. Food definitely needs to be on the planning agenda, with much better linkages to other disciplinary concerns including climate change and all aspects of sustainability – economic, environmental and social. From what these authors suggest, there is much that can be done to address Australia's future food needs in the broader context of the nation's rural sector – but with no room for complacency.

Paul Collits opens his revised Chapter 9 by still declaring that 'regional planning, regional policy and regional governance are contentious topics' and, in Australia, typically not well regarded. Since 2007 this has arguably

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worsened, with regional governance ‘chaotic, fragmented, inefficient and uncoordinated ... generally, poorly resourced to enable increasingly ambitious, complex and intersecting tasks’, according to Collits. He advocates for 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 updated, 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. Geelong’s G21 Regional Plan, for example, is a model for regional planning in the state of Victoria and is outlined in a new case study. Recent national political changes have forced greater exposure of regional issues and concerns. And while some commentators have heralded this as a ‘paradigm shift’ for regional Australia, Collits is cautious, asserting that it is too soon to know ‘if this will result in a permanent cultural shift in government policy towards greater regionalism’. Collits concludes that the compelling reasons for regional planning outlined in the first edition of *Planning Australia* – globalisation, spatial inequities, and the complexity and interrelated nature of planning issues characterising regional Australia – remain.

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 other 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 increasingly complex socio-cultural conditions, as well as community change and diversity. 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. Adapting to climate change, for example, poses serious equity challenges and I use this in the chapter to highlight the urgency of bringing social and cultural understandings to all aspects of planning.

In Chapter 11, Ed Wensing shows that Australian planning is still struggling in its responsiveness to the challenges arising from the belated legal recognition of the occupation and ownership of the nation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prior to British colonisation. (In this book, the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ is used in preference to the term ‘Indigenous’ to denote the original inhabitants of Australia – see further Chapter 11.) Planning practice continues to experience the ramifications of significant amendments to the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) 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. Planners must acknowledge this ongoing connection to country, regardless of whether that connection can be legally recognised. In the first edition of this book, Wensing wrote about the strong moral and ethical imperatives for planning to be more inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s rights, interests, needs and aspirations. And while this is still very much the case, there are a few encouraging signs. Wensing’s new case study on identifying and incorporating Aboriginal landscape values into regional planning processes is one such example. Nevertheless, planning remains culturally blind, and as such, Wensing stresses that there is a pressing need to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in planning education and practice. It is disturbing to realise that while the elements of this knowledge have been identified, there has been no national action to change planning curricula. Wensing concludes that the critical challenge for planning ‘is to dismantle a practice that has allowed one culture to exert its dominance and authority over another, building in its place a relationship based on mutual respect, with the potential to enrich and strengthen Australia’s national life’. The question remains: when will this happen?

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 Nancy Marshall and Christine Steinmetz engage with the complexities of public

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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. Nevertheless, there are no excuses given the plethora of tools from which planners can select to effectively engage with their communities, no matter who they are or where they are located. Busy lifestyles once provided an enormous challenge to get people involved, but developments in online communication are making this easier. Marshall and Steinmetz provide a comprehensive overview of the latest ways to use the internet and social media, as well as some illuminating case studies on effective community participation. With appropriate skills and a willingness to ensure participation, all individuals and communities can be given a genuine voice in planning’s decision-making processes.

Urban designer Stephen McMahon provides a sweeping overview of the nature of urban design practice in Australia. Chapter 13 commences by defining urban design as a prelude to exploring its evolution. And while urban design is as old as the ancient classical cities, the founding cities of Australia were, according to McMahon, ‘generally bereft of any conscious application of urban design considerations’. Surveyor-driven design resulted in a grid pattern of development, exemplified in central Melbourne with its roads, laneways and blocks mathematically precise and uniform. Scant attention was given to the provision of public spaces or the potential that the river offered the city. Sydney’s early development was much less ordered, with no urban design plan to guide the city’s form. Adelaide fared somewhat better, with early plans situating the city’s central grid in relation to urban parkland and the River Torrens. Plans for Perth and Brisbane also included some consideration of urban design in the form of public squares. And, of course, the much more recent development of Canberra boasts a very comprehensive plan. McMahon posits that the most significant urban design initiatives in the history of Australian urban settlement have taken place in the last 20 years in the former dockland and industrial precincts of inner cities.

Having set an historical backdrop to urban design in Australia, the chapter then considers the urban design qualities of ‘successful’ places. Starting with an exploration of the concepts of mass and form, we see how the relationship between humans and their environment, as well as cultural perceptions, are critical elements in understanding the complexities of urban