Chapter 45

Urban Planning in the Late Twentieth Century

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Before we can discuss late twentieth-century urban planning we need to review the origins of urban planning and the forces which have shaped urban areas. We need to try to understand what happened to earlier attempts at planning urban areas and why planning in the late twentieth-century must differ from those earlier attempts.

This chapter is written largely with the experience of Australian cities in mind but illustrations and examples are chosen from cities which grew and flourished in the nineteenth-century. The implicit assumption is that the trajectory of cities was similar in all developed market economies in which most property was privately held. Much of the argument in Australia was influenced by conditions in European and North American cities. This account therefore makes reference to contributions to the general debate about urban issues and planning made by scholars in the Western context.

The Nineteenth-century City

Although there were earlier attempts to lay out towns in an ordered fashion urban development was not planned, and then regulated and controlled to achieve planning objectives until early in the twentieth-century (Mumford 1961). Nonetheless, the story starts with the recognition that contemporary urban planning has its roots in the nineteenth-century in which urbanization was uncoordinated, even chaotic, and led to living conditions which were very unequal (Ashworth 1954; Benevolo 1967; Cherry 1974; Cullingworth 1970, Hall 1988).

By the mid-nineteenth-century there was a perceived need for order and a strong view that emerging capitalist forms of production were under threat from popular discontent. A regulatory system was developed piecemeal to reduce chaos and some forms of inequality. Although the development of the regulatory system, especially in the English-speaking world, was devised largely to protect the institution of the common law (Sedley 1996), its evolution coincided with the rising discontent of the urban poor. There was increasing realization that the poor would have to be given healthier environments, better housing, safer buildings, and some share in the wealth

of the community especially through access to collectively provided services and facilities such as schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities if the stability of the sociopolitical system was to be assured.

The demand for order led to the notion developed by social reformers that if we could only understand the "science" of the economic and political processes which were at play in society we could more equitably and efficiently arrange activities within the city. It was a highly political response to a situation in which some members of the powerful elites recognized that unless the poorer members of society shared some of the increase in wealth the new forces of democracy could lead to increased attempts at radical restructuring of society similar to that in the mid-nineteenth-century when the citizens of Paris made an attempt to overthrow their government and establish a commune (Rude 1980).

Simultaneously, and partly as a function of the stresses created by increasing concentrations of urban populations – including what we now call "environmental" stresses – demand grew for more assured supplies of potable water, for better, healthier ways of coping with the wastes of urban settlements and for better transport in and between human settlements.

By the end of the nineteenth-century the major industrial concentrations were strongly established as urban centers. Examples of such cities in Australia are Melbourne and Sydney which developed as major industrial cities as did Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Manchester, and Newcastle in Britain, and Chicago, New York, and Pittsburgh in the United States of America.

Apart from those which were traditional capitals these nineteenth-century cities were highly centralized. They had grown rapidly but incrementally, often at a key transport node. Their scale, nonetheless, permitted transport, manufacturing, warehousing, commerce, and the institutions of the state, including the administrative elements to be centrally colocated. The use of steam power for manufacturing processes and warehousing and the need to minimize energy transmission losses led to high-density factories and warehouses being clustered around railways and docks.

The scale of the cities also quickly exceeded the locally available water supplies and the capacity of the local environment to absorb the wastes generated by the population and the new industrial and commercial processes in which they were engaged. Water supplies became polluted and disease spread. Technological developments in hydraulic engineering made it feasible to respond to the demand for better water and sewerage services. Cities grew large enough and sufficient wealth was created within or "captured" by them to build the water supply and sewerage systems they required. In most cases water supply and sewerage systems were provided by publicly owned instrumentalities or statutory corporations to serve particular municipalities or cities. In Australia these local bodies were created with a degree of independence of government but answerable to Parliament (Dingle and Rasmussen 1991; Lloyd et al. 1992). This was done to ensure that the public "good" of improved health was experienced by all and to ensure an equitable supply of potable water to all residents. What we now call "big engineering" solutions were developed to meet these demands. By their nature these solutions were highly centralized and delivered by highly hierarchic institutions.

The concentration of jobs and services in the center of the city led to demand for increased access by increasing numbers of the population. Traffic congestion in city

centers with narrow streets was a major source of inefficiency. The transport systems which had evolved to serve the urban populations were gradually supplemented by high-capacity fixed-rail systems.

The rise of the middle class and the general increase in the standard of living led to increased demand for housing. Working-class housing was notoriously poor (for England see Engels 1835) and was the subject of major campaigns based on extensive studies by social reformers who argued that the overcrowding and the lack of privacy should be tackled by increasing the size and comfort of dwellings. A number of enlightened industrialists and philanthropists established model housing estates for low-income families. Rowntree and Cadbury are two examples of nineteenth-century industrialist/philanthropist housing reformers in Britain. Governments were pressured to introduce minimum standards for housing and to accord tenants protection from some of the more egregious practices of landlords.

The demand was not only for increased and higher-quality space in the dwellings themselves but for increased private space in the form of private gardens (Howard 1902). It was also accompanied by an increased demand for public recreation space in the form of parks, gardens, and playing fields (Freestone 1989). Some part of this demand for increased recreational space resulted from the reduction in working hours and the consequential increase in leisure time. These pressures led to increased suburbanization of the cities (Jackson 1985). Some, especially colonial cities like Sydney and Melbourne, were suburban from their settlement (Davison 1993). Much of the explanation of the generally higher standard of living experienced by residents in these colonial cities compared with those in their European homelands came from the fact that they had the space around their dwellings to produce much of their own food and to make much of the furniture (Mullins 1981a, 1981b, 1987).

In the "New World" great interest was occasioned by proposals to build new national capitals. The planning and development of Washington stimulated debate over the ideal city (Reps 1967), and these ideas and arguments received a second fillip when the debate over the planning for the new national capital of Australia occurred early in the twentieth-century (Reps 1997).

As the world economy expanded, cities increased their populations but expanded in area faster and their population densities fell. Tramways and railroad systems were developed to meet the demands from the growing suburban populations. Public transport systems facilitated the further suburbanization and separation of residential areas from the noisy, crowded inner industrial areas with poor amenity.

The City in the Twentieth Century

By the early twentieth-century the scale of cities was causing a range of environmental problems. Their size meant they became large "point sources of pollution" as they discharged large volumes of sewage to the waterways including the open ocean. It had been assumed that the natural waterways would cope with the load of untreated sewage. For a while this was so as the sewage itself was relatively benign. But as its volume exceeded the capacity of the receiving waters, and its composition changed, it began to create major problems – especially in inland waterways.

The solution to the sewage "problem" was to develop large-scale treatment plants in which the sewage of whole cities was treated and the harmless (in terms

of pathogenic organisms at least) effluent returned to the waterways. Many seaside cities, however, simply developed deep ocean outfalls which discharged the untreated sewage some distance out to sea where, it was assumed, the large volume of the receiving waters would be able to cope with the natural breakdown of the sewage.

Air pollution which had been a problem from earlier times now became a significant issue. Industrialization based on the combustion of coal produced major and seemingly intractable problems which were not resolved until the second half of the twentieth-century. The response to the air pollution was to introduce regulations governing the production of smoke and other exhaust gases and for city residents to seek to separate residential areas from industry and commerce, thus increasing the drive for suburbanization.

By the mid-twentieth-century the growth, inequalities, inefficiencies, and environmental stresses being experienced in the cities led to arguments for the introduction of city planning (Cullingworth 1970; Cherry 1996; Hall 1988). Strong town planning movements grew up in many countries. One after another cities in Australia adopted plans designed to minimize transport inefficiencies, to provide efficiency and order in the provision of infrastructure services generally, to separate residential from other incompatible uses, to protect the amenity of the city and to ensure in particular that the amenity of residents in poor areas was improved.

The end of the Second World War was followed by increased determination to improve the quality of urban life. Many of the English-speaking countries among the belligerents in the war promised programs to build "homes fit for heroes." The programs were not only devised to build better housing with greater security of tenure but also to ensure the provision of properly located employment, facilities, and services (Harloe 1995). In Australia the federal government conducted a major review of housing to determine how the housing system should be improved (CHC 1944). Part of the promise to give a greater stake in the country to its citizens was the undertaking to improve the quality of housing and the services available to residents as well as increased security of tenure. The commitment was reflected in the development of large public housing programs which offered low- to medium-income households better housing with greater security of tenure at affordable rents. Another lay in policies designed to increase home ownership. This mix of strategies varied between countries and it also had differential effects within them. In Australia most of the public housing was in the form of traditional single-family cottages and much of it was sold to eligible tenants. The home ownership policies of the Australian government succeeded in lifting owner occupation from about half in 1947 to over 70 percent in less than 15 years.

Postwar urban development was required to include a wider range of infrastructure services. There was widespread recognition that it was economically better to provide services as areas were developed than to try to insert them into existing developments later, which had been the traditional mode of progressive development in Australia. As a result of this change in policy the infrastructure authorities became powerful agents shaping urban growth as they set priorities in the development of their systems. One consequence of this was increases in the price of urban land because it meant that servicing authorities had to indicate where they would extend their systems next, thus conferring monopoly value on the land so designated.

The war itself had stimulated new industries using new technology. The subsequent peacetime industrial expansion employed much of that technology. Steam-powered factory machinery was rapidly replaced by reliable fractional horsepower electrical motors. The adoption of new quality control measures in industrial plants increased the quality and reliability of products. Materials handling technology in factories and warehouses, including the widespread use of forklift trucks, and the increasing use of internal combustion engine powered vehicles radically changed the transport of materials and finished products.

Industrial plants were released from the need to have rail sidings or a waterfront location and could locate to meet different site requirements. They needed large flat sites because manufacturing processes were now able to be laid out horizontally. The progressive move of industry from the older congested areas to new locations on the fringes of cities introduced new restructuring forces which were essentially centripetal in effect. That is, cities often had to make new investments in transport infrastructure, especially roads, to connect the new industrial locations into the rest of the metropolitan area. Although these new roads were part of the radial road system they led to the outward move of industrial employment.

The increased demand for private transport was met by rapid increases in the numbers of private cars in Australia. The increasing level of car ownership both was a response to and facilitated suburbanization. Increasing car ownership freed people to engage in the full range of activities available in the city. The road systems of cities were further centralized in their development, creating large levels of congestion. Investment in public transport, especially fixed-rail systems, was effectively held below replacement levels. The rise in car ownership was accompanied by a fall in public transport usage. A smaller proportion of trips were made as journeys to or from work. Shopping and recreational trips were more than half of all trips made. Central city interests managed to influence the investment in yet more centrally focused high-capacity roads even though it had become clear that the policy of constructing an extensive freeway system had not/could not diminish(ed) congestion. The proportion and, in some cases, the number of jobs in the city center fell. Increasing proportions of residents worked in or near the suburbs where they lived, yet the investment in roads and public transport, where it occurred, continued to assume and promote a highly centralized city structure.

The flight of the factories and warehouses from the city center was followed by a migration of retailing. The widespread takeup of domestic refrigerators after the war reduced the need for daily shopping for perishable goods. Changes in the organization of retailing and its adoption of new technology led to the development of "supermarkets" which offered volume purchases of food and household supplies at discounted prices which in turn led to the decline of traditional shopping centers. Further reorganization of the retailing sector led to the development of major "shopping malls" which further concentrated retailing, usually on large greenfield sites away from traditional shopping centers and away from the fixed-rail public transport systems. Traditional retailing centers identified in city plans withered and "unplanned" new ones sprang up. These major developments tended to change the structure of the city.

Two of the major developments which affected the structure of the Australian city over the last 30 years are transport related. The first is the development of air travel

which has transformed the transport of people and high-value freight between cities nationally and internationally. The development of the airports and the industries to support them have resulted in major restructuring forces on the metropolitan areas of most large cities requiring new roads and, occasionally, new rail services to connect the city to its airports. These new investments in transport services have invariably been focused on the city center. In many cases the development of airports has been accompanied by massive public opposition from residents who are affected by the noise of airplane operation.

The second is the development of fast, reliable sea freight services for bulk and general cargo which led to major changes to the docks in most port cities. Because the old ports could not be redeveloped to meet the new demands of the new large-capacity vessels new ports were developed. They typically were some distance from the old centers and required massive reorganization of the road and rail systems to serve them. The new developments fractured all the traditional relationships between city and docks and the industries which supported them. New opportunities were opened to redevelop the "docklands" vacated and made derelict as shipping shifted its focus to the new sites.

Problems with the Rational Plan?

The postwar planning systems and plans were predicated on modernist or scientific notions of stability, consistency, predicability, and continuity. Although, with few exceptions, the plans were all drawn up for cities with private ownership of property few acknowledged the problems they would face in implementation. The plans were often "end state" plans which proved to be hard to adjust to the changing social mores, behavior, and attitudes of their residents or to accommodate the changes in industry, retailing, and commerce which occurred in them. They took little account of the fact that it was private owners of property who initiated land use change and development, so that the planning authority could only approve or disapprove development proposals. The planning process itself involved the traditional "survey – analysis – design" approach which had to be secretive and confidential to avoid individuals gaining advantage from premature or advanced knowledge of proposed planning changes, yet it also required a high degree of community consultation under which plans were exhibited and reviewed. It was extremely time-consuming and care had to be exercised because the zones ascribed to particular areas of land confirmed great value on them. Initially the process was designed to recover the "betterment" flowing from decisions to zone land to permit higher-value uses and to pay "compensation" to landowners deleteriously affected by zoning decisions. The dropping of the recovery of "betterment" basically destroyed the basis of planning and simultaneously opened the system to intense pressure from those who could benefit from zoning changes. The Australian planning system was heavily influenced by British writers, the most widely known exponent of the British system being Keeble (1959).

In Australia the planning authority was usually established as an independent statutory authority answerable to parliament, the planning scheme for Sydney being the most developed (Winston 1957). It had an "arm's length" relationship with ministers and attempted to establish its authority and create trust by establishing a

regulatory framework based on technical criteria and widely accepted norms and conventions. It had no direct power over the investment decisions of servicing authorities, had few investment programs of its own, and relied on persuasion for its influence with other ministries in government. Unlike other agencies of government which set or influenced policy but which had no direct programs, such as the Treasury, it was not central to the setting of priorities. Moreover, the Treasuries State and Federal were ideologically opposed to planning, making it difficult for the planning authorities to gain support at the state level. In the Australian case although there was a strong degree of support for planning in the postwar period the decision to establish town planning was as much due to the need to comply with conditions laid down by the federal government which advanced funds for public housing but only if the states agreed to create town planning authorities.

By the early 1960s urban development pressures led to the recognition throughout the industrialized nations of a wide range of urban pathologies (Castells 1977). As in the USA and UK political concerns over urban and environmental issues became of central importance in Australia (Lloyd and Troy 1981). Public activism over environmental concerns found expression in a variety of ways including in local citizens' groups founded to fight a range of specific development proposals which residents felt would damage the environment or be injurious to their amenity. One of the most effective forms of protest was "Green Bans" under which industrial unions refused to allow development to occur on specific sites following community protest and representation (Burgman and Burgman 1998). The Australian Federal Government's initiatives included legislation modelled on USA initiatives requiring Environmental Impact Statements before developments were permitted to proceed. Although this raised the level of awareness of environmental issues it had the perverse effect of weakening the planning system. It would have been better to have included consideration of environmental issues as an integral part of the planning process.

Another problem with the rational plan was its inherently gendered conception of the city. Although women had always been important in the Australian workforce, as elsewhere, and were readily drafted into many occupations and industries during the Second World War it was nonetheless assumed that they would return to the more traditional home-centered life after the war. Increasing freedoms and recognition of their rights, however, together with the increasing economic need for them to work, facilitated by the development of labor-saving devices for the home, led to their continued and growing participation in paid employment. This was accompanied by later marriage and lower birthrates. By the early 1980s the fall in the number of school-age children per dwelling was being reflected in falling school enrolments. The "basic building block" of city planning had been "the neighborhood," which was based on the population needed to support a government-funded primary school. It had been assumed that this was a "given" and the hierarchy of school provision and, indeed, of shopping centers was based on this basic building block. The notion of the development of a sense of community was predicated on the assumption that the activities of households would be focused on the school and that this would provide the yeast for the development of a sense of engagement and commitment. For a while it served that function but was heavily dependent on the preparedness or ability of women to engage in supporting activities. But as the school

enrolments fell due to cohort ageing and a fall in household size to the point where some schools were allegedly uneconomic and were closed, and as more women were working, this cohesive force weakened. The fall in the "apparent" school-age population in an area was also exacerbated by the "leakage" of children from the government school system to private schools. The cohesive community force was further weakened because the closure of the school was often accompanied by the failure of the traditional shopping centers which had been developed nearby.

The weakening of the neighborhood as a building block tended to accelerate the growth of the new unplanned metropolitan subcenters. Although this led to decentralization of retailing and some of the personal services, it was not tied to the existing fixed-rail public transport network and increased the demand for investment in roads which further enhanced the radial structure of the city.

The concurrent weakening of the political commitment to collective consumption led to a rise in the financial pressures under which the servicing authorities operated, making it more difficult for them to maintain or extend their coverage (Self 1993). The initial response of governments was to shift the burden for the provision of infrastructure to the private sector, for example, by requiring developers to provide services within new subdivisions (Neutze 1997). For a time this worked although it had marked inequitable effects because it redistributed wealth from poor to rich and from younger to older generations. Later, governments which had run down the reserves of the servicing agencies to fund their current operations were faced with large political pressures in part because, with the continued growth of the cities, they could not avoid the demands for services and partly because many of the services in the older cities were approaching the end of their "design lives" and were now in need of large-scale rehabilitation and renewal. Rather than explore new ways of providing the urban services which the residents expected, the government solution was to argue for a reduction in standards on the grounds that the old standards could no longer be afforded. By the early 1980s this was articulated as a drive for higher-density urban development on the assumption that changing the form of the city would reduce the demand for infrastructure investment (Troy 1996). A supplementary argument claimed that consolidated or compact cities would reduce the energy costs of their operation. It was also claimed that such cities would offer greater housing choice and that the stock of housing would more closely match the profile of household size. None of these claims was backed by empirical evidence. Similar arguments have been made in European and North American debates in favor of the compact city (Jenks et al. 1996).

The "really existing city" is highly decentralized yet its formal structure and the critical investment in transport continues to be made to support a highly centralized structure. The institutional structure of the city also remains powerfully centralized even though the great majority of residents live and focus their lives in urban subcentres and even though the mechanisms and processes of communication have undergone radical change. That is, in spite of the radical changes which have occurred in information technology few of the traditional institutions have used it to decentralize their operations and devolve decision making, making them more responsive and open to local participation. The technology and administrative structure of many servicing authorities remain focused on the nineteenth-century solutions which, while appropriate then, need to be reconsidered.

By the mid-1970s concerns over equity or social justice issues in the city again began to shape the demand for planning. Researchers and commentators again drew attention to the way the urban system itself exacerbated or created inequities (Badcock 1984; Harvey 1973; Troy 1981). For a period concern over social justice appeared to influence urban development policy but this was soon supplanted by preoccupation with issues of growth. The emerging evidence is that under these policies cities are becoming more segregated as lower-income households are forced into smaller dwellings at higher dwelling densities. The segregation becomes polarization, often being associated with groups who suffer multiple disadvantages or experience a variety of ethnic or religious discriminations. These effects have tended to confirm the view of critics that consolidation or compact city policies were thinly disguised attempts to reduce housing standards for lower-income groups.

Contemporary Trends

The planning system created in many countries after the Second World War is now in disarray. In Australia it proved incapable of anticipating the changes in mores, behavior, and attitudes of residents and corporations. More importantly it did not develop processes for responding to, shaping or managing them. Planning was seen as being too rigid and incapable of dynamic response. The professional planners themselves have been loath to enter into the debate over distributional aspects of city growth and operation. They have been reluctant to defend the ethical basis of their concerns and seem to have lost sight of their remit to defend the community interest. In many cases they have conducted little empirical research which might have improved their technical competence and enhanced their authority with a consequential increase in trust in their activities. Academic and professional planners have not offered a planning approach which could be more responsive and which relied less on the negative passive instruments employed in the early postwar planning schemes. The planning process has itself been politicized and used to achieve short-term objectives which are frequently the antithesis of planning (Stilwell 1993a, b).

Privatization made it difficult for governments to pursue social objectives including welfare and environmental targets. The terms of sale often make it extremely difficult for governments to improve standards or even to develop alternative technologies. Ownership of the services is often some distance from the city being served, making it even harder for the local community to exert pressure for improvement. In some cases the terms of privatization commit governments to guaranteeing profits for the service operators for decades to come, thus limiting future governments in their options for urban development. Some privatizations in Australia, especially in roads, are now the subject of legal challenge on the grounds that the prospectuses inviting investment in the infrastructure services are misleading or inaccurate. One of the serious consequences of the privatization of infrastructure services is that cities and their economies have become much more vulnerable. That is, they face increased risk of system failure and of the consequences of failure. The failure of the electricity supply to Auckland's CBD in 1998, the failure of the gas supply in Melbourne in 1998, the failure of the Sydney water supply to meet acceptable health standards for long periods in 1998, the failure of the sewage treatment plant in Adelaide in 1997/98 are all contemporary illustrations of the point.

More recently rising concern over environmental issues is forcing people to challenge the postmodernist explanation of urban development which is essentially defeatist in its conception. This renewed interest in a rational approach to urban development issues provides an opportunity for a renaissance of planning. The search for sustainable urban development under which cities develop and operate imposing minimum stress on the environment has led, in its first phase, to the acceptance of well-intentioned but empirically unsupported policies of containment. They have been buttressed by notions of "the urban" which are at variance with the aspirations and behavior of the great majority of the population. The policies were directed at changing urban form whereas the major inefficiencies of cities spring from their structure or the disposition of activities.

The second phase response is to return to fundamental questions about the size of the population and how it is distributed across the national system of cities. The response should also be to explore what services urban populations demand and how they might be met. This will inevitably mean that, given the limits to the supply of potable water, for example, new ways of meeting the demand for water will have to be developed. Similarly, we cannot continue to meet our energy needs from combustion of nonrenewable fuels and also meet international targets for the minimization of greenhouse gases. This must lead to the introduction of modes of production and operation of urban areas which minimize energy consumption. The exploration of ways of coping with the flow of wastes of urban living will also require a revised way of recovering and reusing resource from wastes and disposing of the remainder in ways which minimize environmental stress. The increasing polarization and segregation of cities will also need to be addressed if we are not to create the conditions which will destabilize the system as a whole.

Much has been written about the opportunities opened by the development of information technology (Castells 1996). The adoption of this technology has served to reinforce centralizing tendencies but it could equally be used to democratize the development and operation of the city. The paradox is that we have learned from our experience in managing relations between nations and, indeed, within them in the case of nations which are federations, how to organize, determine priorities and administer our affairs in a decentralized way yet we continue to approach the cities as though their affairs are naturally served by institutional structures which are highly centralized. A new form of planning which employs the new information technology could allow cities to be efficiently developed and operated as "federations" – more in the manner in which they actually operate now. This holds the promise of making it easier to achieve environmental targets while simultaneously making the city more accessible with lower levels of investment in urban systems, including transport, and avoiding the problems which flow from segregation. The cities could become more environmentally sustainable and more equitable but it will require a planning system which is at once more open and more interventionist (Healey 1997).

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