

COMMUNITY PLANNING IN AUSTRALIA

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1. Introduction

In Western countries the post-war years were dominated by economic growth, social conservatism and political stability. These characteristics emerged from societies that had maintained their faith in centralized government control following the end of the war and had accepted the application of that control to peacetime social and economic reconstruction. Observers have noted the legacy of a 'consensus of value' that had been developed during the war years and the impact of this on popular support for government authority and the rise of bureaucratic control over many aspects of national life (Broadly, 1968). Power in post war society maintained its centrality and appeared to deliver the sort of society and certainty that a war weary generation craved.

Yet, by the 1960s a new generation, unaffected by the war years, was reaching political maturity and began to question and forge new power relations within society. The Civil Rights and Women's movements, the emergence of a youth culture and widespread popular protest to government programs all came to typify a decade that broke with past traditions and heralded in a period of dramatic social change. Central to many of the changes was a growing suspicion of established authority, represented by lawmakers, administrators and enforcers and the questioning of the legitimacy of the power they wielded over individual and community life.

While these were broad changes affecting all levels of society, they formed the foundations for understanding the emergence of community planning in Australia. They formed the basis for the growing frustration felt by communities in submitting to established and centralized systems of planning control. They also give an insight into the bureaucratic culture of planning authorities that attempted to resist change and the increasingly radical strategies that had to be adopted by community groups to counteract this institutional intransigence. Perhaps most importantly, these developments ensured that broader political change became inevitable and it was in the course of this change that community power became institutionalized as a legitimate player in the process of urban and regional development in Australia.

This chapter will analyze community involvement in the planning process. It will outline the early emergence of opposition to planning proposals through to attempts to integrate and institutionalize public input into planning decision making. Precisely where this process of community planning has led the Australian planning system and the degree of empowerment at a local level will be reflected on in two recent case studies. Two major redevelopment proposals within the Perth metropolitan

region (the capital of the state of Western Australia) will be assessed to determine the nature, extent and impact of community involvement in development outcomes. The chapter will conclude by considering the changing nature of power relationships within the planning system. Of particular importance will be an assessment of where the locus of power resides amongst the various players within the local development process.

2. The Story of Community Planning in Australia

In Australia, post-war development concentrated on building and rebuilding towns and cities fit not only for 'returning heroes' but also for the growing waves of refugees and ultimately migrants from Europe and beyond.

Planners were required to respond to the challenge of population growth during this period and the favored model was low-density suburban expansion. This reflected the traditions of Australian urbanization as much as the aspirations of its new citizenry (Davison, 1995). This was the climax of consensual planning that delivered and coordinated urban services for emerging communities on the fringe of growing metropolitan regions. Planning was non-contentious, unpretentious and injected a certainty and uniformity into suburban life which reinforced some of the emerging values of a maturing nation; housing affordability, security through home ownership and nuclear family lifestyles.

However, by the 1960s, the servicing of these growing suburbs required a comprehensive restructuring of the urban fabric particularly to accommodate the increase in car ownership and the transport demands that flowed from low density suburban sprawl.

More than anything else, it was the development of freeway networks and the resultant restructuring of land use and built form that politicized local communities, sensitized the middle classes to the power of political protest and ultimately created the conditions where the planning system had to reinvent the conception of the public interest that it had been professing to serve since its inception at the beginning of the century.

The early examples of community intervention in the Australian planning system include campaigns to save heritage buildings, bushland (natural open space) and even entire inner city communities all threatened by redevelopment initiatives related to the re arrangement of land use and transport provision within the capital cities. These early campaigns had a number of important characteristics:

1. The opponents were primarily inner city communities that at the time were undergoing the early stages of gentrification. (Kendig, 1979)
2. The proponents were the State government planning and transport agencies.
3. The opposition campaigns used all the means and vocabulary of popular protest once it became clear that there was no alternative institutional avenue of influence.
4. In a number of cases protesters networked with more established pressure groups such as political parties and the Trade Union movement to strengthen their cause (Roddewig, 1978).

The political significance of the emergence of community power and action within Australian cities in the 1960s was recognized in the development of the

Australian Labor Party (ALP) platform for the Federal election in 1972. Realizing that the condition and character of the cities was rapidly evolving as a matter of community concern, ALP party policy identified a number of urban development and servicing issues that became a focus for the election campaign particularly in marginal seats in Sydney and Melbourne.

After 25 years in opposition, the ALP won the 1972 election on a reform agenda which included urban planning and development issues. As a new area of federal government involvement, a new Department of Urban and Regional Development was established to implement urban reform. There were a number of important public investment and policy decisions developed in the Department over a three-year period (Lloyd & Troy, 1981) but of significance to the community planning agenda were:

1. The employment of a number of senior planners from the United Kingdom who brought with them the ideology and policy initiatives in the area of planning participation that followed the Planning Advisory Group and Skeffington reports (HMSO, 1965).
2. The attachment of conditions to federal government grants to the states, particularly in the area of road building, related to the requirement for community consultation as part of the planning process.
3. Related to 1. and 2. (above) the professional and political legitimization of community involvement as part of the urban and regional planning process.
4. The entry of the Federal government into the urban development process particularly in the areas of inner city rehabilitation and new town programs (see for example The Department of Housing and Construction, 1980).
5. The recognition of the importance of heritage and local identity in the development and recognition of a distinctive Australian cultural tradition (Lloyd, 1977).

However, despite the political will and the professional expertise, effective involvement in more *local* planning, decision-making took longer to filter down to a community level.

'Not one of our state planning systems contemplates using the resources of civic groups during the early stages of survey, goal definition and plan preparation. As with the individual citizen, provision is made for negative objections rather than positive contributions. Thus we can see that for the citizen, whether he acts as an individual or as a member of a group, the opportunities for active participation in planning are few. At present they are not only limited in scope but are frustrating to those more interested in progress than in protests.' (Colman, 1971: 31).

In this environment it is perhaps not surprising that the political momentum for community planning began to overtake the professional planning agenda.

It is revealing that in a number of local authorities throughout the seventies communities took their planning concerns to the politicians rather than the planners. Local government, once the training ground of real estate developers and aspiring state politicians, now became the focus for a range of interest groups concerned with local planning and development issues (Parkin, 1982). Importantly this characteristic was more evident in middle class communities (Kendig, 1979) and invariably the issues at

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