



Stephen Hamnett, Robert Freestone, eds.. *The Australian Metropolis: A Planning History*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000. ix + 229 pp. \$A39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-86508-053-6.

Reviewed by David Dunstan

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Planning history is no great buzzword in the Australian social science lexicon. But, as the editors of this volume point out, over the past quarter of a century, a respectable literature has been built up. What they bemoan is the absence of a single-volume introduction to the development of urban planning in Australia, and this gap they have set out to fill in this ten-chapter, multi-author volume. Undoubtedly, this is a useful exercise for Australian urban scholars and teachers of planning studies. Whether urbanists elsewhere will be interested remains a moot point. Is Australia of sufficient interest and is the book a good guide to the subject?

To the first question, this reviewer answers an admittedly biased "yes." Australia is a highly urbanised (and suburbanised!) nation and has been for all of its two hundred-year plus colonial and post-colonial experience. Canberra, its capital, is not yet a hundred years old and is a planned city of note to compare with Brasilia, for example. It is now Australia's largest inland city and prominent in discussions in this book. So, too, with Sydney, the largest conurbation and impressively studied and justly celebrated world metropolis. Brisbane, Melbourne, and Perth offer interesting variations on regional experience, if only because under their colonial and state based administrations they have been governed differently, and to a large extent still are. Readers of the broad planning literature of the United States and

Britain may bemoan the absence of the really radically new, but if they venture this far, they will find much of interest from a comparative standpoint. The writers are all well-established scholars. The book is capably referenced with useful tables of key developments and maps of the major planning initiatives. Drawing on the varied experience of different places is never easy. This volume succeeds as well as can be expected with a topic this big and a compass this short.

The approach is broadly chronological and thematic, with a twentieth century weighting. This was when the profession advanced its claims. The metropolitan cities and their satellite suburbs are the places where most Australians have lived and continue to do so. The capital cities were, to use the late Professor John McCarty's phrase, "spearheads of the frontier," and they remain where we mainly live now, notwithstanding all the brouhaha about the Australian outback. How much planning was actually involved in a society driven by the relentless advance of capitalism? Quite a lot--agencies of the state have been major actors in Australian economic and urban development. But we need to disentangle planning from the broad social and political developments of which it is so clearly a part, and in the early period, at least, planning is not recognised for what it is. In "Founding cities in nineteenth-century Australia," Helen Proudfoot proves herself a skilful archaeologist of the idea. She discuss-

es the origins of the rectilinear layout of cities like Melbourne. Urban forms were imposed heroically, she surmises, by surveyors, "men [who] led strenuous and hard-working lives, often in trying conditions, working in pairs or sometimes isolated in the field" - how different from the invading settlers? Cities grew, some spectacularly so, and with them came congestion, disease, poverty and the need for urban reform.

Robert Freestone discusses the origins of professional town planning in the context of city improvement. Aesthetically-minded early practitioners inclined to view their utilitarian and commercially-minded fellow Australians of the late nineteenth century as squandering opportunities for refinement of their civic spaces. In too many instances, Australian cities were ugly and dull. The New South Wales Parliament sanctioned a Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney in 1909 and in Victoria, one on the Housing of the People (1913-15). There was a competition to design the new Federal capital and a brilliant American expatriate, Walter Burley Griffin, together with his talented wife and co-worker, Marion Mahony, produced the winning entry. But it was a 1914 Australasian lecture tour by the Englishman, Charles Reade, and the subsequent formation of Town Planning associations in the major states that saw the origins of professional consciousness.

Metropolitan planning in Australia properly dates from this time, although it would be years before the ideas of the planners were given institutional or legal effect. We witness also the failure of brave initiatives such as the Melbourne Metropolitan Townplanning Commission of the 1920s, destroyed in the snakepit of local politics. There were some notable far-sighted exceptions, like the Queensland port city of Mackay that in the 1930s commissioned Ronald McInnis, a surveyor and planning advocate, to prepare its scheme. Many ideas reflected British antecedents, like the Garden City ideal, and shaping growth to better ad-

dress human needs, the continuing demand for the suburban ideal, the mass production of which is the Australian triumph. This is something the British still find desirable, at least those who have emigrated and continue to do so in large numbers.

Renate Howe identifies a "new paradigm" in the planning and reconstruction initiatives of the 1940s, following the transfer of taxing powers in wartime to the Federal Government. The Cumberland County Council Plan for Sydney (1948) was the first of the comprehensive metropolitan plans to signal a move away from the social reform initiatives of an earlier era and towards new technocratic orientation of personnel drawing on increasingly sophisticated professional expertise. In the 1950s and 60s, urban master planning was part of social engineering. In this era, Australian cities were regarded as too large in terms of both population and area, and requiring regional centres, satellite cities, and greenbelts to ameliorate the sprawl that accommodated post-1945 economic growth. This period also saw the founding of state planning institutes and courses at universities and colleges. In a succinct short essay, Ian Alexander writes of "the postwar city as a time when Australia was still under the influence of its Anglo-Saxon heritage but looking increasingly to the United States for its new cultural model." The automobile, the high-rise building, freeways, supermarkets, motels, planned estate housing, and grand developments such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme--the diverting of the Snowy River over the Great Dividing Range into the Murray-Darling basin to water the inland--all were harbingers of the new modernism.

Could planners ever do more than their political masters would allow? Planning in the 1960s, writes Ian Morison, was about meeting the needs of population growth; but also the consequences of planning, or a lack of planning. Australia was touted as a land of opportunity for immigrants, but there were growing numbers of people in the

new outer suburbs who were neglected or facing destructive environmental and social change. Under pressure, metropolitan strategic planners conceived of corridor development and further altered the shape of cities that had once seemed so radial in their development. The 1970s saw the quadrupling of oil prices by OPEC in 1973 and the rise and fall of the reformist Whitlam Government (1972-5). It was the first to create an urban department for the nation, produce explicit urban policies, and encourage other state and local agencies to follow suit. The 1970s saw resistance to central and inner city redevelopment and the first victories for heritage planners.

More recent decades fall under the rubric of "the revival of metropolitan planning" by Michael Lennon and a sardonic concluding essay on the 1990s by Stephen Hamnett subtitled "competitive versus sustainable cities." In the late 1990s, globalisation offers costs and dubious benefits. The Federal Government has no explicit interest in urban affairs and Thatcherite privatization; national and state competition policies and the contracting out of public services (including planning) has meant a diminishing role for agencies of government in the regulation of urban form and development. Hamnett writes, depressingly, that "cities are increasingly portrayed as economic and cultural entities which need to undertake entrepreneurial activities in order to enhance their competitiveness, with the principal role for planning being to support a new round of civic boosterism and deregulatory place marketing." But he ends on an optimistic note. Following a cursory survey of planning education programs around the nation (planning is still a viable career option), he views the importance attached to environmental planning and values in the curriculum and in metropolitan plans themselves as suggestive of a growing concern about the environmental sustainability of cities. This seems "to lead back in the direction of more rather than less interventionist policies, to the assertion of an idea of a collective interest, and to a society in which people may need

to be encouraged to behave in ways which run counter to their short-term preferences and interests."

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