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## Book review

**Planning Metropolitan Australia**, edited by Stephen Hamnett and Robert Freestone, Routledge, Abingdon, 2018, 224 pp., \$168 (hbk), ISBN: 9781138241077

The governance and planning of Australian metropolitan areas are messy and state-specific affairs, with the arrangements and outcomes of each state reflecting their political leadership, policy challenges and planning ambitions. This volume is timely, both in extending the editors' previous volume *The Australian Metropolis: A Planning History* (Hamnett & Freestone 2000), and in adding to a growing contemporary literature calling for a metropolitan imperative in Australia (Tomlinson & Spiller 2018) and internationally (Katz & Bradley 2013). *Planning Metropolitan Australia* delves into the recent history of spatial strategies in the selected metropolitan regions (Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, South East Queensland and Canberra), introduced with a macroscopic perspective of metropolitan change (Chapter 1), and an overview of the previous book (Chapter 2). Chapters 3 – 8 develop case studies on each metropolitan area, with a provocation on the metropolitan condition closing the volume (Chapter 9).

Although it is impossible to simply aggregate metropolitan governance in Australia, there are several overarching themes that emerge in the book. The first theme speaks to the wide-ranging demographic changes, brought about by both decreasing natural population growth and an increasingly diverse range of temporary and permanent migrants, predominately from Asia (p. 6). Secondly, an ambition for more compact metropolitan spatial structure developing polycentric urban regions, rather than metropolitan areas relying on single nodes. Thirdly, the turnover and range of strategic spatial plans has resulted in an accelerated production of plans, and extended their time-frames. This increased production leads towards reduced significance of strategies, ineffectual outcomes and ultimately, what is repeated through the book, an implementation gap, where governments are failing to respond to major challenges of meeting housing and infrastructural demand, and a “demonstrable gap between plans and reality” (p. 19). Quite cheekily, the penultimate section in the introductory chapter titled ‘The Achievements of Metropolitan Plans’, is rather a checklist of failures of metropolitan strategic planning, and how a more integrated governance framework can do better in leading metropolitan regions in Australia towards more connected futures. These failures are shaped by the ‘parallel universes’ in metropolitan Australia (cf. Chapter 9)

emerging in the proliferation of planning which is not implemented, and the prioritisation of metropolitan centres over suburbs. These differences become more pronounced not just between cities, but also within them.

There is an increased ambition demonstrated by the accelerated production of metropolitan plans, although this ambition is not met by a capacity to deliver these strategies. Writing on Melbourne, Goodman suggests that “strategic planning ambitions have become broader, while the means to implement them have diminished due to the primacy of neoliberal thought on deregulation” (p. 66). Bunker and colleagues suggest that the capacity of metropolitan governance in Sydney has waned, and “Sydney has lacked this dimension since abolition of the Cumberland County Council in the early 1960s” (p. 95). Similar perspectives emerge from South East Queensland, with Burton claiming both a “failure to deliver their strategic visions in practice”, and “failure to integrate other environmental plans and policies produced by both state and local governments in the region with the SEQ regional plans” (p. 166). Thus, the ambition of metropolitan strategy is not met by increased capacity, in turn leading to a failure of delivery.

How state governments adapt to issues of overcrowding in metropolitan centres has usually been to expand the availability of developable land. Ideals of compact city narratives are conflicted by the extension of urban growth boundaries voiced in Melbourne (p. 60) and Adelaide (p. 109). Developmental pressures have forced governments to rescind policy prescription and relax strategic goals which have been cast as “selective targets” (p. 119). In Western Australia, reaching these goals has been the product of exogenous factors such as mining exports and immigration. Broadly, the composite effects of a resource boom have accelerated the challenges for Perth shifting from a “large provincial city”, to a “globalizing city” (p. 124).

Throughout the book, most contributors make clear the effects of neoliberalisation of planning and the interventionist approach of state government neutering the ability of local governments to approve strategically important development decisions. Such acts illustrate the power-relations between state and local government, and the imposition on local government, and the reduced ability of local government to make decisions through new decision-making bodies such as Development Assessment Panels in Perth (p. 135), weakened planning policies to facilitate private development in Adelaide (p. 120) and forced amalgamations in Sydney and Perth (p. 99, 135).

The inclusion of Canberra as a metropolitan region is distinct as the national capital territory is shaped not by local-state relations, but local-national government. However, strategic spatial planning follows similar markers and contradictions, drawing a hierarchy of centres and corridors throughout the region as well as spatial conflicts at the overlap of natural geographic boundaries, strategic ambitions, as well as the proximity to other state borders. The federal jurisdiction continues to be shaped by international influence where historically, it “reproducing global trends of urban development” (p. 189), now turned to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for support developing a strategic plan for the region. Much like the other metropolitan regions, Canberra is not immune to the effects of

vertical fiscal imbalance. As raised in this chapter by Fischer and Weirick, “the ACT Government is clearly not able to afford the city it has inherited from the Commonwealth on the basis of the revenue it can raise” (p. 190) and is thereby sensitive and captive to development interests. A similar story appears throughout other metropolitan regions, with private sector partnerships and major infrastructure projects reliant on private sector funding, as with the development of, for example, WestConnex, a major motorway in Sydney (p. 89).

Given this neoliberal turn, it is unsurprising how major infrastructural projects like WestConnex develop. How these projects develop also raises concern as decision-making leads towards procedural, over liberal democratic processes. These major strategic, financial and developmental drivers generate understandable concern, as Gleeson suggests, economic productivism overrides all else. He is pessimistic about the direction of democratic planning and governance in metropolitan Australia, with a closing chapter, summarising the changes occurring at the metropolitan scale through the intensification of change (social, environmental, economic and spatial among others), and the pluralization of polyvalent metropolitan regions. The acceleration of these changes, he argues, requires much greater investigation of the research-policy discordance (p. 196). Thus, this edited book provides a useful primer of the impacts and drivers of metropolitan change, and a platform for further inquiry into the multiple and conflicting trends shaping the metropolitan development of cities and regions in Australia.

Although this edited book captures the broad ranging impacts shaped by the ambition for metropolitan scale planning in Australia, this inevitably leaves one wanting more detail about the particularities of macroscopic changes in relation to metropolitan change in relation to global peers, or how inequality is produced at a local level. This timely volume will be of interest for students and scholars of comparative metropolitan planning, and a platform for addressing the challenges of an integrated approach to metropolitan governance in Australia.

## References

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