Wicked Planning Problems
and the Reform of Planning Systems:
a Case Study of Sydney

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Moves to steer cities towards more (socially, economically and environmentally) sustainable spatial development patterns disturb established interests and run into strong resistance. This resistance to change, and privileging of established voices, is not just occurring in city planning. It is part of the wider and deeper crisis of modernity, evoking questions of long-term societal vulnerability. Sustainability transitions (ST) scholarship is a growing international research domain which is focused on how societal systems might be steered towards more sustainable trajectories in the face of resistance. City planning systems happen to be regularly under a critical spotlight. This thesis introduces ST theory to planning system reform practice.

Sydney provides the case study setting. The empirical investigation was anchored by an examination of Sydney’s spatial development history, including an explanation of what has led to the marked increase in planning-related problems over the past 30 years or so. The theoretical investigation started with mainstream planning theory, linked-up with (less mainstream) relational and institutional planning conceptions, and then “meshed” these fields with ST theory. The resulting conceptualisation has been framed as a new process model for planning system reform projects in cities like Sydney: the Planning System Transition (PST) framework.

Three pieces of empirical research were involved in the conception and testing of the framework. The first involved interviews with 28 elite, cross-sectoral, planning system actors. Here problems in translating ST insights into the practice world were exposed, and the value of joining together local context, relational and institutional planning thought, and ST ideas, was practically demonstrated. Next, the PST framework was used as a tool to probe a recent major planning system reform exercise for Sydney (2011-2014). It proved helpful in untangling what went wrong in this (failed) episode and how blockers (of transformative change) might be avoided next time. A further case study then explored the question of democracy deficits in institutionalised reform endeavours. It used an investigation of a set of deliberative democracy exercises (on
the topic of planning reform) to indicate how, and why, these kinds of alternative processes provide one of the more likely avenues for reducing the effects of exaggerated fears, and tackling resistance to sustainability-oriented reform.

This thesis finds positively on the potential of ST theory to assist city planning reform. But it also highlights the critical requirement for ST concepts to be contextualised appropriately with both scholarly and practical planning insights. It provides an applied process model to assist in the particulars of this task.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my two supervisors. It has been something special to have Professor Peter Newton as my main supervisor. As an urban sustainability scholar of serious international standing, Peter’s time is called on from many directions. But he still found enough of it for the highest order of exacting, precise and provocative commentary to push this work way beyond where it otherwise might have been. Without Professor Terry Burke on our team (another real leader in his field), with his unruffled and optimistic insights, there’s every chance I’d not have stayed the course.

I also wish to acknowledge Associate Professor Roberta Ryan of University of Technology Sydney, who generously assisted with knowledge about the central case study for this thesis. In turn, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the NSW Department of Planning and Environment as the primary source of this case material. I am also grateful to the many experienced actors in and around the planning system who generously gave their time and ideas in interviews. While interviewees represented the different sectoral interests in urban planning, often in something of a state of battle, the stimulating insights (of these individuals) were more aligned than at odds. Helping in the harnessing of this common spirit of people (rather than interests) in the challenge of managing Sydney’s spatial future is perhaps the core ambition of this work.

There are a few more people I wish to thank, and more than any others. My parents, who both left school at fourteen, but who taught me everything that was important. Anne, the love of my life, for her patience, and special way of lifting people up above the sometimes gloom, especially me. Then there’s Jack and Maddie, our beautiful children, of whom I am very proud. The work is dedicated to Anne, Jack and Maddie.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma by me, and to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person without due reference within the text of this thesis.

Peter Walsh 25/4/2016
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHURI</td>
<td>Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASIX</td>
<td>NSW government’s Building Sustainability Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAU</td>
<td>Business-as-usual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPN</td>
<td>Better Planning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Cumberland County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Committee for Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLG</td>
<td>Centre for Local Government based within University of Technology Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSHA</td>
<td>Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Community strategic plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Development application</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAF</td>
<td>Development Assessment Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Deliberative democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DURD</td>
<td>Department of Urban and Regional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA Act</td>
<td>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Ecologically sustainable development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFC</td>
<td>Global Financial Crisis (phrase describing 2007-8 economic downturn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHG</td>
<td>Greenhouse gas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>Geographic information system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Horizon 1 (H2 = Horizon 2 etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICAC</td>
<td>NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JV</td>
<td>Joint ventures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LARP</td>
<td>Local Approvals Review Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDP</td>
<td>Metropolitan Development Program (for management of housing supply)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLP</td>
<td>Multi-level perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPRE</td>
<td>Master-planned residential estates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCOSS</td>
<td>NSW Council of Social Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>Not in my backyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP 4</td>
<td>The Netherlands’ Fourth National Environmental Policy Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales (one of the six States within the Commonwealth of Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWRL</td>
<td>North West Rail Link project in Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Planning Institute of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>Planning system transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>QANGO</td>
<td>Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBA</td>
<td>Reserve Bank of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPP</td>
<td>State Environmental Planning Policy (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEIFA</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Index for Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGS</td>
<td>SGS Economics and Planning (an Australian consulting practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNM</td>
<td>Strategic niche management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>State Planning Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPSR</td>
<td>Sydney Planning System Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SROP</td>
<td>Sydney Region Outline Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Sustainability transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Transition management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTS</td>
<td>University of Technology Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW1</td>
<td>World War 1 (WW2 = World War 2)</td>
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Chapter 1  Introduction

1.1  The problem

A positive initial storyline
The governance of the spatial arrangements for Australia’s cities can be credited with considerable accomplishments since the nation’s Federation in 1901. This journey, in what today comes under the broad description of “city planning”, can look back at a legacy of better housing opportunity for all classes, improvements to public health and sanitation, the control of pollution more generally, activities to protect our ecological systems and cultural heritage, and the roll out of various critical infrastructures for waste management, water, transport, communication, energy as well as community facilities. For the better part of the last century, Australia’s city planning-related systems, aligned with technology advances, have dealt with these challenges incrementally as they have emerged as matters of social and political consciousness. The resultant urban spatial arrangements in Australian cities provided one of the underpinning factors for a period of quite inclusive social and economic progress as society has modernised.

Today’s more complex planning world
But over the last three decades or so the set of societal conditions which have been emerging are making it more difficult for urban spatial problems to be addressed. Problems like the inability to provide housing at acceptable price points, traffic congestion and resultant long commutes, and spatially-based socio-economic disadvantage, have never been worse in Sydney for example. When added to poor progress in greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions (from among the highest per capita levels in the OECD) and overall resource consumption trends (Newton, Pears et al. 2012) we see the difficulties faced in the quest for sustainable urban development models for Australian cities. More worrying is that problems are worsening over time. This trajectory can be expected to continue with the relatively high population growth levels which are predicted over the next thirty years. While spatially-related, such problems are not restricted to the planning domain. They reach into many corners of government policy and are deeply related to wider economic and socio-cultural shifts. But city planning is in the thick of each of the nominated problems. While not the only answer, an effective city planning system is a pre-requisite for any shift towards more sustainable urban development over time in Australian cities.
Institutionalised resistance to sustainable urban development

There are signs of macro or landscape level shifts towards sustainability in some aspects of urban life. One example is the market’s response to the continuing divergence between housing costs and income – a shift to smaller housing. Another is the response to traffic congestion and costs of private motor vehicle use – lower take-up rates of motor vehicle licensing for younger people and increasing take-up of public transport. These two shifts connect-up in the growing appeal of (small) housing closer to jobs and public transport, and reduced aspirations for the cottage and garden dream (J.-F. Kelly 2011). But rather than encouraging these landscape level dynamics, city planning has tended to be slow in response. When progressive policy responses gain a little momentum they face resistance from within the established “regime” and implementation difficulties can mean original aspirations are overtaken by unintended consequences. A key point to make here is that this resistance to change and privileging of existing routines is not just occurring in city planning in Australia, or indeed the wider world of planning. It seems to be evidence of a wider and deeper crisis in modern society that raises questions about long-term socio-economic vulnerability. It is part of the increasingly urgent puzzle of how we might avoid passing insurmountable problems onto future generations, while short term social, economic and political drivers operate to push us along that very path.

There is growing international scholarly research defining this wider societal problem as a “systems crisis” (Avelino, Wittmayer et al. 2014). "Sustainability transitions"\(^1\) theory is a field which is particularly focused on how societal systems might change (or be “steered”) over time to more sustainable trajectories. It now has a large collection of empirical case studies to support its contentions. This thesis investigates how this transitions thinking and related planning scholarship might help with Australia’s planning system “crisis”.

1.2 Why this thesis

1.2.1 Planning’s practice-research interface in Australia

Urban planning has a tradition of being one of those societal endeavours which brings collective ideals to the fore. Up until the 1960-70s, it was a taken-for-granted aspect of city management that governments would employ the simple patterns of established urban

\(^1\)The name sustainability transitions theory is also interchangeable with “socio-technical transitions” or just “transitions” theory. For this thesis I will mostly use the phrase transitions theory (/scholarship/studies etc).
planning principles, more or less rationally, to deal with population growth. The major
spatial policy was governments’ encouragement of population growth away from inner city
living (and its noise, pollution, congestion) and towards new garden suburbs (quiet, fresh
air, privacy and space). Government subsidies and infrastructure spending significantly
assisted this socio-spatial change (eg through freeway construction and encouragement of
decentralisation of employment). A step forward in time to today reveals a much expanded
and more complex palette of problems. Urban planning scholarship is still interested in that
same challenge of how best to help steer spatial development towards the achievement of
collective societal ideals. Indeed, there is some kind of common view on what scholars
would like cities to be like, spatially. There are variations on the theme, but a convenient
representation of the issues, along with a picture of a desired planning response over time
can be captured with a quote:

... our major cities will be characterised by limited suburban expansion, a strong
multi-nuclear structure with high density housing around centres and transport
corridors, and infill and densification throughout the current inner and middle
suburbs. Residents will live closer to their work in largely self-contained suburban
labour sheds, and will inhabit smaller, more energy-efficient and water-efficient
houses. The percentage of trips using public transport, walking or cycling will have
doubled. Regeneration programs will have broken up large concentrations of
disadvantage, and a diminished public housing sector will only house welfare-
dependent households in acute need. Other low-income households will be able to
find affordable dwellings in accessible locations within consolidation developments.

(Forster 2006, p179)

If this represents an aspirational image of a productive, liveable and sustainable city, as will
be seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis, today sees us going in the opposite direction on most of
the suggested indicators.

Planning scholarship’s interest in Australian cities today seems to still be mostly concerned
with the particulars of spatial arrangements. Or, which particular land use and infrastructure
configurations bring the best prospects for social good. The question of how things might be

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2 The commentary is presented by Forster here more as a representation of aspirational metropolitan strategies at the
time, focused on compact city ideas. For example he also notes that some scholars are not supported of urban growth
boundaries due to a suggested effect on affordability. This quote also appears in (Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012).
brought about to deliver on these desired spatial configurations, usually in the face of resistance, seems to receive considerably less attention. Flyvbjerg puts it best when talking about the wider world of planning scholarship:

... the quandary of normative idealists, including the majority of planning theorists: they know where they would like to go but not how to get there (2002b, p57).

But if ever government was in a position to direct mainstream urban change, through policy or fiscal interventions, those days seem to be long passed. Since around the 1980-90s and the beginnings of what is now labelled as “globalisation”, we have seen a structural hollowing out of the government role and a reduced capacity for it to be influential. This is one aspect of the societal shift from “government to governance” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p148). It sees government agencies collaborate and/or compete with advocates of various societal interests and the market, not just in the making of policies but also in their implementation. As put by Meadowcroft (2007, p305), today “power is so broadly dispersed that policy-makers lack the ability to make things happen”3. This world of governance presents a different problem setting to that faced in earlier city planning pathways. It brings with it new levels of interrogation, including today the complex and contested concepts surrounding what is really meant when we talk of productive, sustainable and liveable futures for our cities and the role of city planning in influencing it. It also brings new accountability frameworks, and thus both new threats and opportunities for democratic legitimacy.

At first glance, the idea that theorising about planning systems might actually help here might be thought of as an almost comically thankless task (certainly this has been a view expressed to me by many colleagues in planning (practice) over recent years). Academic thought is not something which is commonly used to deal with planning practice problems in Australia (Chapter 3.2). But Friedmann (2008, p249) has called for just that. That is, for planning scholarship to uncover innovative ways to turn around an otherwise inclination for our cities and their planners to “drift with the mainstream, helping to build cities that are neither supportive of life nor ecologically sustainable”. This thesis is trying to align with this quest. It is the suggestion that the conception and delivery of worthwhile planning

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3 As is evidenced in the major case study investigations involved in this thesis (Chapter 8), this distribution of power seems to not just be between government and financial capital in the interests of promoting development, but also involves a wider group of elites who might use political persuasion to prevent policy change.
system innovation might have some considerable dependence on the availability of applied theoretical knowledge on system innovation itself. Put another way, it is an investigation of a challenge pronounced by Johan Schot (2014), a transitions scholar of some standing, who has somewhat boldly claimed “there’s nothing as practical as good theory”.

1.2.2 Evolution of research objectives

Personal interest

After more than 20 years of practice in the field, I began this work searching for new knowledge on how the overall planning system might transform to better enable sustainable urban development. I was consulting and teaching in planning system reform, and observing the embedded characteristics of planning problems. There was a strong sense of connection (if not culpability) when reflecting on this setting, as my small consulting practice had been engaged to work on some of the larger planning system reform-related consultancies which have been undertaken in Australia during that period. Planning system reform projects seemed to come about in regular cycles (usually linked to government elections) but they seemed to rarely bring about positive change, and were just as inclined to move things backwards, as interest groups and ideological perspectives dominated the debate.

The perspective I brought to the sustainable development challenge encompassed, but was by no means limited to, the great inter-generational question of climate change. However, my first order concern was the “fair go”, and how spatial planning in Sydney seemed to be effecting an increasing concentration of spatially-based disadvantage. I saw this, anecdotally, as in part happening through planning restrictions which discouraged cheaper housing close to good jobs and better schools. I was aware of the more concentrated spatial disadvantage evident in the US and parts of the UK and how it tended to be sustained across generations. Important for me was the question of whether this kind of social polarisation was something we were heading for moreso into the future in Australia. Certainly this would be a different city to the one I was brought up in where individual prospects were much less related to your postcode. Here I was also aware of the growing literature, now including from within the International Monetary Fund itself, to suggest that more inequality, in the long run, tended on the evidence to lower economic prospects for cities and regions (Ostry, Berg et al. 2014, Dabla-Norris, Kochhar et al. 2015). At the same time, I had a sense of how the introduction of poorly conceived re-development into established
suburban settings has had serious impact on the character of local areas, and often with little or nothing in the way of sustainability benefits. This was pointing to the planning challenge as a complex one with lots of ambiguities. So my interest was less specifically targeted at any particular planning solution, and more about the bundle of concerns around how big, fast-growth, cities like Sydney might shift from short term to longer term thinking. It was about how the planning system might be positioned to do the best it can in helping bring about a fairer but also more productive, sustainable and liveable future for today’s children and the generations which follow.

**Exploration of scholarship**

I started the research with readings in transitions scholarship. It was very stimulating and my initial research intention was all about whether and how transitions ideas might be transferred into the city planning domain (and as quickly as possible!). Transitions scholarship is a young and alluring field, designed to have interdisciplinary appeal. For planning system reform thinking it brought a fresh perspective, and a way of thinking more systematically about the problem. Its focus on change at a societal system level seemed to provide great promise in regard to my interpretation of the planning problem. It was also centred on systems thinking, and I knew already that it was the planning system I wanted to focus on. But transitions is a notably complex and abstract field, and in my early efforts at engaging in the topic with the real world of practice I was mostly met with blank looks. This early contact with senior colleagues in the planning profession identified an initial, and continuing, challenge of translating transitions thinking into the city planning world. There was a need for better planning contextualisation of the transition ideas, and a better situating of them into local planning settings.

There was also an early interest, on my part, in what planning scholarship itself was having to say about such matters. My research and teaching in planning studies up until then had not exposed any real thinking of relevance to the topic. That is, planning scholarship was good at explaining what was wrong, and what a better future would be like, but less strong, in my reading as well, at what was required to link the two. While somewhat obscure and itself a little abstract, there is, as I am now aware, a rich seam of planning and geography scholarship more generally concerned with the interpretation of the workings of planning institutions and what might be involved in actually achieving (“planned”) change (Lindblom 1990, Schön and Rein 1994, Amin 2001, Jessop 2001, Fischer 2003, Healey 2007a, Healey 2007b, Verma 2007). If this work was to be linked up with transitions
theorisations, there seemed to be the beginnings of a more contextualised (and viable) entry point for my particular research interest into the practical planning domain.

**A point of empirical attention emerges – the Sydney Planning System Reform project**

To this point I had clarity that the focus of attention for the thesis was to be city planning systems. The core scholarship to ground the research was also becoming clear. But a problem that can arise with social research of this kind is the availability of pertinent case material to apply and challenge theoretical conceptions. Fortuitously, an almost ideal research environment was emerging. As the scholarship for this thesis began to come together, an election campaign was underway in NSW. City planning was in the public eye in Sydney especially, and planning system reform became one of the key election platforms of the incoming O'Farrell Liberal-National coalition government in 2011. Subsequently, a major organised effort at reform of the planning system for NSW, and in particular the Sydney metropolitan area, rolled out over the period 2011-2014. As things unfolded, and despite really quite a large scale effort across the planning sector, involving many and varied community and other stakeholder interests, it would not end well. This research focuses on the Sydney-centred aspects of the reform project and the term Sydney Planning System Reform (or SPSR) project is adopted to refer to it throughout the thesis. The SPSR project, as a significant reform episode, provided a key opportunity to connect the scholarship under investigation in this thesis and the real world of city planning reform practice. While there remained ambitions to have something wider to say about planning reform more generally, the thesis came to become focused on an examination of organised planning system reform episodes.

### 1.3 Introducing the theoretical concepts

**Sustainability transitions**

Something immediately different and interesting about transitions theory is that it is focused *exclusively* on how societal systems might be steered over time to support more sustainable development trajectories. It is responding to the evidence that persistent societal problems including those related to energy, transport, housing, food production, biodiversity, health and ageing (among others) will bring about major societal disruption into the future without fundamental changes in the way societal systems respond (Stern 2007, Garnaut 2008, Biermann, Abbott et al. 2012). The transitions literature comes from a baseline position that this setting presents as a new stage for society. It suggests that while, historically,
society has been able to rely largely on technological advances to provide for progress, due to the nature and scale of the problems we face today, this will no longer be enough (Kemp 1994, Berkhout 2002). According to this thinking, the kind of changes we need into the future, while still requiring technology innovation, will be just as contingent on transformative change in social processes. It gives attention to problems like institutionalised “path dependence” in both government and social groups, how shifts in complex systems occur over time, and what mechanisms might be best suited to support system change in different circumstances. This emergent and growing research field (Markard, Raven et al. 2012) seems to offer a coherent way to unravel the multiple levels of action operating in the complex systems enveloping city planning in large cities like Sydney. In turn it offers a new perspective on the problems confronted by business-as-usual (BAU) approaches to planning reform efforts. It includes, with its “transition management” conception, strategic heuristics for actioning transition projects, which might be adaptable for use when transformation of urban planning systems is the task at hand.

**Relational-institutional planning**

What I am terming “relational-institutional” thinking then takes us to the notion that it is “institutions” (its meaning here is as in its sociological sense, ie as “social norms” or the “rules of the game”, etc – not just organisations) that are inevitably at the *centre* of any planning reform effort. These institutions encourage certain (strategic) behaviours and discourage others. Under this thinking institutions are socially embedded and will tend to favour those already privileged. In planning reform endeavours this might include property development interests, local resident preservation societies and the like, along with the bureaucracy or politicians themselves, as election cycles have their effect. The concern is the tendency for institutions (standard procedures which centre on concessions and trade-offs among interests) to frustrate wider and longer term ambitions. So in the planning sphere of influence, nominally ground-breaking policy, structural or process changes may come about (eg new planning laws, city governance structures, major new metropolitan plans), but due to institutionally-developed *particulars* the changes can struggle to have impact.

*Relational* thinking joins in here by way of response⁴. It is the further line of planning thought which suggests that the capacity to moderate institutions is a function of the quality

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⁴ This concept is explained at Chapter 3.4.
of relations or interactions between sectoral interests and other system actors. There is a
dualism which is operating here. On the one hand there is the structuring force of
institutions (described above), and on the other the capacity to moderate them by designing
in appropriate relational interaction. In this thesis I am suggesting the term relational-
institutional thinking as involving the conscious linking of the two dynamics as a means of
opening up change opportunities in organised efforts. This emphasis is highlighting the
importance of designing-in opportunity within reform episodes for social (or relational)
action with this intent (ie to directly challenge institutional blockers).

1.4 Research questions

The research questions for this thesis are centrally concerned with: translation of these
academic concepts into planning system reform thinking, testing the concepts against the
reality of planning reform efforts, and investigating subsequent transferability of the
concepts into future city planning system reform efforts with normative intent (in Sydney,
and other cities with similar profiles). So an overriding question can be put as:

Can transitions and relational-institutionalist planning insights better enable
metropolitan planning system reform efforts to be effective in achieving planning
ideals?

At a further level of detail, the questions can be defined as: (1) the extent of alignment or
connection of the transitions and relational-institutionalist planning insights with the reality
of planning reform practice problems, (2) whether and how the linking up of transitions
and relational-institutionalist planning thought might suggest a new approach for planning
reform projects, (3) how such an approach might compare with that adopted in the 2011-
2014 planning system reform episode focused on Sydney, (4) what similarities and
differences present themselves, and what new insights emerge from such a comparison, (5)
what are the implementation prospects of this new thinking with the reality of planning
reform practice.
1.5 Research methodology and chapter outline

1.5.1 Overview

This thesis adopts a mixed method approach. It combines historical analysis, interdisciplinary theoretical analysis, the development of new conceptualisations and their testing in the real world of planning practice (through interviews and case observation).

The research can be described as having three stages. The first stage involved the overall research conception, which included an historical examination of Sydney’s spatial setting and culminated in the development of the central conceptual logic of the thesis (using history and theory to develop new conceptual approach to planning system reform efforts). The second stage comprised the primary research which involved three empirical studies: (1) a set of interviews with key planning system actors on the conceptual ideas, (2) the application of the new conceptual framework to the SPSR project, and (3) an exploration of links with an innovative alternative democracy-based experiment which formed part of the SPSR project). The conclusions of the thesis can then be seen as the final stage.

Figure 1.1 maps out the research methodology and links it to the various chapters of the thesis. An explanation of the particulars of each stage are now provided. This is quite brief here as the more detailed particulars of the methodology, especially in regard to the primary research, are explained when this research is presented in detail.
Research Interest Established
Sustainable urban settlement vs planning system deficiencies (Ch 1)

Sydney’s Spatial Development Outlined
Embedded problems identified (Ch2)

Literature Review & Conceptualisation
new ways of thinking about problem setting (Ch3-5)

Conceiving the Research Project
Develop research questions (Ch1, 5&6)

Empirical Domain Selection
Focused on the Sydney Planning System Reform (SPSR) Project (2011-2014) – a major organised episode aimed at “transformational” change (Ch6)

Case Study Research Method
Qualitative case studies, archival analysis, observation and in-depth interviews (Ch1&6)

Research Project Framed
Research approach established and relevant approvals secured

Primary Research Action
PST logic framed for testing in SPSR project

Interviews Planning System Actors
Testing perceptions on PST concepts and implementation practicalities (Ch7)

SPSR Project tests “PST Framework”
Archival review, observations, then comparative approach using PST framework (Ch8)

Deliberative Panels
Case study testing of reform potential of non-traditional democratic processes (Ch9)

Findings & Future Possibilities (Ch10)

Figure 1.1 - Outline of research conception and methodology
1.5.2 Research conceptualisations

The empirical setting for the research has already been introduced. It is Chapter 2 which provides the anchoring device for the rest of the thesis with its historical explanation of the drivers of Sydney’s urban settlement patterns from about 1900 to date. Three interconnected themes (social and economic processes, technology innovation and governance interventions) are used as threads to bind this exploration. The “exploration” of theory has also become a significant element of this thesis. Chapter 3 provides an outline of what planning scholarship has itself to offer in regard to the quest of bringing about transformative and progressive practice reform in urban planning systems. It starts by outlining the well-entrenched cynicism and/or disinterest about “planning theory” on the part of planning practitioners. Having regard to the implementation goals of this research, a consciousness of the practice-theory interface is highlighted as a core requirement as the research proceeds. But the body of this chapter is more concerned with the examination of shifts in planning thinking and practice in the face of societal developments over modern times. Four major paradigms are introduced: rational-technical, negotiative, neoliberal and collaborative planning. It is shown how scholars heavily criticise the way each of these modes of planning thought have steered planning systems. Chapter 3 concludes with the exposition planning scholarship’s foray into institutional thinking as a means of better understanding planning failures and, as discussed above, how relational planning ideas are suggested as a means of addressing institutional problems.

Chapter 4 introduces sustainability transitions theory which helps “place” spatial planning problems in cities like Sydney into the wider field of urban system failures. This theory is suggesting that, while rooted in unsustainable consumption and production patterns, a set of “non-cyclical”5 and worsening problems now encompass society as a whole. The core concern of the theory is how to understand and shape societal system transitions so they might support more sustainable development trajectories. Transitions scholarship comprises three highly interconnected paradigms. Each have particular strengths: (1) the “socio-technical” paradigm - which is focused mostly on transition dynamics and has extensively studied the pathways of historical societal transitions over time, (2) the “complex systems/process” paradigm – which is focused on the mechanisms for system change and relies on complex adaptive systems thinking, and integrated assessment among

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5 This is the point that these particular societal problems are not likely to self-correct over time (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010).
other scholarship, (3) the “reflexive governance” paradigm – focused on social processes, politics and democracy studies (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010). The complex systems/process paradigm brings the most specific heuristics or guidelines for reform projects through its “transition management” conceptualisation, which is explained in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the symbiotic linking of the planning and transitions scholarship described above. This resulted in the development of a new conceptual logic for planning system reform. The planning system transition (or PST) logic is underpinned by its own set of three theoretical pillars: (1) mainstream planning – which sets the city planning reform project into a spatial context, (2) relational-institutional planning – which draws a deeper attention to the idea of reform, and (3) transitions studies – which is concerned explicitly with complex societal system transformation. This conceptual connection is suggested graphically in Figure 1.2.

![Figure 1.2 - PST logic's three theoretical "pillars"](image)

A new process model for planning system reform episodes is then developed. It is underpinned by the three-piece theoretical structure described above, but using a more detailed “meshing” of the particulars of the three lines of scholarship. The “PST framework” sets out three progressive innovation “horizons” which a planning system reform project should attend to if it is to have prospects of achieving transformative change. The first horizon (H1), which presents at the project conception stage, poses the question of intent. Systems thinking is used to explain why aiming for wider societal benefits (for planning this is captured by the idea of sustainable urban development) can open up opportunities for change which tend to be closed off in BAU approaches. Regular approaches to planning reform, which commonly adopt a narrower, property-centric intent, are more inclined to run into blockages because of political competition among sectoral interests. H2 poses the question of what different understandings might be required to conceive a reform project underpinned by this intent. The challenge is a complex one and
the essence of this horizon is to engage with this complexity rather than avoid or try to overcome it. On the one hand this concern is with understanding spatial planning’s own intricacies; what is important, and what is less so (and why), in the bringing about of planning-related societal improvements (associated with H1). But also the institutional complexities of change in urban systems, discussed earlier. Finally, H3 poses the question: how might action be framed mindful of the particular reform intention and the problem understanding. Transition management research gives particular direction here. H3 gives guidance on: agenda setting, participation processes (including alternative democratic processes), and what types of project outputs should be targeted (over others), if transformative planning system change is the goal. Figure 1.3 provides a graphic overview of the PST framework.

![PST framework's "3 Horizons"](image)

1.5.3 Primary Research: Ground testing the PST concepts

As outlined above there are three pieces of empirical research used to explore these PST conceptions. Chapter 6 provides an introduction to this research and introduces the SPSR project as providing its experimental grounding. Below each of the cases are briefly outlined.
Chapter 7 explains what occurred when the logic behind the PST framework was introduced into the practice world. It reports on a series of interviews with a group of very experienced planning system actors from a range of sectoral backgrounds. It had the direct intention of having practitioners interrogate this “theoretical” thinking, and provide commentary on its perceived value. As will be seen, while not unconditional, there was considerable support for these theoretical ideas in the abstract, and interest in them having more exposure in practice settings.

Chapter 8 reports on the testing out of the PST framework on the SPSR project as a whole. That is, the approach adopted in Sydney’s 2011-2014 planning system reform project was compared to the processes suggested in the PST framework, identifying similarities and differences. Interpretive research sees some value in the probing and untangling of “what happens” in major episodes of this kind as a learning device, and as a means of promoting reflection on the part of stakeholders (Healey 2007a). The PST framework seemed to be able to shine a light on the difficulties involved in seeking to reconcile powerful institutional demands, and the tendency to take options which close off transformational potential. It also helped highlight instances where initiative was demonstrated and under what circumstances.

Chapter 9 draws attention to an example of innovation arising in the SPSR project which had particular resonance for the theory which this thesis explores. Despite resistance from some stakeholders, the government went ahead with a set of “civic jury” style deliberative democracy exercises towards the tail end of the SPSR project. These involved randomly selected citizens (rather than the already vocal “usual suspects”) in a process involving learning, and debating, about planning reform itself. Both transitions and planning research raise concern about democracy deficits in institutionalised policy reform processes. The suggestion from the research on the topic captured in this thesis is that well organised deliberative democracy exercises are one of the more promising arenas for challenging dominant ideas resistant to change in the city planning domain.

1.5.4 Findings and future possibilities

Chapter 10 then rounds out the findings. It is found that the planning and transitions scholarship highlighted in this thesis has good levels of relevance to the planning system reform dilemma faced by large, fast growing cities like Sydney. The meshing of the scholarship examined in the thesis, and subsequent new conceptualisations which are
drawn, are seen to have promising prospects in practice settings when certain nominated pre-conditions are met. The chapter concludes by illustrating how the planning system in a city like Sydney might be different, and better enabled to attend to worsening city planning problems, if these insights were encouraged.
Chapter 2  The Shaping of Sydney

2.1  Introduction

2.1.1  Context

At the last census (June 2011) Sydney had a population of 4.61 million people (ABS 2012). It is the largest city in Australia and has the nation’s largest economy. Like other Australian cities it is highly suburbanised and has low urban densities when compared to other cities internationally. Sydney is regularly listed on global “best cities” rankings, with its striking visual setting, temperate climate, relatively low crime levels, health, cultural and recreation facilities, economic vitality and social stability all highly regarded.

But the story of Sydney is not all so positive. As is the case for residents of all of Australia’s major cities, Sydney dwellers today have among the very highest per capita ecological footprints worldwide (WWF 2012). The appealing climate is limited to the eastern (coastal) precinct, with the more populous western suburbs significantly affected by extreme summer heat. Sydney is one of the least affordable cities in the world, and high levels of car dependency results in heavy traffic congestion, suburban sprawl, long journeys-to-work and very high per capita transport related CO2 emissions. In comparison with 27 of “the world’s key urban centres”, Sydney was rated in the bottom third in terms of mass transit coverage (PwC 2013 ), a key indicator for global competition prospects (Cervero 2013). There is also evidence of an increasing socio-cultural polarisation in Sydney, with data since 1986 suggesting concentrating spatially-based disadvantage (and advantage) within the wider metropolitan area, separating the wealthier east and north, and the less privileged west and south (Randolph and Tice 2014).

A diagnostic of Sydney today would find a contradictory and divided city, a great place to live for some but increasingly tough for others.

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6 Sydney’s economy is estimated to account for over 20% of Australia’s GDP (NSW Government 2014).
7 Sydney’s visual setting is often characterised by its natural harbour, clean ocean, harbour and river beaches, large and prominent areas of bushland both surrounding the urban areas and within it, ringed by steeper topography, water catchments and National Parks, and a World Heritage-listed Blue Mountains backdrop.
8 See Economist Intelligence Unit annual survey of city “liveability” and more recent work of The Economist magazine including additional indicators for “spatial qualities” such as green space, urban sprawl, cultural assets and the like. Sydney is ranked in the top five world cities under both EIU and the more recent measures. Web reference: http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/07/best-city-world . Accessed 14/2/13.
9 The work of references census data from 1986 to 2006, but mapping of SEIFA index data from the 2011 census is included in the body of the thesis which implies this continuing trend.
As the analytical frame shifts to the mid and long term, and ambitions for more sustainable urban development, Sydney seems to be locked into unhelpful social and institutional patterns which will act against its achievement. Policy intentions in support of “productive, sustainable and liveable” futures for our cities (or similar ambitions), are regularly advanced (eg Australian Government 2011). However delivery presents some fundamental challenges, especially with anticipated growth expected to add an additional 1.5m new residents to Sydney over next 20 years (Department of Planning and Environment 2014). Without changes to planning and wider urban system settings, the longer term outlook for sustainable urban development in Sydney is not promising.

If this thesis is about how new approaches to planning system reform might help in Sydney’s transition to a more sustainable development trajectory, it is important that it is anchored in an understanding of what has driven Sydney’s urban settlement patterns to date. This would necessarily include a review of planning, as a governance endeavour, but as one of many influences in what is a complex and interwoven urban system. This chapter aims to help bring about such an understanding.

2.1.2 Approach

This chapter’s objective is to provide a strategic understanding of what have been the key influences and dynamics that have led to Sydney’s spatial form today. Three inter-related themes thread through the explanation which follows:

- **Social and economic processes**: responsive to the technology advances (discussed below), but also to political shifts and globalising forces especially associated with immigration, financing, the knowledge economy and environmental concerns. Changes to the extent and influence of community involvement in urban decision-making have been an important feature here.
- **Technological innovations**: in particular how evolution of transport and communication technologies have improved the efficiency of movement of people, freight and information.
- **Governance efforts**: institutional arrangements for growth management such as planning interventions and the ebbs and flows of infrastructure investment.
The exposition starts from around the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and takes us through until the present time. There have been many significant turns along the way, but for this chapter the narrative is broken into three distinct although certainly interconnecting periods. The first explanatory section takes us up to that time around the end of World War 2 (WW2) when personal motor vehicles began to have a spatial effect. The next section then moves through to the period around 1980 when globalisation began to make its mark. The final historical narrative then explores the period up to the present day, after which some conclusions are drawn.

Before commencing this story of the societal influences on spatial change in Sydney, the scene should be set with a little further background material on: (1) Sydney’s geophysical form, and (2) the time-series of actual urban expansion including the effects of these geophysical constraints. This context is now provided as the last part of this introductory outline.

### 2.1.3 Geophysical form influences spatial patterns of growth

Sydney’s geophysical form has shaped its post-European settlement phasing and patterns. It was the deep-water access of the harbour which drove the selection of the original colonial settlement post to Sydney Cove. The initial settlement area, and today’s CBD, sits near the eastern perimeter of a roughly circular area of around 60-80km diameter and 3000-4000 km\textsuperscript{2}. This Sydney “basin” is quite well defined, and bound in by what has been described as a “sandstone curtain”, the most dominant feature of which is the Great Dividing Range (including the Blue Mountains escarpment to the west). The bulk of Sydney’s urban settlement today has been accommodated on the undulating land of the Cumberland Plain, which stretches to the west, north-west and south-west of the now CBD. Urban settlement has also infiltrated over time into the more rugged lands of the Hornsby Plateau to the north and the Woronora Plateau to the south. Today, environmental controls, development costs and the large National Parks on three sides, point future physical expansion of Sydney towards further undeveloped lands within the Cumberland Plain, including its long “ramps” to the south-west and north-west, which today provide some of the diminishing residue areas available in the Sydney basin for agricultural pursuits.

Figure 2.1 provides a time-series representation of Sydney’s growth patterns into this terrain (Department of Planning 2005), which will be discussed throughout the rest of this Chapter. The figure portrays four stages of urban growth. The first stage represents the original early
city pattern up until WW1 with development radiating perhaps 7-10km out from the CBD and along the key transport corridors. The second stage brings us up to the end of WW2, by which time Sydney’s tram and bus coverage was extensive and convenient infill settlement between train lines became practical. The latter two periods show how private motor vehicle use has opened up more of the basin to the aspirations of low density home seekers. The area shaded yellow would fill the rest of the Cumberland Plain “if the rate of sprawl of the previous 30 years were continued” (ibid p32).

![Figure 2.1 - Sydney's spatial expansion(Source: Department of Planning 2005, p32)](image)

2.2 Walking city to transit city: turn of the 20thC to WW2

This section provides an outline of the key influences and inter-relationships at work of relevance to Sydney’s spatial development from around the turn of the 20th century to WW2. For this, and the two defined historical periods which follow, the outline starts with a graphic overview or “timeline” (Figure 2.2). These timeline images broadly situate key spatially-influential events within the three themes introduced above (socio-economic
processes, technology development and governance), and attempt to align them with the evolving particulars of urban form, for Sydney, over this period\(^{10}\).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Influences on Sydney’s spatial change from the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century to WW2}
\end{figure}

\subsection*{2.2.1 Industrialisation, suburbanisation and lower densities}

By the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Sydney had developed from a colonial outpost with forceful centralised government, the economy of which was essentially pastorally-based, into an economically diverse city with a population of just under half a million people (Spearritt 2000). Technology advances associated with the industrial revolution had found their way to Sydney. These advances were initially centred on the port and transport industry, and included significant but relatively low scale manufacturing activities (especially when compared to emerging mass production in northern Europe). Sydney’s settlement, and industrial labour force housing, were concentrated in a dense area of about 5km diameter, for the most part a “walking city” under the Newman and Kenworthy (1996) city-form description\(^{11}\).

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{10}\) These figures have been developed on the basis of the wider historical literature review undertaken in the thesis.
\item \(^{11}\) Newman and Kenworthy (1996) provides a useful conceptualisation of the relationship between urban form and transport technology advances. Three historical city forms are described: “walking city”, “transit city”, and “automobile city”. This thesis includes a tracing of Sydney’s patterns of growth through these same stages.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
Winston (1957, p14) describes how “tightly packed terraced dwellings of Woolloomooloo, Paddington, Surry Hills, Glebe, Balmain, and North Sydney were built to house the workers in the city’s central industrial areas” (Appendix 1 provides maps indicating place names). The large rail workshops at Eveleigh, almost 4km south of the original port, had become a major employer by the early 1900s. This resulted in the extension of cheap terrace housing away from the waterside and into Redfern\textsuperscript{12}. Today of course, much of this now privately owned terrace housing is very popular for city workers and wealthy “empty nesters” and is among the most expensive housing in the country on a \$/m\textsuperscript{2} basis (Johnstone 2013).

By 1900, the population had already begun to divide along class lines. The middle class had for the most part retreated from the centre of town, which with problematic waste and sanitation management deficiencies was largely left to low income households. The wealthy had moved to scattered large lot “grants” (eg “8-10 acre” holdings), first around the harbour, and then wider afield (Spearritt, DeMarco et al. 1988, p4). Land in the immediate port area was also becoming scarcer, so commerce and industry began dispersing.

Waterside sites especially along Parramatta River accommodated marine industry and manufacturing activities attracted to the practicalities of direct effluent disposal into waterways. In what has become a city-structure dynamic across the world (Badcock 2000), a century later most of these waterfront sites will have been taken up for “brownfield” mixed use redevelopment.

Industrial premises also began to scatter into inner suburban locations with reasonable transport access and/or linked to speculative working class housing development projects (Spearritt 2000). There was a particular development pattern familiar in the inner suburbs to construct a cul-de-sac of terrace accommodation, with a custom-built corner development to accommodate a local shop. Today we observe that with changes in property markets and manufacturing sector reforms, these commercial and industrial premises in the inner ring have also become sites for redevelopment with “existing use rights” overriding zoning controls and facilitating a mixture of land uses in these settings which has helped with inner city revitalisation\textsuperscript{13}.


\textsuperscript{13}The post WW2 Cumberland County Planning Scheme, introduced below, facilitated this process by allowing both residential and industrial uses in such higher density inner metropolitan settings, this as a means of meeting an unexpected shortfall of industrial land in these locations (personal communication with Associate Professor Glen Searle – former senior planning official in NSW government and Associate Professor in Planning at University of Queensland, 15 March 2016).
Within the first decade or two of the 20th century, Sydney’s urban form was already beginning to differ from European cities which today have more dense (and more sustainable) urban settlement patterns, and align more with those in North America. By then there was already evidence of “sprawl”, certainly in comparative terms. Sydney’s average densities, of 20-25 persons per hectare, were around ten times less than working areas of a number of British cities (Timmins 2013), where the post-industrialisation scenario was often one situating housing for tens of thousands of factory workers and their families amidst massive manufacturing mills.

There were a number of reasons why Sydney didn’t follow this path. Aside from the lack of significant (European-scale) heavy industry, both good luck and some socially worthy governance interventions had parts to play. As a consequence of extraordinary success in primary production and trade (coupled with the low population base) Australians had the highest per capita income in the world at the time (Kelly 1992, Banks 2005). Sydney was a trade and commerce-based city with a smaller proportion of manual labourers. Significantly, those “men” earned higher relative wages due to labour policies introduced post-Federation14. These policies had erected trade barriers directly aimed at fostering “domestic manufacturing and employ … labour at … relatively generous wages and conditions” which meant relative affluence in all classes (Banks 2005, p2). A second factor was that Sydney’s growth pressures of any scale occurred after transit services like trams and private motorised buses had begun. Together this meant there were practical and affordable lifestyle alternatives (to the often inadequate inner city terraces) which still allowed ready accessibility to work. For example, the census decade 1911-1921 registered the first decline in population of Inner Sydney, a decline which continued until 1996 (Daly 1998).

2.2.2 Early governance efforts to manage growth

**Government structures**

By the early part of the 20th century, and the inclinations to suburban living described above, there were already 41 local government authorities (councils) in the Sydney area (Winston 1957, p24). But powers and duties of councils were limited (centred on physical

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14 In 1901 Australia became an independent nation when, with UK agreement, the former six British colonial States of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania came together as a federation.
infrastructure and waste management) and massive funding problems existed. What is now known as “cost shifting”\(^{15}\) was a factor in the early colony and the “poor state of streets, doubtful quality of water, and absence of drains (confronted newly elected councils with) problems beyond their capacity or their resources” (ibid, p22).

This scenario provided another important historical distinction which remains significant in the administration of Sydney’s growth today. In Old World cities local responsibility for the administration and funding of services and infrastructure such as education, police, transport and even housing had tended to evolve naturally and locally in response to need (Spearritt 2000, Healey 2007a). In contrast, Sydney’s early growth was initially managed by a single centralised colonial government structure. This setting tended to encourage suburban growth because of the fiscal incentives coming about from the release (and sale) of Crown (or government held) land. These revenues more than offset the funding of infrastructure like improved rail connections and later, the provision of government bus services (Davison 1993). Importantly, it also set in place a more fragmented localised governance form, which continues through until today. The role of local government was, and still is, limited to tasks explicitly attributed to it by State government. This governance structure has meant efforts at planning for, dialogue on, and provisioning of, the range of infrastructures and services required to accommodate population growth has been more inclined to problems associated with fragmentation of authority. In the early 1900s, as now, this contributed to a sense of distance between major planning decisions and the interests of local communities. It is a problem of transparency and democratic accountability (Denters and Rose 2005)\(^{16}\), and a factor in problems of trust and cynicism around change, which are discussed later in this thesis.

**Urban blight drives urban reforms**

By the turn of the century, the political classes, while on the one hand enjoying the successes of industrialisation, had also been directly exposed to the consequent social problems and a reform movement had commenced. The lead had been set in European cities which were experiencing more substantial public health and building control problems due to the scale of the manufacturing sector. In the UK these developments were catalysts for a

\(^{15}\) Costs previously borne by higher orders of government (or the more empowered) shifted onto lower levels government (or the less empowered).

range of reforms ranging from building regulation, significant improvements in the coordination of government activities, and the “city beautiful” ideas and Ebenezer Howard’s “garden city” movement (Steffel 1973).

Sydney followed a similar path. In perhaps a reminder that everything old is new again, activists around this period were seeking a departure from the “issue-by-issue” responses to urban problems and greater recognition of inter-relationships, and associated administrative requirements (Steffel 1973). The Local Government Act 1906 had already introduced building control responsibilities to municipal councils. A more substantive change occurred in 1919 when this Act vested land subdivision control to councils. This introduced possibilities for the local regulation of residential density, and some open space and amenity provisions (A. H. Kelly 2011). In a separate provision, councils could seek proclamation of “residential districts”, described as a “primitive form of zoning” (ibid p6), which will be seen below to have become relevant in the first rounds of neighbour resistance to higher density housing proposals.

2.2.3 Transport, socio-spatial settlement patterns and built form

Transport infrastructure improvements were key influences on Sydney’s spatial settlement. As can be seen in Figure 2.3, the majority of today’s rail system was already in place before World War 1 (WW1). In turn, the pattern of intensification of activity around stations was well-established by the 1920s, characterised by two-storey higher density “shop-top” housing in the immediate station area, then lower density housing dispersing beyond, a pattern still familiar around many suburban stations today. But Sydney’s extensive tram network was seen as a more important driver for the expansion of lower density suburban living, also favoured due to its “speed and cleanliness” (Howard 2012, p93). So up until WW1, spreading suburbia became characterised as mini “walking towns” around railway stations, supplemented by “finger-like pattern of city growth” responsive to the tram network (ibid, p93). By the end of the 1930s the expansion of the tram and bus network facilitated the joining up of suburban settlement in an arc with a 20km radius from the CBD (Figure 2.3). Sydney was a public transport reliant transit city, and essentially remained so.

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17As Sydney’s population headed towards one million people, a Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs, in 1909, provided for a concentrated examination of inter-relationships, constraints and opportunities for improved coordination and practical city improvements, although institutional changes were slow (Winston 1957, p28, Spearritt 2000, p19).
until after WW2 when car ownership levels started to influence spatial development patterns.

A post WWI housing shortage was followed by a major boom through the 1920s as more inner city residents and new immigrants sought a house and garden and began to define a suburban lifestyle (Spearritt 2000, p31). Rail electrification, starting in 1926, had facilitated this shift, as had the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932 (encouraging much more settlement in the northern suburbs) and a crossing of the Georges River in 1929 (opening up Sutherland in the south). The major bridge and rail construction projects caused significant dislocation for residents and businesses but only muted protests, unlike the case 40 years later (discussed at Chapter 2.4.1) when freeway construction intentions brought major public protest and union “green bans” (Freestone 2006).

Settlement in the suburbs continued to reflect a social “standing” (or divide). The upper classes were generally located in the north and eastern suburbs\(^\text{18}\). The inner west was

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\(^{18}\) With the exception of western suburbs-located Strathfield, which was then and remains now something of an outlier.
“mixed class”, and differentiated from the cheaper suburbs further west again (Spearritt 2000 p30,34). However, class-based segregation in Sydney was not to the extent experienced in US or UK cities, where concentrated low income housing and inequalities of services were (and continue to be) defining factors in the urban landscape (Burke and Hulse 2015). Davison (1993, p66) sees the centralised (State-based) funding of core services and infrastructure (schools, public transport, fire services, police and the like) which we see in Australian settings as a key reason for this. This contrasts with European and US cities where local taxes paid by local communities fund such services, and are therefore subject to highly variable, and locationally dependent, capacities to pay.

### 2.2.4 Apartment living and the beginnings of protest

From the 1920s, the form of housing in the eastern suburbs was much more mixed than elsewhere in Sydney. Here, as well as the northern harbour foreshore and the lower northern beaches, apartments or “flats” were much more common. This housing form came about firstly as conversions of large Victorian-era mansions, and then with the construction of purpose-built two and three-storey walk-ups starting in the 1920s. Proximity to the city, harbour and beach, and places like bohemian Kings Cross, was acceptable for a considerably sized group of, principally, home renters. For example in the eastern suburbs municipality of Woollahra the number of flats rose from 12,760 in 1921 to 36,057 in 1933 and 71,788 in 1947 (Spearritt 2000, p67). This legacy still features today with Sydney’s distinction from all other major Australian cities in respect of higher proportions of this housing form.

**Organised Objections to Higher Density Housing Begins**

Organised objections to higher density housing grew in the 1930s with concerns of the effects of flats on local amenity (Spearritt 2000). At the time there was no legal capacity for local councils to restrict construction within an allotment or impose requirements for private open space or the like. But there were avenues open to local councils to act against flats *per se* using *Residential District Proclamations* under the Local Government Act, 1919. These provisions were used frequently during the 1930s, in particular on the north shore. Nevertheless flats made up about 41% of new dwelling between 1933 and 1941 with about

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19 North of the harbour was slower to settle, and subject to patchy growth. Reasons included the harbour crossing requirements, slower and more irregular provisioning of public transport, and especially in the east, more difficult topography and rocky terrain. These factors were important for bushland retention which is now a key aspect of the residential amenity enjoyed (and defended) along Sydney’s more affluent “north shore”.

27
500 flats constructed annually, much greater than for any other city in Australia (Spearritt 2000, p69). Spearritt concludes:

So many Sydneysiders moved into flats in the 1920s and 1930s that this new form of urban accommodation was an important factor in containing suburban spread. The slow growth of car ownership in the thirties and forties ensured that suburbia remained contained.

2.3 Transit city to auto city: WW2 to mid-1970s

Figure 2.4 provides a further timeline, summarising the processes and activities which helped influence city form during this next period.

2.3.1 Post-war “boom”

With high demand and good commodity prices for its primary produce (especially wool), Australia did much better than many countries, starkly different to the UK, in the immediate post-war period (Shepherd 2008). A period of strong and sustained economic growth lay ahead. The Australian government had adopted an ambitious post-war reconstruction and
population expansion program, including an “aggressive national immigration policy” through the 1950s (Evans and Freestone 2010, p226). The war in the Pacific had increased a sense of threat associated with Australia’s relatively small population in control of such a large and well-resourced land. “Populate or perish” became a popular mantra for immigration supporters. Sydney’s population doubled in 24 years between 1947 and 1971 to over 2.7 million. This was also the time of the post war “baby boom”.

The post WW2 boom period was characterised by not only significant growth in population, much of it fuelled by migration, but also growth in home ownership (Figure 2.5) especially within fringe residential areas, where it seemed that whole suburbs were being settled by young families (Baker, Coffee et al. 2000). With this extent of demand, release of land for development and subdivision at the fringe was often ad-hoc or premature, with the sale of unserviced land commonplace (Evans and Freestone 2010, p224).

Big shifts were also underway in regard to transport. Mass production of cars had commenced internationally in the 1930s. While slow initially in Australia, this all changed post-war. Mass production commenced in Australia in 1948, and a major transition commenced from a situation of low car ownership and heavy reliance on public, and active

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transport, to massively increased levels of motor vehicle dependence. This hastened the end for Sydney’s electrified tram system which it is claimed at its peak was among the largest in the world. Increasing maintenance costs, improved flexibility of bus services and complaints about traffic congestion supported by a strengthening car lobby groups saw the last tram service closed in 1961. Immediately after the war some 13% of all Sydney trips were car-based. This figure increased to 50% in 1960, then 70% in 1970 (Wotherspon 2008a). By then private car ownership, and the lifestyle changing improvements in flexibility and convenience it delivered, had become ubiquitous to suburban living throughout Sydney. Car dependence has become a defining feature of Sydney’s infrastructure investment and patterns of settlement ever since.

2.3.2 Town planning, Cumberland County Council: high ambitions - frustrated

The immediate post war period saw Sydney’s first large scale, institutionalised efforts at using town planning ideas to manage this growth. Amendments to the Local Government Act in 1945 brought about requirements for local councils to prepare “town plans” to guide development, and for those proposing development to lodge “development applications” (DAs) for council assessment and adjudication. A further State government goal at the time of the legislation was to amalgamate municipal councils into larger and more fiscally viable entities. This intention was scaled back radically after local objections, a process which has been repeated on a number of occasions subsequently.

Another important aspect of the 1945 local government legislative changes was the creation of Cumberland County Council (CCC). The CCC constituted ten members elected from the then 69 local government authorities within the greater Sydney area. As shown in Figure 2.6, its area of spatial interest was similar to Sydney’s geophysical bounds.

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23 Sydney’s experience can be contrasted with Melbourne which was able to retain its trams network while under similar pressures and has managed a continuous trams system through until the present day, when trams are regaining in popularity. Today Melbourne claims to have “the largest operating tram network in the world” (Source: Yarra Trams Facts and Figures. http://www.yarratrams.com.au/about-us/who-we-are/facts-figures/). Accessed 12/8/2015.
24 The key amalgamation was to occur in the inner metro area with eight smaller municipalities in the city surrounds becoming incorporated into the City of Sydney (Ashton and Freestone 2008)
25 Over the period 2012-2015 the NSW government has been embarking on another effort at municipal council amalgamations, again in the face of vocal objections from individual councils and various community groups. See http://www.fitforthefuture.nsw.gov.au/. Accessed 21/11/2015.
26 The County of Cumberland boundaries closely equate to current Sydney metropolitan planning boundaries but excluding the Illawarra and Central Coast/Hunter areas. It is generally bound by the Hawkesbury Nepean River system to the north and west, and south beyond Camden and Campbelltown to Appin and near Bulli on the coast.
Councillor J P Tate was the first Chairman and saw one of the CCC’s aims as to “awaken the public mind to the vital need for town planning” (Tate 1947, p240). This first metropolitan planning authority for Sydney was tasked with preparing, “(within three years)
a Master Plan for future use and development of all land in the County of Cumberland … to provide for the needs of the community up to the year 2000AD”.

So from 1945 a large-scale positivist planning intervention was being advanced in Sydney. In a mix which is not so often effective, the first “blueprint” plan was both visionary (borrowing many ideas from Patrick Abercrombie’s 1940s plans for Greater London) and had statutory effect, in that it directly controlled subdivision and land use. It also provided an overriding framework for the preparation of what were intended to be more detailed planning instruments by local government authorities.

The Planning Scheme for the County of Cumberland was released in 1948 (although not gazetted until 1951). Transport and open space planning were two of the key themes of the Cumberland Plan. It also made visionary provisions for both rail extensions (including new “circumferential links” to what would eventually be “satellite cities” at the county perimeter) and a comprehensive system of major highways, including a “ready to go” expressway network (Ashton and Freestone 2008b). Then there was the ambitious “green belt”. This was a solid statement of intent to contain suburban growth and provide space reasonably close to housing for agricultural production and recreation opportunities.

**Lessons from Cumberland County planning project**

The ideal of a “powerful metropolitan authority to plan for Sydney as a whole” (Harrison 1971, p129), as a response to the problems in coordination of the many local and State-level interests, has been of interest more or less continuously since. It has particular pertinence again today with legislation for Sydney’s second attempt at a metropolitan planning authority (the Greater Sydney Commission) passed by both houses of parliament in late 201527. In regard to outcomes, Alexander (1981) saw the CCC project providing the most serious commitment to spatial justice seen to date, and as having made considerable advances to achieving it. New industrial zonings closer to dormitory suburban areas increased the “equality of job to worker distribution in the order of 26%” and land acquisition under the plan improved the “equality of open space distribution by 35%”, this for the period between 1945 and 196228.

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28 Quote is from Evans (2010, p228)
Remnant portions of the Cumberland Plan’s green belt have also played a role in the more recent metropolitan level open space planning including in the provision of the Western Sydney Parklands in the environs of some of Sydney’s lower income housing areas (Evans and Freestone 2010, p237). The process was also seen to provide a major turning point in infrastructure funding. Trade-offs involved in securing political support for incursions into the green belt brought about requirements for developer-funding of water, sewerage and stormwater in fringe land release. This was the opening of what has become an institutionalised debate about developer vs public funding of all forms of infrastructure the need for which is generated by new development projects (Gibbons 1976).

The CCC “project” brings particular lessons in regard to governance processes. While receiving government assent and support from then Premier Joe Cahill, these town planning ideas were never able to secure cross ministry or agency support, or indeed support from many municipal councils. At the time, the NSW government was struggling financially following the Commonwealth’s monopolisation of income tax collection powers after WW2 (Meyer 2006), and there was never a government agreement to acquire the green belt lands. Instead land subdivision restrictions were put into place via zoning, which brought on potential for unfunded compensation claims. The plane also faced hostility from a number of State authorities including the Housing Department and some infrastructure agencies (Ashton and Freestone 2008a, p17). One cited reason was the perceived inefficient “dead running” of infrastructure across undeveloped land due to the green belt and open space (Evans and Freestone 2010, p227).

However it was principally pressure from land development interests which brought about the collapse of the green belt from the late 1950s and ultimately the termination of this first attempt at governance of Sydney’s metropolitan planning in 1964. At this point the CCC had over 22,000 compensation claims against it (Ashton and Freestone 2008a, p17). Nigel Ashton a later chairman of the State Planning Authority, immediate successor to the CCC perhaps has captured these struggles most succinctly in suggesting that the plan was imposed “without enough understanding of the pressures to which it would be subjected nor the fragility of its composition …” (Evans and Freestone 2010, p231).

2.3.3 State Planning Authority period overlaps with Commonwealth activism

The demise of the CCC did not signal a step away from ambitious comprehensive planning. However, it did evidence a major policy shift on the part of government. This was towards
support of Sydney’s geographic expansion as a preference over the compact city ideas of the CCC. Between 1964 and 1974 a new agency, the State Planning Authority (SPA), took charge of planning and growth management, bringing a shift back to the State bureaucracy and direct Ministerial responsibility (Spearritt, DeMarco et al. 1988). In 1968 the SPA produced the Sydney Region Outline Plan (SROP) which was founded on the principle that new areas should be opened up on a major scale, and quickly, to meet demand for both industrial and residential development (SPA 1968). See Figure 2.7 for an outline of the relationship between the intentions of the Cumberland Scheme and the SROP.

**Sydney Region Outline Plan – corridors and urban fringe expansion**

The SROP was prepared during the “tail end of Australia’s long post war boom” (Spiller 1999, p188) and set out an entirely new pathway for Sydney’s growth. Beyond the politics, there was a certain serendipity in the timing of interconnected shifts which together positioned Sydney for high levels of dispersed housing growth over the coming three decades. These shifts included: 1) further increases to aspiration and practical possibility for ownership of a detached home in the suburb, accompanied by both financial incentives to promote housing at Commonwealth and State government levels and strong employment levels and wages growth, 2) increasing availability of affordable transport to ease access problems to work, this increasingly through low cost and good quality mass produced automobiles, and 3) commencement of investment in new freeway construction on the part of the State (Spiller 1999, McGuirk 2005, Dodson 2012).

One of the important policy influences here was the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA), initiated with a social-equity interest by the Chifley Labour government in the immediate post WW2 period. While the 1945 round of the agreement supported construction of new rental housing with 50% directed to ex-defence personnel, the next agreement in 1956 explicitly encouraged an increase to the base of home ownership via low interest loans (McIntosh 2001). The CSHA combined with the other dynamics mentioned above to set the scene for mass scale, fringe located, low density public housing in Australia.
Figure 2.7 - Sydney Region Outline Plan 1968 opens up Sydney to urban expansion beyond the ambit of the Cumberland Scheme (Image sourced from: Spearritt 2000)

Spatial settlement question becomes to what extent take-up of the Cumberland Plain by urban growth

Cumberland Scheme’s Intended Green Belt
The program included “whole of suburb” take-up in parts of (then) outer western and south-western Sydney\(^{29}\). The concentration of public housing tenants in these then remote locations resulted in unpredicted social problems which have tended to worsen over time. But the program certainly facilitated an even larger scale achievement by younger and lower income people of what has been described as “the suburban dream of a home in the sun and a car in the garage” (Spearritt, DeMarco et al. 1988, p29). As inferred by McGuirk (2005, p62) this was a period when: “the social democratic traditions (and aspirations for) equitable standards of living” were at the fore. New land release was earmarked for 1.75 million people in growth corridors to the west, half a million people to the Gosford-Wyong areas north of the Hawkesbury and for the Menai area to the south. This placed large areas of peri-urban land in a state of uncertainty, which has had a long term adverse effect on agricultural production in the Sydney basin (Ashton and Freestone 2008b). While predictably supporting industrial development close to future settlement areas, the SROP also nominated a concern about continued concentration of employment in the city centre. The response was to promote development of a limited number of “regional centres” as targets for commercial and office development to ease perceived congestion problems.

It was around this time, that the NSW government introduced a “betterment tax” for the specific purpose of financing public works and facilities associated with metropolitan expansion\(^{30}\). It was known as the Land Development Contribution Scheme and applied to the Sydney region only. The tax claimed 30% of the value uplift associated with the rezoning of rural land to allow urban uses (Archer 1976). This Sydney-based experiment was short-lived (1969-1973), as political expediency (responding to fear mongering on supposed land price hikes) trumped policy intentions. Archer also argues there was no evidence that land prices reduced at all when the levy was abolished. In fact, proponents of a betterment tax see it as a means of both securing funding for urban management challenges and keeping housing costs down through reduced pumping up of prices through land speculation by property investors (Fensham and Gleeson 2003).

**Planning policy vs property legislation**

Property titling legislation has also had an important impact on urban form, on occasions considerably more powerful than planning policy (Davies and Atkinson 2012). While the dominant form of housing at the time was low density, the 1960s also brought about

\(^{29}\) In locations such as Green Valley and Mount Druitt and parts of Campbelltown.

\(^{30}\) After similar moves around the same time in the UK and South Africa (Archer 1976).
Sydney’s second “flats boom”\(^\text{31}\). The Strata Titles Act (1961) for the first time allowed subdivision of buildings, and security of title for individual apartments. It shifted the perception for consumers that flats were only for renting, and thus opened up a much larger market. The three-storey walk-ups spaced about most Sydney suburbs at the perimeter of local centres, and along transport routes, were for the most part developed through the 1960s and 1970s after this legislation was implemented. High rise apartments began to be constructed in the more desirable areas. The strata titles legislation and its provisions for “common property” was also a forerunner to highly flexible small and larger scale private “urban” precinct developments\(^\text{32}\) both high and lower density which included shared (but private and often gated) access, gardens and community facilities under the now Community Titles legislation.

**Cities (not just housing) taken on as a direct national government interest**

A short-lived but reformist and influential national government was elected in 1972 under Gough Whitlam. It had aspirations to build a more integrated and comprehensive social welfare and social justice system, which had up until that time principally relied on cash payments (Whitlam 1972). It was the first of what was to become a series of intermittent Labor Party governments over a 40-year period which recognised a national government role in urban issues. Among a raft of other projects, the Whitlam government commenced the Land Commission Program\(^\text{33}\). The NSW government (along with other states) were funded to establish public land agencies to intervene in the mainstream housing development market. The Land Commission was widely perceived as a constructive innovation in addressing supply side shortages in boom-bust cycles, but also in opening up the land market to innovation in environmental programs, urban design, community services provisioning and affordable housing. It complemented the “negativist” government role in regulating land markets by zoning and other development control instruments (Troy 1978, Gleeson 2005). This Land Commission function and role has more or less continued to the present day, among other things assisting in the principal housing policy aim of both national and state governments of all persuasions, which was about increasing supply and home ownership levels (Eslake 2013).

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\(^{31}\) See Chapter 2.2.3 for discussion on the first flats boom.

\(^{32}\) Referred to as “master-planned residential estates” and discussed in the next section.

Moderately paced socio-spatial and sectoral shifts in employment

This period also saw a further concerted shift to the west for city-based manufacturing firms which were, in any event, seeing the need to replace existing plant with new technologies, looking for wider access to labour, and now less reliant on rail or water-based transport systems. This “suburbanisation of industry” benefitted middle suburbs like Bankstown, Rosehill and Auburn during this period (Wotherspon 2008b). It was the period which also saw a shift in the structure of retailing with the government supporting expansion of local and regional shopping to ease congestion in the CBD. By 1964 Sydney had, at Miranda and Roselands, two fully enclosed car-oriented shopping malls (Spearritt 2000). After WW2 manufacturing had become the dominant sector in the Australian economy. However by around 1960 it had reached its peak when it “employed more than a quarter of the workforce, and accounted for 29% of GDP” (Kelly, Donegan et al. 2014, p5).

2.4 Modern period: end 1970s to today

A final timeline of influences is provided at Figure 2.8.
2.4.1 Accelerating societal change

Spiller (1999) has described the social and economic setting at the start of this period as representing a level of societal predictability and security which would bring some astonishment to many today. It was a time of stability and relative political consensus in policy areas like: centralised wage fixing, a regulated financial market, public infrastructure monopolies, secure career paths through the trades, or for those who sought it after school, expectations of secure public service employment - “life generally was more certain”. This was enabled by the successes of the post-WW2 “long economic boom” (ibid p188). But it was also around this time that Australia’s isolationist approach and its protectionist economy would start to be caught up in volatile international developments (Eslake 2007), including the economic effects associated with the oil shocks in 1973 and 1979, related serious inflationary pressures34 and recessions in 1974-75 and 1982-83 (each of which preceded changes of national government). A major restructuring process was initiated in response. In something of a complete contrast to what had been in place just prior, it was concerned with encouraging: economic deregulation, micro-economic reforms, major labour market shifts (reducing job security), and corporatisation and competition as the new hallmarks of government infrastructure institutions, and the public service more generally. It was the beginnings of the shift towards government austerity and increasing reliance on market liberalisation, which have become more embedded over time. In contrast to Spiller’s depiction of the 1970s above, according to Kelly (1992) the 1980s had brought about “the end of certainty”.

It was also a time of potent societal shifts, summarised by Ashton and Freestone (2008b) who describe a period of “Vietnam moratoriums … the rise of environmentalism, feminism and the heritage movement … street protests, resident action groups and green bans imposed on controversial development projects”. “Green bans”, initiated by the Union Movement, particularly affected development projects around Sydney’s Rocks and Pyrmont Ultimo areas. The 1970s saw governance efforts exposed to the complex and ambiguous inter-relationships between neoliberalism, environmentalism and participatory democracy (discussed further in Chapter 3). In a dynamic which was also found in other western cities, it was a period where the discipline of planning first found itself “politically wedged” between economic and socio-cultural developments (Healey 1997, Gleeson, Darbas et al.  

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It did not stop there. It was in 1992 that the Rio Earth Summit, Agenda 21 and subsequent multi-scaled governance efforts brought a new attention to environmental issues. The important global project of “sustainable development”, with all its ambiguity and complexity, began to manifest. So Sydney planning’s prior attention to questions around equity, efficiency and place quality was now encountering a much more complex set of dynamics. The last two decades have only seen the pace of societal change increase. Randolph (2004, p482) refers to this more recent period as evidencing a “profound ‘step change’ in the organisation of society”, reflecting the increasing complexities of urban life and its “new patterns of consumption, communications and lifestyle marketing”. The effects of globalisation have been critical here. McGuirk (2005, p64) suggests this period has seen a “fade from view” of social democratic distributional intentions which, historically, have been central to the planning “ideal”.

This section now turns to an examination of the city planning implications of all of this. There have been some eight metropolitan planning strategies released for Sydney since the SROP. References will be made to the strategies and other spatially oriented interventions as attempts are made to draw out some of the key planning and infrastructure initiatives and their implications. But overall, the practical capacities of metropolitan plans and strategies to direct change in the modern setting have drawn criticism. McGuirk and O’Neill (2002, p302) for example have found that Sydney is now embedded in a progressively more complex and spatially extensive network of relations that shape its economy, its society and hence its urban development” which tend to overwhelm metropolitan planning intentions, and that Sydney’s recent metro plans have “tended to be overtaken if not entirely overwhelmed” by the conditions they have needed to confront. So rather than frame the discussion around formal planning strategies, the historical outline presented here is structured on the basis of the separate although interconnected themes of: (1) housing, (2) economics, and (3) spatial justice.

2.4.2 Housing

Spatial Patterns: Concentration and Dispersal

The gentrification of the inner city commenced in the 1970s and 1980s. This “wave” has been characterised as a displacement of an industrial working class by more wealthy and younger middle class renovators, seeking a more urban lifestyle but also capital gains from property speculation (Bounds and Morris 2006). During the 1980-1990s a government policy shift to “urban consolidation”, combined with continued manufacturing sector restructuring, saw large scale replacement of inner Sydney and Parramatta River waterfront factories and warehouses with upmarket residential housing. Together this was the start of a significant “re-densification” of the inner parts of Sydney and a reversal of the long term decline in inner city population (Ashton and Freestone 2008b). A significant consequence was a driving out of families with generations of history in a local area. On occasions programs of supported housing were involved in renewal projects. A good example was the, then in decline, Pyrmont Ultimo precinct near Darling Harbour in the inner west (SHFA 2004, p1). This project was one which included developer levies to fund affordable housing places, now managed by a not for profit community housing provider City West Housing. Government has indicated an intent to achieve 8-10% (or about 700 units) of either affordable or public rental housing in the precinct by about 2024 (Department of Planning 2010, p4). The rollout of large scale, well located, high density/high rise “brownfield”37 revitalisation projects continues today (eg Green Square, Olympic Park/Rhodes, Barangaroo) and many more are foreshadowed (Bays Precinct, Redfern-Eveleigh, the massive Parramatta Road Corridor project). These projects demonstrate a capacity for delivery of density close to jobs and with reasonable transit connectivity.

Major housing “projects” were not only being located in inner metro brownfield sites. Sydney’s western fringe was beginning to be sought out for large scale master-planned residential estates (MPRE) often in joint ventures between public and private sectors. Water sensitive urban design, public art, open space innovations and various efforts at social...

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36 An influential Commonwealth Government intervention, the Building Better Cities program (underway during the period 1991-96 under the Hawke-Keating Labor Government), was influential in the revival of inner metropolitan housing. Pyrmont Ultimo’s rebirth in Sydney was put down to the BBC intervention (personal communication with Associate Professor Glen Searle – former senior planning official in NSW government and Associate Professor in Planning at University of Queensland, 15 March 2016).

37 Brownfield land is generally thought of as abandoned or under-used industrial or commercial sites associated with an earlier era of economic activity (Newton, Newman et al. 2012).
connectivity were often a feature of the estates. This was aligned with a policy push from western Sydney councils and others seeking to “(break down) stereotyped working class images and enabling upwardly mobile ‘aspirational’ local residents to remain living in the region” (Forster 2006). The worst of the problems associated with “gated communities” seem to have been avoided in such projects. Research has especially favoured Landcom’s work here as pushing the wider sector towards more sustainable development in the “greenfield” land release market. As put by McGuirk and Dowling (ibid, p182):

_In the assemblage constructed around Landcom’s MPRE development, market-thinking is ... given a different definition, by virtue of its connection to a broader social project._

Landcom’s is a rich story (O'Toole and Petersen 2006). The McGuirk-Dowling research and compiled work by Freestone and Randolph (2006) provides a useful outline of the complexity and contradictions it faced in dealing with resistance, while facilitating and brokering more innovation in the housing and planning domains than the market, or regulation alone, could deliver. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, researchers are suggesting it is this kind of reflective, situated, “social” investigation linking; relations, institutions and outcomes, which brings some prospects for resolution of persistent system problems (eg Schön and Rein 1994, Healey 2007a, Burke 2012). For Landcom, the influence of key leaders has been notable. As such it may not be so easy to replicate as the focus shifts to the complex, higher density inner city redevelopment projects ahead for it (the massive Parramatta Road project, Redfern Eveleigh, Bays Precinct and perhaps more nuanced work in “greyfield precincts”). This is particularly relevant today as UrbanGrowth NSW (near enough to Landcom’s new manifestation) has been tasked with much of the planning responsibility for these major urban projects.

_Housing price increases_

House price increases are part of the everyday public dialogue in Sydney. There have been ebbs and flows in the rate of price increase (although recently, not so many ebbs). There are

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38 The term “greenfield” here refers to land at the rural-urban fringe which has not yet been subject to significant development.

39 The Freestone Randolph work (2009) provides a record of a series of symposiums attended by practitioners and academics. It is deliberatively focused on providing an “accessible record” of “productive exchanges, discoveries and insights” which are often not recorded or widely accessible (p ix).

40 The term “greyfield precinct” is referenced as meaning those ageing but occupied tracts of inner and middle ring suburbia which now represent under-capitalised property assets (Newton, Newman et al. 2012).
three periods of accelerated price increases which warrant mention here (and are represented in two separate graphics below). The first occurred between 1987-1989, when Sydney’s house prices doubled. The second period was described by Gurran and Phibbs (2013b, p382) as “Australia’s long housing boom (between 1997-2004)”. Figure 2.9 shows both of these price booms, and the Consumer Price Index relative flat-lining in comparison.

![Figure 2.9 - The "long boom" in median prices for single dwellings - Sydney leads the way. Source: Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability 2008](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/hsaf/report/c03)

Today we are in another period of historically significant price rise for housing in Sydney. Figure 2.10 shows the more recent pricing hike commencing mid-2013 and continuing through until the time of writing.

![Figure 2.10 - Short respite then another boom in single dwelling prices for Sydney. (Source: Propell 2015)](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/hsaf/report/c03)

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41 The Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia reported on 16/06/08. This graph comes from Chapter 3 and was accessed from the following website on 12/8/2015:
The cause of these price rises has been contested, with different factors being emphasised by different sectoral interests. The suggested causes include misplaced taxation incentives and grants (Burke 2012, Eslake 2013) and overseas investment and excessive borrowing in a deregulated financial system (Productivity Commission 2004)\(^\text{42}\). But the property sector has blamed the effects of planning regulation, which in this thesis warrants some particular attention.

**Misdirected emphasis in explanations of housing price rises?**

In Sydney, the *dominant* explanation for housing affordability problems in industry and government circles has been that it is brought on by excessive regulation, most particularly related to planning (Gurran and Phibbs 2013b). This regulation is suggested to restrict the housing industry from meeting demand. This narrative (which also neglects the major downturn in direct public investment in affordable housing over time (McGuirk 2008)) has been a driving force behind what have been seemingly constant efforts at planning system reform over the last two decades (Gleeson 2006, p1, Gurran and Whitehead 2011, Gurran and Phibbs 2013b). The research by Gurran and Phibbs provides a detailed empirical examination of the link between (1) housing supply and (2) planning reform efforts, over the period 2003-2012. It brought two particular pieces of information forward. First, the work provides detailed evidence\(^\text{43}\) of a continual industry-led argument that supply, and thus affordability problems, are the fault of the planning system. The study then showed how this discourse has been the principal one taken up by governments nationally and at a State level as providing the explanation of housing affordability problems (rather for example than unintended consequences of taxation incentives, and/or easy access to finance, or housing attraction to international investment, or slowing direct investment in social housing by government). NSW and thus the Sydney housing setting is consistently seen as the “nation’s ‘worst’ ” in this discourse (Gurran and Phibbs 2013b, p400)\(^\text{44}\). This logic would follow in that it is in NSW and in particular Sydney that housing is least

\(^{42}\)The 1987-89 boom seems clearly to have been fuelled by the deregulation of the Australian financial system (described above) and “inflow of global funds to the banks which followed” (personal communication with Associate Professor Glen Searle – former senior planning official in NSW government and Associate Professor in Planning at University of Queensland, 15 March 2016).

\(^{43}\)Through monitoring housing industry sectoral narrative in media statements and the like (ie using the “discourse analysis” approach).

\(^{44}\)The property industry’s own “development assessment report card” also shows Sydney as coming in last position (Macroplan Dimasi 2015).
affordable and up until more recently the rate of new dwelling production had been in a significant slump. See Figure 2.11.

The second line of information from the Phibbs Gurran study relies in particular on Productivity Commission research benchmarking aspects of state planning systems (Productivity Commission 2011). Gurran and Phibbs’ analysis of the data suggests (p401-2):

... key available indicators do not reveal particularly marked differences between NSW and the other jurisdictions. If anything the extant evidence, narrow and problematic as it may be, paints NSW in a more favourable light than many of the other Australian states. Similarly, although the state of Victoria is the stand out performer in lifting rates of housing supply, on this data, Victoria’s planning system would seem to be far slower and less certain than those of the other jurisdictions.

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There are very genuine concerns about the affordability of housing in Sydney, with low income rental households most affected. But planning system reform efforts have been underway regularly in Sydney since at least since 1992. The most recent one is considered in detail at Chapter 8 of this thesis. A key concern for the reform endeavour (part of the investigation at Chapter 8) is whether a continuing and hegemonic focus on, what certainly can be costly planning and regulatory processes for industry, distracts from other more fundamental planning system challenges.

**Politics and Housing Affordability**

In 2009, the NSW government introduced an affordable housing policy which reduced regulatory barriers for low income rental accommodation in Sydney (*SEPP Affordable Rental Housing*)\(^{46}\). Among other initiatives, the policy provided floor-space bonuses where projects included affordable rental housing and a strengthened role for non-profit housing groups. It evidenced some attraction to industry and success in introducing affordable rental accommodation (Gadens 2011)\(^{47}\). But this policy came under heavy political flak after DAs were lodged and vocal local objections were raised. The policy was weakened significantly with a change of State government in 2011. The media release from the incoming Minister for Planning on his intended changes to this affordable housing policy was headlined: “Development that destroys communities stopped”\(^{48}\).

Subsequent research focusing on community opposition to affordable housing confirmed that there is often local objection to it *when proposed*. However post-occupancy interviews and surveys indicated a more multifaceted story and, for example, that once developed and occupied, 78% of nearby residents “had noticed little or no effect from that development” (Davison 2013). Davison’s study set down a series of potential strategies for mitigating and addressing community opposition, including the important role of pro-active community and local politician engagement, including education to reduce misinformation (as a replacement for the adversarial models of engagement which normally come about for such projects).

\(^{46}\) State Environmental Planning Policy (Affordable Rental Housing) 2009.

\(^{47}\) Gadens are one of the larger planning law firms operating in Sydney. This publication followed discussion at a joint Planning Institute of Australia/Gadens seminar on 9 June 2011.

The “elephant in the room” when the question of improving housing affordability is in the political spotlight is that many people are happy with house prices going up. Eslake (2013) was referring to the question of putting a break on housing pricing when he suggested that while political parties might profess a desire for this, there is another political dynamic at work in that “there are some 5.8 million households (and over 8 million people) who already own at least one property … do the maths”. It is not a new point. It was also made, albeit a little more prosaically forty years earlier by Peter Harrison (1971) in a Sydney Luker address:

Planning, more than any other activity is concerned with the future; but posterity has no votes and pays no taxes so that it does not weigh heavily in the formation of political attitudes which must be conditioned by the more immediate prospects of the next election or two...

**Housing density, compact city policy and community opposition**

Local community opposition to housing change is not limited to affordable rental housing. There is a much broader question facing housing policy in Sydney today. The government’s “urban consolidation” push which began in the mid-1980s, was based on an understanding of the fiscal benefits of a redirection of housing growth from lower density fringe development to established areas (Searle 2007). There has been an equally long period of contested argument in community, political and even academic domains. The fiscal argument for housing intensification in Sydney remains strong (Trubka, Newman et al. 2008). However support arguments for a more “compact city” have broadened considerably beyond the fiscal. While by no means the only required initiative, more compact living is argued as a key to the accommodation of population growth in a more sustainable manner. Potential benefits in term of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are argued as significant and are discussed further below. But research also links a bundle of other argued benefits, covering social, public health, biodiversity and food security domains, which are argued to come together to align the compact city model (much more so than the dispersed city model) with the wider question of a more sustainable future (Newman and Kenworthy 1999, Lopez 2004, Dodson and Sipe 2008, Newton 2008, Bambrick, Capon et al. 2011, Giles-Corti 2012).

Among the key arguments marshalled by those against housing consolidation has been that forced (ie government-led) policy of this kind denies expression of individual social desire,
reduces housing standards, and denies the “tide of economic forces” which in this case was argued to be more favouring of urban expansion (Troy 1996, pvi). As the debate has moved on there has been a more detailed querying of the particular social and environmental impacts of higher density development, and its economics and market appeal. It reveals a multi-faceted story which demands much more research, but tends to point to the advantages of lower rise mid density housing over high rise apartments if sustainability is the goal (Forster 2006, Holloway and Bunker 2006, Randolph 2006, J.-F. Kelly 2011, Newton and Tucker 2011). But also, as will be argued below, that the societal “tide” has more recently been turning away from suburban fringe living and towards more compact forms of urban activity.

Compact city ideas and the shift from “planning push to market pull”

A motivation for what seems to be a diminishing technical argument against intensification is the evidence of a significant shift in market preference towards higher density housing. Recent empirical work under the auspices of the Grattan Institute (J.-F. Kelly 2011) asked a resident sample to take into account actual economic circumstances (such as real housing costs and personal income) when responding to a question on “what home they would like to live in”. The research found (p2):

This (question) often required respondents to make trade-offs between size and type of housing, and its location. Once these trade-offs are taken into account, big differences emerge between the housing Australians say they’d choose and the stock we have. In particular, there are large shortages of semi-detached homes and apartments in the middle and outer areas of both Melbourne and Sydney.

Similar to the setting around the affordable rental housing SEPP as outlined above, the mismatch between actual market demand and housing supply in Sydney’s middle suburbs (which would be favoured under compact city principles) is partly explained by the political difficulties from resident objections to proposals for medium density forms (Lewis 1999, Ruming 2012, Cook, Taylor et al. 2013). The political/market paradox was signalled at a metropolitan level in the 2011 election lead-up. Groups used the State election as platform to powerfully express frustration about housing costs, overdevelopment, neighbourhood change, and wider distrust and cynicism about government, which contributed to the end of a 16 year incumbency of Labor Party leadership in NSW.
Since coming into office the Liberal-National coalition (O’Farrell-Baird) government has pushed for increased housing supply in both established and greenfield areas. A relevant shift has been a more active promotion of greenfield development outside the government’s long established Metropolitan Development Program, which had up to then dictated the planned sequencing (and servicing) of fringe land release in the north and south west growth centres\(^49\). But this attempt to support new housing even after a historical slowdown in supply (Figure 2.11), faced a structural slowing in demand for greenfield housing. This experience was also relayed more directly in a personal interview with a property sector professional\(^50\).

\[\textit{We had started releasing land in the north and south west growth sectors. There was just no demand for it. The GFC had dampened things but also the market started asking itself, say a 35 year old who is initially keen on say Oran Park (in Sydney far south-west). Do you want to spend 2 hours travelling and spending 40\% of your income on your property. The answer is no. Where would you purchase instead – maybe an apartment in Hurstville (middle suburbs on rail line). So even with a child, or even two it’s OK. Unlike for their parents they’ve been overseas and seen that people do live OK in apartments. So there’s a whole generation who do understand this and prefer it to a remote more expensive house. The demand for greenfield is now usually for people already living 5-10km from there already.}\]

Urban connectivity was becoming more valued in the housing market than dwelling size and type. In spite of population growth, development of attached housing was “on the wane” (Donald 2013)\(^51\).

### 2.4.3 The economy, infrastructure and “global Sydney”

Success in economic competition involves using resources in creative ways to improve productivity. The spatial organisation of cities, and the way they facilitate or otherwise the

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\(^{50}\) As further detailed in Chapter 6, a set of interviews were undertaken with a group of experienced planning system actors as part of the primary research for this thesis. This quote is from the interview with the person given the pseudonym Former Government Official #3.

efficient use of labour and capital are key considerations here (SGS Economics and Planning 2012b). This subsection provides an outline of how historical forces and ongoing change in the wider world have come together for Sydney’s economy, but particularly in respect to the definition of land use and transport infrastructure patterns. Another interest is how growth in, and geographic concentration of, the high productivity “knowledge economy” fits with the city’s urban structure.

**Interrelationships: planning, the economy, jobs and transport**

When one considers the geographic spread of employment in Sydney and its relationship to the efficient use of labour (alone), there would be a twofold policy interest: (1) to what extent jobs are located close to where people who work in such jobs live, and (2) the provision of transport infrastructure to reduce travel inefficiencies.

*Where are the jobs?*

Sydney is unusual in comparison to other Australian cities in that it is the only one with several activity centres outside of the main CBD which have over 25,000 jobs (BITRE 2013, p xi). Sydney CBD has consistently accommodated roughly 10% of the total workforce. There has also been a consistency in the total employment levels of “major centres” at around 25% of jobs (Xu and Milthorpe 2010). Apart from the CBD itself, and Sydney’s “second CBD” at Parramatta, jobs in these centres are weighted to the inner northern suburbs of Sydney. But an important finding of such data is that most jobs are *not* in centres, rather they are spread through middle and outer suburban areas, and journey to work patterns are “correspondingly dispersed” (Forster 2006, p175). Research indicates significant spatial differences in employment self-sufficiency (jobs per employed residents) which disadvantages outer metropolitan Sydney (BITRE 2013).

*Transport mode*

ABS data on journey to work from the 2011 census adds to the picture. It compares Sydney to other Australian cities. It shows Sydney in 2011 as having the highest public transport commuter mode share in Australia (23%, with Melbourne second at 16%), but with private vehicle use highest in the outer suburban areas. Comparative data across Australian cities is shown at Figure 2.12.
There is considerable emerging data which suggests driving among younger people may be on the decrease more generally. But there are still over 70% of Sydney workers facing the social costs of road system congestion and contributing to GHG emissions while so doing.

**Congestion Implications**

Recently Infrastructure Australia estimated the cost of congestion at $13.7 billion/year, and that this would rise to $53.3 billion/year by 2031 (2015). The question of congestion costs take on a new dimension when linked to ambitions on the part of Sydney to participate more strongly in the higher productivity “knowledge economy”.

**Sydney and the Knowledge Economy**

For Sydney, the loss of secondary industry jobs in the inner metro area due to economic restructuring through the 1980s seemed to be quite readily compensated with the beginnings of knowledge economy jobs. This sector of the economy is important because of its higher productivity rates (when compared to lower skilled sectors) and connections with Australia’s challenge to maintain or improve living standards in a period of increased global competition, mindful of Australia’s comparatively high baseline labour costs. How Sydney might position itself to compete in the globally competitive knowledge sector (financial and

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52 There is a clear reduction in license-holding for people under 35 and a more acute reduction for those under 24 based on data to 2008/09 license take-up (Raimond and Milthorpe 2010). The research shows similar developments in Europe and the USA.

53 The term “knowledge economy” captures the use of advanced technology and higher take-up rates of innovation in economic activity. See Bryson, Daniels et al. (2002) for an examination of its relationship to spatial planning concepts.
professional services, communication technology and the like) would be an important indicator of prospects. The underpinnings of this high value sector are still emerging but one of the factors behind its workings is the value assigned to face-to-face exchange of information and ideas. The chief executive of the Committee for Sydney (Tim Williams) was quoted in a recent interview: “The paradox of the digital economy is that it’s centralising and clustering in even fewer locations”\textsuperscript{54}. Sydney’s jobs growth has also been concentrating. Research by the Committee for Sydney (2012) indicates that between 2006 and 2011 over 54\% of this growth occurred in just three LGAs: City of Sydney (especially the CBD), Ryde-Macquarie Park and North Sydney (Committee for Sydney 2012).

\textit{Socio-economic shifts, governance and transport investment}

Three decades of economic restructuring both within Australia and in the wider world can be observed in the Sydney employment landscape. The evidence is of a shift from a point where industrialisation in the suburbs of Australian cities could be “relied upon to boost productivity and enrich human capital” (Spiller 2013); to today where we see opportunity to maintain living standards significantly reliant on growth in knowledge sector jobs. Agglomeration economics would have it that the high-value economic sector would continue to concentrate over time (SGS Economics and Planning 2012b). As suggested by Williams\textsuperscript{55} the problem becomes one of: “how do you get people to those jobs, or how to get those jobs to where people live”. While there are ambitions for polycentricity to employment in Sydney, to a scale which would address outer metropolitan Sydney’s disadvantage (NSW Government 2014), as things sit today these ambitions are up against market trend, especially for knowledge economy jobs.

The kinds of housing and transport related policy ideas which suggest themselves in regard to the challenge of not just equitable placement of jobs, but of economic growth in general for Sydney are not new ones and comprise: (1) the halting of the spread of suburban expansion due to the economic inefficiencies it brings, (2) increasing housing with good accessibility to knowledge sector jobs (not only higher density housing in major centres, but infill in other well located town centres, transport corridors and medium density infill in middle suburbs), (3) city shaping transport improvements to reduce congestion and transport inefficiencies and (4) approaches to integrate ideas (2) and (3).

\textsuperscript{54} Quote in article by Sydney Morning Herald urban affairs journalist Matt Wade 5 March 2014.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
While government policy still encourages fringe area growth, the market seems to have shifted away from this option, which has upside in terms of wider economic factors. The other three policy ideas have had mixed levels of support from government over the recent past. Certainly, the idea of infill housing has been a consistent priority. But political difficulties see some of the most suitable locations for accommodation growth excluded. There has also been a steady investment in transport improvements over the past three decades. But as shown in Figure 2.13 most of it has been in freeways which can be thought of more as spending as a compensatory measure associated with past inefficient land use decisions, than as a means of generating economy-wide benefits through housing-transport-jobs policy integration (Winston 2015).

Figure 2.13 - Sydney railways and freeways 1955-2010
(Source: Curtis and Low 2012, Figure 7.2)

56 In September 2015 the NSW Planning Minister announced the “first major land release in Sydney for a decade” which would accommodate 35,000 new homes beyond Sydney’s existing south-western urban fringe (Stokes 2015).
57 This figure does not include the eastern suburbs rail link opened in 1979 which connected the CBD to Bondi Junction
Transport infrastructure funding commitments recommence

After a long period of uncertain action, the recent past has seen some significant commitments to both heavy and light rail projects. In Sydney today, a series of significant public transport projects are actually underway. This includes the construction of (1) the $8 billion North West Rail Link (linking between Epping and Rouse Hill to the west including a 14km tunnel and eight new stations, (2) the $2 billion South West Rail Link (a new 11km rail line linking Glenfield and Leppington and two new stations, (3) the South-East Light Rail project linking the CBD and Randwick and (4) the inner west light rail expansion linking the CBD to Dulwich Hill in the inner western suburbs. The government is also working on a Bus Priority Program concerned with the identification of bus lanes and bus rapid transit routes to ease transit across the city. Premier Mike Baird took a revenue generation program to the NSW State elections in 2015 based on releasing capital from the State’s electricity network. There is talk of a further $7 billion for Sydney rail infrastructure including a second harbour rail crossing and a light rail system in the Parramatta area (NSW Government 2015). But the major committed transport infrastructure is for the $17 billion Westconnex motorway project, which would increase lanes on Sydney’s M4 motorway and extend it towards the city and Sydney Airport, including major tunnelling. The idea of linking up transport infrastructure spending and Sydney’s land use challenges into the future seem to be missing. For example, thinking on the potential for a fast rail connection between the CBD and Parramatta or the important “missing link”, between Parramatta and Macquarie Park, both of which would significantly connect outer metropolitan Sydney to knowledge economy jobs remain unfunded and undeveloped.

A significant opportunity does arise with the recent government decision to pursue the second Sydney Airport development at Badgerys Creek in Sydney’s south-west. This site is located within an already identified “Western Sydney Employment Area” which, while massive in area, has very low levels of employment density, as a consequence of its core function as a logistics and warehousing area. If there is an integration of transport and land use thinking, the second airport brings significant city shaping potential especially in terms of employment range and quantum. A serious concern here is whether the government’s

58 In the government adopted the Long Term Transport Masterplan which was subject to significant criticism due to its lack of integration with land use planning, including that it led the release of what was the then metropolitan planning strategy
already committed contractual arrangements, which place the existing privatised Sydney Airport Corporation at a competitive advantage (as “first and last” bidders for the second airport tender), will slow the airport rollout and frustrate the city shaping potential of the project (as an employment multiplier and agglomeration hub in its own right). It is the Commonwealth government which is responsible for airports, and in a recent (September 2015) political shift, Tony Abbott lost his job as Liberal party leader and thus Prime Minister. The new PM, Malcolm Turnbull, has a history of progressive policy instincts, and has already indicated a recognition of the second Sydney airport’s potential as city shaping project, and the need for fast rail connections.\(^{60}\)

2.4.4 Inequality and spatial justice

The planning tradition, spatial equity and the market

A precept of the planning tradition is that of delivering social justice, or fair access to social, cultural, political and economic capital such that people will have the chance to lead fulfilling and contributing lives (Marcuse, Connolly et al. 2009, Fainstein 2010). The term spatial justice as used by Soja (2010)\(^{61}\), draws the importance of geography to the equation. Soja suggests planners should be attentive to the “doublesidedness”\(^{62}\) of the power which is wielded in planning, and the political process more broadly. Indeed there is a considerable scholarship which suggests that urban policies have often “served to compound rather than improve conditions of poverty, homelessness, access to basic services and ecological integrity, due to an institutional emphasis on growth and efficiency” (Steele, Maccallum et al. 2012, p67).

Today’s neoliberal agenda with its focus on reducing the role of government in society and the freeing up of the market through deregulation, privatisation, lower taxes and the like, can be at odds with this social justice perspective on planning. Neoliberalism’s privileging of entrepreneurs and the elite has been justified through “trickle-down economics” arguments. This suggests that “growth” which flows from market freedom would eventually flow through to be of benefit to the rest of society. While the market-power ideology remains dominant, twenty years of continuous economic growth under neoliberal ideas


\(^{61}\) This doesn’t suggest the conceptual connection has only just been made. See for example David Harvey’s 1973 work Social Justice and the City.

\(^{62}\) The term “doublesidedness” was used in a book review by Keill (2011).
might be expected to have provided a platform for significant societal benefit in Australia. For Sydney, what we have tended to see is that, while there has been much benefit, it has been concentrated in some geographical areas and not others.

**Sydney’s increasing spatial concentration of disadvantage (and advantage)**

The Grattan Institute has mapped the geography of income across Sydney. This information is shown in the maps at Figure 2.14, which show a clear pattern of income polarisation across the metropolitan area, with higher income earners to the north and east, and lower income earners to the south and west. Data is indicated for each census between 1991 and 2011, suggesting worsening income related spatial polarisation over time.

![Figure 2.14 - Mean individual income by suburb (residents aged 25-65), Sydney 2011 (shown in main picture, with previous related census data above) - Source (Kelly, Mares et al. 2013)](image)
These findings align with Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) mapping from the 2011 census prepared by SGS (2012a) as shown in Figure 2.15\textsuperscript{63}. Later research has confirmed the wider and highly distinctive social polarisation worsening over time (Randolph and Tice 2014, Pawson 2015).

\textbf{Wealth, housing prices and planning}

Property has become a dominant contributor to wealth in Australia. Figure 2.16 summarises research on total assets by household across wealth cohorts. It shows how financial assets (eg superannuation and cash) are swamped by non-financial assets (of which some 79% are in property) (RBA 2004). The data contained in the table suggests the significance of property price increases to net wealth. This shows how, other factors remaining steady, the rapid rises in property prices benefit wealthier groups in society,

\textsuperscript{63} The SEIFA index combines four separate social indexes gathered from the census: the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage, the Index of Education and Occupation, the Index of Economic Resources. The ABS describes the SEIFA index as geographically defining “relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage in terms of people’s access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society”. See ABS media release 28 March 2013 http://www.abs.gov.au.

\textsuperscript{64} I would like to acknowledge the work of SGS Economics and Planning for its work in updating this graphic representation to assist in my research.
while at the same time renters lose out. It evidences a trend for housing’s original function (as a means of meeting a social need) as having been gazumped by its function as wealth or profit-driven societal endeavour (Brenner, Marcuse et al. 2011).

So far Australia has avoided the worst problems of spatially-based income and wealth inequality seen in the US and parts of the UK, with our relatively fair access to home ownership acting as an equalising force over time. But we are seeing a shift. The home owner entry cohort (under 35s) is in steady (proportionate) decline since the mid-1980s65, and with seemingly further diminishing prospects with continuing investor-funded price escalation. This is entering the concerning domain explored by economist Thomas Piketty (2014), and the suggestion of an increasing possibility of unearned, and especially inherited, wealth actually driving a fundamental imbalance in regard to the baseline social and economic objective concerned with equality of opportunity. The concern has been translated to planning’s role in balancing spatial equity goals and property rights:

…(a “crisis” in housing affordability) has coincided with a growing NIMBYism which has exploited the lack of informed debate about the need for new housing – and leads to the position where people who own homes are effectively inhibiting the possibility of home ownership and shelter for others.

(Williams and Macken 2012, p11)

This links the idea of fairness and public interest into the housing intensification discourse. The suggestion is that housing supply is prevented from occurring in those areas which are most suitable for it (ie due to proximity to jobs and services). The blocking is done by those who are already enjoying the benefits of participating in this market (structurally dependent on unearned wealth), and that this prevention (a dysfunction in the market through constraint on supply in desirable areas) also increases the property values for the same existing owners. It is this politically fraught domain in which the planning system has some of its greatest challenges.

**Intergenerational justice and a low carbon future**

The situation in regard to the world’s changing climate is succinctly put in a major report by two commissioners in what was until recently the Australian Climate Commission (Steffen and Hughes 2013, p6):

*For years now there has been a clear and strong global consensus from the scientific community that the climate is changing, that human activities are the primary cause, and that the consequences for humanity of increasing destabilisation of the climate system are extremely serious.*

In hand with this there is overwhelming scientific agreement that it is the burning of fossil fuels that is the human activity that is the causal factor. As a consequence of the unfolding path of development traced out in this Chapter, Australia and its cities have among the highest per capita carbon emissions among OECD countries (Figure 2.17).

At least two major concerns are raised when fairness is factored into the climate change problem. First, in logic, in that as the effects of climate change are in lag, those who will be most burdened will not necessarily have contributed to the problem. Second, is how the impacts will disproportionately affect the poor and most vulnerable (United Nations 2011). The Steffen Hughes report suggests society needs to “virtually decarbonise” over the next 30-35 years if the worse of the problems are to be avoided (p4). In fact the Australian government *has* adopted a GHG emission reduction target of 80% by 2050\(^{66}\), which would

in today’s political environment comprise an almost unimaginable societal shift in one generation.

Cities are seen as the “engines of global warming due to their enormous concentrations of energy use” (Dodson 2010, p489). Greenhouse gas emitting urban activities which have particular potential to be shifted (one way or the other) by planning policy and processes include: (1) transport and movement patterns, in particular reduced car dependence (eg Newman and Kenworthy 1999), (2) building design including services/appliances, in particular having regard to energy efficiency (eg Newton and Tucker 2011), and (3) “embodied energy” in materials used in construction of buildings and infrastructure (eg Dixit, Fernández-Solís et al. 2012). The recent work of Newton, Pears et al (2012) covers all of these topics with respect to housing.

At the scale of the individual dwelling, the NSW government introduced the Building Sustainability Index in 2004 and legislative requirements for design and inclusions in new

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68 Dixit et al (2012) define embodied energy as that energy consumed through the life cycle stages of a building: such as “raw material extraction, transport, manufacture, assembly, installation, as well as (renovation) disassembly, demolition and disposal.”
69 Through State Environmental Planning Policy (Building Sustainability Index: BASIX) 2004, and amendments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation.
dwelling construction to accommodate lower carbon emission targets (the target is 40% reduction in GHG emissions compared to business as usual)\textsuperscript{70}. There is also the remarkable take-up of photovoltaic solar panels on private property, but so far usually founded on government support.

The quest for a long carbon future is also tied to the compact city debate. While evidence seems to be clear at the aggregate level (ie that dense cities use less transport energy than car dependent cities), and of the positive relationships between both road provision and VKM (vehicle kilometres travelled) and rail supply and ridership (Rickwood, Glazebrook et al. 2008), other findings are less clear. For example: (1) there is less evidence on the link between density and mode choice in Australian cities (eg Mees 2010), (2) without evidence of savings in transport emissions, high density apartment living, at least, appears to perform relatively poorly in per capita GHG emissions under current planning controls (eg Perkins, Hamnett et al. 2009), and (3) some existing compact urban development is “fraught with (other) adverse effects” (eg Gray, Gleeson et al. 2010b). Areas in which there is good levels of agreement among planning scholars are: (1) that the actual relationship between density and emissions is a more nuanced, contextually dependent one, which is promising but needs more thinking and action to actual deliver the sought after outcomes, and (2) a key missing ingredient is large scale increases in public transport investment in the right locations for both inner Sydney and in the outer suburbs (Dodson 2010, Gray, Gleeson et al. 2010a, Reid and Houston 2012). Or as Gray, Gleeson et al infer, as far as the question of GHG emission reduction is concerned, we are still missing “the full version” compact city model (2010b, p344).

\textit{Climate change, resilience and adaptability}

This section has given some consideration to spatial planning’s capacity to influence GHG emissions, and thus how it might help in the wider global effort to mitigate against future climate change. When the spatial dimensions of intergenerational concerns are on the table, planning’s role in how cities adapt to, or become more resilient in the face of, a changing climate warrants its own attention (Gleeson 2008). Sydney has a particular vulnerability to rising sea-levels. It is not that there has been no planning for Sydney’s adaptation to it (Lee, Lewis et al. 2013). But resilience is concerned with more than planning. It is about the capacity of systems (planning among others) to “absorb disturbance and reorganise”

(Pearson, Newton et al. 2014, p4). The “reorganising” needed to minimise future climate risks in Sydney involves long term thinking, planning and regulation, and can be expected to be faced by stakeholder denial and avoidance (Newton and Doherty 2014). Helping to build a more “resilient” Sydney today, and for future generations, in regard to climate change but also wider socio-economic and environmental questions, is an important role for spatial planning. But this task joins the list of items where efforts at factoring in long term thinking today, when it is most cost-effective, will struggle against short term interest advocacy.

2.5 Conclusions

The start of this chapter suggested that a diagnostic of Sydney today would find a contradictory and divided city, a great place to live for some but increasingly tough for others. For many, especially those enjoying the city’s privileges, interest in the city’s future is peripheral and sparks only when change might affect them directly. However for others Sydney’s urban problems are quite obvious. Perhaps here we think of a growing cohort of low paid, long distance commuters, with high rental costs, who face education and other service access problems, and thus increased social exclusion (Buxton, Goodman et al. 2012). When the concept of a low-carbon future comes to the fore, Sydney’s scorecard is unambiguously poor.

This chapter has sought to provide an understanding of the influences which have brought about Sydney’s urban settlement patterns to date, so that these lessons can be factored into thinking on the future. A point of emphasis is that the problems we are talking about today seem to be different from those which were around in the first half of the story. The period up until the 1960-70s provides a consistently positive storyline in regard to social and economic progress. But today’s problems are persistent and their effects seem to be worsening. Certainly, planning’s effort at steering change (eg metropolitan planning strategies of varying forms, and the various planning system changes) have had little effect on problems like: spatially-based disadvantage, housing affordability, congestion, directly related city productivity and efficiency, as well as the longer term challenges of GHG emissions.

While the idea of reform to a planning system, may seem to provide good prospects for normative improvements (eg more sustainable housing in locations with good employment
and/or good transport access), those enjoying privileged positions today are often in a powerful position to block change, based on a perception (and possible future reality) that there may be an adverse effect at the special interest or individual level. Given city planning’s potential influential role in such matters, planning system reform practice needs stronger conceptualisations and guidance methods. The question is how one system setting, beset with a range of persistent problems, might, in the face of resistance from prevailing interests, “transition” to another arrangement more capable of responding to these problems.

The next chapter introduces the planning scholarship on the topic. It traces the shift in planning thinking over time from a rational technical exercise, to one today which introduces new ways of understanding the complexities of the planning system, its own institutions and those involving wider society, including the centrality of social processes to their reform.
Chapter 3  Planning theory: can it help?

3.1  Introduction

Context

This thesis starts from the viewpoint that if more sustainable urban growth management is the intention then city planning systems need to take on a different and more influential role. This viewpoint is based on the idea that a planning system can be an integrating force for many other urban system elements central to the challenges facing cities. These include: the transport system, energy system, health system, infrastructure systems, environmental management and social justice systems. The suggestion is that, working well, planning systems can help significantly in the steering of cities towards more economically vibrant, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable patterns of development. But the idea of “reforming” planning systems is hardly new. Indeed there have been almost “ceaseless” government-mandated planning system reform efforts in Australia over the last two decades (Gleeson 2006, p1). Planning scholars have not rated these efforts well. This chapter reviews what planning scholarship itself has to offer in regard to the quest of bringing about transformative and progressive practice reform in urban planning systems and city development. In particular, there is an interest in how scholarly thinking might assist those government-organised system reform projects aimed at major shifts in city planning, which seem to come up regularly.
**Approach**

There are three parts to this review. Chapter 3.2 starts with the dilemma faced by the very idea of using scholarly thinking to help with embedded planning practice problems. There is a well-entrenched sense of cynicism, scepticism and/or disinterest on the part of practitioners, as to the benefits of “theory” in particular and scholarship in general, as they face the policy and practice contradictions of day-to-day planning, let alone its reform challenges. So how *academic* work might, in a sense against the odds, act as a tool to assist in planning practice, needs its own contextual understanding and approach conception.

Chapter 3.3 then moves on to examine the branching and shifting of thinking, governance and practice in the urban planning field in the face of societal developments over the past 100 years or so. Four major (still competing rather than evolving) paradigms are introduced: rational-technical, negotiative, neoliberal and collaborative planning. But scholars heavily criticise the way *each* of these modes of planning thought have steered planning systems.

Chapter 3.4 introduces that branch of planning studies which explores less populist and more abstract “relational” and “institutional” ideas. This line of research takes us to the notion that it is “institutions” (its meaning here is as in its sociological sense, ie as “customs”, “codes” or the “rules of the game”, etc – *not* just organisations) that are inevitably at the *centre* of our planning systems *and* any efforts at reform: encouraging certain (strategic) behaviours and discouraging others. The focus on *relationships*, as a point of particular attention, can then provide for a more specific consideration of opportunities to moderate institutions.

This chapter concludes with the suggestion that the “relational-institutional” planning paradigm is a helpful area of scholarship for planning system reform thinking. It is pointing to the idea that accounting for less formal institutional constraints, and associated relational opportunities, should be *central* to any examination and understanding of planning system problems, and thus any reformist projects. A relational-institutional planning paradigm comes to be useful in the following chapters of the thesis when it is *joined up* with another field of research (“transitions studies”) in the development of a conceptual framework to guide planning system reform work.
3.2 Planning theory and practical knowledge

3.2.1 Use of scholarship on planning practice problems

Sanyal (2002) refers to a question posed to a group of assembled planners attending a program he was conducting at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He describes the question as “which planning theory did (the group of practitioners) use when they grappled with (a certain practice problem)”\(^71\) (p120). The responses revealed that none of this group of professional practicing planners found any theory useful in coming to a response to the nominated problem. Instead, the individuals used “guidelines for action through learning by doing on the job, as we say”. While, the transferability of this position to the Australian planning scene is unproven, interviews undertaken as a component of this research (see Chapter 7) certainly showed an uneasy relationship with theory for Sydney-based planners and related system actors, and an opening position of scepticism about its usefulness to practice problems.

This is a signal to the theory-side of this thesis to focus on the reality of the practical world of planners and their problems. Notwithstanding this, it is the allure of the thought that disciplined and critical scholarly thinking can help with embedded practice problems (like planning system difficulties) that is the genesis of this work. While mindful of practitioner scepticism, the thesis has also been inspired by the recent suggestion, or challenge, from Johann Schot, that “there is nothing so practical as a good theory”\(^72\), and John Forester’s comment that when “stuck”, planners do turn to scholarly research, for:

...another way to formulate a problem, a way to anticipate outcomes, a source of reminders about what is important, a way of paying attention that provides direction, strategy and coherence.

(Forester 1989, p137).

According to the interviews in Chapter 7, actors in the Sydney planning system domain, especially practising planners, do express a sense of being “stuck” in the face of often implausible institutional framings, and disconnected planning, plans and implementation

\(^71\) The planning problem under examination at MIT happened to be about dealing with conflicting interests.

\(^72\) Schott’s comment was including in a keynote address to the International Sustainability Transitions Conference held in Utrecht 27-29 August 2014, which I attended.
practicalities. So if Forester is right, research and reasoning on planning system reform should have something more than academic interest today.

3.2.2 The challenging environment for Australian planning “thinking”

As a starting point for this step into the terrain of theoretical and more abstract thinking, it is useful to distinguish between what are sometimes colloquially described as the “hard” and “soft” scholarly domains, or sciences. For the sake of the discussion here, the hard sciences would include work where factors can be clearly distinguished, the causal relationships can be compartmentalised and, through say econometric modelling, hard facts or statistical probability of possible outcomes can be determined. Or at least the frame for analysis and debate can be clearly established. At a global scale the quantitative work demonstrating the importance of carbon emissions to climate change, and therefore linking emissions from cities and thus patterns of activity within them, is an example (Steffen and Hughes 2013). It has led to “theories” about human-induced climate change.

Another example is the quantitative analysis which comes out in favour of more compact city forms over the dispersed settlement models on sustainability grounds (assessing the various contingencies involved eg around building form, transport, energy typology etc)\(^73\). March (2010, p110) describes such work as within the domain of “scientific or positivist theory”, and posits that here:

\emph{A theory is a general principle supported by evidence which explains observable facts.}

According to March’s representation of Australian practice-settings at least, planning “theory” is interpreted as something different. For the practitioner, the interpretation is mostly as a pejorative (something used by academics which “… doesn’t help when you deal with reality” (p109)).

But in an epistemological sense, two more useful distinctions between planning-oriented theory and the hard sciences can be drawn. The first involves the research conceptualisation or philosophy. Planning has been thought of, generally since its inception, as one of society’s moral and ethical pursuits (Abercrombie 1943). Its process aspects and policy

\(^73\) As a baseline and for comparative purposes when illustrating conceptual points, this thesis will occasionally refer to the compact city idea (see eg OECD 2012), as a point of contrast with Sydney’s more dispersed settlement patterns.
prescriptions have, in the broad, been concerned with the delivery of normative intentions of society, for example the “good city” (Campbell and Fainstein 2003, p1). Theory in this sense is offering “ideas embodying ongoing moral, political and social questions” (March 2010, p111). Planning theory (and planning expression in cities as explained for Sydney for example at Chapter 2) has been based on society’s changing value orientations over time. Therefore, questions about whose values should prevail, and thus politics and power, are prominent (Pahl 1970). These more philosophical questions necessarily involve different and more abstract types of conceptualisations than do the hard sciences, which are more concerned with objectivity and to what extent questions can be settled factually.

The second distinction between planning theory and that of the harder sciences involves the representation of the research domain. The planning world is one where numerous, complex and interdependent effects are at play. As put by Boggs (2003), it can be one of those settings where “empirical reality is too hard to compartmentalise”. The planning system also interacts with the wider urban system. Intentions to address problems with, say, housing affordability are in part within the realm of planning policy and process, but State and national taxation policy are also critical factors, as are the decision processes of both demand and supply side stakeholder groups. City planning finds itself deeply in the domain where the more complex problems simply cannot be resolved, or even examined, independently of numerous other factors. The point to make here is that as a system increases in complexity “the capacity (for scholars say)74 to make precise statements about its characteristics diminishes” (Van Gigch 2002, p208).

So on the one hand there is an appeal, if not indeed societal necessity, to lift the limits of planning study beyond fields which rely on readily measurable relationships, into fields which examine more complex causal processes. In fields like planning system change, it is in the “getting at” this complexity that brings prospects for useful knowledge for practice (Boggs and Rantisi 2003, p114, Hall 2003). But on the other hand, the idea of transferring critical theoretical thinking into the planning practice space needs to be seen as one which itself will meet resistance, given its offering will not always be easy to digest or present clear flawless instruction to those involved in the “real” world of practice. The setting, then, is one where planning system actors do have a sense of being “stuck” with intransigent problems, but also have an understandable “ambivalence” about the prospects

74 Bracketed content was inserted by the myself.
for theory to help. One of the more obvious means of providing, at least, a first order response to this setting is by continuously anchoring theoretical conceptions into the practice world. The next subsection gives some guidance to the thesis on how this might best occur.

3.2.3 Foundations to theorising about planning in this thesis

John Friedman\textsuperscript{75}, in a relatively recent essay written after a lifetime of experience as a planning scholar and practitioner, goes directly to the question of how “theorizing in and about planning” can contribute to planning thinking and practice:

\begin{quote}
So the question for us is this: can planners evolve a value-based philosophy as a foundation for their own practices in the world? My personal view is that this is perhaps the major challenge before us in a world that, despite protestations to the contrary, is increasingly materialist, individualist, and largely indifferent to humans’ impacts on the natural environment. In the absence of a human-centered philosophy or some other defensible construct, we will merely drift with the mainstream, helping to build cities that are neither supportive of life nor ecologically sustainable. 

(Friedmann 2008, p249).
\end{quote}

In this essay Friedman sets up three “tasks”, or challenges, for planning research. The above elicits the first challenge, which is about helping planners evolve a value-based and “deeply considered humanist philosophy”. Here Friedman emphasises planning’s philosophical leaning, and by deduction its role in favouring certain trends and acting to slow other trends which impede achievement of humanist objectives. He contrasts this with the sometimes held primary role of planning as facilitating and mediating disputes (for which he uses the aphorism “getting to yes” (p248)).

His second challenge for planning research is to “help adapt planning practices to their (current) real-world constraints with regard to scale, complexity and time”. According to Friedman, this challenge goes to the question of what can be “reliably known” (p251), and reapplied, in the face of context and complexity. On the base-line level, this task is about empirical factors (ie the hard sciences or “facts” discussed above), and their importance as a

\textsuperscript{75} Friedman is notable planner and scholar and the first recipient of the United Nations Human Settlements Lecture Award (in 2006), concerned with sustainable urbanism. See \url{http://ww2.unhabitat.org/professor_john_friedmann.asp} (accessed 9 August 2014).
lead-in to policy choices. At the next level the challenge involves engagement with the more intricate debates on inter-connected (planning) policy questions. This is the challenge of how research, and planners’ engagement with it, can better position planners for their roles in these debates. Friedman’s third challenge for planning scholarship is to “translate concepts and knowledge in other fields into our own domain and render them accessible and useful for planning and its practice”. This task points to the dangers of an inward orientation and the benefits to planning from engagement with “the universe of knowledge”.

So according to Friedmann, the scholarly task for a thesis concerned with planning practice would seem to be starting off on the right track if it were: (1) founded on the high ground of planning’s humanist intents (so seeking to practically help in the resolution of worsening socio-spatial problems for cities like Sydney has a good alignment), (2) concerned with drawing in new knowledge to assist practitioners “adapt” in the face of increasing planning practice complexity and uncertainty (the thesis is seeking to help directly here by investigating and drawing out evidence to improve knowledge on planning system reform), and (3) to introduce wider fields of research into the planning domain (this thesis attempts to introduce some new conceptualisations based on planning’s non-mainstream connection with institutional studies and the emerging field of sustainability transitions).

But these connections best start with an exploration of how and why planning scholarship itself has changed over time.

### 3.3 Mainstream planning paradigms

#### 3.3.1 Overview

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview explanation of the “shifts” in planning thinking over the last century or so. The particular interests are in what has driven such shifts and how they have related to prevailing socio-spatial challenges of the time. Sydney is again used as a base for drawing such things out. The work of Healey, Khakee et al

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76Again this might for example include such matters as tax policy’s effect on housing market distortions of such relevance to housing affordability and social justice questions.

77Scholarly examination of the financial and market effects of negative gearing on Australian housing investment as now structured, and the unintended negative effects on house pricing and equity of opportunity is helpful here (eg by Judith Yates in Tomlinson (2012)). But planners uninclined to scholarly writings might be more persuaded by popular media’s take on the positives of investment incentives eg see Judith Sloan article in The Australian 8 July 2008 “Doomsayers ignore the facts when picking their targets”.

70
(1997) is useful here in capturing and synthesising the efforts of many authors who have examined or compiled works on this topic (eg Friedmann 1987, Mandelbaum, Mazza et al. 1996, Alexander 1998, Taylor 1998, Allmendinger 2009, Faludi 2013 to name a few). Healey, Khakee et al use four paradigms to characterise developments in more mainstream thinking over this period. They are: (1) rational comprehensive planning - with its reliance on technical expertise, (2) negotiative planning – responding to widening public protest and power, (3) neoliberal planning – with its placing of faith in the market, and (4) collaborative planning – a step beyond negotiation to communication-led consensus building. Figure 3.1 shows a sequencing to these shifts. But to see this as evolutionary is a simplification. Rather, what we see today is planning’s various theory and practice standpoints operating, more or less influentially, at the same time in a kind of “competitive interaction” (Ferreira, Sykes et al. 2009, p29).

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*Figure 3.1 - Shifts in planning thought*  
(Referencing Healey, Khakee et al. 1997)

The rest of this section describes the four paradigms drawing some conclusions on what they offer to today’s city planning problems.

### 3.3.2 Rational comprehensive planning: technocrats rule

Planning’s initial (ie post-industrial revolution) focus was on how government might best address societal ill-effects that accompanied industrialisation. Planning’s work was aimed at achieving a better, healthier life for the masses (Gleeson and Low 2000). Extending out from the opening decade of the 20th century, major global events such as the World Wars
and the 1930s depression strengthened societal thinking in support of a stronger role for
government, or as put by Healey (1997) the “provider state”. This shift empowered the
“modernist” movement, leading up to and beyond WW2, and “its vision of a new world
order, which touched on all aspects of life – environmental, social and economic” (Spiller
2011, p8). In the planning sphere it was a period of ambition and idealism. There was a
sense that planning could, in the face of massive societal problems and through its strategic
analysis and plans, assist in promoting “a classless … society living a healthy life in
harmony with the environment” (p9).

In this paradigm, the key planning actors were technical experts and output was, commonly,
blueprint spatial plans and strategies. This was a time where empiricism ruled and the
“prevailing notion” and legitimation of planning practice was that of “rational decisions”
(Friedmann 1998, p4). For Sydney, these kinds of planning ideas became prominent at the
city scale after WW2 with the County of Cumberland Scheme. Among many other ideas,
the scheme proposed that Sydney’s population growth be managed mainly by concentrating
future development to within boundaries defined by a “green belt”. As outlined in Chapter
2, this rational comprehensive approach ran into opposition from more powerful interests
(landowners, speculators, certain government infrastructure providers) who favoured spatial
expansion. This conflictual setting was not confined to Sydney or Australia. Albrechts
(2006a) describes a consistent experience in other liberal democracies through this period.
For example in European settings also there was contestation of views on the planning idea
of the green belt. Mass availability of private motor vehicles was causing a major shift in
spatial settlement drivers. It became a catalyst for bold rationalist planning interventions
which were sometimes influential and sometimes not (Beatley 2012), often in the face of
“fierce opposition” from other forces within the urban regime (Ferreira, Sykes et al. 2009,
p30). As distinctive spatial decisions unfolded in different cities in Europe, the contingent
factor was the particular power positioning of the spatial planning sector, as compared to
other competing economic sectors involved in political decision-making (Albrechts 2006b).

While it faced difficulties even in the period of the “long boom” (ie after WW2), the
rational comprehensive approach seems to face even tougher challenges today in Sydney.
There are regular endeavours in rationalist prescriptive planning through metropolitan
strategies. But they come under considerable criticism (Dodson and Gleeson 2003, Gleeson,
Two lines of concern have particular pertinence. One suggests these strategies have not been, in a sense, “comprehensive” enough in considering the problems and opportunities metropolitan-level planning projects face. For example, in regard to the ambitions for more concentrated (“compact”) city forms common to metropolitan strategies, criticisms include a lack of attention to the related: (1) social effects – for example missed opportunities to integrate housing stress and affordability factors into the argument (Randolph 2002)), (2) environmental performance – for example lack of accounting for the starkly different GHG emission characteristics of different higher density housing forms eg (Perkins, Hamnett et al. 2009)) and (3) servicing implications – for example the lack of integrated thought on requirements for both hard and soft infrastructure (Bunker 2008).

But even if these planning deficits were addressed more effectively in a particular metro spatial planning document, there is a second overriding level of criticism on whether, today, rational comprehensive plans are the right mechanism upon which to focus attention. Or at least questioning how such plans might be so formulated to actually give guidance in the face of: (1) the increasing pace and complexity of urban change, and (2) a growing number of other related plans, strategies and policies also seeking to respond to social and economic change in the face of stakeholder interests. These include transport plans, infrastructure strategies, housing strategies, natural resource management policies, overriding “State plans” and even local, State and national taxation policies. Some of these can be far more influential on spatial outcomes than intended “comprehensive” metro strategies. We are actually seeing this play out in Sydney today, where the “provider state” (in terms of physical infrastructure at least) is emerging after a long period of hibernation. There have been record commitments to Sydney transport infrastructure projects since the election of the NSW O’Farrell coalition government in 2011, reconfirmed with the 2015 budget now under Premier Mike Baird78. On top of this is the Commonwealth government’s new commitment to Sydney’s second international airport with ambitions for it to be operational by the “mid 2020s”79. These are very large public investments, totalling around $50 billion and including $15.4 billion for the proposed WestConnex motorway, Australia’s largest infrastructure project (O’Farrell 2013). There is a clear societal interest in ensuring these are the right projects and are making the most of the public investments. But Sydney’s metropolitan planning strategies have tended to follow rather than lead here and “rational

comprehensive” evidence to contextualise and justify the case for the transport infrastructure projects has been largely missing:

...there is no evidence that these projects have been properly integrated or will make Sydney a better city.

(Simpson 2015, p18)

While it may be becoming harder for metropolitan strategies to lead the way, it should not be seen as a contradiction that planning continues to work at comprehensive and integrated “technical” responses to city planning problems. Especially as interest has shifted into the social, economic and environmental questions of a sustainable future, there has been an upswing of visionary and ambitious rationalist empirical research on the implications of detailed componentry of city forms and structures and their relationships to such factors. This has taken us into sophisticated and ambitious models for city change. Mindful of Friedman’s third challenge (Chapter 3.2.3), the “3-horizons” work of Newton (2007) uses concepts originating from business management to suggest a “pipeline” of innovations required to deliver a sustainable city over time. See Figure 3.2. Under this model, Horizon (H) 1 is concerned with innovations ready for immediate implementation. H2 innovations are available in concept but not yet in practice. H3 innovations are more radical and beyond current thinking. For each of these “horizons”, Newton details associations and relationships between: (1) technology innovations for cities (such as that related to energy, water and transport), (2) spatial patterning and urban design innovation (including differentials between infill and greenfield arrangements, but also different approaches for both) and (3) individual and collective human behaviour change (from awareness to concern to action) (Newton 2008, p16).
Here planning scholarship is providing abstract thinking (a good thing), but heavily founded on what March (2010) terms “technical facts” (also a good thing). It is useful because it passes Friedmann’s second test of empirical discipline, but also takes us beyond the “here and now”, helping us appreciate the multi-dimensional challenge ahead. Planning practice is concerned with linking this kind of deeper understanding of the urban challenge to more concrete reasoning and action-settings. It is in the discipline of contextualising things, or, drawing the bigger picture and attempting to map a coherent cross-disciplinary response, that planning can be at its best.

3.3.3 Negotiative planning: public protest picks up speed

It was in the 1960s that social protest began to make its mark in western society and societal concerns about the “urban regime” began to manifest (Mossberger and Stoker 2001). Notions became more pronounced of government, and its planning technocrats, being in fact less than idealistic. The perception grew that both government and planners were instead an arm of the urban regime, and in turn inclined to bestow privilege on business or
act in the interests of the capitalist economy. This perception was a catalyst for a societal shift to well organised (and publicised) protest, and the foregrounding of bargaining between individuals, groups and government agencies. Healey, Khakee et al describe this period as characterising a shift in planning focus from comprehensive blueprint plans to individual “projects”.

The Sydney evidence of this included large scale public protests against the construction of new urban freeway projects including in Pyrmont/Ultimo and the Rocks, which included the demolition of low-income housing and/or brought with them unwanted local amenity effects (e.g., noise, visual impact loss of local visual character) or sometimes wider impacts (such as loss of cultural heritage or natural landscape values). Today the results of such protest and negotiation are generally seen as very favourable. By 1979, this social dynamic had taken on a legislative manifestation with the enactment of the first comprehensive planning legislation for Sydney (and NSW), the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979. One of just three principal objectives of the EPA Act was to:

(To) provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment.

Without disregarding the more socially equitable possibilities which come with this sort of change, Healey (1997) points to the problems with an approach centred on negotiation with a group of actors directly involved in an individual project. In particular the traps of such an approach supporting and promoting “the interests of a narrow elite” (p29). This power dynamic is seen to bring the potential for neglect of wider objectives and impacts both related to, and beyond the ambit of, those at the negotiating table (Cook 2012, p29).

3.3.4 Neoliberal planning: faith in the market

Since the 1980s the neoliberal agenda has been on the ascendancy in western society, as global competition began to have much greater significance. This brought with it an interest in paring back the influence of government on the efficient workings of markets. New attention was drawn to the planning system as part of a wider micro-economic reform and deregulation movement across the public sector (Searle and Cardew 2000, Sager 2011, Gurran and Phibbs 2013b). At a practice level the concern was focused on speeding up assessment and cutting transaction costs for development projects. At a more abstract level this was about a shift away from ideas like “interpretation” and “discretion” and their
associated uncertainty and risks to development investment. The shift, originally at least, was towards the idea of a precise rule-base to underpin an efficient market.

Of direct relevance to this thesis is the attention to planning system reform which came with this new paradigm. Starting in 1989, the Commonwealth-funded Local Approvals Review Program (LARP) was an initial government-mandated foray. It involved Commonwealth funding support for bespoke local council-specific (ie bottom-up) approaches to reducing excess planning regulation while still meeting planning goals. It was followed by the Development Assessment Forum (DAF) from 1998 to about 2011 which involved key government interests across all tiers as well as a stronger role for private sector representatives, and the pushing of a more prescriptive model for planning system change across all sectors. Notable here was the ten step “DAF Leading Practice Model” for development assessment (Holliday 2006). The model included recommendations for initiatives like “code assessment” development (ie fast-track development approved by certified private sector agents in accordance with pre-ordained codes – which will come into prominence in the case study work at Chapter 8), but also prescriptions for better strategic planning outcomes.

The LARP and DAF programs were just two nodes of activity in an ongoing two-sided reform agenda which has struggled to find harmony (and sometimes seems to be in open warfare). One side is centred on cutting transaction costs for development projects (eg by speeding up development assessment) and improving the business environment for development investment more generally. The other side is centred on how to secure socially and environmentally responsible development in the face of this. In the early days at least it was thought the neoliberal approach could find a way to achieve both. But in practice it has been an uneven battle. A major point to note here is the dominance of the neoliberal agenda in the reform rhetoric (eg Westacott 2015). Business and indeed government have been much more ready and able to deliver a polemic on the effect of planning systems on business and jobs than other voices in regard to their failings in coming up with sustainable social and economic models for cities. Despite an instinctive argument to blame the planning system for economic ills, the empirical evidence is weak in Australia (Gurran, Gilbert et al. 2013, Gurran and Phibbs 2013a). Nevertheless, as Jacobs (2015) has

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80 I was engaged by the program as the NSW Local Approvals Review Program facilitator from 1991-93.
81 On 6/7/2015, in a discussion with senior representatives of the Planning Institute of Australia, it was indicated to me that the Development Assessment Forum may be re-emerging as a Commonwealth government-level initiative.
82 Potential savings were then estimated at $350m per annum (Productivity Commission 2012).
documented for wider housing policy, prevailing power settings have tended to privilege neoliberal arguments. These kinds of power settings have positioned this particular reform paradigm to, in a sense, get away with a loss of its conceptual (ie economic) purity. If the neoliberal planning paradigm’s purer intentions were concerned with *efficiency* and *predictability* for the market (ie a clear rule base), it seems to now also be about promoting enterprise more generally, including the chasing out of opportunities for windfalls falling outside such rules. Indeed there is a whole industry of consultants, lawyers and lobbyists who work at improving the value of property by challenging the current planning rules for the specific project at hand. The neoliberal planning paradigm thus has become contradictory and confusing in its intentions in regard to planning system reform (Steele 2009, Steele and Ruming 2012, Gunn and Hillier 2013, Gurran and Phibbs 2013a).

In practice, there are some aspects of wider neoliberalist trends which have tended to undermine effective planning reform, as a matter of logic. For example, while there is justification for a planning system which includes both prescriptive rules and flexibility (eg a merits-based test against performance objectives), fundamental to this justification is disciplined planning argument, competent analysis and sound administration. A problem here is that the neoliberal agenda has also been more inclined towards reducing the (relative) resourcing available for government. For example, in Sydney a neoliberalist combination of the pegging of local government rating increases and the State’s shifting of some of its functions and costs to local government has seen funding for local councils, including the planning function, particularly squeezed (ALGA 2010). So neoliberal times can make for something of a perfect storm for planning operatives in government planning and DA assessment, characterised by: (1) expectations for both greater certainty and greater flexibility, (2) diminishing resourcing (which might otherwise have allowed achievement of just that), and (3) increasing pressures from fee-for-service advisors competing for clients on value-adding performance. In 2004, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) conducted a “National Inquiry into Planning Education and Employment” which among other things found local council planning offices as, commonly, a “toxic workplace” especially the DA function (PIA 2004). In the setting suggested here, Friedman’s high ambitions for wise interventionist planning can seem remote.

### 3.3.5 Collaborative planning: communication-led consensus building

From about 1990, and in the face of dissatisfaction with alternative approaches, there has been a deeper acknowledgement of the need for plans and planning to involve processes
which promote a wider appreciation of different interests, and participation beyond the “usual suspects”. This conceptual and practice shift extends the previously described “provider state” (and its reliance on experts), “negotiative state” (and its focus on interest bargaining), and the “neoliberal state” (and its assumption that the market can best deliver outcomes), to suggest a need for a more collaborative approach. With this approach, plans and strategies regain their importance, as participants develop shared understandings and ownership. There is support for participative and discursive processes upfront aimed at reaching public agreement on these strategies. This would also reduce transaction costs at the development project stage (Healey 1997, Forester 2013).

Collaborative planning is aligned with Habermas’ theory of communicative action (1984) and the popular “communicative planning” school which, at the turn of the 21st century, was proclaimed as a breakthrough paradigm for planning theory and practice (Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000). Participatory approaches and rational argument is foundational to the Habermasian approach. It involves a step beyond negotiation (among established interests) towards public discourse and collective deliberation, and includes now a large area of scholarship linking the work of many researchers, including well beyond the planning field (eg Dryzek 1982, Hajer 1995, Forester 1999, Hajer 2003, Healey 2007a, Healey 2008, Hendriks 2009, Innes 2010, Hendriks 2011). This line of thought suggests it is “only by getting more deeply involved in the discursive and symbolic sides of politics (that) policy analysts help decision-makers and citizens develop alternatives that speak to their own needs and interests rather than those defined and shaped for them by others” (Fischer 2003, p15). Sandercock (1999, p96) indicates the collaboration process is about ensuring that there is:

\[... \text{representations of all major points of view, equalizing information among group members, and creating conditions within group processes so that the force of argument can be the deciding factor rather than an individual’s power or status in some pre-existing hierarchy.}\]

But all is not necessarily as it seems. Fainstein (2000) has criticised this school of thought for its emphasis on communication processes over the actual substantive issues such as actually achieving normative societal goals. Roy (2010) has written of the irrelevance of

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83 As quoted in Fischer (2003, p24).
such planning theory to a most important reality – “the struggle for the city”. There is certainly a taste of that struggle in Sydney given the increasing evidence of winners and losers of the city’s ongoing urban change (Chapter 2). Critics also argue that the problem of unbalanced representation of societal interests in policy debate is still very much a trap today. According to Leach, Scoones et al (2010), there remains the tendency for communicative processes to “(close) down around narratives and pathways that prioritise interests that are already powerful and thus … militate against the sensibilities of those currently marginalised” (p96). The problem is suggested to have increased, if not become systemic, under neoliberal governance settings (inherently favouring the market over other sectoral interests). That is, it is suggested that one of the logical consequences of neoliberalism has been a “new style of politics” emphasising the consensual in a neoliberal vision of the city, and showing an “intolerance towards dissenting opinion” (Paddison 2009, paragraph 34). In drawing these criticisms of “communicative planning” together, March (2010, p122) presents a concerning scenario, drawing attention to the need for planning scholarship to assist practitioners in the quest for “real skills” in the face of “real-world constraints” (Friedman’s second “task”):

*Teaching (planning) students narrowly about participation and communicative planning … is akin to teaching manners to soldiers going into the front line – it makes a nonsense of the teacher and the theory at best, and at worst impedes soldiers’ effectiveness in action. The disconnect between the counterfactual ideal of consensus and actual participation processes leads graduates to quickly dismiss this body of theory once they have entered the reality of practice, leaving them with few real skills in addressing the problems of collective action embodied in the planning ‘project’.*

So a key concern is that the alluring setting described by Sandercock, above, is not so easy to achieve. As a starting point there are the “imperfections” within the public authorities which sponsor their arrangements. How might “planners” usually employed in politicised government authorities with their own power settings, personalities and interests (“within the belly of the beast” according to Fischer (2003, p225)), have a capacity to deliver on such noble intents in the forums they create? The concern is that under the guise of communicative planning principles, powerful stakeholder interests (be they organised resident groups, developers or any other group) can still take control of the debate. In Australian cities, the ongoing *planning* debates about change tend to involve middle class, middle aged resident-owners (see for example Lewis 1999) and tend to exclude those
citizens who have most to be concerned about (eg youth, future generations, those currently living in areas of concentrated disadvantage). This draws attention to planning’s involvement in the challenging questions around: what to do about different values and interests, and how the exercise of power should be factored in (Friedmann 1998, Flyvbjerg 2002a, p353).

A related concern loops back to the idea of expertise and rationalist thinking in planning. The communicative planning school sees the primary role of the planner as the facilitation of deliberation processes and working towards a consensus (Forester 1999, Fischer 2003, p223). But this is something Friedmann has said we need to move beyond if planning’s ambitions are to be achieved (his first “task”). He is not alone in this criticism. Fincher and Iveson (2008, p5) remind us of the socio-spatial outcome as the point of attention, and reintroduce the value of empirics, or at least, knowledge and thought beyond mere argument:

*To put it bluntly: to create more just cities, planners need a framework for making judgments between different claims in the planning process, as well as for facilitating them. That is to say, planning frameworks must enable planners to make calculations about ‘what should be done’, not just about ‘how it is done’.*

So while it is easy to point out criticisms of communicative planning, those critics who have an interest in sustainable urban development in cities like Sydney are still faced with the struggle of delivery of change. In a setting involving shared power, and where the needed change tends to disturb *established* interests, public (and political) engagement remain central to this struggle, not only as a means of “getting to yes”, but also in recognition of the learning and knowledge-building capacities it brings of itself.

### 3.3.6 Scholarly thoughts on deficits in contemporary local planning

These generic paradigms help give order to scholarly thought about planning practice. As the above commentary indicates, the critical insights from local (ie Australian) scholars sometimes fits well with these paradigms, but there is more being said. Briefly here, recent work by Gleeson, Dodson et al (2012) can be used to capture the essence of the wider scholarly criticisms of Australian planning. Their work synthesises contemporary urban planning and associated governance problems down to two distinct “deficits”, which together have prevented appropriate societal responses to the important city planning
challenges in Australian cities. The first has been described as a *planning* deficit. This is the suggestion that rationalist technical planning is in decline, described at Section 3.3.2, as involving the contextualising of interdependencies and cross-disciplinary problem solving to come to preferred land use and infrastructure arrangements. For the authors, this deficit is now embedded (or “structural”) and needs not only a new “planning insight” (ie training and competency on the part of government planners) but also shifts in bureaucratic structures. Metropolitan-level planning governance (such as a metropolitan planning commission)\textsuperscript{84}, is suggested not as a “panacea” but rather just as a “pre-requisite” for a more coherent and comprehensive policy responses (p117)\textsuperscript{85}.

The second suggested deficit is concerned with *democracy*. It is suggested that the serious policy challenges facing cities require change, and in liberal democracies, this will bring a need for citizens to reconcile the tensions and ambiguities between self-interest and wider public interest. But the default position is that of citizen disenfranchisement with city planning questions. The democracy deficit is seen to manifest as:

\[
\ldots\text{a morbid political culture, characterised by strategic uncertainty and polarity; administrative confusion, especially between strategic and statutory planning; popular anxiety about growth and change; defensive localism ('NIMBY-ism'); and occasionally, corruption and maladministration of land development and regulation. (Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012, p122)}
\]

This is something opposite to what is required if the aspiration is to discourage short termism, and narrow interest advocacy, and encourage policy design which has an interest in the longer term and the achievement of a more sustainable future. This work of Gleeson, Dodson et al concludes with the thought that these metropolitan governance problems, including that of conflict between localised self-interest and wider city problem responses, are:

\textsuperscript{84} The current planning system for Sydney and other major Australian cities comprises overlapping and fragmented responsibilities between State and local government.

\textsuperscript{85} In a related development, the NSW government are making governance shifts in that very direction. On 3 June 2014, the NSW Premier made an announcement about plans for a Greater Sydney Commission to "modernise the way the NSW Government’s major infrastructure and urban planning priorities are delivered" See Media release Mike Baird MP Premier of NSW, 3 June 2014. Greater Sydney Commission to Transform Our City. See: www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases-premier/greater-sydney-commission-transform-our-city . Accessed 13/10/2014. There has been no further detail released on this matter to the time of writing.
... not merely technical. They are also social and political, necessitating new arrangements to strengthen not diminish democratic accountability. The solutions are to be found in a renewal of political imagination not in technocratic reorganisation.

3.3.7 Taking stock of mainstream planning theory

If Albrechts (2006a) is right when suggesting the spatial governance of cities is involved in a contestation of ideas, what has planning scholarship on offer for this contest? As an overarching frame we have Friedmann’s first “task” which provides a reminder of the values-base which forms the origin of the practice (and study) of planning, centred as it is, on wider social benefit. This does present as something distinctive in these times of globalisation, where a more prevalent, if not hegemonic, alternative is competition, and therefore winners and losers. Underneath this larger frame, I have suggested for example (Chapter 3.3.2) that planning is at its best in drawing attention to the bigger picture and the need for context and comprehensive thought in the policy debate (ie over more fragmented thinking).

But today all arms of government policy (should) recognise the need for better connections as they seek to innovate within their particular “line” of responsibility (transport, energy, housing, social policy, economic policy, natural resource management etc). Where planning is somewhat unique is that it has no particular “line”. If it has a distinguishing concern it is with integration. This means planning needs to be a seller of the notion, as far as city planning questions are concerned, that there are not just efficiencies to be had (although this is important), but that it is in the connecting-up and optimising interdependencies that new answers are to be found. This might occur across policy domains, but also across different spatial scales (local, regional, global) and across time (aware of the “here and now” but also with a view to the long term). So mainstream planning would be a more obvious voice to argue, in a setting like Sydney, that fragmented thinking is the enemy, and key challenges like congestion, housing affordability, GHG emission, social equity concerns, and even economic growth ambitions are not likely to be met while acted upon independently of each other.86

86 Integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches to policy and system reform are central to some of the transition theory principles discussed later in the thesis (Weaver and Jordan 2008, Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010). The point to make is mainstream planning’s baseline affinity with these ideas.
As for any “contest”, what might be thought of as the mainstream planning contribution seems to find it hard to even get into the game as far as major infrastructure projects for Sydney are concerned. As we have seen in the roll-out of decision-making on major transport infrastructure previously referenced, the individual project (e.g., designing a new motorway project while meeting budget and environmental constraints, and in the face of local objections) already brings “a lot of other things to worry about” (Meadowcroft 2011, p72). This is partly about established power relationships but it is also about the power of knowledge and ideas. When we turn explicitly to planning scholarship there does not seem to be a lot of potency. The four planning paradigms discussed in this section all provide useful insights. But none seems to provide a compelling platform (or “epistemological lifeboat” (Hjørland and Nicolaisen 2005)), likely to persuade the revolutionary change needed if sustainable urban growth management is to be achieved. The more contextualised scholarly criticisms summarised above (Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012) provide a more explicit synthesis of the problem in Australian cities. But the suggested planning and democracy deficits also leave us hanging in terms of ideas on what’s to be done. That work suggested a concrete proposition on new metropolitan governance structures, but this is (correctly) indicated as providing no guarantees. Beyond this there is an implied reliance on something as amorphous as a renewed “political imagination”.

To this point the suggested scepticism about the value of scholarship in the world of planning practice seems to make a lot of sense. When considering planning system failure, Australian scholarship seems to be still missing comprehensive conceptualisations of how it is that these problem settings (as say evidenced by the nominated deficits) are so deeply embedded, and for example have managed to resist “ceaseless” reform efforts. We are also missing models on how we might bring about transformative shifts. The latter two “tasks” in Friedmann’s framework (which call for new insights, from both within and beyond the planning world) forewarn that this kind of knowledge might not be so easily accessible. The next section steps into some more intricate planning scholarship to help address the suggested shortcomings.

3.4 The relational-institutional shift in planning thought

3.4.1 Relationships as a point of attention in complex policy problems

Friedmann would be happy to see that in the search for better understandings of the embedded nature of their problems, planning scholars have been drawn to wider fields such
as political science, governance studies and political ecology. These fields have a direct interest in the particulars of why government is “so bad” in tackling long term policy problems (IPPR 2012, p5). One suggestion is that today’s methods rely overly on two instruments: (1) the bureaucracy and (2) the market. Each have played effective roles in tackling “tame” or more linear societal problems which can be handled within administrative silos, or naturally bounded markets. But neither the bureaucracy (today driven by new public management principles\textsuperscript{87}), nor the market (notwithstanding government-constructed incentives of its own) have been well placed for the complexity involved in modern, “wicked”, policy reform challenges. A reason suggested for this is that an increasingly incentivised focus on shorter term performance has (at a time when the increasing layers of complexity had called for the opposite) seen a reduced attention to the crucial aspect of relationships (Cooke and Muir 2012).

As will be seen, the term “relationships” as used in this section has quite a lot to it. While other areas of public policy might have an interest, urban planning has particular reasons for exploring questions around the relational. Unlike many areas of government policy which tend to focus on discrete domains, planning is concerned with the linking up of multiple domains. Planning’s specific area of specialty seems to be in understanding relationships and organising interactions (Healey 2003). If there is to be expertise with this “specialty” it makes sense that planning understands the relational at a deep level. This section is concerned with this understanding.

\textit{You think because you understand “1” you should understand “2” because “1” and “1” make “2”. But you must also understand “and”.

A Sufi saying quoted by Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000, p551)

3.4.2 \textbf{Relational thought and institutions}

From one viewpoint the relationships involved in all policy development work by government are institutionalised. Here the term “institution” is used in respect of its meaning in sociology: a foundational unit of social organisation (Amin 2001, Jessop 2001). A well-referenced definition of institutions is that of Nobel Prize winner in the field, economist Douglass North (1990, p3):

\textsuperscript{87} As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the effects of globalisation has been a re-orientation of the role of the bureaucracy to more align with commercially competitive business practice (Bertelli 2012).
Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic. Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve over time...

The law, government, judiciary and markets provide procedural structures for societal activity. These overarching elements operate hand-in-hand with informal constraints such as "norms of behaviour, conventions, self-imposed codes of conduct" (Connor and Dovers 2004, p11), together forming the bundle of critical societal institutions which shape behaviour and thus forge interaction and relationship (Hall and Taylor 1996, Bell 2002, Powell 2007). So if it is institutions (not just laws and plans but also as established frameworks for less formal connection) which both give structure to key planning relationship and guide the behaviour of involved actors (organisations, politicians, bureaucrats, developers, activists, and even non-active parties), it would make sense that prevailing institutions become a point of study for those interested in planning system reform.

When we talk of institutions as devices that “frame” relationships, one viewpoint is as quite rigid structures providing guidance on, but also binding, social behaviours. This (part enabling, part constraining) ambition can be observed as a key traditional task of city planning. The example is rational-comprehensive planning which can be followed by say zoning instruments which permit or restrict certain types of development. However, as far as the big city shaping policy decision for Sydney are concerned, metropolitan strategic plans have tended to struggle for relevance, and follow rather than lead spatial change. So this opens up to the other “viewpoint” on relationships as they might be involved in planning policy development. This view would focus on the benefits of reduced structure and rigidity and instead the promotion of fluidity and flexibility. This is as a recognition of increasing pace and complexity of urban change. The quest under this view is to not only to be ready, but to also trigger innovation, as new sometimes unexpected relationships emerge.

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88 In continuing the use of the sporting analogy, North (1990, p4) distinguishes institutions (ie rules of the game) from the actors involved in it. He views organisations as actors which are directed by institutions.
“Relational planning” is already a well-acknowledged field of planning study (Jessop 2001, Bathelt and Glückler 2003, Healey 2007a, Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012, Van Wezemaal, Hillier et al. 2012), and while not in the mainstream has had some coverage in Australia (eg Bunker and Searle 2009, Searle and Bunker 2010, Searle 2012). The relational “shift” in planning thought supports the move away from deterministic spatial plans and strategies for cities, in favour of relational conceptions. Relational strategic plans are more schematic. They employ network language, emphasising nodes and flows or, again, relationships. While the work on relational strategic plans is for the most part found in European city and regional settings (Searle and Bunker 2010), it has been observed that some recent planning for Sydney has included a shift to relational conceptions. The most prominent example is, what metropolitan strategic plans since 2005 have referred to as, Sydney’s “global economic corridor”. This arc stretches from Port Botany and Sydney Airport through the CBD and North Sydney’s white collar employment precinct to the major knowledge economy hub at Macquarie Park\(^89\) (NSW Government 2014). The suggestion is that the identification of the corridor would “provide guidance for strategic infrastructure decisions”. But its existence in prominent plans also provides a kind of metaphorical resonance (Searle 2012) which may end up be significant in triggering the kinds of unexpected relationships and innovation mentioned above.

However, these relational spatial planning ideas are only the most obvious of relational concepts entering into planning thought. With this thesis’ focus on planning system reform, there is more interest in what “relational” and, its counterpoint “institutional” thinking, might offer as a means of better understanding planning system problems and their resolution.

3.4.3 Institutions, relational responses and planning system reform

In given situations, a certain set of institutions shape or influence both the “behaviour” and “policy preferences” of individuals (Bell 2002, p3). They condition opportunities and distribute power (unevenly) across social groups, privileging some while distancing or demobilising others (Hall and Taylor 1996, p94). We can think of current planning and democratic practices in Sydney as themselves institutionalised, reinforcing certain patterns of behaviour by actors and resistant to others. Chapter 2.4.2’s reference to the power of

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\(^{89}\) With the Metropolitan Strategy released in 2014, the corridor has become more amorphous, extending beyond Macquarie Park to Parramatta, the Olympic Precinct and the Hills District.
vocal minority objectors to shift government policy on affordable housing, based on what has been proven over time to be exaggerated fears (Davison 2013) is one example.

But how do the many efforts at reforming outmoded planning legislation, ineffective metropolitan strategic planning, bureaucratic silos, and cumbersome, politicised DA assessment systems over the last 20-30 years fit in? Institutional theory would suggest that as negotiation around change came into play (the negotiation process itself institutionalised), normatively-inclined innovations would be shackled, or even resisted completely, by established interests who would be disturbed by such change. The “rules of the game” in exploring and implementing reform, and involving “interested” public servants, political operatives, development interests and (where politics are so inclined) resident activists, would be motivated against normative change and in favour of already empowered interests. This line of thinking would take us to the view that it is the embedding of institutions, as constituted over time and mostly reinforced by relational actions, that have taken us to this setting of, say, planning and democracy “deficits”, and change to these institutions would need to be central to any transformative planning system reform (Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012).

When applied to reformist planning thinking, a relational-institutional lens elevates, to the primary level, this tendency for transformative innovations to be blocked by those already privileged. If, as is commonly the case, there is a tendency for reform episodes to focus on “bold stroke” style sectional changes (eg legislative changes or changes to bureaucratic structures), the relational-institutional viewpoint would see these as secondary, and likely to be illusory. Instead it would see the social rationalities and relationships, or “spaces between” the start of the reform process and the coming to any sectional decisions, as needing to be the central unit of analysis (Bradbury and Lichtenstein 2000, p551). This is because it is here that “different values and interests and concomitant power relations” are at play, and “particular individual and collective actors succeed or fail to imbue their values and interests” (Servillo and Van Den Broeck 2012, p56).

An example can be spelt out having regard to recommendations on new metropolitan-level governance structures, suggested by Gleeson, Dodson et al, (albeit with disclaimers) as a

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90 The term “spaces between” is used often in relational literature. It comes from theological philosopher Martin Buber. According to Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) Buber came to the view that meaning comes from what transpires between two people, and that this for example transcends rationality, and thus warranted its own special attention.
starting point for addressing city planning problems. As it happens, in June 2014 the NSW Premier announced a Greater Sydney Commission as an attempt at this. The relational-institutional lens would suggest that whether or not this structural change comes about is not the primary question. Transformative action which addresses the actual hindrances to improved metropolitan planning is in no way certain with a new metropolitan governance structure. Nor, under this thinking, is it impossible to address the hindrances within existing governance arrangements. The point is that without a shaking up of the institutional foundations, both the existing and “reformed” governance arrangements will be inclined to merely reflect already institutionalised interests.

So while a new metropolitan governance arrangement might provide a new horizon for change, the potential for real reform is a function of relational encounters between involved individuals and groups, mindful of: (1) the different values and reference frames they bring to the table initially, and then (2) how the struggles over differences play out, including to what extent opportunities for individual human action at odds with the current institutions are inspired. The question for reformist thinking under the relational-institutionalist lens thus becomes:

... a more specific inquiry into the circumstances in which a particular initiative in a specific situation has or might release transformative potential, and in which direction, and when, in contrast, it may merely act to reinforce and maintain established practices.

(Healey 2007b, p63)

3.5 Bringing the paradigms together

3.5.1 Theoretical connections

The four planning paradigms introduced earlier in this chapter (rational-technical, negotiative, neoliberal and collaborative) have evolved in response to societal influences over the past century or so. The planning deficit we face is less about the conceptions behind each of the paradigms. In fact, (as suggested in Chapter 3.3) each has something
distinctive to offer in regard to the contemporary challenge of sustainable development in cities. The problem is the institutional dynamics which surround the mobilisation of the paradigms in the world of practice. Existing institutions tend to misdirect planning thought and action from the somewhat ambiguous nominal objective of sustainable development as far as city planning is concerned. This is represented graphically at Figure 3.3. In turn, how relational-institutional thinking “fits in” in a theoretical sense is indicated at Figure 3.4. The idea is that the coupling of: (1) the drawing of attention to institutional blockers, and (2) the capacity to overcome them through relational approaches, opens the opportunity for planning thinking from any, or all, of the paradigms to be more effective.

![Figure 3.3 - Institutional resistance misdirects mainstream planning thought](image)

The point can also be made here that sustainable development is still only one option as far as the city planning “project” is concerned. That is, an awareness of institutional forces and attention to relational implications ships can be used strategically by any system actor. The
next subsection draws attention to the key types of attention and action which can direct relational-institutional thought towards planning system change in support of sustainable urban development.

3.5.2 Relational-institutional action in planning reform episodes

So this relational-institutional paradigm, applied to a planning system reform episode, is suggesting that (1) institutional structures would be generated and maintained or altered, in (2) the flow of relational interactions within the episode. The suggestion is that with suitable design of these interactions transformative opportunities can open up. A relational-institutional way of thinking seems to highlight three particular conceptions as important to reform design. The first is concerned with an orientation which in some streams of the literature underpins any intention for reform (Mouzelis 2001). This is the concept of reflexivity. The second is a process approach for reformist endeavours. This is Flyvbjerg’s (2002b) phronetic approach which foregrounds attention to the universal question of power. The third tackles the particular planning system dilemma of democratic processes, and the capacity for deliberation that might accompany them. Figure 3.5 presents these conceptions, graphically, as key themes to a relational-institutional “lens” for planning reform work.

![Figure 3.5 - Relational-institutional themes for planning reform episodes](image)

Each of the themes help put searching questions to system actors, and open up a different kind of exchange than business-as-usual (BAU) or institutionalised approaches to reform. They are outlined briefly below. Each come up for more detailed examination in the empirical research in Chapters 7-9 of this thesis.
**Reflexivity**

The aim of “relational interaction”, at least as referenced above, is to stimulate change in the rules of the game (including among antagonists) so as to mobilise opportunities for transformative innovations. Change like this doesn’t occur easily. So central here is the idea of something new happening which shifts perspectives or perceptions on the part of individuals or organisations. This “shifting” seems especially difficult in the “morbid political culture” previously suggested as enveloping planning today. The notion of “reflexivity” is mindful that these kinds of political settings are the norm (Giddens 1984, Gibbs 2013). A reflexive approach is entirely concerned with encouraging policy actors “to scrutinize and reconsider their (own) underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices” (Hendriks and Grin 2007, p333). One of the more effective ways to promote reflexivity is to expose institutional dysfunction (the evidence behind say the morbid political culture) itself to protagonists (Healey 2003).

If we now place ourselves in the situation of a concrete planning reform project, this is asking the reform project directors to question, learn and rethink factors which they, themselves, have historically taken for granted as they design and implement the reform episode. No easy job as these project directors would usually include government bureaucrats who are also directly caught up in intensely political, and hence contested, arenas in the background to any substantive reformist effort. The notion of reflexivity is, nonetheless, drawing attention to the centrality of this “self-inquiry” for reform sponsors, and thus the dilemma presents itself as a reform project is conceived. At the next level, reform project designers would “design-in” processes so other actors and groups, normally bound by institutional constraints (say developers or NIMBY groups used to relying on power relations) are stimulated to go through a similar experience.

**Phronetic Inquiry**

Flyvbjerg picks up on the suggestion that “our ambivalence about power” is among the biggest problems faced in planning research (Friedmann 1998, p249). While collaborative or communicative planning ideas assume “ideal speech” situations, Flyvbjerg suggests that in reality power is “inevitably” in the foreground of action and engagement around planning (Flyvbjerg 2002a, p353). Like Healey, Flyvbjerg is interested in the idea of exposition of
power at work, or the concept of “speaking truth to power”\textsuperscript{92}. His “phronetic”\textsuperscript{93} approach to the planning inquiry, puts forward a set of what he describes as “value-rational” questions: (1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What should be done? (Flyvbjerg 2002a, 2004b). Flyvbjerg’s case-work (ibid) seems to prove-up these questions as compelling tools for the opening up of new analytical perspectives for actors, through their explicit drawing of attention to power, values and “praxis” (practical action). The questioning approach he proposes has been evidenced to cause examination of universal values or “generic truths or laws about planning” to emerge naturally in the conversation-exchange (Flyvbjerg 2004a, p285).

*Lay citizen deliberation based on democratic principles*

Earlier in this chapter the importance of citizen involvement in “collaborative planning” was highlighted. This was the image of ordinary citizens coming together to discuss and reason in a fair and interactive process. But such processes can tend, themselves, to reinforce institutional settings through a natural tendency to involve those already active in the planning debate (“usual suspects”). One of the ways around this dilemma is to design participatory processes which factor in a requirement for democratic legitimacy. There is now a movement across many policy domains towards the involvement of randomly selected, but demographically representative, panels of citizens in policy debate involving conflicting interests (Carson 2011, Hendriks 2011). The particulars are discussed more fully later in this thesis where these kinds of “deliberative democracy” exercises become prominent in the casework investigations. But some underpinnings, insofar as the question of relational interaction qualities are concerned, are that: (1) the coming together of citizens itself involves reflexivity (eg learning and new reasoning), and (2) outcomes of deliberations are (somehow!) taken seriously by empowered decision-makers.

3.6 Conclusions

So how far does planning scholarship take us in considering system reform? This section has provided an outline of the shifts in planning thought over the last century or so. It presents a picture of planning (as a normative endeavour) struggling in a policy contest

\textsuperscript{92} See for example Wildavsky (1979) for an explanation.

\textsuperscript{93} From the classical Greek term “phronesis”, which according Flyvbjerg Aristotle used to in the description of human virtue. Phronesis was concerned with values and interests, and was differentiated from “episteme” which represented analytical/scientific knowledge, and “teche” which represented technical know-how (Flyvbjerg 2002a).
where the short term view, fragmented thinking and already privileged voices are prioritised over sustainable development objectives. Mainstream planning is useful in establishing spatial context and explaining what’s wrong in cities, as well as images for a better more sustainable future. The relational-institutional planning literature helps disentangle the factors involved in change and so brings a deeper understanding of the planning system problem. It suggests there is a futility to reform projects unless they take on embedded institutions, and that what matters here is the quality of relational interactions which are designed into the reform effort. There is also some guidance on how appropriate “design” might be characterised (Chapter 3.5.2). Where this work seems to be weakest is in linking these kinds of understandings, with how, in the world of practice, the suggestions might be mobilised, most likely in the face of direct resistance. This is important because the theoretical ideas discussed in this chapter may not be so clear (or comfortable) for system actors already deeply embedded within existing institutions.

So the situation has only partially advanced from that described by Lawhon and Murphy (2012) who suggested that conceptualisations of sustainable development usually tell us much more about “ends” than the socio-political “means” of actually achieving change. We are still missing an explanation of how one planning system beset with a range of persistent problems might over time change to another arrangement more capable of responding to these problems. The next section shifts to an examination of a different line of scholarly work, sustainability transitions theory, which is exclusively focused on what is involved in the steering of complex societal systems (like planning) to more sustainable trajectories.
Chapter 4  Transitions studies

4.1  Introduction

The problem of sustainable urban development, and the urban system changes required to achieve it, are at the core of this thesis. But this problem is not necessarily at the forefront in city planning, or its scholarship, as it competes with other sometimes more pressing challenges\textsuperscript{94}. For this thesis, what is different and interesting about the field of study explored in this chapter is that it is focused exclusively on transformative change of societal systems. Chapter 2’s tracing out of the history of Sydney’s urban settlement presented, overall, a story of social progress, with more persistent problems becoming evident over the last few decades only. The view underpinning transitions studies is that those same last few decades have seen something similar happen at a global scale. It paints the picture that global society is now entering a new stage. While rooted in unsustainable consumption and production patterns, a set of non-cyclical and worsening problems now encompass society as a whole (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010).

The suggestion is that without fundamental change to societal systems, these problems (in regard to energy, transport, housing, health, economic structures, food production, biodiversity etc), will become causal factors for serious social disruption into the future (Stern 2007, Garnaut 2008, Biermann, Abbott et al. 2012). In the past we have seen technology’s capacity to solve enormous societal problems. From a city planning viewpoint, the most evident has been that associated with transport. Chapter 2 showed this technology as a massive social equaliser in Sydney for the bulk of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It also showed how more recently we have seen the unintended environmental, economic and even social consequences of car dependence in Australian cities as population growth has continued. The transitions literature would see this as evidence in support of its hypothesis that due to the typology and scale of the problems, society can no longer rely on technological improvements alone as a response to today’s wider concerns (Kemp 1994, Berkhout 2002). The changes that are needed, in effect, require both technological and societal transformation. Under this thinking the reality of achieving what is required will depend on

\textsuperscript{94} Where it competes with topics like disciplined analysis and good design in land use and infrastructure decisions for greenfield areas, how best to balance new development and local amenity in established neighbourhoods, reducing cumbersome red-tape to free-up economic opportunity, etc.

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“the creation and institutionalisation of new, radically different societal rule sets and practices” (Schot 2014). The processes leading to the achievement of this goal have come to be termed socio-technical or sustainability transitions.

While still early days, transitions studies is supported by a growing international research community. There are positive trend lines in terms of publications and citations in major journals now averaging around 200 peer-reviewed articles per year (Markard, Raven et al. 2012, Markard 2014), numerous special editions in key journals and an array of (mostly European-based) case work. This chapter speaks to the third scholarly “task” suggested by Friedmann: to “translate concepts and knowledges in other fields into our own domain and render them accessible and useful for planning and its practice” (Friedmann 2008, p248). In other words, it is an attempt to translate transitions studies into the domain of city planning and its reform.

4.2 Overview of sustainability transitions theory

There is a considerable epistemology to the development of transitions scholarship which arises from a bridging of: complexity and complex systems theories, evolutionary economics, sociology, cultural theory, innovation studies, history and science and technology studies among other scholarship. Indeed a standpoint of transitions studies itself is the importance of the ongoing integration of knowledge from other disciplines into the study and theorisation of sustainability transitions. Transitions scholarship is described as comprising three different, but somewhat overlapping and highly interconnecting, paradigms or “pillars” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, Grin 2011): (1) the “socio-technical” paradigm which is focused mostly on transition dynamics and has science and technology studies, sociology and evolutionary theory as central supporting scholarship, (2) the “complex systems/process” paradigm is focused on the mechanisms for system change and relies on complex adaptive systems thinking, and integrated assessment.
among other scholarship, (3) while each are concerned with this, the “reflexive governance” paradigm focuses a particular attention on understanding transition dynamics in the real world and has relationships to political science, democracy studies and the like (ibid).

Each of these supporting pillars of transitions thinking come down to the same questions of how to understand and shape radical transitions to a sustainable society. (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p3). Here the term “radical” is concerned with the scope of change not the speed. Transitions research suggests that this transformation is not a short term exercise and that it is reasonable to think of this radical transition process as taking a generation or two (25-50 years). The suggestion is that in most cases the change effort will falter in the face of resistance. But when successful, the societal system will have shifted to better respond to internal circumstances and externalities through arriving at “a higher order of organisation and complexity”100 (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p108). Each of the three paradigms are introduced below.

## 4.3 Socio-technical paradigm

The socio-technical paradigm in transitions thinking is particularly focused on understanding the dynamics of system change101. When transition scientists talk of societal systems here it is the idea of the energy, transport, housing, communication system and the like. That is, the “cluster of elements, including technology, regulations, user practices and markets, cultural meanings, infrastructure, maintenance networks and supply networks” that envelop each (Elzen, Geels et al. 2004, p3). Here, transitions is interested in the dynamics of how one or more of these societal systems shift from one state to a new radically transformed state. The city planning system is unusual in that can be considered as both a societal domain in its own right but also as one of the factors influencing and being influenced by the other system domains outlined above.

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100 In contrast it can be noted that the approach to “transforming” the planning system for Sydney, as explored in Chapter 5, was to look for ways to reduce the system complexity.
101 In transitions studies societal systems are described as “socio-technical” in recognition of the centrality of interaction between technological, including planning infrastructures, and social life.
4.3.1 Multi-level perspective

Geels (eg 2011) has explored the dynamics of historical shifts in numerous otherwise stable socio-technical regimes in the building of the theory of the multi-level perspective\(^\text{102}\) (MLP). The MLP is one of the core ideas in transitions studies. It provides an explanation of the stability of societal systems and the complex factors involved in change. It explains three conceptual levels of activity within a system, as a heuristic device, to help focus on the interlinkages between different roles, actions and institutions (Lawhon and Murphy 2012). These are: the “regime” as the central level, then the “niche” and “landscape” levels below and above, respectively, in a nested hierarchy (Figure 4.1)\(^\text{103}\).

![Figure 4.1 - Multi-levels as a nested hierarchy (edited version of Figure 3 in Geels 2002)](image)

**Regime level**

The stability of the system is explained by the concept of the socio-technical *regime*, the most ubiquitous of the levels of activity in a system. The regime is thought of as a “conglomerate” of three factors: (1) structure (institutional and physical setting), (2) culture (prevailing perspectives), and (3) practices (rules, routines and habits) (Grin, Rotmans et al, p108). In the regular turn of societal events regimes remain “dynamically stable” (Geels and Schot 2007, p406). That is, stable regimes are subject to dynamics (eg variations to policy settings and even changes in government) but only within “stable rule-sets”. So under this thinking, these regime dynamics proceed along predictable rather than any kind of transformative trajectories (ibid). So the idea of a “sustainability transition” is that, as a

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\(^{102}\)Geels historical interpretive research has been cross-sectoral, including across the following fields: land transport, shipping, sewers and sanitation, clean water, aviation, highway systems and industrial production (Geels 2011, p29).

\(^{103}\) Sometimes described as “macro”, “mesa” and “micro” levels.
consequence of a coming together of some extra ordinary set of events, locked-in regimes become destabilised and are shifted to new (more sustainable) trajectories\textsuperscript{104}.

\textit{Considering the Sydney Planning Regime}

It seems useful here to consider how one might relevantly characterise what can be suggested as the regime which overarches planning in Sydney. Urban regime theory provides some initial framing thoughts in its description of what has been seen as a privileged position of business in urban policy including planning decisions. The notion is that there has been an “enduring form of cooperation” and “coordinated action” between city government and business sector actors (Majoor and Salet 2012) which reflects a socio-political recognition of the capital investment and taxation income it provides (Davies 2002). Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) paint the picture more descriptively: “government officials know that failure of businesses to maintain high employment … will upset voters more quickly and surely than about anything else”. Certainly there would be actors involved in the Sydney planning system reform project featured in Chapter 8 who believe this setting needs to remain intact.

However, the setting for planning in Sydney has at least two important disconnects with urban regime theory. First is in relation to the misalignment of interests between the two major tiers of government involved in planning. While State government would recognise, say, business and the development/building sector as crucial aspects of the wider economy, in Sydney many of the routine decisions are taken at local government level. Local government rarely gives weight to the fiscal benefits of new development when in political stoushes over, say, more infill (Cook 2012). Indeed with State government’s recent capping of infrastructure charges sought by councils from developers, and longer term general capping of local government property taxes (ie “rate”-capping), there can be a financial disincentive on local government to support new development\textsuperscript{105}.

Second, is the broader point of the increasing diffusion of power in modern society (Meadowcroft 2007). Government itself is heavily fragmented with both vertical and horizontal layering highly evident. The government decision making system for planning can involve three levels of government, and line agencies within at least two of these tiers

\textsuperscript{104} There is an obvious link between “regimes” and the “institutions” described in the previous section. Under transitions thinking, institutions act to reinforce stability and resist any (transformational) shift in regimes.

all having voices, and differing interests. Development industry interests are strong but not necessarily aligned, with some segments more supportive of greenfield development over infill, and others the reverse. Wider industry lobbies, NGOs, environmental groups and social associations are also actors in the planning regime, ranging from grass roots “save our suburbs” campaigners to affordable housing, active transport and public health advocates. The media exerts important influence on the public debate at all scale levels, and has potential for an expanding role with the increasingly ubiquitous nature of social media. “Intermediaries” (eg consultants, think-tanks, academics) liaising between actor groups are also suggested as playing an increasing part in “re-ordering” the social and institutional relationships involved in the regime (Guy, Marvin et al. 2012, p xiv).

Figure 4.2 provides a graphic representation of this notion of regime, as interpreted from my own experiences in the planning system in Sydney. It indicates the key institutional actors, their connections, and an indication of the power relations involved in these connections, which would vary (within certain limits) over time and space.

![Figure 4.2 - Sketch of “regime” which overarches planning system in Sydney](image-url)
The “dynamically-stable” regime can be illustrated with a practical example. It might be expected that there would be a considerable drive within the Sydney planning regime favouring a move to a more compact city. This could reflect perceived: lower infrastructure costs, better accounting for environmental inheritance (progressive societal interests), maximising property values (property owners and developers), more diverse and affordable housing (new entrants to housing market and varied lifestyle interests), improved competitiveness and agglomeration economics (knowledge economy proponents). However, there are equally powerful regime drivers which limit urban intensification to current levels. These forces would include local resident concerns about loss of amenity or negative effects on property values, political perceptions of a deeply embedded and widespread community resistance to housing density, accompanied by a fear on the part of government of being seen to be too close to development interests. There is tension and dynamics within the regime. For example, there would be instances of shifts in urban density and activity in certain less resistant locations (eg along major transport corridors), or, on occasions visionary local community actors would arise and be more welcoming of intensification in established suburbs. But it seems fair to conclude that such events occur within the bounds of stable “rule sets” and proceed in predictable directions, which need not have any relationship to wider societal goals like achieving sustainable urban development patterns.

**Niche level**

Niches are innovation incubators, or places for cultivation of promising alternatives to existing practices. It is from niche level activity that, from time to time, innovations “emerge” and “co-evolve” with related activity, and then diffuse, “to create ‘configurations that work’ ” (Geels 2010, p495). There are already many examples of niche level activity which are relevant to the challenge of more sustainable development, and the particular subset of that challenge which focuses on shifts in city planning. In regard to Australian-based work the “3-horizons” work of Newton (2007) has already been referenced (Chapter 3.3.2) as an integrated conceptualisation of a “pipeline” of innovations required over-time in different domains of activity. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has the particular role of encouraging research in niche topics related to cities and

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106 For example the Lighter Footprints neighbourhood action group from Boroondara and Whitehouse municipalities in Melbourne has climate change as its key interest and has made regular submissions supporting housing intensification in local precinct plans.
housing. One example is the work of Newton, Murray et al (2011) under AHURI’s Investigative Panel concept\textsuperscript{107}. One of the reasons this project is of interest here is that it is one of the relatively few planning investigations in Australia that have been undertaken mindful of transitions concepts\textsuperscript{108}. This project developed a new “process” model intended to help open up a comprehensive pathway to housing intensification to assist in more sustainable growth management. This research focused on “greyfields”\textsuperscript{109} precincts in middle suburban Melbourne - a band of well-located, established suburbs that are resistant to significant regenerative change. The model identifies and explains eight distinct and interconnected areas where innovation and transformation is needed to effect the intended changes:

- Urban policy
- Shared urban spatial information systems
- Construction and labour force innovations
- Planning/approval process/codes
- Urban renewal organisations
- Design models for precincts
- Finance models
- Proactive community engagement.

Including through consideration of more ad-hoc or disconnected innovative conceptualisations, this work derived a planned, interdisciplinary network of niche-level domains which might come together to deliver more compact and sustainable living in greyfield precincts. The greyfield project concepts are continuing with precinct-specific work (Newton 2015).

\textbf{Landscape Level}

In the MLP, the landscape level is characterised as the broader exogenous environment. The key determinant of a landscape level feature is that it is “beyond the direct influence of regime or niche actors” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p23). The landscape represents macro level trends and provides associated barriers and occasional “windows of opportunity” for sustainability transitions. The landscape, in transitions conceptions, is multi-faceted. Factors

\textsuperscript{107} The Investigative Panel is a deliberative and collaborative research approach supported by AHURI which seeks to practically engage established experts from industry, academia, government, community and other stakeholders in a research question (AHURI 2009). This approach is particularly aligned with the integration of learned research and the pragmatics of urban system mechanics ie “learning by doing and doing by learning approach” promoted in the transition management literature (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010).

\textsuperscript{108} Another centre of study of socio-technical transitions in the Australian context at the time of writing is the Water for Liveability Centre at Monash University, under the direction of Professor Rebekah Brown.

\textsuperscript{109} Newton (2010) describes greyfield residential precincts as “under-utilised property assets located in the middle suburbs of large Australian cities, where residential building stock is failing (physically, technologically and environmentally) and energy, water and communications infrastructure is in need of regeneration. Greyfields are usually occupied and privately owned sites typical of urban development undertaken from the 1950s to the 1970s”. 
of relevance to sustainable city planning would include global (and local) oil price shifts, macro-economic trends and their relationships to the capacity for government interventions over time, the manifestations of major environmental effects like climate change. Chapter 2, for example, traced the history of major exogenous and endogenous drivers of change in Sydney over time. It also referred to evidence of a more recent market trend away from larger, car-dependent, fringe-located housing towards more accessible and smaller housing. This is suggested to be due to a shift in value/lifestyles on the part of consumers (J. F. Kelly 2011). So here a contingent landscape level trend, affecting “consumer choice” in Sydney, happens to have a trajectory which is supportive of sustainable urban development principles.

**The MLP at work**

As we know from repeated efforts at planning system reform, transitions do not occur so easily, and according to the MLP, they require a coming together of a suitable set of events (or “trajectories”), both within levels and between the three levels described above (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p18). Figure 4.3 provides a depiction of how the three levels interact over a time period, as an “intricate web” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p109) to effect a sustainability transition. It notes a dependence on the alignment of trajectories across the levels. That is, the requirement for momentum across innovative projects at the niche level, and landscape level processes individually, and together, building pressure on regime. Together this affects regime stability and opens it up to the opportunity for new configurations (Geels 2011). A “circular” rather than linear causality is at work here according to transitions thinking. That is, no individual factor would bring about the transition. Instead “… there are processes in multiple dimensions and at different levels which link up with, and reinforce, each other” (p28).

The MLP provides a framework to help unravel how elements at different levels interact in producing stability or change. It is aiming to assist in understanding precursors, patterns and mechanisms which together might lead to the building of pressures within regimes. For example the MLP suggests that niche level trajectories are more likely to emerge through a sequence of projects which together can provide for: (1) an *upscaling* (“more and larger projects linking to wider processes”); (2) a *deepening* (“articulation of rules/best practices by aggregating lessons and circulating ideas and people between projects”, and (3) a *broadening* (“include more actors, expand application domains”) (Geels and Raven 2006).
These challenges of upscaling, deepening and broadening can be thought of in relation to the AHURI greyfield project, described above, and its capacities and limitations in regard to innovation emergence and regime level shifts in planning for infill housing in metropolitan settings. That project already adopts a strategic perspective in its problem conception (eg by integrating a range of “planning” and “non-planning” actions), but the MLP might also help in thinking more strategically about (“unravelling”) more and less effective individual niche innovations relevant to the challenge of additional infill housing, but also in relation to interplay with other levels in the governance hierarchy.

4.3.2 Multi-phase concept

Transitions studies also brings a temporal perspective, describing a transition as involving four alternating phases of relatively faster and slower dynamics (Kemp and Rotmans 2009,
Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p126), which are part of the picture in Figure 4.3, but depicted more clearly in Figure 4.4 below.

![Figure 4.4 - Multi-phase concept (Source Loorbach 2012)](image-url)

The four stages can be summarised as follows:

**Pre-development stage**: where regimes act as inhibitors and as a force to maintain existing norms and belief systems. At this stage innovative actors are exploring, keeping options open and encouraging discourse. In terms of planning system reform thinking this stage would be taken up with disjointed exploratory work in fields like: technology advances (design and construction), government agency relations, community consultation approaches, regulatory changes like “red tape” reduction, policy conceptualisations around say transport, jobs, housing affordability, environment, along with more concentrated interest group lobbying. All this usually occurring mostly in the background.

**Take-off stage**: where the process of change becomes more appealing and picks up momentum, often due to exogenous or landscape disturbances as much as the build-up of niche activity. For planning system reform thinking this might include a widening array of institutional and social interests in favour of major system change, or a major political change. Breakthroughs spark government interest which helps release and network innovative practices. Impetus grows for and previously perceived impediments are seen as lesser constraints.

**Acceleration stage**: where promising actions are selecting out, upscaling, deepening and broadening. Structural changes become visible. The regime moves to an enabling role
through say the application of capital and innovation (Grin 2010). For planning system thinking there is ongoing innovation in structures, practices, infrastructures. These changes are reinforcing cultural-cognitive shifts within the “planning society”. New institutional approaches are normalising.

Stabilisation stage: where a new state of equilibrium is reached, consolidates, regularises then stabilises. The dynamic process would then continue within a new regime, which in regard to the planning system is better positioned to address the urban problems raised in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Concentrated planning system reform episodes might have grand ambitions, but in this thinking they are only part of a bigger multi-level dynamic structure.

4.4 Complex integrated systems paradigm (& transition management)

At the start of this this section it was indicated that transitions studies is based on three core pillars, or paradigms. The socio-technical paradigm (outlined above) uses, in particular, the study of historical transitions to build knowledge. We now turn to the second paradigm, which is concerned with what the study of systems tells us. There are two main theory lines which have built this pillar of transitions thinking (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p105). The first is that of integrated sustainability assessment studies. This field has come about, particularly, as concerns about the sustainability of global systems have risen over the past 40 years or so. It recognises the Earth itself as an integrated system and, as far as a sustainable future is concerned, it emphasises a need to consider social, economic and ecological processes as an integrated whole. In transitions thinking, and as questions of changes to institutions are concerned, it emphasises the futility of attending to this question in a piecemeal fashion. As this area of study has “co-evolved” (see below) with societal interest and responsiveness, participatory processes have become more central.

Complexity theory is the second building block of this part of transitions scholarship. It brings a range of ideas on how systems, that might appear stable, are in fact in a constantly

dynamic state. Complex adaptive systems cannot be controlled, but it is known that they are in a continuous process of adaption in response to their changing environment, and internal effects. The study of these adaptive processes, it is suggested, can give insights on how complex societal systems might be steered in one direction or another. Concepts of co-evolution, self-organisation, and emergence are prominent in this line of thinking. They all suggest that when circumstances are right, initial small change in a system can have a major impact in the long run (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p144). Due to its later relevance, the system thinking construct I will describe in a little more detail is the idea of attractors. In systems research “strong attractors” act as “magnetic forces” inclining complex systems away from stability and into novel trajectories (not necessarily towards sustainability of course). Two points seem to have particular relevance when thinking about planning system reform: (1) attractors vary as to their (magnetic) strength, and (2) attractors are particularly active, and more or less only influential, in periods of disequilibrium. The time around a major organised planning system reform episode can, naturally, be thought of as a period of relative disequilibrium for that system. Questions then remain as to the strength of different attractors and the extent that each might consciously, or unconsciously, come into play in a system reform effort.

Beyond these (important) abstract conceptions the complex integrated systems paradigm includes an important heuristic framework which has more concrete application. This is transition management.

4.4.1 Transition management

If the MLP is concerned with understanding the dynamics of transformative societal change, transition management (TM) is concerned with the pragmatic steering of transitions towards it. TM has advanced the more abstract theoretical concepts found throughout the sustainability transitions literature into a descriptive and semi-prescriptive approach to use in attempts to deliberately steer system, and ultimately societal, transition in the real world. Planning system reform projects are thought of as efforts to steer system change so TM is of particular interest to this thesis.

Koppenjan, Frantzeskaki et al (2012, p9) describe the primary scope of transition management as:
... to mobilise actors for taking action for change, to explore and develop innovative alternatives that can enable fundamental change, and to experiment (at small scale) with actor-network configurations for visioning and/or committing to actions that relate to sustainability.

Transition management (including the very term) has been given “political expression” (Meadowcroft 2005, p483) in the Netherlands, a country with strong roots in strategic planning and egalitarian and consensual approaches to stakeholder involvement (Hajer 1995). It has been adopted as an important explicit device to solve major environmental problems, specifically in that country’s Fourth National Environmental Policy Plan (NMP4) which was adopted in 2001 (Smith and Kern 2009). NMP 4 identifies seven important environmental problems resultant from “system faults”, and a management path to overcoming these obstacles (VROM 2001). The NMP4 was produced by the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, in coalition with other ministries. The steps leading to its adoption in 2002 reveal strong political leadership and (eventual) acknowledgement of failings of existing policy approaches within the civil service. The recognition of the need for innovation to achieve sustainable development, brought together (in particular) economic and environmental ministries of the Dutch government. Over time, “ideas for radical, system level change were slowly percolating into policy narratives” within ministries and in joint working parties (Smith and Kern 2009, p11). External support from business and academic perspectives was then called into the process which eventually led to the foregrounding of the transitions management approach in NMP4 (VROM 2001). Subsequently, Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs has funded a broad range of projects (organised by coalitions of stakeholders) to explore different dimensions of transition paths (Meadowcroft 2005, Kemp and Rotmans 2009).

The transition management framework

Under transition management thinking, the basic challenge at a system level is that of redefining111: (1) culture (especially the appreciation of socio-cultural implications for achieving shared long term goals), (2) structure (especially to assist in reconstruction of institutions to improve innovation and integration in governance approaches) and (3) practices (especially with the intent of introducing or operationalising new and innovative “structures” and “cultures”) (Loorbach 2010). Transition management theory suggests that

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111 These three system elements were also drawn to attention in the socio-technical paradigm, but here there is a shift to more explicit points of attention concerned with active steering towards sustainability transitions.
interactive, co-operative design and social learning is crucial for taking on this challenge (Loorbach 2010). One of the vehicles for this kind of co-design and learning is described as a “transition arena”. Under transition management a group of influential and visionary frontrunners from different backgrounds, but sharing an interest in long term sustainable development, forms into this transition arena (Loorbach 2010, p175). The arena is concerned with shifting the dominant regime, and acts from outside of the regime boundaries (and direct influences). It does so through the building up of a network of change agents who are committed to the same sustainability vision and work away on pathways towards achievement of transition. The need for influential arenas outside of regular policy networks is a response to the concern that regular networks are dominated by incumbents whose self-interests block radical change, and that such blocking regularly affects the capacity of parliaments to bring about transformative change (Meadowcroft 2005). As discussed in Chapter 3, the planning system is not immune to such settings.

The “transition management cycle” provides the suggested framework within which a transition arena works. It is shown in Figure 4.5. There are four “activity clusters” in the cycle which can be summarised below (Rotmans and Loorbach 2009, Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010).

![Transition management cycle](image)

*Figure 4.5 - Transition management cycle. (Source: Loorbach 2010, Figure 1)*
1. **Strategic activity**: setting up the problem frame (“shared conceptualization of the system at hand and the problems it is confronted with”) and purposefully establishing a group of individuals as a transition arena. Individuals involved in the arena would be creative minds, visionaries and long-term in outlook, who are active and have some capacity to influence at different levels of the domain (including a capacity to bring about change). A vision\(^{112}\) is created and outline pathways are defined.

2. **Tactical**: agenda building, negotiating, existing networks called upon to participate, new coalitions formed.

3. **Operational**: create diversity by designing and implementing experimental projects that are related to the vision, highly innovative/ground-breaking.

4. **Monitoring/evaluation** – monitoring progress/backlash, repeatability, capacity for validation. Select promising projects for upscaling. Adjusting visions and pathways and the cycle starts again.

A crucial point of emphasis is that fundamental change is the intended goal, and as such should be “engrained in all transition management activities” (Jhagroe and Loorbach 2015, p68). This is reflected in the conception of transition arenas, and their distinctions from mainstream policy arenas (see Figure 4.6).

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\(^{112}\) Visioning is a matter of deep consideration in transition thinking. Here it is not of the blueprint variety but would contain “multiple future images and a diversity of pathways”, which refine over time in an “evolutionary process of variation and selection assessed on what has been learned so far” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p336)
While regular policy arenas, certainly in the planning domain, are inclined to focus on short term outlooks, including the confines of election cycles, transition arenas are focused on the long term. Transition arenas adopt a selective process but instead of the “usual suspects”, they involve “frontrunners”. The frontrunner concept follows again from complexity theory:

... frontrunners are agents with the capacity to generate dissipative structures and operate within deviant structures. They can only do that without being (directly) dependent on the structure, culture and practices of the regime. (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p144)

Under transitions theory, frontrunners have a capacity to think and act independently of the incumbent regime, but at the same time retain connections with it. They are: “creative minds, strategists, visionaries”, and “particular change-inclined regime actors” (ibid). Selected frontrunners, who would represent a variety of backgrounds and interests, are introduced to a protected space and work under the framework of the transition management cycle. While acting outside the regime, the transition arena is about building a base for support with some considerable power (ie beyond that which the individuals within the arena could marshal individually):

... it requires the arena to develop a political capacity for positioning itself favourably in the light of ongoing processes, mobilising support, influencing agendas, and redirecting investments and other commitments away from incremental repair work, and towards more radical transition goals.

(Smith and Stirling 2008, p17)

While transitions arenas themselves are crucial in TM, given the steering role they play, they are not thought of as authoritarian. The approach is suggested as combined “hands-on and hands-off tactics and techniques” (Jhagroe and Loorbach 2015, p67). Transition arenas both support, and are reliant on, other actors and (micro) groups, showing resourcefulness and bringing forward new initiatives and contextualised knowledge through experiments. While a macro-vision on sustainability is at the core, beyond this the complex systems principle of “guided variation and selection” dominates prescriptive or top-down approaches and cautions about “picking winners” too early:
(Guided variation and selection) is rooted in the notions of diversity and coherence within complexity theory. Diversity helps avoid rigidity within the system; without it, the system could respond flexibly to changes in its environment. Coherence refers to the level of interrelatedness among the entities of a complex system. ... Rather than selecting innovations in a too early stage, we keep options open to learn about the pros and cons of available alternatives before making a selection. Through experimenting, we can reduce some aspects of the high level of uncertainty, which leads to better informed decisions.

(Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p144)

For some, just the notion of “transition management” is seen as bringing an important contribution to the initiation of an optimistic or hopeful setting, commonly otherwise beset by persistent problems and deep cynicism (Smith, Voß et al. 2010, Meadowcroft 2011). Given the cynicism which it can evoke, there is benefit in framing the sustainable city challenge with the purposive, but also explorative, notion of working through a transition process. As an example this can bring an opportunity to capture latent aspirational intent of actors without an overpowering confrontation about immediate effects. The transition management scholarship does not suggest itself as a fix-all, and accepts as a starting point the inherent complexity and deep socio-structural causes of environmental problems.

Because there are no ready-made solutions for persistent problems, we can only explore promising future options and directions. Managing transitions therefore implies searching, learning and experimenting. As such, transition management is a quest, not a recipe for robust solutions.

(Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p108-9)

Transition management can be seen as an extension of changing approaches to policy-making over recent decades, sometimes described as a shift “from government to governance”\(^\text{113}\). It is characterised as a response to decreasing capacities of central government to implement policy. While policy setting capacities in more authoritarian settings are different, modern liberal democracies are characterised as network societies

\(^{113}\) For example, “From Government to Governance: The Auckland Experience” was the title of a seminar at the Australian Centre for Excellence in Government at UTS on 2 October 2014, presented by Dr Andy Asquith of University of New Zealand.
“that are not governed from the centre, but by the disjointed activities of a variety of public, semi-public and private parties at different societal levels” (Joop Koppenjan, Niki Frantzeskaki et al. 2012, p9). Transition management is at one level just seeking to make this less formal network process more effective, while also shifting its attention on long term change in society towards sustainable development (Loorbach 2010).

**Strategic Niche Management**

Strategic niche management (SNM) is focused on niche level activity alone. The term captures the transition management idea that sustainability innovations can be facilitated by the creation of spaces which actively facilitate incubation, nurturing, experimentation and co-evolution of innovations at the niche level. Strategic thought and action are seen to have a capacity to move “hopeful monstrosities”\(^{114}\) on from being bound by established technologies, user practices and regulatory structures through to a new acceptance and onwards to assist a broader societal shift to more sustainable outcomes (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p80). The literature includes information on matters such as: (1) actual niche creation processes, (2) conditions that promote or hinder this process (including different landscape and regime level influences such as actor practices and regulatory structures, politics), and (3) what works and what doesn’t in terms of strategic stimulation of niches with potential to bring effects to incumbent regimes (Caniëls and Romijn 2008).\(^{115}\)

4.4.2 Transition management and project context

In the planning system reform sphere, transition management can be thought of as a semi-coordinated approach to the development of system innovation that would occur somewhat detached from the mainstream of reform activity. In a “purest” interpretation, it would create space for front-runners at the edges of the planning regime, with some sense of shared direction, to work on innovations in forming new arenas, coalitions and networks. These actors would share an interest in a planning system shift which foregrounded long term transitions towards more sustainable urban development patterns. The strategic efforts by assorted actors would then, over time, build pressure on regular policy and transformative changes to the pre-existing planning regime. The transition management research and the conceptual frames that have evolved would provide assistance in

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\(^{114}\) “‘Hopeful’ because they look promising and ‘monstrosities’ because they have crude performance” (Raven and Geels 2010, p87)

\(^{115}\) The Caniëls and Romijn (2008) paper comprises a systematic compilation and analysis of SNM literature to that point in time, including detailed references.
optimising the potential of the initiatives undertaken. It is not as if there is not already forces of creativity and influence at work across the planning regime (eg consultation specialists, designers, urban economists, lawyers, local government, state govt, NGOs/cross govt, academe). Important individual initiatives and opportunities aside, past failures seem to suggest a lack of effective coordination and networking of front running actors and structures, and an overall regime setting which has been unable to respond to the problem complexity in planning system reform efforts.

4.5 Governance paradigm

So far an explanation has been provided of two of three paradigms (or pillars) of transitions studies. The third paradigm focuses exclusively on governance and draws particular attention to the idea of agency. The term “agency” is used here in respect to its meaning in sociology were it refers to the capacity of a person (or any other entity) to “act”, in different environmental settings. Under this thinking, any action by an agent occurs within a given social structure, which may either limit or encourage particular forms of action. There is a creative tension between structure and agency (“structuration”) and one of the major debates in sociology is that over the primacy of structure and agency in social settings(Giddens 1984). So in a planning reform exercise it might be the question of whether existing institutions will: (1) dominate sustainability-oriented innovations generated in the course of the exercise (structure has primacy); or (2) actor groups (or individuals) either from within the regime or elsewhere bring sufficient persuasive force to overcome these institutions (agency has primacy). One thing that is agreed in this debate, is that the power to exhibit agency within a given structure is directly related to the amount of reflexivity (introduced in Chapter 3) which is exhibited by the agent (Giddens 1984). The linking of governance and agency in this particular transitions paradigm reflects the idea that societal transition will, to an extent, depend on the technical competence/understandings of individuals mixed in with their creative spirit or “zivilcourage”116 (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p315).

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116 Zivilcourage is a German term which was historically differentiated (by Bismarck) from the idea of courage in the battlefield (suggested to be more common!). This suggestion recognises the particular complications involved in citizens stepping out beyond day-to-day concerns and exposing themselves to risk to pursue altruistic societal objectives (Swedberg 1999).
4.5.1 Situatedness, learning and exposure to difference

Learning on the part of system actors is one of the key requirements for reflexive behaviour (valued as it is for its capacity to place pressure on existing structures which tend to impede sustainability transitions). Here learning is about an enduring change to the interpretive frames which actors are using. This is not something so easy to achieve. Calling on the work of Schön and Rein (1994), a particular point of emphasis here is the importance of exploiting the “situatedness” of policy problems as a means of stimulating learning. It is acknowledging the point that policy problems are usually only seen through the actors’ own frames, often already influenced (strategically) by vested interests. The suggestion is that it is the very exposure of the “situatedness of the controversy” that promotes frame reflection and learning by actors (ibid p176). For planning reform exercises this is suggesting the importance of encouraging stakeholder groups to, in a sense, be forced into the complex situatedness of planning system reform dilemmas. For example, rather than being left to the luxury of a simplified version of the problem as experienced through a limited frame (“giving vested interests too much room” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p281)) actors would be forced into situations where the other viewpoints are expressed (sometimes fiercely).

The challenge is similar to that raised when considering the implementation of relational-institutional planning ideas. That is, how to design processes that can be encouraging of this kind of reflexive activity. But there are insights from empirical work based on this transitions scholarship which might help this design process. These insights are: (1) the crucial role of outsiders in such processes (who appropriately combine “distance and proximity”) (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p279), (2) providing for a separation between policy analysis and policy-making practice (“social interaction and intellectual cogitation” (A. Wildavsky 1979)\textsuperscript{117}) – or the idea of also allowing for outsiders (and insiders) to have the space to work on the puzzle away from core interactive arena events, before using this “cogitation” to shed new light back within the arena itself, and (3) that consensus is not the quest, rather it is that various aspects of a strategy seem sensible and can be accepted as adequate in the fulsomeness of the learning process that has been occurring. This is about “recognising(ing) the concerns of problem-owners” and empathising with their essence rather than trade-off based giveaways (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p280).

\textsuperscript{117} As quoted in (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p279)
4.5.2 Taking politics into account

It is the governance perspective that takes politics most into account in these three transitions paradigms. This is the question of how sustainability transitions might be steered in the “contemporary world of politics, where roles are increasingly ambiguous and power dispersed” (Hendriks and Grin 2007, p333). On the one hand there is the suggestion that some transition thinking sees politics as “a bother” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p235). This is concerned with the effects of its short-termist perspectives on what are long term questions of policy design for sustainability. The governance perspective, while noting the complex relationship between democracy, politics and sustainability policy design, is acknowledging the risks in avoiding the topic. It is calling for better ways to foster productive interfaces between democracy, governance and transition management (Hendriks 2009). Questions of politics and power are discussed from below as criticisms of transitions theory.

4.6 Criticisms and limitations of transitions scholarship relevant to planning systems

Sustainability transitions theory is relatively new and has many interesting theoretical crossovers. In turn there is no shortage of criticisms in the literature, most of which are self-described as having “constructive” intent. Three areas of criticism are particularly pertinent to this thesis: two are associated with transferability limitations, one is concerned with an underplaying of power in transitions conceptions.

4.6.1 Technology Emphasis

While the transitions scholarship claims broad societal system interests, a limitation which is often suggested is that there has been some difficulty in extending out from the scholarly origins in technology innovation. To date transitions scholarship has been mostly focused on energy systems, transport technologies, infrastructures and the like. The problem suggested here is that the conceptual constructs may be inherently and structurally unsuitable to less technology oriented societal shifts (like those involving planning systems). An extensive review of the academic literature by Markard, Raven et al (2012), who examined over 500 articles on transitions in peer-reviewed journals, has confirmed that energy is by far the dominant sector of attention in transitions-related articles (at 36% of all papers). What’s suggested to be weak or missing as a consequence is an understanding of the social context around which sustainability transitions might occur. Responses to this
criticism point to instances where the research has been applied beyond technology transformation to wider societal system transformation (Rotmans, Loorbach et al. 2007, p10, Geels 2011, Grin 2012). We have also seen its application in the water sector in Australia, in what are rare applications of transitions scholarship in this country (Ferguson, Brown et al., Bos and Brown 2012, Bos, Brown et al. 2013, Ferguson, Frantzeskaki et al. 2013). These researchers have already in part responded to the suggested need for more studies that move beyond artefacts and towards the analysis of social processes and “identify points of conflict or complementarity between landscape (level) features” like “societal norms, values, … economic characteristics, niche innovations and desired changes in socio-technical regimes” (Lawhon and Murphy 2012, p361). This thesis is also seeking to assist in testing how transitions ideas translate to non-technology oriented contexts and in domains dominated by complex social processes. So testing, for example, whether and how innovations in techniques involved in planning system reform, might be able to be aligned to innovation in technologies which have been more at the hub of transitions research to date.

4.6.2 Geographical naiveté

On a related matter of focus, critics suggest that the transitions literature to date gives insufficient emphasis to the relationship between different spatial contexts and transition prospects, with spatial settings too often set as a passive background variable (Truffer 2008, Späth and Rohracher 2010, Lawhon and Murphy 2012, Truffer and Coenen 2012). The suggestion is that what’s missing is a focus on “territorial embeddedness (which) helps in disclosing the institutional contingencies and particularities of the various contexts where transitions take place” (Coenen, Benneworth et al. 2012, p976). In some settings a foregrounding of such issues is seen as critical to improving the prospects for more sustainable pathway, as without due focus there will be failure to translate theoretical ideas into effective strategies within local settings (Lawhon and Murphy 2012). The Markard study showed that the peer-reviewed literature demonstrated in respect to geography and scale respectively: a substantial European bias, and that the bulk of the studies applied a national focus (at 38%, compared to about 6% each for “regional” or “urban” scale)(Markard, Raven et al. 2012). A limited search of articles in major urban planning-related journals, undertaken directly for this work, seems to confirm my own observation.

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[^This is for the most part connected with Australia’s Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, which has developed strong connections with transitions research. See http://watersensitivecities.org.au/. Accessed 16/11/2015.]
that transition research has not yet been very evident in this field, either internationally or for the Oceania-region\textsuperscript{119}. As an example of an examination of transitions studies in the explicit domain of the urban planning system, and in an Australian metro setting, this thesis provides the opportunity to further expose the transitions conceptions into these particular institutional and spatial domains. This research also seeks to link to the widening research on the role of cities in sustainability transitions (a relationship seen as important by Bulkeley, Broto et al. 2010, Hodson and Marvin 2010, Coenen and Truffer 2012).

4.6.3 Questions about power relations, elitism and democracy

A more complex tension within the research is that between: (1) substantive societal change as the central research goal, and (2) fair decision-making about how this might occur. The transition management methodology prescribes leadership roles for “front runners” and other elite actors in decision-making, including in regard to “vision” and agenda setting and in the planning of transition projects. That is, by members of a “transition arena”, the composition and constitution of which is flexible but sitting somewhere between a top down and bottom up ideology. Critics can be accepting of the conundrum at hand but unconvinced or cautionary about the current capacities of the transitions scholarship to adequately address the problem. Shove (2007) queries the legitimacy of the selective participatory processes envisaged for transition arenas and asks “on what authority and on whose behalf do they act? … when and how are goals (subject to critical scrutiny) and by whom” (p764-5).

Hendricks (2009, p341) assists in the development of a constructive response to this gap in transitions thinking by linking what is in essence a problem of power and politics (this time employed by transition advocates) with the idea of democracy. She describes a “complex relationship” between democracy and policy design for sustainability, with the latter requiring a view to the long term and aligned policy commitments. The relationship is said to range between a problematic one (due for example to definitional conflict with short term election cycles), and a complementary one (due to the legitimising power that democratic processes can bring). Hendriks suggests that transition management could be interpreted as a form of “network governance” and “in line with the ideals of participatory democracy”

\textsuperscript{119} On 6 June 2014, the terms “sustainability transition”, “socio-technical transition” and transition management” were searched for inclusion in journal titles (only) in the two highest ranking urban studies journals: International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies (available from 1977), Journal of American Planning Association (available from 1990), as well as Urban Policy and Research which is the leading journal on urban policy and planning interests for the Australia, New Zealand and Pacific region.
That is, as one of the devices used to attract and engage participants who might otherwise remain outside politics. Where transition approaches are to be followed, Hendriks argues two points: (1) that “procedural matters need to be ‘designed in’ to ensure that the democratic consequences of policy reforms are taken seriously” and (2) that these new transition ideas be linked to emerging work in democratic systems. This would include consideration on how transition arenas might coexist productively with newer institutions like the deliberative democracy forums discussed at Chapter 3.5.

Transition management advocates do not question the raising of democracy as an important factor, but suggest society’s democracy “project” has its own institutional failings. For example, transitions research draws attention to the concern that central democratic frames like fair representation, ideal speech situations and impartial deliberation in policy setting tend to be enveloped in entirely undemocratic power relations as “the rules of the game” play out. As discussed at Chapter 3.3.5, the planning literature holds similar concerns. The problem setting has been described succinctly as the:

\[ \text{... undemocratic fundaments of institutionalised democracy.} \]

(Jhagroe and Loorbach 2015, p70).

Transition management advocates’ lack of confidence in traditional democracy directs them to what they call “post-foundational democracy” based on ideas from radical democratic theories (Barnett and Bridge 2013) and agonistic democracy (Mouffe 2000).

The idea of post-foundational democracy takes as its starting point historical struggle, disagreement and antagonistic relations, not consensus ... Notions like ‘consensus’, ‘agreement’, ‘contract’, ‘support’ or a ‘win–win solution’ might sound democratic, but often build on exclusions and produce new antagonisms. A crucial insight of post-foundational democratic politics here is that democratic practice welcomes these antagonisms and their disruptive forces, so as to suspend closure, hierarchy and power relations that emerge when criteria are formulated and decisions are made.

(Jhagroe and Loorbach 2015, p70).

For advocates, transition management processes create a place for responding directly to unequal power relations at the centre of policy setting today and appropriately designed can, in this view, provide for improved democratic settings (Loorbach 2007).
4.7 Conclusions

The previous two chapters have provided a scholarly platform from mainstream planning literature, and some less conventional scholarship (relational-institutional planning). This material provides an understanding of the empirical planning domain, what sustainable urban development might mean in it, and the institutional barriers to its achievement. But it is weaker in explaining what might be done to remedy this situation. Domain specific understandings are crucial (Geels 2011), but the sustainability transitions literature, explained in this chapter, provides something new in its attention to a systems viewpoint and its focus on coordinated action for sustainability. The next chapter links up the three lines of research and the world of empirical practice in an attempt to provide a new, coherent and practical way of understanding and responding to the complexity of the planning system reform challenge.
Chapter 5  Conceptualising a new approach to planning system reform

5.1  Introduction

So far this thesis has outlined the challenges ahead if the planning system is to become more effective in helping urban society respond to the problems which planning is directly concerned with. But government in Australia regularly expends effort itself, and marshals effort from a range of other stakeholders, in organised programs of action with the ambition of transforming the (urban) planning system (or component parts of it). Despite this, on the evidence presented in Chapter 2, progress doesn’t seem to be being made in regard to the key quest of achieving more sustainable urban development patterns. This chapter is an attempt to inject some new thinking on this problem setting. By building on the planning and transitions theories introduced in Chapters 3 and 4, it is an attempt to provide a new way to conceptualise not just the planning problem, but how system reform action might be more effectively put into place.

5.1.1  Planning system reform in context

The history of city planning and its reform over time for Sydney was touched on in Chapter 2 of this thesis. It introduced the changing socio-cultural landscape in Sydney and outlined how planning attempted to evolve in response. Often, there have been point-in-time platforms created to consolidate this evolution of planning policy and process. These have often presented as consolidated planning system reform episodes, often involving Green Papers, White Papers and extended public or at least stakeholder engagement processes. They would culminate in legislative change and/or various significant procedural shifts usually for State and local government, the development sector and for those otherwise affected. In this respect, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 (EPA Act) was something of a high-water mark for planning in Sydney. Reflecting the societal developments of the time, it invited greater public participation and interest in environmental concerns and a much more complex and responsive planning system than had existed up until then, including provisions for developer funding of certain physical and community infrastructure. It has been neoliberal ideals which have come more to the fore since these times. For city planning in Sydney reformist efforts have subsequently introduced: private certification of regulatory processes previously undertaken by
government officers, new metrics-based provisions around (limited) sustainability performance for certain developments (BASIX), increased then decreased ministerial power in regard to major projects, legislative panels of independent experts to determine regionally significant DAs (Joint Regional Planning Panels), standard zones for all local government areas and many standard controls, various provisions to reduce “red tape” and public notification for “routine” development\textsuperscript{120}, GIS-related electronic systems for DAs and LEPs, limitations on developer contributions to infrastructure but also greater flexibility through the introduction of voluntary agreements between developers and consent authorities (Piracha 2010, Ruming and Davies 2014).

5.1.2 The focus of recent reforms

Over this more recent past, the regular rolling around reform episodes might be described as being centred on three themes. First is the push to reduce red tape in order to encourage (especially housing) development (Gurran, Gilbert et al. 2013, Gurran and Phibbs 2013b). This has been combined with a rhetoric (at least) about increasing local community involvement and local control (Gurran, Austin et al. 2014, p156, Ruming and Davies 2014). Both of these themes have been underpinned by a third intention of delivering a “simpler”, and therefore faster and less costly, system (Sturgess 1994, Ruming and Gurran 2014, Ruming and Davies 2014). As far as the challenge of delivering more sustainable urban development in cities like Sydney is concerned, these limited and sometimes directly contradictory intentions have tended towards failure, both in their self-defined objectives and in regard to wider planning ideals. Recently (2011-2014) a major planning system reform episode has played out in Sydney, again with disappointing results. This episode becomes a case study in the next chapter.

5.1.3 An alternative approach: the PST framework

This chapter conceptualises an alternative approach to planning system reform thinking. The goal is to help make these kinds of reformist efforts more effective at bringing about planning systems that are supportive of sustainable settlement in cities like Sydney, but also for other normative change (such as more effective deregulation, better participatory approaches and faster/less costly DA processes). This new conceptual framework (the “planning system transition” or PST framework) is an attempt at disentangling, and making

\textsuperscript{120} For example increasing provisions to exempt certain minor development from approval and also the new category of “complying development” for routine applications which can be approved by private certifiers with reduced provisions for neighbours to object.
conceptual distinctions about the processes and mechanisms involved in reform. The practice aim is that of assisting political actors, bureaucrats and advisors who might be “stuck” with administering a planning system reform project (aware of past failings). There are also some scholarly ambitions to this new conceptualisation. These are related to whether the framework can help fill any theoretical deficiencies and gaps raised in the last two chapters.

### 5.2 Integration and synthesis: a new logic for planning system transition

The logic behind the PST framework is based on a synthesis of the literatures explored in this thesis. It is underpinned by its own set of three theoretical pillars: (1) mainstream planning – such as its focus on spatial context, (2) relational-institutional planning – which draws a deeper attention to the idea of reform and the importance of institutional (and relational) contingencies to it, and (3) transitions studies – which is concerned exclusively with systems and their transformation. This conceptual bridging is suggested graphically in Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1 - PST logic’s three theoretical “pillars”](image)

But this integration needs to go a lot deeper if it is to have practical value in making sense of the processes and mechanisms involved in reform. Each of the literatures are conceptually rich and have significant individual offerings, which can be seen as a (sometimes overlapping) progression, but with some areas of theory foregrounding in places where others are less strong. This suggested progression behind the PST logic is now introduced and shown graphically in Figure 5.2.
Mainstream planning scholarship is important on a number of levels. At one level, it
frames the target by drawing attention to the original and still intact ideals of city planning,
and its concern with humanist values and wider societal good (something not necessarily
front of mind in BAU planning reform). It is also in planning studies that we see illustrated
the spatial context of cities, and what sustainability means in city space. It employs a
rational-technical method to analyse factors involved in the shaping of cities, bringing a
scientific or positivist approach to social, economic and environmental analysis, or as
Friedman puts it “the here and now”. Mainstream planning also highlights the spatial
governance dilemma, drawing attention to the particular problems of fragmentary
governance efforts and highlighting the importance of integration and collaboration as
mindsets to help in achieving better governance. It is in the mainstream that planning
studies brings scalar differences to the foreground (there is the metropolitan level but also
local particulars which bring different important understandings). This is important if
corporal ideas are to be translated into effective strategies on the ground.

Relational-institutional planning shifts attention to the institutional problems faced in
planning reform. In this line of thought, particular spatial outcomes (sustainable or
otherwise) are less of a driver. Instead, the gaze is directed to the complex and contradictory
interactions among empowered system actors which are behind existing planning-related institutions (formal and informal rules, norms and practices). It builds on mainstream planning’s spatial focus, now orienting towards to the social processes involved in both entrenching and bringing about change to path-dependent institutions involved in the spatial development of cities. It recognises that institutions are important but that they are “enshrined” within these social relations (Jessop 2001). It tells us how situations which promote reflexivity on the part of individuals, and empower human and group agency, are always at the centre of institutional change. Relational-institutional planning seeks to promote examples of good relational interaction and an expanding network of such practice (through interpretive research approaches). Flyvbjerg’s model of phronetic research is one such example. Deliberative democracy processes are another.

Transitions studies draws attention to urban systems, how to understand their dynamics and what is involved in steering them towards more sustainable trajectories. Like mainstream planning it has an interest in considering the “integrated whole” or triple bottom line of the societal problem. But the explanation is more instrumental. Because of the interconnected nature of the sustainability problem, anything but a perspective which takes in the wider canvas is futile in this line of theory. The multi-level perspective and multi-phase concept provide rich conceptual explanations of the stability of societal systems and the complex factors involved in change. Transition management gives us a framework for the conscious steering of change. Beyond the idea of learning and action based on reflexivity, it is concerned with strategising to promote it. An important part of this is through the co-design of experiments with the aim of promoting a particular type of innovation: those that result in the emergence of institutional ground-breakers. Transition management’s focus on change means it is dissatisfied with traditional democracy which can have its own institutionalised frustrations, and favours less traditional democratic approaches.

5.3 The Planning System Transition framework

The next step is to develop this conceptual logic into a framework for the design and implementation of a planning system reform project in the world of practice. The new conceptualisation is called the Planning System Transition (PST) framework”. The framework suggests three universal questions which need to be confronted in any reform project. These questions, and the delivery of responses to them, can be thought of as a set of progressive innovation “horizons” for a project with the goal of transformative change.
While the original “3-Horizons” model of Baghai, Coley et al. (2000) adopted time as the baseline (“x-axis”) variable, it was in essence concerned with mapping out transformational potential; to see the deeper patterns which underlie events, and to have an awareness of interdependencies involved in effecting change (Sharpe 2013). It is this kind of mapping out which I am seeking to provide in this chapter. The PST framework’s own 3-Horizons model is introduced briefly below and then the fuller explanation is provided in the following sections.

The first horizon (H1) presents itself at the shape-taking stage of a reform episode. It posits the question: if we are embarking on a planning system reform project what should be its intent? From the PST viewpoint the opening position would be to focus on long term planning ideals, and for cities the intention of a planning reform project would be to help achieve sustainable urban development. H2 poses the question: what different understandings might be required to conceive the project? The challenge is a complex one and the essence of this horizon is to engage with this complexity rather than avoid or try to overcome it. Finally, H3 poses the question: how might action be framed mindful of the particular reform intention and the problem understanding. Transition management studies gives particular direction here. The PST framework is shown graphically in Figure 5.3.

5.3.1 Horizon 1: Intention

The first horizon of the PST framework draws attention to the basic tie between an intended action (in this case a planning system reform effort) and what it is being directed towards. Coming to a point of clarity on the “why” question establishes the overarching purpose or philosophical foundation for the reform project. This first reform horizon follows Friedman’s call for a higher purpose for planning, links this to transitions studies’ concerns about a sustainable future, and embeds the intention in contextual settings working at different scales. The intention, in this situation, would be to help the planning system to better position cities like Sydney to address their worsening problems with achieving sustainable urban development. Here the PST framework is in part reflecting a particular values orientation, but it is also trying to do something opposite to falling into the sometimes held trap of being overly idealistic or impractical in the face of the reality of economic forces (Campbell, Tait et al. 2014).
The framework brings no preference for one or another of the integrated (social, economic and environmental) factors involved in sustainable development. The complexity theory and integrated assessment dimensions of transitions thinking informs us that considering all three as an integrated whole is not just about values, but also the best means of addressing each of these dimensions individually. There are three characteristics or key points of explanation of intention, or “H1”, under the PST framework which are outlined in turn below. Two are directly focused on societal outcomes, and one is system focused.

**Inclusive social progress**

This characteristic highlights the PST intention of having the reformed planning system, acting as an instrument of socio-spatial justice and inclusion. Accounting for the welfare of a future society, draws attention beyond the short term and includes concerns about intergenerational justice and thus ecological integrity (and for these purposes captures the “environmental” concern of the “triple bottom line” conception mentioned above). There is a mind to local (here Sydney) context, but also a recognition of planning’s deeper struggle with achieving its reformist ideals in the face of neoliberal capitalism. Including suggestions that in their efforts to compete successfully for private investment, planning systems have

It is acknowledged that there is a choice of orientation involved here. This is sometimes described as the choice between two paradigms: (1) *homo economicus* - society as essentially, wholly and rationally self-regarding, or (2) *homo reciprocans* - cooperative society operating on the basis of fairness and reciprocal behaviour (Bowles and Gintis 2002, Fehr and Gintis 2007). Explaining homo economicus, LeVeness and Primeaux (2004) point to the empowerment of the “individual” (eg individual person, business sector, neighbourhood, suburb, nation)\(^\text{121}\). This orientation is suggested as encouraging “individual” creativity and enterprise as rewards are chased down in competitive environments. Schot (2014) illuminates the significant societal implications involved in such questions of “orientation”, suggesting that post-industrial society is characterised as a struggle between different forms of capitalism: “from more brutal to more inclusive ones”\(^\text{122}\) and over future decades it will tend to “drift” towards one or another form. Brutal capitalism would see advantaged individuals prosper at the expense of those less advantaged. Schot notes this as a point of departure from industrial capitalism which had seen complementary progress across all socio-economic strata within societies. Chapter 2’s representation of Sydney’s spatial settlement over the past century or more presents some worrying signs here. History shows the obvious benefits of industrial capitalism, but also more recent signs of an intensifying spatially-based concentration of disadvantage and advantage in Sydney. This begs the question whether some demographic cohorts/localities are already benefitting at the expense of others in Sydney, and what part the planning system might play in that (eg exclusionary housing policy in certain well located suburbs).

So in the face of this “struggle”, the planning system intention under the PST framework would be oriented away from “brutal” and towards “inclusive” capitalism, but with a mind to the importance of individual creativity and the value that emerges in the interaction of individual and community (Buchholz 2012). An inclusive orientation *is* based on moral values (objectifying societal good), but a point of particular emphasis in the PST framework is the deep interconnection of this inclusionary intent with *economic* and *system* related

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\(^{121}\) This is suggested as the driving normative framework in the governance culture of the USA as well as in influential institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation (LeVeness and Primeaux 2004, p196).

\(^{122}\) Johan Schot’s keynote talk to the 2014 International Sustainability Transitions Conference was not published. But I attended to hear this talk. Professor Schot includes notes from this talk on his weblog at [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/newsandevents/conferences/istblogs/secondbigtransition](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/newsandevents/conferences/istblogs/secondbigtransition). Accessed 14/1/2015.
intentions of planning reform. What is being argued is that it is the very incorporation and accounting for this socially inclusive values orientation which opens up certain transformative opportunities in planning system reform projects which are not always available under BAU approaches. That is to say that promoting individual prosperity as an intention is a quite limiting perspective to take when there are transformative reform ambitions, even when the planning system is the subject of attention.

**Economic performance**

H1 of the PST framework also draws attention to how planning should influence the *economic* performance of cities. Economics is not a new focus for planning system reform. However, it is the narrowness of the economic perspective commonly brought to reform efforts which becomes the point of particular attention, key among them reducing regulatory complexity and thus regulatory transaction costs. Transformative change in city planning systems will require the redirecting of economic intention to ideas more responsive to the complexity of modern planning and economic challenges, such as: reduced congestion costs, improved accounting for agglomeration economics and inter-related matters of employment accessibility, housing and infrastructure location. For example, in Sydney, improving employment accessibility and therefore the labour market itself would be expected to mean such things as: more affordable housing in established suburbs close to employment areas, increased reliance on public transport, and creative approaches to enabling more employment in local areas. So this understanding of planning system reform foregrounds the relationship between economic performance and: infrastructure, housing and the planning system challenge of delivering change in established urban areas.

A second aspect on this *economic* characteristic bridges current economic literature and the “inclusive” intentions described above. Stiglitz (2012), Sachs (2012) and very recent research from within the International Monetary Fund (IMF)\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\) provides evidence on the direct *economic* cost of societal inequality. In particular, the economically dry IMF-based work suggests that in the face of “rising inequality”, it is “(social) equality (that) seems to drive higher and more sustainable growth” (Ostry, Berg et al. 2014, p4, Dabla-Norris, Kochhar et al. 2015). The corollary is also evidenced. That is to say that more *inequality*, in the long run, provides for more instability and, on the evidence, lowers growth prospects.

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\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\) These 2014 and 2015 publication from IMF staffers comes forward subsequent to the critical references to the IMF contained in the work of LeVeness and Primeaux (2004) which was previously referenced.
(Stiglitz, Greenwald et al. 2014). So planning reform intentions supporting (1) inclusive social progress and (2) a city’s economic performance, seem to be aligned rather than at odds.

*Intention as an “attractor” to help shift embedded systems*

The PST framework is entirely concerned with system reform. So the third characteristic of intention turns to the dynamics of change in complex adaptive systems. Chapter 4 explained how “strong attractors” act as “magnetic forces” inclining complex systems away from stability and into novel trajectories. Systems theory here confirms an intuitive perspective that the success of a planning system reform project would be related to its resonance at different levels of the social system, or society. Two pertinent factors from this body of work warrant particular attention: (1) attractors vary as to their (magnetic) strength, and (2) attractors are particularly active, and more or less only influential, in periods of disequilibrium. The time around a major organised planning system reform episode can, naturally, be thought of as a period of relative disequilibrium for that system. The question then arises as to the strength of different attractors and the extent that each might consciously, or unconsciously, come into play in a system reform effort.

This first horizon of the PST framework sets the philosophical foundation for the reform project. So how the intentions of the reform episode are narrated and acted out by its administrators and others, will to a greater or lesser extent reveal itself as a strong attractor in system-thinking. That is, as a force for shifting the system away from embeddedness and towards more innovative trajectories. If transformative change is the goal, what’s needed here is thinking that goes considerably beyond any short term or individual interests. It is about the idea that planning system reform might be able to strike at ideals which ring true across different levels of society, including in explaining planning’s role in attending to problems and hopes of everyday people into the future. So while “sustainability” might be central to this horizon, the term does not always ring true for people. The reform project needs to present the case for change in terms that people can understand and with scenarios that seem real. Beyond say speeding up DA processing, this is about how reform might help provide better housing solutions for young people, or ease the plight of long-distance commuters, or improve public spaces, or enable those otherwise disadvantaged or isolated to connect with and contribute to wider society. On economic prospects, it would be about how reform can better position the whole city’s economic future, taking it considerably beyond the interests of the property sector alone.
Table 5-1 summarises H1 in the PST framework, and suggests some distinguishing features when compared to BAU approaches to planning system reform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing Question: If we are to carry out a major reform of our planning system on what intention should it be founded?</th>
<th>Response: Achieving sustainable urban development.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Distinguishing features (compared to BAU reform)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive social progress</td>
<td>-- Inclusive benefits, over exclusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving city productivity</td>
<td>-- Wide interpretation of economic implications, rather than property-centric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting embedded governance</td>
<td>-- Intention is framed purposively and ambitiously to inspire system shift, not just respond to interests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.2 Horizon 2: Understanding

The second horizon of the PST framework acknowledges the deep challenges involved in steering change in complex systems like city planning. Rather than ignore or avoid it, this horizon calls for a reform program to acknowledge and get close to this complexity. H2 is aligned with Rotmans (2006) suggestion that:

> ... between dream and reality lies complexity.

The understandings required to appreciate the planning system challenge under the PST framework operate in two domains. One is empirical and is concerned with spatial planning, development processes and outcomes on the ground. This domain is particularly linked to mainstream planning paradigms. The other is more conceptual, and is concerned with understanding the challenge of system change. This domain draws on relational-institutional and transitions thinking.

**Understanding the reform challenge empirically**

The understanding being sought here is concerned with both strategic spatial planning as well as the statutory or regulatory variety. For strategic planning, it is about an appreciation of the relationship between urban spatial structure and the functioning of a city, and what evidence has to say about city form options. This reform horizon is a response to the
suggested “dumbing down” of planning’s professional base (Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012). The idea is that when planning system reform is on the agenda, there is a need to bring to the table disciplined thinking which links space, city economics, transport, but also in Sydney’s case, the growing socio-spatial divide, and its heavy per capita carbon footprint. There is already considerable evidence available on such questions. H2 is concerned with including this kind of understanding within the (wider) reform agenda, and re-invigorating planning’s role in the rationalist explanation of: (1) the problems with allowing urban settlement to “drift” (Friedmann 2008), (2) what sustainable and amenable patterns of growth look like, and (3) the role of planning systems in either helping or hindering the achievement of such patterns.

The other field about which high level of empirical understanding is required is the relationship between system reform and planning’s regulatory functions. History shows how since the mid-1980s, and the ascendancy of neoliberal thinking, deregulation and streamlining of DA processing has headlined and been almost overpowering in reformist efforts. This component of PST is concerned with the economic drag of inappropriate regulation. But an empirical understanding is required rather than the unquestioning of tenuous views. There is evidence suggesting regulation is sometimes scapegoated when it is wider economic forces which drive development slow-down. There is accompanying evidence suggesting how a non-stop reformist setting can, rather than provide for a streamlined system, have the unintended effect of increasing instability, uncertainty, delay and costs which are also key barriers to investment (eg Steele and Ruming 2012, Gunn and Hillier 2013, Gurran, Gilbert et al. 2013, Gurran and Phibbs 2013a, Ruming and Gurran 2014). There seems to be a need for more empirical evidence on cumbersome regulation and overkill in the planning transaction costs for proposals across different scales. For example, anecdotal evidence from case study work in this thesis (Chapter 8) pointed to the frustrations felt by regular citizens when faced with these (consultant) costs (ie rather than council fees) and time delays for seemingly minor alterations and additions to their homes. What is needed is a critical appreciation of the adverse effects and potential for improvements due to regulatory change at the DA level, including the limitations to each. These can then be contextualised within the wider intent of planning reform under the PST framework, rather than often seems to be the case, almost entirely dominate the wider reform debate.
**Understanding the reform challenge conceptually**

An appreciation of the facts about the planning system and its relationship to spatial outcomes is important but takes you only so far. It is another thing to understand the concepts which explain the dynamics of this system, and how change comes about. The PST framework suggests such understanding as essential for any transformative reformist efforts. Relational-institutionalist thinking draws awareness to growing societal complexity and the webs of relations upon which planning is founded. It provides an explanation of why reform efforts have struggled to have effect. It suggests that institutions (or “the rules of the game”) in planning reform efforts, have tended to encourage certain short termist and self-interested behaviours while discouraging longer term and public interest initiatives. It further suggests how this has been a factor in the increasing disenchantment at the citizen level, but also within government, professional and industry sectors. The PST framework puts this understanding front-of-mind, positing that this institutionalised dynamic is now embedded and limits opportunities for novel ideas and approaches to open up.

There is an important distinction from business as usual approaches to reform being suggested here. The central requirement (for achieving system approaches more responsive to city planning challenges) is understood to be the social re-construction of planning system *institutions*. For a planning reform project, the response to institutional problems like those stated above starts with *reflexivity*, or a “self-critical and self-conscious reflection” on the part of reform project administrators themselves (Lissandrello and Grin 2011, p226). A major idea is that the challenge is less about the specifics of new structures which might be formulated (eg new legislation, bureaucratic arrangements or procedures which have commonly failed to bring about substantive change in previous reforms), and more in what has happened to bring them about. Where this understanding is heading is towards a realisation that the planning reform project is, *itself*, an extra-ordinary arena for the encouragement and generation of reflexivity on the part of key system actors (including those normally advocating particular interests). That is, it provides an opportunity for influential system actors “to scrutinize and reconsider their (own) underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices” (Hendriks and Grin 2007, p333). It is about making the most of the openness which can occur in a reform project to mobilise the creative power of individual and group initiative (or agency) to reconfigure institutionalised structures, processes and cultural frames.
The final part to a conceptual understanding of planning system reform under H2 in the PST framework links in transitions studies. This thinking develops the institutional and reflexive governance ideas outlined above. What transition thinking offers in addition is a more detailed appreciation of the mechanics of change in an institutionalised urban planning system. This is through ideas like: (1) the multi-level perspective (how niche activity and/or landscape pressures can re-align dominant planning regimes), (2) the multi-phase concept (importance of timing and thus how system reform projects have a special status), and (3) transition management (as a governance orientation and action guideline). The notion is that there are specific patterns, dynamics and mechanisms that drive or block system change and, provided these are understood, the relational-institutional complexity is less an obstacle, and more a practical means of securing some leverage for reform. For a planning system reform project transition management has particular pertinence, with the potential for direct application of heuristics like transition arenas, transition agendas and transition experiments including strategic management of niche innovation (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010). Among other things, transition management is concerned with using these instruments to create space for “front-runners” (creative and influential thinkers and actors from within and outside the system, operating at different system levels, and with divergent rather than complementary views) to develop a shared understanding, co-produce joint goals and strategies for sustainability transitions, and broaden and deepen reformist initiatives over time. Table 5-2 summarises H2 under the PST framework, and suggests distinguishing features from more routine planning system reform approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Distinguishing features (compared to BAU reform)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The empirical problem: what’s wrong now in planning</td>
<td>- Attention to changes to city spatial form needed to achieve intention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Procedural (regulatory) reform has a place but shouldn’t dominate the wider challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conceptual challenge: planning reform as complex societal change</td>
<td>- Transformative potential moreso in the reframing of institutions (culture, structures and practices) than new laws, plans or strategies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next horizon turns to how the transition management concepts might come to be exercised in the action space of a government-mandated planning reform project.
5.3.3 Horizon 3: Action

This third horizon of the framework is concerned with the design of the reform project itself. Transition management is suggested as an important “missing conceptual link” in response to suggestions from scholars that that while many may have a good picture of what an improved city planning system might look like, we have less knowledge on the steps required to get there (Flyvbjerg 2004b, Lawhon and Murphy 2012). So a response to the question of how to best frame reform action takes us to transition management and its (semi) prescriptive governance framework for system change. One of the requirements of the PST framework here is in conceiving how the transition management conceptions (aimed at radical change within a path dependent regime) might be best applied to a government-organised planning system reform (ie mandated from within the same regime). There are basic points of incongruence apparent here. Specifically, the opening institutional position for a regime-mandated planning reform project would be expected to be inclined towards: (1) solving system problems which have the most resonance for politically powerful stakeholders - whereas transition management is about searching, learning, cooperative design and strategic management of niche activity to help achieve societal innovation and sustainable development; (2) self-selected participation in reform arenas (ie by already vocal interests) - whereas policy arenas in transitions thinking are more selectively looking for participation by diverse innovators and even outsiders; (3) shorter term political action (eg driven by election cycles) - whereas transition management brings a longer term orientation. So there are questions as to the prospects of transition approaches associated with the “closeness” of the regime to the reform actions. But this is offset by positive effects which a major government-led reform project brings, such as: (1) the resources allocated by many parties to the work at hand (especially, but not only, government), (2) the attention-creating platform which is achieved (not so easy to otherwise secure given the socio-political competition for attention in a busy world), and (3) the consequential system instability (and thus creative opportunity) which would follow a government-mandated reform announcement. So the challenge for the action component of the PST framework is to capture the best of both worlds.

A question arising early is how to deal with the transition arena concept (a small group of influential and visionary frontrunners from different backgrounds, but a shared interest in long term sustainable development, formed to steer things along). One of the chief criticisms of TM as a methodology, finds this as just another group of elites (Smith and Stirling 2008, p12). But as far as PST thinking is concerned a combination of factors see
the transition arena concept as misplaced in a planning reform project anyway (at least in its complete form). This is because: (1) the first element of the PST framework already establishes the essence of a sustainability vision/images/objectives, (2) a major planning system reform project already has an inbuilt mechanism for the “building up” of a network of actors interested in reform, and (3) the second horizon of the PST framework already requires reflexive design of the reform project, which includes taking on the question of self-interest and blockers. The approach adopted in the PST framework therefore stresses the importance of transition management concepts in establishing a project steering group, but without stumbling into problems of the democratic legitimacy of a (“compliant”) transition arena.

The three action phases of a reform project under the PST framework are now explained: setting of the reform agenda, participatory approaches, and the particular results or output orientation built into the project.

Setting the Agenda

In transition management thinking the agenda has a specific role in providing a “compass” for the “search and learning process” ahead (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p158). It is the preceding two horizons which set up the agenda under the PST approach. A reform project agenda would therefore direct the project towards: (1) a broader rather than a narrower intention in regard to planning system prospects (ie planning system supportive of sustainable urban development patterns into the mid and longer term, rather than responding to narrower concerns raised by established interests), and (2) an understanding of what’s involved in moving towards its achievement (not just new plans and regulations but changes to institutional culture, structure and processes to make them more enabling).

The agenda for a planning system reform project would take up the opportunity provided by the special (ie rare) platform for policy selection which opens up in a major system reform project. It would introduce both the substantive (space-based) challenges as well as the institutional impediments to change. At one level the agenda would draw on the abstraction of the suggested planning/governance and democracy deficits of the system, but it is also needs to selectively synthesise the large amounts of more concrete work already undertaken which posits alternative more sustainable (ie social, economic, ecological) city settlement patterns. The agenda is playing a role in “seducing” frustrated system actors (politicians, stakeholders and citizens) to the idea that there are trajectories which can be followed which
can take the city along alternative pathways over time, and that their ideas and actions might be important in getting there (ie the agenda playing a role as an attractor in complex systems thinking). In that sense, the agenda is concerned with positioning for the mobilisation of the creative power of individuals and groups in the next action phase.

*Participatory approaches*

Regular participatory processes in this kind of work is mostly concerned with eliciting feedback from stakeholders seeking to advocate a particular interest. Under the PST logic, participatory approaches take on a different and particularly important role. At one level they link communicative planning and transitions scholarship, including criticisms of lack of attention to democratic principles. Under this thinking participatory approaches involve stakeholder encounters for exchange of ideas, social learning and new “practical, context-relevant, wisdom and knowledge” (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki et al. 2009, p5). This in part justifies the involvement of creative minds and visionaries. But it also calls for the involvement of those with a particular understanding of local context and practicalities (often one and the same). Together this participation seeks to develop creative responses to system problems (in systems thinking co-evolution, self-organisation and emergence at work). Participatory approaches also need to pay direct attention to concerns about power and elitism and its potential to undermine democratic principles (an accusation against not only transition conceptions, but also planning system reform projects generally). A reform project under the PST framework would not only design-in approaches to ensure democratic considerations were foregrounded in the reform episode itself (Hendriks 2009), but also explore wider potentials for shifts that innovations in democratic approaches might bring.

But there is a “double level” to the participatory approaches under PST framings (cf Lissandrello and Grin 2011, p244). If the first level (above) can be considered as that of actors sharing rationalities and deliberating and collaborating on new images on spatial and procedural planning problems, the second level is that which relates such images to existing (problematic) cultures, structures and practices, including those which guide the behaviour of these participating actors themselves. It requires reform projects to design-in high quality (“relational”) interactions which move beyond the idea of trade-offs and compromises, into the terrain of new interpretive frames which encourage the creative reconfigurations of institutions. A particular target here is innovative and spirited behaviour (ie agency) by individuals normally representing an embedded institutional position, and in
the face of (sometimes hidden) institutional barriers erected by their own organisation specifically to avert this occurring. An example might be that of a particular government department or lobby group representative departing from the “rules of the game” (as established within the group) coming to a point of recognition and associated learning on wider problems, which leads to the development of a different interpretive frame for their own action. Seemingly, almost essential here is the presence of a sense of reciprocal behaviour in the participation of others. It will be shown that in the (protected and experimental space of) interviews with key planning system actors for this thesis (Chapter 6) there were signs of agency emerging when the capacity to argue a simplified version of the planning system problem was able to be removed. The participatory aspects of H3 of the PST framework places the creation of platforms for advancing this kind of thinking and action as a key requirement in reform efforts.

**Outputs/Results**

For a complex system setting (like planning) with its many ambiguities and contradictions, the concern would be towards “guided variation and selection” rather than to go too early in locking-in new structures and processes that may have unintended consequences and spark backlash. Short term policy shifts would be concerned with altering longer term trajectories and, given the complexity involved, be inclined to be experimental, allowing refinement over time. There would be support for further transition-related projects of a variety of scales, including strategically managing the deepening and broadening of promising niche innovations and building networks of innovative stakeholders to stimulate upscaling and breakthrough. But suggestions about experimental outputs can be at odds with institutional expectations of a government-mandated reform project. At the political level, the orientation is likely to be concerned with appeasing vocal interests, and expectations can be more inclined towards concrete, headline-attracting policy change with immediate or at least short term effect. Reform project outputs under the PST logic would seek to reconcile these short term expectations in light of: (1) acknowledged failures and unintended consequences of BAU reform efforts, and (2) the counter-arguments presented in support of the transitions rationale as evidenced in the rest of the PST logic. Table 5-3 summarises H3 under the PST framework, and suggests distinguishing features from more routine planning system reform approaches.
### Table 5-3 - Horizon 3 - Action under the PST framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Distinguishing features (compared to BAU reform)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Framing Question:</strong></td>
<td>If a planning system reform project is to align with the stated intention/understanding, how might action be framed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response:</strong></td>
<td>transition management concepts, as applied to the local planning context, with democratic procedures designed-in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agenda</td>
<td>New visions in the face of embedded system deficits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translate new understandings to opportunities for institutional action centred on agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory approaches</td>
<td>Arenas created to challenge dominant ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning, new institutional images, new networks emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design in participation by diverse “frontrunners”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design in non-traditional democratic procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs/results</td>
<td>Less “one shot” structural change, more facilitating new perspectives and agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reforms position for niche breakthrough projects to evolve and upscale over time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 5.4 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to present a coherent theoretical perspective on the planning system reform problem and how it might be tackled. It introduces the PST Framework with the ambitions that it might help in two ways: (1) as a reference guide (rather than blueprint) to assist in the planning of a system reform project (i.e., in suggesting new rationales and methodologies), and (2) as a critical reflexive tool to apply to the analysis of reform projects. That is, to probe/raise questions/ provide explanations about what happened/is happening/may happen. In Chapter 8 of this thesis the PST framework is used as a lens to evaluate the most recent large-scale planning system reform project undertaken in Australia.
Chapter 6  A pause to introduce the empirical research: PST concepts meet practice

6.1  Introduction

So far this thesis has painted an historical picture of the persistent and worsening challenges facing planning in Sydney (Chapter 2), entered the world of theory to seek explanations (Chapters 3 and 4) and, based on this, conceptualised a new approach to planning system reform to better enable the system to take on such challenges (Chapter 5). But the interest of this thesis is not just theoretical. Its principal concern is whether these kinds of theoretical insights might bring improved capacity for planning system reform efforts to assist the achievement of normative planning ideals. What’s required next is a step into the world of practice, so that the so far developed theoretical work can be applied and challenged. With social research of this kind, a problem can arise in terms of timely and practical access to pertinent empirical material. Fortuitously, for this thesis there was an almost ideal research environment available.

6.2  The Sydney planning system reform project

Recently, a major project aimed at reforming the planning system for Sydney (and the State of New South Wales) was undertaken by the (NSW) government. Planning was in the public eye in the lead-up to the 2011 NSW election, and reform of the planning system was one of the key election platforms of the incoming O’Farrell Liberal-National coalition government. There were political ambitions to both reduce wasteful red tape which was seen to be holding back the economy, and empower communities in important local planning decision making. The reform project began its conception stages immediately upon change of government and, with a mind to the politics, concluded (in the public eye at least) well before the start of the campaign for the March 2015 election (which returned a Liberal-National coalition but under new Premier Mike Baird). Certainly, the government’s aim was for transformative, whole-of-system reform. But the project was unsuccessful, on the government’s own account, due to it failing to achieve passage of intended legislative changes through the NSW parliament. This large scale reform project presents the clash between ambition and political reality. In the broad it is the domain of participatory policy
change in complex urban governance, but its direct focus on the planning system makes it highly relevant to the questions explored in this thesis.

While the planning reform efforts were concerned with the whole of the State of NSW, the interest of this thesis is in the effort within the reform project of pertinence to the greater Sydney metropolitan area. For the sake of this thesis, it is being called the Sydney Planning System Reform (SPSR) project. Figure 6.1 provides a graphic outline of the key steps involved, and the overall timeline. The SPSR project provides the setting for the three pieces of empirical research which underpin this thesis (Chapters 7-9). The empirical chapters explain the changes as proposed in the government’s White Paper (NSW Government 2013a) and accompanying exposure Bills in more detail\textsuperscript{124}. However, to set the scene, this introduction can point out the five nominated “transformative changes” underpinning the SPSR project. According to the White Paper\textsuperscript{125}, these changes were concerned with:

1. **Delivery culture**: Enhancing our ability to positively work together to enable good outcomes while building the expertise, leadership and engagement skills of the planning industry.

   The intent was to shift the “planning industry” culture to be more promoting of “cooperation”, so that it might deliver “positive and pragmatic outcomes”. The government’s expressed commitment to “ongoing education and innovation” was also evidenced as a component of the forthcoming cultural change.

2. **Community participation**: Involving the community early when preparing strategic plans on the key decisions that will shape our cities, towns and neighbourhoods.

   The intent was to establish clear rules for “growth” upfront. A new instrument called the “community participation charter” was to be created which would guarantee high levels of public involvement in the setting of these rules. This would in turn reduce the need for every DA to be notified, and otherwise streamline projects and investment.

\textsuperscript{124} There were two exposure bills proposed to implement the legislative framework for the new planning system: Exposure Planning Bill 2013 established the key provisions for the new system, and Exposure Planning Administration Bill 2013 provided for the establishment of planning bodies and other procedural matters. http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/exposurebills. Accessed 11/3/2014.

\textsuperscript{125} These quotes are from pages 6-8 and page 17 of the White Paper (NSW Government 2013a).
Figure 6.1 - Outline of key stages of the Sydney planning system reform project
3. **Strategic focus:** Preparing good policies upfront to guide growth and development and achieve balanced planning decisions.

The intent was a stronger “whole of government” emphasis in the development of what would be a hierarchy of spatial and infrastructure plans linked by the “line of sight” concept. It is under this agenda item that new governance arrangements were suggested including the establishment of subregional planning boards to take a decision making role between the State government and local councils.

4. **Streamlined approvals:** Making the assessment of proposals faster and simpler by removing duplication but maintaining rigour.

“Faster and more transparent” approvals were the intent, but “with no less rigour”. This would rely on the better strategic plans prepared with full community participation. The White Paper suggested 80% of DAs would be processed as code assessment (ie without rights to neighbour input into the assessment process). But this target was later removed.

5. **Provision of infrastructure:** Ensuring planning and delivery for development and supporting infrastructure occur at the same time.

Integrated with strategic spatial plans would be “growth infrastructure plans”. These would be prepared at different scales and signed off by State Treasury before the commitment to any new growth strategies could be given.

### 6.3 Overview of empirical research methodology

#### 6.3.1 Contextualising the adopted methodology

I’ve suggested above that the SPSR project provided a very opportune research setting. There was much activity associated with this two-year (plus) project and a methodological challenge in turning the empirical opportunity into theoretically useful material. The adopted approach to “making the most” of the SPSR project’s rich contextual setting

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126 A concept based on translating higher level priorities to actions on the ground. Seen as useful as a planning discipline in the roll out of the hierarchy of plans, but also a term for communication (COAG Reform Council 2011, p6)
comprised a mixture of methodologies. This mixture was aimed at collecting useful evidence on the higher order constructions behind PST thinking, as well as the more detailed componentry.

At the higher level, PST thinking is arguing a new innovative logic of what is required to achieve transformative planning system change. This logic is captured by the linking of planning, relational-institutional thinking and transition ideas as a new conception of reform. For the first piece of empirical research, and this higher order inquiry, a qualitative interview approach (referencing Kvale 1996) was seen to provide the best chance for useful evidence collection on PST conceptions. Then, at a more detailed level, the PST framework is concerned with the specifics of action, and an empirical inquiry should be concerned with examining the practical usefulness of the detailed componentry of the PST framework. Case study research is useful for this sort of work given the capacity it provides for a detailed comparative tracing out of event sequences, and causal variables (George and Bennett 2005, Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010). So, for the second piece of empirical research, the roll-out of the SPSR project was used as a case study, to allow comparisons to be drawn between the SPSR project and PST framework particulars. Finally, the opportunity also arose for a piece of more fine-focused empirical research into a particular component of the SPSR project, in particular an inquiry into citizen attitudes to planning reform. This third research component was also undertaken as a case study.

An introduction to the methodological approach adopted for the individual pieces of empirical research is provided below.

### 6.3.2 Interrogating PST logic through practitioner interviews

This research component involved a set of interviews with very experienced planning system actors with either direct involvement in, or a sound appreciation of, the SPSR project. The interviews were undertaken in early 2014, just after the Planning Minister had taken the intended planning reforms off the table, so at a time when, for a group like this, reflective thinking about planning and systems was in the foreground. This was a group of elites, but representing a range of backgrounds and perspectives on planning (government officials, developers, community activists, environmental interests, academics, professional interests). The ethics arrangements for this thesis were such that interviewees were to remain anonymous. Appendix 1 provides a schedule, indicating sectoral backgrounds, and
referencing pseudonyms for use when interviewee comments are cited in the rest of the thesis.

There were really two parts to the questions being put to this group. The first part was testing impressions of planning in Sydney. The second part was testing impressions of the scholarly insights raised in this thesis. The first part drew out perceptions of the larger challenges faced in Sydney’s spatial planning. The second part provided a testing ground for the relational-institutional and transitions conceptions behind the PST logic. While there was significant support, one of the suggestions from interviewees was that these non-mainstream planning and transitions conceptions needed to be made more tangible and practical. This was the genesis of the idea that a more pragmatic conceptual tool or guideline was needed. The PST framework was the result (Chapter 5).

6.3.3 Applying the PST framework to SPSR project

The second piece of empirical research used the SPSR project to explore and test out the componentry of the PST framework in the practical world. A comparative approach was used. That is, the PST framework was adopted as a loose “specification” for planning system reform work, and the approach adopted in the NSW planning system reform project was compared to this specification. Apart from identifying points of difference and similarities, the aim was to expose any useful knowledge on the meanings and consequences of each. Here the PST framework is itself being “used” as a critical reflexive tool to untangle the reform project and probe what happened, and how things might have happened differently. Healey and Flyvbjerg are among those who suggest that carefully gathered accounts of “what happens” (ie in the social relations and institutionalised blockers around the promotion and resisting of change) are central to social research, but also in influencing practice outcomes. As suggested in the PST framework, the exposure of institutional failings itself can act as a potent force to promote reflexivity and behaviour change (Healey 2007b). This part of the thesis offers an account of what happened in a major planning system reform episode. It is an attempt to add to the lineage of such interpretive accounts, this time using PST thinking as the framing device to guide the interpretation. The PST framework was useful in illuminating how, while seeking to reconcile powerful institutional demands, the SPSR project repeatedly found itself taking up options which closed off transformative potential. It also helps reveal instances where initiative was demonstrated and innovation achieved in the face of this, and under what circumstances.
6.3.4 An innovation in “non-traditional” democracy

One of the most interesting examples of initiative, in fact, coming forward in the process steps of the SPSR project involved questions of democratic principles. The third piece of empirical research explores a democratically organised deliberative process within the SPSR project. There are two core reasons for drawing attention to this case. First it is an opportunity to provide a fine focus on an innovation experiment which came forward from the SPSR project itself. But there is a second factor at play here. Both the planning system as currently operating in Australia, and transition management through its selective participatory processes, have been suggested, directly, as suffering “democratic deficits” (eg Voß, Smith et al. 2009, p287, Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012, p122). So a significant scale deliberative democracy exercise, emerging from a reformist planning project already under investigation through a transition lens, was seen to have the potential to have something wider to say about democratic prospects in planning and transitions thinking.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the real world settings into which the PST conceptions were put forward for examination. The three chapters which follow provide this examination, and an attempt to draw out generalisations helpful to the research questions explored in this thesis. They are followed by a final concluding chapter.
Chapter 7 Interrogating PST thinking through practitioner interviews

7.1 Introduction and approach

This part of the research involves the testing of relational-institutional planning and transitions ideas with well-informed system actors. The SPSR project was in a state of abeyance when the interviews were conducted in the first half of 2014. But this government project was conspicuous, as a kind of elephant in the room, during the interviews. This provided a conducive experimental environment, in which interviewees were in a sense quite ready for a discussion on the topic of planning systems and their reform.

Two core questions arose in the design of this aspect of the primary research: (1) who to interview, given the research ambitions to link PST thinking into “the world” of practice, and (2) how to both convey, and get useful feedback on, the intricate relational-institutionalist and transitions ideas in a short interview, in the relatively short periods of time it would be expected would be available. An explanation of the response to each of these points is now provided.

Who to interview

A transition concerned with long term structural shifts in the planning system would involve many sectors of society and their interaction (Truffer and Coenen 2012). For these interviews it was decided to involve a representative group of sectoral actors already involved in the planning system (ie State and local government, development industry, resident groups, other interest groups, consultants, academia). A selection criteria was that interviewees had a familiarity with the recent Sydney planning reform episode. A further preferential pre-requisite was that the interviewee had credentials as a leader or person of influence within their sector, and was experienced in interaction with other sectors. That is, it was important to interview people who were quite familiar with dealing with the politics and struggle between different ideas, values and interests involved in city planning, and had a record of showing initiative in this struggle. While many interviewees have overlapping roles, the resultant collective of 28 individuals can be grouped as follows:

– Group A: Reform project leaders: government officials, key expert advisers (n=4)
Group B: Reform project participants: government officials, development industry representatives, consultants, community members, environmental interests, academia, professional institutional interests, research institutes (n=13).

Group C: Shadow group of actors with a strong interest but less direct involvement in the reform program. This included existing and former government officials, consultants, professional institution interests and elected officials (n=11).

This research secured involvement of senior and experienced planning system actors and comprised:

- Five individuals who are current or former government officials at Senior Executive Band 2 or above (ie executive directors or agency heads).

- To use the transitions term, “frontrunners” from the three most vocal and influential sectoral interests (lobby groups) active in the reform process (Urban Development Institute of Australia, Urban Taskforce, Better Planning Network).

- A leader from one of Australia’s most well-known environmental advocacy groups (Total Environment Centre).

- One university professor and two associate professors who teach and research in planning and local government sectors, including the head of the planning school at one of Australia’s “Group of Eight” (leading) universities.

- Four individuals who are existing or former directors or general managers at larger Sydney local government authorities.

- Five individuals who are directors of large national planning practices.

- Two individuals who head separate privately funded research institutes/think tanks which specialise in governance and politics.

- One State government minister, and one former local government elected officer.

Appendix 2 provides a list of interviewees, based on pseudonyms descriptive of their sectoral position, and the date of interview.

127 It was relevant that my own career in the planning system field provided some considerable access opportunities and this was able to follow through to critical and candid discussions on shared experiences in the interview processes. This tended to ensure a self-correcting element to any misdirection or bias that I might have accidentally conveyed as an interviewer. That is, the group was not naïve, and was quite capable of pushback when I, as the interviewer, tended to suggest a direction not supported by the interviewee.

128 See the following web link for an explanation:
How to engage in complex concepts in a short interview

When these interviews were being undertaken the basics of the PST logic had been established. That is, the importance of linking-in relational-institutional planning and transition ideas if planning reform was to be transformative. The interviews were to provide a testing ground for the conceptions behind this PST logic. There were complex and abstract concepts involved here and only a relatively short space of time available for interviews. It was seen as important that the PST ideas be contextualised into practice settings. So the challenge was how to open up with an initial discussion on city planning in Sydney, but then also have sufficient time to engage in an inquiry on the more abstract PST conceptions.

Flyvbjerg’s (2004b) “phronetic” approach, proved useful here. A modified phronetic research approach set the structure for a sequential, or staged, approach shown in Figure 7.1, and concerned with the following questions:

- Where are we going with planning today in Sydney?
- Is it desirable (who is winning and losing)?
- What (if anything) should be done in response?

The first two questions in this approach were in essence contextual, and for the interviews they provided the opportunity for a discussion on Sydney planning issues (as stage 1) and how the system was responding (as stage 2). It allowed a response to the question of whether the planning problems discussed in Chapter 2 were realistic as far as the interview group was concerned. The second half of the interview then introduced the “new” PST ideas on “what might be done” by first outlining relational-institutional conceptions (as stage 3), and followed with transition ideas (as stage 4).

129 There was one shorter interview of approximately 35 minutes. All other interviews ranged between 50 and 125 minutes.

130 See Chapter 3.5.2 for further explanation of phronetic research.

131 Flyvbjerg’s model, in full, asks an additional question, placed between the first and second questions. It is concerned with “who gains and who loses” and the exercise of power. In the time available it was decided to not directly raise this question, and instead to respond when and if it arose on the part of the interviewees.
7.2 Perceptions on “what’s going on” with Sydney planning

7.2.1 Sydney spatial planning

The interviews commenced with the tabling of a single A4 sheet. It consciously “led” the interviewees to the idea that there were metropolitan-level spatial planning challenges which were faced in Sydney. The list was essentially a representation of Chapter 2’s findings (“Handout 1” – see Figure 7.2). Interviewees were asked “what they thought” of the list as a representation of the spatial planning challenges facing Sydney, opening the opportunity for different views to be expressed. They were also asked whether they’d like to remove or add items to the list. Both the questions opened a short discussion on spatial planning in Sydney. Interviewees were then asked to complete a form titled “Perceptions on urban planning challenges”. It led with the following introduction:
When you think about Sydney into the future, how concerned are you about the “spatial planning” challenges outlined in Handout 1 (including any modifications you suggested).

Interviewees were invited to select a graded response from: “extremely concerned”, “very concerned”, “moderately concerned”, “slightly concerned”, “unconcerned”. Over three quarters of the group expressed serious concerns about the planning challenges. See Figure 7.3 for an outline of the frequency of each of the responses made by interviewees.

![Figure 7.3 - Sydney's spatial planning situation](chart)

The topic then went to the question of how interviewees saw the future prospects for Sydney planning. That is, the outlook for perceived planning challenges to be met and overcome. There was a quite balanced response to this question. Although many interviewees couched their answers with comments like “I’m an optimist”. See Figure 7.4 for an outline of response frequency.

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132 While the interview group comprised 28 individuals, only 21 of these completed these questions. Because of time limits to the availability of some interviewees, it was more important to focus on the latter stages of the interview (ie the discussion on PST conceptions).
7.2.2  Sydney’s planning system

The second stage in the interviews moved from on-the-ground urban planning matters to the planning system. First up interviewees were asked “why” it was that despite the repeated planning system reform efforts things seemed to be not progressing. The most popular explanation was “poor (government) performance” over the years, followed by politics “getting in the way” of good policy decisions. A third significant suggested reason was that challenges were getting more difficult. The recent stalled planning reform efforts were regularly cited as evidence of all three.

After this discussion “Handout 2” was tabled (Figure 7.5), and a similarly patterned approach to the first stage of the interview was followed. Handout 2 suggested a set of institutional problems (short term election cycles clash with long term problems, public cynicism, hijacking by interest groups, lack of recognition of complexity). Again after discussion, interviewees were asked to grade their responses to the following question:

![Prospects for addressing planning challenges](Figure 7.4 - Prospects for improved spatial planning outcomes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning “System” Challenges Some examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Problems require long term responses but short election cycles and combative settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Need change but: public cynicism / stakeholder cynicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Narratives are important in setting pathways ... but often “hijacked” by interest groups, or the quest for simple model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Institutions exhibit their own mistrust, defence mechanisms, self-interests, contradictory initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Complex problems but Everything is Urgent! A rush. Trade-offs can mean a worse result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Process time/cost sucks out goodwill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 7.5 - Interview "Handout 2"]
When you think about Sydney’s society into the future how concerned are you about the planning system challenges outlined in Handout 2 (including any modifications you suggest)?

A significant majority were either “very” concerned or “extremely” concerned. The high levels of concern about Sydney’s planning system expressed in interviews seem to fall in line with national surveys undertaken under the auspices of the Property Council of Australia which have consistently rated the NSW planning system at low levels when all States and Territories are compared (Macroplan Dimasi 2015).

![Levels of concern about Sydney's planning system challenges](image)

*Figure 7.6 - Concerns about Sydney's planning system*

The interview discussion moved on to future prospects, this time focused on the planning system. That is, the outlook for perceived planning system challenges to be met and overcome. A significant number of interviewees had a positive outlook, however the majority were unsure about the future or had a negative outlook (see Figure 7.7).
Preliminary questions had established that there were perceptions of significant concern about planning in Sydney on the part of the interviewees (there was no discernible differences in perceptions among the sectoral interests represented by interviewees). The findings suggested a cross-sectoral concern about Sydney’s planning generally in line with work in this thesis (ie worsening spatial planning outcomes and institutionalised system problems which were resistant to change). From one point of view, this consistency of view might itself be surprising given the under-attention to most of these points in what this thesis is calling the SPSR project. So while useful in eliciting these perceptions from system actors, the interview up until now had been mostly concerned with establishing a contextual platform for discussion of the PST logic.
7.3 “What’s to be done”: does PST thinking help

7.3.1 More on approach

The third stage in the interview used “Handout 3” (Figure 7.8) to lead discussion into the relational and institutional thinking. This stage mostly centred on understanding why flawed systems are inclined to resist change, and what needed to be done differently. The fourth and final stage in the interview then progressed to move beyond this understanding and suggested the transition management concepts as means of manoeuvring out of a problematic planning system into a better one. So by now the interview was beyond complaint about the planning system, and onto creatively engaging in what responses might be needed and how they might be configured. Three further handouts were used to frame the discussion on transition management. They are reproduced in collage form at Figure 7.9.

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Figure 7.8 - Interview “Handout 3”

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Figure 7.9 - Documents used to assist in discussions on transition management
By this point the interview had moved on from the goal of eliciting static opinions from interviewees, to a conversational style aimed at “dialectically examining the topic” (Brinkmann 2007, p116). Knowledge building was now operating in a more dynamic style and at a more complex level. There were two broad lines of inquiry. The first was whether the interviewees could even associate with or connect to these planning/transitions conceptualisations from where they sit in the practice world – including factors like interest, comprehension and resonance. The second was whether the concepts were seen as offering something new and valuable: something innovative. This would include whether the ideas “ring true” in regard to providing new ways to respond to practice settings which the interviewees might have experienced, or to see patterns of social behaviours through a different light; and so suggest both new action and new questions. Behind both of these lines of inquiry was the question of implementation prospects, including concerns and/or preconditions.

7.3.2 Interviewee connection with PST concepts

From the group of 28 interviewees, four or five (there is a question mark over one interviewee) did not connect or associate well with the relational-institutional and transition concepts put in the interviews. This finding is based on subjective inference from the interviewer and is based on the degree of engagement in the open discussion, body language and some explicit comments or concluding remarks suggestion (“thought provoking … but too abstract” (Local Community Advocate #2)). Sometimes this situation arose in the course of the discussions. That is, the concepts themselves, or as they were put, failed to engage. Only one interviewee specifically raised the “anti-theory” viewpoint (ie words to the effect “I switch off when theory comes up” (Consultant #4)). Two other interviewees, seemingly, entered the interview to push a particular (different) line of thinking on planning system reform. They were among a larger group who had this kind of intent. For these two however, the interview approach was not able to be effective in joining their concepts with those involved in this research. Relevantly, only one of these two people would be described as a “lobbyist” (ie one of the individuals particularly associated with promoting and advocating a particular interest in the recent reforms). The other interviewee was pressed for time.

133 That is, neither, say the interview design, nor the interviewer’s attempts to do so, were able to shift these two interviewees into a closer connection with the concepts which were being tested.
Each of the “lobbyists” did tend to commence the interviews with a strong advocacy position in regard to the planning system (either pro-development and investment, or, seeking reform which more empowered local communities in development decisions). There was an interesting dynamic apparent in regard to those lobbyists who did engage in the PST ideas. This was a common tendency for “interest advocacy” (whether pro – or anti-development say) to fall away through the course of the interviews. When considering the unfair influence of powerful interests on sustainability policy, transition theorists have described as important that these interest advocates be removed from the comfortable position of being able to turn a blind eye to the wider complexity of urban problems (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010). The dynamic described above suggested the process design did have some effect on this front. In fact, it was two persons advocating particular (opposing) interests who were among those who expressed the most keenness to participate further in a planning system reform transition exercise.

So overall, over three quarters of these interviewees were quite engaged in the topic. It was Handout 3, as a kind of plain English indication of how institutions or the “rules of the game” get in the way of good governance around planning, which seemed to ring particularly true for interviewees and their experiences.

### 7.3.3 Views on PST thinking as innovative (with constructive criticisms)

**Helpful in providing important new problem explanations**

The concepts as portrayed were generally seen to provide both new framing devices, as well as specific insights on individual problems. Examples of each are outlined below.

*Explaining the downside of the current tendency to a narrower problem conception: This is the point from complex system thinking on the advantages in drawing in the richer complexity to problem settings, to help break free of regular response patterns and creating opportunities for “emergence” of new innovations. Interviewees picked upon this point mindful of an observed tendency to corral the scope of a problem (keep it simple stupid), and certainly as far as the SPSR project is concerned, the core intention to literally design out complexity. The discussion around this point (complexity as an answer rather than a problem) regularly gained attention as something fresh and important in interviews. Government’s otherwise hard grind of working away over the years at metropolitan strategic planning, naturally more inclined to take on the wider interdependencies and*
relationships involved in city planning, was not only put into the background by the reforms, it went backwards:

... desperation to deliver housing, wherever, whatever, at any cost ... this totally undermined any goodwill that may have been built up with solid strategic planning.

(Former Government Official #1)

... we’ve done very badly (in the wider narrative about planning) – a disaster really. NSW seems particularly bad at present in a situation when you really have to be spot-on to get through the difficulties today.

(Consultant #1)

The narrow focus of the SPSR narrative (mostly seen to be on property and its economics, when there were many larger city planning challenges with more universal resonance), was seen to just make it easy for local community activists (often the same individual strategic planners had been working slowly with for years) to “pick off” the reforms (Former Government Official #4). The suggested new knowledge being offered by transitions thinking here is that something that was intuitive, at least for someone responsible for strategic planning in government (ie narrow problem conceptions will come back and get you in the end) now had an apparent epistemological foundation.

New ways of looking at quite specific planning system problems: One of the points of detail contained in the SPSR White Paper was improved “contestability” in urban infrastructure provisioning. This suggestion is that Central Government (as well as planning authorities and developers) are frustrated in their attempts to break through old approaches (“a group like Sydney Water have done things the same way for 50 years” Consultant #1). As the urban infrastructure challenge becomes more complex (eg retrofitting infrastructure to more sustainably accommodate growth in established areas) the need for innovative approaches and highly integrated thought and action is also increasing. But this has been difficult to achieve in the face of barriers resultant from “siloed” utilities provisioning institutions (eg laws, regulations, organisational structures and cultures). One of the interviewees has been a senior advisor to government in this area. He raised the frustrations the government continued to have here, and indicated:
… (the White Paper) doesn’t have the big picture on contestability, only the narrow ideological position... This approach (would start with) the bigger narrative about (planning) in suburbs ..., then a smaller discussion around infrastructure contestability (becomes seen as) a means to an end. Not the end in itself. (PST ideas are) interesting because it’s not been put that way (before)... The ideas you’re suggesting here are a good way to go (on contestability policy approaches).

(Consultant #1)

This was evidence from a major consultant (to central government on infrastructure provisioning) picking up a new insight from the transitions thinking. It was again centred on the idea that system frustrations might be better addressed by giving less space to interests, and aggregative debates (eg here: protected anti-competitive QANGOs putting a break on innovation vs guardians of public assets in the face of slavish free-market thinking). One way this and other wider benefits might be achieved is by seeing the wider complexity and relationships which are also directly related to this problem. This removes the luxury of advocacy arguments being seen as ideological and aggregative and forces them to be seen from the perspective of the broader complexity of the challenges faced in urban society.

*Helpful in reframing system problems when stuck:* For most of the interview group there was something refreshing in the capacity of transitions thinking to provide a new way to look at system problems. The ideas behind the MLP and SNM provided a context for a new reflection on the way intended innovations were consistently running into barriers or underachieving if implementation had occurred. That is, the framings provided a way to re-examine and strategise frustrations or observed lack of breakthroughs with these innovations. For example, in a discussion on strategic niche management, Planning Official #1 went through a number of the examples of “niche innovation” which had had or were having mixed success:

*It’s helpful to have this kind of framework (MLP) its helps you look at things differently and look for these kinds of projects, the little things, as “niche innovations” and how you might help nudge it in the right direction towards game changers. It shows how a lot of these might be able to add up to a compelling force.*

(Government Official #1)
Conceptions not always new but still seen as useful

Certainly a lot of the PST ideas were not seen as new, but they were still often seen to have potential to be useful in better explaining (and perhaps even giving names to) current dynamics and patterns, and thus improving the capacity to influence them. A selection of the insights on this point are provided below:

Relational-institutional thinking and complexity already in the gaze of planning system reform: In regard to the presentation of the institutional problem and planning as a complex adaptive system, the point was made that there was already a long term investigation underway in how governments’ deal with interest advocacy and the need to move away from being so risk averse and short term focused. There was also an awareness of some of the academic work, and not just from the academics interviewed. Specifically, the work of Habermas was cited on collaborative rationality and communication problems in planning by Consultant #3. Another more recently active academic, Judith Innes, was cited in particular for her work in planning as a complex adaptive system by Government Official #1. It was also apparent from the interviews that some of this thinking had been put in place by government in the course of the reforms.

In regard to the relational ideas around exposing different perspectives as a means of securing a more collaborative approach, both a Development Industry Representative #1 and Local Community Advocate #1 made clear that there were some early informal gatherings between them and the Minister and others early in the process with this sort of intent. However, trust was lost on the way (from Local Community Advocate #1’s perspective this was because “there was another discussion going on in another room”). Both of the interviewed development industry representatives indicated a similar impression (ie they were being excluded from some important discussions). There was already a level of recognition of flawed institutional patterns.

Transition management and arenas – both promising and risky: “devil in the detail”

A key concept in transition management is creation of new arenas, coalitions and networks. The emphasis on “new” is deliberate, and a step away from BAU approaches. The actors in transition arenas would share an interest in a planning system shift towards more sustainable city planning, and strategically protecting niche innovations consistent with this goal. There were two quite distinctive impressions on these concepts in the interviews, one was constructive and positive, the other interested but more cautious and pessimistic.
Constructive interpretations: The first was more positive and the discussion was about connecting them to emergent practice examples. Two different smaller but influential organisations which were then operating on the perimeter of the planning system became the practical points of attention in discussion. These were the Committee for Sydney (CfS) and the newDemocracy Foundation (each of which had significant roles in the SPSR project), which were both garnering some support from progressive thinkers at the time. For example, after I described the transition arena concept, Former Government Official #1 suggested:

So is that like … the Committee for Sydney, Tim Williams (CEO of CfS) the mouth, Lucy Turnbull (Chair of CfS) the connections, the brain. All these other people and connections jump on the Committee for Sydney bandwagon. They feel something might happen, because their interests may be able to be absorbed by participation in this group. Or they share the agenda in fact, which is about a better fairer Sydney, which is something we’d all like.

(Former Government Official #1)

The CfS is an interesting case study. The “Committee for (insert city name)” movement is now operating in a number of cities in Australia, and is usually nominally concerned with inclusive social progress. But the institutionalised tendency for groups like these is to centre back towards representing the established regime and major commercial/business interests. The CfS seems to now have established serious credentials in working beyond this. The current CEO (Tim Williams - a former advisor to UK cabinet ministers in the Department of Communities and Local Government) and Chair (Lucy Turnbull - an Australian business leader and former member of COAG’s City Expert Advisory Panel)\(^{134}\) are both often speaking publicly on topics relating to social equity, sustainability and long term city economics. One of the new thoughts that was being suggested in the interviews was that existing arenas or networks like the CfS or others could be evaluated (either externally or internally) in terms of their credential as transition arenas vs that of an advocacy groups (which support the individual and group interests of members).

\(^{134}\) Lucy Turnbull’s husband is Prime Minister of Australia currently.
Yes I think definitely we should be trying to propagate arenas like this. That is getting people with good personal skills and interests in a fairer society we must do more on this.

(Local Community Advocate #1)

An interviewee from central government involved in generating cross agency change in the metropolitan planning domain found it a useful way to think about some work he was already involved in:

_I think it’s quite interesting this Dutch idea (sic) where you set up your teams to work on projects, then bring it out and evolve with coalitions... find the path to build support for something before its hijacked. So the idea of things starting within a closed loop and firstly engaging offline with (progressive actors) to test things and build support (is useful)...._

(Government Official #4)

_Cautionary interpretations: There was also concern and caution expressed on transition arenas and the practicalities:

_You know it’s so fraught this model. ... (It) can work if you’ve got really good people on and fail if you don’t. I see where you’re going with it but our experience has been so abysmal. It’s always the same people getting on and they all have agendas and they would use that group to drive their agendas.

On the question of who to choose, I think it’s been the case that people who are genuine about having a liveable city are the ones you are after. But I’m not sure how you connect them._

(Local Community Advocate #1)

_How would this process be auspiced ... what’s to stop one or another interest group from running with certain matters and not others._

(Consultant #1)

It’s fair to say that an overall view from interviewees in regard to these transitions and niche management conceptions was that the devil will be in the detail (details which are very hard to grasp in a short interview):
It’s really hard to (indicate where I stand) ... I really need to understand it more. So it’s too hard to know right now ... I would need to see something that would really happen like the way you described it before deciding.

(Community Worker #1)

**Good vibes on linking abstract scholarly concepts to practice problem**

One of the key ideas in transitions scholarship is that there needs to be more interaction between scholarship and practical knowledge entirely for the purpose of the reframing of complex problems like that facing Sydney planning. That is there is a current gap in the intellectual offerings to help address practical planning system problems. This rang true for the leader of a consultancy practice which is commonly advising on such problems at high levels of both Central government and various line agencies including planning, at both State and national level:

*There is a rare and an uneven appreciation of these concepts in the Sydney planning domain. However, in government it is particularly rare. There may be some individuals who would, but it is not widespread throughout any organisation and is not evident in the planning system...I believe our business has worked along these lines and it comes from two directions. My own experience in practice has led me to similar conclusions but (another staff member who shared his time with the consulting practice and as university scholar) would come to these conclusions from a research background. So while there may not be an understanding of all the abstract concepts it does ring true in some practical sense in this business.*

A highly useful discussion. This work needs to be picked up in the education of planning practitioners and politicians.

(Consultant #2)

This encouraging positive sense about an essentially new way of thinking about planning system reform both in agenda and process was picked up from many other interviewees:

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135 Consultant #2 named the heads of two State government agencies with whom he had worked.
This looks so interesting, “whoohoo”.

(Former Government Official #1)

But a really interesting discussion… Overall, I think it’s a good process because you’re taking us further than we go now

(Academic #1)

...as we conclude I really like your approach. What like the best about it is bit by bit, little by little, education and change. ...

(Local Community Advocate #1)

This discussion has been great. I think organisations are generally not aware of these issues…

(Government Official #4)

... this is really exciting stuff ... what you’re onto here.

(Government Minister #1)

### 7.3.4 Contentious Issues remaining

Three themes which were oppositional to PST thinking can be synthesised from the interviews.

**Better value to focus on good practice than transformation of the planning system**

This was the view that the system was in such an embedded state of dysfunction that efforts at change were likely to be a waste of time, whereas there were major policies and projects that warranted direct attention:

... the chances of having a conversation in Sydney at the moment about matters like this are not just zero, they are minus zero. The lunatics have control of the asylum and a control they haven’t had for a long time. So discussions about planning are 100 years out of date, and having a serious discussion is just about impossible. They may have just spent $20m on the (SPSR project) when it could have gone to responding to problems (such as) affordable housing.

(Academic #1)
The suggested alternative to the more abstract conceptions put in the interviews was to just focus on good work in concrete projects, and try to learn from and propagate such good practice. An interviewee who indicated he had worked in both more, and less, effective bureaucratic settings operating in the surrounds of the planning system, said the MLP overstated the regime level resistance to innovation. Government Official #3 said individual projects can have high performance cultures and this transitions thinking seems to not account sufficiently for this. He expressed a view of very progressive thinking in the roll-out of Sydney’s $8 billion North West Rail Link project (NWRL)136. While major infrastructure projects had the potential to be “game-changers” in terms of city spatial structure, this happened in his experience “only sometimes”. According to this interviewee, the NWRL project was able to separate itself from the mainstream and “insulate” itself from the cycle of BAU thinking that narrows a project focus. This was evidenced by a high level of innovation and flexibility in the project conception, especially in the planning of the alignment of the rail line.

Long term community payback, rather than shorter term capital cost was able to be adopted as the performance measure. The central relational factor driving the rail alignment was the optimisation of housing opportunity nearby. Not just having regard to shortfalls in housing supply, or optimising value uplift on public land corridors, or reducing high GHG emitting car-based journeys (although these were all important), but especially with a view to return on investment from the “fare box”137. It was suggested that significant portions of Sydney’s current rail line have a return on investment (RoI) of about 20%, mostly due to the domination of one-way peak travel (“tidal flows”). The NWRL project was expected to provide an RoI of closer to 80%, as a consequence of lower operating costs, housing connectivity, higher customer service levels and more dispersed peak and non-peak attractors drawing a wider spread of patronage. This was seen as important as it better enabled further investment opportunities in sustainable transport into the future.

Rejoinder: the concern is that indeed “only sometimes” do major infrastructure projects latch onto relational factors and bring transformative effect in city structure terms. PST thinking is concerned with responding more systemically to this setting. That is, the

136 The NSW government’s North West Rail Link project is under construction at the time of writing and is intended to become operational in 2017.
137 It was suggested that significant portions of Sydney’s current rail line have an RoI of about 20% (mostly due to tidal flows), whereas the NWRL project was expected to provide an RoI of closer to 80%.
The downside is that too many of these major infrastructure projects don’t seem to make the wider city shaping connection. The case in point is an intended new $15 billion motorway project for Sydney (“Westconnex”– Australia’s “biggest transport project” (O’Farrell 2013))\(^{138}\). This massive project seems not to have been able to break free of institutional inertia. After initial aspirations and some early commitments in regard to wider city-structuring goals, the project seems to have now lost favour from previous advocates including the former head of Infrastructure NSW (Nick Greiner) and the Chair of the Committee for Sydney (Lucy Turnbull). Both have indicated a fear that the project has over time morphed into “just a transport project”, when at one time it had prospects to pragmatically capitalise on some of the land use-transport independences and creatively provide for multiple city shaping benefits. Turnbull was quoted as saying (Hasham 2014):

(The transport and urban renewal aspects of WestConnex) seem to have been sheared off from each other and I think that's unfortunate because ... when governments do spend a whole chunk of money, there have to be housing and economic benefits beyond just that project.

**The power of individual initiative is more important than generic structures**

This idea took transitions thinking (or at least as explained in the interview) to be, itself, overly formalised with its structure of arenas backed up by certain rules and heuristics. This was seen to under-account for the power of individual initiative and agency: “personalities are just as powerful to organisational performance as institutions” (Former Government Official #4). One of the interviewees who had achieved considerable success in incremental change with effective projects over a number of years working within government, indicated that the challenge was to achieve change in spite of the system.

*I don’t have a great deal of confidence that we will ever get a good system. But it doesn’t worry me overly because I think you can get there in the end...*

(Former Government Official #3)

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\(^{138}\) The WestConnex motorway project is tied to a Commonwealth interest in “(building) the roads of the 21st century”, and the Commonwealth has committed $1.5 billion towards project. The works would increase lanes on Sydney’s M4 motorway and extend it towards the city and airport through major tunnelling works.
Another interviewee from central government was emphasising the importance of individual initiative as demonstrated by leaders within key organisations. This was about the sometimes impossibility of delivering reform in highly politicised settings and how critical moments shouldn’t be wasted:

... (while) we are in the centre of things, I have to rely on my boss (to push reforms). He has a strong interest in all this stuff, but at the same time, at a moment’s notice, he can be totally distracted on another policy priority of government. The chances of even getting an audience on one policy area are lost. So it’s funny while you think government is big, and it is, but at the active centre, it’s one person or a Premier or a cabinet and you have to get their attention for long enough to convince them to think outside their day to day cycle, and the political hooks for it.

The political hooks for metro planning (for a significant moment were) the (SPSR project) planning reforms.

(Government Official #4)

Rejoinder: While the explanation may have been inadequate in interviews, PST thinking has the opposite intention to the downplaying or limiting of human initiative or agency. It is seeking to add some structure to the discussion though in emphasising the importance of: (1) innovative actions by individuals and groups to shift in long term challenges, and (2) stimulating “co-evolution” of such actions. The idea is that these challenges require a step beyond simple leadership or human initiative, and towards its replication, upscaling and empowerment. Connecting-up of initiatives is central to this. It is this “networking” that provides the platform for the main game: stimulation of mutually reinforcing dynamics which both reduce barriers to reform at an individual level, but also weaken otherwise powerful institutions (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p265). So referencing the above two cases, PST thinking is concerned with using the innovation from the NWRL project to assist in reframing, say, a WestConnex project, to be more aligned with sustainable urban development goals.

“Transition arenas” bring too many downsides

“Unintended” effects of steering: There was a view that a “well meaning” transition arena (ie located outside the regime) wouldn’t necessarily bring better prospects to steer society towards a sustainable path than the current system. Evidence indicated that sometimes top-down governance steps can be highly potent in sustainability terms, either due to: (1) the
direct effects of policies or (2) backlash to them. A suggested example was Ministerial call-in powers for certain major planning decisions (ie removing planning authority from the local council). These legislative provisions (“Part 3A” of the EPA Act), introduced by the former Carr Labor government in 2005 would eventually became one of the pressure points for the landslide change of government in 2011. But they did have an effect on increasing housing in certain well-located suburbs (ie close to transport and employment):

An unintended consequence of Part 3A was that it caused ... councils to take it all much more seriously. They thought if I don’t accept growth somewhere I’ll get it anyway and where I don’t want it ... (we have to) take our head out of the sand.

This was the view that it was only government that had the power to cut through the inertia on this question of where housing should be located. That is, no matter to what extent deliberative processes or transition arenas were working away, it was the direct threat of loss of control that forced the hand of councils in this important policy domain.

Whose interpretation of ‘sustainability’?: There was also criticism of the transition arena model’s “huge reliance” on the elite model, which can have a tendency to focus aggressively on meeting targets aligned with society’s economic goals but at the expense of this idea that PST thinking can support social inclusion (Community Worker #1). The groups and individuals that were active in dealing with the reality of social exclusion at the harder edges of societal problems (eg unemployment and homelessness concerns) and did have potential to shine a light on them in, say, transition arenas, were usually in the field, and unlikely to be perceived as influential enough to sit on a panel of elites (ibid).

Rejoinder: Transition arenas, in their full construction at least, do seem to have some points of incongruence with planning system reform project scenarios. Mindful of this interview feedback, a noteworthy aspect of the PST framework (Chapter 5) was the non-inclusion of theoretically valid transition arenas within a PST-based reform episode itself. Chapter 5.3.3 explains the basis of this position, including the particular concern about the perceived legitimacy of the selection of a set of elites to drive a regime-organised reform process. The PST framework does adopt certain concepts and procedures of the transition arena. There is also a capacity for transition arenas to work as a shadow process outside the formalities of an organised reform episode.
7.4 Conclusions

This thesis comes from the starting point that there are systemic planning problems in Australian cities which are persistent or worsening. Chapter 2 provides evidence to suggest Sydney was locked into such a setting, and the city planning system was not well positioned to respond. This part of the research found that a significant majority of this group of interviewees (persons familiar with planning in Sydney, but coming from different domains within it) generally agreed with this view. Interviewees, all of whom already have a deep background in planning, saw a serious need for transformative change in the planning system as it affects Sydney.

When the conceptualisations which are being explored in this thesis were suggested as a means of helping to stimulate this change, a large majority of interviewees were able to engage with the concepts and saw them as providing important insights. This was summed up in questions put at the end of the interview, which sought perceptions on: (1) “how important” ideas covered in interviews were, in regard to planning system reform, and then (2) existing levels of understanding of the topics. All interviewees (ie across all of sectoral and professional interests involved) saw the interview subject matter as highly important, and a significant majority saw levels of understanding of the topics covered as relatively low. Figure 7.10 below shows the significant gap.

![Importance of interview subject matter vs Existing levels of understanding of topic](image)

*Figure 7.10 - Comparing importance of PST topics and existing understandings*
Interviewees were often quite enthusiastic about the PST thinking. At least five of the interviewees seemed to be beyond just enthusiastic, and gave a strong indication of interest in acting further in a “transition” project, when the idea was posited in general discussion towards the end of the interview. This included two persons from a planning background, and one each from a development industry background, resident activist and academic background. One person from a planning background was keen for the concepts to be used in education programs. But when I put that question to one of the academic interviewees (who had expressed some enthusiasm), there was little interest in doing so. When the option of university classes on “the planning system” (ie the focus of this thesis) was compared to getting expert practitioners in to talk to students about good practice projects, the latter was seen as better value. The point seemed to be captured in a (somewhat backhanded) complement from one of the consultants interviewed:

...*Its good stuff, very interesting. Nice to have a reflective conversation like this, rather than the pressure cooker which is more the reality.*  

(Consultant #1)

But there was reflexive thinking on both sides of the interview table, and comments like “we should get more time to talk about complex ideas like this”. Perhaps this was best captured in two comments from the single government minister who was interviewed\(^{139}\). This interviewee was very engaged and insightful. He seemed to be as familiar with some of the academic ideas being presented as he was with politics. At one stage, when the discussion was linking up the two (theory and politics), his remark was “now you’re making my head hurt”. But towards the end of the discussion his comment was “I think this is helping me more than it’s helping you”. So like for many of us, the transitions ideas were putting questions which were challenging and not often put. It was not the case for that particular interviewee, but it is as if for some of us the “pressure cooker” has removed or cauterised our curiosity. One interviewee, when asked about prospects for transitions thinking beyond a very small group of elites who in his view were already switched-on, he suggested that many in senior government positions were so seriously struggling day-to-day in their roles, it was hard enough to keep your head above water, rather than engaging in these kinds of more aspirational projects:

\(^{139}\) This interview lasted a total of one hour. The Minister needed to leave the first session after 30mins. But invited me back to conclude things in a second interview a couple of weeks later.
"It's hard to see the stars when you're sitting in the gutter."

(Consultant #2)

Or maybe it is as another suggested, that, we, from Australian cultural settings have *not* been in enough pressure situations, at least compared to those northern European geographies from which transitions ideas have come from:

*Europe has that history that enables the mind to think like that ... they know things about humanity and equality and what can drastically go wrong ...*

(Community Worker #1)

Overall, across this group it can be said that there is conceptual support for both the relational-institutional and transitions thinking, and their integration. If there was an opening disinclination to abstract or scholarly ways of thinking, the phronetic interview approach and the (alluring) idea that there *could* be a pathway towards an improved planning system (seen as important to all the group) were together enough to catch attention. There *was* attention. This is something itself given the track record of theory/practice interface in Australia (March 2010). Perhaps the best signal of potential, was the depth of the dialogue that was involved in (most of) the interviews. The level of abstract discussion going on in this “interrogation” of PST thinking, was uncommon and for transition-thinkers this is a very positive thing (linking scholarly thinking to practice is one of the lynchpin concepts). But there were limits to any conviction on the part of interviewees on real-world implementation prospects. Stronger support would be contingent on more practice-based application and evidence. This feedback encouraged me to prepare a more applied conceptualisation (ie the PST framework) which is drawn into the applied setting of the SPSR project in the next chapter.
Chapter 8  PST framework meets the Sydney planning system reform project

8.1  Introduction

The development of the PST framework came about through an inductive process. The exercise started with the suggestion of a knowledge gap in the field of planning system reform (Chapters 2 and 3). Then a new inter-relationship between already existing (planning and transition) theories was developed, aimed at addressing this knowledge gap. The result was the PST logic (Figure 5.1). Conclusions can be drawn that the PST logic does add something to knowledge on planning system reform, based on the feedback from interviews with experienced practitioners (Chapter 7). The PST framework has then been developed through further theory interpretation and inductive conclusions. An explanation of how its componentry was determined is provided at Chapter 5, where “three horizons” came to be identified, as pointers for the mapping out of transformational potential (Baghai, Coley et al. 2000), along with a set of “characteristics” for each of these horizons.

It needs to be recognised that the PST framework remains untested. This is not to downplay its value. It is suggested as helpful to knowledge creation because it has developed the earlier theory-based conceptual thinking into a practice model which can be put into the field. So this point in the research allows the PST framework to be used, not as a prescriptive specification, but as a device to set alongside the SPSR episode, to see what insights might emerge on questions like: what went wrong (and right) with the project, what might have happened differently, and what particular junctures might have been more and less critical as the reform episode played out. With this purpose in mind, the rest of the chapter works sequentially through the “three horizons” of the framework, comparing events from the SPSR project to each PST horizon in turn.

8.2  Horizon 1: Intention

8.2.1  PST Framework Intention: sustainable urban development.

Under the PST framework, establishing intention is a first decisive “horizon”. The “intention” of a planning reform under the framework is to help achieve sustainable urban development. It has three points of explanation. Reforms should be concerned with: (1)
delivering inclusive societal benefits, rather than selective or exclusive benefits to empowered interests, (2) improving wider city economic prospects, rather than only on property-related economic interests, and (3) systems thinking, and that reform is more likely where “attractors” are part of the package (to act as a magnetic force for change in path-dependent systems).

8.2.2 Intentions driving the SPSR project: comparative analysis

Within three months of coming into power in April 2011 the O’Farrell Liberal government announced its plans to “overhaul” the planning system. An 18 month project timeframe was announced comprising three stages: (1) a “listening and scoping” stage to be conducted independent of government by two former (bipartisan) NSW government ministers, (2) a green paper stage which would outline system reform options, and (3) a White Paper stage setting out the proposed framework, and draft legislation for eventual passage through parliament.

A review of ministerial media statements directly concerned with the planning system reform project and released between the announcement of the reform project and the White Paper’s release indicates serious ambitions on the part of government. The Planning Minister Barry Hazzard signalled the commencement of what would be the “first comprehensive planning review in 31 years” which would “kick start an era of integrity and transparency” in planning (Hazzard 2011b). The reform effort was variously described as a “once-in-a-generation opportunity for people to shape the legislation that determines how their regions, communities and streets are shaped in the future” (Hazzard 2011a), a “monumental overhaul of the … system” (NSW Government 2011), “a once in a lifetime opportunity for communities …” (Hazzard 2011c), which would “(bring about) a planning system that will lead the nation in innovation and reform” (Hazzard 2012). A budget of $7.5m was allocated to the project over two years. Each of the nine media statements released during this (pre-White Paper) period highlighted transformative process intentions including in regard to: civic engagement, integrity, transparency, certainty and simplifying the overly “complicated” system. The most commonly cited substantive objective of the reforms apparent from the media statements was that of providing “new housing” to address the “current housing shortfall”. Three other substantive objectives of the reforms were less
frequently nominated in the media statements. These were: improving business opportunity, conserving the natural environment, improving infrastructure planning.140

By the time of the release of the White Paper in April 2013, the government’s intentions had been further clarified. The introduction section to the White Paper, concerned itself with establishing the case for reform. It specified the following as “objectives” of the intended new planning system (NSW Government 2013a, p15):

*The main purpose of the planning system is to promote economic growth and development in NSW for the benefit of the entire community, while protecting the environment and enhancing people’s way of life.*

*To do this, the planning system has to facilitate development that is sustainable.*

*Sustainable development requires the integration of economic, environmental and social considerations in decision making, having regard to present and future needs.*

The White Paper goes on to provide a summary description of sustainable development as being “about giving weight to … three interdependent … pillars”:

*Environment - Protecting threatened species and habitats, using natural resources wisely and minimising, mitigating or addressing environmental impacts.*

*Economic - Promoting the development of the economy and the wellbeing of all communities by facilitating housing, business and employment and other forms of activity and improving productivity.*

*Social - Facilitating housing that meets the needs of the whole community, creating a high quality built environment that promotes the health of all communities and ensuring accessibility to services and employment opportunities.*

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140 For the purposes of this analysis each of the nine media statements was reviewed and keywords/phrases were highlighted. A score of 1 or 2 was allocated for each keyword/phrase in each individual media statement to reflect emphasis. A spreadsheet was then prepared to calculate the total count of keywords/phrases for the nine statements. As at 1/5/2015 all the media statements were still publicly available at http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/AboutUs/Contactus/MediaCentre/tabid/381/ctl/PreviousReleases/mid/950/source/1/language/en-US/Default.aspx.
The White Paper then moves from these more abstract conceptions to its interpretation of the more concrete societal challenges which have an urban planning connection, as captured in the following paragraph (p13):

*A key focus of the reforms is about addressing the State’s under performance in a number of key areas. In particular, the new planning system will focus on better facilitating housing supply, which has recently been at near record lows in NSW, supporting improvements in economic productivity and growth and putting downward pressure on the cost of living for the community, including prices and rents.*

The White Paper (ibid) indicates a further higher order intention of the reforms as that of “improving community confidence in the integrity of the planning system” in the face of what is suggested as an erosion of public confidence due to political interference in decisions about larger development projects in the recent past.

**Inclusive social progress or exclusive societal benefits?**

The language in the White Paper and draft bill were conspicuous in their foregrounding of the encouragement of economic growth and (housing) development as the core intention of the planning reforms. At one level this should be no surprise as the election of the O’Farrell Liberal-National coalition government in 2011 was in part founded on the idea that previous Labor governments had stymied economic growth (and certainly growth had slowed in the later period of Labor power – see Chapter 2). In fact, O’Farrell’s main election slogan was to “make NSW number one again”¹⁴¹. But there was a change apparent here. The planning system has been more commonly understood as something which is involved in managing or moderating development to meet wider societal norms¹⁴². It is a novel step for planning in NSW to suggest, as the White Paper does, that the “main” purpose of a planning system is to “promote” economic growth and development (notwithstanding the implied cautions as indicated above). By way of distinction, an alternative purpose for a planning system (more consistent with the PST logic) would for it to “promote”: the “social and economic welfare of the community” and “a better environment” (paraphrased from the first object of the

¹⁴¹ The Liberal party’s main slogan for the 2011 election was “Let’s make NSW number one again”. For an example election leaflet see www.electionleaflets.org.au/leaflets/671/ (accessed 7/2/2015). The current NSW State Plan (under the Baird government) is entitled NSW 2021 – A Plan to Make NSW Number One.

¹⁴² As evidenced by the evolving intent of planning-related legislation over time and particularly with its consolidation in the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979.
current planning legislation\textsuperscript{143}). Economic growth could then be seen as an important subordinate intention, and one of the means of achieving a primary purpose (Newton 2008, p4). An intention to put social and environmental priorities more into the background is also borne out in other aspects of the reforms. These include:

- A name change from the key planning legislation from today’s “Environmental Planning and Assessment Act” to “Planning Act”. Especially obvious after the government commissioned (“independent”) review, involving the “listening and scoping” stage, recommended a legislation name change the other way, to the “Sustainable Planning Act” (Moore and Dyer 2012).
- Weakening of the specific legislative provisions relating to sustainable development. For example, “intergenerational equity” and the “precautionary principle” would be removed from statutory definitions under the exhibited Planning Bill. These terms have had past significance in moderating economic development projects in development assessment processes including in significant court cases (Bateman 2013).
- Codifying, within the intended legislation, a set of principles to guide the preparation of strategic plans which clearly privilege short term growth over other environmental concerns. These include: “Principle 1: Strategic plans should promote the State’s economy and productivity through facilitating housing, retail, commercial and industrial development and other forms of economic activity, having regard to environmental and social considerations.” “Principle 10: Local plans should facilitate development that is consistent with agreed strategic planning outcomes and should not contain overly complex or onerous controls that may adversely impact on the financial viability of proposed development”\textsuperscript{144} (my emphasis throughout).

The White Paper and draft bills faced the difficult challenge of moving beyond the earlier media statements, which were able to negotiate the conflicting interests at hand by being all things to everyone. It was becoming understood that the reforms were intending a significant shift in support of development interests over other interests. The suggestion seemed to be that some system elements associated with “environmental” concerns (at least), needed to be changed as they were inappropriately constraining development and growth. The reform project’s intentions may still have been argued to be supportive of

\textsuperscript{143} Excerpt from section 5(a)(i) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

\textsuperscript{144} See clause 3.3 at Division 3.1 Introductory and strategic planning principles of the Planning Bill, 2013 (dated 15 April 2013).
inclusive social progress. That conception would be centred on a neoliberal perspective. That is, the best way planning can help is through promoting economic growth and in particular housing development, after which benefits will trickle throughout wider society (Campbell, Tait et al. 2014). However neoliberal foundations have been underpinning planning system reform projects since the mid-1990s yet growing inequality is evidenced. The question of privileging economic factors is covered further in the discussion on the understanding of the challenge of planning system reform (Section 8.3).

**Planning system & city productivity - wider economic intentions or property centric?**

The PST framework extends reformist economic intentions beyond the property-centric (ie improving prospects for private sector investment in property) to wider questions of city productivity (eg congestion-effects, agglomeration opportunities, relationships between spatial disadvantage and productivity). The documentation accompanying the intended reforms were limited in their drawing of such wider relationships. Indirect references include suggesting that a focus of the reforms was to “(put) downward pressure on the cost of living for the community, including prices and rents”, mainly through “better facilitating housing supply”. This seems to fall-back on the view regularly expressed by industry lobby groups suggesting the planning system as the “chief cause of housing market problems”, a fact not supported by the evidence (Gurran and Phibbs 2013b). But more importantly here, the focus on this rather limited aspect of the planning system’s effect on the economic prospects for the city is seen as a missed opportunity. The situation was available to open up the planning reform debate to what’s actually at stake in regard to Sydney’s wider economic problems (Chapter 2). This could help significantly in explaining why some, otherwise difficult to accept, urban change may be necessary.

**Intention as an “attractor” to help shift institutional behaviours?**

The public narrative by the Minister and government, during the earlier stages of the reform project at least, *did* achieve some unusual levels of resonance in the Sydney media at least, with some flow-on effects into the community. The particular aspect of note was the Planning Minister’s indication of support for transformative shifts in consultation processes for strategic city planning. The interest was in part crystallised by the Minister’s suggestion that consultative approaches similar to the Vancouver CityPlan process of the 1990s would be targeted. The Vancouver CityPlan experience, and the governance processes which followed it, were already points of some attention at that time, as a consequence of favourable mention by the Grattan Institute in an assessment of leading practice civic
engagement in city governance (Kelly 2010). According to this research, the city of Vancouver has demonstrated a well-established capacity over time to make hard choices on housing, transport, taxes and other policy domains and “seeing them through” (p11). The Vancouver CityPlan work (much of it under Dr Ann McAfee a former Vancouver planning director) was notable for the extensive and carefully crafted civic engagement processes and consequential strategic planning controls which worked from metro down to neighbourhood scale (Sarkissian 2013). According to McAfee, 40% of Vancouver households, and over 100,000 people participated in the planning process. While this “attention” to strategic planning and aligned consultation was mostly academic and professional, it was picked up in the mass media through news, opinion and letters columns in Sydney papers (eg Moore 2012, Power 2012). The suggestion by the Minister was that “putting community participation at the forefront of planning decisions about how our cities and towns will grow and develop” (Hazzard 2012) would be a revolutionary shift away from the bad old days of the previous (Labor) government and a “deals-for-dollars culture and red tape that has been strangling investment in NSW (ibid).

While there was some evidence of enthusiasm during these early stages of the process, a shift in perception appeared to occur over time. One of the catalysts was the White Paper’s suggested increase in the proportion of development applications (DAs) about which local residents would not have a say, that is “code assessment” development (the White Paper target was for 80% of DAs to meet that definition). The narrative was changing; community activists were noting that any increased community powers at the more strategic (ie conceptual) planning stages would be replaced by dilution of consultation requirements at the DA stage. The suggestion was that the “improved outcomes” would mostly be for developers. By the end of 2012 a new group called the Better Planning Network (BPN) had

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145 The Grattan Institute research targeted eight major cities (Copenhagen, Chicago, Portland, Austin, Toronto, Seattle, Dublin and Vancouver) with “proven success” in city governance performance (Kelly 2010, p7). The research found evidence that the “changing (of governance) structures”, was far less important than involving residents in the tough choices before cities. According to the research, the more successful cities used “early, genuine, sophisticated and deep public engagement” to achieve this (p4).

146 Dr Ann McAfee presentation at a seminar attended by the writer at University of NSW 10 April 2013 titled “Tools for Change: how planning implementation tools can deliver equitable urban intensification outcomes”.

147 For example the head of the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO), not usual supporters of red tape removal, was an early stage supporter of the proposed early community involvement and defining “green light areas” (Moore 2012), however the EDO’s final submission to government was negative and expressed concern that stated intentions were not achieved in the proposed legislation (EDO 2013 )

148 “Code assessment” means development can be assessed based on compliance with pre-documented codes and thus is not affected by comments from neighbours. The White Paper’s argument was that the civic consultation components of the strategic planning stage would be of such high quality that community intentions could still be achieved even with such a high proportion of DAs about which the local communities had no say.
formed with the ambition of overturning the reforms. Corinne Fisher (2012), the convenor of the group, captured the essence of its concerns in an interview, reproduced in part below:

*These reforms have an overall emphasis on fast tracking development at all costs and that is not what is going to be good for our communities and for this country…*  
*We need to have a visionary planning system, integrate fundamental principles: mitigating for climate change, ecologically sustainable development, protecting our heritage, getting good building design that enhances the wellbeing of our community.*

*We would like our politicians to think further than their current term. To think about what they want to see for their children and grandchildren (but) the only thing that is going to stop the government from passing these reforms is for as many people as possible to stand up and make some noise.*

A similar view to the above was expressed in interviews for this thesis by someone formerly within government:

*The key objective was to get a new system in place that was faster and cheaper. Nothing about quality. Nothing about higher aspirations for where we wanted to be ourselves in New South Wales.*

(Source: Former Government Official #1)

This shift in perception (which paralleled an emboldening of activism against the reforms) was captured in two sequential independent surveys on attitudes to the proposed reforms (Manion and Marketinfo 2013). The first was undertaken after the release of the Green Paper in 2012. The second after the White Paper’s release in 2013. There was, in fact, little change in material *content* between the two papers. The first survey showed “broad support” for the intended reforms focusing perceptions of the “more strategic approach”. By the time of the White Paper, survey feedback suggests attitudes had turned more negative. More pronounced concerns emerged about “(reduced) protection of
neighbourhoods”, and property developers seen as “clear winners of the changes proposed” (Manion and Marketinfo 2013, p3)\textsuperscript{149}.

As this conflict around the intended trade-off over community consultation (more strategic and less at the DA stage) built-up a momentum at the community level, the discourse in response to justify the changes was limited. Unlike the quite powerful commentary from the BPN spokesperson quoted on the previous page (which itself had the characteristics of an attractor in complex systems thinking terms), there was only muted discourse from advocates on how the reforms might help shape the future trajectory of the city for community good (eg in regard to problems like spatially-based disadvantage, congestion, directly related city productivity and efficiency, as well as the longer term challenges of GHG emissions as outlined in chapter 2). The government’s narrative justifying the changes was the concern to increase housing in the city. But for many in the community this was less seen as an “attractor” in system thinking terms, and more seen as evidence of blinkered support for the housing industry.

8.2.3 Comment

The intentions brought forward in the SPSR project had generally low levels of alignment with the PST framework. There is no doubt that the government was serious about transformative change in planning. But a review of the government’s documentation and discourse suggests that the philosophical foundation of the project was centred on the (important but) limited idea of assisting in the roll-out of housing, and development more generally, both to meet housing shortfalls and as an economic boost. This is more or less the same reform agenda which has been repeated for more than two decades now in Sydney.

There was not a strong articulation of how the SPSR project’s intended changes might relate to larger spatial planning problems in Sydney; for example, how the planning system might help manage growth more fairly or, the connections between planning decisions and wider questions about city productivity, or with broader questions in the development of a more sustainable economic model mindful of the city’s infrastructure needs and demographic change. There was a new intention to increase public consultation at the strategic planning stage. It was apparent that the Minister was serious in his ambitions for

\textsuperscript{149} The findings separated data on perceptions from professional system actors (mostly planners and related professionals) and other “interested individuals” (which grew in numbers for the second survey) but there was a “high level of consistency” on these findings among both groups (Manion and Marketinfo 2013, p3).
fundamental change here. Aspects of the Minister’s own commitment to this endeavour received some praise from protagonists. However, as will be seen in the latter stages of this comparison work, the intended trade-offs between more engagement in strategic planning and DA streamlining became the key problem for the reform project ahead.

Table 8-1 summarises the key points of comparison between: (1) the PST ideas related to intention in planning system reform efforts, and (2) the intention brought to the SPSR project as apparent from this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST Framework</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Planning System Reform Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Intention Sustainable urban development | Inclusive social progress  
Attention to inclusive societal benefits over exclusive. | – Little mention of wider societal challenge. Goals centred on growth and “making NSW number one again”.  
Virtually no mention of social justice concerns, low carbon future or intergenerational interests.  
– Little evidence of alignment with PST. |
| Improving city productivity | Wide interpretation of economic implications, rather than property-centric. | – Relatively narrow aspirations for planning system to influence society’s wider economic questions. Economic intentions mostly property related.  
– Little evidence of alignment with PST. |
| Shifting embedded governance | Intention is framed purposively and ambitiously to inspire system shift, not just respond to interests | – The idea of increasing the power of people in planning decisions acted initially as a new attractor. The associated transformative power was weakened as reform particulars entered the debate.  
– Partial alignment with PST. |

8.3 Horizon 2: Understanding

8.3.1 PST “understanding”: alertness to complexity

This second horizon of the PST framework highlights the importance of an awareness of the complexity which surrounds planning system change. It draws attention to two interconnected lines of thinking. The first is empirical, and is focused directly on the city planning challenge, or, what’s wrong now with planning for urban development based on rational analysis of available information. The second is conceptual, and is concerned with
understanding what’s involved in change in complex systems, and involves the relational-institutional planning and transitions ideas.

8.3.2 Understandings driving the SPSR project: comparative analysis

**Empirical understandings driving the reform project**

Following on from the discussion on intention above, there are aspects that suggest the SPSR project was attendant to only a narrow understanding of the city’s observed planning problems. The opening to the executive summary to the White Paper would confirm this:

*NSW needs a new world class planning system if we are to achieve our common goal of making NSW number one again.*

Notwithstanding the importance of growth to the city economy, too much focus on shifts in position on inter-state league tables suggests more about attention to short term performance indicators than connection with the distinctive and substantive planning problems embedded in the city’s structure and form and the experienced urban reality of residents day-to-day. Commentators saw a missed opportunity to connect: the empirical setting, the reforms and the community:

*People buy into the idea of living in a city ... I don’t know why we aren’t much more forthcoming on data and information. Isn’t that part of the trust building?*

(Source: Consultant #1)

Turning to the specific idea of introducing new empirical thinking into the SPSR project, there were just two new pieces of independent research which were commissioned by government (or at least released and promoted) during the project.\(^{150}\) The first was a “review of international best practice in planning law” (Stein 2012) which covered three themes: (1) “mediating relationships between state and local government”, (2) “the form and substance of the plan”, and (3) “development control” (p3). The selection of Professor Stein for this work would seem to be a good choice if the interest is in sustainable urban

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\(^{150}\) This is in addition to the early independent consultative work of Moore and Dyer (2012), discussed at Section 0 which suggested more of a highlighting of sustainability principles than was taken up in the proposed reforms.
settlement\textsuperscript{151}, and his paper brought the potential to open up the SPSR project to international examples of statutory policy provisions including those which foreground sustainability and climate change. For example, one of the best practice legislation-related suggestions for sustainability advanced by Stein is the progressive \textit{Natural Step} criteria developed in Sweden and used in over 70 towns in that country and elsewhere in planning. Stein’s report concludes with a summary of best practice ideas for legislative and regulation content. Whereas the “colour” and detail of Stein’s research report does show an awareness of: (1) sustainability concerns, (2) growing planning complexity and (3) required planning law responses; this expert advice is not well represented in the White Paper or Bills, which on the topic of sustainability rarely go beyond the first order idea of avoiding negative impacts. This is evidenced by the Stein report’s citation of a number of particular statutory exemplars which have regard to the core intention of the PST framework. For example, he cites a particular provision on the question of short term vs long term thinking:

\textit{Ensure that plans are drawn up over appropriate time scales, and do not focus on the short term or ignore longer term impacts and the needs of communities in the future. Planning authorities should consider both whether policies have short term benefits which may have long term costs, but also whether short term detriments (which are capable of being mitigated) may be offset by longer term benefits which are realistically achievable.}

(Clause (ii) of UK Planning Policy Statement No.1, as cited in Stein (2012, p18))

This exemplar is almost completely opposite in intent to the “principles to guide the preparation of strategic plans” as proposed in the SPSR project’s exhibited planning bill (see Chapter 8.2.2).

The second new empirical work commissioned by the SPSR project links to the PST idea of evaluating planning benefits, and comprised a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed regulatory changes. This work (CIE 2013) indicates the reforms as proposed in the White Paper will bring savings of between $848m and $1482m per year if fully implemented. While noting there is considerable useful content, this work seems capable of being subject to the regular scholarly criticisms of cost-benefit analyses (Rouwendal and Van Der

\textsuperscript{151} For example, Stein’s listed range of scholarly expertise on the Pace Law School website is in land use planning, climate change law and the “governance of metropolitan strategies”. Source: Pace Law School, New York http://www.law.pace.edu/faculty/leslie-stein. Accessed 12/2/2015.
Straaten 2007, Annema and Koopmans 2014). First is the adoption of a narrow view of planning and development control as simply a monetary cost to society. The analysis provides for limited evaluation of non-market effects. For example, in this analysis, the costs and benefits of proposed changes to the planning and development assessment system are essentially centred on three factors: (1) avoided costs of delay/documentation ($174m/yr), (2) avoided cost of risk ($282m/yr), (with both items (1) and (2) mostly associated with code assessment), and (3) land use efficiency ($413m/yr) associated with achievement of improved development density and thus the upvaluing of land (this argued as directly associated with the changes to public consultation proposed in the SPSR project). A drop from the White Paper target of 89% code assessment to 40% would have an annual cost of $246m according to the analysis (see Figure 8.1). Where this kind of analysis can lose some persuasive power is in the thought that one might as well go for even better savings with 100% code assessment. There is a missing evaluation of unintended consequences of reduced government oversight of development which is central to code assessment provisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14.3 Costs and benefits of changes to development assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Paper reforms (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$m/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoided cost of delay and documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoided cost of risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in strategic planning cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference to White Paper reforms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.1 - Costs/benefits of changes to DA process under SPSR project (Source: CIE 2013, p126)*

The second criticism of cost-benefit analysis is in regard to considerations of long term effects of spatial change. There are reasonable levels of societal understanding now that under current trajectories there are serious risks ahead for cities and wider society due to factors like: climate change (flooding, public health, amenity, climate refugees), loss of accessible arable land (food security), environmental damage (increasingly risky oil tapping, development-related biological extinctions), social disharmony (considering all of
the above, and in part related dismal fiscal outlooks which portent an increasing squeeze on
government revenues and income) (Stern 2007, Treasury Australia 2010, Garnaut 2011, Garnaut 2013, Newton and Doherty 2014). While there might be some societal understanding of a possible different setting for cities like Sydney in just 50 years’ time, there is less in the way of an appreciation of whether and how actions today might be able to influence things. There are points of difference in how cities: (1) contribute to the problems indicated above and (2) are resilient or otherwise to the factors themselves. The spatial form of cities is central in many ways to both. Where this fits into the topic of cost-benefit analysis is to suggest that if there is to be such a focus on material factors in planning reform, then it should be accounting for longer term risks and impacts of spatial change more seriously. The CIE work does include some long term projections of its suggested savings, but these factors are limited and also adopt a high (7%) discount rate (p123) which has the effect of almost eliminating the significance of long term cost/benefits. Critics suggest that a sustainable future should be seen as a normative goal with “no time preference in the weights of the welfare of different generations” (Annema and Koopmans 2014, p2). For example, a 1.4% discount rate was argued in the Stern Review.

Under PST thinking, planning system reform should be closely concerned with city change which reduces risks and impacts for future generations. Among the factors missing today are economic models that factor in sustainability (Doherty 2010). Work on cost-benefit analysis of planning system reform might actually be an empirical tool to assist here. The CIE work brought some thinking on this path (eg in linking large scale civic engagement programs to the benefits involved in securing spatial change). But overall, the work or perhaps its brief in the context of the SPSR project itself, should be seen as a missed opportunity to introduce the wider empirical questions of the economics of a sustainable future and the place of city planning within it.

**Conceptual understandings**

The PST framework suggests that release of transformative potential starts with attention to the “softer” challenges of institutionalised norms (cultures, structures, practices) rather than the “harder” system aspects like laws, regulations and plans. Under this logic, path dependence and the complex social processes involved, mean that changes in laws, metro strategies etc will be ineffective or unable to be implemented unless they are preceded by (or accompanied by) institutional change. At one level the SPSR project was highly focused
on changes to the “harder” system aspects. This is evidenced by the focus on achieving passage of legislative changes through parliament within a tight timeframe sensitive to the 2015 state elections, and the manner in which the rest of the reform program seemed, in the public eye at least, to be dropped by government when the legislative changes failed.

However, this did not stop a number of initiatives arising in the SPSR project which were departures from regular thinking and which confronted “softer” questions of institutional change. Even on the two independent pieces of research discussed above, while the briefs were centred on changes to planning law and development codes, each could be seen as thought starters for institutional reform. Below the “transformative changes” nominated in the White Paper (introduced in Chapter 6) are synthesised to present their potential as devices to address institutional blockers (some limitations are also raised):

*Strategic planning and “growth infrastructure” provisioning.* A complaint about the current system has been the lack of coherence between planning decisions (such as zoning changes to promote growth in infill areas) and planning and provisioning commitments for hard and soft infrastructure. A concern has been cross-agency integration and a target for criticism has been the oversight role of State Treasury as a gatekeeper for government’s own infrastructure commitments. The reforms proposed a “major shift” to a whole-of-government approach including cabinet-level commitments which would result in coordinated land use decisions and infrastructure provisioning. Growth Infrastructure Plans, “signed off” by key agencies including Treasury, were proposed to fully cost and account for hard and soft infrastructure requirements as necessary to satisfy required growth strategies working at metropolitan, sub-regional and local scales. There is a history of announcements of improved integration in planning decisions. But this announcement, from an Acting Director General of the Planning Department, had a little more resonance than usual given the officer’s previous senior role as an advisor on planning and infrastructure funding issues within NSW Treasury:

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152 That is not say needed infrastructure would be State provided but rather that the infrastructure requirements of growth would be understood and a combined public and private provisioning strategy would be guaranteed (“certified”) as a component of growth planning.

153 Metropolitan strategies for Sydney have consistently made this pronouncement but the evidence of major improvements in coordination has not been forthcoming (Infrastructure Partnerships Australia and Arup 2012).
Our new planning system will for the first time specifically recognise and support long-term strategic planning – helping ensure we have the housing, employment and infrastructure that we need alongside growth.

(Jackson 2013)

Community participation. As discussed in Chapter 8.2.2, quite prominent in the SPSR project intention was “placing community participation at the forefront of the new planning system” (Hazzard 2012). Major intended increases to the quantum and form of community participation at the strategic planning stage was proposed (including a new focus on more democratic participation). A new Community Participation Charter would be introduced within the legislation to follow through on this intention, seen as a “key change” by the government (NSW Government 2013a, p44). While there were complaints about decreased participation at DA levels, clearly it is at the strategic planning stage that the more critical decisions about overall development patterns in cities are made. So this suggested commitment to civic engagement was the type which the Grattan Institute’s international research was suggesting could bring about transformative change in spatial planning governance (Kelly 2010).

Governance shifts. Also centrally related to governance shifts was the new concept of “planning boards”. These boards would comprise representation from elected government as well as independent participants (appointed by government but not representing a particular jurisdiction)\textsuperscript{154}. Planning boards would be established at the sub-regional level. This is the level between the Sydney metropolitan region and local government domains. The current metropolitan strategy shows six subregions: central, west central, north, south, west, south-west (NSW Government 2014). So population catchments were in the order of 500,000 to 1,000,000 people. The subregional planning boards were intended to bring a new capacity to influence whole-of-government planning and infrastructure provisioning for this spatial scale, and were charged with effecting the intended upscaling of civic engagement. With appropriate terms of reference, the board arrangements could open up opportunity for more deliberative and democratic approaches to planning and infrastructure decision-making. This brings improved prospects for the planning narrative to prioritise achievement of the larger and longer term planning goals, than do current very fragmented

\textsuperscript{154} In the White Paper, this new intended governance arrangement came within the intended transformative change in “strategic focus”.

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local government arrangements\(^{155}\). These first three ideas provide responses to the planning, democracy and governance deficits discussed in Chapter 3.

*Culture change.* The White Paper’s stated intention was to establish a “delivery culture” for successful implementation of the new “world class” planning system (NSW Government 2013a, p34). PST thinking links the need for culture change with new governance arrangements, that is through “mutually consistent and reinforcing changes” to structures and associated practices (Grin 2011, p4). Admittedly, the discussion of “culture” is partial in the White Paper and as put would be a candidate for the regular criticisms of “cultural change” in public sector reform programs which suggest they are mostly about changing the “identity” of public servants to be more encouraging of pro-market ideologies over wider public interests (Inch 2010, Inch 2012). The suggested “delivery culture” seems to be requesting more “pragmatic” (NSW Government 2013a, p6), and perhaps therefore compliant council planners and CEOs. But why would they be inclined this way after many previous reforms and without some conviction that the changes reinforce their own interests, or are targeting some inspirational societal good. This is again a pointer to the lack of expression of a bigger purpose to the planning reforms. Nonetheless, the discourse on the topic of how cultures across the planning system need to change became a positive one and cross-sectorally within the SPSR project (in part due to different and convenient meaning interpretations by different interests). Overall the raising of this discussion within the SPSR project is seen as an important constructive aspect, given that cultural change (associated with opening up to an orientation supportive of sustainable development) is among the key prerequisites for the required institutional change under PST thinking.

8.3.3 **Comment**

The primary underpinnings of the SPSR project were concerned with economic growth and market liberalisation. Rather than bring a new understanding to the planning system reform challenge to the table, this repeated previous failed thinking. It facilitated the narrow aggregative politics (on the one side pro-growth and development, and on the other “save our suburbs”) which in the end brought down the intended reforms, including those representing considerable initiative. A point of conflict at the outset was the fact that whereas the PST framework is seeking acknowledgement of planning as a complex system, and how understanding this complexity can provide leverage for change, the rhetoric around

\(^{155}\) At present some 41 local councils have control over planning decisions within the Sydney metropolitan region.
the SPSR project was unambiguously about “(reducing) complexity” (NSW Government 2013a, p13). There was a sense of naivety and avoidance of lessons from history apparent here. It is evidenced by (1) a fixation on a narrative about the economics of planning reform which did not resonate at a community level and was limited in its rationality\textsuperscript{156}, and (2) an over-reliance on breakthrough-style “one-shot” legislative reforms which provided no guarantees of institutional shifts.

There were some deeper understandings brought to the table within the project. But the progressive ideas the White Paper raised were lost in the pro-development language. As indicated in an interview with a senior planning consultant:

\textit{They couldn’t help themselves … leading with the rhetoric “NSW Number One”, the emphasis on growth and development … when there was enough content in that White Paper to have a completely different narrative. They could easily have focused on consultation and sustainable development but missed that opportunity.}

(Source: Consultant #1)

One consultant experienced in reform projects in many domains of government, internationally, described this avoidance or naivety to the more complex strategic thinking on institutional change as a ubiquitous problem (ie not confined to planning system reform):

\textit{I die of frustration when I work through this change stuff (with government). I have months and years where I can’t bear it. Nobody is interested in the more strategic thinking (institutional change). When you raise it you can see them resist, close-off. (Government officials) want the activity based stuff (ie breakthrough projects). But then suddenly something will happen where the strategic stuff can be heard. The key issue is to be ready when that occurs.}

(Source: Consultant #3)

Table 8-2 summarises the key points of comparison between: (1) the PST idea of foregrounding an understanding of planning reform complexity, and (2) the understandings brought to the SPSR project, as understood from this research.

\textsuperscript{156} This evidenced by the fact that by October 2014 Sydney had become “number one again” anyway (Constance 2014, p1), including by delivering the highest number of housing starts since 2002-3, despite the fact that the planning changes were not achieved.
Table 8.2 - Comparing SPSR project with PST framework “understandings”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST Framework</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Planning System Reform Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Understanding</td>
<td>Empirical understanding</td>
<td>Focus was on planning as a brake on the economy, without accounting for contrary empirical evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage with the full complexity of the system reform challenge</td>
<td>What’s wrong now in planning?</td>
<td>Little accounting for past reform experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some incidental openings for discourse on sustainability and long term urban economics in commissioned research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively low levels of reflexivity and only incidental alignment with PST.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual understanding</td>
<td>Some of the reform elements showed reflexivity and struck at key institutional issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning reform as complex societal change.</td>
<td>But the naïve or avoidant focus on legislative change (especially code assessment goals) tended to dominate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall partial alignment with PST.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8.4 Horizon 3: Action

8.4.1 PST Action: transition management but in context

The final horizon of the PST framework is focused on actioning an actual reform project in alignment with the previously suggested intention and understanding. There are three points of attention: (1) agenda development, (2) participatory approaches and (3) the orientation (or expectations) of outputs or results. Each are concerned with directing the reform project action to support the types of institutional changes (to culture, structure and practices) which are required to for breakthroughs in planning system performance.

8.4.2 Actions in the SPSR project: comparative analysis

Agenda

The five intended “transformative changes” contained in the White Paper provide a nominal agenda for the action stages of the SPSR project. Chapter 8.3.2 has already indicated how these points of attention did provide enough content to stimulate institutional rethinking. Events which follow will show how despite the credentials of the nominal agenda, a different real agenda came to play out which would result in a blocking out institutional change opportunities. Under the PST frame, the lack of any fortification for the nominal
agenda, in terms of deep normative intentions or solid understandings of system reform
dynamics, was a contributing factor to the project failure.

**Participation**

There was extensive formal and informal engagement between the government and other
participants in the course of the SPSR project\(^{157}\).

**“Urban conversations”**

The Department organised two unusual and innovative events at the City Recital Hall in
Sydney. Both went under the title “Urban Conversations”, were publicly advertised in
mainstream media and were facilitated by a well-known MC/comedian (James
O’Loughlin). Each were held in the evening and attended by around 500 people. The first
was held on 20 June 2012 as the Green Paper public exhibition stage was about to
commence. It came under the subtitle “Triumph in the City”\(^{158}\). The second was held
during the White Paper consultation process on 20 June 2013. Its subtitle was “Your voice,
Your city” and the focus was innovation in community engagement around cities. Each
event started by suggesting that Sydney had serious urban planning challenges (generally
aligned with the commentary in Chapter 2). Increased urban densities were quite prominent
in the suggested response requirements\(^{159}\). The event style in each case included snappy
videos and polished speakers\(^{160}\). While the microphone was quite tightly managed, there
was good time for Q&A in each. There were a number of strongly expressed views
“unconvinced” about density as the answer to city problems. For the second “urban
conversation”, occurring in the midst of the SPSR project, the topic of participatory
approaches was in particular focus, and quite radical approaches were being suggested by
the speakers, supporting “grass roots, collaborative, connected, empowered … activities”\(^{161}\).

\(^{157}\) UTS Centre for Local Government was an advisor to the government in certain phases of the participatory aspects
of the SPSR project. It entered a research partnership with the government in that work and was thus enabled to make
certain information available on the process for research purposes. I wish to express my particular thanks to UTS for
access to information under this arrangement.

\(^{158}\) This is the title of a recent book by the keynote speaker (Glaeser 2011).

\(^{159}\) See response from Norma Shankie-Williams, then director of metropolitan strategies at the Department of Planning
from 49m30s at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18thXJvzsgqE&index=3&list=PLCDC21B5485B07AE6.

\(^{160}\) Speakers including noted urban economist Ed Glaeser, Jane-Frances Kelly from the Grattan Institute (who had
recently published on the topic: “Cities: Who Decides” (2010). Kelly’s talk was focused more or less entirely on the
planning problems identified in Chapter 2, and urban activists Jason Roberts (founder of the Better Block Program in
Dallas) and Dave Meslin (founder of the Toronto Public Space Committee).

\(^{161}\) The Planning & Environment website on 8/3/2015 included a YouTube link to this session. See:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U61IUEiW6Wg&list=PLjdGX64tXQMHo3Q3L9EBdvcXIZC_GXH3&index=5.
This quote is at 8m30s.
McIntyre (then Deputy Director General of Planning) suggested high government ambitious in regard to engagement ideals and that “… part of what we want to do at the moment is experiment a little bit”\(^\text{162}\). But the feelings of those disappointed with participatory aspects of the SPSR project and its suggested reforms came out. This was especially from Corinne Fisher, convenor of the Better Planning Network (which as will be shown ends up playing a highly significant role in forestalling the reforms), itself a “grassroots” organisation by then comprising “an affiliation of over 400 community groups”\(^\text{163}\).

... There’s a very nice story being told tonight about where the NSW government is headed, and then there’s a strikingly different story (in) the planning bill which was being promoted by the government. Not many people have read the planning bill, but I have and can tell you that it has nothing to do with the nice little story that is being spread by the government.

(Corinne Fisher, Convenor Better Planning Network)

There is scholarly criticism in the urban ecology literature of this “urban conversation” concept, which is said to commonly involve using media savvy “experts” to promote compact city ideas. Such approaches are suggested as oversimplifying the challenges of urban sustainability and being more effective as a device to promote “neoliberal urbanism” (Davidson 2013). These quite large public forums may have had that as a background effect. But the diversity of speakers (ie more mainstream to urban radical) and style of presentation was not so hegemonic. For the individuals attending these evenings were unlikely to have radically altered embedded ways of seeing the urban problem. But given this thesis’s interest in urban change, it should be noted that the evenings drew out much larger groups of young people than normally attend government-organised planning forums, and may have provoked a sense of inquiry about exciting possibilities for changing city form in Sydney over time, and a question of “what happens next” to bring it about. Just bringing these conversations about was a radical step for the government, and there was considerable resistance to them occurring at all\(^\text{164}\).

Turning to comparison with the PST framework, these forums would *prima facie* be seen as positive moves, innovatively using “front running practitioners” (ie experienced and

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\(^{162}\) Mr McIntyre’s comment is at 9m30s in the YouTube vide referenced above.

\(^{163}\) Ms Fisher’s comment and question is found at 13m50s in the YouTube vide referenced above.

\(^{164}\) See concluding commentary to this section for some further details on the particulars of this.
persuasive speakers supportive of progressive change in cities). This can help by provoking social learning and evoking new images of city change, and the networks which might be involved in bringing it about. However, here the “urban conversations” themselves would be seen as “one-offs”, and as suggested by Ms Fisher, without signs of deep connection with the government’s mainstream initiatives in planning reform.

White Paper workshop

This was a very different forum. Those not supportive of urban change were much more effective in powerfully expressing their view. The “workshop” was an invitation-only half day session and was held on 11 October 2012 (ie between the above two events) and attended by about 370 selected representatives from local and state government, the planning profession, community organisations, academia and peak industry bodies” (NSW Planning & Environment 2014). The planning Minister attended the full session. The process of this workshop included presentations on three topics (community participation, strategic planning, infrastructure), small group discussions on the topics, individual voting on specific questions using handheld devices, as well as opportunity for text-based feedback to the Department on these questions. Experts presented on each of the three agenda items.

The first and dominant topic was on community participation. Dr Geoff Gallop led this discussion. Dr Gallop is a former Labor premier from Western Australia and a director of the newDemocracy Foundation. He spoke of the problem governments face in dealing with difficult policy dilemmas and the tendency for decisions to be dominated by interest-based politics rather than reasoning. The background to the idea of using random and representatively selected citizens’ juries for vexed policy questions was outlined. The suggestion was that such “deliberative democracy” processes might be able to be applied as a component of the planning system reforms. This question was the catalyst for a conflicted and difficult workshop where there were many speakers from the floor contesting not just the intended planning reforms but also the running of the workshop, including the notion of voting on such complex matters after such brief explanations. These concerns were also recorded in text comments, a selection of which follow:

165 The newDemocracy Foundation was founded due to a concern about adversarial approaches to Australian politics and with a goal of pushing alternative democratic approaches. It now has a considerable base of Australian research in difficult policy fields encouraging of deliberative democracy processes. Its board and/or research committee includes senior politicians (including former State leaders from both sides of politics in Australia), as well as senior public policy and democracy academics like Professor John Dryzek and Dr Caroline Hendriks who have already been cited in this thesis. See http://www.newdemocracy.com.au/.

166 The Planning & Environment website on 8/3/2015 included details on both the voting results and text comments. See:
The system allowed text comments on each of the questions limited to 127 characters per message.
Superficial and leading outline of proposed changes very unsatisfactory ... begs the question about the integrity of the proposal.

- We are given 2 options and (Dr Gallop) spoke for the affirmative. Who argued for the negative? ....No one.
- An appalling set of questions (which) presupposes many things. For a process which is about consultation this a bad example.

Other text comments from other participants were also quite aggressive but on perceptions on actions by the community groups attending:

Vocal community groups here today show how they try and takeover so this justifies support for random selection.
The room today demonstrates why community involvement will never reach agreement. There are too many vocal minorities.
Debate from floor indicates fear of disempowerment of self-interested community group members.

Other comments were more broadly concerned about prospects for usual community engagement:

The argumentative nature of the audience does not bode well for a planning system and planning outcomes based on broad participation.
The loudest voices in the room are the ones with the biggest axe to grind. They are not necessarily representative just loud.
We need to build capacity for consultation. If this is any indication of our capacity right now we won’t get far.

One person from the floor was aligned with the PST framework’s thinking on the need to emphasis on the higher intention of the planning system, given its power as an attractor in the face of embedded system interests and associated advocacy167.

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167 Refer to YouTube video of the workshop: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCLs1Qcil4&feature=youtu.be. Accessed 9/3/2015. See from 9m25s for this comment.
... (on) the green paper and broadly what’s been said this morning, it’s not that I disagree with anything, it’s what’s lacking and this seems to be the problem overall. What’s lacking is a grand vision, a clear focus on why we have a planning system and what it’s trying to achieve. For me that’s creating ... hoping to create a better society. What we’re focusing on all the time is the process: the planning application the community participation process, they’re all important but we’re losing the focus on why we have a planning system. That’s why I think we should have a major re-orientation of this whole review. Let’s identify what we want: better health, better environment ... and relegate the process issues to how we achieve those outcomes.

If there was an opportunity for this workshop to place the planning system reform project within the context of the wider city challenges, this only occurred in a superficial way, or as an afterthought. Only one speaker (Gary White, who was in fact speaking on the development assessment aspect of the planning system) acknowledged this as a problem in an earlier comment\footnote{168}:

\begin{quote}
We haven’t done that well – we haven’t explained well what planning seeks to achieve.
\end{quote}

Overall this workshop would be seen as hardly contributing to any new learnings or new images. The more likely outcome was that of embedding established cynicism and views about the extent of the system problems ahead. The attempts at introducing democratic procedures via the voting system were drowned out by the criticisms, including reasonable views on the lack of deliberation which accompanied it.

\textit{Formal participatory processes concerning White Paper and bills}

The formal strategy after the release of the White Paper can be described as having four key engagement components\footnote{169}. These were:

\begin{itemize}
\item Regular written submissions and online feedback
\item Community discussion sessions
\end{itemize}

\footnote{168} Refer to YouTube video of the workshops at: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM8fzrlip4kA}. Accessed 9/3/2015. See 24m4s for this comment.

\footnote{169} There were many other engagement components to the White Paper’s preparation and review stages, including input from specialist reference groups and expert advisers. See the back cover of the White Paper feedback report where the Minister thanks those groups providing input.
- Technical and community advisory group sessions
- Moderated workshop inviting different interest groups to attend the one session
- Telephone survey.\(^{170}\)

At the conclusion of the process the government indicated over 6000 people had attended public meetings on the planning reforms and it had achieved “unprecedented consultation”. This was a term used in the Planning Minister’s foreword to the “White Paper Feedback Report” (NSW Government 2013b) and the title of a webpage which included the image at Figure 8.2.

![Image: Figure 8.2 - Consultation on the SPSR project (Source: Department of Planning website\(^{171}\))](image)

The point of interest in this comparison is less the content of these various submissions and more the extent to which the participation processes themselves opened up opportunities for transformative change or otherwise. Here, the first four components are of most interest to the PST framework and are considered below. The deliberative panel work, which the government agreed to undertake late in the process, is particularly significant and is covered in Chapter 9.

\(^{170}\) In 2013, UTS Centre for Local Government was engaged by the government to design and conduct an independent and statistically representative community telephone survey on community attitudes to planning system and its reform. Around 3000 people from metropolitan and regional areas of NSW were involved.

Written submissions

It was highlighted by the government that there were 4500 written submissions on the SPSR project. The government made information available on the geographic spread of submissions. It is this which is of particular interest to PST considerations here in that it allowed a sense of the representativeness of submissions. When compared with the SEIFA indices provided at Chapter 2, it showed a relatively small number of submissions coming from the locations of disadvantage in Sydney, and that the most submissions came from the areas experiencing the most social and economic advantage under the current system. This sort of information implies the need for participatory processes to engage with a wider mix of the city’s population if there is an aspiration to factor in democratically representative views into decision making.

Figure 8.3 - Geographical spread of written submissions on the White Paper
(Source: NSW Government 2013, Figure 2)

(Note: the data in Figure 8.3 only show the metropolitan breakdown, 26% of submissions were from regional NSW. Approximately 34% of submissions did not supply an address, and thus are not included in the above.)
Community discussion sessions

Over May and June 2013, twenty publicly advertised “community discussion sessions” of around 1 ½ hours each were held in Sydney and around NSW. Feedback from each of these sessions were placed on the government’s website. There were some complaints about the approach to the sessions. For example, a report from a session in north-west Sydney (Castle Hill), one of the first conducted, complained that the session was “stage-managed” and left “insufficient time for meaningful input” on contentious matters172:

My opinion is that this meeting was an exercise which would let Planning tick the “community consultation” box while avoiding any meaningful input from the community on the concerns they may have ...

This view was consistent with a comment from a former officer of the department:

... frankly I think almost from go to woe it was a hollow exercise. The exercises that followed with the White Paper and the sessions where we counted exactly the number of sessions and the number of people... That is not the point.

(Source: Former Government Official #1)

A summary of the feedback from these “community discussion sessions” was reported within the White Paper Feedback Report173. But this feedback was somewhat swamped by the more “vocal” submissions from representative interest groups, which had more influence in the recommended modifications contained in the report.

Technical and advisory group sessions

These sessions, involving mostly experts deeply experienced in the system, had some potential to further explore the reform agenda and its innovative ideas for change. Ten groups were formed: two from the local government sector and one each from environment, planning, infrastructure, property/development, community, legal, building certifiers and youth sectors (see Table 8-3).

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173 White Paper provisions as
The process involved appointing “lead organisations” to facilitate each of the sessions\textsuperscript{174}. These lead organisations also had the responsibility to invite a group of members to attend the session. The intention was that these groups provide representation of “a broad range of views across each sector” and that the sessions be conducted in a manner which “explicitly focused on key legislation and policy issues regarding the reforms, and potential solutions that could be used to respond to these issues” (UTS CLG 2013, p1).

These sessions had the intent of creating a platform to stimulate the expression of stakeholder views from different sectors. These kinds of forums provide, \textit{prima facie}, an

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
Sector & Lead Organisation & Participation Numbers \\
\hline
Local Government – Mayors, & UTS: Centre for Local Government & 20 \\
General Managers and & & \\
Planning Directors & & \\
\hline
Local Government – Corporate & UTS: Centre for Local Government & 40 \\
Planners and Engagement & & \\
Practitioners & Local Government Managers Australia (NSW & \\
& Division) & \\
\hline
Environment and Sustainability & Institute for Sustainable Futures & 12 \\
\hline
Planning and Allied Professions & Planning Institute of Australia & 7 \\
\hline
Infrastructure & Committee for Sydney and NSW Business & 19 \\
& Chamber & \\
\hline
Property and Development & Committee for Sydney and NSW Business & 22 \\
Industry & Chamber & \\
\hline
Community Groups & Western Sydney Community Forum & 28 \\
\hline
Legal Profession & UTS: Centre for Local Government & 9 \\
\hline
Building Certifiers & Building Professionals Board & 64 \\
\hline
Youth Focus Group & UTS: Centre for Local Government & 10 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Independent working groups by sector (Source: Table 1 in UTS CLG (2013))}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{174}The government assisted in providing some (limited) funding to groups appointed to act as leads in the conception of this work and for the running of and reporting on the sessions.
opportunity to martial advocacy arguments. This kind of opportunity is a regular expectation of reform projects like this (although not necessarily always facilitated by the sponsoring authority). The point of comparison here, with respect to the PST framework, is that this type of platform is something different from a purposive device to challenge the way stakeholders themselves think. The PST framework is seeking the designing-in of instances where sector representatives, themselves, challenge dominant ideas from within the sector. Pressuring them to “to scrutinize and reconsider their (own) underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices” (Hendriks and Grin 2007, p333). The working notes from these sectoral sessions and suggest an eclectic process was adopted among the lead organisations reflecting the considerable freedom of expression. There were some examples of reflexivity. The most notable example of this occurred in the “community sector” stakeholder session. This session brought together experienced community sector personnel used to dealing with Sydney’s disadvantaged people at an acute grassroots level (eg NC OSS, Shelter NSW, Western Sydney Community Forum) and members of local resident groups more interested in protecting local amenity and limiting urban change, or at least by way of the approach suggested in the White Paper and bill (eg representatives of Better Planning Network and Save Our Suburbs groups). So taking the question of shortage of social housing, there were comments like:

*Process of seeking development approval for affordable housing, in the face of opposition from councils and sections of the community, is a serious challenge.*

*Ensure that NGOs advocating on behalf of disadvantaged communities and low income households are assisted to contribute to community debates about the negative consequences of exclusionary planning approaches.*

Whereas a representative from the local resident groups made comments like:

*(Important) not to underestimate the value that people put on their home and their street but to work with this. Need to ensure the planning system creates the right conditions that protect or enhance existing property values.*

One of the attendees expressed a positive view about this dynamic:
This session played an important role. Each side hated it, but it worked in bringing people around. The session leader (from Western Sydney Community Forum) was able to work with this and did an excellent job ... (one side) wanted to stop (resident groups) saying “I represent the community”. It seemed important to hear (one of the key resident group people) saying “I get that” “I get that” ... “there is a community of people who are homeless”.

(Interview with a session attendee, 5 March 2014)

This session was suggested as having “worked a treat”\(^\text{175}\), not only by requiring resident groups to listen, learn and rethink their viewpoints. But also by addressing what was perceived as antagonism against the resident group representatives from some community services provider representatives for superficial reasons (“because they were middle class”). This process of exchange and reflection, leading to an improved connection, was suggested as having the potential to “bear some benefits for both sides down the track”, helping to gain a greater traction for social impact assessment and social infrastructure provision in the wider debates around system reform, where economic arguments tended to dominate.\(^\text{176}\)

The “moderated discussion forum” where resident groups, community service providers and economic interests were all in attendance provided a chance for this to be tested.

**Moderated discussion forum**

This session was organised jointly by the Department of Planning and UTS CLG and held on 30 July 2013. The Minister, Director General and key executives from the department were all in attendance along with about 30 invited representatives of the various stakeholder groups. For the organisers this was a key meeting, coming at the culmination of the consultation process, and with almost all of the key actors in attendance personally. The nominated purpose of the forum was to provide opportunity for “open dialogue between stakeholders, develop mutual understanding of cross-sectoral issues, and seek resolution to disagreements between sectors”\(^\text{177}\). This discussion was to be based on the provision of summary advice on the findings of all of the stakeholder group sessions, as well as a community survey on planning and its reform based on telephone interviews with some 3000 randomly selected people. The general approach was to work through selected major

\(^{175}\) Interview with a session attendee, 5 March 2014.

\(^{176}\) Understatement of social infrastructure provisioning was a particular point of attention in the report from this sector. The recommendation was that 30 year Social Infrastructure Plans, focusing on the terms “health”, “social” and “sustainability”, should be factored into the system and legislation. This suggested deficiency applied to both greenfield and infill locations.

\(^{177}\) I have viewed working notes from this session prepared by UTS Centre for Local Government.
topics, identify points of disagreement, undertake the moderated discussion on each topic, then list points of agreement reached. The individual topics were close to the White Paper’s originally nominated “transformative changes” (see Chapter 6).

There is much in the way of interesting exchange that can be reported on this forum. But in the space available here I will refer to the discussion on the agenda topic of Strategic planning and policy as an example. The discussion on this topic engaged directly with the objects of the intended new Act and, in particular, whether and how questions of ESD, climate change and affordable housing should be treated. As outlined above, in the view of many there is a weakened position on matters of sustainability indicated in the White Paper and draft legislation. One industry spokesperson expressed the following view:

*It is important to remember that asking the planning system to fix all the environmental ills is not the right approach ... Will the planning system be able to provide detailed guidance and all the answers on climate change, similarly for economic growth – the answer is no, it is just one mechanism*\(^{178}\).

The meeting “agreed” that the preferred option was to alter the objects of the Act to revert back towards the stronger definition of sustainable development contained in the current legislation. The agreement was to include provisions for intergenerational equity and “better encapsulates the interactions and trade-offs required between existing and future communities”. Among other things there was agreement that state planning policies should include “key affordable housing provisions” and also, significantly, “reference to climate change”\(^ {179}\).

*Prima facie* with the above agreement, and a series of others like it nominally occurring at this session, there is evidence that this exercise brought about some willingness on the part of the two most powerful stakeholder groups (development industry and resident groups) to soften institutional positions in the face of debate and deliberation. It was certainly seen as important to those organising the session for the Minister and senior officials to observe this\(^ {180}\). But this may be overstating things. The key points of difference remained (ie

\(^{178}\) UTS – CLG meeting notes, previously cited, and personal discussions with attendees.

\(^{179}\) The term “climate change” was not at that point referenced in the White Paper, bills or draft metropolitan strategy. As the draft bill amendments were progressed through parliament it remained excluded.

\(^{180}\) Interview with Consultant #5, who had an involvement in organising the moderated sessions.
resident groups lobbying hard against “code assessment”\(^{181}\); development interests lobbying just as hard for the desired “code assessment” provisions to reduce neighbour objection power). In interviews after the event, the resident group representative seemed to find the forum valuable:

*There was one thing we pushed for which was more dialogue between stakeholders, and the minister did announce (this moderated forum) … I would have liked to have seen more meetings with industry through the course of the project.*

(Source: Local Community Advocate #1)

But interviews with two development industry representatives attending the session very much downplayed the moderated forum’s significance and showed relatively low interest levels in it. One described the forum as a “hopeless process” (Development Industry Representative #2). In an interview a couple of months later, a resident group representative made some comments that may give this industry position some context:

*… when I sat down at lunch with industry representatives they generally weren’t happy to talk with me, (with one nominated exception). It seemed to me that they were so sure they would get the changes through that they didn’t need to talk to me. I think they got totally taken aback when the reforms failed in the upper house.*

(Local Community Advocate #1)

A third interviewee, not aligned with either development or resident group interests felt the session did not give sufficient time to get into the detailed content: “… process was too short”. But was most concerned about representation:

*… we hadn’t heard anything from the community, … we heard lots from community groups.*

(Independent Interest #1)

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It is important to note that agreed “reference to climate change” mentioned above (ie additional provisions in the bill to take some account of it), did not in fact make it through into the various modifications put to parliament, having reverted to a background issue of lesser significance to the more powerful interests involved.

**Results orientation**

The orientation of the results which the SPSR project was seeking were clearly at odds with the PST framework. The reform project saw major new planning legislation as crucial. This kind of output is itself, by definition, providing for a bold, one-off change. That is not to say that this cannot occur in company with the more strategic approach to institutional reform suggested in the PST framework. But in the case of the SPSR project, the effecting or otherwise of legislative change became the absolute centre of attention. The Planning Minister was being squeezed on at least two political fronts: (1) the strong organised lobbying of local Liberal and National Party Members of Parliament (MPs) by resident groups, and (2) a position where the O’Farrell Liberal government did not have the balance of power in the Upper House. The setting provided something of a battleground of lobbying and counter-lobbying by interest groups, especially with the minor parties who held the balance of power within the Upper House. The scenario was one of trade-offs and brinksmanship rather than considered policy debate and, as outlined in Chapter 8.5, in the end no SPSR-related legislative changes passed through the parliament.

**8.4.3 Comment**

The “action” stages of the SPSR project were not well aligned with the PST framework overall. The most aligned part was the agenda-setting componentry. The changes which were promised with this *nominal agenda* did open opportunity for some institutional changes with potential to address city problems (eg less politicised decision-making, more resources for strategic planning, more integrated budgeting and bureaucratic involvement and suggestions of deliberative and democratic forums to help). The problem was that a separate and seemingly more *candid* agenda, the pro vs anti-development argument (here centred almost completely on the extent of code assessment for DAs), became much more prominent and trumped any serious discourse about institutional change. The participatory approaches, as designed, were unable to provide a circuit breaker for this.
The consultation process was hopeless. A process where you just open the door to all the crap to come in rather than taking them down a constructive path.

(Source: Consultant #3)

Under institutional thinking, the tendency to use imaginative ideas and approaches would be resisted and unlikely to have powerful effect so long as incumbent actors, already in key roles in the planning regime, acted as gatekeepers. This seemed to be borne out in the key stakeholder sessions in the reforms. This conceptual idea was well described in an interview with one of the (former) government officials who was central to getting the “urban conversations” concept off the ground (one of the more serious attempts at innovation through the whole process). In the interview this person reconstructed a conversation he had with the government officer (“X”) responsible for the decision to proceed or not with the concept:

“‘X’, we have to do these things (new initiatives like “urban conversations”). We have to get on top of the consultation issues. People are saying they don’t want it (urban change). Why don’t they want it? Because they don’t understand it. Why don’t they understand it? Because they’ve had no exposure to it. Why not? Because we haven’t been selling it.”

Then ‘X’ would finally agree … then later come back again worried: “No way … don’t want to do it, too high risk.” ...

(Former Government Official #3)

In the end, government officer X agreed that the risky idea of the “urban conversations” work should go ahead and it ran professionally and quite effectively.

The story of embedded barriers was also borne out in the idea of introducing deliberative democracy ideas into the SPSR project. The principal group pushing for this initiative was the newDemocracy Foundation. According to interviews, this group was regularly involved in discussions with the government on the concept and its potential182. This important involvement, from an “outsider” frontrunner group, was the central reason for mention of deliberative democracy ideas in the White Paper itself. There were efforts by

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182 Personal communications with Independent Interest #1 in interviews dated 16/1/2013 and 17/3/2014, and other telephone conversations.
new Democracy, and more direct government advisors183, to also introduce the deliberative democracy initiatives within the reform project itself. However, and remembering the strong objections from residents groups expressed in the flawed White Paper workshop (Chapter 8.4.1), this initiative was taken up too late to have any significant effect in the reform project itself. The significant scale experiment in deliberative work (Chapter 9) suggests considerable latent power from this initiative, both in terms securing planning system reform, but also more spatially-based policy shifts.

Together then, the potentially transformative initiatives in participatory processes were either blocked or not effectively followed up or integrated into the mainstream as far as the reforms were concerned. The outputs or results orientation of the project was again antipathetic to the PST framework. The project, including its innovative ideas, seemed to have been leveraged against a shot at legislative change which failed, and the reform exercise seemed to have been almost set aside by government from that point as the 2015 elections loomed.

Table 8-4 summarises the key points of comparison between: (1) the PST ideas on a suitable framework for action within a planning reform episode, and (2) the action stages of the SPSR project, as observed in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST Framework</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Planning System Reform Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Agenda</td>
<td>New visions/images/objectives in the face of embedded governance deficits.</td>
<td>– Some creative new imaginings in the nominal agenda, genuinely take on serious governance deficits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translate these new understandings to opportunities for institutional action centred on agency.</td>
<td>– Good alignment with PST framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arenas created to challenge dominant ideas.</td>
<td>– A shadow agenda became more prominent (either pro or anti-development) and became a blocker for agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning, new images, new networks emerge.</td>
<td>– Intentions and understandings were not well suited to counter this dynamic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

183 Personal communication Consultant #5 dated 30/1/2014.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST Framework</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Planning System Reform Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Design in participation by “frontrunners” with diverse interests.</strong></td>
<td>– “Urban conversations” inclusion of mainstream thought leaders and radical urbanists an example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Design in democratic procedures.</strong></td>
<td>– Late decision to try deliberative democracy experiments showed latent power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Outputs / results

|               | **Less “one shot” structural change, more facilitating new perspectives and agency** | – Reform success or failure centred on achieving legislative change. |
|               | **Reforms position for breakthrough projects to evolve and upscale over time.** | – The reform process inclined to have resulted in reform fatigue and burn-out. Few new project conceptions to carry forward. |

### 8.5 Snapshot of the latter stages of the SPSR project

The flow of events demonstrating how the reforms fell out over the last few months of 2013 and early 2014[^184] is documented below:

- **19 September 2013** - Minister announces to parliament that the introduction of the planning bills would be delayed and announced changes which would: (1) limit code assessable development to nominated fringe growth areas (2) remove the 80% target, (3) strengthen the role of local councils in in code assessable policy development, (4) introduce appeal rights to the making of regional and sub-regional delivery plans, (5) ensure that local government had the majority representation on sub-regional planning boards and veto power over the ministerially appointed chair. (Hazzard 2013b).

- **22 October 2013** - Minister introduces amended bills to parliament, and period of parliamentary debate and negotiation commences

- **October-November 2013** – period of intense lobbying by sectoral interests, especially of Upper House cross-bench where the balance of power was situated.

28 November 2013 – Planning bill passed by the upper house (second last day of sitting) but with 51 new amendments including: removal of the code assessable development track from the bill.

29 November 2013 - Minister highly critical of amendments and indicates government will not be advancing the bill as passed by the Upper House and was reconsidering its position over the Christmas break (Hazzard 2013a).

January-February 2014 - There was some further work undertaken by the government in early 2014 with the intention of revising the bill, including the running of further deliberative panels. But there has been no publicly acknowledged action in regard to the Planning Bill since this point.

The reforms as passed by the Upper House were a shell of their earlier form and apparent intent. They proposed no initiatives which would have any significant effect on planning deficits in Sydney. A feature of the latter stages of the parliamentary approval process was associated with lobbying efforts. The opposition Labor Party had announced it was not supporting the Bills so the Upper House cross benches held the balance of power and were subject to much of this lobbying. There were many sectoral interests involved in lobbying the cross benches and the government, but particularly effective was the Better Planning Network, which by this time described itself as an affiliation of more than 430 community groups.

In the end this group exhibited greater power than the development industry and also the peak local government body (Local Government NSW) in what turned out to be the “bellwether” question of code assessment provisions. This might have been a cause for reflection on the part of development interests, on the questions around dispersed power in liberal democratic settings of note to transitions studies (Meadowcroft 2007), suggesting a rethink on expectations and approaches. But interviews indicated that industry

185 In particular members of the Greens and the Fishers and Shooters parties.
187 For example, it was the BPN which lobbied for a spatially-based approach to the implementation of Code Assessment. Local Government NSW made no such suggestion (Rhoades and Donald 2013). The BPN submission was that code assessment should apply only apply to developing suburbs rather than to established suburban settings (where the bulk of BPN members lived). The Minister’s agreement in his speech to parliament on 19 September 2013, that code assessment apply on to “high growth areas” (as a concession to secure the passage of the rest of the legislation) was a stepping away from a key policy intention and an indicator of the strength of lobbying. The concession, in policy terms, was concerned with the prospects for code assessment to reduce local political barriers to the metropolitan level goal of provision of more housing in well located established suburbs.
representatives and the government were immediately looking for ways to bypass parliamentary processes to assist in streamlining DAs\textsuperscript{188}.

By mid-April 2014 both the Planning Minister and the Premier had been replaced. Further, by mid-2014 the Director General of Planning and all the Planning Department’s upper tier of executive staff had also been replaced. The planning reforms seem to have been set aside, with the failure to succeed with the bold stroke legislative change. In a very interesting related policy development, in June 2014 newly appointed Premier Baird announced a Greater Sydney Commission to “modernise the way the NSW Government’s major infrastructure and urban planning priorities are delivered”\textsuperscript{189}. The Planning Minister has recently arranged the architecture for this new Commission. At the time of writing full particulars of its role, processes and certainly its policy inclinations remain unclear\textsuperscript{190}. Further remarks are made about the Commission in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

8.6 Conclusions

As it came to pass, the SPSR project was not able to have a significant effect on changing established patterns of activity in the Sydney planning system. Under PST thinking, the core reason was that the project was unable to negotiate itself around regime interests at its various stages of conception and implementation. This is the normal, to-be-anticipated, pattern for reform efforts in areas of policy conflict (ie predisposition for normative concerns to fall away in the face of competition over interests and the exercise of power).

Figure 8.4 shows the reality of the SPSR project through the lens of transitions studies’ multi-phase concept. It shows the project’s ambitions, but the reality of it not being able to assist the passage to more sustainable urban development patterns in Sydney.

\textsuperscript{188} Source: Interview development industry representative #2. No such changes have been effected at the time of writing.
\textsuperscript{190} The Department of Planning’s website indicates that the Greater Sydney Commission is responsible for metropolitan planning in partnership with the State and local government. There are some particulars available at this site: \url{http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-Your-Area/Sydney/A-Plan-for-Growing-Sydney/Greater-Sydney-Commission/}. Accessed 10/4/2016.
An overall comparison can be drawn between PST’s three horizons and those same horizons of *intent, understanding* and *action* within the SPSR project. Figure 8.5 presents these conclusions on the three horizons of the SPSR project in graphic form.

The critical opening horizon, marked out by the SPSR project *intention*, neither aligned with Friedmann’s ideas on planning’s role in wider society nor the message from systems thinking that we need strong new attractors to shift embedded system. In regard to the second horizon, or “getting at” the complexity which is inevitably involved in reform, the SPSR project seemed inclined to the more commonplace ambivalent disposition to more abstract knowledge about system change. It followed that the final *action* horizon within the project also tended towards a BAU approach, in regard to: (1) the agenda (innovative aspects were stifled due to dominance of pro vs anti-development narrative), (2)
participatory processes (more concerned with facilitating sectoral interest advocacy than having institutional actors ask critical questions of themselves) and (3) output orientation (centred on black letter legislative change but without parallel change to “the rules of the game”). When ideas and actions which did have transformative potential arose they tended to be blocked due to institutional resistance.
Chapter 9  Deliberative panels: a case study in (niche) innovation

9.1  Introduction

Towards the tail end of the SPSR project three separate deliberative panels (two x 1½ days duration and one x 1 day duration) and eight deliberative focus groups (but limited to 2 hours each) were commissioned by the government to consider certain aspects of the planned reforms. Rather than representing the regular interest groups, participants were randomly selected. This was an experiment in deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy (DD) conceptions are in response to the idea that policy debate is more inclined to be dominated by what Flyvbjerg calls “tribalistic rule by the strongest” and the marginalised losing out as a consequence (2002a, p360). This contributes to increasing citizen cynicism and disinterest about government, and a vicious cycle discouraging civic participation in policy. Within the field of democracy studies, the idea of purposively organising panels of “disinterested” citizens into policy debates has (re)gained interest over the past two decades.

There are two factors which suggest the appropriateness of drawing attention to this case work. First is the direct opportunity to focus on a significant scale innovation experiment which came forward from the SPSR project itself. From the point of view of the PST framework, this is to investigate and interpret: (1) how it came to emerge in the face of resistance, (2) how the experiment itself was conducted, (3) the effects, if any, on the SPSR project, and (4) what new insights the experiment drew out. A second factor, working at a higher level of abstraction, also directs attention to this empirical case. This is the suggested democracy deficit which has been identified as a problem for both: planning practice, generally, within Australian cities (Gleeson, Dodson et al. 2012), and the transition management concept itself (Hendriks 2009). That is to say that the exploration of a

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192 While not without criticisms which will be discussed later, advocates suggest that these kinds of panels, when designed to suit the setting, have undervalued capacities to address problems of aggregative politics and can help produce fairer, more acceptable and more sustainable policy decisions (Dryzek and Tucker 2008, Carson 2009, Hendriks 2011, Niemeyer 2011, Gollagher and Hartz-Karp 2013), and have been able to help bridge societal idealism and the cynicism mentioned above (Dryzek and Braithwaite 2000).
significant scale deliberative democracy exercise emerging from a reformist planning project (say framed by the four queries suggested above), had prospects to bring deeper insights about democratic prospects in planning and transitions thinking. It has been suggested earlier that there is a futility to reform efforts unless they take-on institutions (Chapter 3.4.3). Consistent with this, and using the PST framework as an evaluation tool, Chapter 8 has traced out how institutions seemed to “get in the way” of many the intended reforms mapped out in the SPSR project. What is unusual about the experimental project being described in this chapter is that it seems to evidence a case where institutions were at least in part set aside. Mindful of this setting, the rest of this section provides an account of the relational encounters which occurred, some a factor of the process design which was employed, others unplanned. It is a test of the question of whether a more concentrated effort at using representative citizen deliberation is worthwhile due to its prospects for releasing transformative potential, and if so how.

9.2 How deliberative democracy experiment emerged

As outlined in Chapter 8.4.1, the possibility of involvement of randomly selected citizen’s panels in policy decision making was introduced during the very early stages of the SPSR project (the White Paper workshop in October 2012). After an introduction to the concept by an advocate (Dr Geoff Gallop) and considerable (often heated) discussion, this gathering of representatives from local and state government, the planning profession, resident organisations, academia and peak industry bodies gave an indication of support for their use in the planning reforms193. But within the engine room of the reform process, and despite favourable comments from the Minister at the White Paper workshop itself, there was a lot of resistance to doing so. This came from two main directions. One was from “sceptical members of the public service”194 concerned about the risks of entering such uncharted waters. The other was from members of residents groups who were untrusting of government and concerned that government and powerful development interests would mislead naïve (randomly selected) citizens, co-opted in the “community panels”. In particular, there was a concern about loss of power from both of these directions. It is noteworthy that development industry interests did not openly agitate against the proposal,

193 To the question: “Do you support the proposal for a randomly selected representative Community Panel”; 181 attendees voted “yes” and 78 voted “no” (NSW Planning & Environment 2014). The referenced website includes a qualification that “the results may not be indicative of wider views across NSW”.
194 Interview with independent interest #1 dated 12/3/2014 and endorsed by other interviewees close to the reform process.
and there was considerable evidence of support from this direction\textsuperscript{195}, including a submission from the Property Council of Australia, which indicated the organisation was (2013, p32):

\begin{quote}
... enthused by alternative (engagement) models that broaden opportunities to gauge true community perspectives ... (through use of) randomly selected citizens panels ... designed to move past the current limited pool of participants (on both sides) and better reflect the broader community.
\end{quote}

The main push in support of deliberative democracy was coming from a highly credentialed “interest group”. The newDemocracy Foundation was formed in 2011 with the direct intention of advancing the cause of more deliberative and citizen-based policy decision systems. This bipartisan group, with former state premiers from both main political persuasions on its board, was formed essentially to help address the effects of partisan behaviour on public policy outcomes. The group’s webpage summarises its position as follows\textsuperscript{196}:

\begin{quote}
The research evidence is compelling - trusted outcomes are achieved when a diverse and representative group of citizens, randomly selected, deliberate together. We don’t need better politicians. We need a better system.
\end{quote}

While it has much wider interests, the newDemocracy Foundation was active in its support for greater use of these citizen-based processes within the SPSR project, including as a means of assisting with political difficulties.

After its prominence in the White Paper workshop, there was political pressure to adopt the idea at least in an exploratory way in the reforms, and it was a break through that some of these ideas were taken up explicitly in the White Paper content. But the decision to move ahead with the panels and focus groups by the government within the SPSR project was very late and quite guarded. Hendriks (2006) has noted the tendency for those with vested


interests to “use” citizen deliberation exercises as a means to achieve their strategic goals. This research suggests that partisan actors would rarely advocate the use of panels for normative ideals and are likely to support such exercises only when there are (self-interested) instrumental reasons for “going public” (p571). There is a sense that this was the case in the SPSR project. The decision to move ahead with the deliberative democracy exercise was only taken at the point where it had become obvious that there were serious problems ahead with gaining parliaments support for the reforms. So the first two deliberative panels were initiated by government to, at this late point, seek to evidence the attitude of impartial citizens on the contention topic of code assessment. The idea was that this might allow, particularly Upper House, parliamentarians to be better informed on wider attitudes to the reforms. The focus groups and the third deliberative panel, held in January and early February in 2014, had potential strategic use, as the government considered whether to re-introduce the reforms to parliament after the summer break.

9.3 How deliberative democracy processes were conducted

9.3.1 How should deliberative democracy processes be conducted?

A response to the question of how the experiment itself was conducted should start with some information on what scholars suggest as pre-requisites for this kind of work. In fact there is some variation in standards for deliberative democracy exercises like the panels conducted here, but they do seem to have the following common qualifying points: (1) randomly selected – those with evidence of a significant previous interest in the topic are selected out, (2) representative of diverse citizenry – while often imperfect there is an attempt at a demographic representation of the locale involved in the study, (3) reasonable time available for learning, reflection and deliberation – this would reflect the detail and complexity of the topic at hand but the period can count into many days (4) opportunity to become informed – this can include oral and written presentations from experts as well as interest groups, (5) work at coming to “consensus” conclusions – part of the process is for the panel to seek agreement on a course of action or recommendation to the (usually

197 There are more detailed and discrete points of distinction which deliberative experts could make for different panel types but for the purposes of this discussion descriptions like: civic juries, consensus conferences, mini-publics; are all intended to be captured by this brief discussion.
198 Hendriks (2006, p572)suggests from three to eight days.
199 Submissions from interest groups can be important, in terms of procedural fairness and thus perceived legitimacy of the process.
government) sponsor, (6) independent design and facilitation featuring a certain specialised skill set (Hendriks and Carson 2008).

Comparisons can now be drawn with the experimental project itself. The first point to be addressed concerns the selection of participants, and responds to points (1) and (2) above. The selection process for the first two deliberative panels commenced with the SPSR project’s telephone survey introduced in Chapter 8.4.2 (n=3000 approx). At the conclusion of the telephone call, respondents were asked if they would like to participate further in the planning system-related study. A shortlist from those expressing interest was then contacted again by UTS and asked to complete a series of demographic, values and behavioural questions online. This was followed up with a ten-minute personal telephone screening by UTS academics to “uncover motives for participation, determine level of planning system knowledge, and ensure participants did not represent sectional interests”.

Participants for these first two panels were then selected directly by UTS, aiming for representativeness in terms of demography, geography, personality types, community values and interests. For the focus groups, UTS briefed a specialist agency to identify and qualify potential participants on a similar basis to the above, before a direct veto process by UTS. The membership of the final deliberative panel was then selected by UTS. This time the panel membership was selected from focus group participants (who had some familiarity already with the material covered in the first two deliberative panels). The UTS selection process for the final panel was again based on representativeness. All panel and focus group members were paid for attendance at rates which were apparently the regular fees offered for this in the commercial sector. This indicates a significant effort on the part of organisers to meet the qualifications suggested in items (1) and (2) above.

In regard to pre-requisite (3) as suggested above, and the reasonableness of time which was available, it can be noted that those attending the 1½ and 1 day sessions were asked whether they felt they had enough time for the work they were being asked to do. The feedback for both ranged from there was “sufficient” time, to “another half day would have assisted”. The time available in the focus group sessions would disqualify them as deliberative panels,

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200 The source of this material is my own direct observation, discussions with UTS academics involved in the exercise and an unpublished report from UTS CLG to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (UTS CLG (University of Technology Sydney Centre for Local Government) 2013).

201 Internal UTS document explaining the process.

202 UTS invited one of the leaders of a resident group to attend and observe the final panel session. This allowed UTS to get some feedback on the process and also allowed the observer to provide direct feedback on these panels to the wider network of resident groups who had been actively participating in the discourse on the reforms.
with the value more in what they might offer by way of confirmation. The best way to
reflect on qualifying points (4) – (6) is through an examination of the exercise itself, which
now follows.

9.3.2 Outline of the adopted deliberation processes
For the SPSR project, the deliberative panels and focus groups were arranged in two
tranches. The first two panels were held after the formal notification period for the proposed
planning system changes had concluded\textsuperscript{203}, and during a period of intense lobbying before
the bills were put before parliament. The first was held in Orange (a regional city about
250km west of Sydney, on 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 24\textsuperscript{th} August 2013). The second was in Penrith (a suburb
in Sydney’s west, on 30\textsuperscript{th} and 31\textsuperscript{st} August 2013). The second tranche occurred over a three-
week period from 23 January 2014 and involved eight focus groups and concluded with a
further full day deliberative panel, involving a representatively group selected from
attendees at the focus groups. Each of the deliberative panels were attended by 19 lay
persons. A total of 102 lay persons attended the focus groups. All of this was organised and
facilitated on behalf of the government by UTS\textsuperscript{204}.

While there was much more time available for the work in the panels than in the focus
groups, the overall approach was more or less the same. Five sequential stages can be
described: (1) introductions, (2) explanation of the planning problem, (3) explanation of the
government’s intended reforms, (4) deliberations on the problems and reforms using case
studies, and (5) group and individual conclusions. Each stage is now summarised with
emphasis given to the more relevant points which arose. The discussion below is mostly
based on the deliberative panels (see Appendix 3 for the schedule adopted for these panels).

\textit{Introductions}

The facilitator opened each session with an explanation that the purpose of the session was
to help better understand community attitudes to our current planning problems, and
intended government reforms. A quick introduction to the complexity and sometimes

\textsuperscript{203} The formal exhibition period for the White Paper and Exposure Bills was from 16 April to 28 June 2013.
\textsuperscript{204} I was able to observe each of these sessions with the exception of two of the focus groups. In each of the sessions,
the facilitator (most often Associate Professor Roberta Ryan of UTS) indicated to the group that I was undertaking
doctorate research in planning reform and that I would be observing proceedings and may be reporting relevant
findings in this work. This was after the baseline ethical pre-requisites for the proceedings had been made clear
which already protected the confidentiality of individuals. The role I was personally playing in the panel sessions
was for the most part as an outside observer, while Professor Ryan and colleagues facilitated the sessions and
provided information to participants. I did provide certain input into the panel process design. I was also more active
in the focus group sessions, as Professor Ryan was unable to attend all but the first of these sessions.
conflicting nature of planning goals was provided. It was indicated that the Minister for Planning was directly interested in their findings and a video of the session was being made available to him. The first question from the facilitator to the wider group came under the headline “what’s your story?” and then, less lyrically, comprised two sub-questions: “why are you here?” and “what are your experiences in the planning system?”. The most common responses to the first sub-question was along the lines of “to have a say on planning” or “to have my opinion heard”, and less frequently “to hear the opinions of others”. A lesser number again were more esoteric, and for example: “came to see what the future holds for my grandchildren and future generations”. Responses to the second sub-question were dominated by vigorous complaints about government, planning and those involved in decisions about it. Local councils were the main target for these complaints.

But this part of the process also started to open up conflicting points of view. While explaining a personal complaint about the system, one speaker would run into an opposing view from another which would cause some reflection within the room, even at this early stage of events. This important precursor, to what became an important dynamic of the sessions, can be best appreciated by an example: “Person A” explains her experiences by complaining about “council” allowing a form of unusual housing in her street which is in a residential zone, “a cul-de-sac” with a “close neighbourhood feel”. The nominated concern was that the neighbours had not been notified in advance: “residents in the street were there first so should have a say first”. The initial “groupthink” of support within the room began to wane when it was revealed that, this was a group of people with disabilities. “Person B” asked why these people shouldn’t have the same right to move into the street as anyone else would, what were the special problems. Person A said these were people “who need care” and that this meant sometimes unusual visiting times and minibuses attending for transport. Soon a number of other people were involved in the discourse. By the time the social exchange surrounding the discourse had concluded (and especially when it was revealed this particular group home was set in an area of small acreages), attitudes had shifted from: just another example of “council incompetence”, to: a position decidedly in favour of the new residents. Another (brief) example was when “Person C” complained about council approving what he saw as an inappropriate next door development. “Person D” responded articulately about a long, expensive process of gaining approval for her home renovations.

205 “Group home” is the term used in NSW planning legislation for development which provides “household accommodation for people with a disability or people who are socially disadvantaged”. This form of development is sometimes allowed without the need for a development approval from local councils.
due to a “neighbour from hell”, who had “the ear” of both council officers and local politicians. Observable changes in opinion (“socio-cognitive shifts”) were occurring naturally as more information about cases emerged and people linked in their own life experiences and thoughts about the future. The experienced facilitator was able to use these sorts of exchanges to position the group to: (1) understand that the planning system is involved in balancing personal and wide societal interests, and (2) recognise that “having a say on planning” might involve something more than had been initially anticipated by these individuals. At this point the discussion turned to the basic ideas behind organised deliberative processes of this kind. That is, individuals being asked to bring their understandings and experiences to the process, but also that new information would be brought forward to them which they would be requested to consider on its merits. They would then be asked to exchange views and deliberate on contextualised case examples and, “like juries in court cases”, attempt to come to agreed views on a position to take.

**Explanation of the city planning problem**

This included an outline of the planning system and its role in shaping cities and neighbourhoods, suggesting zoning and infrastructure planning as two of the higher order elements which framed the setting for individual development projects (DAs) which these panellists may be more likely to be involved in. A video presentation from the second “Urban Conversations” session (see Chapter 8.4.2) was then used as an expression of what was happening with planning in Sydney today. In this video, Jane-Frances Kelly attempts to summarise what is now a series of scholarly research endeavours undertaken by the Grattan Institute related to cities\(^{206}\). Kelly’s presentation had two main themes. The first was about the planning challenges facing Sydney, and the second was on the role of citizen engagement in making better city planning decisions. This Grattan Institute evidence lines up with other research suggesting Sydney’s socio-spatial settlement patterns are not well suited to support economic productivity, or equitable access to services and jobs (“bad for the economy and bad for the fair go”\(^{207}\)). It followed, in this logic, that these problems could be solved, in part, by allowing more housing close to jobs and that this was what was wanted by Sydney residents anyway\(^{208}\). The second theme provided an outline of how well arranged community engagement processes could help deliver the type of city changes that

\(^{206}\) The deliberative panels viewed the full 20 minute video. The focus groups viewed a cut-down version.


\(^{208}\) This content Kelly provided evidence about changing housing demands (including more for apartments with good access) and was supported by J.-F. Kelly (2011).
people wanted and that was also good for the economy\textsuperscript{209} (Kelly 2010). So this was a presentation arguing about the need for further densification in Sydney, but here the case was prosecuted on arguments related to fairness, productivity and the economy in its broader sense. That is, the planning case that was being put to the panellists was more directly aligned with the PST framework than the White Paper itself was able to argue. The case was being put that any changes to things like density or infrastructure should also be reliant on a competent and well-resourced exercises in citizen participation.

\textit{Explanation of the intended reforms}

With this wider context already established, the facilitator then explained how these sorts of city problems and expected population growth was putting pressure on the government to change the planning system. The intended changes were then explained through explanation of the five “transformative changes” contained in the White Paper (Chapter 6). It was not until this point that the question of code assessment actually came into the picture. It was indicated that the government’s commitments to funding better planning and infrastructure and upfront community engagement to this end was in part contingent on securing a commitment to more streamlined approval processes for more routine development in suitable zones. The idea of a formal community participation charter\textsuperscript{210} was suggested as the intended means of ensuring appropriate involvement of citizens in major city planning decisions but also in ensuring that only agreed, routine, development projects would be classified as code assessable (ie removing powers for neighbours to object).

\textit{Deliberations}

Panellists then broke into small groups to consider planning issues in a derived contextual setting intended to roughly represent the locality in which they actually lived. For example, for the metropolitan area panels there were five groupings of roughly equal numbers (about six or seven persons in each): inner metro, northern (middle) suburbs, southern (middle) suburbs, western suburbs)\textsuperscript{211}. There were two exercises. The first was called a “strategic planning exercise” where the group discussed the spatial context and were asked to broadly allocate housing to meet predefined targets. The second exercise was looking for “guiding

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Four key requirements were listed: (1) early engagement (ie before decisions made), (2) real choices and consequences made clear, (3) residents negotiating with residents, and (4) involve a significant proportion of the population.
\item Citizen Participation Charter was a controversial aspect of the White Paper (NSW Government 2013a)
\item For the focus groups an abbreviated process was used. The group stayed together as one. Participants were asked to reflect on their own locality, how things are going and how things are changing and what might need to change further in the future. The facilitator moved around the table eliciting responses from all participants.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
principles” for strategic planning, community engagement and how code assessment might work. Both exercises were asking for the identification of conditional requirements, especially relating to infrastructure. There were a number of distinguishing aspects of these deliberations, when compared to more regular engagement processes, which are explained below.

*Stimulating a “double-level” dialogue* – These deliberative processes encouraged the linking up of diverse real life experiences/understandings of city planning-related problems with dialogue on system change. Lissandrello and Grin (2011, p244) have called this “engag(ing) a dialogue on a double level”. On the first level this is concerned with “provoking conversations and facilitating mutual understanding between (in this case the panellists)”. This first level would include the “unmasking” of concerns and complaints and elicit differences of opinion. But then on the second level, beyond the idea of complaint, there is the introduction of reflexive thinking and dialogue. The suggestion would be put that there may be opportunities to creatively reconfigure the system to better meet these problems, and the dialogue would be around how this might occur.

In the case of the DD panels, the session began with a disentangling of a quite commonly held view critical of government and planning. As introduced above, this occurred through the unrehearsed revealing of rich real-life personal experiences of panellists (eg “difference” introduced to a local neighbourhood through a group home, or “neighbours from hell” adding time and cost to a home renovation). Expression of these real experiences (“situat edness” (Schön and Rein 1994)) provoked dissimilar reactions and the “unmasking” of differences. This was “first order” thinking in the Lissandrello and Grin model. But the early stages of the DD sessions also provided a (partial) exposure to the complexity of the empirical planning challenge into the future (through the explanation of wider city planning problems). This stimulated a grasping of, and further reflection on, the tougher questions which are faced in *system* reform.

Then, finally, there was this suggestion from the government (as expressed by the facilitator) of better ways (the five reformist agenda items), all less than perfect, but promising if they could be done well. The panellists were now required to deliberate, but reflexively. They were required to now re-enter a social process (the small group sessions) facilitated to allow a free discourse on the specific questions which were to be considered. So on the one hand, the participants would be re-engaging with their own world of
experiences as they participate. But on the other, new forms of knowledge had been put and new understandings had been stimulated. Such things naturally called on participants to re-evaluate how they were to judge planning and government, but also how change in the system might be best arranged. Flyvbjerg frames this as a putting of the question “what might be done” in the face of complexity, and a step beyond the suggestion that there are simple answers that government just do not see (as mass media can tend to put to lay audiences). So with all of this “provoking” what would be the responses?

Agreed positions were aligned with normative planning ideals – Unlike the feedback to the White Paper reforms, the agreed positions coming out of the small group sessions where mostly aligned with normative planning ideals (eg the principles of inclusiveness and reciprocity rather than promoting self-interest). Participants were highly supportive of more housing closer to jobs (even if this meant change in their own residential areas) and more streamlining of routine development (ie code assessment). The justification for housing closer to jobs was based on a combination of social equity concerns and better city economics. Support for more code assessment was mainly based on dissatisfaction with council approval processes. The taking of these positions was directly at odds with the positions expressed by self-selected resident groups advocating against the changes in the mainstream reform practice space. So provided this deliberative panel research work was completed competently and without bias, this evidence, quite consistently gathered in both the deliberative panels and confirmed in the focus groups, provokes a direct question as to the representativeness of the voices which in effect brought down the government’s intended planning reforms.

It is critical to note that the positions taken in the panels and focus groups were conditional on reciprocal good governance. This was deliverable, in the participants’ view, through the implementation of the other aspects of the reform project. That is, through the complementary implementation of the suggested changes to strategic planning, community engagement, infrastructure provisioning, and reduced politics in decision making through use of sub-regional panels, or, deliberative (citizen) panels such as this. So panel participants were seeing these governance reforms as crucial to not just the idea of better planning. They were seeing them as the path to achieving the kind of city they wanted to live in into the future. The discourse within the panels was a clear contrast to the mainstream SPSR engagement processes. In the latter, these more complex governance
ambitions were unable to gain much attention or leverage, as the discourse contracted to the aggregative ideas of pro vs anti-development arguments.

Conflict, antagonism and consensus – The above commentary is not to suggest there was easy and full agreement within the panels and focus groups. As can be shown in a couple of illustrations, the debates often involved conflicting views. For example, one of the jobs for the small groups was to decide on the locations for new housing. It was common for the small groups to agree on the appropriateness of more apartments near to rail stations. One of the precincts under investigation was south of the rail line in Hurstville (a major town centre in Sydney’s south). This group had some cadastral plans and aerial photos to use in their assessment. One of the questions to be answered was how much new parking should be required for new higher density apartment sites in easy walking distance of the station. “Person E”, viewing the air photos, expressed concern about parking problems in the Hurstville area, and suggested two parking spots per apartment. Others were questioning the need, based on the proximity of a major railway station. Person E specifically made the point that while he was firm in his view he prided himself on an openness to be convinced on the basis of evidence. Rather than empirical data, “Person F” introduced a more rhetorical argument that drew together a kind of confluence of the demographic, economic and social agendas by saying she’d been trying to get her son (late 20s) to move out of the family home and buy a unit. They lived in Lugarno on the same rail line as Hurstville but a little further out from the CBD. Person F said her son didn’t have a car and wondered if the unit would be more affordable if there were no parking spaces. The facilitator said that underground parking spaces can cost over $40k each to construct. Others then asked whether parking was always required and the facilitator said that some inner Sydney councils discouraged parking in apartments as a means of reducing car use. Person F’s story had shifted the debate and the group took a position on there being no need for parking in the apartment block. While Person E was not convinced personally, he was very clear in accepting of the group’s decision.

But sometimes the conflict was more acute. In some small groups there was stronger resistance to the idea of more housing in existing neighbourhoods. On one occasion in particular, this occurred in parallel with prejudiced behaviour. In this group three participants had English as a second language and originally came from overseas urban
settings. Two group members who had longer family histories in Australia were not supportive of the increase of housing targets in the local area, and preferred no changes near where they lived. The differences of opinion led to complaints about accented English language use, insulting personal terms and a questioning of whether more recent arrivals in Sydney should have the same rights to make decisions on neighbourhood planning as longer term residents (“this is our country” – “Person G”). There were raised voices and a heavy clashing of opinions in this group’s work over nearly four hours of facilitated small group deliberation (broken into two sessions). The balance of opinion of the group also ended in favour of what I have suggested above as normative planning ideals (ie support for more housing in what were well located settings). But of greater interest here was the evidencing of passionate argument by many participants defending their opinions, but also voices defending the rights of all to participate and for their voices to be taken seriously.

Afterwards, I asked one group member about the extent of antagonism (“Person H” – a middle-aged man with a strong Scottish accent who had railed against councils in his opening remarks to the panel), whether offences had been taken and what this meant for the group dynamics. Person H thought the discussion was important and powerful. He replied with words to the effect “it has to be that way; without it you’re not getting anywhere at all”. This was the point that the tension and conflict which emerged in the deliberation process brought a special meaning to the discussion and raised quite passionate and committed feelings from participants. Often the only passions exposed in policy debates are those evident in the voices of those expressing a self-interest. Here we saw, at the small scale, and as a consequence of the exchange of views facilitated through the particular design adopted in these panels, people becoming passionate in defence of wider societal interests as well. Mouffe (1999) uses the term “agonism” to describe the idea of this kind of channelling of political conflict towards more societally positive outcomes. The point she makes is that regular “democratic” processes are not working, and that the first task of agonism is to “mobilise passions towards the promotion of more democratic designs” (p756). While it seemed to not occur in the mainstream of the SPSR project, agonism emerged naturally and regularly in these DD exercises.

Session conclusions

Towards the end of two of the three deliberative panel sessions, two senior executives from the Department of Planning attended to hear the findings of the group. Nominated group

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leaders spoke to the (conditional) support for the planning reform changes expressed in their group. But then the wider panel was invited to make comments to these government officials, and then at the end to make short individual comments to (video) camera about the panel exercise. The facilitator indicated that the Minister was the intended audience for this video commentary. Most of the panellists spent some time preparing for their presentation, after which they took turns to sit and talk to the camera for up to "a couple of minutes". I have had access to the transcripts of these presentations, and the consistency of positive views about the panel experience expressed by those attending each of the sessions is important to note. Below I provide an intentionally representative selection of the comments.

Views in support of this deliberative engagement process:

... the (proposed) engagement model ... such as this one run by UTS (is) I believe a worthwhile vehicle to get true representation across demographics. The format has great merit, has a great reach and does tend to bring together people whose views are quite different.

I think this is a great new exciting development the way we are going through with the planning process. It is a process that needs an overhaul. The community participation is a fantastic and value add process and I hope it continues and gets from the top to the bottom.

Today has been great; community involvement in this discussion is awesome. I would like to be the voice of my kids. Have we planned 15-20 years ahead to secure their future? Is housing going to be affordable to sustain the future for our kids?

I used to feel that if I was to find housing of adequate size and close to work then I would need to move to another city, but from participating in this workshop I feel that it is possible to have all of those things in Sydney as long as we have them as our goal and are committed to a long term strategic plan to reach that point.

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213 Facilitator informally limited the length of time to be used for these presentations.
214 That is, I am not selectively choosing the comments that were supportive of the panels. I have selected comments either supportive or not but which bring some narrative interest to the wider questions around reform.
And of the intended planning system changes (ie no substantive negative views were expressed):

*My message is the new approach is fantastic and what NSW needs for the future generation.*

*I am really impressed with the proposed new planning system I think it is brilliant and it cuts red tape and is going to allow faster development and more affordable housing in Sydney.*

*I have always believed that if what you have been doing is not working then the smartest thing to do is change. I see this new planning system as a chance to push the reset button for NSW and to reset our economy and put in a good plan for the future.*

*I commend you on bringing this legislation to the house, I believe it is well overdue in NSW. I speak as an older resident and one who has seen the changes of improper and possibly ill planning to date I believe the principles of the (new) Act and the (intended public involvement) charter are aspirational, worthwhile and if properly implemented will actually bring to the table in NSW fairer and more expeditious process ... The 80% aspirational goal for code assessment is long overdue and you will find great support from myself and a great number of my demographic.*

A single comment only was focused on a self-interested line of thought:

*I think we are far too accepting of population growth, the main problem underlying planning relates to population growth and I think steps should be taken to reduce this. My specific point is please can I beg you to review the location of the (name deleted) Hospital, it is a crazy location. Alternative locations like (names deleted) are more appropriate as these are much more accessible with less traffic problems.*

Social equity concerns were passionately expressed:

*My thoughts on today, one thing that struck me from the beginning was the first statement which was the economy, I would have preferred if it was not the first*
concern. The focus should be to make Sydney a better place to live rather than the economy getting better.

I would like your commitment (to) make sure (community engagement) is equitable with panels not made up only of white Anglo Saxon Australians. It would be disappointing if these laws come in and we only had highly affluent educated people living in beautiful tree lined suburbs but we shifted people from lower incomes to suburbs that become our urban ghettos. This would be an unintended side effect of community participation that is not truly transparent (or) truly equitable, the government has the responsibility to get this part right and I really hope you can do it. Once again I commend you on wonderful legislation I am so excited to see it come in but want to make sure the Government is serious about the reforms.

I hope to afford a house, however, with rising house costs and with a single income and a majority of my income going to rent, I hope the new planning zoning approach including integrating transport and infrastructure will allow me to have better chances of affordability. I hope these changes will also accommodate the needs for our future ageing population.

When planning to achieve the housing targets it is also important to ensure social infrastructure is adequate to support growth, particularly for subregional strategies.

Involving the disinterested:

What most resonates with me from the panel this weekend is that change is important and I am from a generation who doesn’t seem to care but has opinions and incredible insights in how the city should be moving forward. One of the things we should be drawing upon most is informing the general population and getting them into the decision making process. We need to capture their attention and generate substantial involvement as opposed to run of the mill tick of the box. We need them to actively engage in what they want in their cities and how they want their suburbs to develop.
If you have lazy or unmotivated people it does not necessarily mean they do not care, but if you want them to participate from home or online you need to give them an incentive of some kind and participating. You could have a prize draw every three months for participating online and that should give them enough motivation to participate.

Make a TV documentary (of this deliberative process).

I think the principles of the (proposed Act) with community input works very very well and to get all the people together to participate in these discussions a new public holiday should be introduced for planning and development for our future day. I recommend a public holiday called a “Planning and Development of our Future Day”.

9.4 Government’s use of deliberation process findings

There was reference to the Orange and Penrith deliberative panel sessions in the government’s “White Paper Feedback Report” released just before the reforms were introduced to parliament215 (NSW Government 2013b). The panels’ views (generally in support of the reforms) were noted with the comment (p13):

Their views on the planning system were different from self-selected participants and stakeholders and were more likely to be representative of the views of the wider public.

However, the findings from these panel sessions was not prominent in this document, which apparently had its hands full in highlighting the rest of the project’s “unprecedented consultation” (Chapter 8.4.2), and attending to the issues raised by the various vocal interest groups which were by now enveloping the parliamentary deliberations on the bills. There were attempts to use the information from the panels in these informal exchanges among parliamentarians (ie putting the important question of the representativeness of the views

215 Neither the publication itself nor the website references the actual release date of this report.
expressed by vocal resident’s groups), but the direct force of personal representations from the interest groups themselves, dominated the political exchange216.

### 9.5 New insights

#### 9.5.1 Overview

This section examines what may be taken from this DD case work. The insights are related to both: (1) higher order elements of PST thinking (and theory behind it) that reform is futile unless institutions can be set aside, and (2) the important questions about democracy in planning and transitions.

What we see in this experiment is a setting where institutions, or the standard “rules of the game” in policy debate, were, for a time, set aside. One of the key changes was that instead of interest advocates, we had randomly selected groups of citizens gathering to deliberate about serious planning system questions. Citizens were placed in situations which provided for social learning and critical thinking about planning settings. While there was knowledge imparted by experts, there were also learning as a consequence of the powerful exchanges of experiences and views among the citizens themselves. The process design seemed to align well with Healey’s (2003, p110) suggestion that engagement processes should be centrally concerned with creating situations in which “people develop a critical insight into the situatedness of other people’s experiences and to ask critical questions about their own situation”. But what is particularly pertinent from the case studies, if there is an interest in more sustainable urban development, is that when citizens develop these insights and ask these questions the tendency, for the random but representatively selected groups, is to be very open to reformist thinking. For a substantial majority of attendees to the deliberative panels, there seemed to be a substantive, if not wholesale, shift in interpretive frames: from the cynical (about government) and self-interested at the start of the process, to one inclined to foreground the more progressive ideas around city planning as a means of steering change at the end. This is significant supporting evidence of the power of institutional reform.

Turning to democratic ideals, it is transition management’s inclination to selective involvement of elite actors that has been criticised in regard to naïveté to it, and in turn its relationships to politics (Hendriks and Grin 2007, Shove and Walker 2007, Voß and

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216 Advice at the time from two separate sources involved in the high level use of the information from the deliberative panels.
Bornemann 2011). So ideas about “designing in” democratic processes as a means of accounting for legitimacy and accountability have been advanced (Hendriks 2009), and the PST framework has followed this suggestion. But the insights from this democratically founded casework seem to go further than endorsing the importance of providing for a more democratic or legitimate process. In fact, the exercise was not able to overcome the “legitimate” policy making process of the SPSR project. The final stages of the SPSR process seem to qualify as an example of what Jhagroe and Loorbach (2015) have described as the “undemocratic fundamentals of (institutionalised) democracy”. That is, the factors influencing NSW parliament’s decisions in regard to the planning reforms were clearly legitimate, but they raise serious questions about whether the decisions were made in a democratic context, or were just another example of “tribalistic rule by the strongest”. Each of the lobbyists hard arguments to suggest they were “on the side of the angels”, but there is little in the way of evidence that the reform process confronted these groups with critical questions about their own positions.

In overall terms, the insights from this casework endorse the idea of “designing in” non-traditional democratic processes as an aspect of PST thinking, and provide another interpretive analysis of its potential in wider planning and transitions theory. Where the above casework can now help is by being used, inductively, to provide insights on what the “take-up” of deliberative democracy ideas might mean both practically and conceptually in the world encompassing planning system reform episodes.

9.5.2 Practical findings

An overview understanding of planning issues and reform complexity is able to be achieved in compact, pragmatic deliberative engagement processes – Two of the important queries raised in objections to the use of randomly selected deliberative citizens panels during the SPSR project were: (1) those new to the process (ie random selectees) would struggle to unravel the complexity involved and thus be unable to make informed decisions, and (2) there would need to be extended time periods involved which would raise scheduling and cost problems in regard to upscaling their use (and in this case clash with election cycle pre-requisites). As outlined previously, the first issue is oppositional and was raised particularly by resident group activists including certainly some elements of the Better Planning Network.217 The second issue is more concerned with approach. It reflects to an extent the

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217 As argued at the White Paper workshop and BPN submission dated X.
scholarship on deliberative democracy and civic juries. Hendriks (2006) acknowledges that the deliberative model is “multiple and varied” (p576), but as outlined in Chapter 9.3.1, there are some baseline requirements that were not always met in these cases. The underdone aspect of the panels related mostly to the question of whether there was sufficient opportunity to be informed on the counter-arguments to the reforms. The information provided to panellists in panels and focus group sessions was limited to the facilitator and planning experts (all from UTS). So, for example, there was no opportunity for testimony to be made by either development sector or resident activists. One of the reasons this approach was taken was that there were urgent deadlines imposed by government as to the conduct of all of the deliberative work. One argument raised by resident activists, contesting the findings of panels and focus groups, would be that the views expressed by participants was naïve to the likelihood of governance implementation failures. But the reform exercise and its commitment to improved engagement process is seeking to change this. Put another way, reformist ideals will of course have no chance to succeed if arguments relying on the failures of existing institutions are used to prevent their implementation.

Deliberation by randomly selected panels of citizens are likely to be more supportive of planning reforms than the self-selected resident activists directly involved in the reforms – The inductive leap suggested from the panel and focus group findings is that the wider, potentially affected, public is not only capable of deliberation on these matters but would be likely to be open to actions supportive of major institutional changes aligned to the planning reforms (insofar as they were presented by UTS at the events). Notwithstanding the implementation questions, this opening up of prospects for institutional change is good news for normative planning ideals (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993, Healey 2007b). Importantly in political terms, this would suggest there may have been a significant misrepresentation of broader community attitudes in the more vocal feedback coming into the reform process. But the question also begs: what was it that brought about such different impressions. Two alternate responses are: (1) this can be explained away as institutional inertia and lock-in. That is, vocal activists were more likely to be those already privileged in

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218 One person with an influential role in the Better Planning Network (also involved in local community advocacy to address disadvantage) attended the final one day panel held on February 2015 in an observer role only.

219 The Orange and Penrith panel findings needed to feed-in to the White Paper Feedback report which was due in August 2013 (ie the month the panels occurred), and the focus group and final deliberative sessions needed to be completed in February 2014 (ie within weeks of commissioning) as the government was faced with a decision on whether to attempt to advance the legislation through parliament again.

220 This argument was for example raised in interviews with Community Worker #1 (interview date 27 March 2014).
Sydney’s housing scene and would be inclined to resist change and protect such privilege, or (2) the panellists and focus group members were under informed and/or subject to biased expert advice, and/or came to a “manufactured consensus” (Whittemore 2014, p305). But a brief further unpacking of what happened differently in each (as provided below) may provide further useful learnings.

Contrasting the participatory approaches adopted in (1) mainstream and (2) deliberative processes helps illustrate requirements for engagement around transformative change –

The panel/focus group processes, included: (1) the opportunity to engage in wider city planning questions (importantly) flavoured by different personal experiences and thus some “built-in” personal reflexivity, and (2) reflection on what might be done to improve things. Together these two items constitute the “double-level” reasoning referred to above. The construction of the deliberative panel processes succeeded in evoking what Rein and Schon (1993) refer to as a “shift” in interpretive frames. That is, at the start of the deliberative processes, participants could be described as: being cynical or disinterested in planning, having local-scale spatial perceptions of its effects, having negative perceptions about its governance and politics, and (naturally) having values more inclined to resist change as a means of keeping personal resources intact as a consequence (“homo economicus”). By the end of the deliberative process a notable shift had occurred for the majority of panellists: interest in planning had sparked, spatial perceptions now included metro level, a temporal dimension had been added (ie longer term thinking), there was a sense of the possibility of normal people having an effect on policy decisions, and the values orientation of participants had become more inclined towards questions of fairness and inclusiveness (“homo reciprocans”)221. This contrasted with the mainstream engagement efforts really from the start of the reform process. Unlike in the panels, Sydney’s larger social, economic challenges and factors like spatial and transport relationships were not prominent in the discourse. The question of a change in planning culture was raised but not well defined. There was however enough evidence of question marks or bias in the details of the reform222 to create and/or nurture the embedding of a cynical view of the intended changes by those already inclined to resist change. So while the more experienced activists and relatively inexperienced “deliberators” started off in a similar place (ie following the

221 Servillo and Van Den Broeck (2012) take the question of interpretive frames further to assign technical, cognitive, socio-political and discursive dimensions. This construction has been used in defining the collection of changes described here.

222 See Chapter 8.2.1 including the foregrounding of economic growth imperatives in the White Paper, and for example, the submission of Gurran (2013) indicating that the bill was inconsistent with the government rhetoric on increased consultation and the lack of any attention to questions of spatially based social inequity.
dominant societal ideas cynical and/or pessimistic about city planning), the panellists and focus group participants ended up more positive, open and constructive about change. The process design adopted in the deliberative exercises worked well on broader scale questions around the reforms, as was their brief.

9.5.3 Conceptual suggestions

This section considers what might be abstracted from the DD exercise and its process design that could have a more universal message for the policy and institutional conundrums which planning system reform efforts face. As far as the planning reform practice space is concerned, designing-in democratic processes might be, or be able to become, one of the more potent moves which are available. Far from just being needed as a form of validation on legitimacy and/or accountability grounds, (well-organised) deliberative democracy exercises seem to characterise a sought-after type of social innovation. That is the type with the potential to directly influence systemic change. This is a consequence of its: (1) apparent capacities to directly engage in questions of power and thus help to interrogate the politics (which can be otherwise missed in the face of institutional forces), (2) natural tendencies to stimulate agonism on behalf of the public interest much needed by politicians with normative intent in the face of fierce interest advocacy and (3) comfortable fit with some of the more advanced thinking on strategic niche management under transitions thinking (ie consciously protected societal experiments which over time upscale). I explain each point briefly below in considering how deliberative democracy processes might be better strategised in future planning reform.

*Helping to expose power relations and politics* - Friedmann (1998, p249) suggested “ambivalence about power” as “perhaps the biggest problem” faced in theorizing and practically understanding planning. There is criticism that transition management also understates the importance of power. Flyvbjerg’s model (Chapter 4.4) provides a response to this by exposing institutional interests and directly engaging in questions of power. The design of the SPSR deliberative processes can be considered, essentially, as a variation of Flyvbjerg’s already referenced work (Flyvbjerg 2001, Flyvbjerg 2002a, Flyvbjerg 2004b). In retrospect, the SPSR deliberation processes presented data and then did (in

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223 In the spirit of the claim by Meadowcroft to “pity the poor politicians” (2011, p71) even if other regular institutional actors are not so elated.

224 Flyvbjerg (2002a, p353) directly links his work to Friedman’s suggestions on planning’s weaknesses in regard to power.
essence) ask Flyvbjerg’s phronetic research questions (1) Where are we going with planning in Sydney? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this desirable? (4) What should be done about it?)\textsuperscript{225}. Flyvbjerg’s work, which I am suggesting now to have been demonstrated to have a fit with planning reform in Sydney, provides rich theoretical and methodological foundations which are available to be called upon in process design for engagement around institutional reform. Nevertheless and as experienced in the SPSR project (from the White Paper workshop onwards in regard to deliberative democracy suggestions) the challenging of power can be expected to meet resistance. This is considered further in the two points below.

\textit{Agonism and the potential for a new civic discourse on planning and its reform} – Agonism theory (Mouffe 2000) is about the importance and power of “passion” as a component of politics. The concern here is that deliberative processes (including deliberative democracy) can be over-focused on rationalising conflicting views and coming to consensus (“getting to yes” (Friedmann 2008)). The criticism is that their design can be over-concerned with designing-out and disempowering “strife” (Pløger 2004), which is at the centre of politics. In contrast “agonistic pluralism” recognises that (ibid p87)

\begin{quote}
...conflict between different interests, values, and norms is inescapable, and this makes strife ‘the order of the day’.
\end{quote}

There was plenty of strife in the planning reform debate, but as one jaundiced non-partisan participant put it after one (“consensus”) session\textsuperscript{226}: “... we hadn’t heard anything from the community ... we heard lots from community groups”. The paradox of the deliberative panel sessions on the planning reforms was that they actually did induce passion from the community members who participated. The on-camera outpourings “to the Minister” at the end revealed a group of now “informed” citizens\textsuperscript{227}, after a fair but sometimes passionately contested discourse, as a consequence now had a passion and interest in participation in the serious issues ahead. In regard to the question of where narrative power might be centred in the city planning questions, it was also noteworthy that, for the citizens involved in the

\textsuperscript{225} The interviews undertaken as a part of this research used a modified version of Flyvbjerg’s model. In the time available it was decided to not directly engage in the question of power. notes that the interview design used a modified design of Flyvbjerg’s model which consciously excluded the question of power (ie the 2\textsuperscript{nd} question).

\textsuperscript{226} From moderated discussion forum 30 July 2013.See Section 8.4.

\textsuperscript{227} At least partially informed from information presented independently by UTS. But noting also that some of the more vocal activists may not be more informed than this on the key urban system questions faced by the planning reforms.
deliberative panels at least, the issue which was most potent in unleashing this passion was evidence of unfairness (ie including (1) the evidence of increasing concentration of social disadvantage from SEIFA data, and (2) evidence of use of unfair or prejudiced argument within the panel discussion themselves). Up until that point, almost the only passion in the SPSR project was from institutionalised interests. This thinking suggests that fairly organised, group deliberation, itself, may have the power to overcome that inertia of disillusionment on the part of citizens and even stimulate positive thinking (“Planning and Development of our Future Day”!). Stimulating this kind of future-oriented thinking may be attractive to sincere, frustrated politicians concerned about the representativeness of more self-interested views but already swamped by them.

Building up the use of innovative participatory approaches can be assisted by the learnings from “strategic niche management” approach under transitions thinking – Transitions studies emphasise the necessity of pertinent niche innovations if there is to be a shifting of prevailing regimes (and their institutions) to encourage more sustainable trajectories. Deliberative panel work of this kind (randomly-selected participants, learning, reflecting and deliberating on policy vs BAU approaches where vocal interests seek to influence policy to support already fixed views) can be considered a niche innovation in transition terminology. Transitions studies recognise that niche activity of this kind will commonly be “badly adapted” to existing regimes, and if advanced into the empirical world, prematurely, will likely be “selected out” when competing with already privileged interests. One of the points of distinction in transitions studies is the scholarly focus on the strategic management of these niches (“strategic niche management” or SNM). SNM is concerned with creating protected spaces for such “hopeful monstrosities” (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p80)229. There is also a focus on all the potential strategic activities between niche start-up and their eventual entry into the wider environment. So SNM is concerned with first shielding, then nurturing and eventual empowerment of such innovations (Smith and Raven 2012, p1025). The SPSR deliberative processes were shielded, a good thing given that they had already been subject to attack from more powerful forces within the mainstream of the reforms. However, the findings were of little effect in the SPSR project. This despite persuasive argument by the well-connected newDemocracy Foundation. While there is no

228 This social equity concern trumped any worries about carbon emissions or climate change for example.
229 Hopeful monstrosities are depicted in (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, p80) as “…hopeful because product champions believe in a promising future, but monstrous because they perform crudely”. These authors suggest an earlier source for the term as: Mokyr, J. (1990), The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
space to go to this content in great detail here, SNM has been a research domain for about 15 years and after the study of many failed niche management experiences, has gone through its own phases of critical review and development (Grin, Rotmans et al. 2010, see chapter I.5). My point is that if the deliberative processes introduced in the SPSR project are seen as potential devices to assist in bringing about breakthroughs in the power and politics of planning, then SNM already provides a set of conceptualisations and heuristics to help (see eg: Caniëls and Romijn 2008, Schot and Geels 2008, Avelino 2011, Smith and Raven 2012, Voß 2014) including for example the beginnings of a “competence kit for practitioners” (Raven, van den Bosch et al. 2010). That is, the SNM research has potential to be useful to advocates so far frustrated in their efforts at giving deliberative democracy processes more effect in city planning.

9.6 Conclusions

Overall, this case work suggests that the insightful designing-in of democracy-centred deliberation into planning system transition efforts is a constructive move. This is not just from a philosophical viewpoint (ie supportive of liberal-democratic traditions), or just as a response to the democracy deficits suggested in planning and transitions research. It seems to be useful in a pragmatic sense if transformative change towards sustainable urban development is the goal. Individuals involved in the process did develop a more critical insight into both Sydney planning problems and their own preconceptions. Importantly, the consequence of this was an openness to reform which was hardly seen elsewhere in the whole of the SPSR project.
Chapter 10 What has been learnt? What possibilities arise?

10.1 Transforming planning systems in large cities

This thesis commenced with a discourse on the social, economic and environmental problems in Sydney which are related to spatial form (Chapter 2). These problems are “wicked” in that they are embedded, worsening and highly resistant to resolution\(^\text{230}\). There are already scenarios available on how large cities like Sydney might change over a period of time to become more socially inclusive, efficient, environmentally responsible and considerate of future generations. It also seems that when attention is drawn to city planning problems, citizens have an openness to the kinds of changes that are needed, and a consciousness of the non-sense of regular planning system approaches (Chapter 9). It has been shown that a big part of the problem is that change of the kind that is required disturbs established interests and runs into resistance from lobby groups and other powerful interested parties (Chapter 8). This kind of problem setting is not only characteristic of Sydney’s planning system, or indeed those in large cities generally. It is part of the wider and deeper crisis in modern society linked to questions about long-term socio-economic vulnerability. So while city planning systems are already regularly under the spotlight, and subject to direct “reform” attention, it is not a surprise that business-as-usual (BAU) reformist efforts have struggled to adapt to the complexity and seriousness of 21\textsuperscript{st} century challenges.

Central to the conception of this thesis, was the point that there are lines of scholarly thinking (around complex systems, institutions and governance) which explore, at some considerable depth, the challenge of societal system change. The thesis has been an attempt to better connect this scholarship and the planning reform practice sphere. Transitions theory has been shown to be of particular interest here with its deep attention to how societal systems (perhaps like planning) might actually be steered in a more sustainable direction in the face of resistance. On my part, after many years of experience in the field of planning reform, there has been an effort to make this work something other than a dry academic exercise. Indeed, perhaps the core challenge taken on in this thesis was to see

\(^{230}\) See for example the Australian Public Service Commission’s definition of wicked policy problems (APSC 2007).
whether and how this scholarly knowledge might help in the practical re-ordering of planning systems in large cities like Sydney. Therefore, in considering whether there might be any advances evident from the work behind this thesis, Schot’s statement (quoted in the Introduction at Chapter 1) that “there’s nothing as practical as good theory” can act as a kind of yardstick for this concluding chapter. It is to question whether any new practical possibilities might come into view as a consequence of this research endeavour. As a lead-in to this broader inquiry, it is timely to reflect on the particular research questions raised at the start of the thesis.

10.2 What has been learnt?

10.2.1 Alignment with practice problems

In line with the above commentary, and the chosen focus on organised government efforts at planning system reform, the primary research question for this thesis was:

Can transitions and relational-institutionalist planning insights better enable metropolitan planning system reform efforts to be effective in achieving planning ideals?

A response to the question was framed by a further five questions. The first was concerned with the general alignment of the scholarship explored in this thesis with the planning system reform domain. Initially, the scholarly dimensions of this thesis were centred on transitions scholarship. When one has the time and inclination to explore it, transitions can be an alluring and inspiring line of research. However, it is also relatively complex and abstract and when introduced to practice colleagues, in the early stages of the research, it was very difficult to get any level of engagement. At one level, this was evidence of the default position of apathy towards scholarship on the part of planning practitioners suggested by March (2010). But at least as significant was the low levels of (even attempted) application of this field of study into the planning domain in Australia. Even in the telling, transitions theorisations seemed quite remote to otherwise thoughtful colleagues interested in planning system reform. As a core contribution of this thesis, planning-related insights have been “meshed” with transitions thinking, in an attempt to help improve the connections between transitions thinking and the planning world. It is this meshing of concepts which is described as “planning system transition” (PST) thinking in this thesis.
When it came to the more formal interview stages of the thesis, discussion was dominated by the sense that system actors, across the fields of interest represented in the interviews, were all experiencing a high degree of frustration with the planning system. The lack of progress from another major effort at reform between 2011 and 2014 (which I call in this thesis the “Sydney Planning System Reform” (SPSR) project) had extended positions of frustration even further. When the combination of insights around PST thinking was put to this cross-sectoral group of planning system actors, the evidence seems to be clear that the group saw something useful, and beyond the regularly posited concerns about the planning system (eg too pro-development, too responsive to NIMBY attitudes, too complex, too slow). The concepts seemed to be offering a deeper critical understanding of the practical problem. While the qualities of abstraction offered by this PST thinking were seen as valuable, it was also found to have a practical resonance. That is, for some at least, the insights were relatively easily applicable to real problem settings.231

The majority of interviewees ranked this meshing of planning and transitions thinking (as a means of rethinking planning reform potential) at the highest level of importance. But at the same time, as indicated in Chapter 7, there was the identification of a knowledge gap. That is, it was indicated that these conceptions were not well understood in the planning circles in which the interviewees moved. Generally, those who had experienced thinking and action consistent with transitions or relational-institutional insights in the world of practice, saw it as something rare and special, and that evidence of its application was limited to those performing at the highest qualities of practice.

Overall we can note from the interviews a set of quite positive comments suggesting that PST insights are aligned with the planning reform problem and were perceived to be of value. So the answer to this research question is in the affirmative. The conclusion can be drawn that there is evidence of a connection between the progressive planning and transitions insights, as offered in this thesis, and planning system reform problems. Understanding its extent is assisted by a consideration of the remainder of the research questions.

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231 The evidence of this is outlined at Chapter 7.3.3. But to mention a brief example: a senior-level advisor working on a project related to contestability in government infrastructure provision volunteered a new perception, after exposure to PST ideas; that a current ideological lock-in (pro vs anti-contestation in public infrastructure contracting), might be opened up if both sides were to be encouraged towards the “bigger narrative” on suburban change.
10.2.2 Conceptual particulars

The next three research questions were concerned with particulars and evidence of value in the new PST concepts. They were concerned with: what an operational framework for a planning system reform project based on PST thinking might look like, whether it might be compared with the SPSR project approach, and if so what might be learnt as a consequence. The thesis has developed the PST “framework” as a new way of conceiving planning system reform approaches (Chapter 5). It uses the three “pillars” of: mainstream planning thought, relational-institutional planning and transitions studies, to provide the basic theoretical structure. When comparisons were drawn (Chapter 8), it was found that the processes undertaken in the SPSR project had some similar approach elements to the PST framework. But the procedures of the SPSR project (as it played out between 2011 and 2014) generally proved considerably more aligned with BAU planning system reform approaches. When transformative innovations arose in the reform process they were, as a rule, unable to overcome institutional blockers. In turn these innovations were set aside or, through compromise, weakened in terms of their potential transformative effect. In instances when these blockers were able to be overcome, the agreed reforms were of the less substantive type and did not engage in wicked city planning challenges or solutions.

At its centre, the PST process directly distinguishes itself from BAU approaches by both targeting, and linking, two baseline failings which might be inferred from the above. It suggests that it is the joining up of: (1) a primary process aspiration to challenge established institutions (the “rules of the game” - and their favouring of established interests over others), with (2) the actuality of the backdrop of the broader city planning problems (as felt by citizens today, but also with a mind to the future), which provides the opening for different and more responsive answers to be reached to planning system problems. Chapter 9 captures the entire proposition, in a way, with its evidence of a quite serious change in citizen attitudes to city planning dilemmas (and openness to different responses) following participation in deliberative democracy exercises, with the associated learning, reflection and argument on values and ideas that went on within them. But, due to the dominance of narrow sectoral interests in the mainstream of the reform project, the findings of these exercises were not able to have any influence on the SPSR project outcome.
10.3 Future possibilities

The final research question is concerned with implementation practicalities. This takes us to whether and how new practice-centred possibilities might emerge as a consequence of the application of the concepts raised in this thesis, and in what settings.

10.3.1 The city planning system “before and after” a PST orientation

One way to orient a response to this practice-acceptance test is to try to draw a picture of what a new planning system might look like if PST processes underpinned it. It is an attempt to build resonance and interest through a “before” and “after” explanation. As discussed through this thesis, the “before” setting for planning in cities like Sydney is overwhelmed by the power of established institutions. Regular processes, as embedded in the planning system itself, see powerful minority voices dominant in key planning decisions (could be from development interests close to government, politically savvy groups highly resistant to any neighbourhood change, or unaccountable interests within the bureaucracy itself). The attention that these voices garner fosters the stopgap or squeaky-wheel approach leaving little room for attention to the wider and deeper city planning challenges. It is not that planning system administrators don’t see the difficulty. The problem is that it’s hard to see a way around it. This provides an explanation of the inclination for many system operatives to feel power-less and cynical about planning reform (and even worklife) prospects (Chapter 3.3.4). Here the interviews with planning system elites provided some specific value. These interviewees were attracted to this PST way of thinking. Many saw it as taking us to some new ground (eg interview with Academic #1, Chapter 7.3.3). There was also the view that this kind of insight was already seen, and used, in the best efforts within planning, and wider governance efforts in Sydney, but that evidence was “rare and uneven” (eg interview with Consultant #2, Chapter 7.3.3).

A PST orientation would require a considerable cultural shift in planning reform practice. At one level the main feature of the planning system “after” a PST orientation would be simply its attention to “power” as the default driver for planning reform action (ie rather than analytics, or a particular value orientation, or even democracy). But beyond any direction of “attention”, PST thinking, and the PST framework specifics, provides a new process approach to analyse, interpret, challenge and build-in appropriate intervention strategies in practical reform projects. The kind of focus, competence and confidence that is suggested as possible under PST thinking is not by “hunch”. It is based on the scientific
research behind the planning and transitions scholarship discussed in this thesis. But (and perhaps to assuage worried practitioners) it happens that in these research fields, to have a scholarly foundation, means alignment with the idea that we must learn from the best of best practice (“rare” as it may be), along with the interpretation of what fails.

Five specific illustrations of a future, PST-oriented, planning system, with better prospects for achieving sustainable urban development are suggested below. The first is concerned with the better understanding of systems and their dynamics. The next three can help us understand what is involved in this search for “cultural” change in the world of planning. The concluding illustration is concerned with structures and processes. A final remark is made on how individual PST-based contributions combine and interact in this future setting to co-produce ongoing reform.

**A more specific narrative for the planning system reform puzzle**

The multi-level perspective (MLP) is a major paradigm in transitions theory which brings a capacity to “place” planning system reform efforts into the world of wider societal dynamics. Planning reform efforts are quite regularly mobilised to achieve transformative change. Indeed that was the nominal intention of the SPSR project. What the MLP is valued for is its capacity to explain the patterns and mechanisms underpinning system transformation (and stability).

![Figure 10.1 - SPSR project reality in 2014 using the lens of the MLP (adapted from Geels 2004, Figure 9)](image-url)
Figure 10.1 depicts the SPSR project at its end state in early 2014 in the frame of the MLP. It notes certain pressures emerging in the wider societal landscape (such as shifting housing market and mobility preferences, a new scale of spatially-related disadvantage and the suggested growing economic consequences of Sydney’s spatial form, as discussed in Chapter 2). It also suggests the SPSR project itself as a potentially important set of “niche” level innovations. As explained in Chapter 4.3.1, the framework of the MLP reveals that in the end there was insufficient power from the combined effects of the abovementioned landscape level forces, and the SPSR project’s own (sometimes less than fully informed) efforts, to deliver any significant changes from this major episode. It was the initiatives of the SPSR project which were turned back. What is important here is that the MLP’s narrative explanation of something as intricate as planning system reform, can take planning system thinking to a new and useful level of problem specificity, and thus a new explanation of the types of responses that might be more effective.

**Working with complexity**

There is a kind of reinforcing chain of logic underpinning BAU approaches to reform which is challenged by PST thinking. The BAU logic starts with the idea that the planning system is too complex and we must make efforts to do away with system complexity. The situation described by Smith and Stirling (2007, p369) which has been regularly repeated in recent reformist efforts in Australia, again rolled out in the failed SPSR project:

*Despite ... attempts to elude ambiguities, obscure uncertainties and exclude dissent, neglected complexities have a habit of re-emerging in ever more unforgiving ways.*

While all interactions with it need not be (eg routine DAs), a PST-oriented system acknowledges the inevitability of planning system complexity as it attempts to deal with modern societal requirements. So rather than continue a misdirected search for a simple planning system, a re-oriented system would try to work with this complexity as a means of searching out new answers. The question is more a matter of what innovative thought and practice might be needed to respond to this complexity, and it is here that learning becomes essential to the reform task.

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232 See for example the SPSR White Paper, which nominates “(making it) simpler” as the first of five mechanisms by the objects of the reformed planning system will be achieved (NSW Government 2013a, p15)
Learning: a shift from the periphery to the centre

It is more common for planning system actors to see a reform episode as an opportunity to extol their own opinions on problems than as a learning opportunity. But the idea of learning, as a means of stepping beyond problem-identification and towards (the hard choices involved in delivering) change, is central to a future planning system oriented towards PST thinking. This emphasis on learning operates at two levels. The first is at the level of scholarly research, and picks up the transitions studies suggested pre-requisite for interconnection between practice and scholarship in steering change in complex societal systems. Transition thinking’s justification for this interconnection is that problem’s like planning reform are complex and dynamic, so reform has better prospects if it is backed by up-to-date research and evidence on the intricacies involved. The work of March (2010) shows how in the Australian planning world at least, this kind of interconnection is largely missing.

Second, is relevant to practice itself. The whole of the orientation of planning reform endeavour over time, under PST thinking, opts for the process of “guided variation and selection” (Chapter 4.4.1). This is the idea of exploring options before locking in ambitious shifts. In real-life it makes perfect sense to vary approaches based on trial and error. But in the BAU-world of planning, politicians and bureaucrats seek to avoid accusations of being indecisive or of “back-flipping”. Society feels the consequences when costly policy failures struggle on, when it’s seen as too late or embarrassing to change. In a strange twist from the time when the writing up of this thesis commenced in 2013, we see Australia’s now prime minister directly aligned with, and speaking out about, this kind of thinking:

If a policy doesn’t work, chuck it out ... adjust, tweak, agility is the key, the objective is what we’re all about.

(Turnbull 2015).

Non-traditional democracy

Democracy is often suggested as the means of establishing legitimacy in the face of power. But there is also the evidence that “institutionalised democracy” can itself be highly undemocratic, reflecting the hold that sectional interests can have on democratic institutions themselves (Jhagroe and Loorbach 2015). A PST-oriented planning system would see more non-traditional democratic processes in planning decisions as a means of offsetting the
attention that interest advocates can garner. There was supportive evidence of the potential here from the experimental deliberative democracy exercises undertaken in the course of the SPSR project (Chapter 9). Individuals involved in the purpose-designed process were observed to develop more critical insights into both Sydney planning problems and their own preconceptions on what might be involved in better governance. Importantly, the consequence of this was an openness to reform, on the part of these participants, which was hardly seen elsewhere in the whole of the SPSR project. In a sense non-traditional democracy is acting as a leverage point here for the goal that wider participatory processes, in a PST-oriented planning system, are aimed at eliciting reflexivity. The idea is that in contrast to BAU participation processes, which tend to provide an opportunity for political expression by narrow interests, a PST-oriented system forces these interests to consider the more complex situatedness of the planning question. That is, it would reduce the luxury of sectoral interests just using a simplified version of the world to block progressive change.

**PST-oriented structures and processes**

The kinds of structures and processes which might characterise a PST-oriented planning system are discussed in the critique of the SPSR project at Chapter 8. It is not that a PST-oriented planning system would depart so much from the kinds of changes nominated in the SPSR project. It is more to suggest that the framing narrative, and process route for mobilisation, would create an atmosphere with better prospects. The difference is described below using the key suggested changes of the SPSR project as a base:

- New governance structures (and the forthcoming Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) brings a case in point) would be acknowledged for their capacity to open new institutional opportunity (eg in cutting through bureaucratic silos, addressing the dilemma of conflicting objectives between local and metropolitan planning and “taking the politics out of planning”). But these structures would also design-in reflexive processes to account for weaknesses. In the GSC case, which will involve a set of unelected commissioners, the question of democratic legitimacy is a key and designing in alternative democratic approaches (like deliberative panels) would be a pre-requisite.\(^{233}\)

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\(^{233}\) While Greater Sydney Commission is not even operational at the time of writing, the question of democratic legitimacy has already become a point of political attention, and something not yet accounted for in documentation released to date. See [http://davidshoebridge.org.au/2015/11/12/labor-cheers-governments-deeply-undemocratic-planning-bill-through-parliament/](http://davidshoebridge.org.au/2015/11/12/labor-cheers-governments-deeply-undemocratic-planning-bill-through-parliament/). Accessed 20/11/2015.
Under a PST orientation, major planning and infrastructure decisions would be *founded* on integrated thinking. For example, road, cycling and rail projects would all be tested on their socio-economic, not just transport, credentials. In Sydney today this is especially about unlocking affordable housing opportunities to meet changing demands. But the capturing of the value of the infrastructure investment would also be central as an acknowledgement of modern problematic fiscal settings\textsuperscript{234}. A betterment levy (or the like) then becomes more politically salient, as a *reasonable* step to limit rent seeking, and a *necessary* step to reduce land price hikes and fund future transport needs in these more austere times\textsuperscript{235}.

At the level of the individual DA, the objective of faster planning approvals under PST thinking would be seen as fitting into a wider network of change. It would turn less on the *claim* that that to do so is just about privileging development interests, and more on *evidence* of instances where responses to interest groups don’t stack up against the challenge of wider societal costs and benefits, including the economic drag of wasted time in development decisions.

**Ongoing co-production**

A PST-oriented planning system would go beyond the idea that any single attribute is the central plank which translates to system reform. The suggestion from the PST framework is that it’s the bundle of insights (eg more specific explanation of the system problem, corresponding narrative and process redesign for reform efforts aimed at improved reflexivity and agency, greater and more accessible knowledge on the relevant material evidence, improved focus on practicalities of the particulars of change through guided variation and selection, and consequential shifts towards more representative and informed democratic processes around policy) which combine to co-produce a reformist environment and together “speak truth to power”.

\textsuperscript{234} Current Sydney transport infrastructure projects are funded on the basis of public asset sales, which have limits. \textsuperscript{235} Unlike Sydney, the City of London already has the benefit of a modern transport system. But it continues to invest heavily in transport infrastructure despite major reductions in central government funding. Dedring (2015) has described how the £20 billion London Crossrail project has an objective of 50% funding via land value capture, and Crossrail2 (the future north-south tunnel) is planned to be 100% funded through value capture.
10.3.2 Considering the “reach” of PST thinking

In the thesis I have often used the phrase “cities like Sydney” when describing the potential sphere of interest of PST thinking. It is the suggestion that this kind of thinking should be pertinent to cities with similar attributes to the empirical setting used to test the concepts in this thesis. But what kind of attributes count here? Four seem to be most pertinent: (1) that the city have a developed economy with significant levels of population already and which are subject to growth pressures and associated investment in property development, (2) that it be subject to neoliberal governance settings (with tendencies to privilege the market – including from within executive government), (3) that it also be subject to liberal democratic political settings (such that organised and politically savvy sectoral interest groups, benefitting from current settings, have power levels comparable to executive government), (4) that the city evidences a poor sustainability scorecard.

So item 1 would seem to select out cities in those developing economies where a raft of socio-economic and environmental pressures are at play which have not been entertained in this thesis\(^{236}\), as well as cities where there is relatively little momentum (or capital allocated) for spatial change. Items 2 and 3 join together to direct the extent to which power, and the dominant discourse, around city development is either aggregated and narrow, or complex and nuanced. This thesis has most to offer settings where arguments about change are stuck in partisan or single issue mindsets (eg pro vs anti development), and do not yet engage the complex situatedness of planning problems and their relationship to sustainable development. Item 4 then directs attention to the relative societal need for increased attention to sustainability questions in city planning within different jurisdictions. Taken together, these criteria would suggest the PST ideas might have more to say to the major high per capita GHG emitting, cities in wealthy Anglophone countries (say Australia, Canada, USA, New Zealand). On a physical level there is the historical settlement patterns of such cities, and associated dependence on private cars rather than public transport. But when compared say to European settings which on the whole have somewhat less concerning environmental scorecards (WWF 2012), there is also an apparent missing awareness and immaturity of debate about the sustainability challenge\(^{237}\), something which PST thinking is targeting. That is not to say there may not be some interest in the work in

\(^{236}\) See Leach, Scoones et al. (2010) for an exploration of the dynamics of the sustainability challenge for cities within developing countries where, say, poverty reduction, social justice, climate change and water/food security have entirely different dimensions to those encountered in the empirical world of this thesis.

\(^{237}\) For example, research has indicated that concern about global climate change is less intense in countries with the highest emission levels (Pew Research Centre 2015, p15)
other geographical settings as interest in transitions increases\textsuperscript{238}, in that PST thinking provides another new and direct extension of the transitions research \textit{domain} (with its focus on organised spatial planning system reform).

It is the field of planning system reform which has been the point of attention in the thesis. But when the “reach” of PST thinking is being considered, a question which arises is to what extent the ideas have potential applicability in the procedures around plan \textit{making}. While any in-depth analysis is beyond scope here, on the face of it there are many parallels. That is, the processes which surround the preparation of spatial and infrastructure plans for the management of city growth are commonly captured by the same kinds of power dynamics and patterns of behaviour as planning system reform efforts (Healey 2007a). In turn, PST thinking’s three interconnected horizons, to direct thinking and action, would seem likely to provide useful framings for conflict-laden plan-making efforts.

Here it is interesting to reflect back on the Vancouver CityPlan of the 1990s which, as discussed in Chapter 8.2.2, came up in the SPSR project as an exemplar for transformative city planning effort. There is quite a coverage of this city’s plan-making processes in the literature which can only be touched on here. But it suggests the 1990s Vancouver work seems to have followed a PST-like path, \textit{intuitively}. Reflecting on the three horizons of PST thinking, the Vancouver CityPlan effort: (1) was founded on an unusually deep commitment to the wider sustainability challenge\textsuperscript{239} (Punter 2003, Cameron, Harcourt et al. 2009) and evidence of a predominantly “civic rather than private ambition” (Sandercock 2005, p41), (2) took on the depth of both the complex institutional factors and the connected-up social, economic and environmental challenges (McAfee 2016)\textsuperscript{240} and, (3) adopted a radically more extensive and deliberative civic and institutional engagement process around these challenges (McAfee 2013, Sarkissian 2013). This, together, resulted in some success in achieving wide support for certain density and other sustainability measures, unusual for an Anglophone city at least.


\textsuperscript{239} By the starting point of Vancouver’s 1990s planning exercise, institutional and cultural mores had already been established which strongly foregrounded issues associated sustainability, in part associated with the aesthetic appeal of the city’s environmental setting (Punter 2003, Cameron, Harcourt et al. 2009).

\textsuperscript{240} A recognition of institutional complexity, including city/region/State government inter-relationships, was also a point of focus in the Vancouver CityPlan process according to Dr Ann McAfee (co-Planning Director of Vancouver at the time) as explained a full day seminar by Dr McAfee attended by the writer at University of NSW on 10 April 2013.
A contrast can be drawn with the more recent work in Vancouver on its “Ecodensity” program which was much less nuanced in its conception and has met much deeper resistance (Boniface 2008, Rosol 2013, Sarkissian 2013). The point of raising this here is that it seems to suggest itself as evidence of value in using PST conceptions as a guide to help rethink and operationalise processes around complex city planning endeavours, not just projects targeting planning system reform.

10.4 What’s missing

These are early days for the question of implementation prospects for PST thinking and the PST framework. There’s a lot of “space in between” these possibilities and practical change. Today the ideas are offered not as a prescriptive specification, but more as a device to help promote reflection and to guide new thinking and action. The evidence we have to go on in regard to implementation prospects for the PST is the same as for the wider question of advancing transition and relational-institutional planning thinking in Australian planning. That is what might be deduced from interview feedback, and what might be gathered more inductively from the application to the SPSR project and the findings of the deliberative panels. The interview feedback was enthusiastic about the need for this kind of thinking, but it was also sometimes very pessimistic about prospects. One leading Sydney academic presented both perspectives in the same interview. But the more compelling was the negative: “the chances of having a conversation in Sydney at the moment about matters like this are not just zero, they are minus zero” (Academic #1).

There was a tendency in the interviews for a “caution” to accompany the suggested support. This was the point that there was a need for more details: more explanation of the particulars and more evidence of the concepts in play. The interviews were quite early in the development of the particulars synthesised in the previous section. So there are some more details coming forward in Chapters 8 and 9 of this thesis, which can be added to explanations as implementation opportunities are further investigated.

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241 The Vancouver Mayor unexpectedly announced the Ecodensity program to some fanfare just a few days before the World Urban Forum was held in Vancouver in June 2006. A suggestion of political interest, close relations with developers and narrow rather than wider value considerations had the program off to a rocky start at the community level. Opponents effectively put the argument that the balance had shifted towards density rather than sustainability, which set back previous hard won institutional gains (Rosol 2013, Sarkissian 2013).
There are other positive features in evidence. Transitions thinking suggests that regime level change requires the alignment of supportive landscape and niche level dynamics. The socio-spatialities at work in Sydney suggest that in this city at least there are landscape shifts underway relevant to city spatial structuring which happen to be more aligned with sustainable development (eg towards smaller housing and away from car-dependence for under 35 year olds). Under transitions thinking, the implementation challenge is then narrowed to facilitating niche innovations that are particularly connected to such landscape level forces, and then acting to protect, then broaden and deepen them such that they connect-up with other initiatives and co-evolve, not only in response to wider landscape effects, but also with evolving niche activities.

It is also noteworthy that even since the (pessimistic) outlook from Academic #1 (in two interviews in March and April 2014), there have been some political changes at national and state level which have brought about their own momentum for change. The first is the parliamentary Liberal Party’s move to select a more “enlightened” Prime Minister (over the pre-existing decidedly conservative one), in a September 2015 party room tilt. Malcolm Turnbull is known as an advocate for public transport and sustainability principles. This and his appointment of a new Minister for Cities and the Built Environment has already shifted the national planning agenda towards more progressive thinking. This development was preceded by the appointment of a new planning minister in NSW in mid-2015, who might have some regime die-hards in a state of shock with his stated legislative intentions to essentially remove his own ministerial powers in development and zoning decisions with the new Greater Sydney Commission Bill. Together these changes suggest a new political salience to the longer term questions about planning in our cities, and thus some prospects for more interest in PST-oriented ideas than existed even 18 months ago (Walsh 2015).

242 Turnbull previously lost the Liberal Party leadership, in 2009, over his support for carbon pricing.
10.5 What happens next?

10.5.1 Encouraging more PST thinking in the planning and academic worlds

The next question is whether and how PST thinking and the PST framework might be able to position itself for engagement in the world of practice. Here we are in the terrain which is familiar to many researchers seeking to create a forum for the expression of their ideas. At the baseline level this could be concerned with subject-specific training seminars or linking the work up with tertiary courses on governance reform (not necessarily only in planning-oriented courses). Beyond this, there is the test well known to transitions researchers of *broadening, deepening and upscaling*. It is a challenge of engaging with existing networks of practice, or developing new ones, which might be persuaded to see these conceptions as important and useful. As a researcher with a strong foot in the door of practice, I may have some advantages here.

There seems to be particular potential for some of the PST concepts, or the relational-institutional and transitions scholarship behind it, to develop a larger presence in the academic world in Australia. There were mixed opinions expressed in interviews on this point. On the one hand, there was the strong view of one of Australia’s leading consultant’s in urban policy that this material should be taken up in planning and governance studies in universities (Consultant #2). But academics themselves were more sceptical in interviews, and seemed more comfortable with their own routines and teaching approaches. The question was put directly in an interview with Academic #1, who said he saw more teaching benefit in bringing in experts with something to say more directly about the (current) world of practice.

It rings true that inspiring stories from practice make for more engaging and enjoyable classes, a big part of the education battle. But is that always helpful to those seeking to learn about how they might emulate this good practice themselves (eg tertiary students and less competent practitioners)? This takes us back to Schot’s question about the link between theory and practice. It seems to me that learning sessions with high performing system actors has a lot to offer, but without accompanying interpretive narrative, it might not be so effective in directing better understanding of, or improved performance in, complex practical settings for even conscientious students. PST thinking might have something particular and *practical* to offer expert-based learning here. It could add important value through providing a way to: (1) untangle the intricacies of what is different about this
expert’s performance in its context, (2) interpret and extrapolate why certain approaches or understandings work, and don’t, in different institutional settings, and (3) enhance the understandings of how students might translate this knowledge to their own personal and organisation-based intervention strategies “on the ground”. It’s the idea that due to the scientific rigour behind it, factoring in PST-oriented thinking in planning practice teaching, might bring a new critical orientation to what works, and what doesn’t, and where. If so it can help broaden and deepen practical knowledge and the kind of competence and confidence required to meet modern city planning challenges.

10.6 Final Remarks

Australian cities are nowhere near achieving sustainable development, and prospects do not seem good as, seemingly, a world of problems converge and will need to be faced by future generations of residents. Actions can be taken to improve these prospects and city planning has an important role here because of its coordinating and integrating function across many fields of urban activity. The research undertaken in this thesis has been about moving beyond aspirations for something better in respect to planning ideals for cities, towards considering more specifically how this might be achieved. The task to shift things is a complex one. This thesis has been an attempt to “get at” this complexity in a way that might have some resonance in the world of practice.
Appendix 1 – Map of Place Names

Highlighted locations are selected place names from thesis text.

Inner Sydney

Wider Metropolitan Area
Appendix 2 – Schedule of Interviewees

(Reference Chapter 7)

Chapter 7 of the thesis references a set of interviews with planning system actors. The ethics arrangements for this thesis required interviewees to remain anonymous. The table below provides a list of the interviewees (using pseudonyms\textsuperscript{244}), the interview dates (some interviews involved two separate sessions), and which interviewees participated in the surveys reported in Chapter 7\textsuperscript{245}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interview Date(s)</th>
<th>Survey Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic #1</td>
<td>27 March 2014, 10 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic #2</td>
<td>10 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic #3</td>
<td>20 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Worker #1</td>
<td>27 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant #1</td>
<td>12 March 2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant #2</td>
<td>10 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant #3</td>
<td>5 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant #4</td>
<td>9 April 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant #5</td>
<td>14 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Industry Representative #1</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Industry Representative #2</td>
<td>20 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Advocate #1</td>
<td>11 April 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Official #1</td>
<td>25 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Official #2</td>
<td>2 May 2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Official #3</td>
<td>9 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Official #4</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Government Official #5</td>
<td>31 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Minister #1</td>
<td>18 July 2014, 18 August 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #2</td>
<td>10 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{244} A number of interviewees play more than one role in their worklife. For example some academics were also active consultants (and vice versa) and a number of those indicated as representing an interest had former roles in government. The interviewee pseudonyms provided here represent the dominant function of that particular interviewee having regard to the focus of attention of the Sydney Planning System Reform project.

\textsuperscript{245} Time constraints meant not all interviewees were able to complete a survey at the interview conclusion (see Chapter 7 for further details).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Interview Date(s)</th>
<th>Survey Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #3</td>
<td>9 April 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #4</td>
<td>30 April 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #5</td>
<td>31 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #6</td>
<td>5 March 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Interest #1</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Community Advocate #1</td>
<td>21 March 2013</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Community Advocate #2</td>
<td>31 March 2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Official #1</td>
<td>9 April 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Elected Official</td>
<td>14 August 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Deliberative Panels: Process Details

(Reference Chapter 9)

Outline of running sheet for the 1½ day deliberative democracy panels conducted in Orange (23rd/24th August 2013) and Penrith (30th/31st August 2013) NSW. As explained in Chapter 9, these experimental panels were undertaken as part of the public consultation component of the NSW government’s planning reform processes. Source: both of the panels were attended by the writer, with the content below presented as a summary of a more detailed running sheet contained in an unpublished report from UTS to the Department of Planning (UTS 2013).

Day 1 – ½ day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.30-2.00</td>
<td>Welcome by facilitator: The deliberative planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explanation of deliberative panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This panel’s selection as a representative sample of the wider population explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Panel to provide recommendations to Government - not bound to proceed with any recommendations but views will be heard at high levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-2.30pm</td>
<td>Working together: getting to know each other and setting up the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Why did you choose to attend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.45-3.10pm</td>
<td>What does the land use planning system do? What is the role of state and local government?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explanation of the planning system and its different layers (strategic planning and development regulation – impact of both on where you live).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Your experience with the planning system so far.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10-3.30pm</td>
<td>Strategic Rationale for NSW Reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explanation of the purpose of the reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Questions/discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.30-4.15pm</td>
<td>What does “livability” mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- After prompts from other research, move around the room to elicit panel members views – focus is on the liveability of the place “where you live” (live scribed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15-5.00pm</td>
<td>The future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explanation of expected population growth, changing demographics and changing demand for: different housing types</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(5 different housing typologies introduced), and questions on what might drive the location of housing into the future.
- Discussion: considering demand for different types of housing into the future, and where people are expected to wish to live, do you think the place where you live could accommodate some more of this form of housing and which kinds.
- Yes/No (explore reasons for No responses to identify what would be needed to change this into a Yes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.00-5.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Wrap up for the day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Agenda for tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Close</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.45-9.30pm</td>
<td>Dinner at Restaurant and discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day 2 – full day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.30</td>
<td><strong>Welcome and outline of the day by facilitator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Video snapshot of city planning challenges</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Research recently undertaken by the Grattan Institute. Jane Frances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelly from Department of Planning’s Urban Conversations evening of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30-10.15</td>
<td><strong>Explanation of components of the reforms and feedback</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strategic planning: more participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Development assessment, especially code assessment changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Infrastructure: provision more responsive to housing growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.15-11.00</td>
<td><strong>Delivery culture and community participation charter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Overview of what engagement in strategic planning is, what do the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>principles mean to you? Do you think the Charter is a good idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00-11.15</td>
<td><strong>Break for Morning Tea</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Decision Point Discussions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.15-12.15pm</td>
<td><strong>Decision Point A</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- If strategic planning is going to set the up-front direction for how</td>
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<td>your area responds to change, what do you think should be considered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>as part of this sort of exercise</td>
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<td>- If we had to consider some of the things you all just mentioned as</td>
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<td>best discussed in local planning exercises what would be best to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>discuss at this level?</td>
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<td>- If you had to trade-off some of the things you want addressed in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>strategic planning, what would you trade off and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.15-1.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong></td>
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<td>1.00-2.00pm</td>
<td><strong>Decision Point B</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Considering what you think strategic planning should address, and how</td>
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<td></td>
<td>engagement is proposed to work in the new system:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What would make you, and others who are not here, engage more in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>strategic planning processes?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To enable this, what kind of information, tools and methods would you</td>
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<td></td>
<td>need?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.00-2.45pm</td>
<td><strong>Decision Point C</strong>&lt;br&gt; If you were in a planning exercise discussing what the character of the place where you live is, and how development codes might reflect this:&lt;br&gt;- What kind of development standards and impacts would the codes need to consider? (Prompts: privacy, streetscape, overshadowing, building bulk and scale, open space, drainage).&lt;br&gt;- Provided the types of development envisaged as code assessable are in keeping with the general character of your local area and complied with the impacts you just identified, could you envisage a code assessment system working satisfactorily that did not require notice about every complying DA? (visual prompts)&lt;br&gt;- Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.45-3.00pm</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3.00-5.00pm| **Recommendations**<br>- Panelists now provide direct feedback to Senior Executive Staff from Department of Planning who now attend the meeting.<br>- Panel members speak, individually, direct to camera in a “message to the Planning Minister”.
| 5.00-5.15pm| Closing remarks from government officials and facilitator.                 |
Appendix 4 – Ethics Statement

Thesis topic:
Wicked Planning Problems and the Reform of Planning Systems: a Case Study of Sydney

Author:
Peter Walsh (Student ID 7215827)

Ethics Research Number:
SUHRE 2013/272.

Statement from Principal Supervisor:
Ethical review for this project was submitted in 2013 under Swinburne University Human Research Ethics reference number 2013/272.

The survey research for this thesis was undertaken in accordance with the process and instruments outlined in that ethics submission.

Peter W. Newton PhD, FASSA
Research Professor in Sustainable Urbanism
Swinburne University of Technology
11 December 2015


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