PLANNING THE GOOD CITY IN AUSTRALIA: ELIZABETH AS A NEW TOWN

Mark Peel

Urban Research Program
Working Paper No. 30
February 1992
PLANNING THE GOOD CITY IN AUSTRALIA: ELIZABETH AS A NEW TOWN

Mark Peel

Urban Research Program
Working Paper No. 30
February 1992

SERIES EDITOR:
R.C. Coles

Urban Research Program
Research School of Social Sciences
Australian National University
GPO Box 4
Canberra, ACT, Australia 2601
PLANNING THE GOOD CITY IN AUSTRALIA:
ELIZABETH AS A NEW TOWN

Mark Peel

Urban Research Program
Working Paper No. 30
February 1992

SERIES EDITOR:
R.C. Coles

ISSN 1035-3828
This paper describes the planning of Elizabeth by the South Australian Housing Trust. As a new town, Elizabeth drew on the planning assumptions and objectives of the postwar British town planning movement and represented a specific plagiarism of the empowering British tradition which dominated Australian planning. In particular, the planners of Elizabeth assumed that working-class residents could be 'improved' by a proper arrangement of urban space and would not bring their own spatial creativity to bear upon the community, and that the major employers enticed into locating in the new town would also conform to the expectations of a harmonious as well as profitable landscape. Both assumptions were vital in the new town vision, yet neither had any force outside the planning ideologies themselves. The building of the city reflected the difficulty of implementing borrowed templates for the 'good city', especially in terms of 'self-containment' and 'social mix'. Increasingly wary of the unauthorised activities of residents and doubtful about the means of creating a cohesive and mixed community, the Trust's officials instead began to rely heavily on employers to guarantee the social as well as economic outcomes of the project. The paper concludes by suggesting that while economic prosperity and the benefits of Trust planning kept employers loyal to this accumulation site while providing residents with the means to build a working community into the early 1970s, the onset of crisis fatally undermined this version of the 'good city'. 
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Stuart Macintyre, Donna Merwick, Louise Persse and Graeme Davison for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper, which was presented as a seminar in the Urban Research Program at the Australian National University in December, 1991, and Patrick Troy and Steven Bourassa for comments and corrections to the final paper.
PLANNING THE GOOD CITY IN AUSTRALIA: ELIZABETH AS A NEW TOWN

1. Introduction

As Australia's depressed outer suburbs move back into the political spotlight, places like Elizabeth will perhaps attract the kind of research that was neglected as they became disadvantaged. Fringe working-class suburbs have had some sociology, but precious little history.1 As a planned community, Elizabeth has done rather better than most in attracting representations. One is the city born of intelligent, inventive urban performers in the South Australian Housing Trust. It is a relatively good urban space, with a tolerable, even commendable, array of community institutions.2 Another is qualified, Elizabeth in a minor key, the mixed results of new town principles meeting a working-class population.3 Other, less official, Elizabeths emerge from different sites of cultural production, moulded by print and television journalism out of popular memories and knowledges. They magnify the city's physical and social distance from Adelaide and collect the images of social breakdown at a convenient distance from the bourgeois centre. A "Pommy" Elizabeth: strange accents, pubs, rampant shop stewards. An Elizabeth of crime, vandalism and child abuse which teaches what people do when you pamper them with welfare and public housing. A valiant Elizabeth, overcoming its long depression and hiding its welfare stigmata behind a new City Centre and various "SA Great" paraphernalia. An unsavoury Elizabeth, shaped out of the wash of negative stereotypes, which explains the 'slum' present as a prior Elizabeth of battlers and good times 'ruined' by the debilitating 'invasion' of Aboriginals and single mothers.4

Mine is a competing interpretation of the history and significance of this landscape, 'my Elizabeth', to be held up against other, misleading, representations. It is a critical history of its planning and development, its decline under economic crisis during the 1970s, and its future in the competitive city. This history locates the problems of Elizabeth not in the inadequate implementation of design, nor in the deficiencies of its residents, nor in some invasion of the dispossessed, but in the problematic assumptions of the plan itself and the impact of changing economic imperatives on a working-class, migrant community. In this paper, I focus on the plan, in which Elizabeth's builders plagiarised the British new town as the appropriate model for the 'good city', the city of community and productive enterprise. As such,
they incorporated the social strategies and outcomes of new towns, in particular the expectations that a well-planned urban space would improve working-class residents and that the town could be both a harmonious community and a profitable site for private industrial enterprise.

In this sense, the new town model established a 'bargain of expertise' between the planners and their clients: the residents and users of the landscape. The expert provision of the good city could be maintained and defended only so long as those clients, especially working-class residents, could be seen to be improving their spatial and social behaviour to fit the new town's expectations. As participants in the new town strategy, residents were expected to conform to and confirm the ideal geography of the plan. Any deviation, any improper or unauthorised use of space, undermined the bargain. Yet the bargain was already compromised by two crucial assumptions. First, it assumed that residents would and could conform to the social objectives of the plan and would not bring their own spatial creativity and strategies to bear upon the landscape. Slums and council housing estates had proved that working-class people were incapable of sustaining proper social relationships and proper uses of space, even in new housing. An environment planned as integrated neighbourhoods would guide them into pre-determined social territories and form them into proper communities. By ensuring 'social balance', the towns would also contain a middle-class element sufficient to provide examples of the proper ways to use space, maintain community and perform the tasks of citizenship. Second, it assumed that employers who located in the new town would be loyal to the plan. New towns promoted and celebrated a particular kind of capitalism: productive, efficient, progressive. The good city needed good employers, who would provide jobs and respect the objectives of social and physical improvement. Planners expected, and located, a morality in industrial capitalism, a commitment to the good city in the good society.

Both assumptions were vital in securing support for the new town vision; neither had any real force outside the planning ideology itself. The good city was under threat from the moment of its creation because planners expected certainties where there could be none. Effectively, 'long boom' prosperity postponed the destabilisation of new town landscapes, including Elizabeth, into the 1970s. Competing Elizabeths — the Elizabeth imagined by the planners, the Elizabeth used by employers, and the multiple Elizabeths constructed by the stratified working-class population — could exist in the same place. But as
economic crisis threatened the foundations of working-class community and revealed the limits of employer loyalty to place, the good city was stripped bare and abandoned. The 'bargain of expertise' had no power to tie employers down and no explanation of social problems beyond the residents' failure to conform to the rules of the landscape. New Elizabeths of poverty and alienation emerged, Elizabeths which must now vie for growth opportunities in the new competitive city, or be managed as social problems by a retreating public sector.

The first Elizabeth, the Elizabeth prior to all the other constructions of the landscape, was the good city. This Elizabeth was a plagiarisation of the British new town. As such, it is a good example of how a derivative practice was actually implemented in Australia. At Elizabeth, Australian planners decisively intervened in the production of the urban landscape, albeit through a housing authority. They turned derived ideas into a landscape. But my aim is not to dissect their Elizabeth as a discourse. It is more important to understand how their discourse was turned into material practice. Like any planned site, Elizabeth was expected to apply and to prove the knowledge which created it. For all the shining surfaces of planning discourse, and for all the intellectual pleasure to be gained from playing over them, what matters in the end is that move to material practice, with all its contradictions and contests.

2. Elizabeth in the Australian Planning Tradition

Where did this first Elizabeth come from? Why did the architects, surveyors and engineers of the Housing Trust make the good city in the form of a British new town? Like most Australian planners before and after the Second World War, they took their models from British planning and reform. The British example also sustained their claims as possessors of powerful knowledge. Certainly, Australian town planning was never an exclusively professional practice. Urban reformers, engineers, public servants and amateurs always played a role in forming policy. This was, as Stretton argues, particularly true of the Housing Trust. But they were all 'planners', and they all took from Britain the tools of improvement and the arguments for their use in shaping a better urban future, in whichever city they intended to apply them. Within this derivative tradition, the new town emerged as one template for the good city; it was taken up by South Australian planners because it was a distinctive and better choice from the range of derivative possibilities. Adelaide's planning
advocates preferred their plagiarisations direct, not refracted through the reformist activisms of Sydney or Melbourne. In the particular context of the 1940s and 1950s, their determination to produce a distinctive regional strategy for urban development made the new town an attractive and compelling option.

Australian planning had always relied on British models. Its Britishness intensified, if anything, in anticipation of planned reconstruction after the First World War. Wartime dedication to the mother country tied planners even more securely to imperial visions of the race restored by garden cities; "[i]f we are to hold our own in the world as an Imperial race, we must ruthlessly remove the slum and create the garden village." Australians looked to their British counterparts for ideas about how to reform and how to claim power. Ironically, a town planning movement that frequently bemoaned its marginalisation in Britain was celebrated in Australia as the proven example of effective social and environmental activism. Actual English achievement was less important than the imagined English facility for providing solutions that could be applauded and applied across the imperial domain. At this time, Australian planners borrowed more than a belief in the garden city. They also borrowed an identification and interpretation of social problems rooted in the British experience of urban blight. Their imagination was based on English landscapes and implemented on cities transposed into colonial versions of the East End. They looked for Stepney and Limehouse and tried to build Letchworth and Port Sunlight. Achievement was limited to a few garden suburbs and town planning schemes. But their untested assumptions about the need for the good city in Australia, and about how it might be created, remained to shape the next bout of intervention in urban sites during the 1940s.

The strident imperialism of these early planners gradually gave way to a less florid and more technical appreciation of English models during the 1930s, and Australians looked at Russian and French ideas as well as English garden city plans. A commitment to redistribution and a critique of private enterprise gave the idealism of 'planning for life' a harder edge towards the end of the Second World War. Though they lacked the widespread destruction of the urban fabric that freed British planners to advocate wholesale rebuilding, Australian reformers like F.Oswald Barnett and W.O.Burt could still speak of an unparalleled social intervention, of a determination to "reconstruct on lines
that shall be planned, and equitable, and efficient, and beautiful.12 Drawing on their own prewar investigations of slum life and inequitable cities, as well as the experiences of the first housing commissions, they criticized local councils and authorities for their jealous defence of piecemeal powers, praised Russian town planning for its positive approach, and argued that governments faced a clear choice: "[w]e must plan — or perish."13

These reformers were not, of course, creating a problem out of nothing. The extent of the housing problem in 1945 is well-documented, and the war had only magnified the gains of speculators and slumlords.14 Key people in government agreed with the need for some kind of planned reconstruction which would prevent a new depression or a repeat of the half-hearted measures of 1918. The Departments of Post-War Reconstruction and National Development designed national-level projects and carried out a 'stock-taking' of housing and infrastructural needs.15 But the most promising federal response was the Housing Commission Report of 1944, which proposed coordinated efforts in public and private enterprise building, a Commonwealth Housing Authority to advise and coordinate state housing authorities, controlled subdivision and zoning regulations, participatory planning and land nationalization.16 Property interests, Treasury conservatism and a 'housing first' policy made sure that the subsequent Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement of 1945 merely provided federal funds for public housing construction by the states, albeit means-tested to direct funding to the poor, without any significant extension of Commonwealth powers over town planning and land use. This particular 'new order' never got off the ground.17

At state and local levels, plans for a reconstructed Australia also emerged, with the enthusiastic participation of town planners, who could often exert more influence on citywide committees and boards than on government agencies in Canberra. Most cities undertook housing surveys along with town plans for redevelopment and urban extension. Sydney developed its County of Cumberland Plan, while Victorian planners provided for rapid planned growth in their visions of a Greater Melbourne. Whether in metropolitan authorities, government departments, universities or town planning committees, planning advocates gained for the first time a level of legislative support which they could use to implement planning initiatives beyond simple zoning and coordinating functions. For a few energetic years, reconstruction governments in Australia and Britain offered planners the chance to transform their mixed
Planning the Good City

heritage of utopian radicalism and architectural determinism into a powerful material practice. In the end, pent-up housing demand helped defeat careful control over new developments and planners were also frustrated by the compromises of the planning process in the absence of controls over land ownership. For all the enthusiasm of reconstruction, they often spoke in the weary tones of re-inventing the wheel. Town planning, it seemed to them, was too often 'rediscovered' at times of national need, only to be reshelved when property interests and do-nothing governments were able to go back to the more normal pattern of decision-making about Australia’s urban places.

Throughout the period, the identification of what was to be done remained strongly British. As Robert Freestone notes, pre-war channels for English ideas remained intact, and a "more decisive anglicising force in the early post-war period was the appointment of many British-trained people to positions of influence within government and academia." The cementing of the Pacific alliance and the waning of the British Empire in Asia did not lead to any retreat from British models. They may have looked at 'prairie planning', even at le Corbusier, but most Australian planners maintained their devotion to British practices and examples. An England of Attlee made for a stronger connection, if anything. Even as they criticised urban sprawl, Australia’s town planners focused on the slum as the greater threat. Even as they noted the decline of country towns and entire rural regions, they turned to satellite development as the solution to overconcentration. And even as they talked of the problems of ribbon development and soulless housing estates, they thought of British new towns and garden suburbs as the given physical forms of the better society. It was in English terms, indeed often in England itself, that Australian planners learned to read slums, anomie and immoral geographies. They would also learn how to draw the physical structures that would force slum dwellers, developers, and even their employers, into more proper uses of urban space.

During the 1940s, then, the basic concepts of British design were cemented in Australian planning ideology and practice. The garden city idea was already in place, having been employed since at least the First World War as the template for well-ordered and pleasant urban design. Added to it now were neighbourhood units and new towns. The neighbourhood unit, which borrowed from English models and in turn American ideas, was a simple, compact description of how people should live. Its Australian advocates simply
They repeated the adages of the English planners that a top-down reconstruction or creation of neighbourhoods would work and that the village or small town provided the ideal model for social relations. Walter Bunning suggested that "[c]ontemporary town planners and sociologists seek to create the small town community spirit within the great metropolitan area . . . [by] sorting out the numerous small communities which exist within the city, [and] helping to restore their identity and individuality by separating their boundaries". Planners could simply say "it has been found that", or "overseas experience shows", even though some English critics were already questioning the feasibility of neighbourhood creation. But Bunning and other Australian practitioners could move quickly and easily to the problems of implementation, secure in the Britishness of the explanations. Very little debate attended these incorporations, indicating how far the arguments about them remained in England even as the ideas and their determining assumptions made the trip out to Australia.

The other model considered by Australian planners was the new town. Most were ambivalent about this idea, generally endorsing satellite development but remaining unsure of the profitability or feasibility of entirely new cities. Bunning, for instance, did consider new towns to be an ultimate goal, but he did not want to restrict planners to such large-scale projects. His own new town design drew equally on Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier, but it picked up neither self-containment nor social mix, key aspects of the new town ideology. For their part, Barnett and Burt warned against simplistic rehousing policies where authorities expected to "just buy hundreds of acres on the outskirts of the city, build thousands of houses, and the houseless worker and the dweller in slums will immediately rush out to the new homes, the slums will disappear overnight, and all our housing problems will be solved." They preferred to reconstruct Richmond, not simply abandon it.

The new town did have its Australian advocates, but few were at the forefront of postwar planning. After 1950, the example of the British new towns was waved about energetically at planning congresses and in planning journals. The 1951 Federal Congress on Regional and Town Planning heard papers which endorsed new towns while severely criticising Canberra as "[a] garden without a city". But most participants were more interested in regional planning than in new towns. In 1951, A.A. Heath and R.N. Hewison launched their "First Six New Cities (Australia) Movement", announcing it in the British journal *Town*
and Country Planning. They proposed a direct link between migration and
town planning and argued for a transfer of population "from over-crowded
areas of the United Kingdom to suitable sites in the Dominions". Most
professional planners were happy to concede that new towns were the best and
most efficient landscape for modern living. But they did not opt at first for
British-style new town development. The relative standards of slum housing
stock in the two countries, the lack of wartime devastation in Australian cities,
and the failure of the Commonwealth to implement the policy of land
collection suggested by the 1944 Housing Commission influenced their
position. Also, many already had a fear of sprawl and were ambivalent about
simply adding on satellite towns without significantly enhanced federal or state
powers to protect green belts and control the location of industry. Ironically,
this meant new town advocates in Australia were even more reliant on English
rhetoric and interpretation in advancing their cause.

Only South Australia made full steam ahead with new town development, and
then belatedly. In his celebratory article on the founding of Elizabeth, architect
Peter Harrison offered one explanation as to why:

It was to be expected that Australia, with problems of city planning in some ways even
more pressing than those of English cities, should have caught on to the idea. Sydney
and Melbourne are convincing demonstrations of the price of gigantism; both are
struggling with planning schemes aimed to make these places more fit for human use
but neither has come forward with concrete proposals for new towns to relieve the
increasing pressure on their over-burdened metropolitan areas. Adelaide, profiting
perhaps from these examples and aiming to avoid similar difficulties, has started a
New Town, not so much as the outcome of a State policy of decentralisation but as the
result of the uncommon common sense of the South Australian Housing Trust.

"Uncommon common sense", perhaps even the Trust's very distance from
professional planners and normal government procedures, allowed South
Australia to erect the best example of visionary urban planning. South
Australia made the running because the people who created its housing
authority "unlearned most of the conventional wisdom of the day . . . and
replaced it by a half-page logic of their own: local, ruthless, simple, new." While most have explained Elizabeth's development this way, it is important to
place the decision to build Elizabeth in the wider context of Australian
planning ideas. As a derivative practice, Australian planning clung limpet-like
to the changing interpretations of English planning. The Trust's 'common
sense' was conceivably a specific plagiarism of that empowering British tradition, the use of a particular derived model to suit its particular economic and social aims. Granted it was fiddled with here and there, but this was basically Stevenage on the Adelaide Plains. Not even Stevenage, but a rather hazy image of the British new town, stripped of the precise administrative practices demanded by British legal and legislative requirements. The Trust did not so much import a working model as various bits of its machinery, a description of its apparent purpose, and a set of more or less detailed instructions.

Adelaide likes the idea that it is at the cutting edge of progressive town planning, that other states have much to learn from what goes on there, even that Colonel Light taught the British a thing or two. Yet the language and practices of this 'peculiar' activism are distinctly English. Early garden suburb planning, for instance, was dominated by Charles Reade, whose English origins (and intellectual baggage) were impeccable. A garden suburb and some town planning schemes aside, this early planning activism could not sustain comprehensive planning powers, especially in the face of conservative landholders who dominated the Upper House in South Australia. The next surge of activity awaited the realisation that planning was not just good reform, but good business too. The economic revitalization strategy developed by J.W. Wainwright, Premier Butler and eventually Premier Playford in the 1930s seized on the notion of planning as a source of economic advantage. The "Playford Plan" aimed to shift South Australia away from its reliance on primary industry and make it into a manufacturing region. The South Australian Housing Trust, created as a statutory authority in 1936, provided the cheap housing arm of the low wages/low costs industrialisation policy.

This strategy of state-supported accumulation was rarely in serious dispute in South Australia. But the precise functions and powers of the Trust were left for its managers and other senior public servants to work out as they went along. It was restricted at first by cost limitations and the ambiguities of its status as an independent statutory authority deriving its funds from Treasury loans. With the crucial support of incoming Premier Playford, the Trust seized the initiative after 1938, eventually becoming a de facto state development authority and even a migration agency under the leadership of Horace Hogben and Alex Symons, whose work was then extended by J.P. Cartledge and Alex Ramsay. Skilfully using the economic benefits of state
support to explain and legitimise further public sector activity, they were able to win endorsement for positive planning from a surprising cross-section of South Australians: urban and country politicians, industrialists, and landowners. As a tool of the parochial industrialisation policy, South Australian public housing could rely on a coalition unlike any other in Australia.

The Trust's leaders, in tandem with Playford, made it into the most powerful housing authority in the country. They secured two key pieces of legislation which sealed its transformation into an operational rather than simply statutory planning agency. The 1940 Housing Improvement Act allowed the Trust to build, sell, buy or repair any kind of building, including houses for higher-paid skilled workers, and to purchase large amounts of land in anticipation of future housing needs. The Trust could now use its purchasing and building powers to develop large, mixed housing estates and compete effectively with private developers in land and housing markets. The 1941 Homes Act, meanwhile, provided State Bank loans to wage earners for purchasing new homes from the Trust. All along, Playford made sure that the money kept coming from state loans and grants or semi-government borrowings.

It was after the war, especially, that Trust officials began to assert their differences from the other housing authorities. They decided, with Playford's support, to opt out of the 1945 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement because it imposed means tests on the use of federal monies, which would threaten the building of houses for sale. The decision indicated the Trust's sense of its peculiar role. Its mission was housing the worker, not the slum dweller, and its tactic was using sale housing to discipline land and housing markets while generating funds for rental construction. State development demanded cheap housing for workers and a hierarchy of house types, not simply homes for the poor. And that made the new town strategy a particularly inviting option.

So, in explaining why it was the Housing Trust that built Australia's first real new town, this mission is most important, along with factors such as the exhaustion of land supply in inner Adelaide and the need to concentrate construction in cost-efficient large estates. Basically, the new town was a good fit with the Trust's distinctive objectives. It was a useful, and available, model of the 'good' city which would also promote industrial growth for the
region as a whole. It provided a landscape for the worker, rather than simply for the poor. Ramsay, the intellectual heart of the Trust in the late 1940s and 1950s, occasionally mentioned slum dwellers in his proposals for satellite development, but was generally more concerned with "suitable persons" whose problem was as much housing scarcity as housing cost. Acknowledging the work of reformers like Barnett and Burt, Ramsay nonetheless considered that "the swing has been, if anything, too great; from the acceptance of slums to the refrigerator-in-every-house school of thought." He preferred a more conservative and a more effective kind of activism: build houses for those that could afford them and use the profits to supply spartan rental homes at low cost. Garden city ideology had always stressed the importance of providing a range of house types for a range of social groups. The new town movement strengthened the planning rationale and the social justification for a hierarchy of housing types and for public sector investment in private property.

New towns also promised to overcome urban sprawl. Unplanned urban extension was expensive and inefficient, and controlling such costs, especially in terms of public services, was a major impetus for Trust activity in the 1950s. The new town accorded with its evolving strategy to discipline land and housing markets and prevent unchecked development. It showed the way forward: increased suburbanisation, without sprawl, at the behest of a 'bold and decisive' planning and development agency. It showed how operational, as opposed to statutory, planning gave a housing authority the power to construct entire landscapes, gathering land and controlling its sale, lease and use. The new town was comprehensive, positive planning on the grand scale, and stood in compelling opposition to piecemeal intervention, whether refurbished slums or ribbon development along roads and railways. That the model was British made it even more useful in deflecting complaints that the Trust was engaged in some kind of creeping state socialism.

New towns were also economic projects. They would attract new industries or help decentralize and invigorate old ones. Playford secured another key piece of enabling legislation in a 1950 Amendment to the 1940 Housing Improvement Act which allowed the Trust to purchase land for uses other than house building. The Trust could now act like a British new town development corporation, building a whole community: factories, open space, shops and civic buildings as well as homes. The new town also promised to fulfil one other important objective: cost efficiency. Their experience in finding land and
building houses in Adelaide before 1945, and their reading of the financial justifications of the British new towns, convinced Trust planners that only large estates with a mix of rental and sales housing were financially viable and politically attractive. In particular, they took from their studies of Britain the need to build facilities — including worksites — around the houses, not vice versa.\textsuperscript{41}

The Trust did intermittently register its reliance on the English planning movement. By the mid-1950s, the Housing Trust 'tour' of the English new towns was well-established. Geoff Shedley, the major architect, and Vic Barrell, the manager of rental estates, did the tour in 1954, and they were followed by engineer-planner H.E.S. Melbourne in 1956. Barrell suggested to Melbourne that he visit Harlow, Crawley, Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn, Letchworth and Cwmbran, the latter especially because "we have copies of their plans and have discussed their ideas".\textsuperscript{42} As Ramsay noted in 1956, "[i]n addition to the Trust's practical experience of all aspects of housing in city and country, the best theoretical and technical knowledge has been devoted to the task".\textsuperscript{43} Australian know-how, with overseas theory, would guarantee good design.

The actual planning of Elizabeth involved a large number of the Trust's staff. Small planning groups dealt with particular parts of the design, but the overall direction was supplied by Henry Smith (a planner) and two engineers: H.E.S. Melbourne and G.E.Stolz. Ramsay, as General Manager, provided publicity, ideas and support and ensured that the project remained visible as a key component of the 'Playford Plan'.\textsuperscript{44} For all that, the planning of Elizabeth was not, from the evidence of the records, a particularly self-conscious planning process. If there were extended discussions of motivation, philosophy or social ideology, they were not written down. Perhaps the small planning groups and the senior officials practiced a largely oral administrative and decision-making culture, but it seems also that they assumed no need to record any ongoing deliberations over the plan. Only in Annual Reports to the Parliament was there any attempt to provide basic planning philosophy, and even these offered confusing shifts in basic definitions and concepts. Elizabeth was a project based on fitting a set of designs together, in a context of broadly held but loosely defined social objectives.
The decision to build Elizabeth was therefore a decision to build a British new town in Australia. On one level, this meant a particular kind of urban development, using new town design to suit the 'Playford' strategy of cheap housing, industrialization and economic advantage. But it also meant that Elizabeth was constructed from pre-emptive, closed images of what constituted the good city. It would have a geography to improve its residents by means of neighbourhood reconstruction and a village-like arrangement of space. The Trust's use of the new town as a means of economic advancement carried with it the expectation that their bold intervention in urban growth would fulfill these vague but still important objectives of social progress as well. And that meant Elizabeth would incorporate the troublesome assumptions of the new town as a strategy for urban life: that residents and users could be shaped by the plan and would do nothing to conflict with the planners' landscape or threaten their social and economic imperatives.

The Trust did pursue a kind of urban determinism at Elizabeth. It was not a strictly capitalist one, for it attempted to discipline industry as well as workers. Nor was it simply a pragmatic use of state monies to build houses for as many working people as possible, for that did not fulfill the Trust's perception of itself as a community-building agency. Its objective in Elizabeth was to make a home for workers. That meant, in part, providing them with a determining and closed living space, laying down rules in the landscape and trying to make them work. And what it laid down was what it derived from a planning tradition it occasionally questioned but never broke away from. But it was not derivativeness that made the plan untenable; it would be foolish to expect or want Australian planning to exist in isolation. Rather, Trust planners shared with their British counterparts the crucial belief that there would be a single and inevitable relation between what the plan said and what its human objects did. All along, Elizabeth's planners, as they copied the British experts busy at Stevenage and Crawley, forgot that plans can neither dictate nor encompass the lived space of real people.45

3. "Balanced, Happy Social Groups": Laying out the Good City

"Balanced happy social groups" were what Alex Ramsay defined as the product of effective 'instant towns'.46 But actually laying out the new town meant deciding what spatial rules would dictate balance and happiness, as well as economic success. It also meant working out, at least in part, what the criteria
for the success of such objectives were. When, and how, would Elizabeth become the model community it was designed to be? Following British plans closely, the Trust's architects and engineers assumed that self-containment and social balance were the proper ends of the design effort. Their benefits were assumed to be self-evident, in part from their perceived success in Britain but mostly because they were axiomatic as positive social objectives. Self-containment tied residents and employers to an uplifting and improving landscape. Social balance meant that the landscape would not be shaped by the deficient geographies of workers, but would reflect a proper, middle-class use of space. What is most surprising in the published and unpublished papers of Trust officers is how far these concepts were beyond question.

Yet unquestioned concepts did not lead easily to design and implementation. Self-containment, for example, had a somewhat uneven progress in the Trust's deliberations on the new town. 'Flexibility' often looked more like confusion. At first, some described Elizabeth as a satellite of Adelaide. That meant commuting and economic interdependence. But others were not so sure and talked about the town's eventual political or economic independence. The 1950 Annual Report noted of new towns that "if they are not merely to be 'dormitory suburbs' [they] require some reason for their existence and this must ordinarily be provided by a hard core of industrial or commercial development. The town must, in fact, be to a large extent self-sufficient."47 This was good planning logic, and securely within the new town planning tradition. But self-sufficiency was quite a step from 'satellite'. In 1957, Kevin Phillips, the Trust officer responsible for industrial promotion, came up with a rather different version of the planning process:

This original planning was based on the thought that ELIZABETH could, or would, be a satellite of Adelaide where the inhabitants would commute for their employment, but, subsequently, we learned of industry's interest in ELIZABETH as a place for a manufacturing centre and the plan during 1956 was enlarged to take care of this new conception.48

A 1957 booklet from the General Sales and Promotions Office added that the Trust "developed a plan for a future City which was to be a centre of life for its inhabitants and not an extension of city of Adelaide."49 So Elizabeth was to be a self-contained new town, not a satellite, largely because the Trust had managed to secure large industries (and especially General Motors-Holden) for the site.
But the Trust's officers and planners were never sure what successful self-containment actually looked like. They had to bend and twist concepts like 'satellite' and 'self-contained'. In 1958, the Annual Report stated that "the Trust's intention from the beginning has been to ensure that Elizabeth shall be a truly self-contained development, not a mere suburban extension of the capital city."50 One year later, something of a change: "[a] basic conception of Elizabeth was, firstly, to provide housing associated with industry in the locality and, secondly, to provide housing for Adelaide workers, particularly those employed in the northern industrial areas."51 This discovery and justification of a commuter housing role seems to have come from the need to defend the new town against media charges of insufficient employment. Cartledge responded in this vein to an article in the Sydney Sun in 1959:

The South Australian Housing Trust strenuously objects to the article in the "Sun" of 3rd June in which it is stated that Elizabeth in South Australia is facing disaster. The complaints upon which the "Sun" article is based apparently came from a very small number of dissatisfied migrants wishing to return to the U.K....As stated in your paper, the complaint was that some people must find work in Adelaide owing to the lack of jobs in Elizabeth. The basic conception of Elizabeth was, firstly, to provide housing associated with industry in the locality and, secondly, to provide housing for Adelaide workers, particularly for those employed in the northern industrial areas. Critics have chosen to overlook the second deliberate and stated purpose of the Trust.52

This "second deliberate and stated purpose" was actually rather new. Critics could have found it in previous statements, but they would have found just as many denials that a commuting population was ever intended at Elizabeth. The confusion over this basic goal continued into the 1960s. In 1964, Ramsay was still claiming in a letter to an academic that "[i]n spite of its proximity to Adelaide, the new town was planned not as a dormitory suburb of the city of Adelaide, but as a self-contained community providing housing, employment, entertainment, education, hospitalization, culture, and in fact providing for every aspect of community life."53

Despite its technical elegance, self-containment proved hard to articulate and harder still to measure. Any success — like employing twenty more local residents — could be interpreted as meaning the eventual success of the entire concept. Any failure — like the frequent tardiness of employers in actually
starting operations — did not so much undermine the concept as push planners and administrators into occasional retreats, which were in turn abandoned once things had quietened down. Problems with self-containment were problems of other people's misinterpretations or lack of commitment — whingeing Pom migrants were always a handy target in this regard — not problems embedded in the objective itself. What some may want to see as praiseworthy flexibility can just as easily be interpreted as a continual groping for justifications for inadequately theorised and confused social and spatial objectives. And yet the Trust was shaping a landscape with these objectives. Local employment and self-containment versus commuting and economic dependence on Adelaide were hardly academic problems for residents.

As with self-containment, retrospect makes the decision to construct Elizabeth as a city of socially balanced neighbourhood units look a lot clearer than it actually was. Henry Smith said he used "the now widely accepted 'Neighbourhood' theory as exemplified by Ebenezer Howard in his garden city developments at Letchworth and Welwyn in Great Britain." But planning a neighbourhood-based community for Elizabeth was in fact marked by a high degree of uncertainty. A space segregated into 'natural' neighbourhoods was clearly a better space than a polyglot mix of housing, open space, shops and factories. Segregated neighbourhood units could be drawn fairly easily, following rules of size and internal structure — including using the primary school as a centering institution — borrowed from British plans. But working out ways of integrating them and restricting them to an optimum size proved difficult. What emerged eventually was a design based on separate neighbourhoods of various sizes, basically self-sufficient in shops and primary schools, with the idea that there would be a balance between different kinds of housing and people within and between the neighbourhood units.

But what precisely did planners mean by 'balance'? They could easily describe its absence: imbalance meant one-class housing estates, the kinds of landscapes demonised as 'soulless' and 'destructive of community life' in the new town literature. But planning for balance rested on some ambiguous definitions. It sometimes meant a kind of local self-containment, measured simply by population and access to shops and other services. Or it could be a balance between social groups within the town, so that the community as a whole contained a representative sample of the Australian class structure. Alternatively, it sometimes meant a balance within each neighbourhood, so that
each 'unit' would become a microcosm of society. At that level, social balance often blended into social mix, the idea that within each balanced neighbourhood unit residents of various classes would mix in integrating institutions like schools and community centres. Taking that a step further might even mean actually 'mixing' residents by building different types of houses next to each other.

The Trust's planners and architects shifted unevenly between these various models. The 1955 Annual Report noted only that "the built-up area has been planned as six "neighbourhoods", each of which, though contiguous and not necessarily divided in any way from the others, will be to some extent self-sufficient as regards the immediate domestic needs of daily life". The 1957 Annual Report spoke of the "division" of the city into a "a number of neighbourhoods", while in 1958, the units take on a rather passive character, with the expectation that community integration would occur as "the 'neighbourhoods' or localities developed". By 1966, the Annual Report suggested that "[e]ach neighbourhood unit is virtually a separate entity...[but the] overall picture of Elizabeth does not...present one of patched development, but rather the result of detailed planning and construction under the control of the Trust, facilitating integrated development in all aspects of civic and industrial growth." Neighbourhood segregation, then, gradually appeared as a foremost goal. But as with self-containment, how far and in what ways Elizabeth should be a city of balanced and segregated neighbourhoods emerges from the record as a series of reactive decisions, off the cuff justifications and intellectual confusions.

So what was expected to go on inside these segregated neighbourhoods? Community integration, apparently, through some kind of segregated interaction. Such social outcomes were rarely articulated or defined in any rigourous way. Perhaps Stuart Hart came closest to retrospectively laying out what was expected of residents:

Some of us have been sceptical of the theory of planning a new town on the neighbourhood principle, the neighbourhood being a community of five to ten thousand people and served with its own primary school, shops and other community buildings. Perhaps many of us don't find our friends just around the corner. We may travel many miles to visit friends who have the same likes and dislikes. Similarly, we may travel many miles to a tennis club or to a church of our own choosing. Most people, however, prefer to devote their energies to activities in their own district or
neighbourhood. The womenfolk in particular appreciate meeting friends and
neighbours at the shopping centre. Shopping, after all, is one of the most important
social occasions in the 9-5 male-less suburbs. The neighbourhood also creates civic
pride, and a unity of purpose. This is most important in a town such as Elizabeth,
where people of all nationalities are settling in an area with no traditions and no
leaders.59

While the restricted neighbourhood is clearly inappropriate for those with cars
and tennis clubs, it is perfect for the "most people" inhabiting neighbourhoods
sans tennis clubs. The environment is all: it is not people who have traditions,
leaders or civic pride, it is 'neighbourhoods' which produce these things. While the men are working, their unemployed and gregarious wives will build
networks, devoting their energies to community creation and in time
confirming the spatial units laid down by the planners as purposeful
communities. Whether those units hold five thousand or ten thousand residents
is immaterial. It is the strength of the boundaries, not the size of the
population, which matters most. It was on such assumptions that
neighbourhood unit 'theory' and design practice was based. Hart's description
of how the neighbourhood serves "most people" is not peculiar for its naive
and offensive assumption of the purely spatial determination of working-class
communities. It is peculiar for having stated that assumption at all. The
cheerfully segregated groups of residents who appear in other places are not
even granted the dignity of a process. They simply happen.

Another possible outcome of neighbourhood balance was some variety of
social mix. The planners seemed to slide from social balance into social mix,
assuming that balance within each neighbourhood would lead somehow to a
degree of mixing in community institutions. But social mix did not imply the
promiscuous intermingling of 'different' kinds of people, and there would be a
definite hierarchy of housing types and housing locations. The site happily
provided an opportune means of such separation. A flat plain for rental
housing and "enough high country to provide a better class residential area as
the town developed" meant that the new town could replicate Adelaide's
association between elevation (however slight) and class location.60 From the
beginning, this was to be a balanced and stratified community. Social mix
would go hand in hand with social distinction and the creation of social
leadership.
Arguably, social mix theory remains tied to such expectations today. Even with the paternalistic tone subdued, it struggles to overcome a number of obvious contradictions, most notably between private ownership and the balanced street or balanced neighbourhood. Mix means 'balance' with stratification. Elizabeth's planners certainly understood social balance in precisely this way: a balanced city meant a city of distinct spaces for different kinds of residents who would come together in public but rarely in private space. As in Britain, this was justified in terms of the 'natural' tendencies of a segregated population. The sales and promotions staff assured would-be residents in 1957 that the Trust "has always understood that its duty is not merely to provide as many houses as possible but to cater for the needs of the people in the diversification of type, sale price, rental and estate management." Those at the bottom would be well aware of just whose 'diversity' was being protected. Social mix then and now was not intended to force the middle class to abandon any of its means of excluding undesirables from its homes, its schools, its occupations or its public spaces. To claim 'social mix' as part of an attack on class distinctions is to seriously misconstrue its social purposes.

Planners were, however, faced with the problem of actually designing and achieving a stratified social mix. In Elizabeth, a chief means was building sales as well as rental houses. Houses for sale were built along with the first rental double units and continued to be a major part of the building program, despite a consistent over-supply. Eager to sell them and thus to satisfy the objective of social balance, the Trust resorted to various strategies. One was to get employers to recognise the benefits of segregation in living space to match segregation in work space. Companies could purchase better-quality homes for their higher-rank employees, or could direct those employees to the Trust's sales officer. The Trust's estates officers always had a fine eye for such distinctions. A marginal note to a letter from an employer requesting special consideration in housing supervisory workers states that "I asked for this so there would be no chance of housing next door to below supervisory personnel."

Selling houses was a way of raising funds to build more rental homes. This was a key Trust strategy: rather than sell-off rental homes like other housing authorities, they kept their sales and rental construction programs distinct, financing the former out of state loans while using funds from the renegotiated
Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement of 1956 to add to the rental stock.\(^{64}\) But in Elizabeth, selling houses was also a way of creating necessary and healthy social distinctions within what was always going to be a mostly working-class area. The argument that a mix of houses was 'economic' and would save the area from being stigmatized as a one-class estate appeared later. It does not explain why the hierarchy of house types had to so closely match the hierarchy of class. What is economic in housing provision is always a function of what is socially desirable or 'given'. And the given in Elizabeth was that only spatial hierarchy would give the town the middle class influence its renting population needed if they were to learn to use the space properly.

The plan incorporated the principle of a hierarchical balance in other ways. The neighbourhood units, for all of their superficial similarity and monotonous appearance, differed in one important respect: the proportion of rental housing. This depended on how close they were to industrial areas and how far they were from the middle-class hill slopes. In the first neighbourhoods, the proportion of rental houses, mostly semi-detached, ranged from 74 per cent in Elizabeth South, furthest from the hill face and closest to the main factory area, to 43 per cent in Elizabeth Vale, with its southerly exposure to parks and the Little Para River. The later additions of Elizabeth West and Elizabeth Field, close to the northern industrial area, were dominated by the double-unit rental houses: in the West, 76 per cent of the stock was of this type.\(^{65}\) Extensions up the hill face in the Park, the Downs, the East and at Hillbank were almost entirely detached houses for sale. Effectively, the Trust sabotaged its own idea about socially similar neighbourhood units, falling back on a supposedly balanced city as good enough. But nowhere was the significance of such alterations to the objective of social balance or mix considered.

At the same time, each neighbourhood also had a stratified housing pattern. This was by now established Trust practice, but at the virgin site of Elizabeth the process could be achieved without any of the practical difficulties of building within the established urban area.\(^ {66}\) At all times, the main thoroughfares were lined with single homes, often for sale, so that the vista presented to the passing motorist was one of decent suburban homes, not public housing. The semi-detached rental houses were built in groups along crescents, courts and dog-legged roads that no passing motorist would need to
navigate. Renters lived in compact groups, contained and surrounded by a ring of wagons in the form of better residences.

It could be argued that the double units were built in a solid mass because that made for economies of construction. But, again, what is economic can only stem from what is seen as desirable and proper. And what was desirable in Elizabeth was balance without cheek-by-jowl, mix without actual mixing. How mix was actually meant to work in this context was never made clear, though it remained a stated objective of the plan. Ramsay offered one version of how the hierarchy of housing types might work:

[We] made the rental houses not unattractive but very modest, and as they are basically in the industrial areas it is usually found that when the family moves up the social scale the attitude is, "It is about time we moved somewhere else, to be among right-thinking people". This idea of making sure that these rented properties are not mansions does have that effect. It makes sure that these people just do not camp in low-rental houses all their lives.67

Residents were apparently expected to understand such social cues. In fact, they almost immediately interpreted and used these distinctions in rather different ways from those intended by the Trust. This does not indicate that the Trust had no social prerogatives. Nor does it show that Elizabeth's planners made no assumptions about what moral functions 'balanced communities' were supposed to serve. But they would be continually surprised by the way the inhabitants of their landscape could shape it despite the guarantee of good design. And having never really thought about how good design would force people into particular patterns of interaction or mobility, beyond assuming that everyone shared their yearning for an idealised British community, they had to expect that the combination of adequate planning and 'natural' social tendencies in a village-like landscape would lead to some sort of fulfillment somewhere down the track.

Despite misgivings about how space was being used, the closed spaces of the neighbourhood units, the polarization of land uses, and the hierarchy of houses and streets were at least a triumph for order over the chaos of promiscuous urban space.68 In common with other new town plans, Elizabeth stressed boundaries, not the more tenuous, less easily plotted centres.69 It is a classed landscape, of separated and unequal spaces and of carefully delineated divisions between types of housing and the types of residents expected to inhabit them. It
is also a gendered landscape, which stressed access to shops for the 'womenfolk' inhabiting man-less daytime streets, a Town Centre as a place for respectable feminine display, and neighbourhood shopping centres as places where aprons and even curlers might do.

There were other means of securing 'good city' objectives. In the Town Centre, civic buildings were separated from shops, so that their monumental expression of civic virtue would not disappear in the hubbub of retail trade:

[C]are must be taken to ensure that the desirable hustle and bustle of the shopping mall is not carried into the area set aside for civic buildings. It is hoped to achieve this by incorporating in the plan at the eastern end of the principal shopping mall a large open garden area — a type of "village green" — around which, on the sides remote from the shops, the civic and cultural life of the community can be carried on in relatively peaceful surroundings.\(^{70}\)

In addition, open space and wide roads made for vistas of sweep and serenity opposed to the cluttered, narrowed perspectives of the slum. Wide roads also separated the houses, dividing them into pockets of individual domestic retreats. This also prevented people using the street for the wrong purposes, whether play, or conversation, or work. A street full of cars with the people behind doors is a triumph for the planner's vision of everything in its place. Consultants in the 1970s noted that Elizabeth's roads "appear to be unnecessarily wide with median planting strips which look pleasant, but cannot be used."\(^ {71}\) They were not meant to be used: it was the improper use of such pleasant space that had made new towns necessary in the first place.

Relative to other Australian developments in the postwar period, the Trust clearly did some things better. Perhaps learning from its own mistakes at Salisbury North, an outer suburban rental estate already stigmatised as a home for deserted wives in the mid-1950s, the Trust tried to make Elizabeth a well-serviced and mixed community.\(^ {72}\) The provision of services and facilities, especially open space, underground electricity, roads and accessible small shops was considerably better than in other outer suburbs. Hugh Stretton could reasonably claim in 1975 that among such places, "Elizabeth is certainly the country's best [and] certainly lives above the line that divides the tolerable from the unforgiveable".\(^ {73}\)
And residents recognised how far Elizabeth, with its decent houses, its parks and its gardens, was much better than what most had ever known before. It was decent housing and the chance of work that drew people to the new town in the first place. Planning a town of jobs and houses is not the problem. Nor is the act of planning per se to be condemned. But if people wanted decent accommodation, they did not therefore want or deserve planning based on the bargain of expertise: that what is provided must be used in ways which justify its provision and confirm the assumptions of the providers. In a very real sense, the Trust's commitment to its creation was based on the expectation of model behaviour for a model town, even if what that behaviour would be and how design would enforce it remained vague. If Elizabeth was at first relatively successful, this did not mean either that the assumptions written into its making were proved, or that the bargain of expertise was justified.

These were, after all, ominous expectations. The paradoxical idea that a model town would both need and create model inhabitants is evident in much of the literature of planning in the twentieth century. Certainly, Australian planners were not short of ideas about the grand outcomes of model communities. Their ameliorative and redistributive aims also should not be doubted. But building a model community in practice meant retreating further and further from any significant redistribution of power and resources, closer and closer to technical expertise and functionalism. In particular, locating the guarantee for a successful implementation of the planners' goals proved difficult. To define success at Elizabeth, the Trust moved, unsteadily, from relying on design, to relying on residents, to relying on those who employed them. At first, it expected that migrants to the new town would come from those groups who most wanted housing: white collar workers and the respectable working class. Both could be imagined as at least neat and clean, and unlikely to sabotage the design. But one could trust even those residents only insofar as the community incorporated unequal access to superior accommodation in line with unequal positions in the structure of income and resources. Maintaining necessary social divisions meant endorsing an established (and thoroughly British) hierarchy of deference and influence within the new town.

But even with planned hierarchy, relying on the residents posed certain problems. Ensuring model tenants and model home-buyers raised issues of social control and paternalism that Ramsay and others found unpalatable. They did insist on a number of occasions that Elizabeth was not intended for the
indigent poor and would be no "shanty-town". At a conference in 1966, Ramsay mused on the problem at greater length:

There seems to be, and I think it would be true in all countries, a special sort of floating population, some of whom are quite estimable people, and many are not: the real drifters. A new factory is announced to extract a mineral or develop something and the word gets around that big money is to be made. In come these people who have caravans, tents, a lot of children, dogs and all sorts of things; they arrive in the town and I'm afraid bring many problems with them. The first wave of such people come into your new houses and believe me it is not all beer and skittles collecting the rent and keeping the houses in good trim.

So some sort of exclusion was necessary. But Ramsay did not see the Trust as some kind of big brother. He warned at the beginning against "undue paternalism" in the collection of rents or the supervision of mortgages. Like any other housing agency, the Trust had its estates officers, its rent collectors and its inspectors who submitted reports on tenants and encouraged them to keep houses in good order. Unlike others, perhaps, the Trust had the happy knack of appointing people — especially women — to these positions who had some understanding for their clients and a commitment to aiding as well as policing. The Trust lent tenants tools for gardening and home maintenance, did not evict if rent was one week late, and generally acted out the benevolent half of the paternalist ethic. Beyond keeping out urban gypsies, the Trust had neither the desire nor the means to engage in full-blown social selection.

Planners could, of course, fall back on the entrenchment of social stratification through house building and pricing policy. Social leadership would then occur 'naturally'. One of the supposed gains of social mix, after all, was that middle-class home-owners would act as leaders and instigators because of their 'natural' skills in such areas. Or leadership might be generated by cajoling churches and other institutions to set up community-centering facilities. The Trust also tried to select those who would act as leaders by letting shops in local shopping centres to 'community-minded' people, for instance. Women, too, were expected to sally forth from the domestic retreat to shop, talk, plan and integrate. Yet somehow leadership did not emerge in this way. Internal divisions of class, gender and neighbourhood did not simply match those assumed in the plan. Providing for leaders with middle-class skills and interests in a working-class town proved rather difficult, especially because the first imperative of many middle-class newcomers was to establish as much
distance as possible from renters and factory workers in space, in social
contacts and in their relationship with the Trust. But if a pepper-and-salt
sprinkling of middle-class social expertise did not work, the assumptions of the
new town model provided precious few alternative means of explaining or
directing community leadership. If middle-class people didn't do it, who
could? And if it wasn't done, then how was Elizabeth to become and remain a
model community? How would working-class residents learn to adapt their
social and spatial habits? A village-like community needed its squire. And the
emergence of problems with unemployed youth, delinquency, vandalism and
deteriorating standards of home upkeep seemed to confirm that the hierarchy of
deerence wasn't working.

Lacking sufficient evidence of middle class leadership activity at the
neighbourhood level, the Trust increasingly looked instead to another measure
of community success: economic growth. Murky social and psychological
outcomes like integration remained an important part of new town rationale.
In Elizabeth, as in Stevenage or Crawley, planners always assumed they were
constructing the good city, not just a new estate. The good city, if planned
properly, could still produce valued social outcomes — social mix,
neighbourhood community, and village-like social relationships — and an
orderly use of space unlike the chaos of slum or sprawl. Yet such outcomes
were hard to define, let alone measure. What would prove 'integration'? How
did you measure 'village-like' or 'social mix'? But on one thing, measurements
could be made. The increments of new factories, extra jobs, or new
applications for relocation offered hard evidence and a visible economic
outcome of the new town experiment. It also satisfied the demands of the
'Playford Plan' for a richer South Australia. If Elizabeth was an economic
success, then somehow the social goals of new town planning would follow in
train.

As in Britain, this meant locating a vigour and a morality in industrial
capitalism that would assure a harmonious as well as profitable industrial
landscape. Understanding the needs of such enterprises became an increasingly
vital part of the Trust's role as a development agency. Capital was not expected
to be able to perform on its own, or even to perform properly without
adequate guidance. Like British new town advocates, the Trust readily
criticised private capital for its past failures and its apparent inability to cope
with the spirit of planning. In particular, the Trust was not going to build a one-employer or one-industry 'company' town:

My own philosophy here is clear and distinct. "Milltown", the town that has one industry, should be avoided like the plague if at all possible...[T]here are still those giants of industry who seem to yearn to build a milltown if they can. Possibly the reason is psychological — they yearn for a father-image; well we at the Housing Trust will avoid being associated with such a town unless the geographical factors make such development inevitable...Even if the company has enough capital to [provide houses] it is undesirable that the company should own too many of the houses. Tying a house to a job is generally undesirable — both for the man and for the company too.\(^\text{80}\)

Ramsay was also frustrated by the way that industrial capital tended to over-develop certain sites without adequate thought to planning:

Industrialists are conservative people, and if there are industries within five or ten miles they will feel much more at home than seeming to go out into the absolute wilderness. If I might put in an aside — it remains a wonder to me the way industrialists herd into concentrated areas far beyond the capacity of the nearby housing areas to provide the labour which they want. Their labour, therefore, either has long and costly daily journeys or else they bid labour away from one another by over-award payments.\(^\text{81}\)

Illogical, herd-like capital was not the capital for a model town. What was needed was a vigorous and efficient capital which would accept and promote the physical and social goals of the new town and see the benefits of expert planning. There would be no private paternalism dominating this landscape. The Trust's planners rejected zoning — realistically appraising the likelihood of local councils controlling multinational employers — as well as the British principle of the public developer maintaining freehold control over all sites. Instead, they settled for the method of selling land "but so encumbering the title with a caveat and an option for the Trust to repurchase the land if it be used for any other purposes than that for which it has been sold, that the purchaser would find it very difficult to do other than use it for its original purchase."\(^\text{82}\) With this guarantee, the Trust looked forward with confidence to a model town of model industry.
From the very beginning, however, the Trust was engaged in minor and major disputes with land purchasers about what the caveats actually meant. It also found itself building and extending factories to changing specifications and having to prod industrialists into action. A self-disciplining capital proved rather more elusive than they assumed. In addition, they expected industrial capital to lead the way, ignoring other kinds of capital and potential differences between large and small plants or multinational and local companies. Despite these frustrations, the Trust's interpretation of its model community had decisively shifted. One of the lessons planners learned from their grand tour of British new towns was the need for a flexible and friendly approach to industry. Criticisms of private firms were put aside, or raised at board meetings but not in public. Actually forcing industry to do its bit in securing the model conflicted with the need to sell factory sites quickly. Accordingly, the Trust began to expect that private capital, if nudged in the right direction, would not actually do anything to sabotage the plan. Economic success alone could produce valued social outcomes if the design rules for housing and community development were maintained. Kevin Phillips, the Trust's main man in wooing industrialists from Adelaide, the East and overseas, reminded planners that bargains had to be struck:

It has often been said that industry must conform to the general pattern for the town, but I would suggest that where anyone is inducing a manufacturer to take a site away from an area of his natural inclination, the authority involved must be prepared to make every concession and provide a plan which is very flexible, indeed. This, of course, imposes difficulties in the way of service departments and all branches of planning, but until the authority can choose from a large number of manufacturers and enterprise for location, a flexible plan will be part of its inducement.83

Selling the landscape became the primary goal. Elizabeth would become and remain a model community by attracting and holding on to private capital.

This at least was a strategy that satisfied the planners' need for activism, for getting out and selling their master plan. And pinning their hopes on efficient and rational private enterprise offered a much less complicated fulfillment of the plan than building neighbourhood communities, finding the tenants to lead them, and making sure that you got social mix without losing necessary social distinctions. Securing major employers — especially General Motors-Holden — made it easier to explain the purposes of a productive model community and to justify planning activism where it trod on the toes of other property
Planning the Good City

interests. Industry sensed the change of mood. The secretary of the South Australian Chamber of Manufacturers, listing what industry expected from town planners, noted his appreciation of the re-thinking of Elizabeth:

In the original plans for Elizabeth, the industrial areas were located on the extreme south of the City, on the north-west and across the railway line (without any proposals as to housing on that side of the railway line in the immediate future) and a small area impossible to serve by railway in the north-east corner of the town. In other words, industry in Elizabeth was to be treated like the leper and kept outside the city wall. Fortunately, the very substantial expense of land around, and the demands for an Elizabeth larger than originally intended, will cause houses to surround the industrial areas...Town Planning, the same as management, must have a very strong commonsense ingredient if the best interests of the community are to be served. 84

Industry wanted "contented work people" and "community facilities", paid for by the public. 85 The Trust increasingly expected to provide just that.

Planning for uplift was not abandoned. Design for a City provided stylized images of clean and angular shopping malls and green spaces, with stick figures invariably sporting a baby carriage, and the same visual images would reappear during the 1960s. The social outcomes expected of the model town remained fairly intact. Stuart Hart's idea that a city of proud and self-identifying neighbourhoods had come into being was mirrored in the Trust's 1962 Annual Report, which confidently asserted that the town "is rapidly acquiring a lived-in look whilst the inhabitants have become a community." 86 In the same year, the Town Planning Committee of South Australia, restated the older village-city comparisons and made its assessment of Elizabeth:

In Australia the lack of community interest and the loneliness found in many suburban areas contrasts sharply with the civic pride, neighbourliness and "sense of belonging" found in smaller country towns...The new town of Elizabeth, with its separate neighbourhoods, town centre and balanced provision of shops, open spaces, industries and community facilities, is designed to provide the type of environment most nearly approaching the needs of the community. Although it is too early to be sure, there are signs that this object is being achieved. 87

The residents had apparently been transformed. The migrants and workers who peopled Elizabeth had, through the good offices of the planners and employers, become a community. In this simple and efficient determinism, the
conflict and disorder of the demon city had passed without any need for undue paternalism or intervention in the natural processes of human life.

Yet this new town, like all the others, rested on a series of major and most unlikely ifs concerning the results of good design. In particular, it assumed that the problem of the city in a capitalist society was its spatial, not its economic, relationships. Solving the problem of improper uses of space and constructing a bargain of good behaviour for redistributive expertise would mean an integrated, happy and efficient city. Planners also assumed that their plans had a real hold over their objects; that somehow what was planned would happen as long as the planning was good enough. Under the pressure of proving and measuring poorly conceived outcomes, Elizabeth's planners shifted their reliance from the skilful encouragement of community by design, to attempts to select residents who could create community, and finally to carefully and flexibly selling the landscape, in the hope that the new town was already a community or would become one if it attracted the right kind of industry. And so they constructed one last shaky totality: a city of perpetual profit.

4. "Our "greatest venture and most rewarding task": Elizabeth in 1960"

The planning of Elizabeth rested on a vision of new town life and the proper arrangement of urban space. It was a plan with moral as well as economic purposes. True, the Trust did better than other Australian housing authorities in providing decent and relatively cheap housing, influencing land prices, organising community facilities and holding back purely speculative urban sprawl. These were significant achievements, to be defended against those who would return Australian cities to the tender mercies of land speculators or working-class barrack builders.

Of course, there were criticisms of Elizabeth as a specific project. Gilbert Herbert mildly chided the Trust for its social and spatial conservatism and warned of the danger of "a built-in obsolescence of ideas" in 1963. Yencken Tract Consultants noted that in 1971 that "it has sometimes been assumed that Elizabeth is no better than an English working class ghetto with social problems of commensurate order." Their reply, that "[i]t would be more accurate to suggest that within the context of these special problems the social
achievements at Elizabeth have been considerable", is not exactly brimming with enthusiasm.\(^4\) Earlier, Mackenzie had rather unkindly referred to the town as "this urban pancake" in an otherwise laudatory article in a British town planning journal, while in 1973, the consultation group brought together by Australian Frontier agreed that "Elizabeth was imperfect as a model" for the proposed new town of Monarto.\(^5\)

Generally, though, the Trust kept its defenders, who moved with it (or, in the case of Stretton, into it). Having mastered the formidable organisational problems of operational planning, the Trust itself moved on to new projects: suburban developments at Noarlunga, inner urban reclamation at Hackney, inner city revitalization at the Jam Factory, and, later, the strategic provision of housing for historically ill-housed groups like homeless youth. The Trust developed and changed. It found flexible and sensible solutions to the housing problems on its own turf, in part because it listened to its clients and its critics.

But what was happening to the Trust's "greatest venture"? Built as a new town in the British mould, Elizabeth inherited not just the spatial concepts and economic objectives of that model, but also its tenuous assumptions. Throughout the 1960s, these assumptions looked more and more threadbare as those who used the landscape created competing Elizabeths within the same space. Within the model city there emerged different constructions of the site: an Elizabeth of detached home-owners opposed to an Elizabeth of double-unit tenants; a dormitory Elizabeth and a self-sufficient Elizabeth; a workers' Elizabeth of worksites and an employers' Elizabeth of sites of profit; a man's Elizabeth of cars, pubs and factories and a woman's Elizabeth of streets, informal neighbourhoods and intermittent work. The model landscape splintered into different and conflicting conceptions of what the town was and who it was for. On the one site emerged socially discontinuous spaces based on varied commonalities of experience, different relationships with different orders of multinational, national and local capital, stratified residence patterns, and the lived divisions of gender, age, class and respectability.

This is precisely what the new town model's assumptions could not countenance: that residents, and in particular working-class residents, were spatially and socially creative. Planners did not allow that a properly planned space could be used in ways which threatened the integrity and social objectives of planning or could provide residents with the material and
ideological base for local social practices and local investments in particular organizations of space. Homeowners tried to secure their advantages against renters and to dominate local government. Elizabeth's youth occupied and vandalised public space. Residents set up small businesses in their backyards. Working women commuted to Adelaide. Local workers disputed with factory managers. Shoppers skipped the local community centres to head for the big stores in the Town Centre. Planners were curiously unable to imagine how their landscape might be appropriated and used by others, even organized and defended against their intentions.96

Having constructed working-class or even capitalist uses of urban space as the problem, simply providing space could not satisfy the bargain of expertise. Interventionist and redistributive practice, however well-intentioned, needs the return of good behaviour to justify the effort and the cost. During the boom of the 1960s, partly because of the genuine redistributive efforts of the Housing Trust, working-class residents were able to shape the landscape and use the site in their own interests and in their own ways. With abundant work and good wages, at least for men, strengthening the residents' ability to display and defend their prosperity and respectability, the town could be a success in spite of its contradictions. With the downturn of the 1970s, these contradictions would come into full force, undermining a fragile working-class landscape, shattering the confidence of the planners and fatally compromising the bargain of expertise. The Elizabeths made by residents had no real power beyond what they could win from the struggle to distribute the gains of long-boom prosperity. With economic crisis, their Elizabeths would be devalued and eventually turned against them, as proof of their inability to use their bounty properly. What was important was not that those who built Elizabeth failed to turn residents into model citizens, nor even that they made the attempt. But in building the town with that expectation, they built in a logic of reliance, retreat, even abandonment. They invited an interpretation of problems which blames the residents: that Elizabeth was a worthy project undone by those who could not or would not fulfill their end of the bargain of expertise, or that the working-class and the welfare poor will always overcome good design.

If the new town depended on a certain use of space by residents, it was also crucially dependent upon the loyalty of capital to the model landscape. Surely employers, once given profitable and harmonious environments, would have no reason to ever abandon or under-utilise landscapes so committed to
securing their investments. The Trust increasingly focussed on the industrial side of planning: securing tenants for industrial sites, building factories, diverting roads and laying on railroad spurs, planning more housing for workers. The creation and securing of local labour markets were major achievements. The Trust also helped large retailers penetrate a growing market for goods and services. But one of the consequences of the Trust's reliance on local jobs and secure employers was an increased dependence on the loyalty of those employers to this particular landscape. One of the things the Trust took from the British new town model was the idea that capital, given encouragement, did contain a morality beyond profit; that there could be a good city, good spatial relationships, without any interventions in production and economic relationships. Certainly, the economic boom which cemented working-class power in the landscape also guaranteed a degree of capitalist loyalty to sites providing profit, even with escalating industrial unrest during the early 1960s. Yet their loyalty was to their Elizabeths, their interpretations of the purposes of working-class communities. The boom times produced a false sense of confidence that the industrialists were indeed good capitalist citizens, committed to the landscape and to the social objectives of the plan.

By the 1970s, industrial firms large and small would be struggling to free themselves from this particular 'spatial fix', this particular geography of accumulation. They would begin the search for new and more profitable localities than the built environments and unionised communities of the long boom. Moreover, the competition between different kinds of capital to secure and advance their investments in the landscape — a competition the Trust had never expected — intensified. Job loss and relocation threatened land and real estate values, retail markets, mortgages and debt payments. As Elizabeth declined, differently empowered groups battled to deliver the costs of devaluation onto other players in the urban process: to abandon what they could, privatize the bits that could turn a profit, attract subsidies to stay in place. As those who could retreated into private estates or new and better public housing outside Elizabeth, the people left behind were those who had always been ruled out of participating in working-class respectability or ownership by their gender, their age, their access to work or 'male' wages. And in the competitive city of specialized services and labour markets, gentrification and technology parks, multifunction outers and heritaged inners, it is hard to see a future for landscapes like Elizabeth.
But when things went wrong, there was nothing in the derived model to either explain the way employers drew away from the landscape or to suggest ways the developing authority could defend and protect their own investments in the model community, let alone the created civil spaces of the residents. The power of Elizabeth's makers was a structured and temporary one, which relied upon those with economic and political muscle accepting their authority to plan. The Trust's control over space was uneven, to say the least. So was its control over the organization and reproduction of spatial and social relationships, especially where it had given freehold to private individuals or companies. A retreat from commitment on their part undermined the plan in ways that could not be repaired. In Britain, new towns were expected to become harder, leaner places and to "have a flexible response to market conditions" sadly lacking in the 'levelling' projects of over-enthusiastic social reconstructionists. The Trust travelled less willingly down the road to the free market, but it could not in the end save its Elizabeth from 'rationalization'.

In a way, though, the Trust was beginning to doubt its expertise well before economic crisis threatened the community. One Trust officer, reporting on the London Office of the Housing Trust, suggested that a major problem is "failure in London to describe the differences between an English New Town and Elizabeth". What the distinction was, of course, had never really been articulated by the Trust itself, beyond some vague sense that Elizabeth was an "Australian" community. What Phillips might have intended the London Office to tell prospective migrants is not described. But it does suggest some retreat from the idea the British new towns, already being criticised as economic and social failures, were adequate models for Elizabeth.

More serious for the Trust were any accusations that its policies were not working, especially its provision of jobs and attraction of employers. Hence Cartledge and Ramsay's vigorous response to newspaper articles or parliamentary questions which threatened to create bad publicity. But the Trust was itself worried about the balance of jobs, about the ability or willingness of employers to conform to planning goals, and about the future of the model town. A 1957 memo from W.R.Hill paints a somewhat pessimistic picture, albeit in urging a factory construction programme:

Privately owned manufacturing industry at Elizabeth employs 30 persons, i.e. at the Pinnock Manufacturing Co. Pty. Ltd. These people are working so hard that the
Adelaide Chamber of Commerce recently sought details of the company's incentive scheme. There isn't one. Other people are constantly enquiring for work at the factory and offering their services for as much as £2 per week below current wage rates. Some local labour is employed by the Trust's building contractors in the area. Work prospects for juniors are very poor and 350 women are registered for work at the local Labour Office. It has been said that nearly half of the population of Elizabeth is employed outside the town, mostly in the metropolitan area of Adelaide. In short, the rapidly growing population of the town and the industrial expansion in the area are completely out of balance. The development of the General Motors-Holden's site will do little to correct this position. Employees of General Motors-Holden at present working at the Woodville plant will come to Elizabeth each day, probably by special train. Those who tire of the daily journey will seek houses at Elizabeth and a limited number with long service leave or other staff benefits, and who can obtain other employment, may resign. But overall the growth of General Motors-Holden at Elizabeth will absorb very little local labour during the years immediately following the development of this Company. Experience has shown that it is not difficult to sell industrial sites at Elizabeth. The problem is to sell land which will be developed within a reasonable time and thus provide employment for the existing workforce which is swelling under the joint impact of immigration and the increasing number of children leaving secondary school.\(^{101}\)

In August 1961, W. Phillips from the Architect's Section, reporting on his trip to England and Europe, observed "[i]t is interesting to note that some of the new towns were having similar problems to those the Trust is experiencing at Elizabeth, namely the juvenile vandal and the estb. of factories and businesses to employ large numbers of people."\(^{102}\) In Elizabeth, or in Stevenage, unauthorised and unexpected uses of space by residents and the wavering commitment of a supposedly loyal capital created problems that threatened to stretch the plan beyond breaking point.

Within a few years of its founding, then, Elizabeth was beginning to worry its advocates and its planners. They began to mistrust their own technical solutions. Unable to conceive of others or of any significant reinterpretation of expertise, the Trust began to distance itself, uneasily, slowly, from its greatest venture. It came to rely more and more on the commitment and loyalty of employers and less and less on the character of the residents. So long as the majority of the residents could be interpreted as behaving well within the bargain of expertise, Elizabeth could remain a model community and a place
to praise. But any threat to their ability to behave, most obviously through the erosion of their prosperity, was also a threat to the Trust's interpretation and appreciation of its venture. Most important, the plan — partial and derivative as it was — failed as a determinism. The Trust could not guarantee its own construction of the landscape, let alone the constructions of its tenants and mortgagees. Their Elizabeths, their personal and collective investments in the outer suburban landscape, would be the first to fall.

The history of Elizabeth measures the failures of new town ideology as a strategy for a fairer urban society, not just the difficulty of implementing it in Australia. But the real message of Elizabeth is not necessarily about the Trust, or even about new town planning as a deeply flawed practice. In time, the history of Elizabeth would become the history of a working-class and migrant community on the urban fringe, exposed by its industrial structure to the collapse of the long boom, in a country peculiarly dependent on the whims of multinational capital. Its history would not turn on planning, but on who or what has power in the urban landscape. This is the memory and the history which are submerged and made invisible by 'relative success', 'design flaws', 'working-class suburb', or 'welfare ghetto'. The real message of Elizabeth is not what went wrong with planning, but what happens to good intentions and model communities in a society which must always push the costs of eventual crisis onto those with the fewest resources, whether they live in a new town or an old slum.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Australian Planning Institute 1952, Papers of the Second Australian Planning Congress held in Melbourne, October 1952, Melbourne.


South Australia, Department of Town Planning 1921, *Report by the Acting Government Town Planner*, Adelaide.


South Australian Housing Trust 1975, *Extracts from the Annual Reports of the South Australian Housing Trust concerning Development of the City of Elizabeth*, Adelaide.


**Secondary Sources**


Heraud, Brian 1976, The development of community in the new towns, in Ray Thomas (ed.), *Perspectives on New Town Development*, Open University, Milton Keynes


ENDNOTES

4 An extended discussion of these competing memories and histories of Elizabeth will appear in my "Remembering a New Town: Competing Memories of Elizabeth, South Australia", in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds.), Lest We Forget: Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia (forthcoming).
7 Stretton, Ideas for Australian Cities, pp. 136-56.
11 On the early garden city movement in Australia, see Freestone, Model Communities, pp. 70ff.
Planning the Good City


19 Renate Howe, "From Rehabilitation to Prevention: The War Years", in Howe (ed.), *New Houses for Old*, pp. 45-68.


28 *ibid.*, p. 364.


32 This is a particular obsession of Robert Cheesman. See *Patterns in Perpetuity*, pp. 110-31, 161-63. For a rather different appreciation of difference, see especially Hugh Stretton, "A.M.Ramsay and the Conventional Wisdom", *Australian Quarterly*, 50, no. 3 (September 1978), pp. 90-100. R.J.Holton also questions the 'progressive British patrician' explanation of South Australian policy
Planning the Good City


33 Reade was a former Secretary of the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association and editor of its journal. He had arranged an Australasian tour in 1914 and decided to accept the post of Town Planning Advisor for Adelaide in 1916. See [Charles C. Reade], Planning and Development of Towns and Cities in South Australia: Report by the Government Town Planner, Adelaide 1919; South Australia, Department of Town Planning, Report by the Acting Government Town Planner. Adelaide 1921; Cheesman, Patterns in Perpetuity, pp. 173-74.


35 Kyoko Sheridan, "Economic and Social Development: Industrialization with Consensus", in ibid., pp. 31-59; John Wanna, "The State and Industrial Relations in South Australia", in ibid., pp. 130-51.

36 Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, pp. 20-33.

37 On the importance of coalitions and economic projects in endorsing positive planning, see Rob Flynn, "Co-optation and Strategic Planning in the Local State", in Roger King (ed.), Capital and Politics, London 1983, pp. 85-106. On South Australia, see Blair Badcock, "Land and Housing Provision", in Sheridan (ed.), The State as Developer, pp. 166-86.

38 On both Acts, see H.C. Hogben, "Housing in South Australia", Australian Quarterly, 19, no. 4 (December 1947), pp. 33-41; Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, pp. 69-72.

39 ibid., pp. 150-75.


41 Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, pp. 151-62.


44 On the planning process, see Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, pp. 277-82.


47 From the Fourteenth (1950) Annual Report, in South Australian Housing Trust, Extracts from Annual Reports of the South Australian Housing Trust concerning Development of the City of Elizabeth [hereafter SAHT, Extracts], Adelaide 1975, p. 2.

48 Letter from K.G. Phillips to J.L. Buckland (SA Department of Trade), 31 July 1957, SAHT, Records, Box 188, folder 1687 (volume 4).


On social mix in planning, see Sarkissian, "The Idea of Social Mix"; Wendy Sarkissian, Ann Forsyth and Warwick Heine, "Residential "Social Mix": The Debate Continues", Australian Planner, 28 (1990), pp. 5-16.


"The New City of Elizabeth", pp. 5-6.

Note on letter to General Manager from Mr. B. Sharpe, Director of Ernest Wirth, Ltd., 16 September 1960, SAHT, Records, Box 206, folder 1921.

Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, pp. 232-35.


Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment, p. 54 & pp. 171-74.


On zoning, order and 'chaos', see Cheesman, Patterns in Perpetuity, pp. 145-51.


On Salisbury North, see Marsden, Business, Charity and Sentiment., pp. 270-74.


This is where the work of Hugh Stretton is particularly important. See his "Housing Policies, Past and Future", in *Political Essays*, Melbourne 1987, pp. 109-129. See also Jones, *Housing and Poverty in Australia*, pp. 188-215; Lionel Orchard, "Ideas for Australian Housing: Stretton and his Critics", in Peter Williams (ed.), *Conflict and Development* (*Urban Studies Yearbook* 2), Sydney 1984, pp. 119-34.


Yencken Consultants, "Elizabeth, South Australia", p. 1.


Memo from W. Phillips to General Manager, n.d. [1959?], in SAHT, Records, Box 216, folder 2033.

Memo from W. R. Hill to the Board, 6 February 1957, in SAHT, Records, Box 340, folder 2003.


**URU Monographs**


[Retail price: $7.50]