

## **Governance Stream (Final)**

### **Overview**

The theme of the conference was the sustainability and vulnerability of Australian cities. Sustainability focuses on the economic, social and environmental realms as they are found in cities. Vulnerability deals with the economic, social and environmental risks facing cities. So where does governance fit into these themes? The question was asked but not fully answered through the papers and discussion in governance stream. It did not appear even to have been asked in the other streams.

It is now widely accepted that the idea of Australian urban governance incorporates the roles of the three tiers of government in urban areas but extends beyond this to include the roles of the private sector, civil society organisations and the community. The sustainability 'triple bottom line' should really be a 'quadruple bottom line' because it is through urban governance that solutions to urban problems are proposed and implemented. Governments, private industry and the community all have substantial roles to play in the future of Australian cities.

Given this general orientation, three main themes arose out of the papers and discussion in the governance stream:

- Change – Governance relationships have changed considerably recently. Many old assumptions about the role of government, or the role of the market or the role of the community have been overturned. Government has been 'hollowed out', the private sector is now a joint partner in many programs, and greater expectations are being loaded onto civil society.
- Complexity – These changes mean that the relationships are becoming more complex. Past maxims may no longer apply. New ways of addressing urban governance issues are needed.
- The old is still new – Yet many of the hoary old issues still remain unresolved: how do we coordinate and integrate activities? How do we deal with short-term political and social time-frames when the problems have long-term implications and require long-term strategic research and policy responses? What about the role of financing and resources in getting things done? And so on. These questions have been with us for a long time. Why have they not yet been solved?

The focus of most of the papers and discussion was on Australian capital cities rather than Australian cities as a whole. Much of Australia exists outside the capitals. There are areas of substantial growth and of decline in regional areas. The issues of sustainability and change and vulnerability should be applied there as well as to the metropolitan capitals.

## **Research themes:**

### **1. Governance**

What actually is governance? There were several dimensions to this question. There are clear links between governance and planning, including new approaches such as in Metropolitan Sydney and South East Queensland. The role of community participation and participatory democracy needs to be better understood, especially in relation to the old question of the public interest (Whose interest? What scales are important for this? What about equity and diversity?). In relation to representative democracy there are questions about leadership, how to deal with matters outside statutory competence, and the potential roles of new technologies such as e-democracy. The democratic deficit in metropolitan planning is clear, so how can this be overcome? But equally we don't often enough use private sector information (such as property-related market research) in trying to understand what is happening in Australian cities. An overarching theme is that of appropriate scale and the question of subsidiarity.

### **2. Learning from experience**

There have been a number of experiments in governance, including public-private partnerships, intergovernmental agreements, participatory planning experiments, and so on. How do we best learn from these experiments? What works and what does not? What are appropriate institutional forms and policy instruments? The importance of these experiments for governance is how they can support approaches to 'good governance' – how do they add to accountability, to transparency, to sustainability? A related question is the role of non-regulatory mechanisms – we keep turning to regulation to improve integration, to get things done better, but over-regulation does not work. A related under-researched question is the role of the various Courts in the planning and policy systems – what about questions of proprietary rights and jurisprudence; how do judges think, what have been the impacts of the Courts on land uses? Moreover, other roles of the law (defining decision making processes, transparency requirements, statutory objects, etc) are under appreciated. Australia is potentially an excellent laboratory for research into this, because there are different approaches in the different States and Territories. Potentially international comparisons could also be pursued, for example in areas such as how to best govern for privately owned infrastructure, or how to improve collaboration in governance.

### **3. Barriers**

We keep trying to improve collaboration, to improve integration, to develop better partnerships. But we do not seem to be doing this very well. What are the real barriers to better integration? Is it merely the 'tyranny of inertia'? Do we really know what the barriers are and how they might be overcome? Does the form and substance of the barrier depend on the focal issue? How do we recognize the impact of politics, opportunities and context in identifying barriers?

### **4. Time frames and change**

Big changes have already occurred in cities and more big changes are coming. How robustly can we look at drivers for the future and plan for them? How best can we plan

for the long term? Government can look to the example of the private sector here, where there are examples of really long term thinking. A serious difficulty is the differing time scales involved: political time frames related to electoral cycles, climate change over the very long term, annual budget cycles, and so on. Are there examples of the good use of a strategic view, of long term commitment that has worked, even with short-term changes? Some of the drivers of change are external (climate change, neoliberalism, globalization, etc) but some are not. We can learn from history in terms of path dependency, the way approaches have been adapted and so on.

### **5. Urban vulnerability**

We need to understand urban vulnerability better. It relates to exposure, and is exacerbated by denial of the environment. But there is social and economic vulnerability as well. What is really meant by this, and how does it relate to urban governance?

### **6. Fiscal and constitutional resources**

There is a fiscal and resource side to governance, raising questions about tax raising and vertical fiscal imbalance, as well as about how well principles of subsidiarity are being applied. This also raises the question of what the real role of the Commonwealth government is in cities when it is not constitutionally obliged to be involved and following considerable time when the Commonwealth has avoided close involvement in urban policy.

### **7. Regional planning**

The failure of regional planning (both within and outside metropolitan areas) in relation to sustainability is something that needs investigation. Regional governance fits poorly between local and State governments, the Commonwealth's commitment has fluctuated. What is its future?

### **8. Modes of intervention**

What are (or should be) the links between governance and planning, between policy and modes of intervention? Redevelopment authorities and land corporations, for example, are problematic. Why do we have to hasten evolution in redevelopment areas through accelerated intervention? Are there not ways that change can work better over a longer time frame with less direct intervention?

### **9. Research itself**

Research itself is an issue. What is impeding research into urban governance? There are currently problems of transparency, poor sharing of information, problems of data access, privatization of data, and so on. Related to this is how we fill the looming demographic gap in university researchers – capacity-building is urgent. Perhaps conferences like this should more purposefully include post- and undergraduate research.

### **10. Research and policy**

Research results should be connected to urban policy but they should also support public debate. Research results should be accessible to government and the wider community; however this is at times restricted by the increasing frequency of contracted research with

associated confidentiality issues. What is the role of researchers in helping shape opinions about cities? How do the media report city issues? This is both a research issues and a call to action. Perhaps we should get journalists and politicians involved in research so that research is really effective and has a direct input into policy.

John Minnery and Stephen Dovers, December, 2005.