

Urban Planning and Management in a Neo-Liberal World

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It is a little over 25 years since the global wave of neo-liberal reform broke upon Australian shores and dramatically remodelled much of Australia's economy, society, and governance. Initiated by the Hawke Labor government, the process was, to a significant degree, politically bipartisan and permeated all tiers and facets of government in deep seated ways. And, despite the current recession with its Keynesian overtones, the reform processes unleashed have a considerable distance to run as we progressively refine our ideas about the boundaries between private and public action, improvements to collaboration between the two, and appropriate levels and kinds of regulation.

Various aspects of the planning and management of Australia's cities have been part of this reform process. Examples include infrastructure planning, financing, and pricing; public participation; public housing; development control; urban consolidation; and environmental conservation. Infrastructure, in particular, has witnessed considerable privatisation of what were formerly public assets and a greater role for the private sector in the construction and operation of new facilities. For the mostpart, however, we have witnessed more subtle changes in regulation or the style of city development. These typically focus on increasing the adaptability or flexibility of cities as they struggle to accommodate larger populations, changed demographics, new technologies and lifestyle preferences, rising environmental concerns, economic restructuring, and the increasing pace of change.

In fact, the roles and complexity of urban planning have both increased substantially over the 25 years as I think the high priest of Libertarian thought, Friedrich Hayek, might have foreseen. Although he advocated reduced roles for governments and greater reliance on market forces in the organisation of human affairs, he noted that endemic market failure in cities justified public intervention. The refinement of that intervention is now under way.