

Institutional strategy-making for sustainability:

Performance-based planning under the Queensland *Integrated Planning Act 1997*

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ABSTRACT: Since the mid 1980s performance-based planning has been actively promoted as a way of achieving more sustainable land-use planning outcomes in Australian cities and regions. This paper outlines an institutional framework for better understanding and learning from the mobilisation and practice of performance-based planning in Queensland under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA). Within Australia this case is significant as the first institutional attempt to embed both ecological sustainability and performance-based planning at the heart of state-wide statutory land-use planning amidst a pervasive political agenda of micro-economic reform. The proposed framework offers an empirical lens through which to examine and learn from the way ideas are imported, adjusted and brought to bear through urban strategies that seek to support and promote ecologically sustainable development. The paper concludes by re-emphasising that performance-based planning is a shifting institutional construct able to be appropriated by both regressive and progressive agendas.

Land is the most basic aspect of economy, society and ecology...the ownership, regulation and use of land has major practical consequences – shaping the spatial form of development, the social distribution of its economic fruits, and the quality of the environment... These problems have only had a shadowy presence in Australian public policy debates: they warrant more systematic attention.

(Stilwell, 2000, p.23)

Introduction

In an era defined by the tripartite agendas of neoliberalism, globalisation and climate change, the quest for sustainability poses profound challenges to the way urban planners ‘do business’. Growing recognition of the need for significant changes to planning policy and practice in response to the sustainability imperative has led to a ‘restless search’ (Offe, 1977) for ways to transform deeply entrenched institutional patterns and value positions within the constraints of a capitalist political economy. The scope and scale of the democratic challenges that surround societal attempts to co-exist in shared urban spaces has resulted in all kinds of “contradictory planning initiatives which often clash when they take concrete form and evolve into specific programs and interventions” (Healey, 2007, p.4).

Within the Australian context, one important but often neglected dimension of the planning and sustainability nexus that epitomises this ‘restless’ quest for change, is the regulation and development of land-use and its attendant distributive and spatial impacts (Stilwell, 2000). In the last two decades there has been an increase in bilateral political support for performance-based planning at both the national and state levels as a means of advancing creative planning solutions that are ‘outside the box’ (DAF, 2005). Performance-based planning is a multi-scalar concept with contemporary understandings ranging from the level of strategic spatial policy (Hillier, 2007; Steele and Sipe, 2007); ‘performing’ versus ‘conforming’ planning

systems (Faludi, 2000; Rivolin, 2008); to the use of performance indicators and codes at the level of local planning schemes (Baker et. al., 2006; Elliott, 2008).

In theory at least performance-based planning offers the possibility of achieving more sustainable planning outcomes by engendering innovation, creativity and a customized approach to urban and regional areas. The benefits of a more integrated, flexible approach to land-use planning offers a compelling alternative to the rigid and blunt silo style of land-use planning that has shaped and defined the (increasingly unsustainable) structure and morphology of Australian settlements since federation. In practice however, the ‘performance-based turn’ to planning emerges as an ill-understood concept that struggles to live up to professional and community aspirations. Indeed, it has been heavily criticized for reducing certainty, transparency and accountability without delivering on the desired environmental outcomes in conditions of climate change (O’Hart, 2006). The performance-based model has been described as “so stripped of effectiveness by notions such as ‘flexible planning’ and discretionary decision-making, as to be almost the antithesis of the word planning” (Stein, 1998, p.72). Yet, despite these concerns performance-based planning has held only a ‘shadowy presence’ in urban policy and planning that warrants more systematic attention (Stilwell, 2000).

In this paper I adopt an institutional approach to understanding and learning from the evolving dimensions of performance-based planning in Queensland under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA) as a strategy for sustainability. First I outline an emergent institutional framework that focuses on how strategy-making works to support and promote sustainability within particular urban contexts (Connor and Dovers, 2004; Healey, 2007). In the second section I apply this framework to a case study of the mobilisation and practice of performance-based

planning in Queensland under the IPA. Within Australia this case is significant as the first institutional attempt to embed both ecological sustainability and performance-based planning at the heart of state-wide statutory land-use planning amidst a pervasive political agenda of micro-economic reform. I conclude the paper by highlighting that the proposed institutional framework offers an empirical lens through which to examine and learn from the way strategies are imported, adjusted and brought to bear within the Australian urban context as a means of engendering sustainability-led change.

Part 1: Strategy-making for sustainability – an emergent institutional framework

Performance-based planning is an urban endeavour characterised by considerable disagreement over its scale, scope and function. As a feature of land-use planning located within the governance of place, performance-based planning reflects through spatial regulation the structures of legitimate authority and the competing claims of economic growth, social justice and ecological sustainability (Gleeson and Low, 2000). It is thus a moving institutional agenda located at the nexus of two key intersections: political-economy and intellectual history; and city/regions as a phenomenon and planning as a human activity (Campbell and Fainstein, 2005).

To date there have been few empirically-based institutional studies of performance-based planning in Australia or in the literature more generally. Previous research undertaken has focused largely on post-hoc assessments of performance-based planning implementation by planning consultants (Jaffe, 1993; Porter, 1988), comparative meta-research based on the performance-based planning literature (Baker et. al., 2006; Leung and Harper, 2000), or new theoretical models developed around planning with an emphasis on the differences between *conformance* versus *performance* (Faludi, 2000; Hillier, 2007; Rivolin, 2008). Common to

these research efforts is a convergence around the three key negative aspects or challenges offered by the performance-based planning approach, namely:

- *uncertainty*, that affects all developers and applicants, and in particularly those most marginalised members of the community;
- the *discretionary nature* of planning decisions that confer valuable development rights; and
- significant *administrative costs and capacity limitations*, due to the necessity to evaluate and negotiate each development project in the absence of formalised standards.

(Rivolin, 2008, p.176)

What has been missing is an ‘institutional’ understanding of performance-based planning within particular governance settings – how this approach has arisen, been mobilised and practiced - to support and promote more sustainable development. With the notable exception of ongoing research in New Zealand around the transitions associated with performance-based planning under the *Resource Management Act 1992* (RMA) (e.g. Ericksen et. al., 2004; Memon, 1993), there has been a lack of longitudinal and ‘thick’ descriptive case-studies of performance-based planning and a paucity of institutional frameworks focused on the sustainability imperative to support this agenda. This constitutes a significant gap in the international/national planning-related literature in this area.

Institutionalism, as both a theoretical and methodological framework has a long history of use within the arenas of political science, economics and sociology (see Weber, Durkheim, Marx Veblen, Schumpeter, Polyani etc.). The rediscovery of institutionalism or ‘new institutionalism’ emerged in the 1980s as counter-reformation offering new theoretical and

empirical directions that led away from the prevailing positivist context. This marked a revamp of ideas that were prevalent in the Second World War but largely abandoned as individual-oriented theories such as rational choice theory and behaviouralism gained ascendancy from the 1940s through to the early 1980s. The pre-war institutionalist methods were considered ‘unscientific’ by proponents of behaviouralism that sought an objective, quantified approach to explaining and predicting behavior in a similar vein to the natural sciences (Peters, 2005).

By contrast the ‘new’ institutionalism movement that reformed in the 1980s aimed at reinterpreting human action within diverse and complex institutional frameworks. The broad thrust of this was an emphasis on the context specific dimensions of cultural, social and political fields (March and Olsen, 1990). In particular new variants such as ‘sociological institutionalism’ seek to probe the ‘messy’ dialectics of governance such as structure and agency, state-society relations, institutional creation and change, and the complicated web of relationships between institutions, strategic ideas and interests. Implicit is the notion that whilst policy decisions are a product of institutional settings and wider influences (both formal and informal), individuals are themselves deeply ‘embedded’ in cultural and organisational fields that frame and define the key concepts such as ‘environment’, ‘equity’ and ‘efficiency’ (Granovetter, 1985). Within this agenda key areas for analysis include:

- Broad changes in the socio-economic or political context that can produce a situation in which latent institutions suddenly become salient;
- Changes in socio-economic context or political balance of power that can produce a situation in which old institutions are put in the service of different ends as new actors come into play who pursue their new goals through existing institutions;

- Exogenous changes that can produce a shift in the goals or strategies being pursued within existing institutions – that is changes in outcomes as old actors adopt new goals within the old institutions; and
- Political actors who can adjust their strategies to accommodate change in the institutions themselves through dramatic, piecemeal or ongoing strategic manoeuvring for change within institutional constraints.

(Thelen and Steinmo, 1990, p.16)

One example of the ‘new’ institutionalist approach is the spatial strategy-making framework outlined by Healey (2007) which has emerged as part of the contemporary European spatial planning agenda. The spatial strategy-making framework directs attention to three distinct institutional themes for analysis: 1) how understandings are converted into actions through a focus on strategies; 2) how the power of spatial strategy-making shapes governance capacity and landscapes and impacts on the broader dimensions of urban life; and 3) what and how we can learn from the activities and enterprise of strategy-making (Healey, 2007). A focus on spatial strategy-making thus provides a constructive lens through which to better understand the enterprise and activities associated with spatial planning strategies in order to “help those involved develop a richer, more situated and practically effective understanding and ethically informed recognition of the potentialities and limitations of the practices they engage in” (Healey, 2007, p.xi).

This emphasis on institutional change and learning resonates strongly with the work undertaken in Australia by Connor and Dovers (2004) who also seek to identify positive principles for advancing normative learning about the collective and potentially transformative nature of institutional practices. They go further however to focus specifically

on the dimensions of institutional reform-led change that purposively promotes the agenda of sustainability. In the quest for better ways of understanding context specific challenges and opportunities that can usefully inform the sustainability meta-agenda they highlight two key “conceptual and practical principles that can progress institutional change for sustainability” (Connor and Dovers, 2004, p.205). These include: 1) *problem re-framing* through the institutional accommodation of a sustainability discourse, normative change in group-held values and legal change (including international law and policy as drivers); and 2) *(re)-organizing government* through integration in policy and practice, subsidiarity of decision-making, and reiteration of processes as part of a long-term sustainability agenda.

A combination of the spatial strategy-making approach outlined by Healey (2007) and the key principles around institutional change for sustainability put forward by Connor and Dovers (2004) leads to a proposed framework that focuses on urban strategy-making for sustainability. This emergent institutional approach offers an empirical lens through which to examine the way ideas are imported, adjusted and brought to bear through particular strategies by focusing on the bearers of ideas, their organization and their institutional setting. The framework is outlined below in Figure 1:

- Insert Figure 1 here -

This institutional framework for sustainability offers a way of bringing the activities of strategy-making – the practices, discourses and initiatives - into the limelight. In particular the focus is directed towards how a strategy such as performance-based planning better supports and promotes sustainability through three key levels of analysis:

- 1) The *evolution* of the strategy (i.e. how are understandings about sustainability converted into actions through a focus on strategies?);

- 2) The *challenges* in sustaining a strategic focus (i.e. how do strategies work to shape governance capacity around the agenda of sustainability?); and
- 3) The *potentialities* that arise from the activities and enterprise of strategy-making even if the strategy does not work out as intended (i.e. what and how can we learn about the institutionalisation of sustainability from the activities and enterprise of strategy-making?)

A preliminary working application of this proposed framework is offered in the following section which focuses on performance-based planning as a strategy for sustainability in Queensland under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA). Within Australia this case is significant as an ambitious attempt to transform the traditional prescriptive planning agenda into an integrated performance-based approach. Queensland has been described as a land of extremes and ambitions (Evans, 2008), a “ragged edge of empire where everything depends on taking, holding and exploiting the natural environment” (Schultz, 2008, p.13). Land-use planning and regulation in the state has been historically an ad hoc, iterative process with development control pre-eminently a function of parochial local governments (Fogg, 1987). The transition to performance-based planning ushered in a “revolutionary and seismic change” (Fogg, 2006, p.3) that warrants closer institutional analysis and attention.

Part 2: Applying the framework - performance-based planning in Queensland under IPA

In this second part of the paper I utilise the institutional framework - *Strategy-making for Sustainability* - outlined above to offer a working analysis of what can be learnt from the evolving enterprise and activities of performance-based planning in Queensland under the IPA. The adoption of a performance-based agenda in the late 1990s under the *Integrated*

Planning Act 1997 (IPA) represented an attempt to radically overhaul the way planning was understood and practiced in Queensland. Central to these transformative ambitions was an emphasis on the need for a flexible, integrated planning system that would put Queensland at the ‘leading edge’ of planning for sustainability in Australia (McCauley, 1997).

In doing so I draw on empirical data collected in South-East Queensland during the period from 2007-2008. This involved a triangulation of data collection methods including: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence (i.e. government reports, speech transcripts, legislation, parliamentary records, minutes of meetings etc.). For the purposes of this paper I will focus on early themes that have emerged from the documentary analysis component of the data collection, with an emphasis on the ‘formal’ state-based institutional processes. In the following sections each of the three levels of the framework will be addressed in turn: 1) the *evolution* of the performance-based planning strategy in Queensland under the IPA; 2) the *challenges* of implementing this strategy; 3) and the *potentialities* of what can be learned from this strategic enterprise around performance-based planning about the institutionalisation of sustainability.

Evolution

During the 1980s performance-based planning emerged and gained ascendancy as the “preferred style of planning in Queensland” (Queensland Government, 1993) within the nexus of two powerful reform agendas that have worked to re-shape the Australian settlement ideal; micro-economic reform that is associated with neoliberalism and ecologically sustainable development. Queensland, like the other states in Australia, pursued an aggressive reform agenda focused on de-regulation, privatisation and commercialisation of government activities. The dismantling of the Keynesian welfare mentality ushered in a ‘new right’

ideological framework of faith in free market capitalism (Stilwell, 2000). The dominant political aim over the last two decades has been to create a globally competitive environment in which “the economy can operate efficiently with minimal government interference with commercial decision-making” (Queensland Government, 1992, p.2).

At the same time however a parallel transformative agenda around environmental sustainability also gained greater ascendancy particularly since the release of the Brundtland report ‘Our Common Future’ (WCED, 1987). At the national level this agenda was reinforced by the *National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development* (NSES, 1992) which emphasised both: the need to consider in a more integrated way the wider economic, social and environmental implications of decisions and actions through changes to patterns of resource use; and the development of new planning policies and processes to support long-term rather than short-term environmental objectives. The growing imperative of ecologically sustainable development and the need for new integrated ways of imagining and balancing the sustainability tripartite of economic development, environmental concerns and social justice jostled for space on both the national and state political stage (Dryzek, 2006).

In the decade long gestational build-up to the 1997 enactment of the IPA, performance-based planning featured prominently as a key part of the intense systemic change and restructuring designed to make Queensland “the most efficient planning and development system in Australia” (Queensland Government, 1993, p.1). The micro-economic reform agenda was a clear driver in the early formative years as evidenced in the economic development policy, *Queensland – Leading State* (Queensland government, 1992), and the subsequent discussion planning paper *New Planning and Development legislation for Queensland - Planning for the People of Queensland* (Queensland Government, 1993). Both of these documents highlighted systemic problems associated with the traditional prescriptive planning regime including:

fragmentation of development assessment processes; costly development control mechanisms; cumbersome impact assessment procedures; and an over-reliance on re-zoning.

Within this pervasive micro-economic reform environment, a performance-based approach to land use planning, development and regulation systems was positioned as a key determinant in the quest to attract global investment as well as increasingly mobile capital funds (Yearbury, 1998). When the draft *Planning, Environment and Development Bill (PEDA)* was released for public comment in May 1995 it reinforced the need to position Queensland to better “respond to a changing world where the approaches and solutions of today may not be applicable tomorrow as values, knowledge and technologies shift at an ever faster rate” (Queensland Government, 1995, p.i). The Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA - later renamed The Property Council of Australia) were effusive in their support of the reform agenda claiming it to be “one of the most fundamental micro economic reforms to be undertaken in QLD” and one that will be one of the most “outstanding achievements of any Australian Government” (BOMA, 1995, p.1).

Less enthusiastic were the state environmental and community groups as evidenced by the Queensland Conservation Councils’ (QCC) submission at the time entitled *Philosophy and Purpose of the Bill (Lost Labor Opportunities and Queensland's Sustainable Future in Doubt)*. In their submission they argued that overemphasis on economic growth through the proposed legislature changes was unlikely to support and promote fundamental sustainability outcomes such as environmental protection, quality of life, healthy communities, social justice and equity. That indeed the Bill maintained “a pro-development, pro-developer, hands off, behind closed doors, corruption prone approach more characteristic of a Queensland

conservative government that that of a supposedly reformist Labor government” (QCC, 1995, p.1).

When the *Integrated Planning Act (IPA)* was finally enacted in December 1997 it ushered in a performance-based statutory agenda that sought to marry both micro-economic reform and ecologically sustainable development. The stated purpose of the act was defined as ‘ecological sustainability’ broadly defined as a ‘balance’ that integrates protection of ecological processes, economic development and maintenance of the social well being of people and communities (s.1.3.3). This was to be achieved by: coordinating and integrating planning at the local, regional and State levels; managing the process by which development occurs; and managing the effects of development on the environment (including managing the use of premises) (s.1.2.1). Although not stated directly in the IPA legislation, at the heart of the planning transition was a policy shift to flexible, performance based planning that constituted “a turnaround in official planning thought in Queensland” (Fogg, 1997, p.11).

The focus of this section has been on the evolution of performance-based planning under IPA as a strategy for sustainability. The IPA sought to reframe the way planning was conceived and practiced in Queensland. In its genesis it formed part of a broader agenda of micro-economic reform but evolved to encompass a significant attempt at statutory change around the concept of ecological sustainability in response to international and national sustainability agendas around ESD. This opened a discursive space for the role of performance-based planning as a means of achieving sustainability that had not been a substantive part of the state planning vernacular previously. The attempt at normative change did not go uncontested however and raised a number of institutional challenges related to the re-organisation of

governance into an integrated, performance-based framework. The key challenges are outlined in the following section.

Challenges

The second level of the proposed institutional strategy-making for sustainability framework around draws attention to the challenges associated with the mobilisation of performance-based planning amidst the broader re-organisation of governance. The performance-based agenda of the IPA was premised on the need to substantively re-organise the machinery of government in order to better “manage the spatial implications of human activities and the relationships between people and the natural and built environment” (McCauley, 1997, p.3). An integral component of the performance-based IPA reform agenda was the idea of integration both procedurally and substantively as a prerequisite for the achievement of more environmentally sustainable outcomes (England, 2004).

Under the IPA, environmental decisions had to be ‘integrated’ into the decision-making process consistent with the purpose of the act focused on ‘ecological sustainability’ (ES). However an emphasis on ES focuses on achieving a ‘balance’ between economic, social and environmental outcomes rather than the benchmarks outlined in the nationally accepted ESD definition. There is in effect no ‘environmental bottom line’ in the IPA and therefore no minimum requirements as to what integration might actually mean in practice. This puts the onus on decision-makers to demonstrate how and in what ways performance-based integration will be achieved. For proponents of ESD, an integrated approach to land-use planning is essential for a more holistic environmental and development decision-making (Margerum and Born, 1995). However the quest for more integrated approval processes is

also the hallmark of the micro-economic reform agenda around increasing efficiency red-tape reduction and streamlined fast-tracked approval processes.

IPA is focused on an 'integrated assessment' system for development but the emphasis on 'integration' is process oriented - cutting red tape and increasing efficiency of the development process. To achieve the sustainability element of the Act the emphasis has to shift away from process integration towards content integration – integrating environmental, social and economic dimensions through planning (Brown and Nitz, 2000, p.98).

A second key challenge was that the shift to a performance-based planning regime under the IPA was not a collective institutional endeavour but rather a process driven from within the planning department and imposed on the Queensland governance framework. Other state departments, particularly those responsible for matters related to environmental issues were therefore reluctant to relinquish statutory responsibility to the planning and development assessment one-stop shop. By the time the legislation came to be implemented much of the legislation was yet to be rolled in to the IPA and few departments had developed a good working understanding of the requirements, responsibilities and timeframes inherent in the new performance-based legislation (Meurling, 2005). For all intensive purposes the concurrent and referral agencies went on with business as always despite the radical shift in planning legislation and process – much to the frustration of the planning community particularly at the level of local government (LGAQ, 1996).

A third related key challenge was that the shift to performance-based planning under IPA was championed by political powerbroker and institutional heavyweight the then Labor Minister Terry Mackenroth zealously supported by his Executive Director, Kevin Yearbury (Fogg, 2007). The process leading up to the enactment of the legislation was benefited by both a strong political mandate and the public resources to pursue it. By stark contrast the

implementation phase of IPA and in particular the rolling out of the new performance-based agenda was undertaken at a time when the planning department was overseen by a junior conservative party minister with much less institutional clout and thus powers of political persuasion. The impact of this transition was profound. IPA was an ambitious overhaul of the state planning system and without the strong support of a champion within parliament, the roll out of this ‘revolutionary’ legislation was left to the best efforts of senior bureaucrats within the planning department at the time. Having worked for nearly 10 years to get performance-based planning legislation enacted, this was an overwhelming challenge for a state planning department with few resources, little inter-departmental support and even less energy and morale. The political and practical implications of this were not lost on the Queensland planning community:

To suggest that an under-resourced junior Department of Local Government and Planning was well placed to negotiate with the more senior and well resourced Departments such as Main Roads, Environment, Natural Resources....displays a lack of understanding of how politics and public policy works in Queensland (Booth, 1998, p.11).

The effects of this reverberated through-out the institutionalisation of performance-based planning as a strategy for sustainability. Outside of a core inner circle of original IPA architects just what constituted performance-based planning and how this was to support ‘ecological sustainability’ was unclear to those in practice. Key findings from an independent report commissioned by the Queensland Government (C and B Group 2003) highlighted a systemic and generic lack of understanding, certainty and awareness around performance-based planning (Wypych et. al., 2005).

The arrival of the South East Queensland Regional Plan (SEQRP) in 2005 heralded a return to prescriptive prohibitions that signalled the beginning of the end of the dominance of the

performance-based planning ethos. The Queensland performance-based planning ‘experiment’ is widely perceived to have not lived up to its promises of supporting and promoting sustainability within the state and creating better urban planning outcomes (Gibson, 2005; Hopewell, 2003; Schomburgk, 2005). In 2009 Queensland is about to embrace new planning legislation that continues to pursue performance-based planning (albeit with increasing prescription) under the *Sustainable Planning Bill 2009*. What and how can we learn about the institutionalisation of sustainability from the IPA performance-based planning journey?

Potentialities

As a strategy for sustainability, the performance-based planning ‘experiment’ under IPA constitutes a significant and ambitious attempt to change the substantive and procedural nature of land-use planning and development in Queensland. The benefits of a more flexible, tailored approach to land-use planning offer an attractive alternative to the silo style of land-use planning that has shaped and defined the Queensland urban landscape. This third institutional level of the proposed framework focuses on the potentialities for change that arise from the activities and enterprise of strategy-making even if the strategy does not work out as intended. An institutional change agenda recognizes that to act *within* an institution is also to act *on* it (Beauregard, 2005). To this end four key learning insights have been identified and will be outlined below.

1. Institutional discourses/practices

What has become clear through the IPA process is that attempts to marry the twin agendas of micro-economic reform and ecological sustainability through the performance-based planning strategy have resulted in quite different constructions of how this then translates into practice.

As a purposeful shift towards ‘ecological sustainability’ the enactment of IPA represented “a radical shift in the theoretical basis and practical application of planning legislation” (Wright, 2001, p.78). The emphasis of an efficient streamlined ‘one-stop shop’ is quite a different agenda to the pursuit of holistic outcomes that reflect a balance of economic, social and environmental concerns as indicated by the purpose of the IPA. At an institutional level this has resulted in policy and procedural confusion that has reduced the potential for sustainable outcomes. This strongly suggests that there are benefits in teasing out and critically examining dominant discourses and practices that drive strategic institutional agendas such as performance-based planning. This in turn can offer valuable insights into the competing political and/or ideological agendas that shape and re-shape collective efforts towards sustainability (Dryzek, 2006)

2. Institutional ‘embedding’ through implementation

The discussion paper released in 2006 by the Queensland Government as part of a broader planning review process highlighted that the IPA had created an environment characterised by the cultural resistance and uncertainty that “naturally accompanies performance-based planning” (Queensland Government, 2006, p.14). The common consensus expressed both in the broader planning literature and within the Queensland planning profession is that performance-based planning is a seductive idea in theory but difficult to implement in practice (Baker et. al., 2006). Yet from an institutional perspective a closer examination of the Queensland example under the IPA reveals that there are many factors that have influenced the successful implementation of performance-based planning including confusion over core definitions, cross-sectoral support and communication, access to resources, a clear political mandate and champions able to see the strategy through legislation to sustainable urban outcomes. Rather than an inherently flawed planning approach or tool, this strongly points to

the need for a longer-term political vision, resourcing and institutional capacity-building to support strategies for sustainability through the different stages of evolution. This highlights the importance of institutional ‘embedding’ that goes beyond the achievement of new legislation to include implementation and on-going evaluation to deepen the institutional footprint.

3. Institutional change and complexity

Whilst performance-based planning is widely criticized for not doing enough to improve the quality of outcomes and indeed “making good development, which is innovative and unusual, harder to approve” (Durmiso, 2005, p.22), the institutional process has not been wholly in vain. The shift in Queensland planning required a “fundamental change in the culture and practice of the planning and development sector in which planners had to take on new responsibilities, develop different skill sets and engage with other users of the planning system in different ways” (Queensland Government, 2006, p.13). The institutionalisation of performance-based planning as a strategic agenda has not only exposed the range of stakeholders and legislative components involved, but also the substantive and procedural changes needed to better promote and support sustainability through the institutional system. The transition to performance-based planning has thus brought to the fore a better appreciation of the various dimensions of land-use planning and development and the challenges these pose for sustainability - in all their ‘monstrous institutional complexity’ (Dovers, 2001).

4. Institutional learning curve – ‘dissect, distil, disseminate’

Finally, it is extremely unlikely that a ‘transformative’ institutional change such as the shift to a performance-based planning under IPA will occur quietly and without disjuncture and/or

resistance. This challenges the prevailing assumption in Queensland that if reform does not transition smoothly and quickly it has not been successful or worthwhile. Instead the key is to find ways to dissect, distil and disseminate the ‘mess’ and to extract and share the institutional learning insights that result. The evolving institutional agenda of performance-based planning as a strategy for sustainability under the IPA affords the Queensland planning community a rich learning curve upon which to reflect and draw on for future strategic agendas. Ultimately it will be the long term adaptive learning process that will make the activities and efforts of performance-based planning in Queensland under IPA worthwhile particularly in light of the new performance-based ambitions and agenda touted in the recently debated *Sustainable Planning Bill 2009*. In Queensland at least, the ‘restless’ institutional quest for better ways to plan for ecologically sustainable development appears set to continue for some time to come.

Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined an institutional framework for better understanding and learning from the mobilisation and practice of performance-based planning in Queensland under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA). Behind the ‘state of the art, leading edge, best in Australia’ rhetoric that surrounds the performance-based planning ethos, the growing levels of professional and community dissatisfaction, and the results on the ground underscore that there is still much work to be done. Far from being a purely technical planning activity, the ‘performance-based turn’ in land-use planning rests on a bedrock of ambitions that includes both micro-economic reform and ecologically sustainable development. Performance-based planning emerges from the Queensland experience as a shifting construct able to be appropriated by both regressive and progressive agendas. This has been a shadowy area within urban policy and planning scholarship that warrants more systematic institutional analysis and attention (Stilwell, 2000).

The proposed institutional framework - *strategy-making for sustainability* - offers an empirical lens by which to ‘dissect, distil and disseminate’ the lessons and insights that have emerged from the activities and enterprise of performance-based planning. As a strategy for sustainability performance-based planning becomes a complex set of “politically charged processes through which collective action is imagined, mobilized, organized and practiced to ‘make a difference’ to urban conditions” (Healey, 2007, p.266). This approach goes further however to emphasise ‘what’ and ‘how’ we might learn from these strategic institutional endeavours in order to better progress the meta-institutional quest for ecologically sustainable development (Connor and Dovers, 2004). In this way both the proposed framework and the Queensland case-study have the potential to yield valuable learning insights that can be applied to other urban policy changes at local, state and federal levels within a contemporary climate of politico-economic and environmental change.

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Figure 1: An emergent institutional framework: Strategy-making for Sustainability

(Source: adapted from Connor & Dovers 2004, Healey 2007)

Levels of institutional analysis	Strategic function	Guiding questions	Indicative principles
1. Evolution	<i>Problem re-framing</i>	How are understandings about sustainability converted into actions through a focus on strategies?	• Accommodation of a sustainability discourse • Legal change • Normative change
2. Challenges	<i>Governance re-organisation</i>	How do strategies work to shape governance capacity around the agenda of sustainability?	• Integration of policy/practice • Subsidiarity • Reiteration
3. Potentialities	<i>Transformative change/learning</i>	What and how can we learn about the institutionalisation of sustainability from the activities and enterprise of strategy-making?	• Adaptive learning process • Political acceptance of mess/disjuncture • Critically reflexive practice