Innovations and transformations in urban governance: An analysis of local action planning initiatives within Penrith City and the City of Sydney

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Abstract: We live in a time of considerable change which has placed new demands on local governments and raised a number of questions about the ability of these institutions along with other levels of government to address and resolve the problems that arise within contemporary communities. Traditional local governments are being questioned about the ability of their existing expert-driven and fragmented planning processes to resolve the problems that arise within contemporary communities. This has triggered the emergence of local government planning processes aimed at supporting more integrative and inclusive forms of planning that engage public, community and private sector players. This paper provides insight into these emerging planning processes through an investigation of the development of action planning processes within the City of Sydney and Penrith City which enable a broader range of players to participate in determining how objectives within the Council’s strategic plans are realised ‘on the ground’. Drawing on these case studies the paper provides insight into the problems and possibilities that local governments face in their attempts to support the development of more integrative and inclusive forms of planning within contemporary Australian cities.

Introduction

We live in a time of considerable change which has placed new demands on local governments and raised a number of questions about the ability of these institutions and other levels of government to address and resolve the problems within contemporary communities (Parson, 1982 Huntington, 1975, King, 1975). Traditional local governments are being questioned about the ability of their existing expert-driven and fragmented planning processes to grasp and design workable solutions to problems that arise within contemporary communities. These concerns have triggered the emergence of local government planning processes that are aimed at supporting more integrative and inclusive forms of planning through the engagement of public, community and private sector players. This paper provides insight into these emerging planning processes through the development of action planning processes within the City of Sydney and Penrith City. The action planning processes provide both councils with a means of enabling communities and private sector players to participate in the process of determining priorities and approaches to the delivery of services, projects and maintenance of infrastructure to move towards the longer term objectives set out in the cities’ strategic plans. Whilst traditionally within these councils, approaches to achieving the longer-term objectives within the strategic plan were developed by experts and imposed from above, the local action planning processes provides a mechanism that enables a broader range of players to participate in determining how objectives within the strategic plans are realised ‘on the ground’. The first section of the paper provides a background to the emergence of these local action planning processes in light of broader shifts in the relationship between the government and the governed, and the transformation of local government strategic planning processes. This will follow, in the second section, with case studies focusing on the development of the local action planning initiatives within both City of Sydney and Penrith City Council as a means of developing more inclusive and integrated planning processes, and will explore how these processes build on their existing planning frameworks rather than trying to simply replace them. In conclusion I reflect on the similarities and differences between the two initiatives, and their limits.

The emergence of local action planning processes

The relationship between government and the governed is complex and dynamic. Researchers have provided detailed insights into the emergence and transformation of the modern administrative, bureaucratic and liberal–democratic form of government within western society (Foucault, 1991, Gordon, 1991). They identify the very rise of ‘modern society’ and the emergence of democratic citizens with the development of modern government. In recent decades critiques have questioned the way modern governments plan their communities. These critiques reflect a reaction to both established planning processes and the outcomes they produce ‘on the ground’. In terms of planning processes, growing opposition has emerged to the way traditional planning processes are driven by experts who seem to posit a unitary public interest which is often seen to have little regard for what is
actually happening ‘on the ground’ (Gordon, 1991, 2). In contrast to the imposition of ‘top-down’ planning an emergent participatory or collaborative approach to planning emphasizes the importance of developing inclusive planning processes and the planner’s role in mediating among stakeholders within the planning situation (Healey 1996, Healey 1998, Innes 1995, Day 1997). Critiques have also questioned the way modern planning processes driven by zoning regulations and market-driven development are seen to be destroying the spatial basis for community. These reactions to what is appearing ‘on the ground’ is apparent in the emergence of new urbanist (Katz 1994, Harvey 1997) and neo-traditionalist (Jacobs, 1997) approaches within governmental planning processes. Building on widespread dissatisfaction with the anonymity and sprawl of contemporary urban growth, these approaches espouse an outcome-based view of planning based on the vision of a compact, heterogeneous city. A further critique concerning the way in which contemporary planning processes engender social and spatial inequality (Merrifield 1997, Baum 1997, Forestor 1989, Smith 1997, Young 1990, Harvey, 1973, Harvey 1996) has yielded planning processes aimed at creating the ‘just city’ (Harvey, 1973) and seek to redress disadvantage, exclusion and deprivation (e.g. by ameliorating racial, ethnic, and gender disadvantage). This typology of critical approaches to have emerged over the last few decades is not exhaustive as they have not superseded the planning processes that they critique, nor are the types wholly mutually exclusive: each contains elements of the others and most emerging planning processes cannot fit easily into any one type. Nevertheless, each can claim highly committed proponents, and each points to a distinctive path for emerging planning practice.

Within the following case studies I discuss the emergence of ‘local action planning processes’ within Sydney City and Penrith City in the early 21st century. Both local action planning processes represent a shift within local governments in Australia to govern their communities through planning methods and processes that build on the emerging approaches discussed above. Both processes for the City of Sydney’s City of Villages Action Planning strategy 2007-2010, and the Penrith City Council’s Neighbourhood Renewal Program Action Planning process commit the councils to the development of more participatory and collaborative planning approaches and processes (Prior, 2006, Penrith City Council, 2001, City of Sydney, 2006). The local action planning processes within both councils are based around the principle that community members themselves are essential participants in the process of determining priorities and approaches to the delivery of services, projects and maintenance of infrastructure to move towards the longer term objectives set out in the cities’ four year strategic plans (see figure 2 and 3). Within this structure the strategic plans set out the longer-term direction of Council and the parameters within which Council operates. The local action plans that emerge from the local action planning process act as a ‘localised version of the Strategic Plan’ and function as a set of considerations that guide how both Councils work with the community at the local level to develop policy, planning codes and infrastructure as well as deliver vital services that are genuinely responsive to community needs and meet the objectives of the strategic plan (see figure 1). Previously, the city planners were solely responsible for laying out how the strategic goals were to be accomplished through the development of annual plans (sometimes called the operational plan or management plan).

![Figure 1 – Relationship between action planning process plans and strategic plans](image-url)
Whilst there are similarities between the local action planning processes of both the City of Sydney and Penrith City there were also differences, with one process embracing a new urbanist approach (City of Sydney, 2006) and the other building more on an approach to planning aimed at creating a ‘just city’ (Prior, 2006). The scale at which the planning processes were applied to the communities also differed, with one council using the planning process as a universal mechanism across the entire Local Government Area (LGA), and the other to develop approaches to specific areas within the LGA. These differences call for a more in-depth examination of both local action planning processes.

The case studies of the local action planning processes for the City of Sydney and Penrith City presented below follow a similar structure. Each case study describes the strategic planning frameworks and how the action planning processes are related to them, and how the programs themselves were envisioned and function. Each concludes with a discussion on how the emergence of these processes within each council has triggered a transformation of their local government operational structures. It should be stressed that these case studies are unlikely to be comprehensive in their description of the local action planning processes given that they are focused on particular aspects of the processes and that the case studies do not explore the local action plans emerging from the processes but focus on understanding the processes themselves and their broader contexts.

Case study one - City of Sydney: City of Villages, Local action planning process

In 2006 the City of Sydney undertook “the biggest program of public consultation ever undertaken in the 169 year history of the city” (City of Sydney, 2006, 5) to develop local action plans for its city of villages. As Monica Barone proposed:

The Local Action Plans [created out of the council’s local action planning process] for the Villages of Sydney signal[ed] a commitment to a new kind of planning and delivery of services with a close ongoing involvement with the community. (City of Sydney, 2007, 3)

The foundation for the local action planning process lay in the recently completed Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets out Council’s agreed vision for the City of Sydney for the period 2006-2009. The vision within the strategy saw Sydney as a “tolerant, diverse and prosperous city of [interconnected] villages” (City of Sydney 2006, 5) each with its own community and “citywide communities of interest” (City of Sydney 2006, 5). In supporting these village communities the City of Sydney committed to:

…creat[ing] an inclusive environment that fosters creativity, knowledge and innovation. …[and] valuing and celebrating the diversity of cultures and beliefs that make Sydney an exciting and inclusive, and welcoming global city. (City of Sydney, 2006, 5)

Undergirding this vision of the city is a new urbanist approach to planning. The City of Sydney’s vision calls for the development of a heterogeneous city with a strong privileging of the ‘public realm’ structured around the notion of neighbourhood and villages (Kunstler 1996, 117, City of Sydney 2006, 35). Whilst many new urbanists stress the substance of plans over the method of achieving them (Kunstler, 1996), The City of Sydney sought to ground its vision of ‘preserving and enhancing’ its villages through constructive engagement with the occupants of those villages (City of Sydney 2006, 26) with the aim of translating the goals and outcomes within the strategic plan to the neighbourhood level in a way that responds to the needs and aspirations of the city’s diverse communities. To operationalise the Strategic Plan at the local level through community engagement, the City of Sydney implemented a citywide local action planning process. The local action planning process used ‘villages’ as the point of intersection between Council and the communities it serves. To provide some purchase on the complex nature of the city, the City of Sydney Local Government Area was conceptualised as nine interrelated districts/villages. Council has undertaken a significant mapping of the entire City of Sydney LGA, identifying the nine villages, which were designated on the basis of: geographical features, the presence of core community facilities such as schools, libraries, halls and neighbourhood centres, basic retail and services such as transport, pedestrian sheds to these centres and hubs, historical identity, major differences in density and zoning/uses.

In developing Local Action Plans (LAP) for each village, the LAP process built upon the City of Sydney’s current knowledge base about these villages, existing consultation outcomes and targeted community engagement to:

- Identify and prioritise localised versions of the 4 year outcomes in the Strategic Plan, that is, local initiatives focused about achieving the objectives set out in the strategies’ seven focus areas: quality urban environment, economy, environmental leadership, community and social
The following table outlines the hierarchy of outcomes for the proposed City of Sydney LAP process. A hierarchy of outcomes approach involving three steps in a causal chain from immediate outcome, to intermediate to ultimate outcome was adopted as a logic for the program’s framework (see figure 2). As part of the development of the hierarchy of outcomes approach, the key outputs and resources that are required to achieve the identified program outcomes, and the program needs - priority issues that the program must respond to - were articulated and recorded. The hierarchy starts with ‘needs’ at the base, continues up to ‘outputs/resources’ (developed in response to ‘needs’), building up to ‘immediate outcomes’ and ‘intermediate outcomes’, and finally to ‘ultimate outcomes.’

**Ultimate outcomes And finally**
- Long term vision of the strategic plans is attained – City of vibrant villages.
- An actively engaged and involved community with enduring processes to support their ongoing participation.
- Sydney is a sustainable City

**Intermediate outcomes Then what?**
- Constructive community partnerships
- Enhanced sense of place and ownership
- Responsive planning and delivery of services, capital works and other Council operations

**Immediate outcomes What will happen as a result of this**
- Constructive working partnerships
- Shared understanding of strategic plan and Council’s role and responsibilities
- Understanding of issues within villages and an agreed way forward.

**Outputs / activities How does Council in partnership with local communities do this?**
- Development of broadly supported LAP
- Commitment to work collaboratively to implement the LAP
- Partnerships and actions identified

**Issues / needs What are the priority outcomes within the strategic plan that need to be achieved/implemented within this particular area?**
- How can the village be strengthened and enhanced

Figure 2 – City of Sydney action planning process

In developing a consultative approach for the local action planning process the Council adopted a collaborative and communicative approach to planning (Habermas 1985, Healey 1996, Healey 1997). In developing community ownership, important consideration was given to the openness and accountability of the community engagement process. The participatory framework sought to create a constructive and pragmatic learning and consultation environment to build upon existing community assets and reach a workable and acceptable consensus around projects, policy and programs (City of Sydney, 2007a). Within the consultative environment, the planner’s primary function was to listen to people’s stories and assist in forging a consensus out of the myriad of viewpoints. Throughout 2006 extensive community engagement was carried out by the City of Sydney through methods aimed at obviating both breadth and depth of input via techniques such as community meetings, focus groups, and workshops with the community in each village to identify the communities’ ideas and aspirations for protecting and building on the characteristics of their neighbourhoods/villages and lifestyles (City of Sydney, 2007a). Consultation was tailored to suit the specific needs of each area and each individual
local community. The wide-ranging list of suggested improvements were categorised into “three major
categories – renewal, cultural diversity and liveability” (City of Sydney, 2007 inside cover).

Whilst the local action planning process had been clearly located in relation to the strategic plan, there
was also a need to develop an understanding of the program’s place within The City of Sydney’s
broader operational framework. The local action planning process and plans were understood as
forming a set of considerations to guide Council’s operations in particular areas (villages and
neighbourhoods). In the early stages the local action planning process was understood as a process
that would sit alongside the following operations: capital works and infrastructure, service delivery,
community development/social capital, city planning, and public participation. It was expected that
over time the local action planning process would start to provide greater guidance about the direction
of some of these operations at the local level. However, it was also important that the local action
planning process did not stand in the way of the City of Sydney performing the business of delivering
projects, developing policy and providing community services. Where activities were already planned
it was agreed that they would be incorporated into the outputs of the local action planning process
where possible. It was noted that it might not be within the Council’s capacity to address all of the
matters raised within the local action planning process. Where an issue did fall outside of the
jurisdiction of the City of Sydney and its operational capacity, Council agreed to advocate on behalf of
the interests of communities to the relevant authority (City of Sydney, 2007a).

Case study two – Penrith City Council: Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal and Established Area
local action planning process

Since early 2001 Penrith City Council has been using the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program
(PNRP) Action Planning Process to address growing disadvantage within a handful of neighbourhoods
within the Penrith Local Government Area (LGA). The foundation for the local action planning process
lay in the last few strategic plans developed for Penrith City. As part of the development of the
Council’s 2000–2004 Strategic Plan (2005), the Council identified the increasing disparity between
the infrastructure and services available to support local communities in the older established suburbs of
the LGA compared to that available in the release areas developed since the 1980’s. These areas, as
with many other areas within the Penrith LGA that were developed prior to the 1980’s, were facing
aging infrastructure, development pressures, increased strain on existing services and facilities and
changing demographics. Unlike new release areas that have access to Section 94 funding, these
areas were dependent on Council intervention and resources, possibly in conjunction with State
agencies, for their regeneration. Within its 2000–2004 Strategic Plan (2005) Council identified the
longer-term objective of: “Achiev[ing] equitable provision of services and facilities across the City, with
special consideration to disadvantaged areas [within city’s established areas (those built prior to the
1980s)]” (Penrith City Council, 2000). During the early years of the program there was a shift from an
initial focus on the repair and maintenance of physical infrastructure to the management of social
issues. This shift was viewed by many of the program’s stakeholders as a positive move towards a
more holistic approach to the strengthening of disadvantaged communities that addressed both
physical and social aspects of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In 2002/2003 Council identified the
need to accelerate the Penrith Community Safety and Neighbourhood Renewal Program (as the
program was then called) funded by an additional rate increase of 4.8% for 10 years. Within the
2005–2009 Strategic Plan Council maintained its commitment to the action planning process for
disadvantaged neighbourhoods within established areas through an objective specifically aimed at the
“renewal for selected neighbourhoods that contributes to a sense of community identity and
cohesiveness” (Penrith City Council, 2005, 7). This objective comprises one of a group of objectives
which are aimed at achieving the Council’s vision of social justice:

“Seek[ing] to secure social well being by being alert when designing its programs to issues of
social justice and by championing the city’s case to others” (Penrith city Council, 2005, 6).

Underlying this vision for the city is the notion of a ‘just city’ (Harvey, 1973, Harvey 1992). In its more
radical sense, the audience for ‘just city’ endeavours have been urban social movements. For these
movements a ‘just city’ results from mobilizing a public rather than prescribing a methodology to those
in office. During the heyday of mass urban renewal and the cruelties of mass clearance carried out as
part of these renewal programs, the mobilisation of social movement driven in opposition to top-down,
expert-driven planning, and the business and political interests which constitute the power base,
engendered the review of approaches to urban renewal. The lessons learnt have influenced a
generation of planners and councillors who support programs that aim to empower those who have
previously been excluded from power, through promoting an active citizenry, strengthening community
well being and reducing the causes of disadvantage and exclusion. This approach takes an explicitly
normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits: social justice is about access to the same rights and services for all citizens. The program represents one policy framework and action planning process through which Council strives to build a just and inclusive city.

Whereas the City of Sydney’s action planning process is aimed at being all-inclusive and uses consultative processes to achieve that, the PNRP action planning process in adopting a ‘just city’ planning approach makes a special effort to empower those people who had previously been excluded from power and develops close partnerships with disadvantaged communities rather than just communication through consultation. Since 2001 Council has developed the action planning process to promote more integrated forms of governance involving NSW government agencies, the affected communities, local businesses and Council, to regenerate the most disadvantaged established neighbourhoods within the Penrith LGA commencing with initiatives in Cranebrook, Werrington/Cambridge Park in 2001 and a further initiative in North St Marys in 2002.

In developing the program’s framework, stakeholders stressed the importance of utilising a ‘bottom up’ approach to attain a truly integrated governance framework for each place-based intervention, which enabled the collaboration with, and empowerment of, the local community, and was grounded and informed by community involvement during planning, design, implementation and review. It was agreed that disadvantage within specific geographical locations was most effectively achieved by building on existing strengths within those localities. One of the main aims in developing this underpinning for the program was a shift away from a needs-based (deficit) approach to a strength building approach, building on existing social, cultural and economic capital within a neighbourhood and that the program’s implementation should be designed to enhance those strengths.

Figure 3 – Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program action planning process
As part of an evaluation of the program in 2004 Council brought together the program stakeholders (agencies, NGO’s, community representatives and organisations from the program’s existing place-based initiatives, and local enterprise) through workshops and working groups to develop a framework for the program. A hierarchy of outcomes approach similar to that of City of Sydney involving three steps in a causal chain from immediate outcome, to intermediate to ultimate outcome, was developed (see figure 3). This sought to target particular established neighbourhoods with the immediate intent of developing positive partnerships, the intermediate intent of building on existing community strengths to redress disadvantage, and the ultimate goal of redressing localised disadvantaged and creating a more ‘just city’. Whilst both action planning processes worked through a hierarchy of outcomes from collaboration with community, moving through to strengthening those communities, and ending with the achievement of the visions founded in the strategic plans, they also differed considerably. The immediate and intermediate goal of the PNRP action planning process was to work extremely closely with disadvantaged communities and develop partnerships with those disadvantaged communities with the ultimate aim of strengthening those disadvantaged communities to create a more equitable distribution of social capital across the city. The immediate goal of the City of Sydney action planning process was to work with all communities in an equitable fashion, with the intermediate goal of having their input and commitment to the overall planning process of the city with particular input into their own area, and the ultimately goal of supporting and enhancing the uniqueness of their villages.

In developing a supportive environment for the program, the development of the formal program framework discussed above (see figure 3) only represented half the equation for the Council. The second half was to ensure the framework could be supported within the Council’s operational structure, given that the Council was to function as the program’s driver or steward. The inability to create a supportive operational environment for the program was identified as a key stumbling block within the early years of the program. The rigid organisational structures of Council were seen to be impeding the innovative program delivery required to address disadvantaged neighbourhoods within established areas of the city. The program had been the responsibility of one of Council’s functional areas, ‘City Operations’. The reasonability for the fulfilment of program goals was the responsibility of the director of city operations in the first instance, and the day-to-day operation of the program was the responsibility of a series of council officers who were responsible for a variety of other tasks. Two key issues impeded the program’s success: there was no direct allocation of officers who could pay adequate attention to the program, and the program was placed within one functional area of Council while such functions as social planning were in another, undermining program’s effective operation and limiting its ability to provide ‘joined-up’ solutions.

Beyond the need for better resourcing for the program (made possible through the provision of a dedicated program coordinator, consultation expert and enterprise worker) it was clear that the creation of a supportive operational structure for the program required the dissolving of boundaries between functional service areas within the existing operational structure. The division of services into separate departments reinforced professional boundaries and impeded the implementation of ‘joined-up’ solutions to delivering services to specific localities, which was the core task of the program. The dissolving of these boundaries was seen as essential to providing ‘joined-up’ approaches through an integration of land use, economic and social planning. At the time Council turned its attention to creating a more support operational environment, it was undergoing an internal reorganisation of its entire operational structure. This reorganization was conducive to creating a supportive environment for the program as Council was exploring an approach to governance based on the notion of clusters, within which the program was linked to the Social Equity and Established areas cluster that focused on ‘joined-up’ solutions to the management of established areas within the city (see figure 4).

In determining the placement of the action planning process within Council’s operation framework, considerable discussions were raised within Council regarding the linkages between the particular focus of the PNRP and the established areas within the Penrith LGA and the broader embellishment of the Penrith LGA given the Council’s formal charter of responding to all residents within the LGA. Whilst it was generally agreed that the intense level of coordination and focus that the PNRP brought to disadvantaged neighbourhoods was not required in each of the established areas of the Penrith LGA, it was agreed that there was a need to develop another related action planning process with a less intense focus than that of the PNRP action planning process, and similar in a way to the City of Sydney’s action planning process, needed to be developed for established neighbourhoods that were not subject to the intensive intervention of the PNRP action planning process. It was agreed that many of the public domain, infrastructure maintenance and community development issues identified in established areas could be addressed through the development of this new Established Neighbourhoods action planning process. This proposed action planning process was intended to respond primarily to infrastructure, amenity issues and community well being with the PNRP action
planning process complementing the Established Neighbourhoods action planning process by bringing an additional level of coordination including social and economic/employment development programs to selected established areas which were identified as having the greatest need for such services. The relationship between these two programs is represented in figure 4 below.

Both programs signal a move towards place management of the LGA, a management system that encouraged Council to engage more fully with local communities, identifying local issues and solutions in conjunction with the community, then coordinate and drive improvements to benefit the community and the LGA. The implementation of both programs also required Council to assess their current level of servicing to established areas to ensure equity of access and delivery across these areas. Many of the principles adopted within the policy framework, such as community engagement and completion strategies were seen as transferable to the Established Areas Program action planning process. Both programs should also be understood as one key element of the broader cluster place management framework which Council is currently developing to manage and maintain Penrith LGA (see figure 4).

Figure 4, Penrith neighbourhood Renewal action planning process in the context of Penrith City Council’s operational structure

Conclusion

The action planning processes described in this article embrace more inclusive outlooks for local governments and the communities they govern. They represent a move from purely ‘top-down’ planning by experts to the formation of a planning approach that embraces participation and collaboration in which the planner’s role is to mediate among “stakeholders” and develop more diverse ‘grounded’ outcomes for strategic planning processes. Where earlier planning approaches posit a unitary public interest, these more recent action planning processes place difference and heterogeneity in the foreground, offering what may be regarded as a more appealing prospect for the future. The City of Villages action planning process, in utilising a communicative planning approach, evades the issue of universalism and introduces an approach which allows communities to shape the places in which they live: by utilising a new urbanist foundation the process incorporates diversity by providing involvement in the development of urban form that is aimed at stimulating neighbourliness, community involvement, and subjective feelings of integration with one’s environment. In its effort to create a more ‘just city’ for all within Penrith City, the Penrith neighbourhood renewal program action planning process creates a planning environment that encourages participation in decision making by disadvantaged communities and supports those disadvantaged communities in the strengthening of their social and economic capital to bring them to an equitable level with other members of the
community. In embracing this approach Council creates a more pluralistic, cooperative, and decentralized approach to community capacity building. It is worth noting that whilst these processes utilise methods that have emerged as part of the critique of the earlier system, they also encompass many parts of the earlier planning practices and systems, most notably both been embedded within the Council’s strategic planning processes.

These emerging action planning processes should not be faulted for their ideals of openness, inclusiveness and diversity. However, there are some ways in which these processes can encounter difficulties, and are limited, which are worth noting. Firstly, vulnerability lies in a tendency for participatory processes based on communicative processes to substitute moral exhortation for analysis. When speech becomes the objective of planning, the argument can take a moralistic tone, and its proponents forget the economic and social forces that produce endemic social conflict and domination by the powerful. With the cases of the City of Sydney and Penrith City this concern in my view centres on the fact that the processes themselves are founded on new urbanism objectives and ‘just city’ objectives which make the process vulnerable to the accusation that its participatory processes are limited by a pre-existing image of the city, ones that many people may find objectionable and that limit the explanatory process that could emerge from a more open beginning.

Secondly, these local action planning processes should be recognised as not being the only process that can be used to govern the city and determine the actions that will guide its future. Consideration should also be given to the fact that ideas can give rise to social movements outside of council that also play a role in the governance of the city and, in turn, change its consciousness, ultimately resulting in the adoption of new public policy. These processes cannot be obtained through the types of negotiation and consensus building among stakeholders that forms the foundations of the local action planning processes discussed in this paper.

A third issue within the local action planning process arises in the potential conflict between the aims of these communicative planning approaches and the outcomes of these processes if planning is conducted within narrow spatial boundaries. The familiar spectre of ‘not in my backyard’ approach raises its head whenever participation is restricted to a socially homogeneous area such as a ‘village’ or ‘neighbourhood’. Whilst the processes are based on equity and diversity, there is a likelihood that the outcome of stakeholder participation within villages and neighbourhoods could lead to a ‘not in my backyard’ isolationist approach. This is not so much a problem for the City of Sydney process given that it is aimed at consulting across the villages at the same time as consulting within them. The Sydney process incorporates components of across city engagement to encompass diversity of class, race, and ethnicity and escape the homogeneity imposed by spatial segregation.

A fourth issue within the local action planning processes is that participatory processes built about consensus building can lead to a strengthening of the power elite if consideration is not given to providing resource to bolster the involvement of those not so empowered by providing access to resources, including access to expertise and effective organization. Planners using communicative and consultative processes probably would not deny the importance of these resources, but neither do they dwell on them. This omission constitutes the fundamental weakness of such processes and is an argument taken up by those planners who utilise the equity model - or ‘just city’ model – for planning practice. On this note some consideration should be given to the way in which such frameworks as new urbanism can contribute to inequity. As Harvey (1997) notes the problem lies in the fact that the image of community perpetuated by new urbanism disregards ‘the darker side’ of communitarianism. As he notes the enforced conformity of community, especially one developed through consensus, can block the creativity arising from diversity and conflict. This dilemma results from the two-edged quality of community which, in providing emotional sustenance to its members, necessarily excludes others. In concluding this paper it is worth noting that the City of Sydney process in combining the new urbanism with communicative participatory processes, overcomes the problems which have traditionally been inherent in both. The most interesting aspect of the new urbanism is that community easily understands its assurance of a better quality of life. Communicative planning provides the community with a tool to access and input into new urbanism which has traditionally been the realm of expert planners, urban designers and architects.

References


