

# UNHEARD STORIES, UNMENT EXPECTATIONS

## The Failure of Planning

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Once Upon at Time, Planning was...

Once upon a time in the Land of Oz, planning involved professional planners who used their multi-disciplinary knowledge to develop strategies and design the communities in which we live. Nowadays, planners attempt to balance “the built and natural environment, community needs, cultural significance and economic sustainability” (PIA, n.d.). Early Australian planning sought to bring together the best of both the urban space and English country life (Sandercock, 1990). These early planners were also those that felt that physical arrangements of low-density urban areas would lead to the building of community and improve social integration (Sandercock, 1990). In order to accomplish this, planners historically cleared forests, filled in or otherwise contaminated rivers and leveled hills and mountains in order to build cities and towns (Campbell, 1996). In the early 1990's, however, several ‘sets’ of realization took hold and new phenomena, such as economic planning and the rise of environmental enthusiasm became increasingly incorporated into urban planning (Campbell, 1996).

Equally, planners have previously followed an almost prescriptive or scientific approach to planning during the modernist period. Planning was seen as a technical profession, where strict analytical planning following Patrick Geddes’ Survey-Analysis-Plan was the way (Hajer et al., 2010). In this ‘style’ of planning, scientific knowledge and the ‘planner as an expert’ were paramount. There are still a large number of practicing planners who were trained in this manner.

More recently, there seems to have been a shift away from planners and their technical planning to a situation where politicians have taken over much of the direction and control of planning. In many cases, the final decision on a plan or development rests with a State Government Minister. In Queensland, the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning may use ‘call-in’ powers under the *Sustainable Planning Act (2009)* to decide a planning application. These decisions have only limited appeal rights (EDO, 2011). Other major developments in Queensland are approved by a separate corporate entity, the Coordinator-General. However, the Coordinator-General has legislated “wide ranging powers to promote economic and social development and job opportunities through coordinating and implementing large scale projects and developments” (DEEDI, 2011). [After machinery of government changes in Queensland in February 2011, the Office of the Coordinator-General was moved from the Department of Local Government and Planning to the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. Some web links have not yet been upgraded to reflect these changes.. In New South Wales, Part 3A of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act (1979)* allowed the Minister for planning to make the final decision, taking away the ability of the local government and communities to decide on specific plans and projects. Even with the changes made by the current government, the Minister still has the power to make decisions. This is by no means only an Australian phenomenon, previously, in the Netherlands, the planning Minister had the final say, usually imposing his or her preference (Hajer et al., 2010).

This trend towards the politicization of planning and development has left both the community and the technically capable planners out of the loop. The stories that planners have in the past heard from communities about the directions they would like to see taken are now falling on deaf ears. Many planners are no longer going out into the communities to hear their stories, instead relying on the few that may be received through “consultation” once a plan or development proposal has already been developed. Where there are strong stories, they may only be heard or acknowledged after the fact. When it counts most, during the *development* of a plan or proposal, they are unheard.

This paper will outline, particularly from the community perspective the problems with planning shifting from planners to politicians and away from the balance between planners, politicians and community

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that it should be. First we will discuss the idea of strong stories and how these stories become unheard stories or general narratives. We will then discuss the impact strong stories and unheard stories have on planning, briefly providing some Australian examples of strong stories and also unheard stories and the meeting of expectations. We will conclude with the consequences of unheard stories and unmet expectations in planning and what planning may be able to do about them.

### **STRONG STORIES AND UNHEARD STORIES**

#### **Strong Stories**

Each of these three ‘pillars’ – planners, politicians (or administrators) and civil society (the community) have a story or a narrative for how they see a particular area should be developed (for example). Each of these stories on their own could be dismissed as simply a single person or entity’s point of view. However, when all three of these pillars’ stories are intertwined, this becomes a clear vision (or a strong story) for a particular area.

According to Hajer et al., (2010) strong stories are the intertwined narratives that planners, politicians and civil society collectively agree on to move spatial planning forward. Hajer et al. (2010) further suggest that without strong stories there cannot be any successful planning – planning needs vision from *shared* stories to turn them into strong stories. This suggests that planners and politicians need to involve the community early in the planning process so that their stories are included in the development of a particular plan.

Despite government, planners and politicians using such buzzwords as engagement, community engagement, Engaging Queenslanders, among others, there is very little actual engagement or participation happening or seemingly allowed. Behind this façade of engagement, we find that there is simply “consultation”. In the case of the Queensland State Government, Department of Local Government and Planning, they offer “The following consultations provide an opportunity for the community, industry and organisations to comment on proposed changes.” (DLGP, 2011). This site demonstrates that the State Government politicians have already developed a plan (either their own or developed by State Government planners, so that the plan then only has two ‘pillars’ of a strong story. [Having experienced working in the Queensland State Government, often the Minister has already decided the precise, specific policy or plan that is to be implemented, often only in conjunction with their advisors. Their department is simply tasked with implementing the policy or plan. In other cases, the department develops a suite of options for a particular policy or plan for the Minister. This depends on how a particular Minister operates.]. Civil society is invited to comment on these plans, however they have had no opportunity to share their stories in the development. It is questionable as to whether their stories, commenting on plans after they have been developed are actually incorporated. There is no mechanism for feedback to civil society members detailing how their comments have been dealt with. This is where potentially strong stories from/that include civil society become unheard stories.

Again, the same may be said for Brisbane City Council (BCC). The BCC allows for formal submissions to be made with respect to development applications and city or local plans. These submissions must be formally written, stating whether the submitter supports or opposes the application or plan and the reasons for their position (BCC, 2011a). This does not allow civil society to share their stories where they could make the most impact in the form of a vision – when the plan or application is being developed. This method not only brings into question whether their stories have even been heard, but also as Young (2000) and Klinger and Cosgrove (1999) note, also privileges those that are able to communicate well in argumentative writing and disadvantaging those members of civil society who have similarly valid views, but require different ways to express themselves.

#### **Unheard Stories**

What happens when one or more threads or pillars of strong stories aren’t heard or the stories themselves remain untold? Simply, they become what we call unheard stories. These unheard stories may emerge from any one of the politicians, planners or civil society pillars, however this paper will focus on the unheard stories from the civil society and community perspective. Several examples will be introduced below to illustrate both how positive the use of strong stories can be, as well as the impact of unheard stories.

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We present two examples of where strong stories have demonstrated that they contributed positively to successful planning. First is the Gold Coast Waterfuture planning process. Between 2004 and 2006, the Gold Coast City Council undertook a deliberative participatory process where representatives of a large section of the Gold Coast community were invited to develop a 50 year water plan for the Gold Coast, in conjunction with local political representatives and local and state government water and planning experts. After two years of dialogue, a plan was developed between all three 'pillars' required for a strong story, and unanimously adopted by Gold Coast City Council. This was a shared vision between the local council, civil society and planners and experts on how to manage water security for the next 50 years in the face of changing climatic conditions and increasing population and economic activity on the Gold Coast.

The second example where it is possible to see a strong story around planning is again on the Gold Coast. This time in 2008, Gold Coast City Council convened a community advisory committee which included elected representatives from the local council, community members and planning experts. With extensive input from individual community members as well, the committee developed the Gold Coast Bold Future, a high level strategic plan that aims to provide a clear and commonly held vision for the future of the city; an action plan to achieve this vision; an integrated approach to strategy and planning and an ongoing adaptive management and community engagement framework for the city (Gold Coast City Council, 2009: 11). This idea came out of a desire to address ongoing economic, climatic and resource changes happening on the Gold Coast. With a long history of community engagement, the Gold Coast City Council was open to exploring this idea of community visioning (Gold Coast City Council, 2009).

It would appear that where there has been a lack of foresight on the part of administrators to plan in advance for issues that have been apparent for some time, there is a tendency to do away with strong stories. As Klein, (2007) notes, the best time to force through unpalatable solutions, policies or plans is during a crisis. Several times in the past few years, Queensland politicians have used this method to deal with the lack of planning using strong stories, giving the perception that they are doing something to resolve the crisis.

There is some recent evidence to suggest that politicians and/or planners individually or collectively have used the moniker of crisis to forge ahead with the planning process without including the third pillar of strong stories, the community. Planning has often been taken over by political forces, for example, the South East Queensland (SEQ) Regional Plan in October 2010 had no mention of three additional urban developments, Yarabilba, Greater Flagstone and Ripley Valley, that were announced by Queensland premier Anna Bligh on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 2010 to address the "sudden" realization that SEQ would require 150 000 new dwellings in the next 30 years. These newly announced urban developments were not even within the designated urban footprint in the SEQ Regional Plan (Low Choy, 2011), taking away land from other designated uses (including agriculture) without civil society being able to contribute their stories.

Again, recently, there have been other instances of unheard stories in planning. In two cases in Brisbane, the State Government and the BCC have or are attempting to ignore or stifle the stories from civil society. In one case in Brisbane's inner west, in the suburb of Milton, a local community group has been pushing to have a development application approved by BCC suspended by the State Government as it does not comply with the existing local neighbourhood plan. In addition, the community claims that their concerns about flooding and impact on traffic and infrastructure did not seem to have been heard by either level of government. With this in mind, the community has appealed the approval to the Land and Environment Court so that their stories may be heard, however, the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning is threatening to use his call-in powers to stop the appeal (Hurst & Trenwith, 2010). Residents simply do not want to be ignored in decisions about how their community looks and is developed. Using call-in powers to approve the project would allow it to go ahead without any possibility of appeal (Hurst & Trenwith, 2010; EDO, 2011).

A second case, this time on the south side of Brisbane, residents in a unique, 'bohemian' inner city suburb object to a 30-storey apartment building to be built in the middle of the suburb under the Riverside Neighbourhood Plan (Calligeros, 2011). While this height of building may be allowed under the Riverside Neighbourhood Plan, when the draft plan was opened for submissions, approximately 96% of all submissions received were against allowing buildings of this height in the West End suburb

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(Calligeros, 2011). This would appear to be a prominent example of the stories told by the community going unheard by planners and politicians at Brisbane City Council.

Taking a step back in time, back to the Gold Coast Waterfuture strong story, a 'dragon' of sorts, in the form of a 'crisis' announced by the State Government, appeared and put an end to this strong story. In 2006, the Queensland State Government (Peter Beattie, Premier) announced that to ensure water security, the newly announced Queensland Water Commission would be taking over control of the supply and distribution of water in South East Queensland from local councils (State of Queensland, 2006). The State Government would take this over so that there would no longer be any mismanagement, critical infrastructure would be completed on time and uniform water restrictions could be imposed across the region (McKenna & Wahlquist, 2006). While the local politicians, community and planners on the Gold Coast said "Not to worry, we are still the customers and the new entity will have to listen to their customers", the dragon simply breathed fire. In other words, the State Government decided that the strong story created on the Gold Coast, was simply the wrong one. The dragon took away the Gold Coast's water assets, built a desalination plant before its time and thought nothing more of it. Yet, much of this strong story was incorporated into the South East Queensland Water Strategy, by that very same dragon.

Interestingly, in 2011, the dragon, as dragons sometimes do, realized that devastating local council water delivery and infrastructure might have been wrong, and in early April, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh announced that the State Government had made a mistake in taking over water supply and distribution from the local councils, and if local councils wanted, they could go back to the structures they had previously. This result did not happen without the State Government from twisting some of the background, and stating that the State Government was undoing these 'reforms' because civil society needed to be protected from local councils, and by undoing these reforms, local councils could be held directly accountable.

### **UNMET EXPECTATIONS**

What happens once these stories become unheard stories? They often create unmet expectations on the part of the community or civil society in general. When there are unmet expectations, there are a number of subtle and not-so-subtle things that happen: Lost of trust by the community; loss of legitimacy; and loss of community buy-in.

#### **Loss of Trust**

Trust is one of the 'factors' that can be severely impacted by unheard stories turning into unmet expectations. Trust is a state of being whereby one party takes a 'risk' beyond normal circumstances with another party, believing that their positive expectations about this risk will be met (Kasperson et al., 1992; Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005). Predominantly, people use their previous experiences with a particular person or entity to make an almost complete decision as to whether their positive expectations will be met. This information is also a factor in determining whether they will take 'a leap of faith' (increasing their risk temporarily to have their positive expectation met) and actually trust. When we look at several of the examples above, civil society's experience with planners, politicians and administrators does not appear to be what they expect. In the two examples from the Gold Coast, however, overall civil society's expectations were met.

In both cases, on one hand where there is trust and on the other mistrust, both can still be used to shape government and society (Möllering, 2001). Where there is mistrust, governments and society need to realize that mistakes have been made, and changes to their approaches need to be made so that increasing mistrust is not an on-going phenomena. In the Gold Coast examples, a strong form of trust was developed between civil society and the local authorities (Edwards, 2009) because of the way that the planning process was undertaken, including stories from planners, politicians and civil society to create strong stories. In the Brisbane examples, it would be difficult to find even the lowest level of trust amongst actors, as control methods (i.e. written plans or contracts) appear to be ignored rather than go through the proper process to amend them.

Where trust is to be built at all, strong trust can only be built where there are appropriate engagement practices, not simply consultation. Being able to communicate views, reflect and understand all perspectives while working towards a consensus outcome is part of developing strong trust. Engaging

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with others, both in a 'work' setting and a more social setting is key to building relationships that will eventually permit people to start a trust relationship. As we gain more information about each other in a participatory process, understanding each others' stories, we gain experience with each other, contributing to our ability to trust.

Trust may be an indicator of legitimacy, in that people that trust that political power is appropriately exercised have good grounds for compliance with a particular decision. However, when that trust is absent or withdrawn, legitimacy may also be absent or withdrawn.

### Problems with legitimacy

Legitimacy is often considered to have two aspects – the legitimacy of inputs and the legitimacy of outputs. Legitimacy of input is obtained by involving parties who are confronted with the consequences of decisions and legitimacy of output is obtained from the quality of the outcome, be it a plan or policy (Hajer et al., 2010). There is a third area of legitimacy that is tangentially brought up in the work of Edwards, (2009) and stated explicitly by Hajer et al., (2010): Throughput legitimacy, where the way in which the plan is made influences whether it is legitimate or not. There are two factors in throughput legitimacy – inclusivity and binding outcomes on decision-makers.

In a number of the examples above, there are some aspects of legitimacy present, primarily output legitimacy. There are two exceptions to this – the Gold Coast Waterfuture and Bold Future processes. In both of these examples, we can see all three aspects of legitimacy are present. The community, including young people, being part of the process to develop the plan was exposed to the potential consequences of all options that went into the plans, both in the short and long term. This allowed the participants, including the planners and politicians to reflect on each option carefully before agreeing to either include or discard it in the end. The open, democratic, participatory process that both of these plans embraced allow us to conclude that there is throughput legitimacy present as well. Output legitimacy is also present – the quality of the Gold Coast Waterfuture plan was explicitly praised by the Water Services Association of Australia (the peak national body for water service providers in Australia) as well as implicitly by the Queensland Water Commission by including numerous elements of it in the SEQ Water Strategy.

In the other examples however, there appears to only be the possibility that output legitimacy is present. In all of these examples, output legitimacy may be claimed in that all of these plans or developments increase density in Brisbane, and contribute to the need for over 150 000 new residences in South East Queensland in the next 30 years. However, both input and throughput legitimacy are lacking, due to the absence of civil society and their contribution towards strong stories. Horlick-Jones et al., (2006: 272) outline several ideas around participatory redesign that encompass ideas of transparency, including being "*transparent* to both those involved and interested parties; specified *well-defined tasks*; run in an *independent and unbiased way*; *inclusive* of all relevant views ... [with] *sufficient resources* with which to achieve ... objectives; and *effective and fair dialogue*."

Where members of civil society have been engaged or invited to contribute through submissions, they believe that it is legitimate for them to 'question' the implementation of a project or plan because they were invited to put forward their beliefs and still believe that some consideration of their input must happen. This can be elaborated further using Beetham's (1991) ideas around consent and legitimacy. On one hand, authorities, by opening up the planning process (no matter how narrow an opening) consent to civil society having their say and thereby confer legitimacy on civil society to ensure their voices are heard. Conversely, civil society consents to authorities hearing their voices and thereby *lends* legitimacy, but only until the authorities demonstrate that civil society voices have not actually been heard and legitimacy is lost.

Habermas provides an appropriate summary here. He states that any crisis in legitimacy can be traced to a lack of transparency in socio-political processes (Misztal, 1996). Where there is simply consultation and a distinct lack of transparency in whether or how civil society's stories are heard, there appears a lack of legitimacy.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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In many disciplines, the idea of engagement, trust legitimacy and participatory democracy are already well developed. Planning, as a profession needs to embrace the work that has already been done and adapt it to the urban and planning context. It is crucial for planners to understand this, as they are often seen as the interface between communities and political leaders.

Planners and politicians also need to stop and revisit what we consider a fundamental piece of literature in planning – Arnstein's 1969 Ladder of participation. Starting from the bottom rungs, Arnstein (1969) notes that manipulation and therapy are non-participation; the next three rungs, informing, consultation and placation are tokenism; while the top rungs are true citizen power, encompassing partnership, delegated power and citizen control. While local and state governments claim to be engaging civil society in planning, they are simply on the fourth rung of the ladder – consultation. Arnstein, (1969) notes that this is still tokenism – the community is allowed to have a voice, but they lack any power to ensure that their views will be incorporated: another unheard story. It is once we get to at least the sixth rung of the ladder, partnership, where developing strong stories together, planners, politicians and civil society have a partnership to *develop* and implement plans.

Due to its nature, true engagement is much more easily accomplished at a local level. In this context, if State Governments are to be involved in planning issues, they should be setting a broad policy framework that allows local councils some flexibility to plan and design for both their local context and the overall needs of the state or country. Not all 'Queenslanders', for example, are homogenous. Within Queensland there are many unique and different people, groups and cultures spread throughout the state. It is at the local level then, that effective participatory engagement can then be undertaken, allowing the largest number of groups to have their interests represented. The quality of engagement is then assessed on the quality of the process, the extent to which groups have their interests represented and the extent to which broader social goals have been achieved (Beierle & Konisky, 2000).

The examples described herein, while on the surface may not seem too serious or worthy of study, however, they all represent issues that are set to increase in importance in a future with climate change. Managing our water resources in anticipated times of drought, locating housing and new town centres where there is low risk of flooding and ensuring that there are effective public transport routes are all key concerns in the climate and planning dialogue. Palutikof, (2010) reminds us that Australia is on the 'frontline' of climate adaptation due to its unique features (e.g. water scarcity) and is already showing signs of mal-adaptive responses. These mal-adaptive responses (i.e. desalination plants) have a good chance of being avoided or at least mitigated through ensuring that strong stories are heard and used in planning.

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