

Defining the inevitable: micro-practices of strategic spatial planning

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Abstract: This paper is a contribution to understanding the elements that shape strategic planning practice. It uses a practice-based approach to describe and understand strategic planning. In Australia micro-practices have tended to be overlooked in discussions of strategic planning. The focus has been on the macro-level outcomes of the plans and their implementation. In contrast, in this paper, I examine the micro elements of the practice: the rules, shared understandings, and structures. Specifically, I examine the elements of practice related to time and to the need to demonstrate 'difference' and argue that these rules, shared understandings, and structures enabled and constrained certain activities. The paper is based on close scrutiny of the practices of a planning team preparing a strategic spatial plan for Sydney, Australia. It is drawn from interviews with team members and the observation of their daily practice. The author was a participant in the planning practice and the paper is therefore a form of 'insider research'.

Introduction

This paper applies a 'practice theoretical' approach to strategic planning, focusing on the preparation over a four year period of a single plan, the strategic plan for metropolitan Sydney. I have adopted the practice approach as a way to extend the literature on strategic planning practice by emphasising the importance of 'micro' elements of the practice, rather than the macro-level outcomes of the plans and their implementation. This approach can deepen our understanding of what it means for planners to be *doing* strategic planning. For example, the path dependency of Australian strategic planning (Bunker 2012) has been explained by reference to macro forces; this paper aims to show that particular strategic planning practices are also the result of much more immediate and micro concerns.

I will start the paper by outlining the theoretical approach, which is based on Schatzki's practice theory. I will then describe the methodological approach of the paper. Although I use many of the traditional qualitative methods – interviews, participant observation, and analysis of texts – the research is based on a very specific position: I was an 'insider', a member of the team that prepared the strategic plan that is the subject of this paper. I will describe some of the ethical and methodological issues related to 'insider research'. I will then describe the elements of the 'practice', including background to the preparation of 'A Plan for Growing Sydney' (Department of Planning & Environment 2014). All descriptions of practice are 'slices' of social life (Schatzki 2011) and my 'slice' focuses on two issues: time and the need to demonstrate 'difference', particularly through the materiality of the plan as 'document'. I conclude by making some observations about the value of a practice approach to understanding what it means to 'be strategic'.

Theoretical background

This paper is a contribution to the literature describing detailed accounts of planning practice from the practitioners' perspective (Forester 1988, Healey 1992, Innes 1995, Forester 1999). It supports the argument that 'fully contextualized stories of planning practice' (Watson 2002, p.185) are the 'raw material' (Innes 1995, p.183) for planning theory. I argue, though, that there is a bias, particularly in the Australian planning literature, towards the structural and institutional elements at the expense of the equally important micro-practices. The recent 'turn' to practice approaches in the social sciences offers a productive middle way between these individualist and structuralist concerns (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001).

There are a number of versions of 'the practice theoretical approach' based on different philosophical and sociological traditions (Reckwitz 2002, Whittington 2006) but each approach is based on the notion that human co-existence unfolds through the organised activities of multiple people. The practice approach is therefore in contrast to approaches that conceive of human co-existence as either the aggregate of individual thoughts and actions, or as determined by abstract structures (Reckwitz 2002). The specific practice approach and terminology used in this paper is based on the work of American philosopher Theodore Schatzki (Schatzki 2010b, Schatzki 2011). In this section I will define the elements of Schatzki's approach.

Schatzki (2010b) argues that human co-existence ('social life') transpires through bundles of practices and material arrangements, which he calls the 'site' of the social. 'Practices' are organised bundles of 'doings and sayings' (actions). Examples of practices include political practices, teaching practices, research practice and planning practices (Schatzki 2011).

Practices are social phenomenon not only because a participant in a practice interacts with other people but also because the organisation of a practice is expressed in the 'nexus of doings and sayings that compose them, as opposed to the individual doings and sayings involved' (Schatzki 2010b, pp.87-88). There are many 'doings and sayings' that can be undertaken in the same site and at the same time. 'Doings and sayings' are linked in a practice by three things: rules, shared understandings, and end-means structures (which Schatzki calls 'teleoaffective structures'). The distinctiveness of a practice is the distinctiveness of the 'particular array of cross-referencing and interconnected' rules, shared understandings, and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki 2010, p.87).

Schatzki (2010b) defines 'rules' as 'explicit formulations, principles, precepts, and instructions that enjoin, direct, or remonstrate people to perform specific actions' (p.79). 'Shared understandings' are of two types: practical understanding and general understandings. 'Practical understandings' are the understandings about how to achieve desired actions through doings and sayings, how to do particular things, such as use a computer, cook a meal, get someone's attention, etc (Schatzki 2012, p.16). 'General understandings' are:

abstract senses, for instance, of the beauty of an artisanal product or of the nobility of educating students. They are not ends for which people strive but senses of the worth, value, nature, or place of things, which infuse and are expressed in people's doings and sayings

(Schatzki 2012, p.16)

In this paper, I concentrate on 'general understandings', although, of course, the practical understandings are formed and shaped by general understandings, and vice versa.

The third element that binds the practice together is what Schatzki (2010b) calls 'teleoaffective structures'. Teleoaffective structures are ends, projects and tasks that are normative and hierarchically ordered. The projects, tasks and ends 'seem' right when performed as part of the practice, as though they ought to fit into it. As Schatzki says:

A practice always exhibits a set of ends that participants should or may pursue, a range of projects that they should or may carry out for the sake of the ends, and a selection of tasks that they should or may perform for the sake of those projects

(Schatzki 2010b, p.80)

Teleoaffective structures typically signify what it is acceptable to do. Teleoaffective structures are the property of a practice rather than of the actors performing the task; they are the 'recurring and evolving effects of what actors do together' (Schatzki 2010b, p.81).

The other element to the bundles is material arrangements. Material arrangements are the 'entities significant to humans through which their lives hang together' (Schatzki 2010a, p.129): 'linked people, organisms, artifacts, and things of nature' (Schatzki 2011, p.4). In this paper I focus on rules, shared understandings, and teleoaffective structures, but I will discuss two elements of material arrangements: the materiality of the plan as printed document and the people involved in its production.

Methodology

My paper uses qualitative methods. It is based on a combination of interviews and participant observation. The personal participation in the activities described in this paper makes this research a form of 'insider research'. In this section I will briefly describe the general methodological issues of the research and address the specific methodological and ethical issues of insider research.

My interviews were with the planners employed by the NSW Department of Planning to prepare the

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metropolitan strategy for Sydney. The interviews occurred just after the release of the 2013 exhibited draft while the final plan was being prepared. Eight of the ten planners were interviewed. This included a senior executive, a team manager, two team leaders, and team members.

The interview questions were open seeking to gain a narrative description of the process of preparing a plan. I did not ask questions specifically related to the practice. I have used the transcripts approved by the interviewees. In reporting the interviews in this paper I have anonymised the participants, referring to each by a specific letter of the alphabet. The participants represented a range of team roles but I have not indicated these differences. While this obscures the power differences within the team and does not address the 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker 1967), I have used this approach to retain anonymity because the team was small and it would be easy to identify specific individuals.

I also reviewed the exhibited draft and final plans and the consultation reports and supporting documents. Any details of the process after the interviews were complete are based on publicly available media reports, the plans, and my observations of the process (I indicate when I am relying exclusively on my observations).

This overview of the practice has been developed from a specific position. I was a permanent member of the team whose practice I was researching. I worked in the team from the July 2010 through to January 2015, initially on a short term contract and then from December 2010 on a permanent basis, as a 'planning officer'. I started my research in March 2011. I was given specific themes to address in the 2010 Plan (social inclusion and social equity) but this changed as the preparation of the various plans progressed. By the time of the production of the final Plan I had responsibility for the 'environment' theme. In January 2015 I left the Department of Planning to work in another NSW government department. I was intimately involved in the process of the preparing both the 2010 and the 2015 plans.

This paper is therefore a form of 'insider research' (Brannick and Coghlan 2007, Sikes and Potts 2008). 'Insider research' is research undertaken by complete members of the organisational systems they are examining (Smyth and Holian 2008). An insider researcher continues to participate in the field after the research has been completed and this 'dual role', researcher and participant, raises a number of methodological and practical issues.

An insider researcher's immersion in the field has some advantages: access to both shared public knowledge about the field as well as access to 'routine' experiences that may be closed to or overlooked by outsiders. Insider research has been accused of lacking objectivity because of this immersion, which does not allow the 'distance' required for valid research. Discussions of insider research often focus on the problem of the researcher 'going native' (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). As well as workers or team members, insider researchers also have the role of 'researcher'. This provides access to positions and tools, such as theory, information, and formal discussions with other participants about their roles, that provide for 'distance' and 'reflectivity'. For example, I have triangulated my observations with references to the interviews and public documents.

An insider researcher therefore may have intimate access to the field and a strong emotional involvement in it, but they also have access to resources, roles, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks that provide opportunities to be 'distant' from it. I do not claim this distance is objectivity; it is the site viewed from a particular position, a position which was (as far as I know) unique in the team, the position of the 'insider researcher'.

Finally, in terms of issues of consent, my research was approved by the organisation by a letter to the head of the planning department. My colleagues were informed that I was researching strategic planning and provided consent for each interview. They were made aware that I was 'observing' our activities. I have excluded details from my observations that I considered might be confidential in terms of my employment contract and that might cause embarrassment or hurt to my colleagues, many of whom I still see in a professional capacity.

The 'site' of strategic planning

Background

Although there have been plans for the Sydney region since 1948 (Searle and Bunker 2010), this paper concentrates on the four years period from the release of the Metropolitan Plan by the NSW Labor Government to the release of 'A Plan for Growing Sydney' by the Liberal-National Government of Premier Mike Baird.

The 2010 Metropolitan Plan was released in December 2010 three months before the NSW state election in 2011. During the election campaign the opposition criticised the 2010 Metropolitan Plan as unrealistic calling it a 'glossy brochure' (Aston 2010). As an election issue, the efficacy of metropolitan strategic planning was subsumed in broader concerns about the planning system more generally and the need for 'planning reform', in particular the role of major development approvals (the so-called 'Part 3A') (Moore 2011), but there was some debate about the appropriate mix between greenfield and infill development as expressed in the Metropolitan Plan (Nichols and Moore 2011, Nichols and McKenny 2013).

In March 2011, a Liberal-National Government was elected. There was no immediate commitment to a new metropolitan strategy for Sydney. In late 2011 the government committed to reviewing the Sydney metropolitan strategy (Interview: Team Member A) and a discussion paper was released in May 2012 for one month with a commitment to prepare a new plan by the end of 2012 (Department of Planning & Environment 2014, p.1). Following the close of the exhibition, there was little publicly information about the new strategy until the release of a draft for comment in March 2013 (Harley 2013).

The government also continued to pursue its planning reform agenda. A Green Paper had been released in July 2012 and a White Paper, which provided more detail on the proposed changes, was exhibited in April 2013. Both these documents gave a greater prominence to strategic planning, including at the metropolitan region scale. The Draft Sydney Metropolitan Strategy was presented as the exemplar for this new kind of strategic document. There was public questioning of how a key component of the new planning system could be delivered before the planning legislation had passed into law and a petition requested that the preparation of the plan be delayed (REDWatch 2014).

The planning reforms stalled in November 2013 (Hasham 2013) and the Metropolitan Strategy appeared to have stalled. The Strategy was not publicly discussed by the Government and there were questions in the media (Harley 2014) and by development industry representatives (Johnson 2014) about the delay in releasing the plan. In April 2014 the state premier resigned, a new planning minister was appointed as part of a cabinet re-shuffle, the head of the planning department resigned (McKenny 2014a) and a new head of department appointed. In November 2014 the government released 'A Plan for Growing Sydney' (McKenny 2014b) as the new 'action plan for Sydney'.

A strategic planning practice

My informants told me that strategic planning was complex and 'messy' (Interview: Team Member G). Schatzki (2010b) says that the 'social' is made up of a range of bundles and overlapping practices, which form what he calls 'densely interwoven mats' (p.87). In this paper I present two threads as a way of describing the site of the social: time and the need to demonstrate 'difference'.

'We weren't given enough time'

I have used the theme of time for three reasons. Firstly, it has been suggested that manipulating time is a distinguishing feature of strategic planning (Kornberger and Clegg 2011, p.138). Secondly, time was a common theme in discussion of the Plan amongst some stakeholders: industry groups, for example, questioned the length of time it was taking to prepare the Plan (Johnson 2014). Some community groups questioned whether this was the appropriate time to prepare a new strategic plan, considering the progression of the Planning Reforms, which would change the role, format, and statutory force of strategic plans (REDWatch 2014).

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Thirdly, time was a constant theme in the interviews. Each of my informants talked about time in the 'big sense', often associated with strategic planning, such as the 'future' and the development of the city over time:

I think if you don't point out the need for a future as it looks a particular way for the city then you've lost most people's attention in terms of whether this is important or not
(Interview: Team Member E).

But they also talked about time in 'smaller' senses: for example, the 'lack of time' to prepare the plan and the impact this was having on the quality of their work. As one informant told me, 'we should spend a lot longer on it than we do I think in this department' (Interview: Team Member G).

This lack of time was embedded in a particular site through specific rules, shared understandings, teleoaffective structures and prefigured certain actions, creating a specific practice.

In NSW, there are no rules about when a regional strategic plan (such as the Sydney plan) should be prepared. While there have been attempts to specify when plans should be reviewed, for example, every five years (Department of Planning & Environment 2014, p.20), this has never been applied. This is because there is a shared understanding that the plans are the product of a government, even of a particular premier or planning minister, and that the trigger for preparing a new plan rests with the government. As one informant told me: 'from the outside it looked as if the process had worked in terms of a cyclical review. The reality was a little bit less smooth' (Interview: Team Member H).

When the new government took power in March 2011, there were months of waiting to determine if a new plan would be prepared (Interview: Team Member F). Once it was decided to prepare a new plan there was automatically a strict time frame on its preparation because it became a project associated with this particular administration and needed to be prepared within the government's term of office, which in NSW is four years.

The minister for planning though announced that a new plan would be completed within the much shorter time frame of one year (Department of Planning & Environment, 2014, p.1). This was to emphasise the government's focus on 'delivery' rather than 'planning':

I suppose the stronger focus on delivery ...That had not been done so well before and was something the Government wanted to demonstrate
(Interview: Team Member G).

It was also to align with a new transport strategy and state infrastructure strategy being prepared at the same time (Interview: Team Member F), both of which were emblematic of the government's commitment to 'delivery' rather than the preparation of 'glossy brochures'.

These understandings of when a new plan should be prepared formed part of the context for the practice. This was expressed in scheduling: the prioritisation of activities and their sequencing in time. Scheduling as an activity is expressed in rules, understandings, and teleoaffective structures. One of the most important elements of scheduling is 'deadlines', expressed as rules ('you must deliver on time'), reinforced by public statements about when the plan would be delivered (Department of Planning & Environment 2014, p.1).

Although the Plan was released just over three years after the work commenced, the actual work was scheduled based on the original short time frames: 'turnarounds that were programmed really were quick I suppose' (Interview: Team Member C). The original deadlines were continually extended as various delays set in but were always:

...very short deadlines. But they kept being extended which means you can't actually do the planning for it ... I'm loosely describing kind of a linear description of what happened because I can't tell you what process we went through because we didn't really have one
(Interview: Team Member C).

My observation was that there was a series of short bursts of activity followed by periods of inactivity. This meant there was little project planning beyond a month and mostly the team worked week by

week.

One of the reasons for this was the intersection with other practices. Decision making was invested in certain roles: a chain of approval led from the team leader, through to different members of the departmental structure, through to the minister and the cabinet (Interview: Team Member F). Approval requires time for reading and review as well as the scheduling of meetings with executives, the minister, and Cabinet to gain 'approval'. In a hierarchical structure work cannot proceed until there is approval and an important teleoffective structure is that working without approval is pointless because unapproved work may simply have to be abandoned. The document was therefore prepared between these 'burst' of approval.

Some of these intersecting practices have strict 'rules' about time frames. For example, the Cabinet approval process has 'rules' about the amount of notice needed before an item is placed on an agenda, and how much consultation time is needed with government departments and with ministers (Department of Premier & Cabinet 2015). Failure to deal with these deadlines effectively and to gain approval would delay the delivery of the plan catastrophically. This was the case with the Sydney plan:

we were more or less expecting to get through Cabinet quite easily, but in the end it didn't... So in the end it was - that added about an extra three months to the process
(Interview: Team Member F).

Because the decision to prepare a plan is a minister's and government's, when there are unexpected changes there is a delay while their view is sought. In 2014 the change of premier and planning minister meant that there needed to be confirmation of their wishes regarding the new plan, which further delayed the process. The different approach of these new participants meant time frames to re-work the document to suit their wishes were again short, particularly as the term of the government was coming to an end with an election due in less than a year.

These rules, shared understanding, and teleoffective structures about 'time', and in particular, the sense that there was 'not enough time' constrained actions. The 'lack of time' made it acceptable to exclude or defer certain actions: for example, community engagement and research:

Not at any point in that time have we had ... program time to undertake research just because - we've had deadlines that have been very short deadlines.

(Interview: Team Member C).

In my observation, there was some research and community consultation as part of the process. During the exhibition of the Discussion Paper and during the exhibition of the draft there were community engagement activities, but these were not integral to preparing the plan, because much of the writing of the plan was occurring at the same time. The result of some research was only available *after* the document had been finalised.

The short deadlines also enabled certain actions: for example, borrowing from previous work (also enabled by technology):

I remember I literally started off with a Word document which had all the text from 2005 and I worked my way through thinking, well is there a good reason to change this or to delete any of it?

(Interview: Team Member D).

The short deadlines and the apparent urgency of the process also resulted in more centralised control of the process. An already very hierarchical process became even more hierarchical as the time pressures appeared to mount. Specialist writers and consultants were engaged to assist in the delivery of the plan because of the short time frames and there was less involvement by the team in decision making about the content of the plan as it was being prepared for ministerial review and Cabinet.

'something that looked different'

The second theme is the need for difference: the new plan could not be the same as the previous two

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plans. It had to clearly differentiate itself as the product of a new government. Later this became the need to differentiate the plan as the product of a new administration when the premier, planning minister, head of department, and director of the strategic planning team changed.

The need for difference was expressed in a number of 'rules', many of which focused on the materiality of the plan, its existence as a physical document. As one informant said a key aim was the preparation of a 'workable document' (Interview: Team Member G) (rather than a workable 'strategy' or 'plan'). There was an emphasis on the materiality of a *printed* document, even though during the preparation of the Plan the use of the internet, online mapping, and 3-D modelling (e-planning) was being heavily promoted by the department as important new initiatives (NSW Government 2013, p.6).

This was partly because of the way a different *looking* document could create the impression that there had been a change:

By producing something that looked different it could help to create the impression that we were moving on, that we were doing more work, that we were just generally progressing things

(Interview: Team Member D).

There were a number of rules relating to the design of the document: for example, the prohibition on using any photographs that had appeared in previous plans and 'a directive from the minister's office to make it user friendly and easy to read' (Interview: Team Member B). In my observation the way the document was to be structured was a key concern of team members and regular topic of discussion. There were even discussions of the preferred orientation of the document: whether it would be better if the document was prepared and printed as portrait or landscape (the exhibited draft was landscape, the final portrait) (Interview: Team Member B). Different types of document headings could also reinforce the notion of the plan as an outcome, rather than process, focused plan (Interview: Team Member F).

In my observation, there were also instructions about the ideal number of pages for the plan, the need to manage the length of the document and the number of actions. There were explicit instructions to have fewer pages and fewer actions than in previous plans. There was a directive to halve the size of the exhibited plan as the final plan was being prepared.

Team members therefore had to cut text and remove actions. Towards the end of the process, actions were quickly culled to shorten the document to meet the 'rules' about the ideal number of actions; team members reported to me an afternoon cull of actions to shorten the document for immediate review. Team members were creative about meeting these rules: rather than simply removing actions, some were merged into the descriptive text, although it was unclear whether these actions would be implemented if they were no longer a headline action.

The delivery focus of the new government was also a point of difference. Team members had to therefore devise actions that would be deliverable over the short term: 'I think we're still going for the quick runs' (Interview: Team Member C). It was easier to find actions that were already being delivered rather than develop new actions, particularly with the tight deadlines: 'all it seems to be doing is just evolving the things that were happening anyway' (Interview: Team Member C). When there was not enough time to resolve issues, the response was to defer decisions, to commit to additional planning, so that delivery was deferred to a later time. For example, the response to the complexity of the area outside Sydney's already built-up area is the preparation of a 'strategic framework' which will 'assist decision making' (Department of Planning & Environment 2014, p.98).

'I don't think we did much strategising'

I have treated the various actions as part of a single practice linked by specific rules, shared understandings and teleoaffective structures. This reflects the way each of my informants described their involvement in a distinct activity (none of them used the term 'practice' in the sense used in this paper). This activity was different from the other things the team members did at work: replying to letters, writing briefs, writing speeches, meeting, eating lunch. Some of these other actions relied on or intersected with the practice of strategic planning but were nevertheless distinct from it.

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My informants also identified strategic planning as a special activity, different from other types of planning, such as development assessment. Their descriptions of strategic planning, what made up the 'strategic planning world' (Interview: Team Member H), shared some common themes: broad scales (the 'metropolitan scale'), long time frames, selectivity, and direction or guidance for other types of planning.

Some team members questioned whether these particular linked actions were 'strategic planning'. For example, although they were expected to think about long time frames, 20 years into the future, the focus was usually on short time periods. The conception of the future in the Plan was considered particularly 'thin': there was not much to the future 'beyond demography' (Interview: Team Member C) and it was 'just a date we put out there to suggest that we're thinking about the future' (Team Member A). The planners needed to satisfy the desire for difference from the elected officials rather than the 'needs' of the city (Interview: Team Member H). Some viewed the focus on the materiality of the document as antithetical to strategic planning: 'I don't think we did much strategising, we just produced a document' (Interview: Team Member C).

Others team members accepted the focus on the structure of the document, its design, and language as a key element of strategic planning, because it is about messaging and therefore its presentation was as important as its content:

there are very few new ideas and even fewer new good ideas in planning. You can present them in ways, you can communicate them in ways which have a point of difference which is important

(Interview: Team Member F).

Managing the length of the document was considered by some team members an important aspect of producing a strategic plan that 'worked':

In a sense the bigger the document and the more words it has, the more theoretically people can pick and choose which bits they want to focus on when demonstrating consistency or otherwise. Also, the bigger the document, the more words, the more potential there is for inconsistencies within the document itself

(Interview: Team Member D).

I have chosen to call this particular practice 'strategic planning' for the simple reason that it resulted in a document that has been called a 'strategic plan' ('A Plan for Growing Sydney'). This plan generally fits into the 'Australian strategic planning paradigm' (Bunker and Searle, 2009): (Bunker and Searle 2009) it focuses a generation ahead (20 years into the future), is designed to coordinate infrastructure (particularly new motorway projects), has a stated reliance on private investment and the market (although advocates considerable intervention by the state in urban renewal through 'priority precincts'), includes considerable detail about the arrangement of activities (being predominantly an action plan), and honours the notion of local control (through constant reference to working with local government).

A number of actions in the practice are consistent with normative expectations about strategic planning, such as 'selectivity', choosing what is most important to do (Albrechts 2004). The choice to defer a response to the complexity of the area outside Sydney's already built-up area is an example of this selectivity. I suggest that this is as much the result of immediate and short term time pressures as it is of any strategic intent. The practice was shaped by a very immediate future, rather than the long time frames espoused in the plan itself (twenty years in the case of 'A Plan for Growing Sydney').

Similarly, it has been argued that Australian strategic plans are 'path dependent', tending to continue in a past or traditional practice even when there are better alternatives available (Bunker 2012). This has explained by reference to macro forces, such as state governments' routinised responses to accommodating expanding populations during long boom periods. These macro forces are of course important. But this paper shows that strategic planning practice can be the result of much more immediate and short-term pressures: the need to quickly meet deadlines can mean planners recycle material and replicate approaches from past plans. Demands to deliver something new and different can mean the practice focuses on the appearance of the plan, its materiality as a printed document, at the expense of new ideas or concepts. The path dependency is a product of the rules, shared

understandings, and teleoaffective structures that constrain and enable the practice.

Finally, it is valuable to remember that practices are undertaken by real people. In my observation the practice I have described took its toll on the people involved. The stop and start approach made it difficult for them to take control of their work because it was never clear when the project might be beginning and ending. One of the informants shared her 'fatigue' after 'having only just been around for about a year and a half' (Interview: Team Member C). As another planner told me:

It's bloody hard work. It's hard work because you try and do it right and it takes so damn long ...and it's becoming harder, I think it's becoming harder

(Interview: Team Member F).

Conclusion

My aim in this paper has been to deepen our understanding of what it means to be engaged in strategic planning practice, to demonstrate that the 'complexities' (Healey, 2009) which planners deal with when they undertake strategic planning are often 'micro' and immediate as well as 'macro', long term and structural (Albrechts 2004).

I have applied the practice theoretical approach to a specific example of strategic planning, the preparation of 'A Plan for Growing Sydney'. This approach can add to our understanding of what it means to undertake strategic planning in the Australian context. For example, the 'path dependency' of Australian strategic planning (Bunker 2012) is the result of immediate and short-term pressures as from macro forces.

The case I have presented in this paper also shows that without adequate time to plan new ideas are deferred and abandoned, and we get strategic plans that have thin visions of the future. Strategic planning practice needs time to 'dream and doze' (Cocteau and Madame Leprince de Beaumont 1950) if we are generate the sort of responses we need to address our shared issues, if we are going to 'triumph over the inevitable' (Cocteau and Madame Leprince de Beaumont 1950).

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