

Downscaling planning's fashions: network formation and application in the small city

ABSTRACT Small cities in Australia are typically home to growing populations and changing economies. Many of the issues central to the politics and planning of metropolitan Australia resonate here, yet these smaller cities also have their own tensions in planning and development. They are important spaces for exploring key planning concepts for the Twenty-First Century. The application of contemporary planning concepts to these cities is not simply a process of downscaling existing metropolitan models. Using the example of "20-minute" neighbourhoods, increased urban density and walkability metrics, (concepts drawn from, among others, metropolitan Portland, Oregon) this paper considers their application as planning concepts in Bendigo Australia. The paper considers the very real limitations to policy acceptance and suitability in locations where the metropolitan diseconomies of scale, including congestion and housing costs, are less evident and where scope for innovative niche development markets is limited. The paper reviews recent policy along with interviews with local planners to explore the attraction, success and limitations of 'downscaling' metropolitan planning concepts to smaller cities and the suitability of methods of enquiry that seek to understand assemblages of dynamic networks in framing planning problems and mobilizing and maintaining networks of support.

Introduction

Interest in the local and international transfer of planning ideals typically examines the movement of the presumed universal 'fashions' of planning practice between metropolitan centres (Healey, 2012; Ward, 2002; Sanyal, 2005). Such analysis, while useful has variously been concerned with contextual barriers to policy transference related to governance models, or urban regimes as well as to considerations of capacity and culture especially with reference to examples of transference from developed to developing world cities.

Considerations of the consequences of scale are less evident, with some examples only emphasizing the suitability of downscaling from the perspective of resources and expertise. Yet clearly scale matters, not only through considerations of the local and durable regimes of doing planning, but also, critically in the way that planning problems are formed, discussed and negotiated by government and community. In this way small cities can be seen not simply as scaled-down metropolitan places, but rather as locations where actors and motivations of communities and planners are shaped by particular representations of place. These representations often emphasize distinction from those modes of urbanization, urban cultures and urban problem-formation apparent in larger metropolitan regions. They often to look and act as provincial centres while gesturing to the forms of planning and development considered necessary for a larger city.

Over the past two decades Bendigo, Australia has experienced housing and population growth along with economic transformation, while embarking on processes of planning, civic design and urban place-making that have seen the adoption of several planning ideas from 'elsewhere'. Some of these have been initiated in response to opportunities or requirements of larger regional or state policy, including the desire to create a network of connected cities surrounding metropolitan Melbourne (e.g. Plan Melbourne, 2014). Others have been applied in response to locally-developed, but often internationally-derived, ideas for new approaches to urban form and design. The local strategy of developing 10-minute neighbourhoods (GHD, 2014) throughout the city is largely an instance of the latter, taking international examples as cues to construct locally-relevant approaches to new urban development in infill and greenfields sites.

Understanding the success and limitations of such approaches within this context requires consideration not only of the portability of ideated planning approaches, but also of the assemblages of various actors in place; the community, planners and also the city's form and urban culture amongst them. The specific features of a small city, and in particular one tracing its forms of urban life and urban development to a specific socio-economic and environmental event (the 1850s gold rush) matter for the successful application of policy ideals from elsewhere. These are not simply about the capacity of planning and the exercise

of power, but also relate to the lived experience of the 'small city' and the symbologies and relationships of non-human elements and mediators influencing life in the city including the environment, historical notions of place and the experiences of urban form. Despite planners' received notions of 'good' planning, their application is not simply about building coalitions of a political kind, but also about seeking an understanding of context and the social power of place-specific urban formations and networks.

To consider these issues, the paper focuses on the implementation of a planning strategy to establish and maintain 10-minute neighbourhoods in Bendigo, Australia. The paper reports on the adoption of a policy ideal and exploratory interviews with local planners to consider the suitability of assemblage theories or Actor Network Theory as a methodological approach to understanding the practices and processes of policy transfer and downscaling, and to consider the success of these, and conversely the barriers to policy transfer.

Planning and the City as Assemblages

Considering the city, and planning the city, as an exercise within social and physical *assemblages* is not new, with a growing base of literature attempting to consider the city, and the actors shaping it, through the lens of assemblage theories and more specifically through actor-network theory. Actor-network theory (ANT), most readily associated with Latour's (1991, 2007) consideration of the social processes of the sciences (particularly of the roles of human and non-human actors shaping outcomes through 'laboratory work') and the consequent bridging of the material-symbolic or natural-social divide, has become a point of analysis in a range of planning studies that seek to place human actors and agents (including planners and the community) alongside non-human entities (place, city form, legislation) in emergent networks (or assemblages) performing changing roles and mobilized within dynamic circumstances.

Law (2009: 2) contends that "practices then, *are* assemblages of relations. Those assemblages *do* realities" (original emphasis). Planning practices operate by mobilising and translating the material and non-material to become social actors as dynamic networks rather than as structures; desires, logics, rules, norms, urban cultures and streetscapes amongst them. Social processes, such as planning, can consequently be seen as operating within assemblages or networks that react, change and reform, rather than as structures themselves emanating and contesting power through practice. This approach suggests that the fluidity of networks is not simply one of power relationships and the formation of coalitions in planning, but also relates to plans, practices and norms of city life and history, with planning institutions and planners as one, albeit significant, node in a dynamic environment.

Such approaches also consider cities as *processes* with unique and distinguishing features of social and spatial character, rather than simply a set of stable policy-making networks. In this conception, the 'city' becomes a network that includes the material forms of place and the modification rendered as social agents through the 'momentary association' (Latour, 2007: 65) that forms new social meanings and requirements that are subject to change, mobilization and reinterpretation. As Nigel Thrift contends, the city as a basis of research is not just networks or as 'imitative flow' but is a place, actor and agent itself that cannot be seen as a uniform tabula rasa to be managed from afar – "cities can be powerful actors in terms of producing small changes that can move on to become big changes" (Farias, 2010: 108). Cities are intrinsically about dynamic networks and actor-relationships that transcend the discrete and overtly *social* field of policy practice. Gestures, received logics, material forms and the potency of place-identity each form networks alongside social structures and institutions.

Of course planners are at least ostensibly aware of the spatial and material issues of practice in place and the way in which symbols of place are used to mobilise ideas and civic interest, yet in reality it is arguable that place-specificity is often disregarded, or assumed to matter less than received and abstracted notions of what constitutes good planning. Such perspectives often appear to mask the apparent contingent meanings of place, history, culture and urban form.

In contrast, Beauregard's (2012) call to 'plan with things' provides a salient description of the potential usefulness of an approach to planning within context and within dynamic networks of the 'non-social' as a way to overcome the seeming displaced or aspatial application of many

planning ideas. He considers ANT not as an explanatory theory, but rather as a heuristic for considering the way that planners operate as one agent in the process of plan implementation in an actual place where culture, physical form and the daily experiences of the city act to shape perceptions of the planning 'problem' and its solutions that are often formed by experts and shaped by presumptions and assumptions about place.

Examples such as Tate's (2013) description of growth management planning in Vancouver and Beauregard's (2013) exploration of hazardous activity siting decisions in Iowa offer specific examples of the analysis of plan adoption and 'planning events' in the context of the city as dynamic assemblages of actors and processes where specific forms of city life, policy settings and the material city matter to network formation, yet are often ignored or assumed stable in policy. In an Australian context, Ruming (2008) offers insight to the roles of the environment and landform as neglected agents or intermediaries in urban development and considers the consequent application of planning policy when natural systems are translated into social actors. In this case the meanings associated with landscapes, landforms and specific native species matter in descriptions of development logics, and their meanings are fluid over time and between networks.

To provide such a schema an heuristic value requires consideration of the agency of physical forms, social norms, structures and the environment and their constantly changing interaction with apparently 'social' formations; including 'community' networks, professionals and institutions of government. Actors are not considered to bring fundamental or essential knowledge, representations or facts to any debate, but rather negotiate 'matters of concern' (Latour, 2007) through networks by translating of the symbolic or the material to a social moment; giving 'things' agency in making social and natural reality through network formation. Callon (1991) outlines four stages of translation; *incorporation* where actors become part of networks, *interressement*, where the actors exercise influence over others, *enrolment* where others are convinced of specific representations, definitions and networks, and finally *mobilisation* where actors can consequently speak for others.

In an urban planning context this can be seen to include the ways in which networks of actors form around ideas, react to problems, draw-in the community, utilize non-human actors (ideas, places, physical formations) and contain definitions and meanings, often through the exercise of technologies and devices of expert systems, story-telling and the meanings ascribed to place.

In the case of the transference and incorporation of a planning concept, such as the 'walkable neighbourhood', assemblage theories suggests a way to consider the formation of dynamic actor networks that advocate, mobilise and seek to draw in the signs and symbols of non-human actors and concepts to create social understandings. That these concepts are given meaning as potentially universal and as ideated metropolitan notions of 'good' planning is also considered powerful in network formation. The universal ideals are 'called upon' and defined and placed within such assemblages (either consciously or aconsciously), but so are local meanings and problem-spaces. For this reason we consider that an analysis of policy transfer and its consequent 'suitability' in place can be seen through the lens of ANT, at least so far as to consider the way in which planners seek to form networks, and how non-human actants are (or not) translated and mobilized in the social practices of planning in place.

Planning Policy Transfer and Downscaling in Place

The transfer of planning policy has a fraught history. Tensions between planning as a universalist and normative practice, and planning as a responsive and contextualized exercise of policy have been evident over decades. Specifically, with the decline of the modernist, practitioner-centred, modes of planning from the 1970s, interest in developing responsive, local and co-produced approaches to planning have become desirable, if not typical in practice. Nonetheless professional practice remains caught between the universal and the contingent (Healey, 2012), recognizing that concepts, ideals and fashions in urban design, practice regimes and policy directions are often sought from elsewhere.

Downscaling planning models from the metropolitan city to the Australian small city is one example of this tension. Planning objectives for housing design, transport, density among others are received and problematized differently in the different circumstances of investment, employment and community life and absent the diseconomies of scale and expanse typically

evident in metropolitan Australia. Yet, ontologically, planning systems operate in ways that nullify such difference; this occurs through codes and strategies, and also through the aspirations and ideated norms of practice. We argue that in this case study many of these differences are willfully 'flattened' in an attempt to recast the 'provincial' city to a city within a metropolitan network. The adoption of internationally-derived ideas, language and symbols of walkability and neighbourhood creation are a part of this process.

The incorporation of ideas from elsewhere in planning practice requires the formation of new networks of logic and practice, and contends with other contingent and emergent formations that resist this. As exploratory consideration, we are interested in two facets of such transfer. Firstly, how an appealing and popular notion of 'neighbourhood walkability' is brought into planning policy, and possibly into practice through the flow of desires amongst planners, and secondly how this is instituted through the use of signs, logics and place identification in a different type of urban form – the small Australian city.

Portland and the 20 Minute Neighborhood

Recent planning work in Melbourne, Sydney, Toronto, and Portland (as examples) emphasizes the desire to halt the expansion of the car-centric urban landscape. Sometimes the term is "compact development, "walkable neighborhoods" (specifically, the "20-minute neighborhood"), "transit-oriented development", or similar terms. Policy in Portland often uses the terms "complete neighborhoods" (with the corollary of "complete streets").

All these terms conceive of a pairing of residences and business (both goods and services) that are mutually supportive. In its Australian adoption, these are neighbourhoods "where people have safe and convenient access to the goods and services they need for daily life within 20 minutes of where they live, travelling by foot, bicycle or public transport" (State Government of Victoria, 2014: 117). The scope for this to be realized has been widely critiqued (see for example Whitzman et al, 2013). Likewise, ideas such as 15-minute neighbourhoods, neighbourhood 'walkscores' and other measures of local connectedness have become seemingly ubiquitous tools for spatial planning in urban settings, themselves taking cues from long-standing objectives of polycentricity in metropolitan city growth. In Victoria this dates back to the *District Centres Policy* of the 1980s (MPE, 1983).

Portland Oregon offers a specific case in metropolitan planning for walkable neighbourhoods and reversing previous approaches to car-based suburban sprawl. Portland's renown in this regard amongst planners is largely due to its half-century policy consistency and the awareness of this model amongst other similar cities in North America and globally. In Portland, the lessons of the 1960s are still form a remarkably stable consensus that the unbridled postwar car culture must be reined in and alternatives sought.

Background

In Portland, social activism of the 1960s was a neighborhood-based reaction against the urban clearance efforts of post-World War II modernism. After 1945, fast-growing car-centric suburbs increasingly eclipsed Portland's 'downtown' area for both retail and commercial services. The neighborhoods of inner Portland were suffering from civic neglect, 'white flight', and disinvestment.

In reaction, Portland experienced a "downtown revolution" (Abbott, 1983: 208) that culminated in the 1972 *Downtown Plan*, a generational change in urban policy. A linear park replaced a city-centre freeway along the Willamette River. Two central streets were given over to public transport, and the area was re-made subject to a 'citizen design review' based upon design guidelines developed for this consultative process. These guidelines gave primacy to traditional urban form and had a focus on the pedestrian realm. This emerged from Lawrence Halprin's study and was part of a movement to contain sprawl surrounding mid-Willamette Valley postwar growth. "Between 1972 and 1975, the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments produced several reports demonstrating the efficiency of urban containment over urban sprawl. These efforts led to one of the first urban development stop lines adopted in the United States" (Nelson, 1993: 25).

Over the next thirty years, the city's desire to revitalize the urban core met the environmentalists' desire to preserve farmland. A walkable urban development pattern would serve both urban and environmental policy aims. And a compact development pattern would

allow a shift away from single-driver car transportation mode of travel.

Portland's neighborhoods were re-envisioned through a series of neighborhood plans that gave new value to Portland's tram (streetcar) era close-in neighborhoods. New attention was paid to the "seams" between neighborhoods, that is, the main streets that the streetcars ran down in the 19th Century. The result was the 1980 *Comprehensive Plan* that introduced the twin concepts of "main street revitalization" and stable inner-city neighborhoods.

At the same time that Portland sought to reinforce the "land use/transportation connection", the broader metropolitan regional government adopted the *Metro 2040 Growth Concept Plan* (Oregon Metro, 2014) with its system of regional and town centres. Portland further reinforced its centre and corridor strategy development policies with specific renewal plans for old town centres that had fallen into disrepair and disinvestment. Each centre is identified within the metropolitan city hierarchy of centres with a parallel level of bike or public transport accessibility. This framework for growth is contained within an Urban Growth Boundary, which can only be expanded based upon analysis of unsuitability of land for continued farming.

On the environmental front, Portland was the first U.S. city to adopt a carbon reduction strategy, in 1993. The "Global Warming Reduction Strategy" called for more public transport, more compact urban development, and making bicycle and pedestrian friendly streets as part of a strategy to reduce per capita carbon emissions by ten percent. Portland has now adopted a 2015 *Climate Action Plan* (City of Portland & Multnomah County, 2015) that builds upon the role that walkability (along with cycling and access to public transport) plays in reducing CO₂ emissions from the transportation sector.

Visitors and 'Planning' Tourism

From the 1980s Portland became prominent on the national (US) scene as a place that was 'bucking the trend' toward central city (downtown) abandonment. Professional planners and community activists from around North America, and later from elsewhere, started arriving as visitors to tour the Waterfront Park, the Transit Mall (first bus and then light rail), urban redevelopment of unused railway yards to the north of the city centre and the former World War II shipyards to the south of the city centre. The first new tram (streetcar) line to be built in many decades was completed and now the first *non-automobile* transit/bicycle/pedestrian bridge over a major river in the US, opens as of September 2015 and is likely to attract more visitors.

At the regional level, visitors now regularly tour the urban growth boundary, with high-density residential development on one side of the line and farm fields and vineyards on the other side. They take a "sustainability tour", visiting research institutions and funding institutions or touring "green infrastructure" like city "green streets" (bioswales and other means to reduce stormwater runoff).

Like other global urban transformation exemplars (for example Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Germany, <http://www.freiburg-future-lab.eu>) such professional tourism has become regularized by the creation of a specific *welcoming* department within Portland State University. *First Stop Portland* organizes custom-design study tours using influential Portlanders and experts in architecture, property development, land use and transportation/bicycle planning, landscape architecture and community planning. The First Stop website and blog (First Stop Portland, 2015) also indicates tours of institutions relating to the medical field and social sciences, as well the wide ranging source of visitors. Most importantly, First Stop seeks to promote two-way learning from visiting experts. Increasingly social media influences practitioners worldwide within this network, supplementing visits.

The construction of a professional network supporting and promoting the 'planning credentials' of Portland, Oregon in relation to innovation, urban management and policy transfer is a critical component of the dissemination of these ideas, particularly in a North American context. These ideas also suggest a global resonance and they are specifically identified in examples recent Australian urban planning policy and practice as an ideal and desirable form of future Australian (sub)urbanism. Neighbourhood walkability in this regard is not simply an objective planning concept, but one that traces its roots through international social movements and the symbolic notions of a progressive city. Peck (2009) for example discusses walkability in the context of city branding and the 'creative class'. Such notions elevate walkability and quality neighbourhood design to an assertion of 'proper' urbanity when

considering the changes in a 'provincial' small city such as Bendigo.

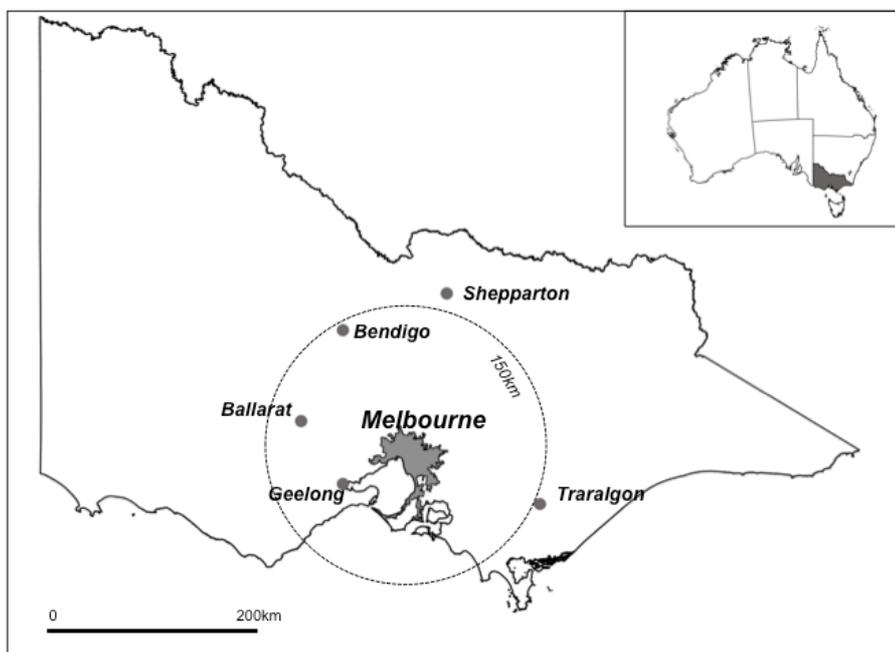
Bendigo: urban form and the adoption of an idea

In the context of Australia Bendigo is a mid sized city. The municipal area of the City of Greater Bendigo has a population of about 110,000, but the City extends across a rural area of 3,000 square kilometres and the contiguous urban area, which lies at the heart, has about 95,000 people.

Bendigo located 150 kilometres north west of Melbourne (see Map 1) was founded on gold – immense amounts of the precious metal. The discovery of alluvial gold in 1851 attracted thousands of miners. Deep lead mining, which was in full flight by the 1870s, resulted in Bendigo boasting the title at the time of the world's wealthiest goldfield. With that pedigree a pretentious city was built featuring buildings and parks that wouldn't be out of place in a European setting and a tram network to serve its suburbs. Bendigo city is in its historic form a European conception superimposed onto a landscape of dry forest, intermittent waterways and abandoned mines.

As the gold became harder to extract by WW1, mining was in decline and the city stagnated. In 1901 the population stood at 39,400, fifty years later the population was less than 37,000. From the early 1970s the population began to climb as regional cities within an arc of about 150 kilometres of Melbourne started to attract population as industrial investment was encouraged, government departments decentralised and higher education institutions were established. During the 1970s to the end of the 1980s the population climbed from 45,000 to over 70,000. Over the last twenty years population growth has been sustained and has averaged over 1.5% per annum.

Map 1: Bendigo in the context of cities in Victoria, Australia



The original development of Bendigo followed the gold in the creeks and gullies. This pattern of settlement spawned the early tracks, which eventually became roads. They paralleled the creek lines and connected the gullies. Housing and businesses clung to this early skeleton of roads and tracks. With the coming of Bendigo's rail network from the 1860s the pattern of settlement followed the stations and the later tram system. The clustering of settlement around these early transport nodes and corridors was largely swept away by the rise of the family owned motorcar by the 1950s, and later with greater affluence by two car households. Where people could live and work and travel to education was no longer primarily related to whether they could access locations by public transport, bicycle or walking. A prime example

of this was the establishment in the mid-1970s of what was to become a campus of La Trobe University – on the urban edge – well away from its origins in the city centre. In common with metropolitan cities, freestanding shopping centres started to be established in the early 1980s and outlying development saw commuter suburbs established from the late 1970s. The compact urban area was reshaped by most households having convenient access to most things they needed by a car. Public transport, particularly buses was largely relegated to a welfare transport option.

State government policies since the mid 1960s have in some way promoted or loosely supported regional development and decentralisation. Bendigo's population started to experience real growth when in-migration started to exceed out-migration from about the 1970s. The sources of this growth include movement 'down' the urban hierarchy, mainly older adults from metropolitan Melbourne, with a net loss of young adults (ABS, 2012) and *centripital* migration (Ford, 1999) from areas of rural Victoria undergoing rural restructure (Budge, 2006). Since then in Bendigo there has been a sustained, increasing rate of population growth along with a corresponding increase in residential construction.

The city's urban form grew on the assumption that 'everyone' had a car. The consequence was that the city sprawled to a degree never imagined. The total footprint of the urban area for the number of people housed produced a low-density city that for many people worked well. The radial roads leading away from the city centre became the new spines and then the areas in between this framework started to fill in with more housing. Many residential areas only became practical as places to live if you had a car. Parents drove children to school, people drove to work in the city centre and needed car parks to store their car for the day, shopping had to be done by car.

The outcome of this pattern of living is that urban Bendigo in 2015 stretches about 25 kilometres from north to south and a similar distance from east to west. In even relatively light traffic a trip from one side of the urban area to the other takes about 30 minutes by car, hence for many living in the city a 10-minute *driving* 'neighbourhood' already exists. The linear form of Bendigo is substantially shaped by the forest (public land) that virtually encircles the urban area. In many places urban development is located hard up against extensive vegetation and public land. This outstanding feature of the extended urban area sets Bendigo apart from other regional cities in Australia. This defining element has been determinant in defining the shape of urban Bendigo and the future prospects for urban form and the settlement pattern. The large, heavily fragmented areas of public land, almost all of it forested and much of it declared National Park constitutes 25% of the land area of the city. As well much of the 75% of private land is not highly productive for agriculture.

While the 'city in the forest' is a highly valued feature and part of the unique character of Bendigo, it too is shaping Bendigo's urban pattern. In 2004 Greater Bendigo City Council adopted an urban growth boundary to define and limit the spread of the city. This appears to have worked, at least for the last decade. A recent review of residential development needs (Abbott, 2012) proposes to retain virtually the same growth boundary to 2024 based on the capacity of greater residential infill and through utilising land that had been leap-frogged for residential subdivision.

Council currently uses a suite of themes and area specific strategies to guide planning, growth and statutory decision-making with the principal land and spatial strategies covering; residential development, commercial land, housing and an overarching integrated transport and land use strategy. Previous strategic planning to guide the development of urban Bendigo and its immediate surrounds could be described as a loose set of processes from the mid-1970s until 1994, when the state government forcibly amalgamated the various parts of Bendigo into a single local government.

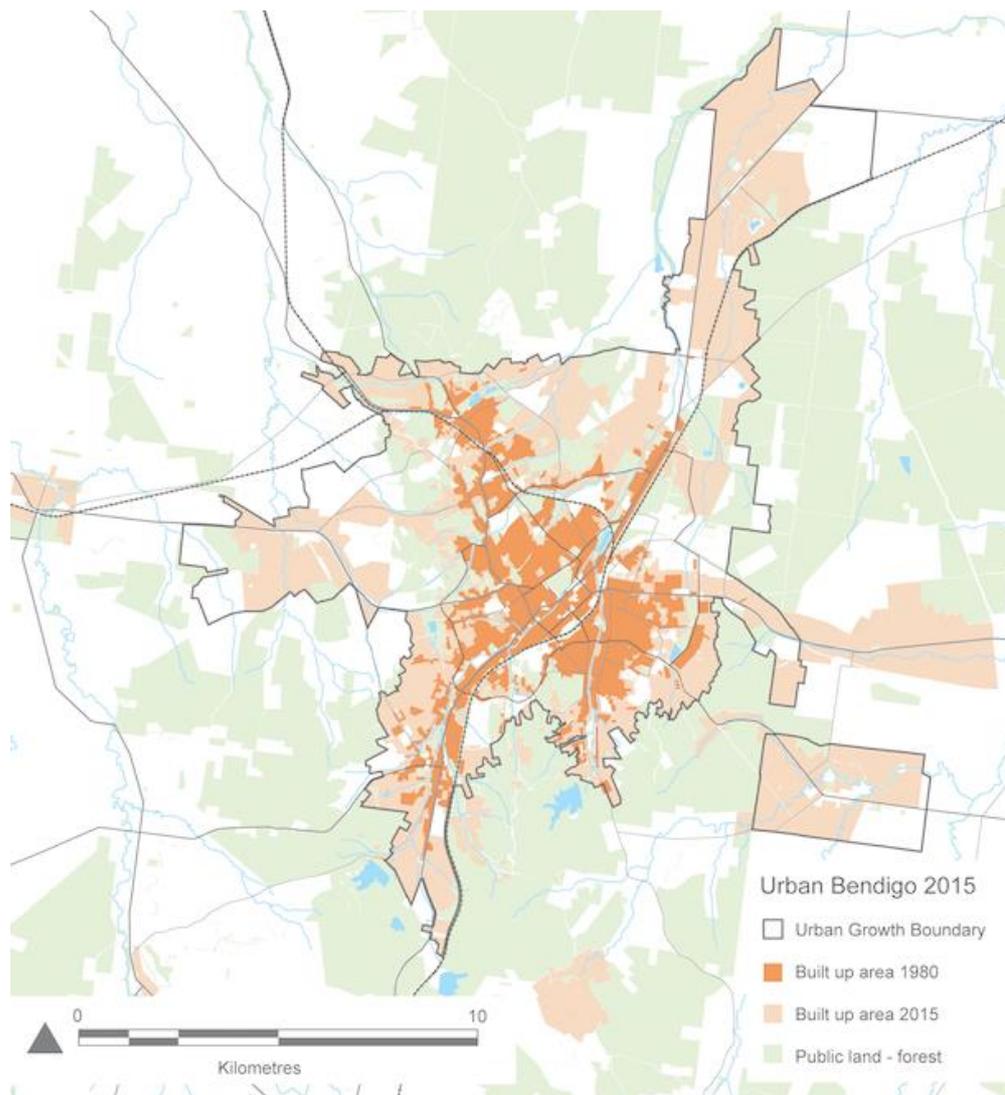
The land use and spatial planning process between the then five Bendigo Councils, the Loddon-Campaspe Regional Planning Authority which came into existence in the early 1970s (particularly to fill the void produced by the lack of agreement between the five Bendigo Councils), the separate water and sewerage authorities, a separate state roads authority and a succession of state planning departments was at best a compromise. Developing an agreed strategic framework in that setting was a brokered process between five local governments and various departments, agencies and authorities. The plans were largely developer led, the integration of transport (road) planning and land use was largely lacking, servicing authorities

(water and sewerage) tended to define the shape and form of new development, and the three urban fringe Council played an increasingly important role, particularly given that from the 1970s onward almost all urban development was taking place in their municipalities. The result of that situation is that Bendigo's legacy of past planning is that urban development is defined by the following attributes:

- an almost total reliance on the motor car for travel,
- while most cities have discernible rings of growth –progressing from oldest suburb to newest as you drive outwards, in Bendigo, the eras of development repeat around each former mining settlement, or look to be randomly mixed,
- the City Centre has retained its dominant commercial and retail role but the sprawling nature of the newer residential development has started to disperse retail activity,
- employment is still focused (47% in and around the City Centre)
- most of the retail development, employment, schools and health facilities are located along the Bendigo Creek – a north south linear spine that is such a dominant feature of Bendigo urban structure. This potentially provides scope for walkable neighbourhoods focused on this 'spine',
- industrial areas are generally fragmented (over 60 separate industrial areas with a dozen major locations) many compromised by nearby residential areas and some accessible only through residential areas, one of the reasons for proposed a large new business park which is well served by road and rail infrastructure,
- extensive areas around the urban area fragmented into small lots on top of the small lot legacy associated with early settlement, and
- very large areas of rural Bendigo have become rural lifestyle development areas.

In summary, the result is a fragmented urban form with limited large areas suitable for residential development and some areas constrained in some way (bushfire, flooding, contamination) and therefore leap frogged in pursuit of greener pastures. The formation of the City of Greater Bendigo in 1994 brought all this fragmented urban pattern and the surrounding rural – residential / rural living area under a single municipality, water and sewerage provision brought under a single authority and to some extent government and Councils were becoming increasingly aware of the need to integrate land use and transport although that is still a journey being undertaken.

Map 2: Urban Bendigo 1980-2015



Map 2 indicates the public land areas, the defined Urban Growth Boundary, the built up urban areas since 1980, the small towns and the major road network. This pattern defines the whole City, urban Bendigo, the relationship between urban Bendigo and its hinterland. Importantly it defines how future Bendigo can and will grow – both in terms of supporting a strategy that ostensibly favours infill over sprawl. There is a focus on a series of transport spines rather than a broad front or fronts of urban development. There is an overwhelming constraint of vegetation but it is a defining environmental and lifestyle value – the ‘city in the forest’ concept. The threat of bushfire and the concentration of much of the urban development along watercourses and the corresponding limitations caused by flooding is also significant in many locations.

Resolving the dilemmas of half a century of car-based residential development is a cultural, economic and physical process that involves the intersection of the housing development industry, community expectations of residential spaces and the capacity and legitimacy of planning concepts. In Bendigo, introducing notions such as increased walkability require the development of discourses that draw on a range of powerful motivators; housing affordability, health and lifestyle, forest/farmland protection amongst them. These are also ideals that sit at odds with existing notions of the small city as a space of freedom and accessibility, unhindered by the diseconomies of congestion and scale.

How Bendigo’s Planners Position Walkability

As part of this research a focus group of Bendigo’s strategic planners was held during March-April 2015 to inquire into the settings and situation of the development of walkable

neighbourhoods as a planning concept. These discussions consisted of two focus groups (14 practitioners overall) with planners working in transport, strategic planning and development assessment roles. In these focus groups discussions focused on the basis and inspirations for recent local policy and strategy work in transport and neighbourhood design, including the source materials from state level, social media, professional journal and the like. The planners ranged in age and experience, but were all involved in the development and implementation of *strategy* in the areas of transport, urban design and residential land release. This research is the first stage of a longer proposed research project investigating the sources of professional knowledge and the negotiation and implementation of normative planning approaches and socio-spatial transformation in a regional Australian city.

The planners were aware of the growing professional consensus regarding 'walkability' and suburban form, and the ways in which the origins could be traced to international and domestic policy concerns and emergent planning practices. They were also aware of the barriers and opportunities for local implementation and the critical differences of forming narratives and arguments in Bendigo. They were aware that, as planners, they often did not share broadly held views regarding preferences for car-based travel in Bendigo. The responses included commentary on the following:

- That the planners generally saw their role and their legitimacy in planning and local politics as related to the provision of 'technical expertise', including that expertise and knowledge garnered through examples from elsewhere
- That the planners were aware of specific examples such as Portland, Seattle and Vancouver as examples of 'good' urbanism and that these were considered more appropriate comparators than European examples of contemporary urbanism
- That the planners saw these examples as part of a continuity of ideated planning policy and practice in Australian planning – such as 'new urbanism' and 'Transit Orientated Development' – that are ubiquitous in professional planning discourses and trace roots to North American examples, including in current local strategy (GHD, 2014)
- That the planners were acutely aware that resistance to such models was a feature of the residential development industry, including amongst skeptical planners, and rarely actually made it into real designs 'on-the-ground'. Moreover, a number mentioned concern that where real changes occurred in neighbourhoods it was led by, or resulted in, gentrification and further marginalization to the car-dependent fringes of Australian cities
- That the planners firmly understood the car-based character and culture of Bendigo where public transport was dismissed, daily trips were typically short and congestion was almost non-existent. The sense that future development space was limited by public land was held by the planners, yet they were aware that many in the community dismissed this concern, expecting future 'leap-frogging' of the forest as a matter of course.

Planners confirmed ideas about transfer, such as the ubiquity of 'good examples' on the internet and social media (at least amongst professionals) and sense that these were symbolic of an urban maturity that Bendigo sought. Despite this, they considered their own agency as limited to 'expertise and information' within a political debate about land supply, adaptive reuse of existing spaces (and the potential meanings of urban 'density') and arguments about the legitimacy of planners' intrusion into models of long-standing developer-led residential housing design and development; these developments have been delivering the 'good life' for many households over many years.

Can Assemblage Theories provide an interrogative tool for policy transfer in the small city?

While 'plans erase what exists in order to propose what has been imagined' (Beauregard, 2015: 4) they only do so within networks of places and practices. Moreover their success in erasure is limited by the formation and reformation of dynamic networks of interests and the social constructions of ideas and material elements of place.

The case of downscaling of an idea relies on such network formation, yet also pushes against existing and new networks that seek to 'defend' existing lived practices. In this case the planners and the plans rely on global connections and multiple scales of understanding; the

neighbourhood, the (small) city, the metropolitan city network and the transnational notions of good planning.

In this regard place and the symbolic qualities of 'things' in place matter. As Ruming (2009: 457) suggests we should 'see localities as part of a larger network phenomena', yet locality too is a defining feature for planners. These planners and plans both embrace and 'push against' locality, at once seeing qualities in urban form, the forest, traditionally erratic urban expansion and the like, yet also seeking claims to expertise in distilling forms and ideas from afar. In Bendigo, it appeared that planners are well aware that urban culture, morphology, representations and desires coalesce in framing the urban problem. These form a network along with the more substantive and evident components of politics and expertise; land development agenda, planning regulations and the like. Nature and form of the city, for example, become mediators of the presumed notions of the small city, 'pushing' against normative planning approaches of increasing urban densities and walkability. This can be expressed through resistance to transference of metropolitan problem formation and policy solutions.

Three distinct considerations of the usefulness of an assemblage, or indeed an ANT, approach to exploring the downscaling of planning for walkability in Bendigo appeared evident from the focus groups:

- Firstly the dynamic nature of networks that extend well beyond institutional constructs of planning's authority at the local level – yet claims to legitimacy and the formation of networks occurs as a multi-scalar process drawing upon metropolitan and international logics and arguments.
- The roles of non-human actants within these networks are overt; the city, its physical 'boundedness' and the symbolism associated with the 'provincial city', 'rural' place and its lifestyle expectations are all powerful elements translated through networks of experts and within the community. However the ways in which networks are presented, formed and maintained are often fluid – policy arguments and legitimacy in planning practice is sought through the construction of meaning of the local circumstances and tropes of the small city. As the city expands, planners show awareness of the need to speak to residual 'local' feelings about place.
- Finally the capacity to identify and trace powerful yet complex relationships that at times change rapidly in response to new circumstances reveals useful ways to understand how plans and ideas are co-opted from elsewhere and offered place in local arguments. Networks in this regard appear to change configuration as language such as 'healthy suburbs', 'urban growth boundaries' and 'urban renewal' are each translated and act to enroll and form networks. Ideas such as *aged* or *child* friendly cities for example have resonance and in turn are regarded as powerful symbols to enact change through logics of safety, access and even nostalgia for a 'smaller' community.

This paper suggests the usefulness of ANT as a method of research, not necessarily as a broad conceptual or explanatory framework. In the case of re-conceptualising Bendigo as a city that needs 'metropolitan' solutions, issues of drawing in logics and arguments from elsewhere, yet setting these within networks that draw upon and translate local issues and actors, offers a way to consider the formation and reformation of networks as a way to describe the emergence of new planning problems and the placement and construction of their solutions in practice.

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