

Does strategic planning provide the clarity it claims? Framing land-use conflict as competing interpretations of the same planning concept: the case of the 'mixed-use neighbourhood'

Ryan van den Nouwelant¹

¹UNSW Built Environment

Abstract: A key component of urban governance is participatory strategic planning. Among other purposes, it is intended to establish consensus and clarity around future development patterns. This, it follows, reduces conflict during subsequent development assessments. Using textual analysis techniques, this research unpacks the planning concept of the mixed-use neighbourhood, as used in Sydney's planning strategies. On one hand, objectives of 'jobs closer to home' and 'amenities in walking distance' create a sense of the neighbourhood being self-contained. On the other hand, objectives of 'building on hubs of a public transport network' and 'productivity gains through mobility and connection' create a sense of the neighbourhood being well-connected. Using stakeholder interviews, the research highlights how planning conflicts in mixed-use neighbourhoods – the case of Kings Cross is examined – are often over these different interpretations. Contentious developments are those seen to prioritise either local amenity (of the self-contained neighbourhood) or metro-wide economic growth (through the well-connected neighbourhood) at the expense of the other. The findings highlight a possible limitation of strategic planning providing clarity for the community. In turn, it highlights the folly of expecting engagement during strategic planning to be an alternative to engagement during development approval.

Participatory strategic planning

Current urban planning is strongly steeped in a language of engagement, participation, collaboration and communication with affected communities. In planning theory, this stems from a communicative turn that dates back to Davidoff (1965), Arnstein (1969) and Friedmann (1973) (for comparative details, see Lane (2005)). It has been developed in more recent years by Forester (1999), Innes and Booher (1999, 2004) and Healey (1992, 2003, 2006) among others.

In practice, this ethic of participation also dates back many decades. For example, in NSW – the focus of this research – the still-current EPA Act 1979 (NSW Government, 2015) formalised consultation in planning practice (McFarland, 2011). The need for greater consultation had been made necessary by environmental and social protest movements opposing un-checked development throughout the 1970s (Huxley, 2000). Other jurisdictions saw similar trends at a similar time as the pendulum in urban governance swung away from the technical approach that had dominated post-war planning: the Moses versus Jacobs period in New York's planning is a high-profile example (Flint, 2009). More recently, participation has been inscribed in the *modi operandi* of institutional planning agencies like the World Bank (1999) and UN Habitat (2015). It has been codified by organisations like the International Association for Public Participation (2014). And it has become fairly ubiquitous, at least as a planning principle, across Australia's local and state/territorial governments (Gleeson *et al.*, 2004). As such, while this research examines the specific experience of the City of Sydney, it has relevance to planning practice in other Australian jurisdictions.

In strategic planning, there are multiple reasons community participation is expected to achieve better outcomes. One is the greater degree of transparency in planning decisions. This reduces both actual instances and perceptions of corruption, incompetence or other malfeasance. Another is the greater degree of acceptance of planning decisions. This is because, by generating dialogue between different stakeholders, the processes either: generate consensus on future directions; instil future directions with a greater democratic mandate; or, if nothing else, increase awareness and establish clear expectations of future directions.

In practice, participatory planning is argued to often fall short of the theoretical ideals. In part, this relates to Arnstein's initial critique that too much communication is a one-way, tokenistic marketing exercise. It is also argued that processes designed to engage across communities tend to continue to focus on those stakeholders already actively engaged in a policy development process, like private and public interest

groups (Healey, 2012). More broadly, the deliberative nature of participatory planning is thought to sit in inherent contradiction with other contemporary governance trends, like those towards entrepreneurial or neoliberal governance (Sager, 2008, Olesen, 2014). These critiques, and evident limitations of participation in practice, have led to claims of a 'post-collaborative era' in planning theory (Brownill and Parker, 2010). Divergent priorities and desires, as well as complex political forces, often preclude consensus on many planning decisions. As such, planning theory has moved towards an ongoing *agonistic* embracement of these differences (Hillier, 2002). Planning theory has also moved towards more meaningful engagement through principles of co-production (Watson, 2014), rather than tacked on as an adjunct to established and, arguably, closed governance structures. Planning practice, though, is yet to embrace this agonistic ethic in most instances.

This paper furthers these critiques, arguing that participatory strategic planning – even in ideal conditions – is not likely to achieve one of its purported outcomes: that of providing clarity about future development patterns. The argument made here is that strategic planning processes – and the documents they produce – deal with necessarily abstract planning concepts (see Lefebvre, 1991: 37-39). Their abstract nature conceals a lack of conceptual resolution that is only fully revealed when the concepts are applied to situated, material places (particular neighbourhoods, streets, properties, etc.). This limitation is examined here by identifying underlying ambiguities of the planning concept of a 'mixed-use neighbourhood'. And by demonstrating that subsequent community conflicts over planning directions stem from these ambiguities.

This limitation is an important concession to make, because an expectation of clarity about future development patterns is used to justify removing or reducing engagement and third party rights in subsequent 'delivery' planning phases, like individual development approvals (McKenny, 2013). It is, perhaps, worth reiterating early in this paper an obvious point: participation in strategic planning could well reduce conflict over subsequent developments (because 'everyone knows the rules'), but this would make removing established checks and balances unnecessary. Without good strategic participation those checks and balances might increase uncertainty for proponents. But if, as claimed, strategic participation minimises conflict at this later stage, there would be little to gain from removing them. Moreover, removing them adds to the perception that initial participatory processes are undertaken disingenuously, and are simply used to stymie debate under the auspices of a 'post political' delivery (Legacy and van den Nouwelant, 2015). By demonstrating that participation in strategic planning processes is unlikely to provide sufficient clarity, this paper aims to further discourage attempts to reduce comprehensive engagement throughout all planning processes.

Mixed use neighbourhoods

There has been a well-observed trend in contemporary planning to curtail suburban dispersion, through *compact city* or *smart growth* policies (Daniels, 2001, Dieleman and Wegener, 2004). Under these policies, the growth of both population and economic activity is accommodated (at least to a greater degree) through more intensive and efficient use of existing urban land. Developments accommodate larger amounts of floor space, enable more efficient transport options, and mix a wider variety of land uses (Calthorpe, 1993, Schwanke, 2003, Dittmar and Ohland, 2004). The mixed-use neighbourhood typology synonymous with these developments is particularly prominent because it has emerged from multiple directions. There is the renewed interest in historic inner-city neighbourhoods (Smith, 1996), which predate cars and so integrate land uses. There are major development sites on obsolete industrial or government land built expressly to accommodate a mix of land uses (Lange and McNeil, 2004). And there are previously commercial precincts, particularly CBDs, that have recently introduced residential uses (Birch, 2002, Tallon and Bromley, 2004).

As an urban form, the mixed-use neighbourhood is thought to respond to many urban problems. Perhaps the most common discourses promoting mixed-use neighbourhoods are environmental ones. For example, the UN Environment Program argues that for reducing carbon emissions: "A key focus is ... the redevelopment of economically depressed or polluted areas, focusing on mixed-uses with access to mass transit" (UNEP, 2012). In addition to increasing the viability of less carbon-intensive public transport, mixed-use neighbourhoods are considered 'walkable' (Speck, 2012), increasing the modal share of active forms of transport (Barton, 2009, Ewing and Cervero, 2010). Debate remains about whether compact built forms are necessary to redress car usage (Mees, 2000) – or any other desired environmental outcome

(Neuman, 2005). But there remains a consistent and compelling correlation between more dense and integrated urban patterns and decreased environmental impacts (Jabareen, 2006), giving arguments much traction in planning practice.

There are also a number of related economic discourses that argue for mixed-use neighbourhoods, mostly revolving around the economic shift away from heavy industry to a more centralised, 'global city' economy of finance and corporate management (Sassen, 1991). Central to this economy is a greater reliance on innovation, and so a skilled workforce, to increase productivity (Storper and Scott, 2009). The position of mixed-use neighbourhoods on transport hubs, noted above, increases connectivity and, therefore, labour-market thickness, skills matching and productivity (Wheeler, 2001, Bertolini and Clercq, 2003, Melo *et al.*, 2009).

Also, the mixed-use neighbourhood is associated with the 'creative city' thesis (Landry, 2000, Florida, 2002), which reinvigorated arguments that cities should continue to focus on 'knowledge spill-overs' (Glaeser *et al.*, 1991, Porter, 2000). Attracting an innovative and diverse population into close proximity with one another at the street scale is thought to best enable these spill-overs (Malmberg *et al.*, 1996, Kuah, 2002). A key feature of the creative city thesis is the need to provide amenity to attract the skilled and productive workforce (Clark *et al.*, 2002), which is realised in the retail and hospitality component that is a feature of the archetypal mixed-use neighbourhood.

Framing the discourses through environmental or economic narratives conceals the fact that, conceptually, two very different spatial constructions are being employed. They are summarised here as the *self-contained neighbourhood* and *well-connected neighbourhood*. Increasing walking and informal spill-over effects through the co-location of homes, jobs and amenities reflect the self-contained construction. The well-connected construction is most literally realised with physical connections of transport networks. But it is also evident in the economic rationales of increasing the viability of the local economy by functionally connecting it to broader networks of capital, customers, suppliers and workers. It is not being suggested these two constructions necessarily lie in conflict: in economics, for example, knowledge spill-overs and thick labour markets go hand-in-hand. But these constructions do present a 'fault line' in an otherwise seemingly aligned set of objectives that mixed-use neighbourhoods are expected to help achieve. The next section examines a local community plan of the City of Sydney. It presents a planning vision for the council-area's various 'villages'; mixed-use neighbourhoods as defined in this section. It demonstrates how a strategic planning exercise fails to provide sufficient clarity around its various objectives for these villages. The analysis is based on a qualitative textual analysis. This approach gives significant insights into the conceptual tensions highlighted here, and is a useful case for other Australian jurisdictions because it is both held up as an exemplar of participatory planning and it deals with a common structural shift towards a centres policy (Randolph, 2004, Forster, 2006).

This all might feel like a tedious point: any concept is malleable and could result in different interpretations, misunderstanding and conflict. But that is the point. Planning, particularly strategic planning, is a necessarily conceptual exercise. The hypothesis is that conceptual ambiguity will materialise during subsequent community conflicts. The spatial constructions identified here are not endpoints in themselves worth contesting, but serve to align with particular social arrangements that will empower one set of stakeholders over another (Purcell, 2001). In this case, the more territorially bounded construction of the self-contained neighbourhood empowers those within the constructed boundary. This is often, but not exclusively, residents for whom the neighbourhood is an extension of their home (a more unambiguously bounded construction). The well-connected neighbourhood, on the other hand, empowers those benefitting from the flows along the network. This is often, but again not exclusively, businesses that rely on connections to customers, suppliers and workers to create a necessary economy of scale to make a business viable. The section after next uses a series of stakeholder interviews to examine community conflicts about late trading in Kings Cross, Sydney. It demonstrates how those on opposite sides of the conflict draw from the different spatial constructions that the planning concept of a mixed-use neighbourhood purports to support. Kings Cross is a unique neighbourhood with unique local politics, but it is useful as an *extreme* case (see Flyvbjerg, 2004) whereby the issues can be more easily analysed due to their greater prominence. The final section then draws some general conclusions about what this means for planning practice and theory.

Policy ambiguities

This section summarises the findings of a close reading and an iterative and interpretive coding of the City of Sydney's *Sustainable Sydney 2030* strategy. It employs a form of discourse analysis that focuses on the textual, rather than inter-textual, material. That is, the analysis focuses on how the language and structure of the text itself frames discourses about future planning directions. In corollary, this analysis does not cover the broader context of the material, such as the political environment in which the strategy was produced or other activities in the planning space. As Fairclough (1992) argues, both textual and inter-textual analysis is revealing in discourse analysis, the latter more-so for uncovering the motivations and effects of a particular text's author and audience. This analysis does not claim to uncover the motivations behind the discussed conceptual ambiguities, as is the case in some theorisations about 'post-political' planning processes (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, Ruming and Gurran, 2014). The next section, though, explores some of the ambiguities' effects.

The City of Sydney Council's recent¹ overarching *community plan* (City of Sydney Council, 2013) is based on a 2008 comprehensive strategy called *Sustainable Sydney 2030*. The 2008 strategy comprises two volumes: the *vision* (City of Sydney Council, 2008b) and the more detailed *support document* (City of Sydney Council, 2008a). Combined, these three documents outline the council's position on a range of issues. Of interest here is the identification of, and plans for, a series of 'villages' or 'activity centres'. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* was lauded as an exemplar of participatory strategic planning, winning awards from the Planning Institute of Australia, the International Association for Public Participation Australasia and the Local Government and Shires Association². So it serves as a useful case study when trying to uncover how even ideal participatory planning practice can fail to provide the desired clarity.

In the current community plan, the council area is divided into the 'City Centre' (i.e. the CBD) and a series of 'villages'. A definitive list of the actual villages is not given in any of the policy documents. Notably, the word 'village' imbues a sense of small-scale quaintness and of local self-containment. The choice might be used to avoid confusion with already defined functional areas – like 'suburb'. But it is seemingly chosen over other less evocative words, like 'precinct' or 'neighbourhood'. Also, in various points in the documents, examples of villages are given, where they largely do equate to the defined – and territorially demarcated – suburbs:

The residential areas in the City have been characterised as a diverse 'City of Villages' surrounding the City Centre, including Kings Cross, Paddington, Newtown, Surry Hills, Redfern, Erskineville (City of Sydney Council, 2008a: 182)

So the choice to avoid using the suburbs, and instead introduce the idea of villages, suggests a deliberate attempt to construct the council area in a different way. As in the above quote, the villages are often considered residential areas in the documents. Elsewhere, though, the villages are described as a "main street and surrounding residential areas" (City of Sydney Council, 2008a: 192). This is a seemingly innocuous shift in emphasis, but the meaning becomes muddier. In the same section, it is argued that there needs to be some acknowledgement of:

precincts that have come to serve wider needs beyond their local population... These places contain greater concentrations of economic, social and cultural activity and infrastructure normally expected in a Village. They are more than service centres for a residential population. (City of Sydney Council, 2008a)

¹ A 2014 community plan has been subsequently released

² PIA National President Award 2009, PIA Commendation for Australia Award for Urban Design 2009, PIA NSW Urban Planning Achievement 2008, IAP2 Australian Core Values Award for Robust Public Participation 2008, LGSA RH Dougherty Award – Reporting to your Community within Local Government 2009

These precincts are called 'activity hubs' (not villages) in the 2008 documents, but that term is not used in the 2013 plan. Their reference in the original vision statement (City of Sydney Council, 2008b: 7) – as "The Villages will be served by Activity Hubs where services are concentrated..." – was changed in the current community plan to where the villages are simply served by 'centres' (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 17). The concept of activity hubs survives, however, with the ten identified in the 2008 vision (City of Sydney Council, 2008b: 57) appearing on a list on the council's website (City of Sydney Council, 2015); not as a list of hubs, but rather a list of 'our villages'.

From a corporate communication perspective, it is understandable that this change could have flowed from a desire to simplify the nomenclature, and integrate the different objectives of a given neighbourhood into a single notion of 'village'. The notion of 'village hubs' also predates the term 'activity hub' (City of Sydney Council, 2008b: 56). However, it also speaks to the ambiguity central to this paper that the single concept of a village centre is expected to simultaneously carry the connotation of a commercial hub of the local resident population and a node on a broader network of city-wide, if not metro-wide, economic activity.

Being a local government policy, it responds to a decidedly local political economy. But it hedges. For example, the policy's position on transport does acknowledge the need to consider different modes and different scales (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 36). However its objective is that these broader scale uses of the transport network, like freight and commuter movement, not to be at the expense of local village amenity, with the objective stated to be "reduce negative impacts from transport on public space in the City Centre and villages" (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 37). Of note, one of the three overarching themes of the 2030 vision is for a 'connected' city, albeit represented by a bicycle symbol. The overarching vision statement, before mentioning connection to and from the council area, opens with:

The City will be easy to get around with a local network for walking and cycling, and transit routes connecting the City's villages, city centre and the rest of Inner Sydney. (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 17)

In economic terms, the policy also skews towards the local political economy. For example, a detailed picture of the desired growth in 'creative' industries is given:

Proximity to quality inner City living environments for younger professionals – such as Kings Cross, Paddington, Glebe, Newtown and Erskineville – is desirable [for small creative start-ups]. A sense of 'place', and a creative milieu in which to establish these enterprises – generating pleasure, enthusiasm and networking opportunities with other creative people – is important in attracting creative people, investment and subsequent economic growth. (City of Sydney Council, 2008a: 226, see also City of Sydney Council, 2013: 52)

Here too, the residential amenity and growing economic activity in the hubs are considered symbiotic: 'a creative milieu [sic]'. Elsewhere, the idea that these places primarily service the local community is reiterated: "...create a network of Village Centres as places for meeting, shopping, creating, playing, learning and working for local communities" (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 47). However, later on the same page – like the above quote defining the activity hubs – there is a desire that the "The City Centre and Village Centres create an integrated Global Sydney" (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 47). The objective of fostering the council area's role as 'Global Sydney' is articulated as:

an employment and cultural focus for metropolitan Sydney ... critical for Australia's prosperity. A strategic plan for the City has inevitable implications beyond the local government area. (City of Sydney Council, 2013: 10)

As theorised above, the economic and transport discourses articulate the role of the village centres in spatially ambiguous ways. They are expected to service the (self-contained) local community and integrate with the (well-connected) city and metro areas beyond. As noted, the villages are not defined in the community plan, but the Kings Cross 'activity hub' is defined as "a key entertainment and tourist destination, including ... a range of accommodation, while recognising and protecting its important residential character" (City of Sydney Council, 2008b: 58). This does little to indicate that the tourist destination and residential character might not always align. It is also perhaps notable, in light of the issues with Kings Cross described in the next section, that the 'Kings Cross' hub in 2008 was renamed to the 'McLeay Street and Woolloomooloo' village on the above-mentioned web page. This might be to better match the names of the other villages, which refer to their main streets. But, the new name does exclude a large section of this village's commercial activity, particularly that part which services the wider metro.

Contested neighbourhood

This section summarises the relevant findings of a series of semi-structured interviews. Twenty-one stakeholders active in local community conflicts in and around Kings Cross, Sydney, were interviewed between 2012 and 2014. The stakeholders were identified through their engagement in media coverage and council and other government consultation processes over the same period. Participants included state and local government planners, various longstanding resident, business and industry interest groups, and those engaged in particular heritage, open space, social services and street vending issues. Participants have been de-identified. Of particular interest here is evidence that those engaged in the conflicts identify with the self-contained or well-connected constructions of the neighbourhood that align with, or even draw on, policy constructions.

The most prominent manifestation of community conflict in Kings Cross related to its cluster of late-trading venues. Media coverage rightfully focused on two separate but parallel incidents involving young men who had headed out to these venues, been the victims of unprovoked attacks while on the street, and died as a result (e.g. Devine, 2012, Sexton, 2014). As a community conflict, though, the issues extended to other adverse impacts of late-trading venues on surrounding land uses, particularly on residents. This included: comparable risks to safety due to anti-social behaviour; other impacts at the nuisance end of the anti-social behaviour spectrum like vomit, urine, and broken glass; traffic congestion; noise from patrons, vehicles and cleaners; and even societal ills more tangentially associated with late trading, like illegal drug use and an associated presence of organised crime.

During the course of the research, a 'freeze' on liquor licences in Kings Cross was in place, so no new applications for late-trading venues were allowed (NSW Office of Liquor, 2015). It should be noted that much of the debate about liquor licencing, as well as the regulatory response, fell outside the domain of local planning. This might suggest any policy ambiguities or inconsistencies lie *between* policy arenas. But the last quote in the previous section highlights inconsistencies *within* local planning policy too (see also van den Nouwelant and Steinmetz, 2013). As a result of this absence of new late-trading venues, the conflict played out over the management and regulation of existing venues. There was consensus that the recent incidents were terrible, and that they were externalities associated with late trading in the neighbourhood. However, in broad terms, the positions of stakeholders fell into two categories: whether late trading is desirable and so should be better managed to limit externalities without affecting its ongoing viability, or whether late trading is undesirable (or inseparable from the externalities) and should be curtailed wholesale.

There were a number of nuanced positions along this spectrum, rather than two homogenous and discrete camps, however this dichotomy is useful. Expectedly, those with an interest in the ongoing viability of late trading – particularly the liquor industry and licensed venues, but also patrons and other affected sectors like tourism and cultural industries – tended to argue for limited interventions to enable as much as continuity possible. On the other side, those without an interest in late trading's viability (or, moreover, an interest in its unviability) – particularly the most vocal residents, but also emergency services and broader social issue interest groups around alcohol consumption and youth violence – tended to be more comfortable arguing for late trading to be restricted indiscriminately. That is to say, at least among vocally engaged stakeholders interviewed, the desired outcome of stakeholders was that which was most beneficial or empowering for them.

Residents engaged in the community conflict had long-held concerns that the adverse impacts of late trading could escalate as they eventually did. For example, in one interview, a local resident activist, unprompted, spoke more about her fear for safety in Kings Cross than anything else. Her thoughts were likely being shaped by the media coverage, but were also easily accommodated into her pre-existing perspective on the problems in the area. When asked whether any particular incidents she personally experienced made her fearful, she conceded that she stayed well clear of the streets during Friday and Saturday nights. This line of questioning was intended to elicit some distinction between perceived dangers resulting from media coverage versus personal experience. Instead, the need to avoid the area consolidated her thoughts that late trading meant the monopolisation of the street by patrons coming from outside the neighbourhood and, by extension, outside the community. A similar sentiment emerged in other interviews as well.

For those that opposed late trading, there was often strong language of 'outsiders' used. There was a sense of problems being caused by visitors who had little regard for the local area: littering, vomiting, fighting, and whatever else. This sense of outsiders also played into the above narratives of fear and security: outsiders coming into – invading or penetrating – the boundaries of the neighbourhood. This territorial construction of the neighbourhood is analogous constructions of the home, where the 'local' neighbourhood is epitomised by its sense of exclusivity and security. Any sense of someone else within that territory threatens the neighbourhood's ability to fulfil the function of providing security, familiarity and a sense of agency over the environment. This construction is more strongly connected with the localism of a neighbourhood as a self-contained unit, and therefore aligns with a desire to get rid of late trading that is seen to attract outsiders.

An interviewee from the chamber of commerce held different, but related concerns about late-trading venues 'monopolising' Kings Cross. For him, any monopolisation was media narratives that overshadowed the range of commercial activities in the area, which was thought to reflect the diversity of the community more broadly. However, he felt a well-managed late-night economy was possible and desirable. Possible, he advocated, if appropriate supporting infrastructure was in place like better transport late at night and more organised policing and security. Desirable because the neighbourhood's point of difference, which could be drawn on to attract business, was its long-standing connection to the cultural economy of arts, music, fashion and the like, which had a strong recreational, and so late-night component. Another interviewee from the late-trading business community similarly wanted to see more supporting infrastructure for the late trading venues. For him, the late-trading venues were central to Kings Cross's ongoing commercial function. Other businesses largely traded on the identity of the area that was created – historically and contemporarily – by its unique nightlife. The scale of Kings Cross's commercial activity raised it above any notion of being a local set of shops, and it had a role for the city as a whole, which made it commercially viable.

Notably, issues of safety and security were not as readily raised by stakeholders wanting to see its ongoing viability. This is partly because the incidents were seen by those involved in late trading as extraordinarily unusual, and something that could be managed with better resources and policing. Also, there was not the same sense of territoriality. Instead they identified with the neighbourhood through its connections to other places: its function as entertainment destination for other parts of the metro; or its function for tourism and so its connection to other parts of the world. This narrative was undeniably partly driven by a commercial interest – i.e. maximising the potential market for what you're selling. But it was, all the same, a narrative that involved a very different spatial construction. It was a much more relational construction, one where the meaning of the neighbourhood relates to its connections to other places.

In terms of the suitability of late trading in mixed-use neighbourhoods, there was a line of argument from the resident activists interviewed that such amenities were more suited to the CBD or some other unpopulated areas. There were also the dramatic policy shifts, like the liquor licence 'freeze', and a reduction in shorter permissible operating hours, irrespective of management and regulation (NSW Office of Liquor, 2013, NSW Office of Liquor, 2014). This points to the fact that what is being contested is the suitability of some *ideal* nightclub, rather than just the *particular* nightclub falling short of that ideal (which management regulations would govern). Some of this can be explained through those arguing that late trading is not suitable anywhere (from health and other anti-alcohol interest groups). However, by

exploring the positions of residents and other locals engaged in the debates, there is evidence supporting the role of contested neighbourhood meanings in the debate. If the neighbourhood is constructed as a self-contained unit, the metro-wide commercial activity was out of place. And vice versa.

The stakeholders interviewed were actively engaged in planning processes, including engaging in consultation with local council policy making. As such, interviewees were aware of the *Sustainable Sydney 2030* constructions of its village centres and Kings Cross. And, as described here, interviewees did largely align, albeit selectively, their own constructions with those of the council's policies. There was little explicit evidence, though, that interviewees pointed to earlier policies when arguing against current council actions. That is, there was no sense that agreed policies that were now being ignored. Where there was a perception that the council was failing to act – shutting down the late-trading venues, for example – the argument of interviewees was that the council never intended to act, not that the council had changed from its policy's position. This was, though, likely due to the fact that current conflicts had shaped stakeholders' perceptions of the council as a whole, and on the merits of earlier consultation and policy positions.

Discussion and conclusion

The case study examined here points to the limits of strategic planning in achieving consensus or even clarity. Even the *Sustainable Sydney 2030* strategy, a lauded participatory planning exercise, failed to minimise subsequent conflicts over neighbourhood development and regulation. The policy-making exercise itself, and the pursuit of consensus, led to the adoption of necessarily ambiguous discourses. Necessarily ambiguous because they could gloss over potential aspects of future neighbourhood development that would have made any sense of consensus, or even widespread acceptance of a democratic mandate, impossible. And, in doing so, such discourses make another aim of participatory planning – providing clarity in the absence of acceptance – equally unattainable. There is an inherent limitation to conceptual discourses in describing singular, material instances of whatever concept is being constructed.

The inability to achieve consensus is less to do with the shortcomings of a given participatory planning exercise, and more to do with the complexity of urban politics. The case study examined has demonstrated the fundamental differences in how the neighbourhood is constructed. There will never likely be agreement. And differences like these will mean planning will remain political, whether claims to consensus, or a democratic mandate, are made. In this respect, the chimera of consensus, and the claims to settling political debates, could do a great deal of damage. It was hypothesised here that giving the impression of clarity – allowing affected communities to see what they want to see in strategic plans – would only increase the sense of betrayal or procedural injustice, when what was seen in policy failed to materialise in real life. Or, perhaps worse, and as was evidenced in the interviews, employing rhetoric of 'implementing an agreed plan for the neighbourhood' will simply disillusion stakeholders with the planning process in general.

All of this points to the need for meaningful ongoing engagement throughout all urban governance: planning, development and regulation processes. Such commitment to ongoing engagement can be done in a spirit of embracing the political nature of urban governance through agonism (as per Hillier, 2002). As Hillier's work indicates, planning theorists have arguably moved to a *post-collaborative* phase that highlights the "conflicting rationalities underlying planning practice" and "the problems that can be obscured, as much as resolved, by some forms and attempts at collaboration" (Brownill and Parker, 2010: 276-7). But, as Taylor and Hurley (2015) have noted, there is a disconnect between theory and practice in the planning field. So perhaps a commitment to meaningful engagement can simply be done in a spirit of pragmatic acceptance of the reality that planning decisions will always be political. Either way, planning practice should not expect the impossible – like expecting sufficient agreement or awareness of strategic planning directions to make ongoing engagement unnecessary.

References

Allmendinger, P. & Haughton, G., 2012. Post-political spatial planning in England: a crisis of consensus? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37, 89-103.

- Arnstein, S.R., 1969. A Ladder Of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35, 216-224.
- Barton, H., 2009. Land use planning and health and well-being. *Land Use Policy*, 26, S115-S123.
- Bertolini, L. & Clercq, F.L., 2003. Urban development without more mobility by car? Lessons from Amsterdam, a multimodal urban region. *Environment and Planning A*, 35, 575-589.
- Birch, E.L., 2002. Having a Longer View on Downtown Living. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 68, 5-21.
- Brownill, S. & Parker, G., 2010. Why bother with good works? The relevance of public participation (s) in planning in a post-collaborative era. *Planning, Practice & Research*, 25, 275-282.
- Calthorpe, P., 1993. *The next American metropolis: Ecology, community, and the American dream* New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- City of Sydney Council, 2008a. Sustainable Sydney 2030: Support Document.
- City of Sydney Council, 2008b. Sustainable Sydney 2030: The Vision.
- City of Sydney Council, 2013. Sustainable Sydney 2030: Community Strategic Plan (2013).
- City of Sydney Council, 2015. *Our Villages* [online]. www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/learn/about-sydney/our-villages [Accessed Access Date 15 July 2015].
- Clark, T.N., Lloyd, R., Wong, K.K. & Jain, P., 2002. Amenities Drive Urban Growth. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 24, 493-515.
- Daniels, T., 2001. Smart growth: A new American approach to regional planning. *Planning Practice and Research*, 16, 271-279.
- Davidoff, P., 1965. Advocacy and pluralism in planning. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31, 331-338.
- Devine, M., 2012. Thomas Kelly is everyone's son - time to reclaim our streets (11 Jul). *The Daily Telegraph*. http://blogs.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/mirandadevine/index.php/dailytelegraph/comments/no_g_o_sydney/ (accessed 22 Oct 2015).
- Dieleman, F. & Wegener, M., 2004. Compact city and urban sprawl. *Built Environment*, 30, 308-323.
- Dittmar, H. & Ohland, G., 2004. *The new transit town: Best practices in transit-oriented development* Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Ewing, R. & Cervero, R., 2010. Travel and the Built Environment. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 76, 265-294.
- Fairclough, N., 1992. Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 3, 193-217.
- Flint, A., 2009. *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs took on New York's master builder and transformed the American city* New York: Random House.
- Florida, R.L., 2002. *The rise of the creative class: And how its's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* New York: Basic Books.
- Flyvbjerg, B., 2004. Five misunderstandings about case-study research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J.F. Gubrium & D. Silverman (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 420-434.
- Forester, J., 1999. *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging participatory planning processes* London: MIT Press.
- Forster, C., 2006. The challenge of change: Australian cities and urban planning in the new millennium. *Geographical Research*, 44, 173-182.

- Friedmann, J., 1973. *Retracking America: A theory of transactive planning* New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- Glaeser, E.L., Kallal, H.D., Scheinkman, J.A. & Shleifer, A., 1991. Growth in Cities. *National Bureau of Economic Research: Working Paper 3787*, Cambridge, MA.
- Gleeson, B., Darbas, T. & Lawson, S., 2004. Governance, Sustainability and Recent Australian Metropolitan Strategies: A Socio-theoretic Analysis. *Urban Policy and Research*, 22, 345-366.
- Healey, P., 1992. Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory. *Town planning review*, 63, 143-162.
- Healey, P., 2003. Collaborative planning in perspective. *Planning theory*, 2, 101-123.
- Healey, P., 2006. *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healey, P., 2012. Re-enchanting democracy as a mode of governance. *Critical Policy Studies*, 6, 19-39.
- Hillier, J., 2002. Direct action and agonism in democratic planning practice. In P. Allmendinger & M. Tewdwr-Jones (eds.) *Planning futures: New directions for planning theory*. London: Routledge, 110-35.
- Huxley, M., 2000. Administrative coordination, urban management and strategic planning in the 1970s. In S. Hamnett & R. Freestone (eds.) *The Australian Metropolis: A Planning History*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 131-148.
- Innes, J.E. & Booher, D.E., 1999. Consensus building and complex adaptive systems: A framework for evaluating collaborative planning. *Journal of the American planning association*, 65, 412-423.
- Innes, J.E. & Booher, D.E., 2004. Reframing public participation: strategies for the 21st century. *Planning theory & practice*, 5, 419-436.
- International Association for Public Participation, 2014. *IAP2's public participation spectrum*. www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/84 (accessed 15 July 2015).
- Jabareen, Y.R., 2006. Sustainable urban forms their typologies, models, and concepts. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26, 38-52.
- Kuah, A.T.H., 2002. Cluster Theory and Practice: Advantages for the Small Business Locating in a Vibrant Cluster. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 4, 206-228.
- Landry, C., 2000. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* Near Stroud, U.K.: Earthscan.
- Lane, M.B., 2005. Public Participation in Planning: an intellectual history. *Australian Geographer*, 36, 283-299.
- Lange, D.A. & Mcneil, S., 2004. Brownfield Development: Tools for Stewardship. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, 130, 109-116.
- Lefebvre, H., 1991. *The production of space* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Legacy, C. & Van Den Nouweland, R., 2015. Negotiating strategic planning's transitional spaces: the case of 'guerrilla governance' in infrastructure planning. *Environment and Planning A*, 47, 209-226.
- Malmberg, A., Sölvell, Ö. & Zander, I., 1996. Spatial Clustering, Local Accumulation of Knowledge and Firm Competitiveness. *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 78, 85-97.
- Mcfarland, P., 2011. The best planning system in Australia or a system in need of review? An analysis of the New South Wales planning system. *Planning Perspectives*, 26, 403-422.
- Mckenny, L., 2013. Scorn from lawyers on reforms to planning (13 July 2013). *Sydney Morning Herald*, www.smh.com.au/nsw/scorn-from-lawyers-on-reforms-to-planning-20130712-2pvly.html (accessed 15 July 2015).
- Mees, P., 2000. *A very public solution: transport in the dispersed city* Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press.

- Melo, P.C., Graham, D.J. & Noland, R.B., 2009. A meta-analysis of estimates of urban agglomeration economies. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 39, 332-342.
- Neuman, M., 2005. The Compact City Fallacy. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 25, 11-26.
- Nsw Government, 2015. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (as amended). www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/maintop/view/inforce/act+203+1979+cd+0+N (accesses 15 July 2015).
- Nsw Office of Liquor, Gaming & Racing, 2013. New liquor laws for Kings Cross. *Liquor + Gaming: News from the Office of Liquor, Gaming & Racing*, 8, 2-3.
- Nsw Office of Liquor, Gaming & Racing, 2014. Fact Sheet: Special licence conditions for premises in Kings Cross (June 2014).
- Nsw Office of Liquor, Gaming & Racing, 2015. *Liquor licence freeze* www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/liquor_licence_freeze.asp (accessed 15 July 2015).
- Olesen, K., 2014. The neoliberalisation of strategic spatial planning. *Planning Theory*, 13, 288-303.
- Porter, M.E., 2000. Location, Competition, and Economic Development: Local Clusters in a Global Economy. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 14, 15-34.
- Purcell, M., 2001. Neighborhood activism among homeowners as a politics of space. *The Professional Geographer*, 53, 178-194.
- Randolph, B., 2004. The Changing Australian City: New Patterns, New Policies and New Research Needs. *Urban Policy and Research*, 22, 481-493.
- Ruming, K. & Gurrans, N., 2014. Australian planning system reform. *Australian Planner*, 51, 102-107.
- Sager, T., 2008. Planners' Role: Torn between Dialogical Ideals and Neo-liberal Realities. *European Planning Studies*, 17, 65-84.
- Sassen, S., 1991. *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schwanke, D., 2003. *Mixed-use development handbook* Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute.
- Sexton, J., 2014. Daniel Christie: a true brave heart remembered (18 Jan). *The Daily Telegraph*, www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/daniel-christie-a-true-brave-heart-remembered/story-fni0cx12-1226804530431 (accessed 22 Oct 2015).
- Smith, N., 1996. *The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city* London: Routledge.
- Speck, J., 2012. *Walkable city: how downtown can save America, one step at a time* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Storper, M. & Scott, A.J., 2009. Rethinking human capital, creativity and urban growth. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 9, 147-167.
- Tallon, A.R. & Bromley, R.D.F., 2004. Exploring the attractions of city centre living: evidence and policy implications in British cities. *Geoforum*, 35, 771-787.
- Taylor, E.J. & Hurley, J., 2015. "Not a Lot of People Read the Stuff": Australian Urban Research in Planning Practice. *Urban Policy and Research*, 1-16.
- Un Habitat, 2015. Participatory and Inclusive Land Readjustment. In U. Habitat (ed.) <http://gltn.net/index.php/component/jdownloads/finish/3-gltn-documents/2211-participatory-and-inclusive-land-readjustment-a-brief-eng-2015?Itemid=544>.
- Unep, 2012. *The Emissions Gap Report 2012* Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- Van Den Nouwelant, R. & Steinmetz, C., 2013. Concentration vs. Dispersal of a Late-night Economy. *Spaces and Flows: An International Journal of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies*, 3, 31-43.
- Watson, V., 2014. Co-production and collaboration in planning—The difference. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 15, 62-76.

Wheeler, Christopher h., 2001. Search, Sorting, and Urban Agglomeration. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 19, 879-899.

World Bank, 1999. Public consultation in the EA Process: A strategic approach. *Environmental Assessment Sourcebook Update*, 26 (May), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSAFEPOL/1142947-1118039086869/20526299/Update26PublicConsultationInTheEAPProcessAStrategicApproachMay1999.pdf>.