



Progress in Australian planning history: Traditions, themes and transformations

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Abstract

Planning history is a distinctive strain in modern planning scholarship that provides dividends in the broader understanding of planning’s aims, development, impacts, achievements and limitations. Since the 1970s, with the infusion of more critical social science and creative humanities perspectives, planning history has developed a global reach characterised by cross-cutting themes and international institutions but research remains largely organised on a national basis. This review of recent and cutting edge literature deals exclusively with the Australian realm: its origins, governance, preoccupations and potentials. The major focus is on recent (mainly post-2002) literature and contributions capturing of innovative takes on the historical development of planning. Like urban history, planning history takes shape primarily within topical clusters and Abbott’s (2006) threefold characterisation of urban history concerns for planners provides a useful typology. Against this backdrop, the paper describes the culture, structure and progress of planning history studies from an Australian perspective. It establishes an interdisciplinary framework with other adjectival histories (architectural, urban, environmental, social), reviews recent path-breaking research organised around six major themes resonant of wider planning concerns, and reflects on directions for future research.

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Keywords: Planning history; Literature review; Australia

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1. Introduction

Planning history is the historical study of all aspects of urban and regional planning and its variants within their social, economic, cultural and environmental contexts. Nominally straddling the interstices between the planning and history professions, it is most visibly constituted through scholarly societies (the International Planning History Society or IPHS) and journals (*Planning Perspectives* and *Journal of Planning History*) but captures a wider array of critical writing underpinned by historical sensibility from the general planning literature and cognate social science and humanities disciplines. The growing body of work in this field since the 1980s has been reviewed by various authors, notably a series of national-based accounts in the 1990s¹

¹ Burgess, P. (1996). Should planning history hit the road? An examination of the state of planning history in the United States. *Planning Perspectives*, 11(3), 201–224; Cherry, G. E. (1991). Planning history: Recent developments in Britain. *Planning Perspectives*, 6(1), 33–45; Hall, T. (1994). Planning history: Recent developments in the Nordic countries, with special reference to Sweden. *Planning Perspectives*, 9(2), 153–179; Miller, C. L. (1998). New Zealand's planning history – Quo vadis? *Planning Perspectives*, 13(3), 257–274; Monclús, F. J. (1992). Planning and history in Spain. *Planning Perspectives*, 7(1), 101–106. Note: Citations to the broader international, contextual and theoretical literature are footnoted, with the references consolidated at the end constituting the main body of recent Australian work under review.

complemented by Almandoz's review of Latin American historiography for this journal.² Stephen Ward, Christopher Silver and myself have recently surveyed the “remarkable blossoming of research activity” internationally.³ The present article does likewise for Australia, a heavily urbanised island-continental nation with a little over two centuries of European settlement making it an instructive laboratory of the rise and impacts of modern urban planning.

Planning history has been portrayed as a regrettable fragmentation of historical interest in the city.⁴ Yet the very process of specialised and critical inquiry unbounded by strict orthodoxy is in fact one of the field's strengths. This paper does not try to review everything exhaustively. Acknowledging the research platform established internationally and nationally from the 1980s, the approach is more selective and intended to highlight recent diversity and innovation in the field. This bibliographical essay is effectively the fourth in a series of reviews covering approximate decadal periods and dating back to 1983 (Freestone, 1983; Freestone &

² Almandoz, A. (2006). Urban planning and historiography in Latin America. *Progress in Planning*, 65(2), 81–123.

³ Ward, S. V., Freestone, R., & Silver, C. (2011). The “new” planning history: Reflections, issues and directions. *Town Planning Review*, 82(3), 231–262.

⁴ Daunton, M. J. (1983). Experts and the environment: Approaches to planning history. *Journal of Urban History*, 9(2), 233–250.

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