

A TALE OF TWO TOWNS:

Policy and action in the Bathurst-Orange growth centre:
A case of perceptions, politics and power in centrally
commanded regional policy planning.

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Kevin W. Sproats.

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ABSTRACTA TALE OF TWO TOWNSPolicy and action in the Bathurst-Orange growth centre:A case of perceptions, politics and power in centrally
commanded regional policy planning.

In October 1972 the N.S.W. Government announced it had selected the two central western towns of Bathurst and Orange as the State's pilot growth centre. Subsequently the Federal Government joined in the project and a public Development Corporation was imposed to implement the program. Ultimately the project failed dismally to achieve its stated goals and has been extinguished slowly over many years.

This study seeks to document and explain the rise and fall of the Bathurst-Orange growth centre. Given that the centre started life as a political contrivance and was prosecuted on the basis of centrally commanded policy planning, the pervading theme of this work concerns the relationship between politics and planning: how the perceptions, imperatives and power relationships of political, bureaucratic, community and other actors meld to determine planning policy and action.

The case is presented in four parts. The first three examine the selection, implementation and demise respectively of the growth centre. The fourth comprises an inquest over the corpse.

The first part traces the evolution of growth centre policies by four political parties leading up to the federal election in 1972. The process was found to be analogous to the impulsing of a nova star propelled by the political propensity for power. Policy was shaped by perceptions of community issues, substantiated by selected technical advice, subject always to its electoral appeal.

The second part examines the translation of policies into programs through political bargaining and the legislation of a political/bureaucratic network. It was found that alternate procedural approaches, such as market-oriented or social action, were not contemplated. The overriding proclivity was for central command through a bureaucratic program. In this, struggles of perceptions

and power were effectively institutionalised.

The third part explains the launching of the local program in Bathurst-Orange and the struggles to sustain it in the face of declining political commitment. Following a brief encounter with the personal commitment of two influential politicians, the Development Corporation gradually lost its political patronage. Bureaucratic strategies for sustaining a program were identified, as were political strategies for liquidating it.

The study is completed with an elaboration of a circular model of policy and action. This is used to explain the events of Bathurst-Orange as a process of circular and contracting policy commitment; firstly political contraction, then bureaucratic, leaving a local program to substitute policy and struggle for survival. Planning roles in this process and alternate planning approaches are raised as areas for further research and experimentation in policy planning.

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With my supervisors, Dr. Malcolm Cooper and Dr. Tony Sorensen, I leave a considerable debt. Their encouragement, discussions and insights have helped to make this thesis what it is. My special thanks go to Tony upon whom fell the task of reviewing drafts of this text during 1983. His rigorous scrutinising of argument, interchange of ideas and helpful comments have been valuable not only in preparing this study but as I struggled through my own changing understanding and attitudes to planning.

I am indebted to my colleagues at Mitchell College of Advanced Education. Without their encouragement and willingness to rearrange my program, at a time when we were all carrying heavy teaching loads, I wonder whether this thesis would ever have seen the light of day.

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Without doubt my biggest debt is to my wife, Eira, and children, Jennifer, Alison and Grant. For four years they have had to suffer a husband and father who was either away interviewing, in Armidale at the University, at his desk working, or thinking about "the thesis". If there was to be a dedication of this work, it would be to them.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.I.U.S.	Australian Institute of Urban Studies
B.O.D.C.	Bathurst Orange Development Corporation
C.M.A.	Central Mapping Authority (N.S.W.)
D.A.T.A.R.	Delegation a l'Amenagement du Territoire et a l'Action Regionale (France)
D. & D.	Department of Decentralisation and Development (N.S.W.)
D.M.R.	Department of Main Roads (N.S.W.)
D.U.R.D.	Department of Urban and Regional Development (Australian Government)
E.H.C.D.	Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development (Australian Government)
I.D. & D.	Department of Industrial Development and Decentralisation (N.S.W.)
N.C.D.C.	National Capital Development Commission
N.U.R.D.A.	National Urban and Regional Development Authority
N.S.W.	New South Wales
P. & E.C.	Planning and Environment Commission (N.S.W.)
S.I.D.C.U.R.D.	Standing Inter-Departmental Committee on Urban and Regional Development (Australian Government)
S.P.A.	State Planning Authority (N.S.W.)

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PREFACE

Some personal explanation is appropriate at the beginning of this thesis.

With a freshly minted planning degree from the University of New South Wales I joined the Bathurst-Orange Development Corporation as chief planner a few weeks after it had commenced operation. For the ten years prior to that I had been practicing as a surveyor and urban designer in the central west of New South Wales whilst based in Bathurst. The planning degree had been a step in a continuing interaction between practice and relevant theory.

As a surveyor I had been involved in subdivision and land development in Sydney and the central west. Dissatisfied with my knowledge of subdivision design I had completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Neighbourhood Design from the University of New South Wales. That study had raised more questions so I launched into the Bachelor of Town Planning program. The thesis I prepared for the degree (during 1973) was entitled A Regional Basis for New Cities in N.S.W. This was fundamentally an endeavour to understand what growth centres were, for by that time Bathurst had been nominated as part of the Bathurst-Orange Growth Centre. I must admit in hindsight that the theoretical basis of the thesis was not strong. On commencing the research for the case study presented here I discovered I knew nothing of the work of Perroux and Boudeville or the derivation of growth poles.

I joined the Corporation because I saw it as an exciting opportunity to really get involved in some planning. As other staff were appointed, an enthusiastic team was formed eager to implement this new growth centre program. After several years as chief planner I was appointed Deputy Chairman which thrust me into direct contact with politicians.

Throughout my time with the Corporation I was constantly faced with a dichotomy. On one hand I could see opportunities for utilising the technical planning skills I had acquired, but on the other hand I was directly involved in the realities of political decision making. Increasingly there appeared to me to be a distinction between what we were doing and why we were doing it.

At a time when a dedicated Corporation team was working extremely hard to develop the growth centre politicians were asking fundamental questions as to why it was necessary.

In 1979 I left the Corporation to commence this research. I came to this thesis with a desire to identify lessons which should be learned and to point to directions which might be followed in the future. The Corporation and its staff had performed with considerable distinction in difficult circumstances, and there was a temptation to document all that had been achieved. Initially I also sought refuge in theory. I thought that by increasing my knowledge of theory in the planning, growth centre and management literature I would be able to find answers. Very quickly I concluded that to simply explain the Corporation's programs and relate them to theoretical positions would be tantamount to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. The real issue to be addressed was the political nature of the growth centre policy.

There was some reluctance to take on this task. It meant I would need to critically examine the work of people I had personally been involved with and, without exception, I respected the energy and effort they put into the growth centre. There was also the danger I would attempt to rewrite history to prove my own point of view. I can only claim that I have sought to examine the processes rather than the people as individuals and any criticisms of lack of knowledge of what was done applies equally to me.

Having completed this thesis I can reflect on those five years in the Corporation and realise how little I understood of the relationship between political policy making and the implementation of a bureaucratic program.