
CONCLUSION

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The urban pattern that exists today is a product of complex interactions of a variety of phenomena, all of which have taken place over a substantial period of time. A multitude of factors have played a role in determining urban form outcomes, including social, political, cultural, technological and economic processes.³⁹⁵ In many ways the city is the physical manifestation of thousands of decisions made by many thousands of agents. Many of these decisions are in conflict, and the distribution of capital and power between economic agents is in no way uniform, but consciously or subconsciously the agents will have to take into account the outcomes of decisions made by those who have gone before.

Path dependency theory provides a partial explanation of the limitations placed on decision makers, at any particular period, and why the urban pattern has taken the form it has. While in this application the influence of path dependency has been most heavily felt through the constraints placed on the system by existing urban form, other factors have also been seen to be influential including behavioural aspects and the impact of the accepted norms of society. Path dependency does not provide the universal answer to all locational outcomes. It does, however, assist in providing some explanation of the land use patterns that have emerged.

³⁹⁵ Aplin, G., "The Rise of Suburban Sydney" in Sydney: *City of Suburbs*, Max Kelly (ed), UNSW Press, 1987, p 192

As a locational theory, path dependency helps provide explanations of some of the spatial outcomes that emerge in real life. It is concluded that path dependency makes its own contribution to enhancing our understanding of locational decision making, especially through highlighting some of the physical constraints under which decision-makers operate. Similarities between path dependency theory and behavioural and structuralist location theories are not surprising given that all three approaches have as their base a neo-classical economic approach. However, investigation of location decision-making would be incomplete if path dependency, for example, was relied upon as the sole location explanatory tool. A weakness in this study's application of path dependency has been its limited consideration of the impact of political economy and the motives of decision-makers. Adopting a more structuralist approach to locational analysis may have corrected this weakness. Accordingly, it is suggested that a more specific application of path dependency to individual projects would be enhanced by incorporating an urban political economy approach into path dependency analysis.

Of the principal elements of path dependency theory 'locked-in outcomes' is considered to be highly suited to spatial applications. In the case study of Sydney, locked-in outcomes were offered as an explanation of: (a) why a number of urban transport projects were completed after many years of stop-go construction; (b) why employment levels in Sydney's inner core have remained relatively constant over the last fifty years; and (c) why population growth through immigration has remained an apparent 'end in itself'.

Reasons for the locked-in outcomes can be broken down into sunk costs - whether involving infrastructure or organisational investment - or through positive feedback mechanisms. Positive feedback might include the push for suburban residential living as a result of the general acceptance of the populace to the desirability of this form of living.

Similarities between institutionalism theory and behavioural theory have been noted. Further examination of these theories and their relationships to path dependency will need to occur if it is to be accurately determined whether the theories are duplications or are complementary.

The approach taken in this study has been to generalise the application of path dependency theory in an effort to gauge the 'big picture' impacts on changes in the urban pattern. It was envisaged that a universal application of path dependency theory would be a useful explanatory tool to assist the study of urbanisation. However, in the approach to path dependency theory adopted in this, two key elements may have been neglected. These include the impact of 'events' in leaving a persistent influence on outcomes, and the role of 'timing' and place of windows of opportunity. It is suggested that a detailed empirical analysis of individual projects or processes would be required to explain the impact of these two elements. It was beyond the scope of this study to provide this type of analysis.

Finally, with regard to the efficiency of spatial outcomes produced, the application of path dependency to the case study of Sydney does indicate some of the reasons why apparently inefficient or superseded urban forms continue, however, this evidence is not comprehensively nor rigorously gathered. 'Locked-in' decision making can be given as one of the reasons for the perpetuation of urban sprawl, while at the same time the urban form that was moulded by public transport and even earlier, for instance the pattern that developed during Sydney's 'walking city' period, continues. The revival of each of these urban forms might be considered to cast doubt on the efficiency of them all.

Efficiency in urban form is difficult to assess, particularly when qualitative measures are required. To speculate on what might have been a more efficient or better spatial outcome, is even harder. Certainly when considering individual projects efficiency can be measured, for example if the construction of a railway line was undertaken more expediently, then initial investments would not have been left idle and under performing for so long. However, measuring the efficiency of an entire urban pattern is onerously complex. To determine where an outcome represents a First, Second, or Third Degree form of path dependency, as outlined by Liebowitz and Margolis (1995), would appear to be particularly difficult.

Despite these constraints a logical next step in the exploration of the links between path dependency and urban form outcomes would appear to be to seek empirical evidence for potential linkages. The question remains as to whether valid empirical evidence can be gathered given the potential difficulty in isolating individual examples from the complexity of interactions that take place in the urban system.

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