

# **ENGAGING TO HARNESS COMMUNITY CREATIVITY FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN PLANNING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper reflects on different approaches to public participation in the highly complex field of urban planning. It is based on research, personal experience, case studies and theories. Engagement principles are discussed and recommendations made for harnessing community creativity to achieve sustainable planning outcomes for current and future generations.

This exploration is triggered by several factors, primarily: a realization of the shortcomings of current approaches to urban planning to create healthy, integrated, liveable and sustainable communities; increased pressure by those citizens whose lives are affected by planning outcomes to influence planning decisions; and the concurrent increased focus by the Australian government, across all three tiers, on engaging citizens.

These factors in turn are to a major extent driven by the effect of technological advances on communications, which is increasing communities' access to information, fueling the social media revolution and providing ever-increasing potential options to include more voices.

Approaches to urban planning and their outcomes are affected by key issues of democracy and participation in public policy making at local and regional level, the role of the private sector and the balance of markets, government and civil society.

The political system focus on short-term benefits (Hoggett), a containerized approach by government, and a heavy reliance on the market to deliver government policy, results in much urban planning failing to recognize 'the relationship between our choices now and their consequences tomorrow' (Integrated Design Commission) particularly in terms of sustainability.

Increasingly, governments, planners, architects and communities are realizing that 'Sustainable communities cannot be designed using the same methods that produced unsustainable ones' (Condon). Also, gradually, the focus is changing from seeking

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solutions to identifying problems and understanding how everything inter-connects (IDC).

Urban developments can take decades to plan and deliver, and therefore need a flexible, holistic approach to respond to changing conditions, multiple stakeholders and ‘the multiple layers and components of social systems’ (Sarkissian et al). There also is no one way in which to plan and design the urban landscape and no one way in which to engage.

At the heart of both planning and engagement needs to be creativity, ‘using methods that honour people’s individual and collective knowledge about their lives and their environments’ (Sarkissian & Hurford).

In identifying creativity as the key to a better future, McIntyre-Mills argues that ‘policy and practice needs to consider social, economic and environmental implications for all life’ (McIntyre-Mills) the challenges of which ‘are unprecedented’ (McIntyre-Mills) and she asks ‘Can we design systems and technologies that sustain a future environment, or will we design systems that destroy our future?’ (McIntyre-Mills).

This raises the question of whose creativity can and should be harnessed, and how. It is neither a task for government alone, nor for experts across the public and private sectors, to determine how communities and individuals should live. Recognising this, the Premier of South Australia, said that community engagement is central to urban renewal projects.

Analysis of the engagement approaches all emphasise that we citizens ‘are the dots and we are the interconnections. They are one. We make or break the connections’ (McIntyre Mills & de Vries). Engagement also needs to be guided by principles to determine both the process and the outcomes and to be ‘as open and transparent as possible’ (Cook).

McIntyre-Mills recommends development of ‘a cycle including discursive democracy, deliberation on areas of concern – such as the multiple and complex issues associated with urban planning – based on structural dialogue and then voting on decisions’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries). The recommended mix of approaches to public participation in urban planning explored here can contribute towards achieving that objective.

Keywords: engaging; community; sustainability; complexity; planning; creativity; democracy

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#### **The Quest for Sustainable Urban Planning**

Aboriginal peoples believe ‘How I live will determine the quality of the landscape’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010:8) and that the quality of the environment and our relationships with others directly determines quality of life and happiness (Ibid:8).

Increasingly, communities and their elected members see our cities as unaffordable, too vehicle dependent, resource intensive to build and maintain, and leaving residents ‘emotionally and physically compromised’ (Condon 2008:2). ‘And yet, all manner of experts can never answer the question: how do we want to live?’ (Beck 1999:22).

We live in ‘a complex, fragmented urban world’ (Stoker, in Pierre 2000:92) where ‘Land use, employment, leisure and welfare in urban areas are profoundly shaped by the forces of the private market’ (Ibid:92). It is a world where ‘global problems are generated at the local scale and should be solved there too’ (Condon 2008:2) and a world in which every being has ‘the right to live a decent, sustainable way of life which is currently being undermined by the state and the market’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010:7).

McIntyre-Mills argues that ‘policy and practice needs to consider social, economic and environmental implications for all life’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010:5) the challenges of which ‘are unprecedented’ (McIntyre-Mills 2011:2). Identifying our creativity as the key to a better future, she asks ‘Can we design systems and technologies that sustain a future environment, or will we design systems that destroy our future?’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010:4).

This raises the question of whose creativity can and should be harnessed, and how. It is neither a task for government alone, nor for experts across the public and private sectors, to determine how communities and individuals should live. Anthony Giddens argues that ‘both social engagement and steering from above will be needed’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:77).

Recognising this, the South Australia Government recently formed the Urban Renewal Authority (which trades as Renewal SA) to ‘present a fully integrated approach to urban development’ (Weatherill 2012a) Launching the Authority, the State Premier said this represented ‘a new way of planning for residential and industrial communities in South Australia’ (Ibid) and that community engagement would be central to all urban renewal projects (Weatherill 2012b:11), and so a key factor in achieving sustainable urban development.

How? Public participation can take many forms. In order to explore effectively a range of approaches to public participation in urban planning, discuss engagement principles and make key findings and recommendations, we first need to examine the context for

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urban planning. At the same time, what is meant – or understood – by sustainable development also requires clarification.

Approaches to urban planning and their outcomes are affected by key issues of democracy and participation in public policy making and delivery at local and regional level, the role of the private sector and the balance of markets, government and civil society.

### **The Context for Urban Planning**

#### *Key Issues of Democracy and Participation in Public Policy making and delivery*

Neoliberal reforms in the 1970s, influenced by the customer-oriented cultures of the private sector, focused on reducing government expenditure, a major consequence being ‘subordinating social policy to economic competitiveness’ (Hoggett 2009:157).

A current example in South Australia is the State’s policy on establishing new schools. A school will not be build until demand exists. This affects planning for the Renewal SA-managed Bowden urban renewal project in that, despite projected demand, a new school cannot be built until the residents are in situ; yet some potential residents are reluctant to purchase without assurance that their need will be met. If current policy prevails, the project master plan requires sufficient flexibility to include a school at an advanced stage of the site’s development. If community buy-in, literally, through residential purchasing, is not achieved, the development could run the risk of failure.

The view of potential residents is not unreasonable, and is shared by the existing adjacent community, which considers the new development as its neighbourhood. Indeed, to ‘create a fully inclusive nation, we must ensure that all people live in communities of opportunity – places with quality schools ... quality house choices, public transportation, safe and walkable streets, services, parks, access to healthy food and strong social networks’ (Rogers 2012:15).

The political system focus on short-term rather than long term benefits (Hoggett 2009:161) is compounded by neither governments nor citizens appearing to be willing to ‘face up to their own responsibilities for collective problems’ (Ibid:161), while globalization of economic, technological and political developments is providing ‘a homogenizing stimulus’ (Stoker in Pierre 2000:92) for city governments to look elsewhere for ideas.

South Australia exemplifies this. The previous administration has been criticized for its ‘narrow vision for city planning, its deliberate disengagement from the public in planning processes, its failure to address major longstanding urban planning problems, and its dumbing down and weakening of existing planning controls’ (O’Leary 2011:18).

O’Leary states that the instead of developing ‘a credible overarching vision for Adelaide’ (O’Leary: 2011:18), the Rann Government was ‘more intent on implementing a string of showcase development projects around the city’ (Ibid:18) some of which do not meet wider strategic needs’ (Ibid:18).

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All of this, and a containerized approach by government – illustrated by there being no less than five different planning reports commissioned by State or Local Government for Adelaide in the past two years ‘competing for vision splendid’ (Williams 2013:66) – results in much urban planning failing to recognize ‘the relationship between our choices now and their consequences tomorrow’ (IDC 2012:2) particularly in terms of sustainability.

What then is sustainable development? The Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development defines it as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Condon 2008:5, Chapman 1996:90).

Chapman raises the challenge of designing and managing human settlements in a way that ‘people may live at a decent standard based on sustainable principles’ (Chapman 1996:90) of futurity, environment, equity and participation. Chapman also notes that one of the outputs of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 specified that ‘the integration of land use and planning, energy and conservation, waste management’ (Ibid:90), among other issues, would be ‘examined at a local level in consultation with local people’ (Ibid:90).

### *The eternal triangle – markets, government and civil society*

More recently, the Washington Consensus is attributed as a major cause of global failure ‘to generate sustained economic growth, poverty reduction and fair outcomes’ (Held 2004:11). Held criticizes it on the grounds that it ‘underplays the role of government, the need for a strong public sector, and the requirement for multilateral governance’ (Held 2004:9-10). He warns that ‘Leaving it to markets on their own to resolve problems of resource generation and allocation will perpetuate many deep-rooted economic and political difficulties’ (Ibid:15).

Held advocates the Washington Consensus model (in which privatization, minimal regulation, free trade and movement of capital are key features) be replaced by a social democratic agenda characterized by ‘Strong civil society, state-led investment strategy, strong public sector [and] priority investment in human and social capital’ (Held 2004:34).

This approach lies behind the formation of Renewal SA, but is not welcomed in all quarters. Views differ widely on the role of markets, government and civil society. The Property Council, in its *Adelaide: City of Lights* report, advocates ‘a new governance model for Adelaide’ (Johnston 2012:77) transferring ‘a significant amount of control and responsibility’ (Ibid:77) from local to state government (Renewal SA), sparking debate on ‘whether we should be allowing the development industry to drive the strategic planning of the state, often behind closed doors’ (Ibid:77). Renewal SA’s predecessor, the Land Management Corporation, relied extensively on public private partnerships (PPPs) for planning and delivery of its projects.

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Others defend the private sector saying it ‘can’t be blamed for filling a vacuum created by a lack of government leadership and investment in the level of community-informed planning’ (Johnston 2012:77) while yet others call for more industry contribution via ‘establishment of new infrastructure funding arrangements and local stewardship models that enable developers, local businesses and residents to invest in, manage and market their own neighbourhood precincts’ (Ibid:77).

Whatever the approach, Adelaide has been advised by an England-based geographer and ‘localism’ strategist to ‘avoid narrow economic definitions of success, and rigid governance structures that are no longer affordable, and which stifle experimentation and creativity’ (Johnston 2012:77).

The power of the private sector in urban development and its reluctance to innovate in the interest of sustainability has long plagued Adelaide. It required the State Government to lead the initiative at the Lochiel Park Green Village, supporting the four developers through training and incentives to incorporate innovative, ecologically sustainable development technologies (Hurley 2010:10) new to Adelaide that constrict their profit margins and increase their risk.

Economic realities do need to be recognized – ideally with sustainable, integrated development assuming both ‘the short-term benefits of financial profit and the long-term benefit of economic sustainability to be of equal importance’ (McIntyre 2003:348).

Held acknowledges that ‘there will be conflicts between economic development and the strengthening of civil society’ (Held 2004:13) and that ‘societies need significant measures of autonomy to work out their own ways of managing these conflicts’ (Ibid:13-14). He also emphasises that we need to realize that we survive not through conflict and competition but ‘because we are complementary to each other’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:219).

### *The Dis-integrated City – the fallout of poor planning*

How can urban planning therefore be approached? It appears that ‘our ordinary problem-solving methods don’t work when we are designing, planning and building sustainable communities’ (Condon 2008:2-3). Ironically, while succeeding technically in improving individual elements of the urban landscape, such as buildings, roads, open space and water recycling systems, ‘taken together they fail in crucial ways’ (Ibid:3).

In creating ‘sprawling suburban landscapes’ (Condon 2008:3) we have provided ‘a collection of impressive solutions to very narrowly defined problems – rational details adding up to an irrational whole’ (Ibid:3). As Condon concludes, ‘All of these elements, however exquisitely designed ... do not add up to a whole worthy of the word *community*’ (Ibid:3).

The Integrated Design Commission (IDC) of South Australia held a similar view, saying ‘It is not good enough for a city to look good. It also has to perform well’ (IDC 2012:1) and, in talking about planning for inner-Adelaide, emphasised that ‘The right decisions

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reflect the values and beliefs of the people who live, work and play here' (Ibid:1). The IDC also recognised that economic prosperity, the earth's health and our communities' wellbeing 'are not mutually exclusive agendas' (Ibid:2). Prior to being disbanded in 2012, the IDC proposed that design-based methods of urban planning 'offer a way of meeting each of these objectives' (Ibid:2).

Design by experts has played a major role in the past, with poor outcomes, as Condon describes. The modern 'dis-integrated city' (Condon 2008:xiv) in the developed world, with its segregated land uses, is characterized by big box shopping centres isolated from enclaves of single-family residences in dead-end streets. It has lost the connectivity of the web network of streets and commercial activity acting as a 'thread binding the fabric of the city' (Ibid:xiv) which characterizes older cities.

We are now challenged with 'changing the world of the 5-minute drive to the world of the 5-minute walk' (Condon 2008:45) not only in physical terms through design but in changing mindsets – of planners, designers, retailers residents and 'stubborn automobile addicts' (Castells 1996:396).

The disintegration of cities goes far beyond disconnected streets. Detroit, described as 'a half-ruined city' (Toohey 2012:29), 'ghetto' and 'among America's five most violent cities' (Ibid:29) has gone from economic prosperity to poverty within three decades. Half its houses are 'abandoned, burned out or bulldozed' (Ibid:29) and it lacks basic community services. Most of its people have no prospects to enable them to leave or improve their lives; instead they have 'no dignity, no pride or respect' (Ibid:29).

Detroit exemplifies the 'systemic disempowerment of inhabitants' (Gordon & Koo 2008:204) of cities 'at the intersection of myriad financial interests and government jurisdictions' (Ibid:204-205).

Any approach to better planning to resolve this complex mess and balance the state, market and society, to provide a sustainable environment requires, as McIntyre-Mills says, 'a democracy/governance cycle that spans conceptual, spatial and temporal boundaries' (McIntyre-Mills 2010:8) and 'working across nested systems and ensuring that the people who are to be affected are included' (Ibid:8) if we are to succeed in supporting the global commons (McIntyre-Mills & DeVries 2009:175).

Former South Australia Premier, Mike Rann echoes Giddens in saying cities need revitalizing through 'a plan drawn from its citizens but delivered through strong leadership' (Rann 2012:7-8). In Australia, 'after years of neglect' (Ibid:8) a 'renewed national engagement with urban policy' (Ibid:8) is emerging.

That the government recognises 'Our cities play a pivotal role in securing the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of our nation' (Australian Government 2011a:2) and has committed to a reform process, issuing a new national urban policy 'for a productive, sustainable and liveable future' (Ibid:3), is encouraging.

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Capital and regional city planning systems must meet nine criteria focused on sustainability and wellbeing indicators in Australia's *Liveable Cities Program*, (Rann 2012:9-10, Australian Government 2011b:2,11) adhere to policies on climate change and urban development, and be guided by the first *Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities* – containing broad principles for urban design and the *State of Australian Cities 2011* report – which identifies seven liveability measures (Australia Government 2011c:141), These all contribute to the context for urban planning.

Essentially, the *Urban Design Protocol* is founded on 5 pillars: productivity, sustainability, liveability, leadership and design excellence. Under Leadership and Governance, it has two key principles relevant to this paper – Engagement and Custodianship – each of which has several attributes to help achieve world-class urban design (AG 2011b:11).

Three key Engagement attributes are identified – to engage with relevant stakeholders – being: it acknowledges that urban design is primarily about creating places for people; it engages people in the development of their community; and it adopts a multi-disciplinary and collaborative approach to planning and design (Ibid:11).

Four key Custodianship attributes are identified – to consider custodianship and maintenance over time – being: it recognizes that communities, environments and cities are continually evolving and adapting; it considers the wider environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of development, operations, maintenance and disposal; it ensures that the design of a place is appropriate for its ongoing maintenance, operations and upkeep; and it incorporates strategies to reduce and adapt to climate change (Ibid:11).

### **Different approaches to Public Participation**

#### *The need for Expanded Pragmatism*

Urban planning has been the subject of much debate in professional and academic circles, with different perspectives on whether it is an art of science – based around ‘the importance of rational/emotional, technical/social and singular/multiple approaches to current and future issues such as sustainability’ (Sarkissian & Hurford 2010:5).

The either/or thinking underlying these debates is a fundamental problem. Urban planning cannot succeed if it occurs in isolation to the people at the receiving end of its plans; that is ‘we need to be the subjects not the objects of other people’s designs’ (McIntyre Mills 2010:7) and therefore be involved in developing them. As Beck says, ‘This is a matter no longer of hospitality but of the right of the “living the side effects” of the risk decisions of others to have a say in those decisions’ (Beck 2007:191).

‘Community engagement for sustainability, like food, personal safety and shelter, is foundational’ (Sarkissian et al 2009:76) and ‘promotion of a healthy environment needs to be placed as a central assumption of planning’ (McIntyre-Mills 2003:348).



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McIntyre Mills and De Vries expand on this, saying, ‘Participation, social construction and valuing the experiences of those who are to be at the receiving end of decisions are important for wellbeing’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:104). McIntyre-Mills advocates that these experiences can be shared through ‘listening, telling stories and creating scenarios’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010:4). That ‘can create shared meanings where none existed before’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:80) while also enabling connections and enhancing creativity (Ibid:80).

How specialists in a wide range of fields involved in urban planning policy are able to ‘think about our thinking’ (McIntyre-Mills 2006 in McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:86) through the process of ‘unfolding’ values with the people affected by the policy decisions, at the same time covering all social, cultural, political economic and environmental dimensions, is crucial (Ibid:86). They need to understand ‘how the micro-culture of the locality will articulate with the macro-culture regionally, nationally and internationally’ (Chapman 1996:174) because ‘the nature of the built environment that we have locally will have impacts upon the world in general’ (Ibid:174).

Gradually, the focus of many urban and social planners, architects and governments is also changing from seeking solutions to identifying problems and understanding how everything inter-connects (IDC 2012:1).

An investigation of decision-making in eight of the world’s most successful cities by the Grattan Institute (an independent think-tank for Australian public policy) argues for people to be involved in make decisions about their neighbourhood (Grattan Institute 2012:28). ‘Helping to shape the future of the local area creates a sense of stewardship and promotes connection with other residents’ (Ibid:28).

However, participatory design is complex and difficult (McIntyre-Mills 2003:345). How does one identify all who are to be included in the urban planning process and enable the dialogue?

Two decades ago many commentators noted that public involvement was ‘still based upon social class’ (Chapman 1996:176) with most people affected by development proposals not knowing where to start in understanding a development project’s impact (Ibid 176). While it can be argued this has improved through increased awareness, transparency and engagement opportunities, the powerless remain excluded (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:204, Florini 2003:87-88).

Expanded pragmatism – ‘the capability to think in terms of the consequences for self, others (including sentient beings) and future generations of life’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:328) is needed. Encouragingly, this is included in the *Urban Design Protocol for Australian Cities* principles (Australian Government 2011b:11).

### *Announce and Defend*

Many projects ‘follow a familiar and well-trodden path to poor outcomes’ (Twyford et al 2006:51) by presenting a solution for comment. The outcome invariably leads to an

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unproductive cycle of public meetings where the people who hate the idea ‘make things unpleasant by heckling the project team and anyone else who doesn’t agree with their views’ (Ibid:51-52).

This has been the case for years in Australia, with 80 percent of planning for infrastructure development projects occurring within government (Rann 2012:29). Technical experts develop options, select a preferred option and present it for feedback. This ‘announce and defend’ method much used by the South Australia Government has caused community outrage (Liebrucks 2010:12).

Simply including the community early to identify the problem, identify and resolve issues in developing options, and deciding on the preferred option avoids a destructive process and poor outcome. However, in drawing many voices into the discussions how can planning be expedient, ensure that all voices are heard and respected and the outcomes agreed?

### *Citizen’s Jury*

The State Government has opted for a citizen’s jury of 40 South Australians to review the ‘array of competing visions’ (Williams 2013:66) for Adelaide. The jury will receive about 50 hours of briefings on issues facing the CBD, in a process to be run by the not-for-profit NewDemocracy Foundation and produce recommendations by the end of 2013 for final decision by Parliament (Ibid).

Citizens juries are useful to randomly represent diverse community interests through a few in deciding among options for complex areas and challenging the experts presenting the options. Citizens jury reports are made available to technical experts, the media and the public as well as Government. The proof of Government truly collaborating with its citizens will be revealed when the final decision is made by Parliament and compared with the recommendations made by the citizen’s jury.

### *The iterative design Charrette*

One popular engagement process used for extremely complex design projects with multiple stakeholders is the design charrette, used successfully for the Bowden master planning. It challenges participants ‘to collaboratively solve what appears to be an impossible problem in what they may think is an absurdly short time’ (Condon 2008:1).

A strength of the charrette process is its capacity to ‘make citizens with a stake in their community ... members of the design team’ (Condon 2008:13) where ‘Their own empathy, understanding and compassion fuel the creative collaborative process and allow the group to transcend the status quo’ (Ibid:13).

Charrettes are an ideas forum, ‘offer the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback’ (Liebrucks 2010:10) and a final decision involving all participants (IAP2 2006b:49, Stein 1992:51). They also enable citizens to design, proving that design is ‘more a way of thinking than a specific set of technical skills’ (Condon 2008:57-58).

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However, charrettes also are cost, time and labour-intensive in preparation (Stein 1992:51) and risk excluding time-poor citizens from participating. Another weakness of charrettes, and other forms of traditional engagement, is that they involve only a representative few of the community. With Bowden, the charrette followed an appreciative enquiry process of facilitated workshops to develop the vision and initial planning ideas. While many charrette participants participated in the entire process and speak highly of it, the need remains to include more voices.

Similarly, on-site community open houses, while offering the opportunity for community to discuss issues and ideas directly with the specialist planning team also are limited by time and physical constraints. They need to be complemented by other forms of engagement to include more people and extend the iterative process.

### *Collective voices online*

Technological advances have fuelled a social media revolution with ever-increasing potential options to include more voices. So swiftly is social media change, it is described as ‘like trying to catch lightning in a bottle’ (Gillin 2009:xxii) as its users share opinions through personal publishing (Gillin 2009:4-5).

‘Social media is about ordinary people taking control of the world around them and finding creative new ways to bring their collective voices together to get what they want. Whether you like it or not, it is the world to which institutions must adapt’ (Gillin 2009:4).

Social networks provide ‘a much richer environment in which conversations can take place’ (Gillin 2009:106) with networks for nearly every age, interest and geographic region (Ibid:98). However, the vast range of options means ‘strategy is vital to sorting through them’ (Ibid:21). Factors such as age come into play. Conventional means are more likely to succeed with the over 50s than the under 20s (Ibid:25), while for children ‘social networks have become the online equivalent of the local mall’ (Ibid:107).

Can social media be a planning tool for engagement in its own right? It has been described as ‘the new means for efficient and effective community engagement and collaboration’ (Liebrucks 2010:6).

Social media such as *Meetup* exist ‘so that people can use the Web to get off the Web. It strives to connect people in their geographic area who share similar interests’ including politics (Gillin 2009:140) to meet up ‘using the old-fashioned way – in person’ (Ibid:140). ‘The objective is to make it easy to create physical get-togethers’ (Ibid:140).

One application of social media in urban planning is the use of QR codes – a Quick Response matrix barcode accessed free through a mobile telephone application – to link the past, present and potential future for a site, or elements of it, and invite a conversation which, like charrettes, can be both online and face-to-face. It is proving increasingly successful for planning public open space such as a reserve, mall or streets, where it is impossible to identify all users. QR codes physically displayed in the public area can

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invite citizens to link to a website showing images, plans and discussions about its future development.

Social media therefore can be useful to create conversations on planning issues to feed into other online engagement tools used for urban planning. It is particularly useful to engage young people – the next generation – so often excluded from the planning process.

Children have a different objective and cognitive view of the world than adults, and also ‘may have a richer perspective on their local environment’ (Cook 2012:2) through their ‘smaller geography’ (Ibid:2) Gaining their ‘different experiences, perceptions and meanings attached to their cities, spaces and places’ (Ibid:2) through visual methods – to which social media lends itself - is often easier than more traditional consultation (Ibid:4). Children also have an uninhibited, ‘unique ability to tap into creativity and dream about the future’ (Sarkissian & Hurford 2010:159-160).

### *Spaceshaper*

Another online engagement tool proving successful for meaningful engagement of children is Spaceshaper. Specifically developed for planning to improve an existing public space with which participants are familiar, Spaceshaper provides immediate feedback to input, informing dialogue and decisions. It was recently trialed in South Australia through a partnership of local government, state government and the SA Council for the Care of Children.

### *Second Life*

Three-dimensional visualizations have long been useful urban planning tools. They help to address community concerns about space, density, scale and linkages and can assist in identifying and exploring technical problems.

Highly controversial, because of its virtual-reality gaming roots, Second Life in particular has much value to urban planning as it ‘attempts to mimic the real world through a three-dimensional experience’ (Gillin 2009:134). Users’ characters can interact in ‘destinations representing different communities of interest’ (Ibid:134) in an experience ‘closest to resembling genuine human reaction’ (Ibid:134).

It also enables participants to experience different characters, their experiences and viewpoints, and ‘unquestionably has value as a medium for virtual meetings, where presentations can be combined with discussions and ad hoc groups can form’ (Gillin 2009:135-6). Its appeal to play has particular potential to engage children, but online games also have adult appeal and provide ‘a chance for citizens to test their knowledge or come up with their own solutions to public problems’ (Leinghninger 2012: 23)

Although virtual worlds are in the experimental stage, ‘a few early successes indicate they merit watching’ (Gillin 2009:136).

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### *The Virtual Charrette*

The success of charrettes has stimulated development of the virtual charrette, which can be held concurrently with a live charrette. Liebrucks has explored the feasibility of a virtual charrette in South Australia, for the Property Council.

She notes that to succeed, virtual charrettes must emulate physical charrette collaboration through social media (Liebrucks 2010:15). Liebrucks focuses on three – Facebook, blogs and micro blogs – based on their accessibility and success for Adelaide community groups ‘to gain force behind community activism’ (Ibid:12).

Spacing Toronto enabled a virtual charrette in group blog format for the new Bathurst Bridge, through an online dialogue of words and images. A key success factor was engaging citizens early in the process (Liebrucks 2010:16).

Hub2, an initiative of the City of Boston, uses Second Life’s ‘entirely user-created virtual world’ (Gordon & Koo 2008:205) platform to create a sequence of simultaneous physical virtual charrettes, with ‘a physical moderator and virtual designer orchestrating deliberation’ (Gordon & Manosevitch 2010:89). Aiming mainly ‘to nurture local communities’ (Ibid:205) Hub2 participants both ‘imagine and collectively experience their design’ in virtual charrettes where ‘particular attention is paid to the social and communal dimensions of the collaborative design processes’ (Ibid:205). It too has been highly successful.

### *Wikipanning*

The City of San Jose, California used Wikipanning successfully as an alternative planning technique to incorporate the input of thousands. The process engaged communities that have largely been underrepresented in past planning efforts – especially 18- to 25 year olds and people of color’ (Leighninger 2011b:19). Within four months some 4,500 online participants engaged through a range of activities including online surveys with instantaneous results, a blog, mapping exercise, a page where pictures could be posted, recorded and video presentations. A more traditional public workshop engagement process was also held, attracting 600 people for face-to-face meetings over a two-year period (Ibid:19).

The cost of compiling the Wikipanning report was deemed minimal as the log of comments and survey results were cumulative and written by the participants (Ibid:19).

### *Pathways for Wellbeing*

Of all the engagement techniques reviewed, *Pathways to Wellbeing* (Pathways) in which I have been involved in the early stages of testing, offers a unique avenue for ongoing, long-term engagement between citizens and local government. It has been developed to ‘scale up participation’ (McIntyre & de Vries 2011:155) and facilitate expanded decision making at the local level.

Scenarios are used as ‘a starting point for an engaged conversation’ (McIntyre & de Vries 2011:24) ‘a discursive democracy that can help us change the way we live’ (Ibid:24). It

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aims to help citizens use their own knowledge and experience to think through the future implications and consequences of their choices (Ibid:183). The choices relate to sustainable living and the extent to which people are prepared to adapt their lives to mitigate against the effects of climate change. Social, economic and environmental factors are all taken into account.

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While enabling individual citizens to manage their pathways, the software enables analysis of the responses to inform and assist local government in matching service outcomes to the perceived needs of service users. It is conceived as an online process to work out where to 'draw the line' based on inclusive testing of ideas with those who are to be affected by the decisions (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:183)

Pathways also enables comparisons of where people choosing the three different pathways not only differ but overlap – and therefore find common ground in regard to their views – their concerns, values, priorities and approaches to how they want to live their lives. This facility is an excellent catalyst for shared conversations through multiple means, both online or off, adding to the richness of the planning while connecting people.

Technology specialists identify five key criteria for engaging successfully online. Two could apply to any engagement – being that 'participation must be easy' (Cook 2008:99) and 'contain personal value to the individual' (Ibid:99). In addition to easy access, the software must be intuitive, not requiring training – something that Pathways required to overcome.

The specialists also advise that online engagement also works best when integrated with other processes and building on existing relationships (Cook 2008:99). However, Pathways, virtual charrettes, QR codes and other techniques all have potential to reach unidentified participants for urban planning, thereby initiating the relationship.

The experience of local government in Britain, where nearly all councils use some form of social media, also finds engagement to be 'most successful when combining the best features of the offline and online worlds' (Marsh 2013). Marsh quotes Tom Hoy, senior policy officer at Lambeth council, in saying 'Without an offline dimension to engagement you will often end up with a talking shop where nothing gets done. And with no online dimension you can find it difficult to connect, sustain and scale a community in a meaningful way' (Ibid).

As with offline engagement, online engagement it must be 'built around the needs, goals, and concerns of the potentially engaged, not just the engagers' (Leinghninger 2012b:4). Hoy recommends engaging with 'one foot in cyberspace and one in the real world' (Hoy 2013), from the experience of founding *Made in Lambeth Community*, an initiative which persuaded highly skilled residents to give up their time to solve social challenges within their borough, engaging with youths who were not responsive to more traditional engagement. (Ibid).

Similarly, OpenIdeo, a global community that aims to bring people together to problem solve for social good, is using a mix of online and offline engagement in its restart project to reduce e-waste by changing consumption of e-gadgets and divert them from waste (Gunter 2013). Through the mix of its online networking and offline community events participants are empowered to extend the lifespan of the electronics they own through aided self-repair, and by doing so, actively reducing e-waste in their local community.

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### **Public Participation Findings and Recommendations**

These approaches all emphasise that we citizens ‘are the dots and we are the interconnections. They are one. We make or break the connections’ (McIntyre Mills & de Vries 2011:84). They also highlight the importance of using engagement processes that ensure stakeholders no longer have ‘the luxury of maintaining their own narrow position’ (Condon 2008:13).

As McIntyre-Mills argues, diversity matters but ‘only to the extent that diversity and freedom do not undermine the future of the next generation of life’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:197). Instead, ‘Systemic approaches [to] strive to honour the value of diversity and to continually address and redress the balance between individual and collective interests’ (McIntyre-Mills 2010) is needed. Evident too is that ‘Designs need to address current, convergent social, economic and environmental challenges’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:243). Design-led urban planning has largely failed to achieve this.

Charrettes are particularly good at bringing together stakeholders with different, often opposing viewpoints, to work, through mutual respect, as a team (Condon 2008:13-14). Extending the charrette to include a virtual charrette enriches the discussion and the outcome.

However, too strong a focus on the physical form of design in charrettes runs the risk of further failure. It is cause for concern that the IDC, while recognizing that ‘economic prosperity, the health of our planet, and wellbeing of our communities are not mutually exclusive agendas’ (IDC 2012:2) also stated that ‘design-based methods offer a way of meeting each of these objectives’ (Ibid:2). Design can only be successful in an integrated design process with ‘an essentially human-centred focus’ (Lee 2010:10) aiming to ‘improve the quality of life’ (Ibid:10).

While face-to face relationships remain the most effective means of engaging individuals, online tools – such as Spaceshaper, Second Life, Wikiplanning and Pathways to Wellbeing – can help ‘involve people more meaningfully in the planning and publicizing of events and processes’ (Leighninger 2011b:5) for engaging. Therefore, ‘the combination of face-to-face relationships and online connections can make a huge difference’ (Ibid:5) to who is involved.

Liebrucks concludes that social media’s free-to-use social networking sites ‘provide interactivity between communities and stakeholders – resulting in increased legitimacy and trust’ (Liebrucks 2010:6) and also that ‘social media could be a vital tool in forming a mind shift to sustainable living’ (Ibid:6).

#### *Principles for engagement*

Public participation case studies and work experience reveal that, just as the engagement tools vary in response to different scenarios (Leighninger, M. 2011b:7) the levels of engagement may need to vary for different cases, at different stages of planning and development, or even for different stakeholders. The International Association for Public



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Participation (IAP2) has developed a useful participation spectrum (Appendix:3) with an increasing range of public influence – from informing through to empowering communities with decision-making and implementation (IAP2 2006a:35, Twyford et al 2006:133).

IAP2 based this continuum on engagement being ‘Any process that involves the community in problem-solving or decision-making and uses community input to make better decisions’ (IAP2 in Twyford et al 2006:19). It takes into account context, parameters or prior decisions – such as South Australia’s commitment to transit oriented development and compact urban form (Rann 2012:19-20).

This paper supports Twyford in encouraging participation at the higher end of the spectrum – to partner and empower, as engagement ‘facilitates understanding, creates more sustainable decisions, and identifies critical issues early. It also acknowledges the human desire to have a say on those issues that affect us’ (Twyford et al 2006:13-14).

Three of the key challenges for any engagement process are: clarifying the problem, defining the decision-maker (together with the participants) and defining the objectives of the engagement process (Twyford et al 2006:39). Addressing those challenges, with reference to the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum and principles for engagement will help identify the appropriate methods of engagement.

Most South Australia government agencies have aspirational engagement principles, but their application tends to vary. Early in 2013 the State Government launched its Better Together: Principles of Engagement – a foundation for engagement in the South Australian Government, with the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum as its basis to ‘make better decisions by bringing the voices of communities and stakeholders into the issues that are relevant to them’ (GOSA 2013:7) and “to be transparent about the level of engagement being used’ (Ibid:9). Its principles seek to move the State Government ‘from a culture of “announce and defend” to one of “debate and decide” (IBID:4). They arguably do not go as far as the IAP2’s Core Values in the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision, but the State aims to develop its framework further from this initial foundation, through a series of workshops with employees from across all agencies.

The IAP2’s set of seven Core Values for Public Participation provide a clear, concise, practical and flexible set of principles to use as is or as a base to develop or review principles for any area, including urban planning and development. Essentially, the core values recognize citizens’ democratic right to have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making that affects them, to determine how they will be engaged, enabled to participate meaningfully and advised of the outcome of their participation.

### **Conclusion**

‘Sustainable communities cannot be designed using the same methods that produced unsustainable ones’ (Condon 2008:123). This, and that we are caretakers or custodians

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for future generations (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:204, Australian Government 2012:13) is becoming increasingly recognized by governments, planners and communities.

There is no one way in which to plan and design the urban landscape and no one way in which to engage. At the heart of both needs to be creativity – ‘the necessary work of evolving community engagement practice using methods that honour people’s individual and collective knowledge about their lives and their environments’ (Sarkissian & Hurford 2010:4).

As McIntyre-Mills says ‘It requires taking a leap into the unknown and using retroduced logic to make connections that enable us to see patterns (in the past and in the present) and to consider the implications for the future’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:85). We must have the courage to do this.

Urban planning therefore needs to take a holistic approach ‘taking into account the multiple layers and components of social systems’ (Sarkissian et al 2009:218) and be long term focused. It is reliant on trust between the professional planners and community. Trust can only be built over ‘a long period of sustained democratic policy implementation’ (Chapman 1996:191). However, the open dialogue of social media offers potential to increase trust.

At the same time ‘democracy in its current form does not function effectively to enable us to address the convergent social economic and environmental challenges that we face’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:222). ‘We need both centralized controls to protect the global commons and decentralized engagement to test out our ideas’ (Ibid:223).

An extension of the Aarhus Convention (applicable at present only to Europe) would ‘enable freedom of information and the right of local people to participate in local governance’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:281, Florini 2003:87-88). While defining government as ‘the decision-making apparatus of the state’ (Fiorini 2003:64) Fiorini notes the trend of declining national power (Ibid 66-75). Her work on new forms of democracy uphold the principle of subsidiarity – that decision needs to be taken at the lowest possible level (Singer 2002).

Beyond that, McIntyre-Mills recommends development of ‘a cycle including discursive democracy, deliberation on areas of concern based on structural dialogue and then voting on decisions’ (McIntyre-Mills & de Vries 2011:243). The various approaches to public participation in urban planning explored here can contribute towards achieving that. Engagement also needs to be guided by principles to determine both the process and the outcomes and to be ‘as open and transparent as possible’ (Cook 2008:123).

Ultimately, unsatisfactory engagement of local people in urban development will result in ‘loss of potential value for the scheme’ (Chapman 1996:191) in the short term, and in the long term ‘alienation and dislocation’ (Ibid:191) and the denial of future generations their right to quality of life.

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