

Sydney, a Global City for Whom?: Bringing Back Discussions of Equity

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In post war Australia socio-economic disadvantage has been marked by a series of changing lead indicators. From the 1990's onwards the best single indicator of disadvantage is ones post (zip) code. Sydney with the combination of particular early settlement patterns, constrained geography, increasing migration, and extremely fragmented governance is dominated by urban sprawl and some of the worst aspects of car dominated cities. Now with the least affordable housing in the world, accompanied by the longest travel to work times, spatial inequality in Sydney is evidenced by markedly different access to public goods. The consequences of this are rendered opaque with the relatively well-off, most influential citizens largely unaware of the living conditions of their less advantaged fellow city residents. These factors are all exacerbated by neo-liberal thinking prioritising individualist, small government promoting property for profit and market oriented beliefs absent of state interventions to address this increasing spatial disadvantage. The only policy interventions, those which seek to support economic growth, are aiming to increase housing and public transit through private sector urban renewal, absent of any understanding that inequality impedes the very outcomes sought by global city positioning and the realisation of the benefits of economic growth. Highly fragmented urban governance leaves few mechanisms for citizens to penetrate urban renewal initiatives as public participation is dominated by the concerns of government backed property interests privileging support for economic growth through increased housing supply; or existing property owners trying to protect their amenity and the homogeneity of their locales, often posited as environmental protection, from increased transit and services impacts. Sydney as a global city is at risk. The only real action on the horizon which seeks to address these challenges comes from innovations in local governance.

Transportation and Planning in the Sydney City-Region

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At the last census (June 2011) Sydney had a population of 4.6million people. Like other Australian cities it is highly suburbanised and has low urban densities when compared to world standards. Sydney is regularly listed on global “best cities” rankings, with its striking visual setting, temperate climate, relatively low crime levels, health, cultural and recreation facilities, economic vitality and social stability all highly regarded. Yet it is also one of the least affordable cities in the world, and high-levels of car dependence results in heavy traffic congestion, suburban sprawl resulting in long journeys-to-work, and very high per capita transport related CO2 emissions. There is also evidence of increasing socio-cultural polarisation, with data over the last four intercensal periods suggesting concentrating spatially-based disadvantage (and advantage) within the wider metropolitan area. This paper sets out the governance efforts, technological innovations, and social and economic processes that underpin Sydney’s growth as a global city in the 20th Century. It charts important spatial structural shifts and the transport infrastructure attending these shifts that have influenced Sydney’s geophysical form. It closely examines the post war period that saw a strong and extended period of economic growth,

related massive take-up of private car use, and spatial settlement spreading out from the inner city. The paper concludes by arguing how neo-liberal transport planning and delivery ideologies have evolved to favour more compact urban settlement patterns and housing in Sydney's established suburbs.

Economic Competitiveness: Sydney's Global City Strategy

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This paper proceeds from a literature review of contemporary methods that seek to assess the competitiveness of global cities. It then provides an account of how the Sydney economy is characterised within Australia's intergovernmental fiscal relations. Third, deploying the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classifications Index (ANZSIC) it provides a portrait of how the Sydney economy has transformed into a post-industrial city, the political economy of which is nevertheless hampered by a lack of adequate governance structures. It argues that comparison between Sydney and prima facie similar cities, while informative at a general level, are nevertheless limited due to issues of data compatibility. Sydney's claim to be primus inter pares in the Australian context is also critically assessed.

Governing Global City Sydney

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The global city is an analytical concept rather than an authoritative jurisdiction. Who then decides what boundaries, infrastructure, services, and policies to adopt and what political institutions or processes are created to make these decisions? This paper outlines the historically fragmented local governance system in Sydney and efforts to develop a strategic capacity to manage a global city that now numbers well over 4 million. There is a lack of correspondence between the scale of the metropolis and the organization of the local state. New ways of planning that acknowledge and understand how Sydney works as a global city are needed. New institutional structures or processes with the strategic capacity to reconcile a broad range of urban antagonists are required to harness, deliver and distribute the benefits of globalization whilst countering the local impacts of urbanization.