

# GOVERNING THE AUSTRALIAN MEGALOPOLIS

## The challenge of the 200km city (and beyond)

*Megalopolis is a large liquid metropolis whose boundary demarcation is always provisional. It is a giant metropolitan region always in a state of becoming, as well as being.*

(Short, 2007, p.16-17)

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### INTRODUCTION

Within Australia's 3-tier federal system the need to better address the challenges of new spatial settlement patterns has been highlighted (Brown and Bellamy, 2008; Gurren *et al.* 2006; McQuirk and Argent, 2011; Searle & Bunker, 2010; Spearritt, 2009; Stilwell and Troy, 2000). Whilst recent urban policy has focused strategic metropolitan attention around urban consolidation and the compact city, the on-going growth and increasingly contiguous nature of the mega-city continues to re-define contemporary urban Australia (Forster, 2010; Newton, 2008; O'Connor, 2005). The largest of these occur along the Australian coastline and include the areas from Melbourne-Geelong, Sydney-Newcastle and South-East Queensland (SEQ) which links the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast with the capital city of Brisbane. The latter has been coined the 200km city or Noosangatta (Noosa-Coolangatta) by Spearritt (2009, 2010) who highlights that the unplanned nature of growth in SEQ poses significant challenges for local and state governments. It has been argued that the growth of the mega-city region represents the "most significant transition in Australia since the auto city transition in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century" (Newton, 2008, p.173).

There is a growing (some might say insidious) spatial settlement trend in Australia towards vast conurbations that extend most visibly along the Eastern coastline: an almost seamless link-up of mega-cities, cities and towns into complex *mega-metropolitan regions*. Within this new urban order, the planning and management of metropolitan/regional complexity - and at what scale - are now crucial urban governance dimensions. Perhaps thus it ever was. As Gottmann (1961, p.vii) pointed out half a century ago the extension of urban and economic activity in a linear corridor from Boston through to Washington D.C. in the United States was what he termed the Megalopolis: "the cradle of a new order in the organization of inhabited space...that was in fact far from orderly". He highlighted the opportunities offered by Megalopolis in terms of economies of scale. This view was contested by Mumford (1961) who stressed that the 'Myth of Megalopolis' represented the transition from purposeful growth to purposeless expansion resulting in what he termed 'sprawling metro giantism' or 'the burst urban container'. More recently Short (2007) has highlighted the liquid spatial nature of megalopolis that is perpetually in motion.

Our point of departure for this paper is to draw on the notion of megalopolis - *not* as a geographically specific US spatial context or economic development trajectory model premised on the notion that 'big is better' - but rather as a heuristic for thinking about the governance implications of complex new Australian spatial settlement patterns at scale. The emergence of interconnected Australian mega-metro regions that spill across state jurisdictions offers a different kind of urban governance and policy problematique to the notion of a single city (capital, regional or otherwise). The messy reality of urban settlement development and growth is that it does not adhere neatly to local, regional or state administrative boundaries. Recognition of the provisional nature of settlement growth boundaries raises questions about current urban governance arrangements, as well as the potentialities of a national policy framework to better support strategic decentralised urban concentration.

To this end the paper is divided into three sections. The first section 'Megalopolis Unbound' recovers some of the key tenets of thinking from the megalopolis literature that highlight the implications for urban governance across complexity and scale. The second part of the paper 'the 200km city (and beyond)' builds on this to explore the contemporary governance conditions and challenges of an emergent Australian mega-metro region in the SEQ/Tweed region that crosses over into the Queensland/New South Wales border. Finally, the third section 'National Narratives' focuses on the potential role of national spatial policy to address these new spatial settlement patterns attentive to the principle of subsidiarity in a climate of change.

## MEGALOPOLIS UNBOUND

The concept of Megalopolis has a long history that, like the phenomenon it describes, is “always in movement, never at rest” (Short, 2007, p.17). The first recorded notion of Megalopolis in 370 BC consisted of a large number of village communities located together within an extended city wall structure and formation (see *Figure 1 below*). Since then the term ‘megalopolis’ has shifted to refer more explicitly to the extended complexity and scale of metropolitan regions linked together to create new types of urban and economic connectivity. This concentrated agglomeration of inter-connected self-governing urban realms was coined by Gottman (1961) as ‘Megalopolis’ in relation to the continuous linear stretch of urban and suburban areas from Boston to Washington D.C – the main street of the nation – and since been extended to include the urban spill-over south into Maine and to the north above Portsmouth (see *Figure 2 below*).



Figure 1

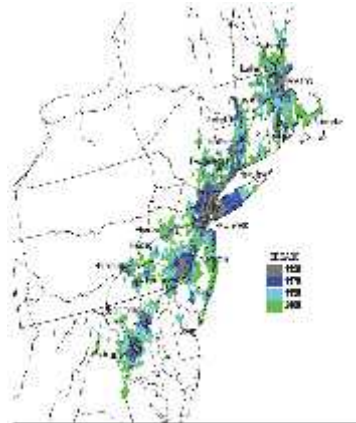


Figure 2

**Figure 1:** The bounded city walls of Megalopolis, Greece based on Excavations 1890– 1891 (Pound, 1961); **Figure 2:** Population/urbanized area growth in the increasingly unbound Megalopolis, USA 1950–2000 (Lang & Knox, 2009).

The resulting Megalopolis was according to Gottman (1961, p.9), “the most active crossroads on earth” in terms of the economies of scale available. By contrast Mumford (1961) deployed the term megalopolis to describe part of the cycle of urban growth, expansion and disintegration. Building on earlier thinking by his mentor Patrick Geddes, he cautioned against the hypnotic attraction of megalopolis as an instrument of the nation state and symbol of sovereign power.

The growth and multiplication of great metropolises were both the proofs of this general tendency towards monopolistic concentration and the means by which it was effected. Even in the most self-complacent provincial town, the pattern of institutional life became increasingly that of the metropolis: the shibboleths of power politics, the orgiastic surges of nationalism, the general acceptance of both the commercial and the cultural trade-marks of the metropolis, to the shame-faced exclusion of local products, became wellnigh universal by the beginning of the twentieth century. (p.605)

As urban geographer Short (2007, p.3) highlights “for both Geddes and Mumford, *megalopolis* characterizes a degenerative stage of urban development in the era of giant cities, after the vitality of *metropolis* and before the exploitative *tyrannopolis*, and the finality of *necropolis*, the city of war, famine and abandonment”. Urban planner Doxiadas (1961) took this one step further by invoking the notion of *Ecumenopolis*: a future world city made up of interlocking megalopolitan regions within which most of the world’s population would reside. There is contemporary resonance here with the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the ‘Age of Cities’ - but what kind of cities? What types of democratic governance structures are required?

Early work in the USA by Cutler (1969) found no examples of a megalopolitan wide agency with a mandate to deal adequately with the extensive areas of inter-linked urban growth and development particularly in relation to key areas such as transport, water and energy. Cutler highlighted that whilst the megalopolitan conurbation is functionally interwoven with goods and people able to move freely, it is politically fragmented by a multiplicity of administrative boundaries, functions and governments that compete for and/or replicate services particularly at the local scale.

Attempted solutions are usually at the local level, often inadequate, conflicting, and uncoordinated, although some local governments, frequently prodded by federal and state agencies, have made limited cooperative efforts to tackle some of the pressing common problems. The problems of megalopolis can probably best be handled by administrative structures that can operate and plan on a megalopolitan-wide

basis to offer megalopolitan solutions-an approach commensurate with the changing scope and nature of urban settlement (Cutler 1969, p.464).

Track forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the megalopolis literature shifts away from the industrial mega-city region towards an emphasis on the post-industrial, decentralized nature of liquid Megalopolis unbound (Vicino. et al. 2007). This is the 'liquid city' described by Short (2007) where metropolitan growth "possesses an unstable quality that flows over political boundaries, seeps across borders, and transcends tight spatial demarcations: a process not in culmination, always in motion, rarely at rest" (p.15). Within the context of globalization, the simultaneous forces of metropolitan expansion and regional integration on the megalopolis scale invites both: [1] "a reconsideration of the traditional separation of urban and regional scales"; and [2] "the need to look beyond locally bounded processes of competition for land, congregation and segregation" (Lang and Knox, 2007, p.11).

As part of a whole of government approach to spatial settlements the role of national spatial policy to support and promote mega-urban connectivity, competitiveness and sustainability has emerged particularly within the European Union (EU). The focus of governance policy in the EU has been extended to include the supra-territorial level where the economic, social and environmental 'costs of non-co-ordination' have been highlighted (Robert *et al.* 2001). Key identified challenges for spatial policy include: uneven and inequitable spatial settlement patterns, increasing levels of diseconomies of scale; congested transportation networks; and limited infrastructure capacity within these conurbations. Spatial policy in this sense relates not just to the integration of policies related to physical land, infrastructure and changes to the built environment, but also the way in which global/regional/local trends drive and re-define spatial settlement patterns (Duhr *et al.*, 2010). The overall quest is for a more competitive and sustainable Europe within a global economy, in the face of a growing sense of crisis around climate change, energy security, transportation, labour shortages and an aging population (Faludi, 2008).

Work by the US based Lincoln Institute of Land Policy echoes this approach with calls for a 'new megalopolis model' within the US context. This is based on the premise that a co-ordinated, co-operative approach across scale will "take advantage of the complementary roles of each area while addressing common concerns in the areas of transportation, economic development, environmental protection, and equity" (Carbonnel & Yaro, 2005, p.2). The argument put forward is that whole of government mechanisms more attentive to this mega-metro scale will:

1. contribute to improving social and economic cohesion along with a better territorial balance;
2. support more sustainable development by emphasizing collaboration on important policy issues;
3. better direct infrastructure investments and instruments for facilitating economic growth and job creation in an increasingly global economy;
4. identify important natural resource systems that sustain public water supplies, biological resources, sense of place and recreational opportunities;
5. facilitate the capacity for urban areas and their surrounding regions to work together on a larger scale to address common concerns and share their complementary strengths; as well as
6. increase economic opportunity and global competitiveness for each individual city and for the nation as a whole" (Carbonnel & Yaro, 2005).

As an urban metro-landscape in constant transition, the megalopolis invites national spatial policy co-ordination that adheres to the principle of democratic subsidiarity. This principle is crucially important because people identify themselves as living in localized communities, rather than as residents within the nebulous (pseudo)-boundaries of a megalopolis. Within the Australian context a raft of innovative local and regional urban planning governance mechanisms currently exist (i.e. South-East Queensland Regional Plan) but do not in isolation address the strategic spatial question of how to plan and manage megalopolitan-wide concerns. In the following section we highlight the contemporary conditions of megalopolis unbound within the SEQ/Tweed Shire context as one of Australia's fastest growing mega-metro regions. The 200km city (and beyond) is of particular interest because whilst it does not have the same population size as the Melbourne-Geelong and Sydney-Newcastle mega-regions, it offers an example of a large growing conurbation that spills across the demarcated state borders of Queensland and New South Wales. This is in spite of/despite the urban footprint and set growth boundaries articulated in the latest statutory iterations of the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031(SEQRP).

## **THE AUSTRALIAN 200 KILOMETRE CITY (AND BEYOND)**

As an urban nation the majority of Australians live in cities and city-regions along the eastern seaboard of Australia. This settlement reality is not the 'manhattanization' of cities and towns, but complex networks of largely suburban/urban connectivity that form mega-metro regional hybrids such as South-East Queensland (SEQ). The transformation of the SEQ region into a '200km city' is only a recent phenomenon. Just over half

a century ago SEQ was dominated by the city of Brisbane which accounted for 78% of the area's population and the Sunshine and Gold coasts were merely holiday destinations (Spearritt, 2009). However following two to three decades of sustained urban growth, there has been significant population growth across the region facilitated in part by the development of a highway system linking the Gold Coast to the Sunshine Coast, as well as west towards Logan, Brisbane and Ipswich. The Brisbane city council area now only accounts for 37% of the region's population. The development of the Gold coast and Sunshine coast has generated important economic centres that have been integrated into the wider mega-metropolitan economy (Spearritt, 2010).

The high population growth experienced over the last few decades in the SEQ region has led to an increasing demand in housing largely met by greenfield developments. This resulted in a low density "urban tidal wave" moving out of the major urban centres and into the peri-urban areas (Low Choy, 2006, p.24). This process resulted in a significant loss of open space with a reported 7,500ha of bushland and agricultural land cleared each year. Despite the policy and planning switch towards urban consolidation and the compact city model and away from low density green-field development on the suburban/rural fringe, this has not managed to contain the fluid urban interconnections that continue to develop both in and between the regions' cities and towns.

The urban realm of the 200km city now extends beyond the Queensland border to the Tweed Shire in northern NSW. This extension from Noosa Heads (Qld) almost to Byron Bay (NSW) (300km) covers seven local authorities from SEQ and one local authority from NSW, and includes the capital city of Brisbane. The governance arrangements are further complicated by significant recent developments such as Cobaki Lakes: the masterplanned 'mini-city' on the Queensland/New South Wales border. When complete the \$3 billion+ development will have the capacity to house an additional 12,000 new residents in the region (see [www.cobakilakes.com](http://www.cobakilakes.com)). This development was approved in 2010 by the NSW planning minister Tony Kelly. The ongoing development of SALT/Casuarina beachfront estates in the climate-constrained coastal strip between Kingscliff and Cabarita in NSW, and plans for a further \$2 billion master planned community outside Pottsville just south of Cabarita, further extends and reinforces the urban footprint down a linear coastal corridor. This has transformed what were urban islands into an urban corridor. A landscape-scale inversion has taken place whereby "urban use is no longer a set of islands, but rather the natural and agricultural land uses take the form of islands" (Ipsen, 2011, p.176). The socio-spatial implications of such growth and development-led change are significant in terms of the resultant deficits in core public infrastructure/services, water resources, agricultural land and ecological integrity (Gleeson and Steele, 2010).

The Queensland Government responded to the unregulated nature of urban growth in SEQ with the first Australian statutory regional plan in 2005. The SEQ Regional Plan (SEQRP) identifies an urban footprint within which new development can occur and clearly marks out rural land to be maintained for productive purposes (Spearritt, 2009). The SEQRP took precedence over all other Local and State government planning instruments. The plan represented a move away from the previous voluntary collaborative approach to regional planning to a statutory plan towards one that was legally binding on all state government agencies, all SEQ local authorities and the private sector. In addition, an annual Infrastructure Plan for SEQ accompanies the Regional Plan and outlines the State Government's infrastructure priorities that are needed to support the Regional Plan. The 2005 Regional Plan was replaced in 2009 by the SEQ Regional Plan 2009-2031.

To this end the SEQ plan provides a strategic and statutory framework for managing the challenges of growth and development in the region. As England (2010, p.67) articulates the SEQ regional plan was "generally lauded as the most sensible way forward to deal with SEQ's (apparently) unstoppable growth". However as Figure 3 below highlights, the ambit of the regional plan is clearly bounded and stops at the Queensland/New South Wales border.



**Figure 3:** Map of SEQ regional land-use (Queensland Government, 2005)

The plan does acknowledge, albeit briefly, growth and development dependency between the SEQ region and the Tweed shire and calls for: [i] potential cross-regional development issues to be considered in a broader planning context; and [ii] arrangements to be put in place to address these issues. Furthermore, in explaining the regional significance of the Gold Coast, the plan highlights that “the Gold Coast’s urban development is concentrated between Yatala and Coolangatta, and *continues south beyond the Queensland border into the Tweed Shire*’ (p.19, italics for emphasis). However despite this tentative recognition of cross-border urban growth and development, the ambitions/limitations of the plan remain clear:

The SEQ Regional Plan does not directly influence the planning processes or regulate the use of land in areas outside SEQ (Queensland Government, 2005, p.7).

A quite different narrative was offered in the Tweed Strategic Plan 2004-2024 *Tweed Futures*. This document emphasizes that “in many ways the Tweed is part of South-East Queensland” (p.8) and acknowledges the significant issues in planning for sustainability that this co-dependency raises specifically related to dealing with the challenges of growth pressures and spill-over development. The plan identifies the need for better cross-border governance arrangements to address these issues citing the example of the planned mini-town Cobaki Lakes which is located predominantly in NSW but will rely on Queensland for key infrastructure services. The Australian Bureau of Statistics corroborates the regional dependency argument by recognising the Gold Coast-Tweed Heads region as a single statistical district (ABS Census, 2006). Yet, the governance responsibilities/spatial maps delineating the SEQ region in Queensland abruptly stop at the border ignoring the complex interconnectedness and mutual reliance with northern New South Wales. As the *Tweed Futures* plan succinctly observes:

Currently there is no formal arrangement to integrate planning and service delivery for the Tweed and Gold Coast (Tweed Shire Council, 2009, p.21).

At present there is institutional recognition, but negligible governance structures able to address the dynamics of megalopolis unbound within the SEQ/Tweed urban region. Despite cross-jurisdictional willingness to address ‘common good’ issues through Tweed Shire involvement in regional frameworks such as the South-East Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (SEQROC) meetings, the governance capacity to effectively address contemporary cross-border issues associated with urban growth and development is very weak. In light of both the challenges and opportunities underlying the 200km city (and beyond), the need for a cross-jurisdictional approach at state and local government levels is needed to create a new framework of governance that is founded on functional connectedness rather than geographical boundaries (Glicksman 2011) – and is strategically supported by a national spatial policy role.

The 200km city (and beyond) poses several key challenges for urban planners, policymakers and politicians. A delayed response to understanding the unbounded nature of Australian spatial settlements (and the existing institutional dependency pathways that largely fail to support them) has created a new web of challenges – infrastructural, bio-physical, and socio-economic – that will further defy both regional and national visions for megalopolis regions such as SEQ/Tweed. The list below is by no means exhaustive; on the contrary, we argue that these challenges are only ‘the tip of an iceberg’ and are intended to generate dialogue – across communities, local councils, state jurisdictions and their federal counterparts through the national urban policy. This dialogue may help to translate some of these challenges into potential strategic

regional synergies, which must necessarily build on, and complement current local capacities to better plan and manage issues that cut across the mega-metro region. Challenges for the SEQ/Tweed include:

1. Climate change: recent floods in Queensland have established the extreme vulnerability of populations not only across the SEQ region but also those beyond the geographical boundaries who remain dependent on SEQ for health care, education, employment and other aspects of socio-environmental wellbeing. Climate change-related projections of more frequent and intense changes to weather patterns draw attention to the many ways in which the existing resilience and adaptive capacity of the 200km city (and beyond) will be further tested as a vast coastal conurbation
2. Rising infrastructure demands: as mentioned earlier in the paper, the 200km city (and beyond) has witnessed a strong population increase thereby generating further demands for housing and energy. Given the regional inter-dependence for employment, there are important transportation challenges associated with the megalopolis. In a changing climate, there are concerns over the region's ongoing over-reliance on cars for mobility and ensuing fuel demands. Public transportation system needs further resources and policy direction for a sustainable reform in existing transportation patterns.
3. Socio-spatial equity: much of the new development is in the form of large master-planned estates that include little in the way of affordable housing. New architecture designed dwellings are priced at a premium which raises the price of surrounding suburbs and tend to remain vacant until eventually sold. The cross-border implications of public services such as childcare, schools and hospitals lag behind the development of mid-up market residential dwelling stock, increasing the pressure on scarce community resources at the local level.
4. Ecological integrity: the long-term sustainability of the megalopolis must be understood not only in terms of the scale of degradation of natural resource systems that sustain public water supplies, biological resources, sense of place and recreational opportunities; but also the integrity of territorial ecological communities, key landscape habitats and wildlife corridors.
5. Scale and policy mismatch: this relates to the core problem of scale identified earlier. In SEQ/Tweed both local and state governments have struggled to link cross-scale urban and regional dynamics (the existence of a mega-region transcending state and local jurisdictions) with suitable policy actions. The latter have thus far focused on generating short-term solutions with little or no consideration of their role in potentially causing long-term problems – the development of Gold Coast's coal-fuelled desalination plant, close to the NSW border, in the backdrop of a changing climate is a case in point.

The speed, scale and intensity of urban growth in this megalopolitan region poses significant governance challenges in terms of competing demands on limited energy, land and water resources. At the local level there is neither the capacity nor influence to tackle metropolitan or megalopolitan-wide problems and cross-border issues. In the case of the 200km city for example the *bounded metropolitan region* is SEQ as outlined in the SEQ regional plan. The *unbound megalopolitan region* however extends SEQ development south in a linear coastal corridor towards Byron as part of the Tweed Valley/Byron Shire in Northern New South Wales. Thus while the principles of good governance are arguably the same, the spatial complexity and (dis)economies of institutional scale are different, and extend far beyond the ambit of the existing suite of state-driven strategic plans which guide metropolitan policy and activity. In the final section we turn to consider the potential role of national spatial policy - as part of a whole of government framework – to address these new spatial settlement patterns.

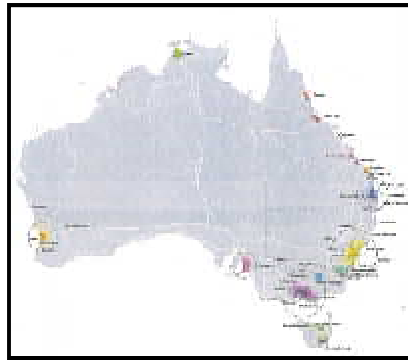
## NATIONAL NARRATIVES

The governance of the Australian mega-metropolitan region as a complex network of interlinked spatial settlement organizations is characterised largely by a lack of institutional co-ordination and policy integration particularly in key areas such as climate change, transport, communications, industry and housing development. A stronger national policy role for Australian cities has long been advocated by urban researchers who have pointed to the disjuncture between the urban concentration of the population and the absence of dedicated structures for urban decision making for welfare and well-being at every scale, from the individual to the nation (Stilwell and Troy, 2000). At the core a national role is envisaged to involve the development of nationally defined urban policy priorities that focus on enhancing the sustainability of cities. At the State of Australian Cities Conference in 2007 McGuirk for example noted that “national public policy settings have had a tendency to be spatially blind despite their deeply spatialised impacts” and that as a result “urban governance capacity clearly needs to be lifted on to the national agenda” (p.9).

In 2011 the Australian Government released the first National Urban Policy *Our Cities, Our Future*, which sets out the aims and aspirations for the planning, management and development of Australian cities. The national urban policy is premised on the need to proactively address contemporary challenges such as population, urban growth, accelerating globalisation and the imperative of climate change in order to achieve



better - that is more sustainable - outcomes in Australian cities. Located within Australia's three-tier federal government system the emergent settlement feature of expanding *metropolitan regions* includes the extension of the 200km city of SEQ into northern NSW outlined in the section above (see Figure 4 below).



**Figure 4:** Australian metropolitan regions (Australian Government, 2010)

A theme that runs throughout the national urban policy *Our Cities, Our Future* is that a national approach to Australian cities is not just about capital cities but must include the challenges and opportunities facing large regional cities as well. The argument offered in the policy is that the “complexity and scale of these challenges” requires a hitherto unseen national approach, framework and set of overarching goals for cities (Australian Government, 2011, p.8). To this end the policy states that the planning and management of cities, including regional cities, should be improved through: [1] a facilitated whole-of-government approach; [2] integrated planning systems and infrastructure management and delivery; and [3] best practice in alignment with the principles of subsidiarity, policy integration and stakeholder engagement (Australian Government, 2011, p. 20-1). The policy also highlights the need for comprehensive strategic plans not only to capital cities but also for regional cities in alignment with the Council of Australian Governments’ national objective and criteria (COAG, 2009). This includes the allocation of funds to enhance communities’ sustainability in regional cities and improve their liveability to make them more attractive places to live, particularly through affordable living choices (p. 64). Further, it creates the Sustainable Regional Development initiative with an allocated \$29.2m in funds for the 2011-12 period to improve sustainability planning in regional and coastal areas which are experiencing significant growth (p. 43). Yet the challenges and opportunities posed by the size and complexity of growth, investment and development at the mega-metropolitan regional scale remain.

As part of a whole of government approach attentive to the principles of subsidiarity, the national urban policy offers a step towards the development of a strategic spatial framework for Australia’s growing mega-metro regions. In his foreword to the policy the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport specifically reinforces the necessity of building “strong interrelationships between cities and regions” (Albanese, 2011, p.3). However it falls short of substantively addressing the key challenges of the planning and management of new Australian settlement patterns increasingly characterised by megalopolitan-scale growth and development. This join up of once separate cities and towns now accommodates almost 80% of the Australian population (Short, 2007). As Newton (2008, p.178) argues the key challenges of this trend relate to urban governance in terms of “developing urban planning and management practices appropriate to multi-municipal, poly-centric, mega-metropolitan regions”.

The cross-border interrelationships and megalopolitan characteristics of the contemporary Australian spatial settlement are clearly evident in the background and research paper that underpins the national urban policy *Our Cities: the challenge of change*. The discussion paper specifically acknowledges that population growth over the next decade will lead to greater levels of urban connectivity and closely linked groups of metropolitan regions. Yet aside from the reiteration of the principles of good governance (see above), the implications of this are not expanded on, nor clearly linked to governance mechanisms outside the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), nor are the mega-metro regions substantively translated across from the discussion paper to the resultant national urban policy *Our Cities, Our Future*. This offers limited capacity to support the spatial strategies such as polycentric urbanism or decentralised concentration.

The national urban policy does not address the case for metropolitan scale (let alone mega-metro regional scale) governance reform in Australia put forward by Stilwell and Troy (2000) and, more recently, by Gleeson, Dodson and Spiller (2010). Specifically the latter highlight: the lack of sustained and accountable metropolitan governance frameworks which have responsibility for creating and implementing workable strategies for urban development; the ‘institutional distance’ or urban policy disconnection with the patchwork of local authorities that govern urban development; and the highly specified and spatially confined nature of

metropolitan responsibilities within a context of rising stresses, dislocations and inefficiencies experienced in Australian cities. This governance deficit is intensified by climate change - itself a wholly unbounded entity - in two distinct ways: firstly that climate change has the potential to act as a threat multiplier on varied social, economic and environmental challenges that already exist; and secondly that climate risks often compound existing spatial challenges (Gasper *et al.* 2011, p.155). Addressing contemporary settlement challenges such as climate change will involve the strategic spatial planning and management of “multi-nodal yet integrated urban structures at both the metropolitan and megalopolitan scales” (Lang & Knox, 2009, p.19).

Within Australia, the multi-scalar governance of a mega-metro region involves all three tiers of government (local, state, national), as well as input from the private and community sectors working in concert together. Stilwell and Troy (2000) identify three types of coordination between the three tiers of Australian government: [1] coordination between the different tiers of government; [2] coordination between policies for urban development and other national social and economic policies; and [3] coordination between urban development plans at the national level. Despite the effectiveness of forward thinking strategic/statutory planning instruments such as the SEQ regional plan, their adherence to bounded regional/state administrative demarcations provide little or no capacity to influence or address cross-border issues (as the SEQRP itself highlights). Similarly at the local level there is neither the power nor influence to tackle broader metro-wide structural concerns around public transport, water, energy sewerage and public housing. This points to the value of a national urban policy role to help mediate the spatial challenges of new urban settlement patterns and growth trajectories (McQuirk & Argent, 2011). As Stilwell and Troy (2000, p.926) argue “without a national urban and regional strategy, the beggar-thy-neighbour tendencies and the problems of incompatibility of policies between the states will inevitably continue to loom large”. The alternative is a *de facto* settlement trajectory propelled largely by market demands for ever-greater levels of economic and development growth. A fairer, more sustainable urban future for Australian cities beckons.

## CONCLUSION – AUSTRALIAN METROPOLITAN FRONTIERS

Is megalopolis unbound the contemporary metropolitan frontier? Current global trends suggest that most of the population already lives in nebulous mega-metro of some description that will shift and change as new settlement patterns develop. Australia is no exception. Whilst the Australian city can claim its own distinctive urban characteristics and historical metropolitan trajectory (see Searle *et. al.*, 2011), there are resonances with the governance planning and development challenges of other mega-urban regions and conurbations within a globalised world context in climate change. As Short (2007, p.19) points out “the sheer extent of megalopolis questions all of our assumptions ...and takes us beyond formal city boundaries, everyday lived experiences, and common conceptions of the city, urban growth, and metropolitan frontiers”.

We have focused on the Australian metropolitan context by highlighting the context of the 200km city (and beyond) that now links SEQ with northern NSW. Despite the Australian urban context increasingly characterized by megalopolis unbound, there are no governance structures that as yet explicitly address the emergence of these vast conurbations, nor a national urban policy that directs action much beyond the state-bound metropolitan gaze. There is an almost exclusive linkage of national policy (and infrastructure investment funding) to existing strategic *metropolitan* plans and an (over?) emphasis on compact city policies. This underscores the existing governance deficit whilst challenges are already manifest at the megalopolitan scale. Key challenges identified in the SEQ/Tweed include: climate change; rising infrastructure demands; socio-spatial equity; ecological integrity; and a policy/scale mismatch.

We view megalopolis as a useful heuristic for thinking about the governance implications of interconnected cities and regions that increasingly transcend local, regional, state and even national boundaries. Like its parent global capitalism, the unbound mega-urban-region is always in a state of both becoming *and* being, and finds ways to flow across borders in ways that demand a different governance mentality to those in the past (Short, 2007). The use of different sectoral policies at scale tends to simply shift problems across administrative borders and/or offer contradictory policies that generated more spatial issues than they resolved (Duhr *et al.*, 2010). Similarly reliance on parallel multi-level governance mechanisms that are *inter alia* institutionally divided, does not address the issues and challenges increasingly manifest in cities at the megalopolitan scale. The resulting impact affects the ecological and economic capacity of this vast conurbation, as well as the overall quality of life of those who live within them.

As for the future of megalopolis? In the so-called ‘age of cities’ perhaps it is *Ecumenopolis* unbound: the future world city imagined by Dioxides (1961) made up of interlocking megalopolitan regions within which most of the world’s population would reside. Without a strategic spatial planning agenda mindful of the increasingly fluid and interconnected nature, complexity and scale of urban regions, it is not too difficult to imagine one long linear urban city that hugs the eastern coastline of Australia. Whether this is a desirable



outcome should be the focus of robust deliberation and democratic governance. It should not be left to a default position that emphasizes artificially bounded metropolitan regions that in terms of growth and development have already slipped their metro-moorings and started to sail away. How to plan and manage these new spatial settlements is the contemporary governance – and therefore democratic – challenge within the Australian urban context.

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