Contrasting residents’ priorities and planners’ visions in peri-urban Australia: can SEA enhance deliberative regional planning?

Albert Llausàs
Ruth Beilin
Michael Buxton
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Background

Map of Victoria, Australia, showing regions numbered 1 to 7:

1. Ballarat
2. Central Goldfields
3. Greater Bendigo
4. Hepburn
5. Macedon Ranges
6. Moorabool
7. Mount Alexander
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Background
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Background

Area of high natural amenity value + proximity to Melbourne (pop: 4M.)

Amenity migration or “tree-change”

Development pressure

- Protect natural resources
- Plan for appropriate access

SEA

Ad hoc
Future oriented
Objective-led
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Aim

Current planning

To be strategically assessed against environmental objectives defined by:

- Planners vision
- Residents vision
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Methods

- **Planners vision**
  - Buxton et al. (2011). Vision statement resulting from a workshop with spatial planners of the Periurban Group of Rural Councils (Victoria, Australia)

- **Residents vision**
  - Community consultation:
    - Online survey
    - Face to face interviews
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Methods

- Online survey
- Future expectations
- Alignment with institutional vision
- **138 responses**
- Statistics (Descriptive + PCA)
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Methods

Interviews

40 face-to-face (0.5–2 hours) semistructured interviews:

23 residents
9 Landcare groups
4 Local councils
2 Farming organizations
2 Environmental organizations

Discourse analysis:

Transcription
Coding
Software-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Methods

Planners vision

Buxton et al. (2011). Vision statement resulting from a workshop with spatial planners of the Periurban Group of Rural Councils (Victoria, Australia)

Residents vision

Community consultation:
- Online survey
- Face to face interviews

Three topics of interest:

- Biodiversity conservation
- Sustainable agriculture
- Landscape character
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Results

Online survey

Future expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Stable</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area of fields and paddocks managed by professional farmers</td>
<td>Total area of fields and paddocks</td>
<td>Quality of water in rivers, streams, ponds, dams, lakes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of wildlife</td>
<td>Total area of forest</td>
<td>Total area of forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of native forest</td>
<td>Area of tree plantations</td>
<td>Mining activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of dams, lakes, etc.</td>
<td>Area of public transport services</td>
<td>Windfarms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of powerlines</td>
<td>Risk of bushfires</td>
<td>Road network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of built up township</td>
<td>Rural tourism and accommodation businesses</td>
<td>Subdivisions and isolated dwellings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population residing in the area</td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>Stable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institutional vision

By 2040, the communities of the peri-urban region are healthy, sustainable, vibrant, socially diverse, culturally active and economically productive. The peri-urban region is linked both locally and more widely through efficient and accessible transport options. The region is also linked nationally and internationally through efficient and accessible communication networks and technology. Designated centres will provide accessible and affordable education and health services. Townships both small and large will be well planned liveable places. The region is an economically productive one supported by sustainable and accessible energy. Productivity is based fundamentally on protecting the region’s environmental and heritage attributes. These attributes attract visitors and enhance the liveability of the area for permanent residents. The peri-urban region will be attracting investment and providing a wide range of advanced and traditional business services, including new economic activities in the environmental and communication sectors. Agricultural production has increased in value and importance. The condition of the physical environment is substantially improved, particularly on private land and in streams. Planning for growth and investment has achieved this vision and prevented the loss of environmental and social attributes essential for the region’s economic development and liveability. Rural landscapes will be maintained. The region will also capitalise on opportunities of climate change and maintain resilience to major change.
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Results

Online survey

Alignment with institutional vision

High priority

Medium priority

Low priority

Against

Prevent the loss of environmental attributes
Protect the environmental attributes
Promote sustainable community health
Plan townships with liveability in mind
Provide health and education services
Protect the heritage attributes
Support social and cultural diversity networks
Improve communications networks
Maintain resilience to major change
Increase public transport
Planning for growth
Planning for infrastructure
Expand transport opportunities as they are
Maintain rural landscapes as they are
Maintain rural landscapes as they are in 2013
Promote economic activity in the communication sector
Planning for investment
Attract investment
Intensify agricultural production

Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Results

Online survey

Alignment with institutional vision

High priority

Medium priority

Low priority

Against

Prevent the loss of environmental attributes
Protect the environmental attributes
Promote sustainable community health
Plan townships with liveability in mind
Provide health and education services
Protect the heritage attributes
Support social and cultural diversity networks
Improve communications networks
Maintain resilience to major change
Increase public transport
Planning for growth
Planning for infrastructure
Expand transport opportunities as they are
Maintain rural landscapes as they are
Maintain rural landscapes as they are in 2013
Promote economic activity in the communication sector
Planning for investment
Attract investment
Intensify agricultural production
Results

Interviews

Planners vision

“too waffly”

“motherhoody”

“a fluffy sort of thing”

“a lot of rot”

“a bit open-ended”

“words that are always used, cut and paste”

Status quo, focused on validating the current trajectory
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Results

Interviews

Landscape character

2 views

- Stewardship

- Farming

Maintenance not an option

Support for multifunctionality and diversity of uses

Need to decouple rural landscape planning from production

All groups reject status quo (incremental development on rural zones)
Results

Interviews

Biodiversity conservation

Vision goal to “substantially improve the condition of the physical environment” overwhelmingly supported

Doubts on feasibility under current scheme

Chase of moral amenity offers opportunities for environmental improvement

Stewardship useful and needed to involve farmers in conservation
Contrasting priorities of residents and planners

Results

Interviews

Sustainable agriculture

Agreement on “agricultural production to increase in value and importance”

Not through increased production

Transition:

Large enterprises + food growing cheaply

Biodiversity and ecosystem services + niche, local, organic, etc.

Agency:  
- New residents as innovators and restorers
- Traditional farmers need to be engaged
Conclusions

“planning ... stories function as sanction and justification for the current order, but also as launching pads for counter versions”

(Sandercock, 2003:22)

Public participation in SEA is a suitable platform to generate alternative narratives

In the case study: the planners’ vision validates the status quo
the residents’ objectives are closer to transformational action

An objective-led SEA can benefit from incorporating different sets of environmental objectives... ... and coupled with a participative process it can facilitate discussion and decision making

Other benefits observed: - Awareness raising - Knowledge exchanges

Assessment team

Planners

Public
Impact Assessment for Social and Economic Development

Public participation in action: a real tool for rising effectiveness in SEA

References


Thank you

Albert Llausàs
(albert.llausas@unimelb.edu.au)

Landscape Sociology Group
Department of Resource Management and Geography
Melbourne School of Land and Environment
The University of Melbourne, Building 379, Room 1.57
221 Bouverie Street, Carlton 3053 (VIC, Australia)