Spatial Planning & Urban Design – Implementation Challenges

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Introduction

• Let’s take a step back and consider a few issues before we begin the new ‘spatial plan’ journey

• Firstly, let’s not forget, that the new Auckland Council is going to be the largest single local government reorganisation process ever undertaken in New Zealand's History
• So It’s part of a much bigger picture

• Through this reorganisation and ‘bedding in’ period the new Auckland Council will be required to develop a new spatial plan for Auckland

• All within a year?
• Where did this idea of a spatial plan come from and why?

• What is wrong with the RPS and the district plans, why couldn’t they do the job?

• Are we just ‘caught up’ with making ever newer plans, without thinking about implementation and evaluation?
Royal Commission

- The Royal Commission found that Auckland’s governance was weak and fragmented; as a result failing to address growth and infrastructure problems.

- We should note: RC basically concurred with urban limits and ‘densification’ around nodes and corridors ‘ala’ the RGS; criticism was more about making it happen.
• The commission noted there was no strategic vision to coordinate implementation, so suggested a strategic spatial plan and a single statutory plan (unitary plan) to address this concern.

• Does this mean that one plan would solve all our problems?
• They noted a need for strong regional overview, through a single council with strong local engagement to meet the needs of their local communities

• So was the Royal Commission suggesting that the existing urban planning approaches were not working?
• If so, why? and what does that say about the current state of urban planning practice in Auckland?

• I shall return to this point later on, including considering the issues of implementation and evaluation

• So what is a spatial plan?
The Spatial Plan

• Does anyone know what a spatial plan is in the NZ context?

• I know there are a number of ideas,

• What do the communities of Auckland think, and what will it provide for them?

• Can we look to overseas examples for some guidance?
• Yes, but we must be careful. Do they have the same planning mandate and funding mechanisms?

• If not, how relevant are they to the NZ context, especially in terms of funding and implementation?

• Section 79 (LG(AC)AA 2010) provides a detailed level of guidance (maybe too detailed?)
• Consequently, are the Act’s goals too ambitious and can they actually be met in such a short timeframe (one year)

• While the idea of creating a spatial plan is laudable, I worry about implementation and commitment

• There’s a real risk that the plan becomes another failure where everybody is promised everything
New wine in old bottles

• Potentially, few practitioners in NZ have any real understanding of, experience in undertaking spatial planning

• While the enthusiasm seems high, we may risk re-branding old approaches given the time pressures

• Spatial planning should be about integrating and prioritising decision making
• Needs to provide a clear long term vision linked to real shorter-term action.

• Needs to understand the bigger picture, but also engage with the detail

• Is as much a social process as a technical one
• It is not simply everybody’s ideal sector-based outcomes all jumbled together.

• Needs to explain how, in different circumstances, competing objectives can be resolved and prioritised.

• How do we hold CCOs’ to account and serve appropriate objectives wider than just their own financial imperatives?
Detail tests where greatest change proposed...

Multi-disciplinary analysis and goal setting...

An integrated, specific spatial plan linked to ‘when’ and ‘how’

GCUDS Spatial Planning component – Winner 2008 NZPI Nancy Northcroft Planning Practice Award
Urbanismplus Ltd., Auckland
• In doing so, the spatial plan should seek to bring together all of the Council's functions under the LGA, RMA & LTMA

• Need integrated decision making, which is deliverable and will actually be implemented in practice

• We need to move well beyond the rhetoric of integration; it has to become a way of working to solve problems across the organisations
Issues

• I would argue (supported by current research) that we have a poor track record of implementing and evaluating plans in NZ

• Who knows whether their policy approaches actually worked on the ground?
• Who actively undertakes policy effectiveness monitoring?

• Even then, how can we separate what was good policy, and what was just lucky circumstance of the right people in the right place with the right financial backing?

• The question of attribution
• So, we appear to be more interested in constructing plans than implementing them.

• Is making them happen some else's problem?

• Catkins (1979) – Plan fatigue is not new
• I would call this the ‘implementation gap’, linked to the ‘knowledge disconnection’ between policy formation and implementation.

• Are we just creating another layer of bureaucracy, or worse, false expectations?

• Will the spatial plan fall into this category?
• In addition, what is the relationship between the RPS and the district plan with the spatial plan?

• This is especially relevant in the period between the delivery of the spatial plan and new unitary plan (I think three years maybe optimistic)
• More importantly how can a non-statutory plan with limited community engagement which has not faced the statutory process effectively influence a statutory plan?

• E.g., in terms of resources consents, is this going to be a s104(3)(c) issue?

• If so, how does this lead to integrated decision making?
Issues – Commitment

• Do we have the commitment to give effect to the spatial plan?

• Internationally you find higher levels of either state or central government; or other funding mechanisms (sales taxes) to fund their spatial plan outcomes
• The spatial plan will not work without serious commitment from all levels of government, especially central government

• So I ask the question, is central government serious about the spatial plan?
• Where is the money going to come from? What happens if regional preferences are different to central (infrastructure preferences?)

• There is a risk that the spatial plan becomes simply an infrastructure programme. Australian spatial plans have been criticised for morphing from spatial planning into spatial engineering
• Do we have the right tools to deliver a spatial plan?

• What about the role of practice, including the roles of all the professionals involved in the built environment?
Issues – Commitment

• We need to combine the best from each profession – and understand what each professional can bring to the table

• Will this require a culture change, are we ready and do we have the skill sets required to deliver?
Conclusions

• Its unclear what a spatial plan is in the NZ context

• Will the spatial plan be any better, or just a plan ‘on a shelf’? Is it just another box we tick to remain in the ‘globally important city’ club?

• Are the time frames too tight, should the first spatial plan be like a draft, a test run to get it right?
• There are many challenges ahead in delivering this plan

• Are we up to it?

• Is there sufficient capacity & commitment to deliver a meaningful plan capable of effective implementation that will make a real difference in the medium term?
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