



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Irregular no. 15; Oct. 1968

This is the Unpublished version of the following publication

UNSPECIFIED (1968) *Irregular no. 15; Oct. 1968. Irregular (15)*. pp. 1-7.
(Unpublished)

The publisher's official version can be found at

Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/16335/>

15/8
October 1968

An irregular publication for members of the Town Planning Research Group. (Not for general publication or republication).

THIS ISSUE:

- 1) "Can the 'Quality of Life' be measured?"
- 2) "Have the Councils a kick left?"

1/15/8 Can the "Quality of Life" be measured?

(Recapitulating some of the points in recent T.R.G. discussions and fore-shadowing points with a view to facilitating further discussion of the subject, with a special emphasis on the particular subject for the next discussion

"What standards would raise the quality of local community life?")

How can you "quantify quality?" It sounds like a contradiction in terms. Every science that ever was, however, has done precisely this. Further development of science can only proceed by the same process. Moreover, the "quality of life" cannot be reduced to sharp popular demands, cannot be rendered capable of formulation as a political demand, until standards can be erected as a goal. (This is not to say that what you might call individual preferences, or value-judgements can be reduced to measurement. No-one can give objective points to the Beatles as against Beethoven or to life in a detached cottage as against life in a flat, still less, in the writer's opinion, can you compare "enjoyments" of a different character, e.g., a day in the home garden as against a bush picnic. But even here opportunities for exercise of choice can be reduced to some sort of standard. But, there is a mighty lot of life that has not been reduced to measurement and standards which could be.

Take the simplest first

2/15/8 Natural Physical Elements of the Environment.

- 1) Pollution of air.
- 2) Pollution of water.
- 3) Excess noise.
- 4) Odious odours.
- 5) Reduction of flora and fauna by excessive forest destruction, overstocking pastures or pesticides.

Obviously science has set and is still setting minimum standards for such elements and technology can be devised to establish control capable of maintaining such standards. (Historically, before these became burning issues, adequate light and air, sunlight, weatherproofing, space, water, sewerage for man's dwellings have been reduced to standards now in the Uniform Building Regulations).

However, there is one physical element that assails the senses, namely.....

6) Unsightly sights.

Which seems by its very nature rather intractable to quantify or control. Moreover, from amongst the ranks of the very ones, the architects, who kick up the greatest commotion about the Great Australian Ugliness are to be found others who resist to the utmost, as undemocratic, any official control over sight-makers, other than those who dig quarries or erect poles or hoardings.

Yet despite difficulties even in this field, there are moves for the rudiments of measurement and control in some aspects. For example, the growth of a demand for better regulations governing bulk and siting as between buildings, the fact that

for every three architects in the U.S.A. there is one landscape architect; and the unique provision of the South Perth Council for a "design-control" committee which vets every application for buildings of more than 2 storeys, are straws in the wind

3/15/8 Compulsory Social Elements of the Environment.

When it comes to social elements of the environment one would expect that matters of the "quality of social life" would be so varied and complex as to defy any standardisation. Not so. Take the clearest cases . . .

7) Schools.

8) Kindergartens.

The first of these, based on compulsory education and standardisation of basic curricula subjects, have created certain objective standards of school buildings, playgrounds and teachers per given number of children. (They could be improved, yes, but there are standards).

In the case of kindergartens, whilst standards of building, equipment and teachers have been established, standards of the ratio of kindergartens to the child population have not. But, Dr. Vera Scantlebury Browne, former Director of Maternal and Infant Welfare, proposed sufficient centres so that mothers in built up areas need walk no further than a quarter of a mile to a kindergarten. Mrs. Ruth Crow proposes a variant... 1 kindergarten of 50 children for every primary school of 600... i.e., equivalent to catering for 50% of pre-school children.

The compulsory social school life of children dictates predictable basic requirements of land, buildings, teachers and equipment. It spills over into semi-compulsory after-school activities, so that, in Australian country towns and suburbs, the following....

9) Libraries

10) Swimming Pools

11) Sports grounds

have become so common as to be almost expected community facilities.

A Warning - before leaving behind the above "simple" examples which have been produced and dismissed in a few words as if the problem of measurements, standards and control had been long ago solved, don't swallow too much of it. Reflection will demonstrate that all that has been proved is that such subjects are amenable to quantification and control not that this process is complete or satisfactory. Indeed, it is a continual struggle in even the most established spheres to incorporate, as it were, ever higher qualities into standardised and general practices.

Thus, the playing fields of State schools (where they have them) are a far cry from the green sward and genuine turf pitches and practice nets of the Grammar Schools. The lavish libraries and science blocks of the Grammar Schools find no counterpart in the State schools. Far more kindergartens south of the Yarra are manned by trained kindergarten teachers than north of the Yarra. The degree and quality of participation, not just the fact of an institution, must be evaluated.

When you turn on your tap it may well be that what you should expect to emerge is not "pure" water of "nature" together with natural contamination, but water suitably chlorinated and fluoridised.

4/15/8 Leisure-Time Social Activities in local environment.

If there are difficulties enough in establishing agreed standards of physical elements, or compulsory social elements in the local environment, when we turn to youth and adult leisure-time social matters, we nose-dive immediately into turbulent controversy.

In the case of kindergartens and schools, the adults know, or think they know "what's good for the children," and are even anxious to listen to the advice of experts on such matters, or on libraries or swimming pools.

When it comes to the leisure-time activities of these same adults who determines, apart from the press and T.V., "What's good for them," They themselves? But, "client-centred" standards are notoriously unsatisfactory. Thus, where sociologists conduct a questionnaire of lower income groups as to what they think they want or need, naturally their answers are circumscribed by the constrictions of their own past experience. Having had no training or opportunity to experience better standards, they cannot formulate changes for the better that range very far beyond their own conditions of life. The same people who will listen avidly to experts advice about their own children regarding education or sports-training, do not turn to experts in connection with their own activities. It is characteristic of many intelligent, highly-strung embittered youth, as it is of lonely neurotic housewives stranded in the outer suburbs, that they "don't know what they want."

Most T.R.G. members appear to dismiss as unworthy, the current fashionable answer to this problem.... car mobility has meant that whatever they want, they don't want local social "neighbourhood" or "community" centres.

Whatever its advantages, the car does not and cannot overcome man's need for social activities of various types. His new-found ability to get into the countryside is no substitute. Whether competition is a necessary element of the best social endeavours or not (T.R.G. members have differences on this) what options are open if there are to be local and district centres?

The problem is complicated by the habit of scattering facilities at random over the face of the suburb, unconnected either with each other or with public transport (contrary to the principle of Jane Jacobs for very high density urban areas for separating and mixing primary land uses in our very low density suburbs surely the opposite should hold true in an attempt to make lively at least one spot on the non-lively urban scene?)

Here we are then into uncharted qualitative territory, unmeasured, unquantified, uncontrolled. We supply no answers, but we have organised a question.

Which of the following types of social complex could supply such a degree of need as to sustain vigorous local or district activity to the point of being regarded as a "standard."

5/15/8 The School as the Community Centre.

This case was put and supported from many angles last discussion

The case briefly is that man can only avoid the turning in on himself induced by acquisition of material goods, can only resurrect himself as a civilised human through education and the age of more leisure will make this more urgent for the future.

The school is the logical place for learning, culture and social recreation around which transformation can take place for adults as well as children. This brought up a crop of supporting examples:-

The proposed Collingwood High School with language laboratories, gymnasium, assembly hall and canteen, etc., open for youth and adults after school hours.

The V.C.S.O. Conference (Vic. Council of School Organisation) Conferences illustrate keen adult interest in educational problems as a natural base for expansion of adult activities around the school.

Old Boys. In quite a few secondary schools there are already established "old boys" and "old girls" activities, especially sporting activities and dances which take place at the school. This could be a basis for expansion to other types of activity.

Specialisation to Avoid Mediocrity, whether children or adults, with the relatively small numbers around the even bigger school of 1,000 there is insufficient to provide a high standard of choice if too many activities are offered. Mediocrity can only result which repulses people. Therefore, a success more likely to be based on a degree of specialisation in a few cultures or sports in any particular school.

Schools in Parks. The concept of siting a school in a park and supplying common facilities for both the school children in school hours and youth and adults at other times is one worth considering. Thus gymnasium, changing rooms, halls and canteen facilities as well as playing fields and courts of different types would be economic and provide a wider range and a higher class facility for both children and adults.

Urgency to get School Solution. The immediacy of redevelopment schemes in the inner areas, the flexibility given by extra space that could become available (e.g. gasometers after natural gas) make all-over planning, including the schools, easier and this matter is urgent.

Embrace, if you like, all of the above ideas; grant that ultimately the standardised local social centre may turn out to be one that revolves around the school for all social purposes (just as the mediaeval village revolved around the church). Grant too the immediacy of new type schools for inner areas as an integral part of the re-development process, yet the facts are that very few youth or adults are at present organised in such a way.

Therefore, surely there would need to be staged and phased transitions from the level of existing social centres towards the desired goal.

For example, consider the following supplementary centres:-

13) Co-operative Pubs and Night Clubs

A traditional haunt of the Australian male - pubs are undergoing some changes. In Sydney they are definitely evolving into something like working men's night clubs. In fact, there are several institutions run by committees of workers called workingmen's clubs with licences. They have card nights, concert nights, dances, as well as beer and they are for the women as well as the men. One-arm bandits have made such development possible.

Simultaneously, to attract more customers, both women and men, many hotels put on "floor shows" in the evening. Folk singers are invading these precincts and folk singers bring ideas of a different class to torch singers. Many youth come here too.

"That's all right for N.S.W., not Victoria" you may hint. Did you see the "Herald" 28/6/68? Under heading "They Want Pub not C.U.B." - a news item explaining that the 1650 people at Churchill were very angry because the Housing Commission had rejected their tender for a community hotel and had given it to the Carlton and United Brewery Ltd. to build and own. From the profits of the Churchill Co-operative Hotel they had hoped to aircondition the school, build a swimming pool, library and teaching aids and sports equipment.

At Hopetoun, Victoria, where they have had a "community hotel" since 1958, they have subsidised a caravan park and clubrooms for young farmers, the infant welfare centre, the local schools. Irymple Community Hotel, near Mildura has supported local sporting clubs.

In the Melbourne metropolitan areas millions are being invested in hotels and in hotel-motels. If we could get a cross between the raising of the cultural level within the pub itself (as in Sydney) with more community mindedness (as in Victorian country towns) would that not be a starting point worth exploring?

14) "Take in a Show When You Go Shopping."

District shopping centres are trying to turn themselves into community centres. At the opening of "Southland" the "Moorabbin Arts Festival" was opened too in art galleries attached to the centre. Further - there is a Southland's Theatre let to a professional theatre company anxious to produce Australian plays. The first play "Razza-Ma-Tazz" is said to be "roping them in from the surrounding suburbs."

"These great modern shopping centres seem to be a return to the market towns of England and Europe", says John Howson, playwright - "we see it as a real focal point of the community."

15) The Swimming Pool.

This is a special Australian standardised facility. Youth go there, swim, sunbake for a while, then they are bored. Why cannot swimming pools have a complex of complementary facilities.... gymnasium, bowling alleys, coffee lounges, with entertainment, even a library or centre for artistic expression between swims?

"HAVE THE COUNCILS A KICK LEFT?"

(The Editor thanks reader "Double You" for drawing attention to material used in article)

6/15/8 Some planners, exasperated with lack of bold centralised, well designed plans, see the local Councils as the scapegoats and propose administration units of say, 250,000 or so. Premier Bolte wants to strip the M.M.B.W. of its 43 Council representation. Main thoughts behind such ideas seem to be that local Councils are an anachronism.

Of course there is no doubt that corruption, nepotism, conservatism and sheer indifference can be found in local Councils as in any other sphere where prestige and perks carry weight. But equally there are plenty of examples of refreshing foresight and even political acumen coming from Councils.

A glance through "The Australian Municipal Journal" proves the point. This is the official organ of the local government associations of Victoria, Tasmania and Sth. Australia. It was established in 1879 and given statutory recognition in 1907. Good ideas emerge and are even adopted despite all. Point is to grasp them, integrate them in overall plans and see they are pushed.

Some of the excerpts below are formal resolutions, others are notes or articles in the Journal.

7/15/8 From the pages of the Journal (June '66) we read of a move in N.S.W. for local Authorities to be eligible for Federal Subsidies for Aged Persons Homes. The Aged Persons Homes Act has been amended since then to make this possible. An article by Race Matthews in the Feb. '66 Journal describes the Croydon "open youth Club" managed by professional youth worker. Apart from dance floor, coffee lounge, indoor games and music rooms... "At one end of the building... a double workshop, one section equipped with benches and tools for individual crafts and hobbies, the other for car repairs and boat building."

In March 1968 the Journal gives details of State Government grants for Youth Clubs. Financial assistance is detailed under five headings - (1) Building, (2) Maintenance, (3) Equipment, (4) Leadership Training and (5) Camping.

8/15/8 How automation can help small municipalities was described in Jan '66. One of Victoria's smallest shires is the first shire to make use of automation in its rate office. The Shire of Dunmunkle is convinced that many relatively small municipalities will follow its lead once they are aware of the advantages offered by electronic processing. The shire used a Melbourne computer and prepared their 2000 rate notices in four hours. "The use of the E.D.P. put us six to eight weeks ahead of normal rate collection schedule" it is stated.

In the same article it is reported that five larger municipalities... Broadmeadows, Nunawading, Traralgon, Echuca and Altona share the same computer.

9/15/8 Mr. Bruce Marshall A.R.I.A. has written a brief, but detailed article - "Master Plan for a Civic Centre." This is in the Jan. '66 Journal.

In March '68 an article by James M. Dobbie, Brisbane's Civic advisor sees -

10/15/8 Public Transport as a Counter to Traffic Congestion. This is a report of an interview with Mr. James C. Slaughter who is described as "the doyen of Town Clerks with fifty milestones behind him". Here is a quote from Mr. Slaughter - "The great weakness in the thinking of local authorities abroad was that they concerned themselves with the concept of roads to relieve vehicular traffic, rather than with the idea of moving people. We temporarily committed this error, too. The Wilbut Smith survey for the Government and the Council, in relation to our town plan, looked at our traffic problem only as a roads problem; and it was to cost us about \$18,000,000 to put into effect. What was needed was a transportation of people survey.... and such a survey is being made."

11/15/8 In April 1968, the Secretary of the Municipal Association of Victoria states in an article on "Population Growth" ... "Regard must be had for the Prime Minister's policy speech in the Higgins by-election where Mr. Gorton showed his awareness of the vast economic problems caused by traffic congestion and his apparent willingness to undertake a study of the problem as a joint Commonwealth-State activity. Presumably the Commonwealth would share in the cost of remedial treatment."

12/15/8 The August issue of 1967 included an article by Grahame Shaw on "Problems of Urban Renewal." Here are a few challenging quotes from his article. "I think that it is high time that the people living in Australian cities should begin to think about the kind of cities they wish to live in." "While the U.B.R. can satisfactorily control low density development the evidence of their failure to come to grips with other

points of residential development should alert us to the need for reassessment of their worth in these situations." . . . "Frequently the redevelopment is taking place in the wrong place and without the benefit of a plan at the scale where it counts."

13/15/8 In June 1966 there is a report of a deputation of the Municipal Association to the Acting Premier. The deputation asked for a review of the State grants and subsidies for Infant Welfare, Immunisation, Libraries and some help, pre-school, elderly citizens, swimming pools and playing areas. The Deputation included representatives of some City Councils and a number of country Councils.

14/15/8 The January 1966 Journal included a report on Victorian Executive Meeting held in November 1965. At this meeting a number of Councils presented a resolution supporting the Victorian Teachers' Union which was proposing amendment to the Education Act to enable Department Schools be open for inspection by local health officers.

The January 1966 Journal also reports a resolution from the Springvale Council proposing that subdividers pay an amount to a Council Trust account sufficient to purchase 5 percent of area being subdivided, if in opinion of Council land in subdivision is unsuitable as open space. This resolution later became law.