Sustainability and local policy and planning responses

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Sustainability - definition

- equal emphasis accorded to three principles:
  - social justice and development
  - economic development
  - ecological responsibility

- Sustainability is the goal of achieving a high, equitable and sustainable quality of life for both current and future generations through simultaneous social, economic, environmental and cultural development.

Eckersley, 1998
The importance of sustainability for the future of Australia is highlighted in the following:

“If growth does not provide properly for the well-being of all Australians, if it does not contribute to the solution of existing social, cultural and environmental problems, if it increases disadvantage, produces new inequities, and further despoils the environment, then it not only causes pain and hardship to those affected but also undermines the fabric of the society and the future potential of the economy”.

Yenken & Porter, 2001, A just and sustainable Australia, p.6
Elements of Social Sustainability

- protection of fundamental human rights:
  “Human development and human rights are mutually reinforcing, helping to secure the wellbeing and dignity of all people, building self-respect and the respect of others”
  UNDP, 2001, Human development – Past, present and future

- access to core services – health, housing, education

- participation, engagement, social capital

- recourse through the justice system regardless of nation, status, gender or race
Sustainability – How in the broader context?

- Sustainability framework must be integrated across government functions.

- OECD *Sustainable development: Critical Issues* report notes that a sustainability framework:
  - requires coherent integration of policies across social, economic, and environmental spheres
  - significant participation of the community in policy making and implementation
  - strong political commitment to a long-term perspective
  - necessitates institutional and technical capacity to assess social, economic and environmental implications of policy and planning decisions

How is a sustainability framework achievable?

- relates to strong governance processes
- key aspects of good governance:
  - relate to community participation and engagement
  - recognition that effective planning for the future requires adopting alternative priorities
- Such priorities must also favour those who have been disadvantaged in the past, and in doing so, help to build communities which are not only more inclusive, but are also more likely to be sustainable in the future
The project was commissioned by the Victorian Department of Infrastructure (DOI) to inform development of *Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth*.
- VCOSS highlighted that community consultations consistently fail to attract, and therefore hear, members of the community who experience disadvantage.

Discussions with VDOI focused on key question:
- How to provide the perspective of Victorians on low incomes and/or who experience disadvantage?

Project sought to respond to the challenge of incorporating the voices, concerns and issues of members of the community who experience disadvantage, who are disempowered and frequently bypassed by routine or conventional methods of policy research, community consultation and participation.
Aims and objectives

- Actively seek and draw out the concerns, difficulties and priorities of people on low incomes and/or experiencing disadvantage;
- Identify barriers to access to local services and participation in community life;
- Inform local area planning;
- Highlight the lived experience of people experiencing disadvantage, and remind policy makers of this experience.
Three main foci

- the built environment: transport and mobility, housing, public space, amenity and safety;
- service provision and delivery: health and disability, leisure activities, education and employment; and
- participation and equity: information and discrimination, wellbeing, adequate income
Methodology

- Intensive consultations with 14 households across 3 diverse localities experiencing disadvantage – Coburg, Sale and Rosebud

- Qualitative and focus group methodology:
  - Exploration of each area in terms of demographic profile, employment, service provision, participant observation, semi-structured interviews

- Participants identified in consultation with local service providers
Key Findings

Built Environment
- Transport and mobility
- Housing
- Public space & safety

Access to Services
- Health & disability
- Leisure activities
- Education and employment

Participation and Equity
- Information and discrimination
- Wellbeing & community involvement/participation
- Adequate income
Some participant responses

“I only go to the letterbox and back, that’s my outing for the day”

“The community bus just goes on the old peoples routes”

“Its alright if you’ve got a car, but if you miss the 9am to Frankston you have to wait 2 hours for the next one”

“The place’s just not welcoming for young people”

“It takes me 3 hours just to do my normal shopping”

“I must walk 10 kilometres a day I reckon”

“This place is just catered for tourists and the elderly”

“It’s dead...there's nothing around”

“You name it I can’t do it because I don’t have the money”

“The kids cause trouble cos there's nothing to do”

“That’s where this place falls down – transport”
sample was limited in size, however the findings derived from careful qualitative methods:
- give validity and depth to existing studies,
- reinforce that the difficulties raised by participants are likely to be mirrored by many others experiencing disadvantage across Victoria

Critical need for government policy responses and service delivery to be responsive to the local or community level of impact and to listen to the voices of the community, and in particular those who are structurally marginalised
- actively seeking input from people experiencing disadvantage is a vital part of any community consultation

reinforced the recognition that for social investment to be effective, it needs to be responsive to the needs of particular groups, especially those who have been systematically excluded
Ways forward

- If the first step in policy and planning is to ask, *what kind of society do we want?*, then it is also important to ask the question about who will win and who will lose if the proposed vision becomes a reality.

- Sustainable development means adopting alternative priorities which will also favour those who have been disadvantaged in the past, and in doing so, help to build communities which are not only more inclusive, but are also more likely to be sustainable in the future.
The report of the Social Mapping Project, *Snapshots of Life*, is available from VCOSS:
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