



COVER SHEET

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Collaborative Community Planning ***Opportunities for cooperation between Governments, Businesses,*** ***Communities and Universities***

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Abstract

Effective practice demands balancing action and reflection, reviewing our actions in the light of both ideas and values. Actions are the core of practice and reflection is the basis of theory. Linking theory to practice should help develop more effective processes and more relevant theories. Involving affected communities in this cycle should further enrich and improve the relevance of the resulting processes. The early planning theories of founding fathers like Geddes and Howard grew out of this kind of activism linked to reflection and review. The recent "Communicative Turn in Planning Theory" (Healey, 1994) takes the action - reflection cycle out of the confines of a single mind and puts it into the broader arena of public debate and policy making. As the basis for a practical profession, planning education has always involved a significant proportion of "real life projects" involving this kind of action learning. Current distinguished examples of this process being stitched into planning course curricula and structures can be found in the Universities of Illinois, Cornell and Oregon, with their Community Planning Centre and Workshops.

QUT's Community Practice Unit (CPU) was established in 2002 to consolidate and promote this kind of shared activity between community, government, business and academic sectors. It aims to benefit students by improving the relevance of their learning, contribute human resources from the university to the broader community, develop networks to link the four sectors and to review and comment on current practice to help develop better methods. Examples of work to date include the Brisbane City Council Homeless Infrastructure Project, work with Department of Main Roads on the impacts of urban roads and rural by-passes on local communities, and the production of Guidelines for Public Consultation, work with local communities to prepare community development strategies and integrated local area plans and particular problem solving projects connected with local employment development and urban improvement. Student groups from all five years of the various courses have participated. Other work has included research and consultancy with local and state government departments and planning consultants, the organization of conferences (including the "Planning for Independence " Conference in Dili in 2002) and the development of networks spanning the different sectors.

In June 2003 a Steering Committee was established drawn from partner organizations in community and government sectors as well as students and staff of the planning program, since expanded to include representatives of business. The paper considers the prospects and potential benefits of such practical links between these sectors.

THE CASE FOR LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

As a practical profession planning has always needed to link ideas and action. Planning courses have always devoted a substantial part of their time to practical project work designed to produce proposals for physical and social change. While Architecture courses have often been drawn to visionary designs, planners have been more inclined to practical problem-solving work to address current real world needs. This has often led them into advocacy roles, involving active cooperation between students and local community and promotional groups. There has, however, been less collaboration with governments or businesses and very little attempt to convene or participate in an active partnership with all three groups to develop and test new ideas. Indeed, until recently, planning was marked by a damaging division between often quite abstract academic theorising and a practice that had acquired the image of a rather conservative and unimaginative profession labouring to fulfil the regulatory roles which it had been assigned by governments.

There is, nonetheless, an inherent need to link theory and practice. Pure theory, referring only to itself or other theories runs the risk of circling back to an isolated ivory tower, which neither the profession nor the general community want to visit. Practice which does not refer its actions to intentions, or reflect upon what it is doing in order to improve performance runs the risk of becoming conservative and ultimately irrelevant. As well as practitioners and theorists, two other parties also need to be involved. The people experiencing the situations and problems which planners intend to resolve need to be heard in their own cases, since none of us can stand in others' shoes. Such people can be seen as the demand side of an equation whose needs it was assumed for most of the twentieth century would be met by governments. Now, however, economic rationalists disown this exclusive role and seek to engage the energies of private enterprise in "Third Way" approaches that have given rise in the UK to "Community Strategies" (Entec, UK, 2003) and Australia's "Public Private Partnerships". Not only does this fusion of ideas and practice demand the inclusion of private players, but also the supply of a continuing stream of good information about the needs of consumers and communities and the contributions which new ideas can make to their work. This in turn demands adequate supplies of well informed and motivated young practitioners to operate the new system of community based action planning

ACTION AND REFLECTION, PRACTICE AND PROCESS

Involving students in action learning recognizes the role-played in practical thinking by action and reflection (McTaggart, 1991). The resulting action and reflection cycle is illustrated on the accompanying diagram. Schon (1983) alerted readers to the fact that the pure practical application of theories has seldom been a possibility for most practitioners who must respond to real world situations as they arise, making use of instinctive processes of "reflection in action", much like the decisions of the sports umpire before the days of instant playback video recordings. We act with whatever experience we have to guide us and then later reflect on what we have done, to enable us to act more advisedly next time. On closer inspection, the action-reflection cycle involves four phases. In our daily lives, reflection upon our actions allows us to identify patterns of practice, discerning regularities and anticipating future situations. Reflection on this practice can then give rise to normative *processes* that we can consciously adopt, in a spiral that moves from action through practice and reflection to process and improved action as shown on Diagram 1.

EVALUATION IN THE ACTION-REFLECTION SPIRAL

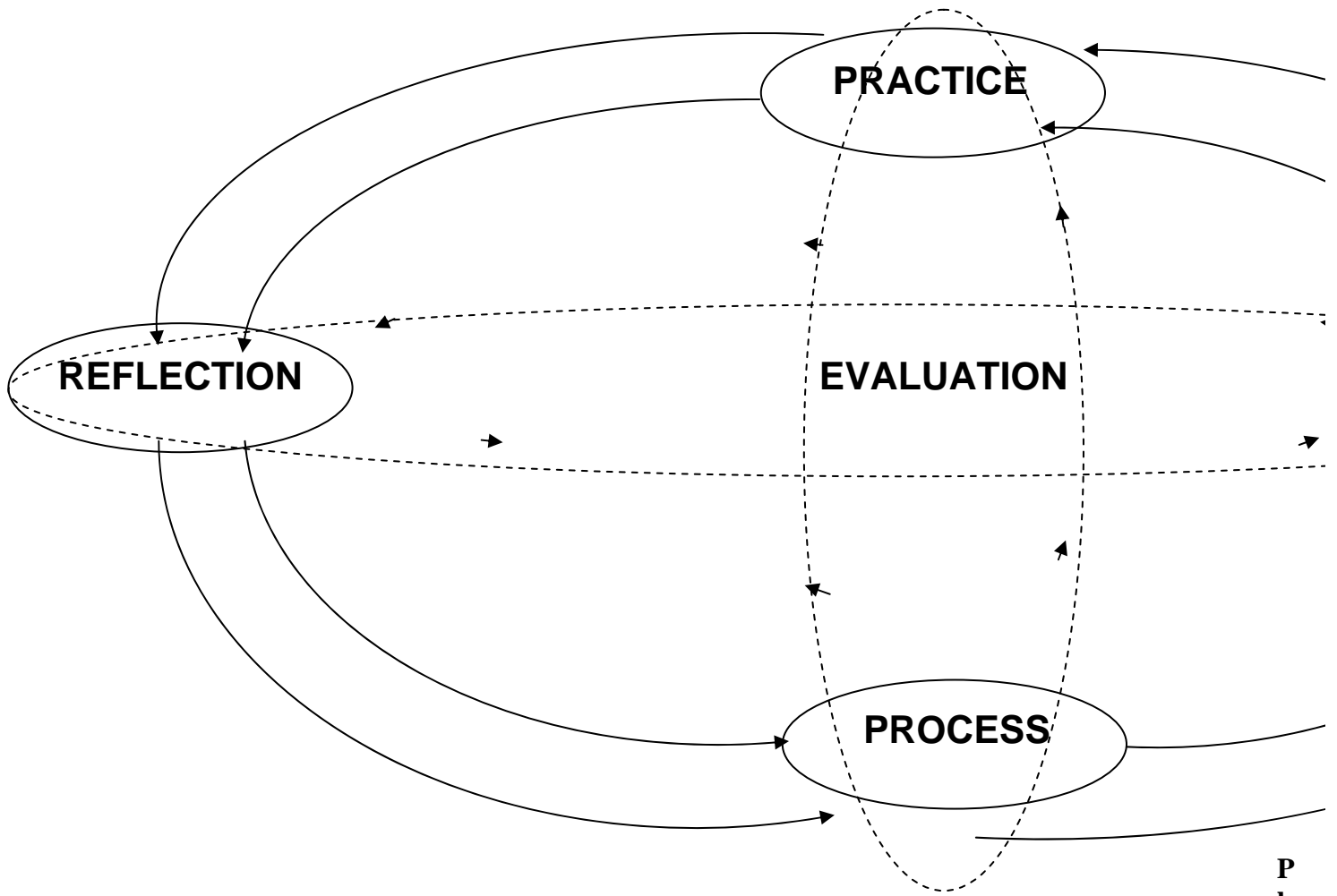
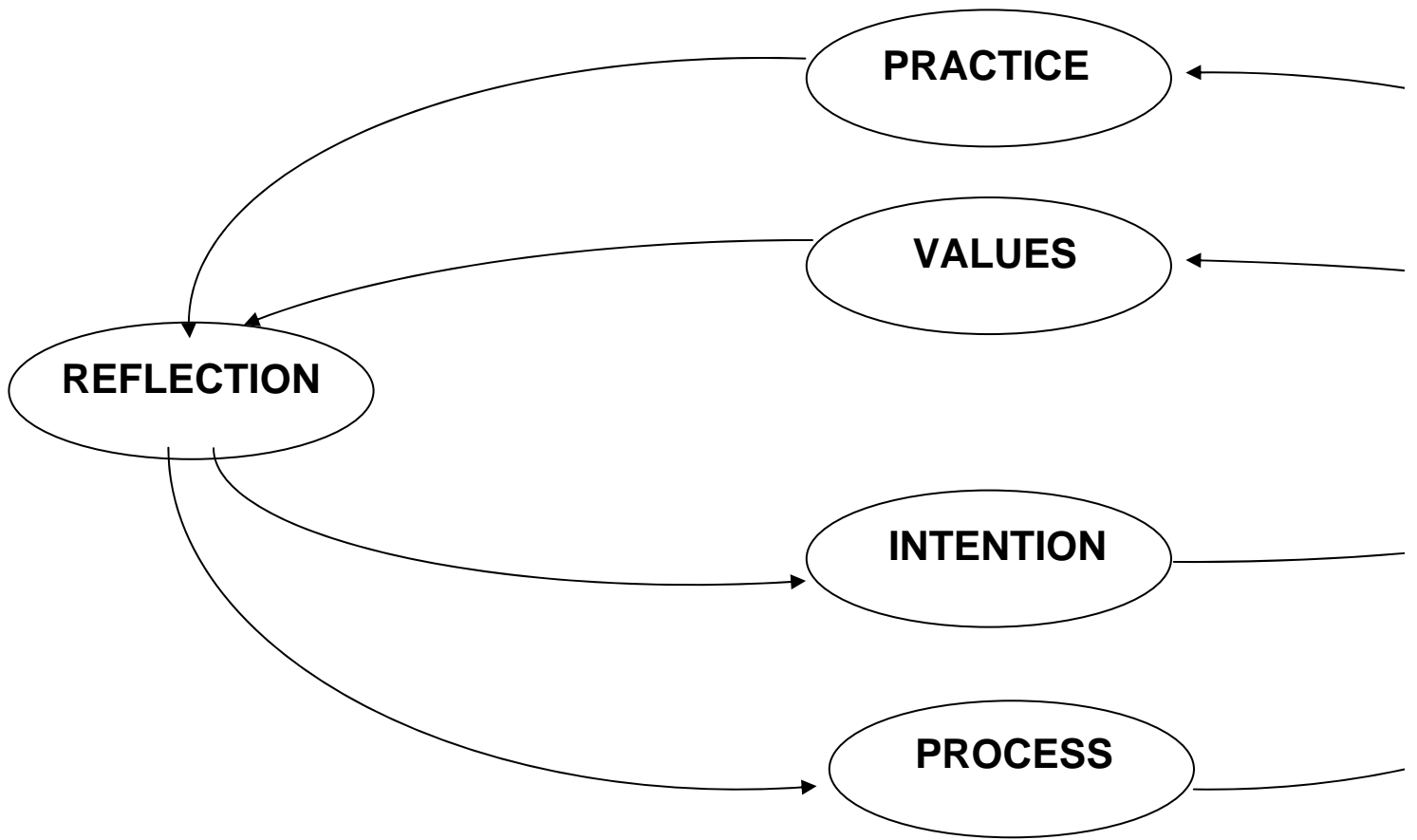


DIAGRAM 2: THE ACTION-REFLECTION SPHERE



We should not however ignore the role that ethical considerations play in the evaluation of our actions and practice. As Diagram 2 shows, the two dimensional action-reflection cycle then becomes a three dimensional sphere also involving comparison of actions and practice with acceptable values.

This action – reflection sphere is a useful basis for cooperation between the different partners engaged in collaboration. Universities can cooperate with government departments; communities and business enterprises engaged in action to help review their practice, by reference to both ideas and values. This review can be a shared activity out of which can come ideas for new and better processes which can give rise to new actions which will then enter into the same cycle of evaluation to produce an upward spiral of improved ideas and practice. With luck and energy this improvement may keep pace with the natural tendency of life constantly to produce new problems.

ADVOCACY PLANNING

There are both similarities and differences between this view and Paul Davidoff's celebrated theories of Advocacy and Pluralist Planning (Davidoff & Reiner 1963, Davidoff, 1965). On the one hand, there is Paul Davidoff's clarion call of 1965 that the planner "should do more than explicate the values underlying his prescriptions for courses of action: he should affirm them: he should be an advocate for what he deems proper" (Campbell & Fainstein (ed) 1996, 307). He thus defines a clear role for academics working with communities and a confident stance for ones working with government and business. On the other hand, the inherently adversarial drive of Davidoff's arguments asserts that every interest should have watchdogs, which will compete among themselves to ensure that the best idea survives. Collaborative Planning by contrast aims to restrict the adversarial contest to the battle between ideas themselves (rather than between stakeholders), so that the various participants are able to resolve intellectual conflicts before they become political or personal ones. Such activated battles are becoming increasingly expensive and deadly in a postmodern world of mounting dissention, confrontational contact and consequent violence. In the words of Karl Popper, scientific criticism often makes our theories perish in our stead, eliminating our mistaken beliefs before such beliefs lead to our own elimination (1989:261) in "Evolution and the Tree of Knowledge".

THE ROLE OF REFLECTIVE REVIEW AND DELIBERATION IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

Donald Schon's "Reflective Practitioner" (1984) emphasised the need for professionals to reflect upon own actions and trust their own experiences rather than relying on abstract theories to guide future practice. John Forester has recently (1999) extended this to the idea of the "Deliberative Practitioner", pointing out that we also need to deliberate upon the pattern of our actions to weave out new theories that will help to achieve an upward spiral of self-critical practice. His colleague Ken Reardon demonstrates impressive examples in programs involving planning students and staff of the University of Illinois working with communities in tackling major social and physical problems in areas of dramatic deprivation in Eastern St Louis from

1998- 2002 (East St Louis Action Research Project, 2004, <http://www.esl;arp.uiuc.edu/>) and more recently Cornell students in community activation programs in Rochester, New York State (Reardon 2001).

COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND PRACTICE

These practical arguments for collaboration are paralleled by the “communicative turn in planning theory” (Healey 1995), triggered by the influence of the work of Jurgen Habermas on how to ensure that ideas and policies developed in the active debate of the “lifeworld” can predominate over the less relevant prescriptions and formulae of the “systemworld” of bureaucratic procedures. Habermas argues for a policy process in which all participants have an accepted place at the discussion table and contribute to social decisions affecting all participants. Convening such open opportunities for policy discussions and ensuring that all voices are heard is a valuable role for academics and universities.

THE TRADITION OF ACTIVISM

For over a hundred years, thinkers in and outside universities have involved themselves in community action. At the end of the nineteenth century, Patrick Geddes was founding the Royal Mile Housing Association and Howard and his Garden City Association were establishing Letchworth Garden Suburb. At the same time, various Oxford Colleges were establishing “University Settlements” in East London to tackle the serious social problems afflicting areas of low income, physical overcrowding and unequal educational opportunity (Willmott and Young, 1956). Clem Atlee, later to be a reforming Labour Prime Minister of UK, spent his university vacations working in one of these settlements in Bethnal Green. In the thirties and forties, Saul Alinsky worked in the Back o’ the Yards area in Chicago’s Zone in Transition (Alinsky, 1979). Later in the sixties, London universities played a major role in opposing the proposals for high-rise commercial redevelopment of the old Covent Gardens Markets in East London, and won a redevelopment that included public housing and traditional city centre activities (Heywood 1974). Ed Blakely during his time at Berkeley also worked closely between the university and the Oakland Community Councils to improve housing conditions and local economic development (Blakely, Peres comm., 1991)..

INSTITUTIONS FOR COLLABORATION

Based on the findings of a study tour in 2001 to Europe and North America, which included visits to a number universities in Britain, Netherlands and USA, discussions were held among QUT academic staff and contacts in the community and government organizations to consider the establishment of a Community Practice Unit in QUT to pursue the same kinds of collaborative work in Queensland. The following is a brief account of some relevant findings of that study tour.

In the UK the integration of practical work continues with the widespread inclusion of practice experience segments and placements in planning courses. However, more purposive links have mainly been confined to co-option of academics onto the management boards and research programs of Community Partnership Programs. There has been little direct linking of educational programs with the new community

involvement emphasis, resulting in a likely lack of suitably experienced and motivated professional personnel to power this new consultation-based community planning approach. By contrast, in the USA, the requirement for universities to demonstrate community service activities to secure public funding has resulted in a flowering of links between planning programs and local community action (Reardon, 2001). Two influential and positive examples have occurred in New York State with Cornell's Local Government Workshop and Community Service Fieldwork and in Oregon with the University of Oregon's Community Planning Centre.

Cornell University

The Cornell Course includes practice-based units, which involve students in teamwork on research with all levels of government, non-profit organizations and international agencies on schemes such as alternative structures for local government service delivery (Reardon, 2001).

Students also undertake fieldwork placements over several weeks in their second year, with each week consisting of 3 days of work practice, one day of reflection and discussion and a fifth day devoted to some form of action related to the group reflection session, mirroring the action-reflection cycle discussed earlier. Community members are paid for their contribution to this process, and Community Fellowships are being considered for community activists.

Masters students may also undertake a City and Regional Planning Workshop, with public and non-profit organisations throughout New York State on urban issues such as housing, traffic, economic development, zoning and related planning concerns. Community Service Projects are undertaken either individually or in teams for clients requesting planning assistance. The practice units are organised in cooperation with the university's Community Services Executive Director, who links the university's community service capacity to government, business and community organizations, and seeks grants from funding bodies.

In Cornell, Practice and Community Service form an important core to the teaching of urban and regional planning. Faculty also see them as a practical way of returning to local and regional communities some of the time and money that society gives to universities. The Faculty does not experience difficulty in obtaining support from funding bodies for these purposes.

The University of Oregon

The university's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management offers a Planning major which includes economics, community development, and environmental management. Each student also completes a one-term internship, to apply academic ideas and concepts to real world situations. Community Planning Workshops (CPWs) provide undergraduate and Masters students with the opportunity to work on applied research projects in planning and public policy, including watershed planning, public transport options, housing needs assessments, tourism studies and strategic planning. Small research teams of students contract with Oregon community agencies and organizations to give practical assistance with planning and development issues. They apply research and development techniques to develop practicable solutions to real community problems.

The university's Community Service Centre (CSC) also includes a Resource Centre for Rural Environments (RARE), the Oregon Natural Hazards Workshop (ONHW) and a Grant Application and Writing Program, as well as student-originated studies. Graduate students must undertake the Community Planning Workshop, working with Oregon communities on community-based projects. Each year 5-8 topics are selected on which teams of 3-5 students work under the direction of CPW staff member. Paid research opportunities are available for students after two years of additional study.

Under the RARE program 25-30 students a year work for up to a year in rural Oregon communities, making use of government grants to assist rural communities in sensitive areas to prepare and implement projects to develop local economies and improve environmental conditions. Students receive modest monthly salaries as well as an educational award at the end of the year. The program is a well-established feature of Oregon rural and community life, and acts as a stepping stone for students to subsequent employment in organizations as varied as the 1,000 Friends of Oregon and watershed management agencies.

QUT'S COMMUNITY PRACTICE UNIT (CPU)

QUT's first CPU Coordinator, Ms Anita Egginton, now a Social Planner with Cairns City Council but then a colleague in the Urban & Regional Planning program of QUT set about a vigorous program of consultation inside the university and with government and community groups to establish the unit with the goals to:

- Benefit students by improving the relevance of their learning;
- Contribute human resources from the university and its students as active intellectual and human resources for the broader community
- Develop networks to link academic, professional and community practice.

In the first year of its operation, 2002, Anita launched and steered a number of successful activities, which have continued since I took over the role of Coordinator on her departure for Cairns in December 2002. A Steering Committee drawn from community organizations, local and state government departments, and staff and students of QUT's urban planning program was formed in June 2003, and meets three or four times year to set directions, review the unit's business plan and advise on forthcoming activities. The unit's activities have been focussed in the following four areas:

Practice Project Partnerships
 Consultancy activities
 Research
 Communications and Networking

1. Practice Project Partnerships.

Forming a bridge between community needs and student work is one of the dominant aims of the unit, and many of the programs of the first two years have pursued this objective, responding to current concerns of communities and government

departments, to produce options for action. This is helped by the fact that communities and governments represent different levels of formality in responding to the same challenges of change and often share unrecognised commonalities of interests in tackling and solving planning problems,. Thus schemes that originate with communities frequently benefit from the academic capacity to involve government and other practitioners, and projects that originate with government are often seeking independent help in involving community groups and members.

Anita launched the CPU's activities with a trail blazing multi-disciplinary project of this sort, involving students from a variety of years and courses, with the Brisbane City Council in the ***Homeless Infrastructure Project***. This involved approximately thirty students working for a semester with Brisbane City Council staff to produce a study of the use made by homeless people of the City Gardens (Old Botanical Gardens). The findings were presented to the City Council in the form of an innovative report, which produced recommendations spanning social policy, urban management and physical design. The problems have only grown more acute since the project was conducted and the relevance of the work has not diminished.

Other work has involved the ***Department of Main Roads (DMR) Design and Review Projects in Nundah and Warwick***, with approximately forty second year Planning students examining Nundah as a Cultural Landscape for an Environmental Impact Study of the effects of bypass construction. The following year a similar group analysed community input to the planning of bypass routes for country towns, producing both physical design proposals and guidelines for the DMR for public consultation in such schemes.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Brisbane City Council were involved in the "Evaluating Suburban Sustainability Project" in Nudgee Banyo which produced an exemplary study on sustainable suburbs which won the PIA National award for Excellence for work by Tertiary Students in 2003. Later in 2003, several sections of the Brisbane City Council including the City Planning and Community Development as well as the Butterfly Housing Association collaborated in the production of an ***Integrated Local Area Plan and Community Development Strategy for Inala*** which was awarded the Queensland Division PIA award for Excellence for work by tertiary student and a national commendation for Urban Design. A third in a series of collaborative suburban studies with ***Logan City Council*** also involved the ***Woodridge Community Renewal Project***. Thirty-five postgraduate planning students produced a series of four options for a ***Community Development Strategy for Woodridge***. These projects continue the Planning Program's ten year tradition of providing copies of the Topic and Proposals reports from community based projects to the local municipal and school libraries, Ward Councillor, and at least one local community group, so that the information is widely available to local people and governments. This process has been much assisted by modern information technology, which makes it possible to reduce the previous 12-14 volumes of 50-100 pages each into one slim CD.

Partnering demands and student interest are combining to lead us to diversify away from sole reliance on large, integrated projects with as many as 50 or 60 students all working on a single scheme. We have had to re-think several of our more senior Practice Units along similar lines to the University of Oregon's Community Planning

Workshops, with groups of 5-6 students selecting projects within the general theme of the unit on which they would like to work. For instance, within the overall framework of Environmental Sustainability, which Dr Bajracharya had selected for the unit in 2003, seven teams of third year undergraduate planning students worked on self-selected projects in conjunction with local councils and community groups. One team of six working with the Nambour *Integrated Community Enterprises* and involving Maroochy Shire councillor's applied " Learning Region" principles to create a most impressive proposal for ***Ecologically and socially sustainable employment and economic options for the future of Nambour*** following the closure of Maroochy Sugar mill. Qut staff and our partners were equally enthusiastic about this project, which gained the Head of School's Award for the best Planning Design work in the school in 2003 – a year in which other projects gained state and national PIA awards! It is planned to again undertake a wide range of similar projects in Logan, Gold Coast and Brisbane Cities in the forthcoming semester

Other schemes have involved building bridges between local community groups and local government councillors and planners. The Walter Taylor South Action Group and Brisbane City Council planners were both involved in an investigation of issues and options by first year undergraduate students for urban intensification in the suitably named inner middle suburb of Graceville. A final year group of more experienced graduate students prepared a regional planning strategy with assistance from the Minjerribah Planning Study Joint Management Committee on optimal strategic planning for Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), a study which unearthed the huge potential for imaginative planning to accommodate both native title, environmental conservation and cultural and eco tourism in the medium term future when the current mining leases expire in 15-20 years time. Another joint study with the Gold Coast City Council reviewed the location and design of the city's "Gateways" in the light of latest urban design principles. Further work being considered includes the preparation of a regional environmental plan for a coastal area north of the Pioneer Estuary in Mackay City and Whitsunday Shire, and a study of the issues of ***Planning with Young People in Gold Coast City***.

Groups from all years of all courses have undertaken these collaborative projects. Students display increased enthusiasm and willingness to put in often long extra hours to polish work to a standard required for public display and professional scrutiny. Numerous external awards have confirmed staff perceptions of above average levels of performance and achievement. In addition the Planning Program has benefited from extra funds that have allowed projects to be undertaken at other wise prohibitive distances from the university, and to achieve standards of presentation that would otherwise have been too expensive for students to afford. Cross subsidisation of work with community groups has also been encouraged.

2. Consultancy activities

Consultancy work has been done on public consultation with schools for the Boggo Road Master Planning Project. Research studies on Community Facilities Planning have been prepared for Brisbane City Council, and on planning for Young People in Public Spaces for Palmerston Town Council in Northern Territory. Public workshops

have been organized and run for the Department of Families as part of the SEQ consultation process.

3. Research

Work includes the evaluation of the social and physical effects of major planning projects and community consultation techniques for the Department of Main Roads and reviews of Housing Futures for AHURI and the collaborative process involved in the Warwick and Walter Taylor projects conducted jointly with the Main Roads Department and with Walter Taylor Progress Association and Brisbane City Council Planners in 2003. Current research projects funded by QUT's COLAB and by the CPU are evaluating the role played by communication in current professional planning practice. Discussions are now being held with the Department of Communities on a Research project on designing for crime prevention in local communities

4. Communication and Network Activities

The School intends to introduce into the Planning Program a Practice Experience Unit to be undertaken at some stage between the first and third years of the course. Potential employers have been consulted and guidelines prepared for this unit, which will be introduced as part of the next review of the course in 2005. Other networking activities have included the organization of the **"Planning for Independence Conference"** in Dili in May 2002, and the preparation and distribution of the 100 page Conference Proceedings in both English and Bahasa Indonesian. Support has also been lent to the formation of the **PIA Social Planning Chapter**.

These networking activities took a considerable step forwards when the unit produced its first brochure, copies of which are available, and are illustrated on this figure. Design of this brochure was given to first year students in their Communications class, and the result predictably demonstrates more zest and student interest than traditional professionalism. Nevertheless, the leaflet is proving successful in its role of attracting new partners and publicising the role of the CPU in creating and expanding positive problem solving networks.

It is interesting that our most recent new link, with the Crime Prevention Program of the Department of Communities came via the leaflet, which attracted the lawyer who was responsible for developing partnerships because of its energy and vitality. A more professionalised product might have gone straight past his gaze. Current discussions with the State Government's Crime Prevention Program are considering third year undergraduate students doing *Crime Prevention through Environmental Design* projects in a variety of locations in Inner Brisbane, including some chosen by student groups themselves, to produce schemes for use as both as Crime Prevention Projects and as models to encourage communities in other places to do their own.

CONCLUSIONS

Now that the CPU is in its third year of formal existence, it is possible to review the costs and benefits for both the university and its partners, and these are summarised in Table 1 below.

**COSTS & BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE PROJECT WORK BETWEEN
UNIVERSITY PLANNING SCHOOLS, GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITIES**

BENEFITS		COSTS	
COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT PARTNERS	UNIVERSITY & STUDENTS	COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT PARTNERS	UNIVERSITY & STUDENTS
Independent views and ideas	Increased relevance of teaching and practical work	Staff members' time involved in planning and cooperation	Staff members' time involved in planning, organization & cooperation
Imagination and energy of young volunteers	Motivation of students	Difficulties of integrating student work into practice processes	Organizational requirements for inherently unique projects
Opportunities for low cost action research	Opportunities for valid action research	Some funding costs may be involved	Greater accountability and exposure
Opportunities to review and test options without official commitment	Course reputation, recognition & visibility	Limitations on exclusive ownership of results	Limitations on exclusive ownership of results
Links to research culture and activities of university staff	Support and funding & links to research culture and activities of Practitioners	Pure gain	Pure gain
Capacity to build links with local communities	Professional and community partnership research	Pure gain	Pure gain

There are a number of reasons why such collaborative frameworks as QUT's CPU offer significant ways forward for both practitioners and academics in urban & regional planning. The old boundaries between government, business universities and communities are dissolving in the world of public private partnerships and mixed funding streams, so that it is time to consider how best to engage in mutually beneficial joint work. As the old distinctions between governmental "gamekeepers" and developmental "poachers" disappear, it is more important than ever that independent and public interest concerns are incorporated into the development of planning policies and programs and the involvement of university personnel, both staff and students is a good way of doing this. It is also important to ensure that a

well-grounded stream of young planners should emerge from the planning schooled able and enthusiastic to work with and between government, consultancy, community and research institutes. Finally students find real world work inspiring, allowing them both to test academic ideas in practice, and to gain advance experience of workplace needs, just as the experience of working with academics and students can be very stimulating to talented practitioners who can thereby gain a more detached evaluation of their everyday work. This kind of approach opens up the conversation round the policy table (Habermas, 1983), and adds new chairs and participants in a way that should enrich the range of discussion and improve the quality of professional practice.

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