

The Emergence and Evolution of Environmental Planning in Australia

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The development of modern urban planning in Australia from the late nineteenth century can be mapped across various narratives emphasising productivity, aesthetic, health, and social dimensions. This presentation focuses on the ‘greening’ of planning theory and practice. While the nature of Australian environmental movements has been well documented at various junctures, this development of a distinctively environmental-orientated planning is less well covered. This has a long pedigree although a truly ecological foundation dates only from the 1970s. Six major phases are recognized to structure this chronological-thematic story:

1. Late 19th century – stirrings of an environmental ethic
2. 1900 – World War 2: recognising nature in the town planning movement
3. Post-war to mid-1960s: formalisation of town and country planning
4. Late 1960s-1970s: environmental crisis and reaction
5. 1980s-2000: the rise of sustainable development
6. 2000s onward: resilience in an era of climate change

These phases are criss-crossed by themes which tie together over time a changing cast of concerns, characters and circumstances. The cumulative outcome today has been an unprecedented professional and community awareness (not always uncontested) of issues such as global warming, ecological footprints, green star ratings, biodiversity, green roofs, urban conservation, and overall sustainability. At the same time, the realisation has dawned that the goal of a sustainable Australian urbanism will never truly be attained. This is the nature of environmental planning as Daniels (2009) indicates in his parallel view of American trends: it is a process not an end-state and sustainability is ‘something to work toward rather than something that will soon be achieved’.

Bio

Robert Freestone is Professor of Urban Planning at UNSW Australia. His research interests span contemporary and historical planning issues. His books include *Place and Placelessness Revisited* (2016), *Exhibitions and the Development of Modern Planning Culture* (2014), *Urban Nation* (2010), *Designing Australia’s Cities* (2007), and *Urban Planning in a Changing World* (2000).