

## 'Whose City? Activist planning for a democratic Sydney'

9.30 am – 3.30 pm, Tuesday 17 November, 2015

Building 6, Room 4.040, 702-730 Harris Street, Broadway

Shouldn't we have right to make the decisions that define our city? In the midst of a major top-down reorganisation of local councils, and growing concentration of planning power in the hands of an appointed 'Greater Sydney Commission', people across Sydney are engaged in a myriad of contestations to claim public power. Drawing on this experience, this workshop asks how our 'right to the city' can be claimed, and won. We look back to previous experiments and engage with current initiatives to develop new models for grassroots social planning. The workshop has the following aims:

- (i) produce a public report highlighting the role of activist planning in Sydney
- (ii) write a letter to the new Federal Minister for Cities and the Built Environment
- (iii) map a program for research into claiming the 'right to the city' in Sydney

### Program

9.30	Welcome from the convenors <b>Introduction: 'The Right to the City?'</b> Lee Pugalis, Prof of Urban Studies, Centre for Local Government
10.00	<b>Roundtable 1: Lessons from the Sydney 'Area Assistance Scheme' (1975-2009)</b> Jenny Onyx, Margot Rawsthorne, Amanda Howard, Judi Bamforth, and Barbara Gapps, introducing a new book on the AAS experience
11.00	<b>Roundtable 2: Democratic planning and local government</b> Convened by Roberta Ryan, Director, Centre for Local Government; Lee Pugalis, Centre for Local Government; Geoff Turnbull, REDwatch + Better Planning Network;
12.00	<b>Roundtable 3: Experiments in grassroots planning today</b> Convened by David Barrow, Sydney Alliance; Justine Lloyd, Sydney Alliance
1.00	Lunch
1.30	<b>Re-planning the City? Themes for leverage</b> Introduction: Jason Prior, Institute for Sustainable Futures
2.00	<b>Small group workshops</b> Identifying points of leverage and frameworks for citizen action
3.00	<b>Plenary Discussion</b> Chaired by Jenny Onyx: themes highlighting the role of activist planning in Sydney and for a letter to the Minister; possibilities for future collaborative research.

**RSVP – Bookings are essential – [Eventbrite RSVP](#)**

**Contact – James Goodman [James.Goodman@uts.edu.au](mailto:James.Goodman@uts.edu.au)**

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### **Rationale**

In 1968 the ‘Right to the City’ was proclaimed in Paris. Soon after, the Whitlam Government created the ‘Australia Assistance Plan’ which in Sydney became the ‘Area Assistance Scheme’, a thirty-year social planning experiment, where people in Sydney defined social needs and planned how to meet them. Through the 1980s local councils also became a key site for democratic social planning. Councils were increasingly defined as a key barrier to Sydney’s ‘global city’ aspirations and in 1987 councils were suspended and a series of appointed bodies created to plan the city.

Democratic life has flourished at the local level, with councils becoming key vehicles for public involvement in Sydney’s civic life. Yet again, in 2015, councils face reorganisation under the guise of ‘amalgamation’, and now referred to the appointed ‘Independent Pricing and Regulations Tribunal’. Political power over planning is to be vested in a new ‘Greater Sydney Commission’, composed of 13 appointees. Meanwhile, at the City of Sydney local democracy is to be reconfigured for private interests – with the introduction of two compulsory votes for each business, plus a residential vote, giving some charmed voters the obligation to ‘vote thrice, vote often’.

Planning ‘from above’ does not serve us well. Failed social planning continues to blight the city, and produce wide-based public mobilisation for alternatives. We are witness to multiple and cumulative attacks on the fabric of our city life, from the attempt to close inner-Sydney public schools in the 1990s, backfired in its entirety, to road-building and toll-road initiatives that clog the city, to the discontinued coal-seam gas exploration projects, and closed-door planning-for-gambling, poised to make Sydney the highest-spending gambling city in the world.

In this context, new political forces are emerging, both to protest at planning failures and to promote alternatives. New experiments in urban planning through social participation have emerged, asserting public priorities against a wide range of social ills. Some of these forms of ‘activist community planning’ are highly successful and offer alternative models for the city, albeit in microcosm. There are other deliberately cross-sectoral and cross-Sydney initiatives, such as the Western Sydney Community Forum and the Sydney Alliance, designed to remake the social planning and political landscape.

This Workshop aims to reassess the potential for participatory and democratic social planning in Sydney. It reflects on the lessons of past efforts, and draws together emerging models. How would Sydney change if power was exercised by the people that live here? What mechanisms can be leveraged or constructed to enable a new social planning paradigm? What are the key sites and issues for creating momentum for our ‘right to the city’?

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