Residents' Attitudes and What They Tell Us about the Possibility of Sustainable Development in a Rapidly Growing Urban Region[1)]

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Ⅰ. Introduction

The paper focuses on the attitudes of residents of Australia's South East Queensland (SEQ), and how these attitudes may inform us of the possibility of achieving a sustainable development in this rapidly growing urban region. Of specific interest is the question of sustainable consumption : how residents' attitudes towards consumption can indicate the possibility of sustainability. Sustainable consumption is defined as

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the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations.[2)]

Ⅱ. South East Queensland (SEQ)

SEQ is Australia's fastest growing mega metropolitan region and it is one of the fastest growing of these regions in the developed world (Kemp et al., 1997). Such regions typify the urbanisation of the late twentieth century, in both the developed and less developed worlds, and it is an urbanisation which is integral to the global change of the last 25 or so years. A new - a postindustrial - age has emerged whose spatial form is not the city, or the metropolitan area, but the urban region : the mega metropolitan region. This is 'polycentric' in form and comprises one or more metropolitan areas, a number of smaller cities, other urban centres, farming districts, and natural environments (see Kling et al., 1991). The South East Asian equivalent, for example, has called 'desakota' (ie. a mix of city and country) (McGree and Robinson, 1995). Certainly, industrial (ie. manufacturing - based) conurbations (like the German Ruhr) have been in evidence from the nineteenth century in the most developed industrial societies, but they disintegrated, or were profoundly restructured, over recent years. In contrast, the new (ie. postindustrial) mega metropolitan region is far larger in population and geography and is service-based (producer, consumer, and community services) although, in some cases, it is also centred on new and clean manufacturing industries. In other words, these new urban forms have different economic bases from the (old) industrial conurbations.

SEQ has a population of 2.1million people. Brisbane (1.5 million people) - the capital of the state of Queensland and Australia's third largest city - forms the metropolitan core, with the tourist cities of the Gold Coast (0.35 m) and the Sun-

2) *Sustainable Consumption & Production : Linkages Virtual Policy Dialog*, p. 1 [Web document] Available : http : //www.mbnet.mb.ca/linkages/consume/overview.html[1997, Sept. 19].

shine Coast (0.15 m) being the regions's other two major urban centres (See Map 1). There are also a number of smaller urban areas, as well as an extensive rural-urban fringe, farming districts (to the north west, west, and south west), and diverse natural environments, including the World Heritage listed Lamington National Park (on the southern boundary), and Moreton Bay (on the eastern boundary). The region extends 200km in length, from Noosa in the northern part of the Sunshine Coast, to the southern part of the Gold Coast in northern New South Wales, and from Moreton Bay in the east, to the city of Toowoomba to the west.

SEQ doubled its population over the two decades from the early 1970s. This was the result of the largest internal migration in Australia's history, with people moving from the southern states of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania, to Queensland (and Western Australia). If current growth rates continue, SEQ will become the second largest urban centre in Australia by early next century, displacing the Melbourne-Geelong mega metropolitan region.

Ⅲ. Sustainable Consumption and Australia's Mega metropolitan Areas

Over the last ten or so years, there has been considerable debate within Australia about the role played by the country's three mega metropolitan regions - Sydney - Newcastle - Geelong, Melbourne - Geelong, and SEQ - in Australia's future. Integral to this debate is how to ensure these regions's sustainable development.[3)]

The emergence of a global economy is having a particularly profound impact. Economic competition, involving the flow of goods, services, information, capital, labour, and people generally - in hand with national and international policies - are bringing marked changes to the economy, culture, society, and environment of SEQ, of other Australian mega metropolitan regions, and of Australia as a whole.

3) For a concise summary of these debates, see State of the Environment Advisory Council (Chair : I. Lowe), 1996. *Australia : State of the Environment, 1996.*

Concerns about achieving sustainable urban development have focused on a number of related issues. The first is on the low density, sprawling nature of these mega metropolitan regions and how this socio spatial structure is leading to undesirable outcomes, outcomes which make sustainability difficult. These consequences include the loss of good agricultural land, of woodlands, animal habitats, and of mangrove areas along the coast.

Second, the very low - density nature of these urban regions has meant an increasing expansion at the urban outskirts. Concomitantly, inner and middle suburbs of the metropolitan cores have a declining share of the populations of the metropolitan areas and the wider regions. This not only means a continuing reliance upon private motor vehicles - to self - service virtually all transport needs - but an increasing reliance on this mode of transport. This, then, has significant implications for energy consumption, air quality, and traffic flow.

The socio spatial structuring of SEQ and other mega metropolit an areas led to demands to physically restructure Australian metropolitan areas. This is to be done by introducing policies which would increase the number of households living in depopulating (since the 1940s) inner and middle suburbs, and concentrating many more popple and activities in modal centres within the region (See, for example, Newman et al., 1992). However, doubts have been raised about the economic, social, cultural, and environmental efficacy of this 'urban consolidation' policy (See particularly Troy, 1996). It may not lead to the desired outcomes.

Third, there has been a marked increase, since the early 1970s, in the per capita consumption of energy, water, and food in these mega metropolitan regions, as well as in the production of solid waste, sewage, and air waste. In the case of air pollution, the increase is largely attributable to carbon dioxide, this being a product of the sharp growth in motor vehicle use. However, all other air pollutants have declined in these regions, per capita, since the 1970s.

Yet, in spite of these problems, Australian mega metropolitan areas still make more efficient use of resources than smaller centres. This seems due, in part, to better public transport, greater economies of scale, more efficient and better technologies, bigger markets for recycling, and more efficient uses of land.[4]

4) State of the Environment Advisory Council, 1996. *Australia : State of the Environment, 1996*, p. 3-35.

In sum, then, the issues of concern with regard to achieving a sustainable SEQ centre on

1) controlling the socio spatial structure of this new urban form, particularly reducing sprawl by concentrating households and activities into defined areas;
2) controlling the level of consumption of energy, land, and water, and
3) controlling the output of solid waste, sewage, and air waste.

Ⅳ. Data and Methodology

To address the above questions, data are drawn from a sample survey of SEQ residents (n = 1347) conducted by means of telephone interviews over February - June 1997 using random digit dialling. The aim of this survey - based study was to identify the quality of life of these residents, and this was undertaken as part of a larger Australian Research Council - funded collaborative project, which is examining the economic, environmental, and social components and consequences of this rapidly growing mega metropolitan area. The other component of the project is the creation of a geographic information systems (GIS) database which will help document the economic, environmental, and social change in SEQ over the 1980s and 1990s.

Ⅴ. Residents' Attitudes, and the Possibility of Sustainable Consumption in SEQ

To achieve the three goals cited above, four main factors need to be addressed. First, there is a need to restrict the encroachment of urban SEQ onto land considered valuable for ecological, cultural, economic, and social needs : ie. restrict urban sprawl. To achieve this would require slowing the rate of growth of the region, particularly at the fringe, and encouraging higher urban densities. The second requirement would be changing the overwhelming reliance on the private motor

vehicle, with its implications for energy use, air quality, and traffic congestion. The third factor centres on the environmental sensitivity of SEQ residents, this indicating the preparedness of residents to adjust to a more sustainable form of consumption. The final factor relates to the willingness of residents to take communal - ie. government - led - approaches to controlling the level and nature of consumption for purposes of environmental protection, and thus for an improved quality of life. These four issues can now be addressed in turn.

1. Restraining and Controlling Urban Sprawl

SEQ residents are very positive about the overall quality of life in their region, and about their general standard of living. Relatively few regard the rate of population growth in the region as a problem (23.9%), and only a quarter (25.8%) consider the region to have too many people. Many more (52.3%) were concerned with the sprawling nature of the region, although they would not consider increasing housing density - through urban consolidation - to be a solution to this problem. The great bulk (80.5%) of residents rejected the idea of needing more medium density housing in the region. Such an attitude confirms the Australian preference for detached housing and the general opposition to medium to high-density dwellings. Certainly, there is a noticeable movement of people - particularly highly skilled and well paid employees and their households - into medium density inner and middle suburbs, but the fastest rates of population growth are still at the fringe where there is an overwhelming preponderance of detached housing. Indeed, while many inner and middle suburbs are now increasing in population after decades of decline, the fastest rates of growth are still at the fringe.

Thus, it will be a very difficult task to persuade SEQ residents to live in medium density housing and abandon the preference for detached housing - at least over the short term. Still, it needs to be noted that housing density, in itself, contributes little to urban density. Rather, the problem rises because of extensive tracts of open spaces, and because of factories, schools, hospitals, and other institutions

require large amounts of land (see Troy, 1996). Thus, increasing housing density will not, in itself, reduce the rate of urban sprawl.

2. The Transport Question

Since the 1950s, Australian urban residents have self-serviced their transport needs by buying and maintaining cars. This explains, then, the transport conundrum for SEQ : that the private motor vehicle appears the only viable system available to the bulk of households today. Public transport services cover only a tiny fraction of all trips, meaning that unless there is a marked orientation towards a collective approach to transport, private motor vehicle use will continue to be the dominant form of transport in SEQ and in other Australian mega metropolitan areas. For a fundamental change to occur there will need to be a marked transformation in the nature of Australian cities and society, including a profound change in the role governments play.

The reliance on cars in SEQ is clearly reflected in the pattern of car ownership : 95% of the region's households owned at least one car, and more than half (51.7%) owned two or more. Thus, households largely carry the direct costs of transport themselves, with governments providing the necessary infrastructure. Within SEQ, private motor vehicles are the most widely used - by 75.2% of respondents - mode of transport in the journey to work, with only 9.0% using public transport. The car also dominates shopping trips, with 64.3% of respondents using cars for the main (weekly) shopping.

So overwhelmingly dominant is the private motor vehicle that a change to an alternative - ie public transport - system looks impossible in the foreseeable future. Still, respondents acknowledged problems associated with this overwhelming reliance, and they expressed the need for better public transport : 73.7% considered traffic congestion to be a problem; 71.9% said that there was need for better public transport; and 87.5% felt local governments needed to encourage people to use public transport. However, a large proportion (86.0%) also felt that governments

needed to improve roads.

Moreover, considering the importance of private motor vehicles to households, only 52.5% said that it would be difficult living in their area without the use of a car, and only 52.0% said that public transport was not an alternative to a car. It seems clear, requiring a car, but, at the same time, emphasised the importance of public transport, and the need to improve these services. In this regard, a significant number (44.1%) recognised the need to restrict the use of cars under particular circumstances and favoured (51.1%) road tolls to pay for new roads.

3. Environmental Concerns

The major concern with pollution was over the despoliation of water. Where over half (57.9%) of the respondents were concerned with this pollution, a smaller number were concerned with air (35.2%) and noise (29.3%) pollution. These responses reflect the reality of the situation, with water pollution arguably being more severe in SEQ than either air or noise pollution. Air pollution, by contrast, is more severe in Sydney and Melbourne than SEQ.

A wider range of environmental concerns were also expressed by a significant proportion of the population. A little over half (55.4%) felt that those living in SEQ used too many resources, and almost half (45.8%) felt environmental protection was a more important than the loss of jobs and economic growth. There was, then, a considerable interest in protecting the environment.

4. The Role of Government

Governments were seen by the overwhelming bulk of residents to play the key role in safeguarding the environment, and specifically water quality (96.7%), air quality (96.1%), and the recycling of waste (94.9%); and 65.6% said governments should make direct charges for water use. There was also the recognition by 76.9% that the private sector does not think enough about environmental issues.

Thus, governments were regarded as necessary for playing the key role in environmental protection and thus in ensuring the achievement of sustainable consumption and production.

Ⅵ. Conclusion

The question now is to understand which residents of SEQ are more predisposed towards actions which would contribute towards a sustainable. development, and which residents are least predisposed. The rest of the presentation will address these questions.

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