LESSONS IN REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM CANADA AND AUSTRALIA

Jackie Wolfe

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In 1973 the Australian National University created the North Australia Research Unit for two purposes: to carry out a research program of its own and to provide a base and logistic support for research workers, from ANU and from other Australian or overseas research institutions. The Unit is part of the Research School of Pacific Studies.

The Unit's activities range well beyond its base in Darwin in the Northern Territory to research localities in central Australia and the north and west of Queensland and north Western Australia.

The Unit's academic work is interdisciplinary and principally in the social sciences. An overall aim is to initiate research on problems of development in the north, little studied by other institutions. At present, emphasis is being given to four main research areas:

- Environmental management and planning
- Governance and policymaking structures
- Economic development and social equity
- Quality of community life

The future prospects and present needs of the Aboriginal and Islander communities remain a major theme in our work as are ecological and economic sustainability.

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Each paper will be short (see guidelines below). They will often deal with controversial topics. While the Unit takes pride in, and legal responsibility for, its publications, these papers reflect views of authors and not those of the Australian National University or the North Australia Research Unit.

The Unit is willing to publish discussion papers written by authors who are not members of ANU or NARU. However, NARU retains the right to use referees or to reject manuscripts. Non-NARU contributors may be expected to make some financial contribution towards publication.

We hope that this series will open up discussion about some issues of northern development and the inevitable conflicts that arise from change, culture contacts and diversity of values.

Information about the Unit's activities and publications can be obtained from:

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Guidelines for contributors:

Papers should not exceed eleven thousand words. The Harvard system of referencing is used. Authors are asked to follow the styling used in this paper. Originals of illustrative material should be supplied. Authors are requested to submit their papers on floppy disk and as hard copy. Papers will be accepted in MS Word in IBM or Mac format and in WordPerfect. Papers may be refereed before publication. An abstract of about three hundred words and a short resumé about the author(s) should also be supplied with the manuscript.
Acknowledgments

There are so many people to thank that it is hard to know where to begin. Across northern Australia people in many Aboriginal communities and organisations have offered their ideas, their comments and their guidance over the years that I have been interested in community and area planning and development issues. People with whom I have had lengthy discussions which have helped shape my ideas and to whom I owe so much include Bill Sheldon and Geoff Richardson from the Cairns ATSIC Regional Office, Cath Elderton and others associated with the Kimberley Land Council and Warringari Resource Centre, Barbara Flick and staff of Mamabulanjin Community Development Unit in Broome, members of the West Kimberley CDUs in Derby, Geoff Barker who also works with communities in the Kimberley, Brian Burkett and David Riley of the Northern Territory Open College Community Development Planning Program in Alice Springs, staff of the South Australia TAFE system Community Management Training Unit, and Alan Dale of Griffith University in Brisbane. I hope I have done justice to your experience, your contributions, your ideas, and your ideals. Here at NARU all the staff give so generously of their time to visiting researchers like myself. To Mardy Aye, Nicki Hanssen, Jann King, Colleen Pyne, Sally Roberts, Janet Sincock, Ann Webb and Meriel Weir — my gratitude for your help and your friendship. Special thanks to Dr Nugget Coombs whose life, mind, and ideas are an inspiration. To NARU Director David Lea, my appreciation for his support and hours of discussion and critical reading. I know there are more, but I am running out of space. It shows that these papers belong to a lot of people, though I take full responsibility for what is in this version.

Disclaimer

The views expressed by the author are not necessarily the views of the Commission.
Notes on contributor

Jackie Wolfe is a geographer and Associate Professor in the University School of Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada (1967–present). She has worked in community planning and development with Indian and Inuit groups in Canada. Since 1986 she has spent several months each year as a Visiting Fellow at NARU, researching and writing on Aboriginal community government, conditions in town-camps, and, for the last three years, on Aboriginal community and regional development planning.

ABSTRACT

The sixty elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) regional councils are required by the terms of the ATSIC legislation to 'formulate, and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social, and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait residents of the region'.

As the first of two NARU discussion papers examining regional planning by ATSIC Aboriginal regional councils this paper considers whether any relevant lessons for Aboriginal regional planning can be drawn from experiences of regional planning and regional development in other settings. It concludes that they offer little guidance but many cautionary lessons. For example, Australia, unlike Canada, has had little relevant domestic experience: consequently there is little expertise in the theory or practice of regional planning and development to draw on.

The paper notes that ATSIC 'regions' have few, if any, of the geographical, economic, political, social or even cultural characteristics usually associated with a region. The regional councils are all creatures created by ATSIC in the last two years, and derive what little power and
authority they have from ATSIC. Little evidence exists that Aboriginal people were asked about their conception of what would constitute a workable region.

The paper concludes that there are few precedents in regional development or regional planning of a relatively powerless and poorly educated minority being expected to plan for itself under the auspices of an elected council whose limited authority is derived not from its constituents but from its creators: councils which, moreover, have been granted limited financial and human resources to bring to bear to the task.
ABSTRACT

The nine elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community (ATSIC) regional councils are required by the terms of the ATSIC Agreement to formulate, and assess, a regional plan for improving the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait residents of the region.

As the first of two MARD, Crosscutting Issues nutrient-focussed papers, this paper considers whether any planning lessons for Aboriginal regional planning can be drawn from experiences of coastal planning and regional development. In other words, how can structural initiatives that address this issue be used to inform the planning process of regional strategies and development in other areas?

The paper notes that ATSIC regions, from now on, will focus on the geographical, economic, political, social and cultural characteristics usually associated with a region. The regional councils are all working towards improving the socio-economic outcomes for residents. This focus is similar to the regional approach used by ATSIC in the last two years, and it aligns with the power and
Introduction

'I really don't know what it is and I don't like the timetable, but we have to make this planning thing work, because nothing else has done'. This was a typical response from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC) regional councillors and from staff working with them on regional planning in mid-1992. Another all too frequent response was 'we are being set up to fail'.

The sixty elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) regional councils in Australia are required by the terms of the ATSIC legislation to 'formulate, and revise from time to time, a regional plan for improving the economic, social, and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait residents of the region' (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*).

Consultants Coopers and Lybrand were commissioned by ATSIC to prepare a report on appropriate planning methodology, resource and training requirements, and the benefits and constraints on regional planning by ATSIC (Coopers & Lybrand 1991). As a further part of their brief, the consultants prepared guidelines for the preparation of regional plans based on the six phase, eighteen step planning process they recommended (ATSIC c.1991).
Formal regional planning by ATSIC councils began in 1992, as a component of the Community and Regional Planning Program approved by the Commission in August 1991. Coopers and Lybrand recommended the following milestones: completion of the first phase, Framework for Development of Regional Plan, by the end of June 1992; preparation of a Draft Plan by the end of September; completion of the first Plan by April 1993, and completion of full and final regional plans by all councils by April 1994. The consultant noted that in the first year some regional councils may wish to concentrate on developing visions and goals only, while others may be ready to move into strategy development. ATSIC administration adopted the timetable in principle, but expected full and final plans to be completed for use in the Budget estimates process in April 1993. By the end of November 1992 the Community and Regional Planning Section of Regional Support Branch, Canberra, had received thirty-eight Frameworks and twenty Draft Plans.

As part of the Community and Regional Planning Section's review of the status of the Program, I visited eight ATSIC offices across northern Australia between June 1992 and October 1992, to prepare reports on four joint DEET-ATSIC community development planning pilot projects, and on the way in which community planning and regional planning was being carried out in the area (Wolfe 1992). Interviews were held with staff, regional councillors, other community leaders, consultants and other professionals involved in Aboriginal planning, and staff of Aboriginal organisations. Files and other materials were reviewed. I also had the opportunity to attend a number of regional council and sub-committee meetings which had regional planning on the agenda. The time frame for the review did not allow for visits to communities. Although this limited the scope of the information and perspectives on which the report and this paper are based, I felt that it was premature to visit communities, given that regional planning was in its infancy. At ATSIC's request, I also prepared summaries of the twenty Draft Plans prepared by councils around Australia, seven of which were from northern Australia (ATSIC 1992). This exercise afforded me some insights into the approaches being
taken to regional planning by councils around the country, and the priorities they were identifying.

This paper outlines the experiences of regional planning and regional development in other settings (Coombs 1981; Mathews 1981; Stöhr & Taylor 1981; Chambers 1983; Toye 1987; Higgins & Zagorski 1989; Fenge & Rees 1987; Holmes 1992), and asks whether relevant lessons can be drawn from them. It concludes that they offer little guidance but many cautionary lessons. Consideration is, therefore, given to factors that may distinguish Aboriginal regional development planning from regional planning and development elsewhere and what implications these have for Aboriginal regional planning (Crough 1993). It is noteworthy that ATSIC does not seem to have asked this critical question when it embarked on the preparation of regional plans.

The second paper on Aboriginal regional planning (Wolfe 1993b) argues that effective planning by any agency has a number of requisites, including decision-making authority, recognition, adequate and appropriate resources, and legitimacy, and examines ATSIC regional councils from these perspectives. The ATSIC elected arm is placed within the context of moves by and for Aboriginal people towards greater self-management and self-government. Statutory Aboriginal representation and the responsibility for plan-making are recognised as delegated rights and a delegated responsibilities. The paper also places regional councils in the context of Commonwealth, State, Territory, Local Government agencies and existing and emergent Aboriginal organisations which provide an array of services to Aboriginal clients and communities, and which make some efforts at planning their own service delivery. The relationship between regional plans, other agency plans, organisation plans and community plans are controversial and unresolved.

Case material compiled for the 1992 review of community and regional planning (Wolfe 1992) is used in the second paper to examine ATSIC regional planning and plans in practice. LG Smith's simple evaluative framework of context, processes and outcomes (LG Smith 1983) is
applied to bring out salient features in each case, and to discuss problems associated with ATSIC regional council planning.

Many regional councils in northern Australia have taken on the planning task with great seriousness and have devoted considerable time and energy to it. Councils struggled to follow the guidelines for regional planning provided by ATSIC and found them too detailed. Some have tried to do it alone, with little or no outside assistance. Others have used ATSIC staff or professional facilitators. Still others have used professional planning consultants to develop regional plans, with varying amounts of consultation with regional council and with area Aborigines.

The products differ in comprehensiveness and style and mode of presentation. Nevertheless there are commonalities in the attempts to include the major issues of land, control of resources, justice and civil rights and cultural survival, along with a regional perspective on better quality and more effective distribution of health, education and other services, and community and organisation needs and projects.

The balance between these levels of emphasis varies from region to region. Some have adopted a conventional approach of ranking regional needs and focussing on one or two priorities, such as physical infrastructure or health. Others have attempted to keep the connections between regional priorities in sharp focus. Many of the regional councils struggled to figure out the appropriate relationship between community and organisation planning and plans, and planning at the regional level, and found the attempt frustrating. Many insist that communities in their region are so different that any attempt to develop a regional perspective is impossible. The majority of councils and councillors feel uncomfortable with proceeding with regional planning before community planning. A few have ignored the guidelines and have expressed their own understanding of what regional development and planning means in their own idiom.
The regional planning process has often not been smooth. Some existing and emerging Aboriginal interests and organisations in the form of land councils, special purpose Aboriginal organisations and service-providing resource centres with local or regional legitimacy challenge the delegated planning responsibility and delegated decision-making authority of the ATSIC regional councils, especially now that ATSIC has given Regional Councils considerable responsibility over the allocation of substantial amounts of regional funds. Regional councils, for their part, are vulnerable to the criticism that their decisions are politically biased towards particular interests, because they have not been assisted to develop and apply consistent and objective criteria in their decision-making.

The ability of regional councils to use the plans to negotiate more effective service delivery is equally problematic. The burden of responsibility for negotiating for delivery on plans' goals and projects rests with the regional councils. Yet they have little experience in negotiating even with the ATSIC regional bureaucracies, let alone with the array of other Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Government agencies which are mandated to provide services to Aboriginal people. Regional councils have no formal authority over these agencies to get them to be responsive to the new plans. No powers, or even mechanisms, formally exist to coerce other agencies, with their own priorities, policies, programs and political constituencies, to subsume their plans to those of an Aboriginal regional council.

ATSIC regional council planning is an ambiguous activity at best: the likelihood that it will be able to do anything more than shift formal responsibility for difficult and highly political decisions about allocation of scarce funding resources from public servants to elected Aboriginal regional councillors, is as yet unproven. Unless the differences in goals for development and planning between central agencies, regions, Aboriginal organisations and communities are acknowledged and the priority of Aboriginal goals accepted; unless the Commonwealth government commits itself to an ongoing and stable process of Aboriginal
regional planning, with appropriate allocation of financial and human resources; unless other governments and their departments are coerced into 'listening to Aborigines' (Coombs 1978) and taking account of ATSIC regional plans; until regional councils find some way of handling the burden of work which threatens to overwhelm them so that they can continue the regional planning which is only in a gestation phase; and until they have some way of making funding allocation decisions that can be seen to be fair and equitable, this attempt at regional planning will be yet another one-off, well-intentioned but abortive governmental initiative to add to all the others which have preceded it, and all those which will undoubtedly follow.

Regional planning and regional development

The meanings attached to the word 'development' are numerous and often contradictory. The popular understanding of development equates it with growth: most specifically with exploitation for profit of the natural non-renewable and renewable resources of an area, with some hope of parallel increase in paid employment. Development is also understood as the building up of physical infrastructure, such as transportation facilities, public utilities (power, water, waste removal), housing, and so on. It may be regarded as a means to provide 'basic needs' of food, shelter, clothing and employment; to increase living standards; to improve 'well-being' and 'quality of life'.

From time to time we are reminded of the roots of the word development — meaning to unfold and to use the capabilities that are within — by those who are convinced that it must be a process through which people expand their inherent capacities, acquire others which they recognise they need, and exercise control over those aspects of their lives and their futures which are of central concern to them.

Regional planning and regional development are undertaken for a number of different policy purposes. Regional planning and development has
been widely used by central governments in both 'developed' and 'developing' countries as a mechanism for stimulating growth in lagging regions (Higgins 1981, 21; Stöhr & Taylor 1981). In developed countries, and more recently in developing countries, regional planning has also been used to control and redirect the negative consequences of rapid growth in growth regions.

In 1980 Wilson commented that regional policy is a very recent area of interest to the Australian federal government. 'Australia is virtually unique ... in not having, and never having had a major problem of regional disparities' (Wilson 1980, 179). However, Higgins pointed out in 1981 that 'there are pockets of unemployment and relative poverty in country towns and metropolitan neighbourhoods, and among people in particular categories of age, sex, education and skills who dwell in them' (Higgins 1981, 79). His analysis led him to conclude that treatment must be specific and repeated, and examination should be made intermittently to observe the advance or retreat of the malady (Higgins 1981, 79–80). A 1988 review of regional development, regional differentiation, regional policy and regional planning in Australia, (Higgins & Zagorski 1989, vii) came to a rather different conclusion from Wilson's: that basic similarities at a state level give way to marked differences at the regional level, and that the societies occupying these different spaces have different interests (Higgins 1989, 252). Higgins then offered the opinion that:

A nation which is both a democracy and a federation must take note of these different, sometimes conflicting interests if a degree of harmony, great enough to make the society workable, is to prevail (Higgins 1989, 252).

Nowhere in either reviews of Australian regional development and regional planning in 1981 (Mathews), 1989 (Higgins & Zagorski) or 1991 (Economic Planning Advisory Council — EPAC) was any mention made of Aborigines as a group particularly disadvantaged in Australian society. In these analyses they are 'invisible people' (Crough 1993).

The majority of Aboriginal Australians are the poor whether they live in the richer or poorer of Australian states, in the more or less advantaged regions of those states, or in remote areas, small rural towns or
metropolitan locations. They are impacted negatively by rapid growth and change going on around them while they lag in terms of physical services in their communities, housing availability and quality, employment and income levels, health, education levels and opportunities: in summary, in virtually all aspects of living conditions and quality of life however defined. At the same time, across northern Australia, they form the stable population base, and contribute substantially to the regional economy (Crough et al 1989; Crough 1993).

This does not mean, however, that they are one people. They are many. As Sansom said, 'traditional or modern, Aboriginal society is small scale' (1982), both culturally and politically, separated (and linked also) by kinship, language, traditional culture, and experience with settler economy and society. There are outstation, centralised community, fringe or town-camp, and slum dwellers; the politically and socially conscious radical activists and militants; the politically and socially conscious active 'conservatives'; and those who outwardly at least, lead lives much the same as non-Aboriginal Australians (adapted from Gilbert 1973, 11). As such, they have different and often competing interests. Higgins words (1989, 252) quoted above have potent, though probably unintended, meaning for the practice and outcomes of Aboriginal regional planning in Australia.

Higgins also noted that:

It would be amusing, if it were not so serious, that advanced, capitalist countries (including Australia) insist on development planning as a condition for their aid to less developed countries, but fail to see the need for similar planning to solve their own problems (Higgins 1989, 258).

The Commonwealth government has made regional planning by Aboriginal regional councils for Aboriginal people in Australia mandatory. No other nation-wide agency is required by legislation to do regional planning.

Given the widespread use of regional planning and development elsewhere and its limited application in Australia, it is reasonable to ask
whether anything can be learned from these experiences that has relevance for the current initiatives in Aboriginal regional planning and regional development.

**Development: other ways of perceiving people, events and things** (Chambers 1983, 23)

There are many messages to be derived from the experience of planning for regional development in so-called 'developing areas'. This limited review will focus on a few relevant lessons.

The most obvious is that the word development means many different things and includes, but is not confined to, matters as diverse as improvements to physical infrastructure and housing and general material living conditions, and empowerment of disempowered groups so they can determine for themselves what development means for them. Interpretations, goals, and preferred processes of development, in turn, 'unavoidably depend on the values of the person doing the defining' (Toye 1987, 10), or, I would argue as equally pertinent here, the institutions doing the defining.

Recent research on ATSIC's Aboriginal community development planning program concluded that there were multiple agendas for community development planning, that they were not readily compatible, and that community-level agendas were likely to be overridden by central government agency agendas (Lea & Wolfe 1993; Wolfe 1993a&c). Questions for Aboriginal regional development planning include: are different interpretations, goals and processes being used in the current regional planning activity? Who is using them? Are they compatible? If there are differences which are not compatible, which concepts and associated values are prevailing, in what ways, and why, and with what impacts?
Korten and Alfonso (1985) and Quarles van Ufford and others (1988) have explored these questions in some detail. Leaving them unanswered, Quarles van Ufford argues, is a major contributing cause of 'the hidden crisis in development'. Their analysis of international development agencies and their activities highlighted fundamental differences in understanding of what development was about between the 'top', the external donor countries and development agencies, and the 'bottom'; between the funders and their central agencies and the implementers working with real people and real situations on the ground. Funders worked with the development theory or program focus that was 'the flavour of the month or year'. The central agencies had to account to the donor that money was spent as the program or project dictated: theirs was an 'input' concern. Development workers at the grassroots tried to be responsible towards the people they were working with: theirs was an 'outcome' concern (Quarles van Ufford 1988, 21). A consequence of these differences in purpose, expectation and allegiance frequently resulted in a 'web of deception', as each group tried to hoodwink the other that procedures were being carried out according to the program or plan, and that genuine development was taking place. The result was mistrust, considerable misuse of funds, burgeoning bureaucracies to account for funds, and little improvement in the quality of life of the intended recipients.

Several critics of international regional development have commented on the characteristics of the organisations involved (Korten & Alfonso 1985), suggesting that

they often have difficulty in dealing with error, have short institutional memories, tend to be hierarchical, authoritarian and punitive ... Bureaucratic systems of this nature have great difficulty handling diverse or apparently contradictory ideas (Porter et al 1991, 210).

A further observation about international regional development practice relevant to the promotion by ATSIC of regional planning is that

the weakest levels tend to receive the burdens the more powerful cannot cope with. This in many cases is the lowest level. Hence any solutions to the problem of
organisation must take into account the *whole* of these interconnected agencies (Quarles van Ufford 1988, 34).

Given the national preoccupation in Australia about accountability for expenditure of public funds, and the differences already identified in development and planning goals between government agencies and Aboriginal communities, it is pertinent to ask whether anything similar is emerging in Aboriginal regional planning in Australia.

Already there are indications that differences in interpretation and goals have emerged. Now that draft plans are in circulation, critics, including staff, activists and professionals working with Aboriginal groups, and ATSIC and other government agencies at different levels, are ready with comment on each plan. Comments include: 'It's too general.' 'It's too specific.' 'There is no supporting data.' 'There is nothing but data.' 'What we have here is a professional planner saying what ought to be, this has nothing really to do with the lives of Aboriginal people in this area.' 'It's all about issues like justice and land which planning can't deal with — it should be about water and electricity and housing.' 'It deals only with general issues.' 'It deals only with community needs.' 'The main problem in this region is land (or health, or housing, or environmental management — depending on the commentators own focus or that of the persons affiliate agency) and this plan says it is housing (or land or health or environmental management) and they have got it wrong.' 'They have listed all these issues but as a regional plan it misses the point — the issues are linked — they must be integrated and they are not.'

Many of the criticisms have some foundation. The relationships upon which plan development and implementation depend are in a state of flux between conflict and cooperation. What they fail to acknowledge, though, is that planning is a gradual and slow process. The array of supports which planning requires are not yet in place. Time and patience, authority and resources are required to develop a functioning process and usable products.
Canadian experiences

The Canadian federal and provincial (state) governments have, for several decades, used regional development and regional planning as tools to deal with disparities in regional economic growth, income levels and social welfare: with what Higgins (1981, 54) calls Canada's 'sizeable and recalcitrant regional gaps'. Commenting in an Australian review of regional disparities and development, McLarty says 'Canadians have tried most of the possibilities' (McLarty 1981, 81) and distinguishes two themes — 'real estate policies' and 'people policies'.

The decade of the 1960s in the province of Ontario is described as the 'golden age' of regional planning: plans were prepared for controlling development along the scenic Niagara Escarpment; for controlling and directing development around metropolitan Toronto, the provincial capital; and for expansion of the Mid-Canada Corridor to alleviate pressures of growth in urbanised and industrialised southern Ontario, and were very much to do with real estate.

The plans were typical 'rational', top-down elaborate documents, backed by numerous maps, statistics and predictions, and driven by the political needs of central governments to manipulate, contain and direct industrial, commercial and residential growth, and protect agricultural land from development. The plans were compiled by professional planners who placed a high premium on the collection and analysis of large quantities of descriptive and predictive data about the region, a moderate priority on input from key players, including those in the development industry, politicians and high level public servants, and a low priority on public input. They were guided by a genuine concern to recognise and deal with linkages between economic and other sectors. However, mechanisms for plan implementation were largely based on existing or revised land use planning legislation and on planning authorities and staff at the local government level.
Because of inadequacies of the legislation and reluctance on the part of provincial and local governments to enforce regional plan recommendations, the 1960s are better characterised as a decade of professional planners making plans rather than a decade of regional plan implementation by citizens and the instruments of government. Nevertheless, the style and content of regional planning which the Ontario experience typifies continues to be well entrenched in the training and practice of planners two or more decades later.

By way of contrast, there are also numerous Canadian examples of federal programs directed to stimulating lagging economies and socially disadvantaged populations. While initially most of these programs were directed to specific economic sectors (namely agriculture, forestry or fisheries), the sixties and seventies saw a sequence of jointly financed federal-provincial ARDA (Agricultural and Rural Development Agreement) programs directed to economically and socially disadvantaged regions and their populations, particularly in the Atlantic Provinces of eastern Canada, and in parts of the Prairie provinces. From 1969 these were administered by DREE, a specially created federal Department of Regional Economic Expansion. At the outset the development programs applied notions of infrastructure improvement, target sectors, lead industries, and growth poles, but were soon broadened to encompass principles and practices of Integrated Rural Development. The intent of FRED (Fund for Rural Economic Development) plans was to link local and regional infrastructure improvement with economic development and social development so as to shift whole regions from poverty and dependency to economic viability. In practice, the planning activity tended towards costly and time-consuming base-line studies and establishment of complex administrative procedures. In the late seventies and early eighties Northern Development Agreements (NORDA) targeted the northern parts of the provinces, with substantial indigenous populations.

While the infrastructure and social conditions of targeted regions has improved substantially, so has that of adjacent regions which were not
targeted, begging the question of the efficacy of the integrated regional development planning programs in Canada (for a description of the Canadian initiatives from an Australian perspective see McLarty 1981, 81–98).

Also relevant to the northern Australia context is the environmental planning and management, and regional land use planning which has been ongoing throughout the 1980s in Canada's two northern territories with large Aboriginal populations, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. In a recent discussion paper on strategic regional planning on northern frontiers, Holmes (1992, 9) points out that the Berger Inquiry (Berger 1977) into the social, economic and environmental consequences of the proposed Mackenzie Valley natural gas pipeline highlighted the inadequacies of the existing *ad hoc* regulatory approach (Rees 1981, 1984, 1987; Fenge 1987) and led to a more open and participatory approach which has gradually become inclusive of indigenous interests and perspectives.

The Berger Inquiry was pioneering because Justice Berger chose to take his inquiry beyond the initial terms specified by the Canadian government by considering and then incorporating the right of citizens as individuals and communities of concern to participate in normative planning decisions about desired goals for northern development: that is, what ought to happen. Berger did not restrict public input only to strategic and operational decisions about this route or that route (for a full discussion of normative, strategic and operational planning see Smith 1982, and for an application of the concepts to community development planning see Wolfe 1993a).

To elaborate on one example: the 1980 federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND) Northern Land Use Planning Policy objective was to adopt a comprehensive approach to regional planning in the two northern territories, and to develop a reliable data base (DIAND 1981). The planning structure included a Northern Land Use Planning Committee, a Territorial Land Use Planning Commission, professional
land use planning teams, and planning area review panels, each with different responsibilities. This was a top-down, highly bureaucratic and professionalised approach to regional planning. The only provision for any public participation was an opportunity for review and comment on proposed policy alternatives.

By contrast, the 1987 arrangements fully involved three-way interests, federal, territorial and Aboriginal. The Policy Advisory Committee, representing the federal government, Council for Yukon Indians, and territorial government, was responsible for generating the terms of reference for preparation of land use plans, and their implementation. Terms include environmental, economic, social and cultural goals, with emphasis on sustainable resource development and planning consistent with the experience, aspirations and values which resident Indians and non-Indians associate with land and resource use (Yukon Land Use Planning 1989, quoted in Kipfer 1992, 49). Although these arrangements are not backed by legislation, Indian participation in planning activities is recognised in the Yukon First Nations Umbrella Final Agreement (a comprehensive land claim agreement with the federal government, with the Yukon Territory government as a major third party interest). Whether these arrangements result in planning that is more reflective of Indian interests remains to be seen.

There are other Canadian examples of Aboriginal participation in regional resource planning and management which have brought about important changes to the consultative and decision-making processes adopted, and the management systems recommended and implemented. These include the management of Lancaster Sound, NWT and the Inuvialuit Comprehensive Claims Final Agreement (Jacobs & Fenge 1986; Doubleday 1989). Slowly, and in the face of political, professional and special interest resistance, Aboriginal demands for inclusion as partners in decision-making and co-managers of renewable resources in their country are gradually being acted on (Usher 1987; Osherenko 1988). It is doubtful, though, that the partnership with government and industry can be regarded as an equal one. Aboriginal ecological knowledge is slowly
being recognised as valid in its own right, though whether it has achieved or will achieve recognition as being different from but equivalent with scientific knowledge is debatable (Freeman & Carbyn 1988; Wolfe et al 1992).

**Australian experiences**

Higgins maintains that regional planning and policy have never been as high on the Australian national agenda as they continue to be in Canada (Higgins 1989, 8). Canada's Constitution commits governments to 'reducing disparities in opportunity', not just in terms of each Province as a whole, but for individual citizens within each Province. Efforts to reduce income gaps, which in Canada have been cast in regional as well as national and individual forms, have not taken regional expression in Australia. Consequently regional studies, regional analysis, regional development and regional planning have not assumed a predominant role in Australian social science research or planning training and practice.

Australian federal experience with regional planning and development, such as it is, can be traced to the impacts of the depression on rural and small town Australia, and the continuing neglect of these during the second world war. As part of the Ministry of Post War Reconstruction, headed by Dr HC Coombs, Rural Reconstruction Commissioners took their task to encompass all aspects of rural life, from rural electrification, to housing and education, health, and rural and agricultural economic diversification (Coombs 1981, 57-74). According to Coombs, the Commission was influenced by the American experience with planning for hydroelectricity generation and industrialisation of the Tennessee Valley (the TVA scheme), and the spin-off literature on the nature and techniques of economic development planning for large physical and economic regions (Coombs 1981, 59).

A particular feature of Australian thinking and practice was, however, support for voluntary local citizens groups to provide the means for local involvement in the planning process inspired by the subsequently much
researched and publicised 'spontaneous' co-operative community initiatives taken by the citizens of Nuriootpa, South Australia (Robbins 1981, 144–165; Coombs 1981, 60–61). The Commission promoted a concept of regional developmental planning characterised by active participation of concerned residents.

From 1944 to 1947 a number of Commonwealth-State conferences were held to discuss the possibility of national economic development mediated through coordinated regional planning (Harris 1989), and Australia was divided up into ninety-seven planning regions (Commonwealth Department of Post-War Reconstruction 1949). After the fall of the Chifley Labor Government in late 1949, the Menzies government decided not to proceed further with an integrated Commonwealth-State approach to regional planning and economic development (Harris 1989, 108–109). Regionalism and planning were unfamiliar and, to a great extent, threatening concepts for many in the Commonwealth and State administrations (Coombs 1981, 67). Planning of specific projects, many of regional scope, such as the Snowy River Scheme or comprehensive water supply for the goldfields and agricultural areas of Western Australia, was more understandable than regional planning and development, and Australia generally took this route.

Vipond argues that, in so far as there were regional policies at all, they were largely a State rather than a federal responsibility, and were directed to promoting decentralisation away from capital cities and maintenance of the quality of urban environments (Vipond 1989, 65; Clare 1991b, 3–5). However, under the Whitlam government, in the early 1970s there was a flurry of federal activity in support of designated regional growth centres, the best known being Albury-Wodonga on the Victoria/New South Wales border, where two new cities, Thurgoona in NSW and Baranduda in Victoria, were proposed. A Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) was set up with an ambitious agenda to assist and promote a national strategy. But it produced few tangible successes (Clare 1991b, 5–8). Another regional planning initiative introduced by the Whitlam government was the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) in which
Regional Councils for Social Development drawn from local authorities, State and Commonwealth and public agencies, non-profit organisations and members of the general public would function as social planning authorities to develop and integrate welfare services, income support programs and welfare related aspects of health, education, housing employment and other social policies (Harris 1989, 110).

As Holmes (1992, 2) points out, there has been a belated Australian response to land and land management issues in northern frontier regions in the form of regional planning initiatives, namely in the West Australia government's Kimberley Region Plan Study Report: A Strategy for Growth and Conservation (1990), the Northern Territory government's Gulf Region Land Use and Development Study (1991), and the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy (CYPLUS) initiated by the Queensland government in 1990. Holmes notes that, unlike the situation in northern Canada, the planning initiated by the Australian state and territorial governments is 'entirely divorced from settlement of Aboriginal claims' (Holmes 1992, 2), that consultation with Aborigines has been negligible even by CYPLUS in which 'public participation will be the cornerstone of the project' (Holmes 1992, 3), and there is no mechanism for ongoing public participation in regional planning. John Lea (1993) is optimistic that ATSIC regional council planning opens up opportunities for Aboriginal participation in various aspects of planning and management. The issue, though, is not only whether Aborigines have input into development of the regional council plans, important as that is: rather it is also, do the plans clearly reflect local and Aboriginal priorities, and do those priorities have influence on what actually happens to Aboriginal people in the region?

Given this history of regional planning and regional development in Australia it is not surprising that most of the reactions I got from professional planners, academics and some ATSIC staff when I began to look at ATSIC regional planning were: 'Regional planning doesn't work, never has', and 'Look at the record of regional development anywhere in the world: dismal. It doesn't work.' Reflecting on Australia's sporadic
flirtations with regional planning and development, Dr Coombs observed that the sad thing is we have learnt so little from it.

The concept of development as the building of a harmonious relationship between man (sic) and nature leading to a landscape modified by man’s activities but capable of meeting his human needs and being sustained from generation to generation, has still to be incorporated into our thinking (Coombs 1981, 72).

Although Australia's domestic experience with regional planning and development has been modest, Australia, like Canada, the United States, the Netherlands and other western countries, has been heavily engaged in rural development planning in developing countries in the Pacific, southeast Asia and elsewhere, as an aid donor and program or project planner and implementer.

Critical Australian analyses of some of these interventions point out, among other things, that it is customary to elaborate, at the outset, a multi-step 'Project Cycle' designed to guide the project, and to be followed in careful sequence: steps and sequence sometimes inappropriate to the changed circumstances surrounding the project. It is also customary, in a concern for 'holism', to require comprehensive data collection, regardless of the appropriateness of its scale of resolution or its relevance. Furthermore, emphasis over the past decade has been on 'integrated' development, where integration may mean linking modern and traditional economic sectors; coordinating economic with social development; linking sectorally structured government departments; or linking central agencies and regional or local organisations (Crittenden & Lea 1989, 3–4). Because of the difficulty, indeed the impossibility of doing this, the usefulness of 'integration' has been widely disputed. But, Crittenden and Lea argue, 'this should not discredited the concept'. Recognition, at the local level, that

'everything' is related to 'everything else' is essential before effective planning and development can take place (Crittenden & Lea 1989, 113).
Some lessons

It is not within the scope of this paper to tease out all the lessons from international, Canadian and Australian experiences: rather, it is more useful to draw out those that have some relevance for Aboriginal regional planning.

Lack of theories, experience and training

The first and most obvious is that Australia, unlike Canada, has had little recent relevant experience, except in so far as it has participated in regional development planning outside of Australia (see Crittenden & Lea 1989 and Porter et al 1991 for description and analysis of several of Australia's international rural development interventions). Consequently there is little expertise in the theory or practice of regional planning and development to draw on, again with 'developing countries' experience being the exception.

At first glance this may be interpreted as an obstacle: few theories or models to draw on, few successes or failures for guidance, few practitioners to recruit. Given the special character of Aboriginal regional planning, lack of irrelevant preconceptions and entrenched practices could prove advantageous and could open up opportunities rather than cut them off. However, there are plenty of other preconceptions and practices which impose themselves on Aboriginal regional planning.

Planning without the capacity to implement

Virtually all regional planning and regional development is initiated outside of a region by central governments which are preoccupied with financial accountability and expenditures which conform to programs or project rules set externally. ATSIC regional planning is likely to follow to this practice.
It is customary, however, in regional development for specialised central and regional agencies to be established to act as the instruments through which planning and development are implemented. Programs and sub projects continue for several years, with substantial investments of financial and staff support, as well as encouragement of grassroots participation.

Central government has initiated Aboriginal regional planning by including the requirement in ATSIC legislation. There is little evidence so far, though, that financial and human resources have been committed by ATSIC to the regions at levels which will support regional development planning of major consequence. The Commonwealth government seems initially to have presumed that ATSIC regional development planning would be a one-off activity which required only a short-term input of financial resources; this despite the recommendation of the consultants for trained Regional Planning Officers attached to each regional council, upfront training and on-the-job action-based learning and 'three year, rolling, global budgets' for all activities associated with regional councils, such as, regional planning...' (Coopers & Lybrand 1991, III). Endorsement of ATSIC regional planning by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston 1991, Rec. 203), and by the Audit of ATSIC Regional Administration (ANAO 1992, 6.6.4), has not yet led to any significant increase in staffing and resourcing.

Lack of authority and powers

Although special-purpose agencies may be set up to prepare regional plans, implementation is frequently expected to occur through the instruments of local government and local planning authorities. Regional planning elsewhere has met with limited success because, among many reasons, consultative groups, regional task forces and local planning authorities lack legislative or other authority to get the cooperation and coordination which implementation of regional planning demands.
Given the widespread evidence of lack of concern on the part of local government in most Australian states for the needs of Aboriginal residents (Rumley 1986; Toomelah Report 1988), it is unrealistic to look to mainstream local government bodies for significant support to regional and local Aboriginal plan implementation.

The Coopers and Lybrand report on constraints on ATSIC regional planning noted, with particular reference to Western Australia, that models for coordination and planning appear effective in theory, but there is little evidence of their success in practice. They appear 'to generate goodwill, but to achieve little in relation to coordination and effective service delivery' (Coopers and Lybrand 1991, Issues for ATSIC Management to Address). This is, in large measure, because of shifting and overlapping authority between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments over responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and provision of government services to Aboriginal people. Crough points out that ATSIC is principally a service delivery agency mainly concerned to achieve efficient service delivery and to account for expenditure of public funds to the Commonwealth Parliament (despite its rhetoric of self-determination and social justice); that emphasis is being given to bilateral agreements with State and Territory governments; and that State and Territory governments have a basic principle of mainstreaming service delivery to Aboriginal people (Crough 1993, 111 & 115); and that those governments and their local government instruments are frequently delinquent in service delivery to Aboriginal communities.

ATSIC regional development planning has, as noted above, no regional development agency supporting it, unless ATSIC itself should be presumed to be that agency, and ATSIC has no designated specialist regional development planning staff at either the central office or regional levels, few carefully thought out policies, and few effective instruments for development planning.* Similarly there is little meaningful authority behind regional planning: neither ATSIC councils, nor the

* ATSIC is attempting to address these deficiencies in response to recent critiques.
Commissioners, nor the ATSIC public service have the power to obtain compliance from other governments and their agencies with ATSIC regional plans, or even to get them to take account of the plans if they do not wish to. Legislative responsibility to plan is not back by legislative authority to implement.

Lack of participation and empowerment

Elsewhere more and more emphasis is being placed on the participation of local citizens in planning for development. Although this frequently involves only elites and is often confined to details of local projects rather than more fundamental choices (see Smith 1982 and Wolfe 1993a for an elaboration of participation at the operational [project], strategic [options and implications] and normative [value-driven] levels), there are encouraging signs from Canada that Aboriginal people are beginning to directly involved not only at the local level, but also, as of right, at the higher levels of decision making. As John Friedmann has recently argued, local community struggles and mobilisation and the transformation of social into political action at higher territorial levels are mutually supportive and complementary, and must be pursued concurrently (Friedmann 1992, viii, 171).

In Australia, participation by Aboriginal people in critical decisions as of right, rather than on sufferance, is in its infancy. Little credence is given to the magnitude of political barriers, in addition to the socio-cultural barriers, to Aboriginal participation, and little consideration is directed to how to overcome them. The elected arm of ATSIC, while increasing participation of Aboriginal people in specific aspects of decision-making from the regional to the national level, is itself a non-Aboriginal Commonwealth government structure, and is constrained as to what it can deal with by the legislation which controls it, the budgets which enable it to function, and the relatively small portion of the total financial support to Aboriginal people which it has responsibility to allocate.
There are a number of hopeful signs, however. For example, in the Torres Strait, Islanders are claiming and acting on that right. Under the auspices of the Island Co-ordinating Committee (ICC), Torres Strait Islanders themselves are developing a Marine Strategy for the Torres Strait (MaSTS) (Mulrennan et al 1993). Though referred to in the Draft ATSIC regional plan, it is noteworthy that it is not a prominent feature of the plan.

**Emphasis on infrastructure and service delivery**

Because of personal experience as citizens, or through professional education, or in-service training by professionals, the majority of politicians, government agency staff and consultant planners tend to the view that planning is about the more efficient delivery of a limited array of services typical of those planned for in Australian towns and cities. Top of the list, therefore, is planning for physical infrastructure and for housing. Because of the orientation of government programs in recent years, these are supplemented by emphasis on planning for enterprise development, for employment, and for training.

Emphasis on service delivery tends to obscure the fact that service utilisation is equally important. Concern for delivery, or provision, is input oriented; concern for utilisation is outcome oriented. Insufficient consideration is still given to whether services are used, and, if used, how they are used, and whether they are producing long-term beneficial effects.

Although these types of services are of critical importance to most Aboriginal people because of their inadequateness, so too are control of land (Coopers and Lybrand 1991, Planning Environment — Constraints), social justice, sustainable environmental use and management, mental as well as physical health, and cultural and spiritual revitalisation (Johnston 1991): those things that are at the heart of human development and human flourishing. For Aboriginal people these make the difference between survival and 'thrival'.

Planning systems are not set up to deal with these issues. Regional development acknowledges their significance but has few tools to promote them. And, as has been outlined above, existing legislative and other relationships between Commonwealth, States and Territories, and Aboriginal people in Australia are not designed to bring about their resolution or improvement (for a careful and detailed analysis of the limitations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which touches on many of these key issues, see Rowse 1992b).

**Continued domination of the centre or 'the top'**

One of the most intractable challenges which regional development planning initiatives have been unable to meet is how to make effective links between the increased involvement of disadvantaged citizens at the base, or grassroots, which is contributing to development 'from the bottom up' (Ross & Usher 1986), and existing or new central government programs initiated in the name of regional development (Stöhr & Taylor 1981; Quarles van Ufford et al 1988). More often than not central programs and initiatives, including the planning initiative itself, become political and bureaucratic hurdles and hindrances to be overcome, rather than supports to be used. This may be the outcome and the fate of the ATSIC regional planning program unless functionally effective intra- and inter-organisational linkages are established to support regional and local planning efforts.

It is in this broad context of limited opportunities and formidable constraints that Aboriginal regional development planning is expected to take place.

**ATSIC regions, Aboriginal regions and regional planning**

Aboriginal regional development planning also takes place in a more specific regional context. ATSIC regions and regional planning differ
from much of what has occurred elsewhere under the rubric of regional planning and regional development.

The sixty 'regions' into which Aboriginal Australia has been divided are subunits of the administrative regions into which ATSIC has divided the States and Northern Territory. They have few, if any, of the geographical, economic, political, social, or even cultural characteristics usually associated by geographers and regional scientists with a region. In no part of Australia is there an ATSIC regional council and council area which was in existence as a spontaneous and voluntary coming together of Aboriginal groups: they are all creatures created by ATSIC in the last two years, and derive what little power and authority they have from ATSIC legislation and the Commonwealth government.

Little evidence exists that Aboriginal people were asked about their conceptions of what would constitute a workable, meaningful region. Pertinent to Aboriginal regional planning, little evidence exists that ATSIC gave consideration to what might constitute a meaningful region for development and planning from an Aboriginal perspective. Promotion of community planning generated considerable discussion on the meaning and nature of community for Aboriginal people (B Smith 1989; Elderton 1991; Johnston 1991, 113; Wolfe 1993a&c). Only Rowse (1991, 6) has dealt in any depth with this issue as it relates to ATSIC regions, noting that what Aboriginal people have in common is their gravitation to the local, particular and familiar. Elsewhere Rowse (1992a, 100) goes on to argue that Aborigines have engaged in the task of 'domain preservation' where the distinct domain is structured through political relations, honour and indebtedness, and the relatively unfettered consumption of time. According to Rowse, their 'tendency to disaggregation' and loose and temporary forms of collective action:

sit awkwardly with administrative notions and technologies which are inclined towards aggregation, the unification of sovereignties across space and the persistence of corporate forms through time (Rowse 1992a, 99).

ATSIC regions are, however, consistent with the way in which regional delineation has occurred in Australia generally, where it 'owes more to
politics and to the sometimes arbitrary decisions of statisticians than to nice theoretical constructs' (Clare 1991a, 15), or to the way the people themselves construct their 'region'. The reference to politics here is pertinent, though it does not refer to Aboriginal politics. Regional consciousness in non-Aboriginal Australia, though it varies greatly in intensity across the country, has a strong political expression. Many elected politicians regard themselves as being the representative of people of a particular region. Politicians endorsed the establishment of ATSIC 'regions'. As Rowse perceptively notes, the ATSIC regional arrangements:

risk obscuring an ideologically crucial boundary between non-Aboriginal state structures and the Aboriginal organisations which give form and strength to their local constituencies (Rowse 1991, 12).

It is noteworthy that the April 1993 policy response by ATSIC to administrative difficulties with regional councils is not to increase the number: it is to almost halve the number, with serious implications for the regional planning efforts which had already been undertaken.

Across many of the regions (parts of northern Australia being the exception), Aboriginal people are the minority population, and are scattered in relatively small concentrations. In sections of some cities (Redfern in Sydney, for example) there are large numbers of Aboriginal people within a relatively confined area, but they are still a minority group. There is 'a diversity and lack of cohesiveness and homogeneity within communities and regions' (Coopers and Lybrand 1991, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Planning Environment — Constraints).

In metropolitan regions there is often no identifiable Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and many do not identify with established organisations, while in rural and remote areas people from different tribal and language groupings have been congregated together for the convenience of missionaries and administrators (Coopers and Lybrand 1991, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Planning Environment — Constraints).

ATSIC regional council boundaries are presently under review, since many Aboriginal communities and regional councils feel that the boundaries have been arbitrarily and inappropriately drawn in such a way
that related groups are split between councils, and unrelated groups are placed together. It is not surprising, therefore, that peoples, communities of residence and organisations thrown together in ATSIC council regions do not share common development goals. Nor is it surprising, as Coopers and Lybrand noted, that there is a pervasive lack of commitment to the concept of 'region' upon which the entire regional planning activity is premised. The original proposal for ATSIC for 'some 28 regions' (Hand 1987, 3) was increased substantially to the present sixty: a major concession to the significance of localism within Aboriginal culture (Rowse 1991, 11). Evidence suggests that this is still far too few 'regions' to accommodate the diversity and localism of the Aboriginal domain (the April 1993 proposed revisions to regional council boundaries will reduce the number of regions from sixty to thirty-six).

Furthermore, Aboriginal regional planning is taking place in a context, on the one hand, of widespread decline of rural and primary resource-based economies and on the other, of inner city decline and joblessness. Experience elsewhere suggests that these problems alone demand a rethinking of approaches, and very long-term commitments.

ATSIC was alerted by the Coopers and Lybrand report to many of the constraints just discussed (Coopers and Lybrand 1991, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Planning Environment — Constraints). The list of constraints might have been expected to be so overwhelming in its message that regional planning would be given little chance of success. But the consultants concluded that 'despite the constraints, there is overall support for the ATSIC philosophy and model, that it is the way to go and that the constraints do not make regional planning impossible': an optimism itself difficult to justify unless there were clear indications that ATSIC intended to give regional planning significant time, resources and authority.
Conclusion

There are few if any precedents in regional development or regional planning anywhere (as far as I have been able to discern) of a relatively powerless and often poor and poorly educated minority being expected to plan for itself under the auspices of an elected council whose limited authority is derived not from its constituents but from its creators: a council which, moreover, has been granted limited financial and human resources to bring to bear to the task. These and other issues are explored in the second paper on regional planning (NARU Discussion Paper 18).

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