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# THE BIG PARTY SYNDROME

A Study of the Impact of Special Events  
and Inner Urban Change in Brisbane

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JANELLE BROWN  
KEN BUTLER  
MORRIE O'CONNOR  
MARIA TENNANT  
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All of us in turn were advised and assisted by numerous other people whom it would be invidious to attempt to record. ETHEL KABOTH extremely efficiently and willingly did the bulk of the typing. Graphics were prepared by GLENN THOMAS of the Queensland Institute of Technology.

Phil Day

THE STUDY BRIEF

In June 1988, in recognition of the indications of concern and uncertainty in the community about the implications of major developments and about the future planning and management of the changing urban environment, the Commonwealth Minister for Local Government, Senator the Hon. Margaret Reynolds, funded the present study as part of the Australian Government's ongoing Local Government Development Program. The study brief formulated by the Office of Local Government, Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, called for an assessment of the socio-economic implications for local government and the community of major developmental events such as Expo '88. It was envisaged that, using the impact of Expo '88 as a primary case study, the project would identify the impact of major developments upon the inner urban environment of Brisbane generally and upon lower income and disadvantaged groups in particular; the likely future direction of urban changes; and the environmental planning and service provision implications for local government.

It was agreed that the study would be carried out under the auspices of the University of Queensland Department of Social Work by a project group directed and co-ordinated by Messrs. P.D. Day (latterly of the Department of Geographical Sciences) and A.D. Kelly (Department of Social Work), assisted by an advisory committee, and that the results of the study would be submitted to the Office of Local Government on or before 31 December 1988.

## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Expo '88 will doubtless be a focus of research for a long time to come. Its many and varied impacts will provide a fertile field for analysis and evaluation across many professional disciplines. As more data become available over time, it will be possible to assess particular impacts in detail. Within its time constraints the present study does not purport to be a definitive evaluation. Indeed, it is important to appreciate that it does not purport to be an evaluation of Expo '88 but rather *an initial overview of urban change exemplified by and accentuated by Expo*. This of course is an even wider and more ambitious assignment than an evaluation of Expo *per se* - and even less amenable in the short term to definitive appraisal. Thus the results of the study should be viewed in their proper perspective.

Conceivably later information and subsequent research into specific aspects of Expo may suggest amendments in some matters of detail, and perhaps in shades of emphasis. Nevertheless the members of the study group believe that the broad thrust of the study is unlikely to be substantially affected.

Conclusions which emerge from the study are summarised sequentially hereunder in the order in which they are derived from the text. Some are specific to Brisbane. Others have a wider application. Most are directed to governments, but some conclusions prompted by contemplation of urban change in the late twentieth century raise philosophical issues for society at large.

1. The inner suburbs of Brisbane are demonstrably vulnerable to structural change and contain a high proportion of people on the margins of society who are least able to cope with structural change. (Chapter 2)
2. Expo '88 has had widespread, well documented, if not readily quantifiable, negative personal and social impacts on the people of South Brisbane and West End, one positive by-product of which, however, has been a re-affirmation of community spirit and militant activism transcending social and institutional boundaries; the majority of retail traders in the area experienced a negative or neutral impact. (Chapter 3)
3. *Queensland made virtually no attempt to identify and anticipate the likely social impact of Expo '88; social impact assessment of all development proposals should be an integral part of the urban planning process; a social impact assessment should be required to identify whether (and how) the development proposed will ameliorate social inequities or (in the long term) unemployment, since these are commonly asserted justifications for more development.* (Chapters 4, 16 and 18)

4. *There is no single body in Brisbane or south-east Queensland responsible for monitoring the housing situation, assembling and disseminating authoritative information about the nature and location of demand, or co-ordinating remedial action; the housing situation in Queensland is characterised by fragmented responses by a variety of public and private bodies operating without regular communication; this is paralleled by the absence of any courses of training in housing as a generic field of study in the tertiary institutions. (Chapter 4)*
5. *Before giving support or funding for special events such as Expo, the Commonwealth should ensure that state housing authorities have assessed the probable housing impacts and made adequate provision for them. (Chapter 5)*
6. *The Commonwealth should continue to press the Queensland Housing Commission to increase its public rental stock to a level more in line with the Australian average. (Chapter 5)*
7. *Through the Commonwealth Department of Housing's representative on the Local Government and Community Housing Program State Advisory Committee, the Commonwealth should support the funding of rental housing co-operatives, particularly in areas such as the Brisbane "frame" area where traditional low income private renting is under threat. (Chapter 5)*
8. *The state should increase public rental housing in Queensland to the Australian average so that lower income families in Queensland are not disadvantaged by having to rely so heavily on a volatile private market, and in particular increase public rental housing in the Brisbane frame area. (Chapter 5)*
9. *Through the Queensland Housing Commission representation on the LGCHP State Advisory Committee, the state, like the Commonwealth, should support the funding of rental housing co-operatives, particularly in areas such as the Brisbane frame. (Chapter 5)*
10. *The state should exercise ministerial discretion to make the Housing Interest Subsidy Scheme available to housing co-operatives. (Chapter 5)*
11. *The state should establish a mechanism to promote joint Queensland Housing Commission and Brisbane City Council co-operation in the provision of low income citizens' housing in the Brisbane frame area; and, in recognition of the increasing role of the community sector, establish a consultative mechanism between the Queensland Housing Commission and the community housing sector. (Chapter 5)*

12. Brisbane City Council should specifically acknowledge the need to preserve housing in the Brisbane frame area, particularly lower income housing, and establish staff resources to co-operate with the Housing Commission to this end. (Chapter 5)
13. Brisbane City Council should adhere to its Town Plan and cease using the rezoning process to allow further commercial encroachment into residential areas. Town planning controls, if implemented, can prevent the encroachment of commercial development into residential areas, and the outward expansion of the CBD can be prevented if future CBD-type development is diverted into the regional business centres for which provision has been made in the Brisbane Town Plan since 1975. (Chapters 5 and 13)
14. Population growth and redevelopment will inevitably (and properly) increase land values; there is no way the preservation of a socio-economic mix in the inner urban areas can be achieved without public sector intervention. (Chapter 6)
15. In the context of finite resources the objectives of promoting further development and population growth need to be clearly identified and their implications need to be understood; there is no evidence that the amelioration of unemployment and social inequities will be achieved merely by further growth and development. (Chapters 6, 16, 17, 18)
16. There are economic as well as humanitarian and philosophical reasons which justify the provision of public rental accommodation in inner urban areas for people dependent upon access to community support services. (Chapter 6)
17. Public sector intervention to provide affordable housing in inner urban areas is justified in the interests of preserving balanced, integrated communities; this is a separate question from the general question of housing affordability. (Chapter 6)
18. The socio-economic and environmental implications of metropolitan growth are insufficiently understood; community endorsement of population growth and "development" is irreconcilable with the community's resentment of consequences of population growth and development which are inevitable. (Chapter 6)
19. There is as yet unrealised scope in Brisbane for increasing accessibility to inner urban residential accommodation at acceptable density standards by implementing a dual occupancy policy and by providing more realistically for multiple dwelling units intermediate between detached houses and three-storey walk-up unit blocks. (Chapter 6 and Note 7)

20. The *Residential Tenancies Act 1975* is outdated and deficient and provides only minimal protection for tenants in normal circumstances; the experience of Expo '88 indicates that *special events create abnormal housing market circumstances in which tenants require extra protection.* (Chapter 7)
21. Expo '88 has confirmed a *very large underutilisation of public transport capacity in Brisbane* and demonstrated that Brisbane's public transport services could cope with a very substantial increase in patronage; this spare capacity is unlikely to be utilised, however, until road space and central city parking pricing mechanisms reflect the real community costs of private car usage, and while personal mobility is predicated on the *ownership* of personal transport. (Chapter 9)
22. Within any given community special events such as Expositions will result in a diversion and redistribution of resources (which may or may not be desirable); this will *not* represent a net gain unless additional expenditure is attracted from outside the community. (Chapter 10)
23. It is not possible to quantify all the public and private costs and all the public and private benefits of staging special events such as Expositions, and the requirement that Expo '88 should not impose a burden of cost "*on the Government of Queensland*" appears in retrospect to have been misconceived at least, if not mal-intentioned. (Chapter 10)
24. Citizen participation in town planning, and the rigorous implementation of town plans by local authorities, is inhibited by the cost and rigid legal formality of Queensland's totally judicialised planning appeals system and the conduct of appeals on an adversarial basis. (Chapter 13)
25. In the particular political and administrative circumstances which have evolved in Brisbane *the scope for effective citizen consultation in metropolitan planning and management is presently limited*, and federal assistance to research and establish an appropriate participatory mechanism is warranted. (Chapters 13 and 17)
26. The success of Expo as a community experience reinforces the need for town planners to co-operate with social planners and recognise that town planning must take account of social and economic considerations as well as physical land use and urban design. (Chapters 14 and 15)

27. If local government in Queensland aims to be a true level of government, *local authorities will need to look beyond their traditional preoccupation with property-related works and services and accept more responsibility for community development and housing*; Brisbane City Council has been conspicuously reluctant to acknowledge this. (Chapter 15)
28. The elected national government, which represents Australia to the outside world, has the resources and an obligation to monitor the nation's performance across the socio-economic spectrum, set standards, and redress interstate and inter-regional disparities in the overall national interest; *to assert the primacy of "states' rights" over the national interest is to deny Australian nationhood and regress to pre-federation parochialism*. (Chapter 17)
29. The role of the Commonwealth in urban planning and management needs to be identified and re-affirmed; in terms of maximising national productivity and international competitiveness the Commonwealth has reason to be concerned with the efficiency of metropolitan planning and management and, notwithstanding constitutional constraints, there are ways and means open to the Commonwealth to exercise a constructive influence. (Chapter 17)
30. While individual members of the community should be able to profit from their labour and enterprise, the environment will continue to be threatened by private greed and the power of increasingly unequal wealth *unless land is recognised as a community resource the use of which should be paid for at its true use value and the incremental capital value of which should be retained by the community*. (Chapter 18)