

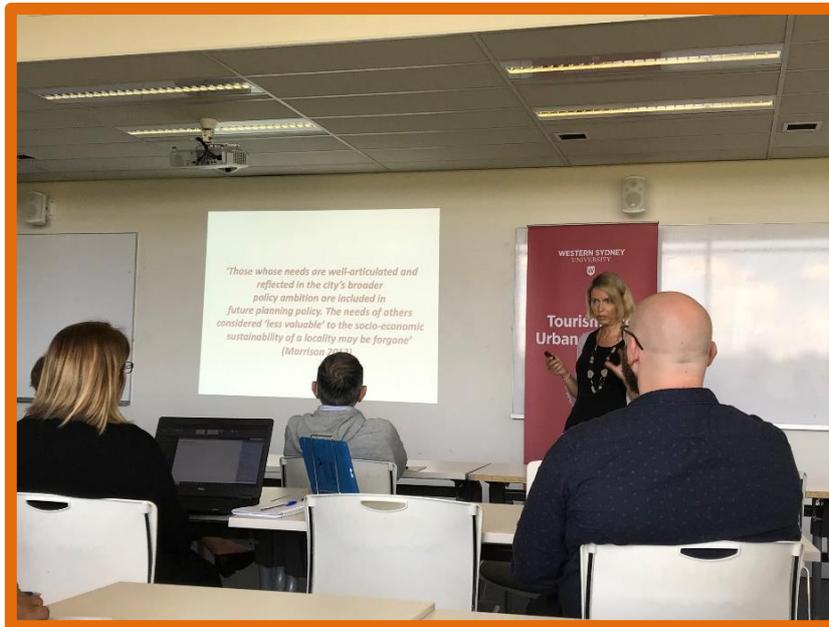


SEMINAR REPORT:

‘Planning, Politics and Power’ Professorial Lecture

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PLANNING, POLITICS AND POWER PROFESSORIAL LECTURE

By Amy Lawton and Laura Butler, Social Research and Information Officers, WESTIR Limited

WESTIR Limited attended a professorial lecture by [Professor Nicky Morrison](#) titled 'Planning, Politics and Power' at [Western Sydney University](#) in October 2019. The professorial lecture was part of Western Sydney University's Research Week 2019.

The professorial lecture looked at four planning case studies from Professor Morrison's career: Cambridge (England), Shenzhen (China), Accra (Ghana) and now Western Sydney (Australia). It explored the challenges that urban planners face in managing economic, social and environmental priorities and how they reconcile competing stakeholder expectations and conflicting interests. The premise of the lecture was exploring who the 'winners' and 'losers' were in planning decisions and outcomes, by considering the following quote:

"Those whose needs are well articulated and reflected in the city's broader policy ambition are included in future planning policy. The needs of others considered 'less valuable' to the socio-economic sustainability of a locality may be foregone." (Morrison 2013)

Urban planners often find it difficult to address the environmental, economic and social dimensions of the 'land use planning challenge' as the planning system is intertwined with short-term politics, investment decisions, vested interests and non-formal codes of behaviour. The following international case studies provide an insight into who owns land, who owns development rights, and who the winners and losers are in each planning system.

Case Study 1: Cambridge, England

In England, one third of land is owned by aristocracy but the government owns the development rights. This means that every developer needs to get approval before development occurs, with the vision that no one should be worse off due to development. Professor Morrison discussed the Cambridge urban extension sites, which have experienced consistent growth around the historic university. The 'winners' of planning decisions have been land and home owners in the area, while those who cannot afford housing and the surrounding green space have been the 'losers'. In response to increasing inequality, urban planners implemented several planning strategies including a special review of the inner green belt and key worker housing for those in the public sector. Statutory requirements for developers to include a proportion of subsidised affordable rental housing was also raised as a strategy.

Case Study 2: Shenzhen, China

In China, land is owned by the government, who then lease it to the public. It is a unique situation, with a centralised government operating in a decentralised governance model. Professor Morrison was invited to Shenzhen as an advisor to the Ministers, with the aim of implementing the first public housing act in China. This has been difficult to achieve with local municipalities under pressure to:

- Retain land transaction revenues
- Create strong incentives to maintain high land values
- Prioritise economic growth over social equity goals
- Attract talented workers to sustain place competitiveness

As a result of these pressures, Professor Morrison discussed how Shenzhen had adopted 'urban entrepreneurialism' as a planning strategy. The concept of 'key worker housing', seen in England, was translated into 'talented worker housing' in order to maintain economic growth and competitiveness. By prioritising the needs of private sector employees over others, Shenzhen has seen hundreds of thousands of people displaced as it 'upgrades' its urban villages. There is, however, a commitment to see an affordable housing target for the city to address ongoing housing affordability issues.

Case Study 3: Accra, Ghana

In Ghana, the land is mostly owned by tribal chiefs and a small proportion is owned by the state. As part of her work with Amnesty International, Professor Morrison explored how Accra, Ghana's capital, experiences issues such as lack of tenure security, grossly inadequate living conditions, and a vulnerability to forced evictions. In many areas of the city where slums are present, there are vested interests in maintaining this 'slum informality' – that is, the government maintains the status quo until they decide what to do with it, the tribal chiefs capitalise on the inequality, and the situation is tacitly accepted by the relatively powerless slum residents. This case study is a good example of how "the needs of those considered 'less valuable' are foregone".

Case Study 4: Western Sydney, Australia

Professor Morrison finished her lecture by looking at Western Sydney, the region in which she currently works and lives. After years of political wrangling, the ambitious plans for Western Sydney are a once in a lifetime opportunity to get it right. Despite being relatively early in the process, developments such as Western Sydney Airport have potential winners and losers due to land use zoning granting priority for certain land uses over others. The potential 'winners' include landowners near the Badgerys Creek site who may receive large windfalls from selling their land, while potential 'losers' are those whose land may be devalued around areas such as South Creek. Professor Morrison called on urban planners for Western Sydney to ensure inclusive growth for all by:

- Engaging the community in the planning process, including the marginalised,
- Not selling people empty promises, and,
- Understanding the real importance of place-making, including holding developers to account in meeting this obligation.

Throughout the lecture, Professor Morrison also spoke about the role of academics in the planning system. She suggested that planning academics have a responsibility to theorise, track, question, hold to account and proactively shape planning systems so they are underpinned with principles of equity and social justice.

