PART I
INTRODUCTION

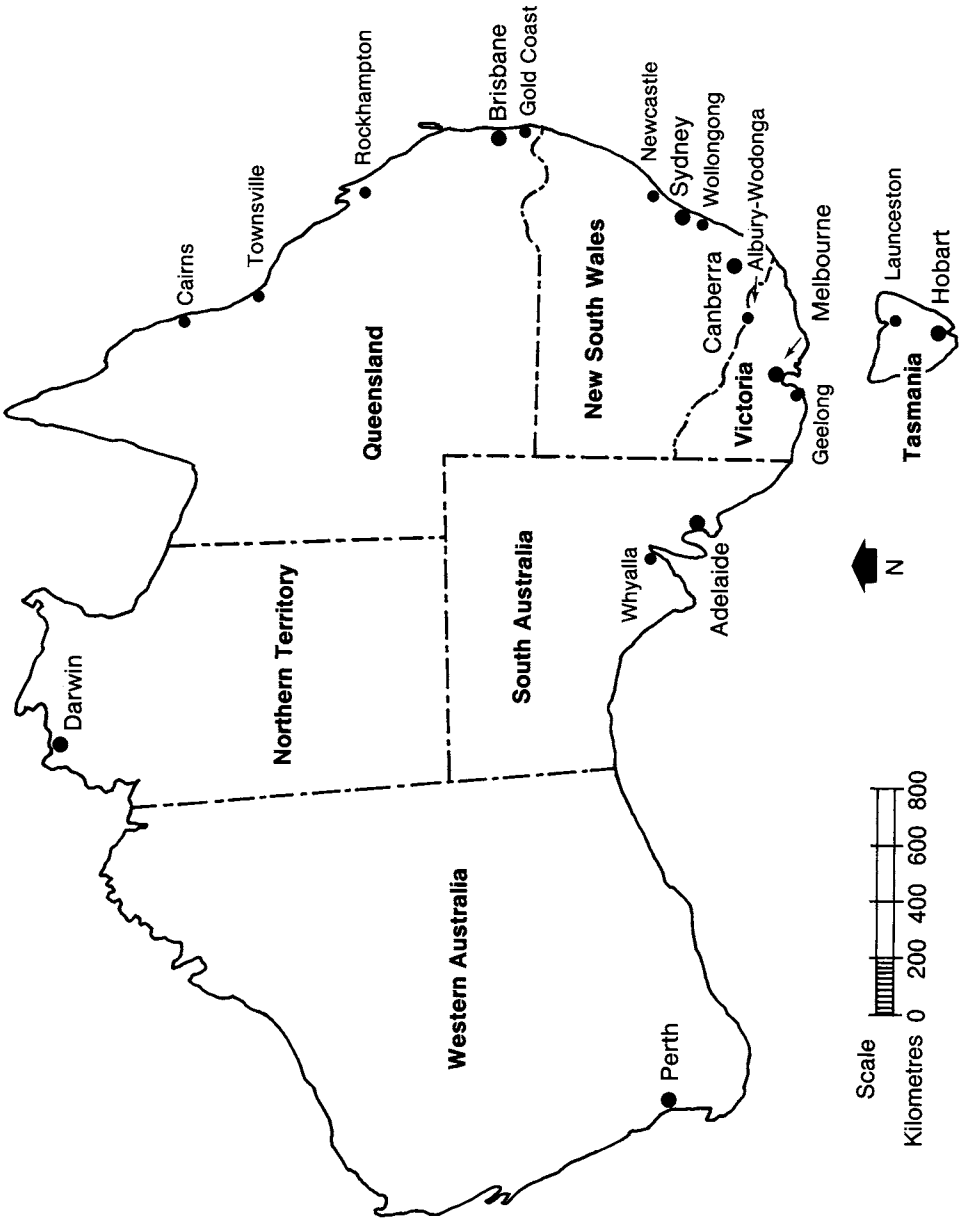
1 MELBOURNE ENTERS THE 1990s

IT IS early in 1991 and the world awaits with bated breath the United Nations' deadline of 15 January for President Saddam Hussein to withdraw from his occupation of Kuwait. The world has not known a similar tension since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 when John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev drew back from the brink of conflict.

But even the Gulf crisis is edged off the top of the front page of the *Australian* (8 January) by the headlines: 'Pressure mounts on governments as economic downturn takes heavy toll' and 'Victoria facing financial crunch'. On inside pages we read that the 'Recession storm hits with unequal force'—with Victoria rather badly placed—and that the 'City's office boom looks set to bust'. On the same day, in a leading article Melbourne's prominent morning paper the *Age* comments on the latest moves to avert a crisis in housing and the State Government's attempt to resolve this by a new home-finance scheme. One of the paradoxical contradictions in the housing area is that at a time when prices in the metropolitan area have been falling in real terms after a spectacular boom in the late 1980s, affordability is still near the all-time low. Only two days later, Melburnians read that:

> funding for infrastructure will be one of the most important issues of the 1990s. At a time when our cities are showing signs of urban decay, governments are faced with the need to provide facilities for a rapidly increasing population on the expanding urban fringe (the *Age*, 10 January 1991: 10).

Lest these events and reactions be seen as selectively picked out of context, consider the State Government's land-use planning agenda of the previous few years. After some twenty-seven years of Liberal (conservative) governments, the electors of Victoria returned a Labor State Government in 1982 which was committed to clean, open and efficient administration. Indeed, it was this corporate style which came to be the dominant quality of the period of John Cain's premiership until his resignation in 1989. The Cain years of 1982–89 saw the creation of new large government departments and the development of a managerialist style of behaviour in which the high points of policy articulation were marked by a long series of 'strategies'—many of which were directly or indirectly relevant to land-use planning policy. The 1980s also saw a number of similar strategies produced by the largest local government authority—the Melbourne City Council (MCC). From public pronouncements on these, and the



1.1 Australia, Victoria, Melbourne.

reactions of the responsible news media, with hindsight we can distil the salient concerns of strategic land-use planning policy in the 1980s. First let us look at the main urban development characteristics—demography, economy and geography—of Victoria and Melbourne during the decade just past.

The population of the State of Victoria grew very slowly during the 1980s, just passing four million about the middle of the decade, a little under one-quarter of the nation. All the indications are that there will be no significant shifts, up or down, in this size or proportion as the Australian economy continues to stagnate and is increasingly exposed to the rigours of global investment and disinvestment patterns.

Within Victoria and Melbourne a number of slow, steady, but significant shifts have been occurring. The era of increasing metropolitan dominance ended twenty years ago when Melbourne's share of the State population reached 68 per cent; by 1986 this had drifted down to 66 per cent (just under three million) and is still falling. But, as in almost all metropolitan regions in Western democracies, this decline is more a reflection of statistical boundaries than of real socio-economic significance. The fastest-growing parts of Victoria are those areas on the immediate fringe of Melbourne—such as Bacchus Marsh, Gisborne, Kilmore, Healesville and Warragul—where the government expects growth of around 43,000 between 1988 and 2001. Taking the broadest view, a recent government study (Ministry of Planning and Environment, 1990) forecasts that Melbourne plus these outskirts may grow in population from 3,121,130 in 1988 to 3,558,480 in 2001—an increase of well over 430,000 persons which is described dramatically in some official circles as 'building Canberra in ten years'; without, the observer might cynically respond, the lavish infrastructure provided by the nation's taxpayers! But such total population figures mask the potential demand for new housing since, almost everywhere, the average household size has been falling—and shows no sign of levelling off—from 3.62 in 1947 to 2.97 in 1981 to 2.88 in 1986. To give some idea of the significance of these figures, a population of three million would obviously occupy one million dwellings at an average household size of 3.00, but if the average household size were to drop to 2.80, an extra 63,000 dwellings would be needed for that same population. More and more households are of one and two persons, fewer and fewer of four persons or more. Melbourne's population is also ageing: the proportion of people of sixty-five years and over went up from 8.6 per cent in 1976 to 10.1 per cent in 1986, and these trends raise questions about social services, housing and location.

The economic changes in the State and in Melbourne are rather more striking and give policy makers as well as citizens cause for concern. For the whole of the postwar period, Victoria was the heart of Australia's manufacturing industry, and Melbourne had the lion's share of jobs and investment. At its peak in the early 1970s, manufacturing employed almost one-third of Melbourne's adult men and one-quarter of its women; by 1981 these proportions had fallen to 28.7 per cent and 19.7 per cent and by 1986 to 23.8 per cent and 15.9 per cent; the likelihood is that they have fallen even more sharply in the current deep recession. The country's economy has become increasingly exposed to global competition, wherein relatively high wages and union organisation are seen as major disincentives by both overseas investors and the controlling multinational companies, in typical sectors such as motor vehicles and white goods manufacture. Redundancies in such declining industries as clothing and footwear and in the beleaguered mining and agricultural sectors, largely account for the sharp rises in unemployment in Melbourne—up from around 7.5 per cent in 1981 to about

7.9 per cent in 1986 and 8.4 per cent in 1990. During the 1980s, Victoria had the enviable record of the lowest unemployment in the country; at the outset of the 1990s it was the highest (M. Logan et al., 1981).

The evolving geography of Melbourne showed a broad continuation of earlier trends during the 1980s. The 'suburban sprawl'—a catch-all term for continuing development at the fringe; the decentralisation of jobs, schools and shopping, albeit uneven and slower, continued as did the tendency for much faster suburbanisation to the north-east, the east and the south-east rather than the north, north-west and west. But this is to look only at overall patterns—the aerial photographs as it were. Such a broad picture conceals matters of far greater social and political significance.

During the 1960s the phenomenon and the term 'gentrification' were first encountered in the inner suburbs of Melbourne with their largely Victorian and Edwardian housing stock. Parkville, Carlton, East Melbourne and Fitzroy were affected first and the trend continued there but also spread to other suburbs in the 1970s. The result has been a transformation of the social geography, the local built environment and the housing stock of large parts of Melbourne. The steady invasion of most inner suburbs by the better-off, better-educated, younger and more articulate middle-class professionals is nowhere more dramatically seen than in Fitzroy, the archetype of Melbourne gentrification together with Carlton and Parkville. But other inner areas followed a bit later, in true (though inverted) 'Chicago School' fashion—South Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Middle Park, Collingwood and Richmond, and perhaps will be joined soon by Brunswick, Northcote and Williamstown.

One unfortunate result of these mass transformations has been a remorseless displacement of former working- and lower-middle-class households to the less desirable—or cheaper—middle and outer suburbs. But in stark contrast to the 1960s and early 1970s, when what were then the outer suburbs of Broadmeadows, Oakleigh, Dandenong and Doveton were developed in association with the booming new car and consumer-goods factories and readily provided with public services of all kinds, the new fringe areas are characterised by serious lack of shops, schools, public transport, child care and even basic sewer and water services.

The social and environmental plight of these outer Melbourne suburban wastelands was strongly brought home to both State and Commonwealth Governments in the Federal general election of March 1990 when dramatic swings against Labor came uncomfortably close to unseating Prime Minister Hawke's government. He got the message and immediately called a number of high-level conferences on the housing, land and infrastructure issues which had almost brought his government down, and sent out powerful warnings to the Victorian Government. State Premier John Cain reshuffled his ministries and split off a Ministry for Conservation and Environment from the new Ministry for Planning and Urban Growth—or for 'middle-class greenery' and for 'working-class sewers'—as some waggish cynics put it.

Another area of land-use planning which has been of major concern to a host of public and private interests during the 1980s is the Central Business District (CBD) and the central city generally. This concern is of course endemic in large cities in developed countries, but in Melbourne it has taken on particular local forms. The saga of planning in central Melbourne was never so dramatically punctuated as in 1980 when the State Government sacked the Melbourne City Council (Saunders, 1984) and subsequently never fully restored its planning powers.

Central business districts pose 'wicked problems' for all policy makers. By way of

brief introduction here, we may mention the MCC's Strategy Plan of 1974 as the first prominent attempt at solutions in the postwar period, to be followed by the Strategy Plan Review of 1985 which, at the time of writing, is being re-examined. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, before the merger of its town planners with the State Ministry of Planning and Environment in 1985, had always made significant mention of the CBD in its several versions of the Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme. During the Cain administrations of the 1980s the central city has loomed ever larger in policy pronouncements, where its development has been linked to the economic development of the State as a whole, or to strategies for social justice and, increasingly of late, to the wholesale promotion of an image of Melbourne as a vital, exciting and energetic place where investment will be rewarded and the Good Life may be lived.

To push these barrows—associated with several huge development possibilities: the Very Fast Train, the (failed) Olympic Games bid, the Docklands proposals and many others—the State has continually transformed its administrative structure and tended to create a number of small *ad hoc* special agencies—typified by the Major Projects Unit—geared to streamlining the paths of both public and private proposals for large and prestigious developments, cutting red tape and generally being seen to be Getting Things Done, even if that often meant going around its own planning regulations.

Such energies and enthusiasms for a small part of the State and Melbourne itself have not been confined to the public sector. A self-appointed and largely private-sector Committee for Melbourne has been very vocal in its pronouncements (though much more guarded about its inner workings) on the central city. It has attached most of its energies and statements to major image-building exercises such as those I have already mentioned and to others like the Multi-Function Polis, Docklands project and all kinds of 'mobilisations of spectacle' (Harvey, 1982; 1985). Elsewhere, especially in the media, there has been a renewed interest in, or one might say obsession with, the whole question of the vital or exciting central city. Among many commentators, John Stevens of the *Age*, in his 'Marvellous Melbourne' column, has continually bemoaned the 'deadness' of the centre, its lack of 'liveliness' and bustle especially after hours and at weekends. This is often linked with pleas for a much greater resident population, and unfavourable comparisons are drawn with Paris, London and New York. These and similar attitudes can be found in many official policy documents, for example in most of the MCC's 'Strategies' over the years.

The main point to note is the wholly unrealistic tenor of such notions and (especially in public policies) their total lack of understanding of modern urban dynamics on the one hand, and the particular motors of Melbourne's change on the other. For example almost all large city centres having considerable office areas are dead after working hours—Wall Street, the City of London, Bay Street in Toronto, 'the Loop' in Chicago—precisely because of the office monoculture. Almost all large city centres have declining populations of the desperately poor who seek for pickings, or the rich who are the only ones who can afford the rents. Apparently deaf to all the accessible evidence on the costs of living in central cities, some prominent Melburnians continue to go on about the need for a vital central city. For journalists to do so is perhaps forgivable though regrettable; for public policy makers it is inexcusable in displaying the lack of background knowledge they are well paid to command.

What general sense can be made of this selective, but I hope representative, series of historical and more recent events and attitudes? What, if anything, can

they tell us about the nature and the effectiveness of land-use planning policies and controls for Melbourne, and the political, administrative, professional and technical means which have been used? It is my contention that such a series of events can tell us a great deal which is, at the very least, suggestive of major deficiencies.

Certain observations and questions can be drawn out here, which we shall discuss in detail later. Melbourne's planners seldom if ever seem to have achieved what they set out to do, notably to guide the overall growth patterns of the metropolitan area. Why has this been so? How far has it been technical incompetence, or administrative complexity, or political chicanery, or bad luck, or a mix of all these factors? A corollary of this is the chronic tendency for public land-use policies to be reactions after the event, surprised and shocked changes of direction, closing doors when horses have bolted. Put another way, and perhaps more usefully, the planners seldom if ever seem to have forecast, even conditionally, what was *likely* to happen on the basis of what *had been* and what was *actually* happening. For example, as I write I have in front of me a number of major policy-analysis documents produced by consultants—it seems very competently, but on a one-off basis with no real hope of continuity. The documents are addressed to the future settlement pattern of the State of Victoria—why were these not produced by the public service directly?

An adequate knowledge of past and current trends in both broad and detailed land-use changes must always be related to the socio-economic context which drive them. Planners in Melbourne seem always to have lacked such foreground and background understanding and this may go some way towards explaining the consistently weak links between land-use and wider strategic policies. Certainly it is true that the Cain administration made serious attempts to do just that, but the connections were usually rhetorical and lacked any analytical base—other than that occasionally provided by consultants. If we take a wider international view, we can see innumerable examples of this kind of policy analysis for large urban regions—in the French Schémas Directeurs, the work of the SVR in the Ruhrgebiet, the English Structure Plans and the Scottish Regional Reports among many others; why has this sort of valuable (I would say essential) work seldom if ever been done on a continuing and consistent basis in Victoria? Could this lack be the main explanation for policy ignorance, reactive tendencies and enfeebled public debate?

Melbourne's strategic planning seems to be an example of the French cliché—*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*—with its long history of unprepared reactions, crisis management, sharp swings of policy and so on. The central argument of this book is that these chronic conditions have clear explanations, and hence the possibility for clear remedies. The explanations can be found in the combination of a *lack of understanding of the dynamics of urban change* (especially by the professional public service), a *lack of attention to forecasting, monitoring, research and review* associated with actual land-use policies and emergent changes, a *failure to relate land-use policies to wider public policy areas, and the failure to realise the damaging limitations of a rigid and legalistic 'zoning' basis* when it is applied to the implementation of broad land-use strategy.

Let us put the central argument another way. Town planning theory-and-practice in Western developed countries has never matured. Indeed it is chronically uncertain both in the office and the academy. The only way to achieve significantly better (self-aware and critically reflexive) practice is to build better theory. The only way to have better theory is to conduct rigorous studies of practice taking account of its specific socio-historical context, its stated aims, methods and outcomes. Such an argument is of course perfectly general and applicable to all

human practices; that town planning is one of the few exceptions in which practice has *not* been studied is a matter to which I shall refer on a number of occasions. This observation serves to emphasise the lonely, pioneering, dangerous, modest and doubtless flawed character of the research and this book. No serious attempt will be made here to tackle the development of theory; instead I hope to make one small contribution to the Herculean labour needed in the future—the theoretically-informed study of practice.

The growth and planning of a city over a lengthy period is a very complex business. Trying to explain all this is a daunting job and to do it in linear narrative, probably impossible. Therefore, like so many other authors, I had to decide in which of the limitless ways I would divide the seamless web of the story. I have done so in a three-way cut which reflects quite closely the way we divided up the actual research task. The three major 'slices'—with themes of history, sociology, and geography—are presented in the three main parts of the book.

Since these themes are sufficiently cohesive, and since the material presented in the chapters of each part is fairly complex, I decided not to provide the customary explanation of the book's structure here. Instead, I have given a short introductory chapter to each part—Chapters 3, 10 and 17—which provide outlines of the arguments and the contents of the respective constituent chapters.

A parting note to end this chapter: the actual cutting of the seamless web in three ways arose slowly, sometimes painfully, but in the end rather easily out of innumerable research discussions, formal meetings, working papers and those priceless chance encounters I have already mentioned. It was therefore most rewarding to find later the following passages by two of my chief guides.

> Space is not an empty dimension along which social groupings become structured, but has to be considered in terms of its involvement in the constitution of systems of interaction. The same point made in relation to history applies to (human) geography: there are no logical or methodological differences between human geography and sociology! (Giddens, 1984: 368).

> Ultimately, we may be able to transcend the problems inherent in our way of conceptualizing social processes and spatial form. Until that time, however all we can do is to attempt some kind of evaluation of their implications and adapt our research strategies and our policy making accordingly. It is, after all, a major tenet of scientific thought that errors can only be estimated and combated if we have an understanding of the sources from which they arise (Harvey, 1973: 49).

2 APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF LAND-USE PLANNING

SINCE all human practices are based, however unconsciously, on theory, so must any study of those practices be theoretically informed. And, since there is a large range of theoretical positions which can be adopted for such work, it is important to be clear which position is being chosen and why. The kinds of questions that one asks in a study of practice, and the kinds of answers that result, depend on what we see as the most important aspects of the phenomena, and how these are constituted and related—that is on theory. The choice of a particular theoretical position for the study of practice (or anything else for that matter) of course excludes certain other possibilities of explanation and interpretation. Clearly all social scientists hope and believe that the position they have chosen offers the best explanatory power, the greatest capture of the matters under study and the least loss of essential understanding. Equally they hope that their choice of theory, which they believe will have the greatest power to *explain* past and present practice, will also thereby offer the best possible tools for *improving* that practice and, perhaps most important, will provide supporting arguments as to *why* these changes are held to be positive.

In the social sciences, as elsewhere, the choice of theory is intimately related to the choice of methods for studying the subject of interest. For instance, if we are studying the results of a social welfare system such as unemployment benefit—the dole—we may choose a 'behaviouralist' type of theory which would lead to a research emphasis on the kinds of individuals affected, what leads some to claim benefits and not others, what is their previous employment history, and so on. By contrast, the choice of an 'institutional' type of theory would lead the researcher to place prime emphasis on the governmental agencies which deal with the dole, how they judge applicants, the decision rules they bring to bear on the granting or denial of the dole, the role of the law and the private charities . . . and so on. In general then, the choice of practical methods and fields of investigation is always based on an explicit (sometimes implicit) choice of theory. After we have decided to adopt a particular approach to a study, certain fields and methods are likely to get greater emphasis and others to be touched lightly or excluded from that point on.

This is an over-simplification: most studies in the social sciences are started off by fairly lengthy discussion of the inter-relationships between theory and method, where the central subject of study is pushed to and fro like a pendulum between

the two until some sort of satisfying equilibrium is reached. Sometimes even, the study has actually begun, and data is being collected, before it is realised that there is a misfit between theory and methods so that the path of debate must be retrodden; in fact a great deal of progress in human knowledge—for example in cosmology, anatomy, physiology and archaeology—has been achieved in such 'sleepwalking' ways (Koestler, 1959).

What happens when such fundamental precepts are applied to the study of town planning? What sorts of theoretical and methodological issues arise? What guidance can be gleaned from the experience of other researchers? If one wants to study the actual effects of land-use planning and controls, what kinds of theories and methods are likely to prove the most useful?

Rigorous studies of the practice of town planning (especially in Australia) scarcely exist; this was the main driving force behind the research on which this book is based. It is true that there are indeed one or two outstanding studies of land-use planning practice, but compared with the enormous volume of material produced by practitioners themselves around the world, documenting in great detail their policies, strategies, plans and control mechanisms, the serious academic study of all this is minute, disjointed and ephemeral. Such a remarkable state of affairs—in a widespread practice staffed by the products of hundreds of academic departments around the English-speaking world alone—has not gone unnoticed. There is a modest but most interesting scholarly literature on the lack of study of town planning practice (Huxley and McLoughlin, 1985).

Three things are noteworthy: first that these critical commentaries which try to explain the lacunae are comparable in their total size with the few serious studies which we do have; second that the best of both—the studies themselves and the commentaries on the research chasm—have come either from outside the conventional town planning schools (for example, Hall, et al., 1973; Wildavsky, 1973) or from people who form a tiny minority of town-planning academics (such as Healey, 1986; Reade, 1982b; Scott and Roweis, 1977) and finally, such work has tended to be ignored both by the practice and the academic communities we might have expected to read and question it. Such singular lack of critical awareness and reflexivity with respect to our own practice sits oddly with the notion of professional claims to competence and detailed knowledge.

These questions could easily spin outwards to become another book in the same genre as those by Forester (1989); Reade (1987) and Scott (1980). But the present intention is rather to point out the great difficulty of choosing theory and methods for this sort of research, in the near absence of any precedents for guidance. A text I have found extremely helpful in emphasising and demonstrating the reciprocal, or iterative relations between theory, methods and interim findings is the middle-period work of Castells (1983). For the time being then, an approach to the study of town planning practice must be built up virtually from scratch. However, as a preliminary step, examples of past studies of city planning (which were in no way intended to do the job we have attempted here) can be considered. We can see what sort of approaches have been tried and which ones we might 'cannibalise' in careful ways. At the same time we can conjecture how certain academic disciplines would approach the task—keeping in mind the necessity for a much wider view.

Quite a number of studies of urban planning have come from an architectonic or *urban design* perspective; this has some pride of place as one of the oldest-established ways of thinking about town planning—alongside public health and working-class housing. It springs from the 'City Beautiful' movement in the USA and from the dominance of the architectural profession in setting up British