Towards effective planning of trans-border city regions
three Australian case-studies
Aim of research

To investigate the uneven progress of policy for regional planning of Australia’s emerging internal trans-border city regions since the 1970s

Context:
Global growth of city regions, often transcending state and national borders

Case Study Research methods:

• Three city regions crossing the borders of New South Wales (NSW) with three neighbouring states/territories
• Literature review, document research, policy analysis
Three Australian case studies: Different times, different places, different success levels

Three city regions crossing state/territory borders of state of NSW with the states of Victoria and Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

1. **Albury-Wodonga**: the first trans-border planning experiment 1960s-2019
2. **National Capital City Region**: exemplar of cross-border planning 1990s-2019
3. **South-East Queensland trans-border overspill city region**: inconsistent approaches 2005-2019
Albury-Wodonga
The first trans-border planning experiment 1967-2019

• Two State governments’ (Victoria & NSW) response to pressure to decentralise Melbourne and Sydney – 1967 agreement

• National Growth Centre Strategy 1972-75 established agreement between Federal government, 2 State governments & 7 local governments – Development Corporation formed, “to acquire, hold, manage and provide land in those areas designated for development”

• Planned for city of 300,000 by year 2000 – reached only 100,000
  - too far from major cities to achieve growth targets population, economic development

• Legacies include urban & regional infrastructure and regional parklands framework

• Informal alliances & collaborations by several councils continue
  - “Two Cities: One Community Strategic Plan 2017-2021”
  - twin-towns approach rather than city region
Albury-Wodonga
Improved outlook for trans-border city region planning in 2019

• Uneven commitment by State Governments to cross-border planning – stronger from NSW than Victoria in 2019

• NSW regional plan recognises cross-border city regions


• Provisions for Joint-State agreement not yet taken up

• Renewed Federal Government interest in cities since 2015

• 2019 announcement of Albury-Wodonga Regional Deal
  - modelled on UK City Deals; AUD$3.2 million over 10 years

• Federal, NSW and Victorian governments and 2 City Councils will engage business, industry and community in a cross-border strategy for population growth and economic development.
Canberra Capital Region cross-border planning exemplar 1995-2019

• City of 400,000 people in **constrained Territory** of c2,500 km²
  - combined regional population 660,000 within one hour of city by 2036 (NSW Gov 2017b)

• 1990s: Recognition that Canberra plays a **regional city role** for surrounding NSW regions outside the ACT (Australian Capital Territory)

• **Decades of voluntary cooperation formed basis for formal planning** - Regional Leaders’ Forum (RLF), Capital Region Development Board (CRDB), planning strategy working groups
Canberra Capital Region cross-border planning exemplar 1995-2019

• Sydney-Canberra Corridor Strategy 1995
  – 200km, linking growth of both cities
  - 2 MOU Agreements (settlement pattern, water supply) signed by NSW Premier & ACT Chief Minister & regularly renewed 2006, 2011, 2016
  - ACT and Sub-Region Plan 1998 (ACT government)
  - Sydney-Canberra Corridor Regional Strategy 2007-2031 (NSW)

• Canberra Region Joint Organisation established 2015
  - 10 NSW local governments in region are members
  - ACT Government is an associate member
Canberra Capital Region cross-border planning

- Recognition of mutual benefits

- ACT-NSW cross-border planning approach reflects **community conviction** that regional prosperity is dependent on Canberra and Canberra is dependent on the region

- **Canberra offers the region** its airport, jobs, health, education, high order services, cultural institutions, lifestyle qualities

- **Surrounding region offers Canberra** a bigger market, an expanded workforce, broader housing opportunities (affordable & prestige), recreation (ski fields, mountain walks, beaches), fine produce, scenic landscapes

*Canberra region* = ACT + 9 NSW local government areas

(image: ACT Planning Strategy 2012)
Canberra Capital Region cross-border planning collaboration

- South East and Tablelands Regional Plan 2036 (NSW Gov 2017b)
  
  Vision: “a connected and borderless Canberra region ... with the nation’s capital at its heart.” (p8, emphasis added)

- ACT Planning Strategy 2012, 2018

- Regional collaboration on biodiversity conservation, transport and economic development

- Legal and contractual reforms for seamless cross-border public transport

- Supporting housing densification in Canberra without spurring low density sprawl across the border

  - in contrast to Clark County, Washington (US) where car-dependent sprawl has accompanied the compact city policies of Portland, Oregon (Bae 2000)
SEQ and North Coast NSW: uneven approaches to cross-border city region planning 2005-2019

• SEQ: Australia’s 3rd metropolitan city region
  - rapidly developing **polycentric city region of 3.5 million people**
  - projected population 5.3m by 2041
  - centred on Brisbane, 100km north of state border
  - contiguous with…

• Far North Coast New South Wales
  - ‘remote’ corner of NSW, 800km from NSW capital city, Sydney...
  - 100km from Queensland capital city of Brisbane
  - c300,000 population
  - “region of villages” and World Heritage natural areas
  - significant integration with SEQ economy, lifestyle, environment
SEQ and North Coast NSW uneasy approaches – beyond the Regional Plans

• Steady increase in recognition and action from NSW
• Fluctuating interest and action from Queensland
• Existing **MOU** renewed: Queensland and NSW Statement of Principles and Priorities for Cross-border Collaboration 2016-1019
  - economic development; services coordination; transport; national issues
  - greater adherence in regional plans of NSW than Queensland

• **SEQ Council of Mayors**
  - influential group of 10 councils recognising that SEQ “functions as a single metropolitan area”
  - does not include any NSW North Coast mayors (unlike predecessor organisations)
  - little recognition of the border or the contiguous areas beyond it

• **NSW Cross-Border Commissioner:**
  - potential for greater role; no Queensland counterpart
SEQ and North Coast NSW: addressing the trans-border interface in Regional Plans

North Coast Regional Plan 2036
(NSW Gov 2017)

Vision: “... Northern communities have established important links and are integrated with a burgeoning [SEQ]....”

• Stresses collaboration with Queensland by strengthening communities of interest and cross-regional relationships
• Devotes one of the Plan’s 25 strategies to cross-border collaboration
SEQ and North Coast NSW: addressing the trans-border interface in Regional Plans

Gateway Regional Economic Cluster

Shaping SEQ 2017
(Queensland Gov 2017)
SEQ and North Coast NSW: ignoring the trans-border interface in Local Plans?

City of Gold Coast Council (Qld) and Tweed Shire (NSW) collaboration

- combined population of 700,000 spanning the border
- rapidly growing, Australia’s sixth largest city
- Part of 3.5m SEQ population
- longstanding agreement for bi-monthly strategic regional planning consultations is sporadically enacted regarding critical matters
- Council plans ‘stop at the border’
Conclusions

• Albury-Wodonga, Australia’s oldest cross-border city region planning exercise, has been its least consistent, possibly because too far from a major metropolis…. Renewed cross-border planning efforts in 2019.

• Canberra trans-border Capital Region is the exemplar, from which SEQ-North Coast NSW could learn critical success factors, including:
  - Tight borders of ACT have made cross-border planning essential
  - Successes in formal cross-border strategic planning are built on consistent voluntary efforts and community/business ‘buy in’
  - Clear conceptualisation of a cross-border identity narrative aids public uptake and political implementation
  - Signing of MOU between State Premiers/ Chief Minister
  - Consistency in implementation
  - NSW Cross-Border Commissioner as active cross-border broker
  - the value of 50+ years of addressing cross-border planning at NSW’s state borders
Finally... Cross-border or Trans-border? Does terminology matter?

- “Trans-border” recognises trends to singular (?) city regions that ‘flow’ across borders
  - ie not merely adjacent and discrete cities/regions

- “Transborder” implies advanced cooperation across borders, so “we can no longer talk about cross-border regions, but trans-border regions” (Fehérvölgyi et al. 2012:74)
  - The above definition would exclude 2 of my 3 Australian case studies
  ....but would include the Oresund link between Copenhagen-Malmo

- “Cross-border” is used in most literature, so it is important that this paper is seen as part of the cross-border urban and regional planning governance literature