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Chapter X

Building Regional Communities in an Information Age: The Case of Greater Western Sydney

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ABSTRACT

Twelve local government authorities constitute Greater Western Sydney, the fastest growing and most diverse metropolitan region in Australia. With a regional population of 1.5 million, it has been described as the dynamic economic powerhouse of the nation. Over the last 20 years there have been efforts within the region to develop mechanisms for innovative regional governance. One of the latest, TeamWest, aims to harness people, resources, expertise and information to pursue widely shared outcomes and to deliver better planning and better services to the people who live and work in the region. It is a process of collaboration acknowledging that achieving regional social, economic and environmental outcomes depends not only on resources and skills but

also on organisation of a broad range of stakeholders. This chapter draws on the experience of the authors in TeamWest, and provides an illustration of one of the many specific initiatives of TeamWest — the development of a regional Web site as a vehicle for the exchange of knowledge and information of relevance to citizens and leaders within the region. It describes in detail how the Web site was developed, and explores the potential and issues involved in building regional governance infrastructure in an information age.

INTRODUCTION

Greater Western Sydney is the fastest growing and most diverse metropolitan region in Australia. It has been described as the dynamic economic powerhouse of the nation. After just 10 years, the University of Western Sydney (UWS) is emerging as a mature, large (30,000 students), coherent, contemporary urban university, an exemplar of a region-building institution, with a strong applied research profile and diversified research funding base. The university was established under state government legislation that emphasizes the institution's role in building the region's research base and capacity by stressing, among other things:

- The dissemination and increase of knowledge, the undertaking and promotion of research and scholarship, and contribution to the intellectual life of Greater Western Sydney
- The development of consultancy and entrepreneurial activities, including research and development initiatives, that will contribute to the development of Greater Western Sydney

UWS was restructured in 2000 and has rationalized its operations across its seven campuses, while at the same time, changing the structure to increase its competitiveness. One of the most significant developments has been to pull together the university's research, postgraduate research training, consulting, industry links, and community outreach functions into a single Division of Development. As part of this, an Office for Regional Development was established, headed by a Director, one of the authors of this chapter, Professor Kevin Sproats.

The university is now arguably better positioned to fulfil its legislative requirements in Greater Western Sydney. Described in this chapter is one arena in which the institution has been trying to engage more fully with its region. That is, involvement in regional governance and the development of partnerships with local, state, and federal government departments and organizations to develop cross-sectoral initiatives of benefit to the region.

Twelve local government authorities or councils constitute Greater Western Sydney. Over the last 20 years, there have been strenuous efforts within the region to develop mechanisms to govern. Two voluntary organizations of these councils have formed; one of nine councils called the Western Sydney Regional Organization of Councils (WSROC), the other of three councils called Macarthur Regional Organization of Councils (MACROC). The most recent governance initiative in the region has been TeamWest, instigated initially by WSROC but now incorporating WSROC and MACROC.

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