

National spotlight on urban design

Hosted by the *South Australian Integrated Design Commission* and *Urban Design Forum*, the recent *Australian Urban Design Initiative* roundtable in Adelaide marked a significant acceleration in action to use integrated urban design as a key tool for developing and managing Australia's cities and towns for the 21st century.

The two day roundtable, launched by SA Premier Mike Rann, saw more than 60 urban designers, landscape architects, architects, planners and other disciplines discuss climate change, living affordability, pollution, traffic congestion, and energy and water limitations. But the emphasis of this highly experienced and diverse group was on action, not just discussion.



▲ South Australian Premier Rann, sporting his Movember, launches AUDI

"In Australia, the property industry, planning and design professions, state architects, media and communities are all making positive contributions and raising the urban design bar, but it is a rather disjointed process - and sometime counterproductive," said Mr Horton, SA Commissioner for Integrated Design.

"The AUDI initiative recognises that the process of creating and managing urban places is not the exclusive province of the private sector, government, or any single group. By establishing the *Australian Urban Design Initiative* we're bringing together a wide range of individuals and organisations that are committed to quality urban functioning and design. We know that we can only achieve sustainable and responsive urban environments through collaboration across all sectors," said Mr Horton.

Initially inspired by the success of CAFE (the UK Commission For Architecture And the Built Environment), the *Australian Urban Design Initiative* is connecting a growing number of people and organisations, working together as a dynamic network to influence policy formation, decision making and action at national, state and local levels.

"The initiative is a generator of ideas and innovation - a force for change, not just a structure for design review," said Mr Horton. "The roundtable was not a talkfest; we came together and focussed on practical solutions that will help create and maintain socially, environmentally and economically sustainable urban environments."

Opportunities for action

It became clear during the Roundtable that there are many opportunities for positive action. A series of models for how to proceed were explored (what to do and how to do it). The complexity of the problem/challenges and contexts related to developing sustainable and well-designed cities was well recognised and generally accepted. The models for action spanned the setting up of a new organisation to a minimalist approach—a multiplicity of actions and strategies to build on current national activities, without rushing into a new urban design focused national organisation.

If it was to be a new national organisation, it would need to cover and be funded by all levels of government, but not be at the mercy of changes of government (as has been the case with UK CAFE). The structure could be linear/hierarchical, a community of interests, or a cluster with national leadership.

If it was to be a minimalist approach, a starting point would be to create a range of "projects" aimed at exploring current issues associated with creating sustainable cities in Australia, such as: a 'Clearing House' or 'Knowledge Observatory' gathering and disseminating knowledge; research, analysis and critique; gathering benchmark examples; building linkages between urban design professionals and professional bodies across

URBAN DESIGN FORUM

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the design and development sectors. These projects would have a "sunset clause" and seek to provide a clear end point for funding groups, generate dialogue across the design and associated sectors, and avoid turf wars between professional bodies.

Funding possibilities include COAG or Local Government. The Urban Design Protocol might provide an opportunity to leverage Federal funds. At the sunset of projects, consideration can be given to the closure, extension of the current projects or the introduction of new projects; the creation of a new entity or entities such as a national UDAL based on the experience gained from undertaking the research projects.

Engagement with the overall community

It was well recognised that engagement with the overall community, as well as with special interest groups was crucial. Effective action would need to address all sectors – community, private sector, professional and education institutions, and the three levels of government. There would need to be high level participation, embedding urban design in major projects from the outset.

QUDAL celebrates 10 years

Juris Greste

The Urban Design Alliance of Queensland members, friends and supporters, after a ten year long windup, let their hair down at a dress up dinner in October, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of activity and achievement. Over 150 guests offered their goodwill and best wishes for the next 10. The chief guest, the Hon. Sterling Hinchliff, Minister for Infrastructure and Planning congratulated and acknowledged UDAL's important contribution in Queensland's built environment professional community. Brisbane City Councillor Amanda Cooper presented the six previous Chairs with life memberships in recognition of their service.

However, an equally important part of the well-spirited evening was the announcement that the Governor of Queensland, Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AO has accepted to become the Patron of UDAL Inc. Qld. We are honoured and pleased to have her support and interest and look forward to meeting high vice-regal standards.

Some of the highlights over the last two years, since appointing Donnell Davis as our very able executive officer, (sadly now moving on to greater things in the international sphere) have accelerated us to new levels: an electronic network of over 1,000; exceeded target of new members and corporate supporters; a well progressing new strategic plan to 2015; established foundation institutional relationships with Bond and Griffith Universities; strengthened links with state government; 'youth' generation representative on our Board and conduct of a youth round table; major local government and corporate sponsors; links and partnerships with allied groups such as UN Habitat, Sust. Design Co-op. Research Centre and others; regular electronic newsletter; a web site; monthly well attended Forums; members collectively and individually actively furthering the urban design cause.

Vale CAFE?

Given that cities and towns are universally recognised as primary drivers of the economy, and that their quality is a primary driver of their value, it is very surprising that the incoming UK government decided to decimate CAFE – a case of ideological politics sidelining commonsense economics, shooting yourselves in the foot.

But, as the dust settles, it is clear that good ideas don't die, even if they fade in the glare of short-sighted ideology. And CAFE is a very good idea. The Australian Urban Design



▲ AUDI roundtable action in Adelaide

One of the more interesting models was to pursue the setting up of a 'foundation', based on a 'daisy wheel' of interests and activities, similar to a number of foundations operating in other spheres. The mandate would be focused but broad-based, with multiple funding sources, including endowments.

Clearly there is still much work to be done, but the participants left Adelaide with a determination and commitment to promptly pursue actions in their own particular spheres, and continue to work with each other electronically. People who have registered interest in the Australian Urban Design Initiative (aka CAFE DownUnder), but who were not at the Roundtable, will be kept up to date by email.

Preceding the party, the 'guard' was changed. Nothing like a nice meal to entice AGM attendance. The formalities were completed expeditiously to elect the new Board of: Andrew Hammonds, Chair; Peter Edwards, vice Chair; John Loneragan, Treasurer and John Clarke, Secretary, supported by a large, diverse and energetic management committee

Vision for QUADL

The new Chair, Andrew Hammonds, in summary, states his vision for QUDAL over the next few years thus:

- It focuses our attention on the outcome - which is the creation of places facilitated by urban design and other 'disciplines' like engineering, surveying and planning. By recognising the range of stakeholders and professions involved in placemaking we not only broaden our support base; we increase our area of influence.
- The vision confirms the fundamental driver for urban design is the users of places (not the designers) – ultimately people who use a place who determine the benchmark of success.
- The vision also acknowledges that good places which are economically vital, environmentally responsible and socially equitable have universal qualities developed over thousands of years.
- Last, but not least, the vision confirms that our area of influence is not just cities but the suburbs as well as the towns and centres in the regions of Queensland.
- In order to deliver this vision my focus as President will be on: Placemaking; Place users; Partners; Presence; and Professionalism.

Congratulations QUDAL on 10 years of progress – and best wishes for the years ahead.

Melbourne Place-making Series

Megan Bloomfield

Place-making as a movement took a leap forward in late October when more than two hundred professionals from multi-disciplinary backgrounds gathered in Melbourne to discuss the creation and delivery of our future cities and communities. The *Melbourne Place Making Series*, which prompted a series of lively debates and conversations throughout 2010 about the role of collaborative place making, culminated in a three-day conference.

National and international place leaders including Carol Coletta, US moderator of the debate on successful cities, Chris Leinberger, developer of sustainable and profitable urbanism, Neil McInroy, CEO of the UK Centre for Local Economic Strategies and James Kunstler, well-known author and social commentator, challenged current thinking to determine better ways to make our cities more liveable.

People at the heart

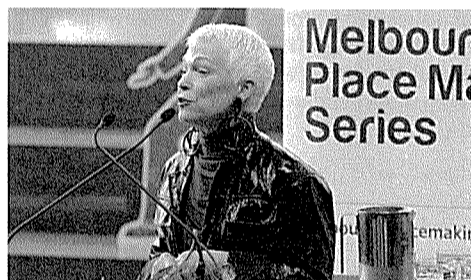
A key outcome from the conference was the importance of putting people at the heart of place-making. For many participants, walkable urban places were the key metric.

This conference was about transformational change in the way development is carried out: creating a new mindset and a new language for Melbourne around development. The place-making approach to urban development starts by asking what characteristics can be enhanced or added to deliver a neighbourhood in which more people choose to comfortably live their lives.

The conference attendees largely agreed that this people-first approach is more likely to deliver outcomes that are in keeping with positive attributes of existing neighbourhood character.

Six months of lead-in events and online forums helped develop the conference program. They engaged representatives from the development, finance and community sectors unearthed some interesting viewpoints, including:

- the need for a new set of metrics to ensure property valuations take into account place



▲ Carol Coletta, CEO of CEOs for Cities

value; the investment in the characteristics of an entire area rather than the investment in just one individual building;

- the need for much closer collaboration with the finance sector, with a typical comment being 'what gets funded is what gets built', in reference to a belief that new development models struggle to achieve finance;
- the need for development professionals to develop understanding and skills in community engagement to better manage opposing viewpoints.

Growing community expectations around the design and form of places in which they want to live make these types of discussion vital. Hosted by VicUrban, in partnership with the Department of Planning and Community Development, City of Melbourne, Federation Square and Village Well, the series has amplified the idea of place making as a movement. VicUrban and the conference partners are keen to hear feedback on the conference to ensure momentum is maintained and stakeholders continue to be identified.

Presentations, videos and discussions are available on the Place Making website www.melbourneplacemakingseries.com.au. Conference participants developed eight draft action statements to advance the place-making community of practice. These make great reading and can also be viewed on the website under the Statement of Practice tab. Stay tuned for ways you can champion the place making movement in your day-to-day work and help raise the debate on city liveability and collaborative practice.

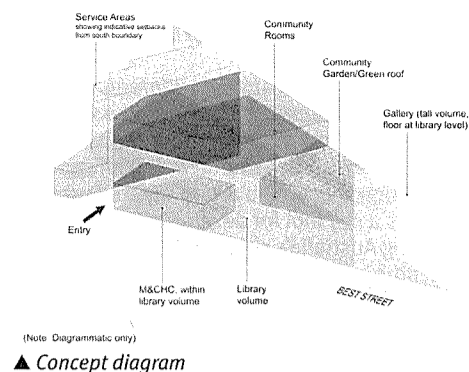
Integrating heritage and modern design

North Fitzroy, in inner Melbourne, has a strong urban history, and a very active local community. After local residents in the professions of heritage and architecture urged stakeholders to be open to bold, modern, multi-storey, geometric, designs, Yarra Council received a concept design from Whitefield/McQueen/Irwin/Alsop for a new library and community hub on a prominent triangular, now vacant site. The concept incorporates a maternal and child health centre, multicultural

citizen's centre, community meeting space, and rooftop garden.

At the meeting, Council agreed that the modern design concept would be used as the basis for developing a more detailed design, in consultation with community representatives. The concept presents a vision for a hub that is contemporary, environmentally friendly, and in keeping with the cultural and historic characteristics of North Fitzroy.

Graeme Loughlin, an architect, local resident, vice-president of the Postcode 3068 Residents Group Inc, and UDF reader brought this interesting project to attention. He can be contacted at loughlin@internode.on.net Whitefield McQueen Irwin Alsop Architects (WMCQIA), Project Designer, Richard Brenchley, can be contacted at richard@wmcqia.com.au For more details about the concept and the process, see www.yarracity.vic.gov.au



What have fridges and washing machines got to do with improving housing quality?

Stefan Kruczkowski

Despite the widely criticised and short-sighted decision by the UK Government to withdraw funding from CABE, efforts to improve housing quality will no doubt continue with many local authorities in England already using the national Building for Life standard (BFL) as a tool to support the creation of better designed homes and neighbourhoods. The recent decision by the UK Government may well also signal a return to more 'free market' principles in planning policy and, in turn, require urban designers to think of different ways to improve housing quality.

CABE's ambition was to see 'good' and 'very good' developments (as defined by BFL) become the norm as opposed to the exception – a tall order when its national housing audits showed that only 18% of developments met this standard.

How can this ambition be realised where baseline performance is so low? Is it through strengthening local policies? Is it through further regulation? Is it through encouraging the widespread adoption and use of BFL? If we had all of these 'in play' would it be enough? Or do we need something else? These were the issues that one English Council considered when it adopted a radical new approach to housing quality – one that harnessed consumer influence.

The challenge is a tough one. How can a step-change in design quality of new homes and neighbourhoods be achieved where robust urban design and place-making skills are in short supply (or rarely used), where house builders *can* seem reluctant to invest in better places (and in many cases, even more reluctant to design *for* the place, rather than impose a design *on* the place)? How do we drive standards upwards when consumers seem willing to invest in places we regard as below standard? Has the time come to focus our efforts on creating and nurturing a more 'intelligent client' as championed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (*Consumer choice in housing*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002, York Publishing, York).

How ourplace™ works

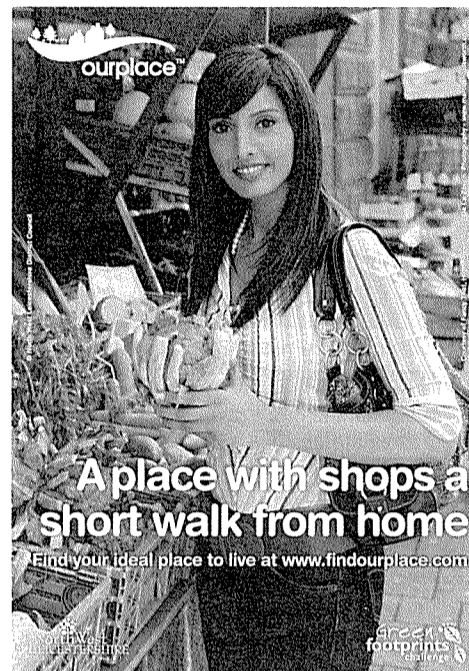
Our simple and easy to understand rating system is based on the BFL standard. Once a planning application has been assessed (and assuming it is granted planning consent), the developer is issued with a certificate for one of four tier ratings, ranging from 'A+' to 'C'.

The idea is simple – we believe that if home buyers are offered an easy way to identify well-designed places (and in turn compare places to one another), design standards will be driven up by more discerning purchasers. Clearly, the more local authorities that join the scheme the more impact it will have.

Similar rating schemes have successfully influenced consumer behaviour, with energy rating certificates on fridges and washing machines perhaps the most high profile example.

The primary concern for home builders is, and will always be, the activity of building and selling homes - with that of local authorities related to the wellbeing of its communities. If we, as local authorities, really want house builders to recognise the value and importance of urban design and place making, we must raise the profile of design in the market place, and reward those more enlightened developers who embrace the idea of 'place making'. It also requires urban designers to think a bit differently and ensure that we don't let our government completely extinguish the ideas and ambition of CABE that was centred on enhancing people's everyday, ordinary lives. Something that sadly does not appear to appeal to every political persuasion, and is considered too expensive in today's economy.

ourplace™ is being extended to a number of English local authorities during 2011 following a successful pilot scheme. We'd be interested to pilot ourplace™ in Australia, so please get in touch if you would like to find out more. This article forms the content of a CABE Housing Task Group presentation, and is based on a research paper written by the author. To find out more, please email stefan.kruczkowski@nwleicestershire.gov.uk



Stefan Kruczkowski is a Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design and is Principal Urban Designer at UK North West Leicestershire District Council. He is a CABE enabler and researches housing quality and consumer behaviour as a postgraduate student at Nottingham Trent University.

Using 3D game engine technology

Philip Greenwood

Game engines can be used to create user-friendly interactive 3D environments to visualise a complex range of information. In the field of urban design and strategic planning, they provide a useful complement to traditional methods of site assessment such as mapping, plans, and aerial photography. In particular, the model can be used to assist decision makers to visualise new built form and test development scenarios in full context and total freedom of movement. Over the last two years ASPECT Studios have used game engines to create interactive models for the development of Activity Centres in Melbourne such as City Street in Dandenong, Carlisle St in St Kilda, Oakleigh Village, and within the Banyule Municipality.

ASPECT's approach is to create their own new software, harnessing the power of game

engines. After several years of experience in visualisation, we were able to synthesise a standard set of interactivity features from the participant's needs, such as viewing from any angle, real-time shadowing, measuring, and GIS data import. Since many projects will already have rich 3D information, or a full model for the purpose of rendering or animation, we can create interactive models simply by importing the existing data into our software, ready to present at a workshop or community consultation.

As part of the Revitalising Central Dandenong project, an interactive model was developed comprising City Street and Station North Plaza and several surrounding blocks. In workshops with VicUrban (and other internal stakeholders), the model successfully investigated the impact of several development scenarios. The ability to raise and lower the heights of proposed buildings and change the

width of the plaza allowed the rapid resolution of issues surrounding impact on view lines and overshadowing. The model was particularly useful in external workshops where the design team was confident that the public was viewing the proposed design in an accurate context.

Interactive environments can also be used on larger scale projects. For example, Banyule City Council's Municipal Model incorporates a digital terrain of their entire municipality with major Activity Centres and structure plans modelled. Council actively uses the model to develop and communicate a vision for the future of the city, describe design guidelines for development to achieve good design and explore changes for a better planning scheme for good design. The Municipal Model was used in a design charette for Burgundy Street where possible built form scenarios were immediately visualised and reviewed in community consultation. Banyule City

Council's ability to create an active discussion with the community led to The Heidelberg Project being recognised by the Planning Institute of Australia, at the 2009 Victorian Awards Ceremony.

Interactive 3D environments using game engines provide efficiencies in gaining consensus from a wide range of decision makers. By using the game engine to turn design parameters into user-friendly interactivity in a 3D model, multiple development scenarios can be quickly tested. By empowering strategic planners and decision makers through interactive 3D environments, we can focus on the implementation of better urban design.

Philip Greenwood is the Senior Developer at ASPECT Studios and can be contacted at philg@aspect.net.au

Knowledge Hubs, Innovation Precincts, Technology Parks, Employment Centres

– whatever label you want – they're much more than real estate projects!

Andrew McDougall and Ellen Witte

Specialised employment centres have appeared in many countries around the world, and their numbers continue to increase. Government support is unlikely to wane as, when successful, these centres host businesses that are export-oriented and provide high quality jobs for their host communities - an increasingly important issue as Australian metropolitan areas sprawl.

Recent work by SGS has reviewed the thinking behind these precincts and case studies of success. Urban design undeniably plays an important role. The thinking behind employment precincts, albeit under many guises (eg business parks, technology parks, knowledge hubs, vibrant multi-use activity centres) dates back to the writing of Alfred Marshall (1920). His initial theory of agglomeration established the base for many subsequent researchers. This body of work supports the need for good design,

hard infrastructure commitments early in the development process, and an array of soft infrastructure initiatives. Without all three, planned employment precincts in the contemporary environment are unlikely to deliver their envisaged benefits.

Best practice

The best practice principles, drawn from SGS's research into well functioning employment precincts, highlights the need for the following, if a critical mass of quality jobs are to be hosted:

- The precincts are integrated in a broader government program aimed at strengthening target industries through the leveraging of relevant programs onsite and through the use of related government facilities as anchor tenants eg education, health and research institutions.
- Precinct management has a clear vision of the desired outcome on site and often play an active role in establishing relationships

between on site businesses and with external networks. Active government lobbying is not uncommon, as is the establishment of a calendar of events to activate the precinct, and an array of business support services to nurture fledgling businesses and entrepreneurs.

- Branding is linked to the unique selling point of the precinct, and often leverages the established reputation of key anchor tenants. Branding also tends to underline the creation of an integrated community for knowledge workers.
- The physical design of the precinct encourages a true mix of uses and a density that engenders a feeling of vibrancy and critical mass - which underpins the urban amenity and diversity of services knowledge workers demand. The physical design also deliberately incorporates spaces that enable knowledge workers to meet and exchange ideas. These can include conference

centres, meeting rooms, flexible workspaces and more informal places such as cafes, restaurants, sports and cultural facilities.

In terms of hard infrastructure needs, all the case study centres are highly accessible by major roads and most are accessible by public transport. Fast internet connections are common, as is the provision of some shared infrastructure including laboratories, meeting and education spaces, and business services centres.

Strategic partnerships are obviously crucial to success, as are upfront commitments and ongoing support.

Andrew McDougall is a Director of SGS Economics & Planning Pty Ltd based in the Melbourne office, and Ellen Witte is a Senior Consultant with SGS Economics & Planning Pty Ltd based in the Tasmanian office. They can be contacted at andrew.mcdougall@sgsep.com.au or ellen.witte@sgsep.com.au

Urban dreaming: Australian cities for the future

The ADC have just published a comprehensive report, edited by Andrew Roux and John Stanley. The 2010 *ADC Cities Report: Enhancing Liveability* addresses many of the key issues and challenges for cities and towns that relate to urban design. Some excerpts from an article by the editors are as follows:

...“There is a trade-off in city size between agglomeration benefits and increasing external costs such as traffic congestion, crime, pollution and noise/sustainability concerns). Large cities that are compact and enjoy good accessibility, matched by efficient transport infrastructure, are among the most efficient urban settlements. These cities do not arise by chance but require decades of careful management and guidance”...

...“Australian capital cities regularly feature in the top ten in international liveability rankings. However, the refreshingly honest federal *State of Australian Cities 2010* report noted a concerning tendency for some rankings to decline in recent years. The absence of cities of greater than 5 million among the top ranked cities in The Economist and Mercer liveability surveys is also notable”...

...“Professor Ed Blakely from The University of Sydney notes that, with the right linkages, cities of 250,000-300,000 people, either standing alone or as a substantially self-contained element within a wider city, can have the benefits of both scale and density to be

competitive, without the detriment and burden related to larger populations”...

...“The village/precinct level is the urban space in which people conduct much of their daily lives and is where their sense of community is likely to be most firmly based. Village/precincts can range from small local centres, through large activity centres to Central Business Districts or parts thereof, with a sense of distinctiveness/identity being a key defining quality”

Enhancing the liveability of villages/precincts within our cities is a high priority. This is about place-making, including issues such as local job creation and innovation (eg in areas like energy efficiency, distributed energy generation and water self-sufficiency), promoting community building, extending low rise compact settlement patterns with more mixed use development and affordable housing, improving walkability and connectivity, enhancing local character and providing a high quality public realm (including passive security features).”

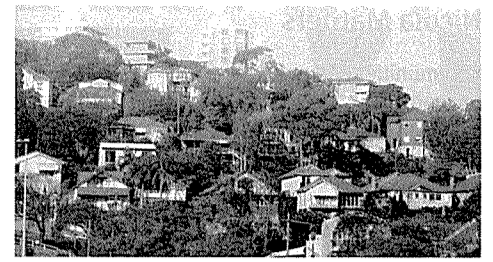
...“Inclusive governance – and decentralised urban functionality more generally – is a crucial aspect of the long-term development of our cities, and will be a good test for the spirit of our democracy. Collaboration goes beyond simple consultation, and by involving more stakeholders – not only for comment on individual planning projects or issues, but as

legitimate voices in the direction their urban environment will take – suboptimal outcomes can be avoided. Additionally, this urban strategy process has the potential to mitigate and transcend the vagaries of partisan politics”...

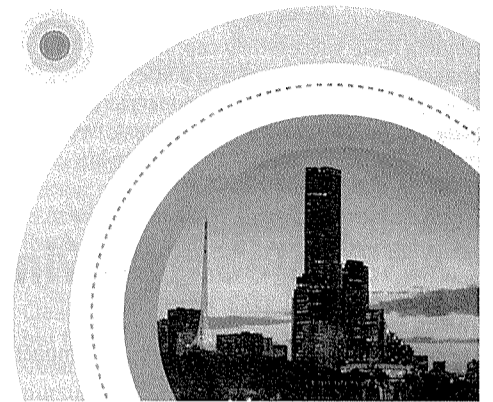
...“Just imagine a network of city nodes, each a few hundred thousand people connected by advanced communications technology and transport access, where people don’t need to travel too far from home to find meaningful work, where the society is economically productive and competitive, socially and ecologically resilient, surrounded by lush forests (perhaps geo-engineered in large scale reforestation programmes to bring increased rainfall), and subsisting on “vertical agriculture” (where, without any derogation of the value of traditional farming, food produce is grown in multi-storey glasshouses); and while people would live in closer proximity, the quality and quantity of their public spaces, parks and gardens would be much greater too”...

...“If our cities are to remain great cities, transformational changes will be needed, rather than a continuation of the incrementalism of the past”...

Anton Roux is Director of Programs, ADC Forum, and John Stanley is Adjunct Professor, Bus Industry Confederation Senior Fellow in Sustainable Land Transport in the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies at the University of Sydney. See www.adcforum.org for more information and downloads of the full report.



ADC CITIES REPORT ENHANCING LIVEABILITY



Who has trump cards and who’s bluffing?

- the age old Sydney-Melbourne rivalry

Leila Heggie

Sydney can boast about its outrageously good-looking harbour, lazy bays and legendary surf beaches, but Melbourne takes the cake when it comes to building a beautiful city.

So why is Sydney ugly? Well, it’s not really, with its sparkling light, blue sky, headland parks, bountiful vegetation, alluring topography, honey coloured sandstone, splendid harbour, unparalleled climate and fresh ocean air.

Good cities are more than god’s gift, they are textured, they have energy, buzz and grit, designed to capture the mind, offer possibility and mystery.

Melbourne was planned, with a riverside grid, while Sydney, once an unruly village, was not. Sydney’s slender streets, like New York, should make it more charming, not less.

Sydney is almost certainly over-governed, being home to State Government and its agencies as well as the City Council. This multifaceted approach to management causes constant disparity, meaning more often than not nothing happens. Take, for instance, the countless proposals to demolish the Cahill Expressway at Circular Quay which have been lost in the processes of management and, in particular, isolated decisions of unconnected authorities. The contrast between these cities lies in their approach, with Sydney government agencies not straying from their ‘core business’



and Melbourne combining the talents of engineers, architects, planners, artists, environmentalists and politicians to constantly re-imagine the city and champion good design.

In the late 1950s, Sydney embraced the skyscraper with vigour. Heritage buildings were eradicated for skyscrapers, historic suburbs for road reserves. Laneways were considered a burden, not a benefit, and everything was growing bigger and more brash. Melbourne, by contrast, protected heritage, laneways, and the finer grain of the city through the simple device of height limits, which capped pressure to demolish and acted, in effect, as heritage legislation.

In Sydney, we look back at these times with despair. It’s still happening. Take Sydney’s Barangaroo as an example of grossly over scaled buildings and vested interests prevailing in the city.

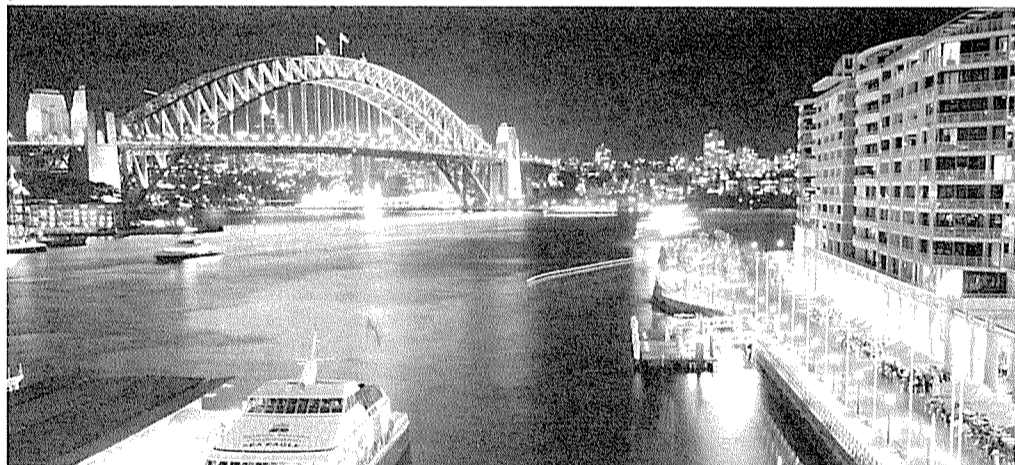
Both cities fail as you move through the growth rings. Farmland lost to hectares of

depressing eave-less boxes where aluminium framed windows sit on sun-baked walls with air-conditioning whirring day and night. Each house separated just enough to ensure public transport is never feasible. Ugly? Yes. It’s the underlying ugliness that’s most worrying, the total disregard for the environment. As if we have learnt nothing.

The difference between Melbourne and Sydney is not the grid, heritage, or climate, but Sydney’s cultural coyness. While Melbourne is not really bold, it has just resisted forces, such as the development lobby, roads lobby and political pressure a little more.

The source of Melbourne’s beauty, which is as much spiritual as physical, is its sense of awareness, cleverness and adventure.

Leila Heggie recently returned to Melbourne and Urban Initiatives after four fantastic years in Sydney at NSW Public Works, Government Architect’s Office. She can be contacted at leila@urbaninitiatives.com.au



US leads way to communities of the future

Excerpts from a recent Edward Blakely article are as follows:

“Fruitvale Village in Oakland, California is something Australian cities can emulate. In the midst of a job meltdown and faltering economy, one might think the lives of low-income African-Americans and Latinos would be bad everywhere in the US. But during a recent trip to the US, we saw hope springing from an unlikely source – a transit hub.

This idea is gaining traction in Australia (despite protests from established residents), conjuring, as it does, images of a beautiful enclosed tram/train stop surrounded by coffee shops, boutique stores and sidewalk cafes with up-market, low-rise apartments in the background. But we found that new and startling things regarding transit, development and density are going on in the US.”

...“The Obama Administration is putting more than \$US10 billion a year into urban light rail and related projects to include bus and bicycle connections to urban cores and suburban areas across the nation. Almost \$US200 million is devoted to funding mixed use (retail/

residential), high density projects along these transit corridors. All of these projects must be matched dollar-for-dollar by the states and localities. Almost every state and many municipalities that, at one time, fought against these developments, are now vying with local governments to get federal funds for these projects.

Real estate developers across the nation are refusing to develop anywhere that does not have fixed rail connections close by. It is clear that light rail has found favour by surviving housing downturns because it provides alternative transport for working people as petrol costs rise”...

...“While Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane are embarking on extensions and improvements to existing rail systems, none of these cities is making as large a commitment to the combination of density increases along an entire transport route. Nor are they encouraging the kind of businesses or tax raises that will provide funding when the



federal money goes away...The formula in Fruitvale is one Australia’s inner city planners should examine”...

...“It may be hard for us to replicate Fruitvale in every city that has a rail or bus node. But the ingredients to this success are easy to understand. By co-locating social, child and community services, the low-income parent has more time to do job searches or simply be involved with their child and other family and community members. They do not have to invest in a car or if they need a car, it’s just one and it’s not needed as often”...

Rob McGauran has brought to notice this recent article by Edward Blakely, an Australian-American and an Honorary Professor of Urban Policy at the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, who is visiting the US to see what lessons we can gain in Australia from the Obama emphasis on transit as the key to urban revitalisation. For the full article, see www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/us-leads-the-way-to-communities-of-the-future-20101020-16trd.html



▲ *Rob Cowan, UK Urban Designer, writer, commentator and cartoonist of renown, has just published a new book of his best urban design cartoons. *Plandemonium*, softback £9.95, 150pp, ISBN 978-0-9544330-1-7, is available online now at www.streetwisepress.com/plandemonium*

Shaping the future

Nicola Mathers

Communities can only be truly sustainable if they are designed to flourish. Public spaces are at the heart of this, providing places for rest and relaxation, play and sport, meeting places, food growing, sustainable travel, protection from the impacts of climate change, and improving property values. When these spaces fail they can lead to a spiral of decline, bringing the look and feel of whole neighbourhood down.

CABE's Spaceshaper toolkit, being trialled across Australia, brings together a range of professionals with local people in order to transform failing local spaces. This practical tool works by measuring the quality of a public space against a wide range of criteria. It ensures the perceptions of both the people using a space and those responsible for running it are successfully captured and analysed to form the basis of a brief for change, and ensure the right concerns are prioritised. Over the past three years, two hundred workshops have taken place in communities up and down England.

Bringing together everyone who is interested in a public space improvement scheme can be difficult at the best of times. Entrenched divisions and long-standing grudges can create a hostile atmosphere. A domineering participant can stop others having their say. Run as a half-day workshop, Spaceshaper is led by a trained facilitator, who ensures everyone makes a contribution. It has been designed to accommodate a diverse range of participants, from dog walkers to designers, local residents to councillors and cleansing departments. All views have an equal footing and participants understand others concerns and points of views.

I have seen how it can be applied to all types of public space, from neglected parks to busy streets. Involving the community helps raise aspirations and means a relationship can develop between the users of a space and those who look after it. "We were looking for ways that would bring together council officers and members of the community," comments Maggie Mellor, a Spaceshaper local authority client. "Spaceshaper puts everyone on the same level, it evens things up a bit."

Key to the process is a site visit, where participants experience the space at first hand and record their individual views. "Residents were initially sceptical about conducting a site visit to the street in which they live," recalls Spaceshaper facilitator Alex Allen. She has used Spaceshaper on eight streets projects. "However, most of them end up seeing their street differently when encouraged to think through the Spaceshaper questions."

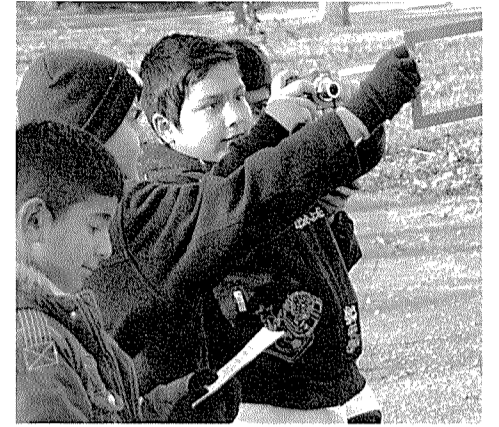
Participants rate the site against eight themes including access, maintenance and design. Many have been impressed by the speed of the results. "The instant feedback provided by the software is useful. So often residents are asked to fill-in surveys but never get to see what happens to the information," Allen adds.

The presence of an external facilitator removes suspicions of prejudice. "The advantage is that they come from outside. It's a neutral presence," explains Sarah Glenn, another Spaceshaper client. "It's not seen as the council imposing their will on other folk." After the workshop, the facilitator writes-up the results, discussion and proposed next steps.

A version for 9 to 14 years olds is proving very popular in the Australian trial. For more information about Spaceshaper and how you can use it contact PLA at admin@parks-leisure.com.au or phone +61 (03) 5444 1763 www.parks-leisure.com.au

Nicola Mathers is Public space advisor at CABE, and can be contacted at nmathers@cabe.org.uk

Photo credit Victoria Wood



CABE celebrates vintage year for English housing

The quality of housing, public buildings, streets and open spaces has a profound impact on everyone's life, every day. Indeed, the quality of your local neighbourhood matters even more in tough economic times. By creating multifunctional landscapes at the heart of new housing developments the needs of the whole community can be met that help build social cohesion and create a good quality of life for everyone.

As the Australian Urban Design Initiative continues to gain momentum Down Under, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in England has shockingly lost government funding through the Comprehensive Spending Review which has seen massive cuts across the public sector. However, despite the funding cuts, CABE continues to champion good design through the delivery of many of its programs for the immediate future.

This month CABE celebrates the 2010 Building for Life Awards. The winners have been selected from a record 55 new housing developments that have achieved the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods across England. This year, standard achievers range from a 32 home self build scheme in Bristol to a 1,200 home multi-developer scheme in Bedfordshire. In a vintage year for housing design, ten exceptional new housing schemes have been selected for a Building for Life award.

Led by CABE and the Home Builders Federation (HBF), Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. New housing schemes that score more than 14 out of 20 against the Building for Life criteria are recognised with a silver standard in recognition of their commitment to design quality and those that score more than 16 achieve gold.



And it's not about simply building houses. To achieve the standard, schemes need high quality open spaces in order to be attractive, functional and sustainable places where communities are proud to live. The 20 criteria exemplify places with distinct character; mix of tenure and house types that meet local needs; decent landscaping providing homes with green, open spaces and streets designed for people and cyclists – not just cars – with shops and schools close enough to walk to.

For example, Watercolour, in Redhill, by Linden Homes and John Thompson and Partners, has exceptionally strong landscaping that sets the scheme apart. The reed beds, SUDS and lagoon on the former quarry site create a strong sense of place, as well as obvious environmental benefits. The scheme provides variety, with terraces of town houses formally arranged along the canal and more informal, lower density housing arranged around a series of open spaces. Mature trees and landscape features have been retained and innovative planting provides character.

To learn more about this year's winners visit the Building for Life website at www.buildingforlife.org

For over a decade, CABE has championed good design in new housing, public buildings, streets and open spaces. While it comes as a surprise to see that no resources have been allocated from the Culture department to deliver the English government's commitment to this area of public life, CABE is currently

looking at options to create new ways to support and champion good design. We hope the Australian Urban Design Initiative will continue this legacy, champion good design, and inspire others to do the same.

Elizabeth Hoehnke is Public space advisor at CABE and can be contacted at EHoehnke@cabe.org.uk. To learn more about CABE visit www.cabe.org.uk and Building for Life visit www.buildingforlife.org

A Charter for Queensland Places

Leslie Curtis

The Queensland Board for Urban Places was established by the Queensland Government in August 2009 to provide independent guidance and advice to the Government on urban design matters. In aiming to ensure the best futures for Queensland places, the Board has recently produced a Charter that calls for a Queensland response to place making and identifies place making principles that are framed by a narrative addressing the fundamentals of place making and urban design in the context of Queensland. The key Principles espoused (and expanded on) in the Charter are;

- Our places embody our values and our uniqueness;
- Our places are for people and about people;
- Our places are ecosystems that we respect and nurture;
- Our places value our natural landscapes and waterways
- Our place experiences are enhanced by what we build and the spaces within and between

- Our places are connected, accessible and contribute to the surrounding neighbourhoods

- Our places are shaped by design, our shared responsibility and our management

The Charter is intended for all Queenslanders: those who shape the environment; those who seek to make, use or understand Queensland places.

The Charter is the foundation document in an intended suite of future Board publications. These will include a Tool Box providing a comprehensive interactive checklist for all phases of design, development and evaluation, as well as reports and advice on procurement processes and capacity building.

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Conferences, etc

Eco-Cities in Pan-Asia

17-18 June 2011

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

Proposals are invited for papers to be presented at the 5th International Conference hosted by the International Eco-Cities Initiative in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University, the Smithsonian Institution and the University of Westminster. The conference will bring together academics, planners and policy experts with the aim of analyzing and comparing a variety of eco-city developments in China, India, Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries. The focus will be on discussing diverse eco-city initiatives within their specific local and national contexts, as well as comparing relevant governance and innovation perspectives across national and cultural boundaries.

We welcome papers discussing: individual eco-city case studies; cross-national comparative analyses; and/or theoretical perspectives relating to eco-city innovation in various Asian contexts. The participation of early career researchers and practitioners is particularly welcome and will be supported through a competitive travel bursary scheme.

Deadline for submitting abstracts (250 words): 14 January 2010. Please send the abstracts to: d.tomozeiu@westminster.ac.uk For more details please visit: www.westminster.ac.uk/ecocities (see 'International Conferences' link)

FLOW

- a conference in two parts

Two linked conferences – FLOW 1 and FLOW 2 – will address issues of the relationships between interiors and landscape. FLOW 1 will take a historical perspective covering the period from the late nineteenth century to the present day. It will be hosted by the Modern Interiors Research Centre (MIRC) in collaboration with the Landscape Interface Studio, Kingston University, in London 12-13 May 2011. FLOW 2 takes a critical approach to contemporary environments, and will develop themes and issues that emerge at FLOW 1 in London. This conference will take place at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, in February 2012.

The FLOW conferences invite scholarship that focuses on the relationships between interiors and landscape. This recognises that the 'transitional spaces' of the home – conservatories, balconies, picture windows - have offered, and continue to offer, new configurations for mediating the exterior and interior as intermediate zones of occupation

and performance. Equally the continuous, undefined urban condition of super-modern public spaces - international airports, shopping malls and post industrial parks - render problematic the relatively simple concepts of 'inside' and 'outside', 'private' and 'public' and 'domestic' and 'non-domestic'. The 'fluidity' of landscape space and time is similarly informing critical discussion about design, change, occupation and conservation in the outside environment.

For more information about abstracts email to mirc@kingston.ac.uk The deadline for abstracts is 3 January 2011.

Subtropical Urbanism - beyond climate change

9-13 March 2011, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The 3rd biennial Subtropical Cities conference is hosted by the Queensland University of Technology Centre for Subtropical Design and the Florida Atlantic University College of Architecture, Urban and Public Affairs.

The conference will address the following cross-cutting and interdisciplinary themes. Adaptation to climate change, mitigation of its effects, and planning for massive change due to inundation and increasing storm activity in coastal communities demands a multi-disciplinary approach to design.

Where are the vulnerabilities, and what are the effects? For more information see www.subtropicalcities2011.com, www.fau.edu/bcdc/ or email John Cotter at john@americanmeetings.com

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