Cities are perhaps the most complex and enduring cultural expressions of mankind and in a world of global travel and migration have become increasingly multicultural. Despite this reality there is often little recognition of the underlying cultural dimension to managing, developing and sustaining the built environment.

A city's culture is too often narrowly expressed through the arts as manifested in the building of iconic institutions such as the Sydney Opera House, the Guggenheim in Bilbao or through periodic events such as the Edinburgh and Adelaide festivals. This narrow view has led to culture being seen as the icing on the cake, the thing you can have when the essentials have been paid for.

This book argues that culture is in fact the very basic building block of a city. It argues that even infrastructure projects such as highways and bridges have a cultural impact and need to be considered in new ways. The book lays out a theoretical yet practical framework for "thinking", "planning" and "acting" culturally. At the heart of this framework is the notion of Cultural Literacy. If we accept that culture is the way of life of a people, then it is critical to be literate. There has perhaps never been a time when a need for Cultural Literacy has been greater than now, with greatly increased mobility, migration and the growth of the intercultural city.

The author explores the notion that it is vital for city managers, planners and designers to think, plan and act culturally in order to create places where we can live in a culturally rich, safe and diverse built environment - where a bridge can be more than just a bridge.

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Richard Brecknock

MORE THAN JUST A BRIDGE - PLANNING & DESIGNING CULTURALLY

INTERCULTURAL CITY

COMEDIA

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Planning & Designing Culturally

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He has worked on the groundbreaking *Intercultural City* project, 2005-2006, in association with Comedia. This international research project involved a number of case study cities and researched the benefits of cultural diversity and the development of appropriate supportive policies and strategies. Richard was project director on the City of Auckland and City of Logan case studies and advisor to the London Borough of Lewisham case study.

Richard has an MA [Cultural and Media Policy] from Griffith University; is a member of the Planning Institute of Australia; an affiliate member of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects; and a regular contributor to the Urban Design Forum [UDF]. He has been a committee member of Australian Institute of Urban Studies [SA]; and a member of the SA Government and the Adelaide City Council Urban Design Advisory Panels. Richard has travelled widely researching and photographing urban cultures.

He has presented papers and keynotes on cultural planning and art in the urban environment at conferences in Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, New Zealand, Spain and the USA. Richard has had a number of published articles and is the author of “A New Renaissance: Contemporary Art Commissioning” an important handbook for artists and architects.

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More than Just a Bridge

In November 2003 I found myself in a room full of structural engineers, traffic management experts, risk and asset managers, urban designers and smattering of community development officers. We were meeting to discuss a new public transport and pedestrian bridge across a suburban river. The bridge to be known as the Green Bridge, would link two very different suburban communities that had previously been serviced by a small cross-river ferry. Therefore the bridge would potentially create a new synergy across a region of Brisbane that had been geographically separated since the city's establishment.

As with most major infrastructure projects of this type it was publicly contentious. It had already been widely consulted on and was potentially political sensitive with a council election just around the corner. Yet here I was with my colleague Sue Shaw, about to workshop ways that a Cultural Literacy practice framework could be applied to the planning of the bridge and inform the drafting of the tender documents.

Typically, the meeting was attended by over a dozen male professionals each representing their specific discipline, each with considerable experience and technical knowledge. I have over the years observed that there is often a lack of true collaboration between professionals on urban development projects. I suspect this is because the majority of professionals are operating within a carefully defined area of practice, for instance the traffic engineer would be reluctant to make aesthetic suggestions to an architect. Therefore I was not sure how the Cultural Literacy concept would be understood or perceived by the bridge team.

Despite my initial doubts, once we got past the stage where they assumed we were there to just talk about public art, the workshop participants got their heads around the broad cultural context associated with the bridge project and the potential impact of the bridge link on the two communities on either side of the existing river divide. A key element of this was establishing that thinking culturally provided a framework for considering the "public good" at the centre of the project. What was the core reason for building a bridge across that part of the river? The team identified that the "public good" was

about linking communities and enriching lives by reducing travel time, commuting stress etc. Having established this concept of the public good the project became known as the Green Bridge Link.

I am pleased to say that, although we came in rather late in the process we did have some success. Not only did references to the need to consider culture literacy make it into the tender documents but a strong cultural vision came out of the exercise that this was "more than just a bridge".

This was in recognition of the importance of designing and planning culturally, including both the structural infrastructure elements and also consideration of the impact the bridge would have on the cultural life of the soon to be connected communities.

The workshop outcomes included the following statement:

> ***Place and Link*** *- an experience that communicates history, culture and dynamism of the future through a landmark and symbolism that represents the City….*

Subsequent work on the Green Bridge project has led to an innovative program "Building Bridges", that included aural history projects and the development of soundscapes and text based works that tell stories of the area, its people, the riverine environment and the building of the bridge itself.

The bridge is just one example of planning culturally and highlights the point that there are many different urban professionals who contribute to developing the city as a stage set for people's cultural life.

This book is the result of both my frustration and excitement of working with city governments and design/planning consulting teams as a cultural strategist. I am both frustrated by the lack of understanding and curiosity about the role of culture and excited by the potential for change often very small change but change nevertheless that a heightened understanding of culture can bring.

Cities are and have been for centuries perhaps the most complex and enduring cultural expressions of mankind. However in the evolution of western democracy and the resulting popularly elected governments there appears, all too often, to be little or no recognition

of the underlying cultural dimension to managing, developing and sustaining the urban environment.

As will be discussed a city's culture is too often narrowly expressed through the arts as manifested in the building of iconic institutions such as the Sydney Opera House, the Guggenheim in Bilbao, or through periodic events such as the Edinburgh and Adelaide festivals. While such buildings are wonderful expressions of creative and engineering masterpieces and arts festivals bring excitement and challenge; they alone do not constitute a culturally rich city.

This narrow view has led to culture being seen by many city managers as the icing on the cake, the thing you can have when the essentials have been paid for.

Fortunately the days when city councils considered their role to be limited to "roads, rates and rubbish" have passed, and social and community cultural development activities are now considered appropriate, even essential activities for local councils. These activities are however still not mainstream and still highly dependent on available funds. Despite the recognition of community cultural development as a valuable community building concept there still appears to be many city governments with little understanding of the depth of and the importance of culture to city life.

Interestingly though, as an Australian, I live and work in a country where perhaps the majority of people still consider culture to be an elite notion, a notion associated in their minds with the "high arts" of art galleries and opera houses. Yet Australia is a country with an indigenous people whose culture goes back in excess 40,000 years; is arguably the most stable and developed multicultural nation on earth; and has a "beach culture" to die for. But despite that the word "culture" is the greatest BBQ conversation stopper of all time.

Why then is one of the most significant aspects of humanity so little discussed, so poorly understood and marginalised in the context of city planning, design and management? It is the aim of this book to explore the critical issue of the cultural underpinning of cities; provide some observations on how to read and understand culture's central role; and finally to consider ways to work thoughtfully and culturally.

According to the Americans for the Arts the expression "cultural planning" first appeared in print in 1979 when:

.. economist and city planner Harvey Perloff recommended it as a way for communities to identify and apply their cultural resources to "society's dual objectives" for the arts -- "the achievement of artistic excellence and community contribution." The process is rooted in nineteenth century amenity planning, the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful Movement, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) cultural jobs creation programs of the 1930s, and the pioneering work of the community arts movement of the 1940s.

The reality in many cities is that most cultural policies are developed to inform their funding support to arts and cultural organisations, inform capital works expenditure and define the staffing resources required to deliver cultural programs to which their community aspires. Rarely though do they extend to the city's entire infrastructure.

Capital works projects are popular with politicians as there is a tangible outcome and a long term legacy for the community. Ideally the politician also gets to cut the ribbon at the opening and hopefully gets a picture in the local newspaper.

The 1980s and 1990s was a time of solid urban policy activity and saw notions of community, culture and city amenity move beyond just the arts. In 1985 Bob McNulty, Dorothy Jacobson and Leo Penne from Partners for Livable Places published their seminal text *The Economics of Amenity: Community Futures and Quality of Life.* This publication helped focus attention on cultural and community issues during a period of rampant urban development. Partners for Livable Places, later to become Partners for Livable Communities, work with cities across the USA, and have undertaken projects in Australia, on essential notions of sense of place, liveability and quality of life.

In Australia during the 1990s the Institute of Cultural Policy Studies [ICPS] at Griffith University in Queensland, under director Colin Mercer, broke new ground in cultural policy thinking at city level. Mercer et al created the first significant Brisbane City Council Cultural Policy in 1991. At that time the concept of cultural planning was totally alien to many in local government. Fortunately local government has moved on and cultural planning and policy is now an accepted practice. This is of course with the understanding that, as Javier Pérez de Cuéllar et al reminds us, governments and institutions "cannot determine a people's culture: indeed they are

partly determined by it". However governments are in a significant position to "influence it for better or worse, and thereby affect the path of development". [Pérez de Cuéllar, et al,1996:15]

City governments need to accept that the more holistic cultural policy approach will provide a framework for city thinking about its cultural life and the strategies that can support and nurture the community's cultural life.

It is therefore the intention to present the argument that culture is not simply 'another community service' but is the very basic building block of a city and to lay out a theoretical yet practical framework for "thinking", "planning" and "acting" culturally.

At the heart of this framework is the notion of Cultural Literacy. If we accept that culture is the way of life of a people, then it is critical to be literate. Perhaps there has never been a time when a need for Cultural Literacy has been greater than now. With greatly increased mobility, migration and the growth of the intercultural city it is vital that city managers, planners and designers understand the diversity of communities.

For many years I have been working as a cultural strategist with multidisciplinary urban design teams on civic projects across Australia. During the course of this work I have been gradually evolving methodologies to assist the project teams to understand the existing cultural values and heritage, cultural layering, upon which to build or overlay new civic works. At the same time to provide a mechanism, Cultural Filters, by which the impacts of the project work on the cultural life of the community can be considered.

For example, as part of a team designing a new police station in a town with a large Aboriginal community I was alarmed to see that the modernist architectural design, which was excellent in so many ways, had a long narrow glazed tunnel like entrance. The entry had been designed in response to police concerns regarding security management but the design solution created a psychologically threatening space that would be intimidating to most people. When considered through the cultural context of the region and the recognition that there would be many Aboriginal people coming to the station from settlements in the surrounding desert regions it was clear that the design was culturally inappropriate.

Once the cultural sensitivities were raised the client and designers explored alternative solutions to the entry design. Finding a solution that addressed both the practical needs of the police and minimising visitor stress.

While the outcome might appear to be just another building, I am pleased to say that the outcome was a safe but symbolically and physically accessible station that included a more welcoming entrance with greater transparency and an external waiting area with a low wall for accompanying family members to sit on.

In addition, pavement artworks that told the story of the region were designed by artists from the outlying Aboriginal communities and integrated into the paving leading up to the entry.

This project was for me an early example of the need for Cultural Literacy to be a structured part of the planning and design process. Here was an excellent architect designing a stylish, environmentally sound and highly practical building in response to the client's brief. However, as is so often the case the focus was on fulfilling the brief, meeting the deadlines and conforming to the budget, while the cultural context had been overlooked. Had a Cultural Literacy process been undertaken at the time of preparing the brief then the cultural issues would have been flagged from the very beginning of the design process.

It also highlighted to me the role that issues of safety and security play in influencing design decisions. The original design put the police officers' safety first, unfortunately at the expense of local cultural sensitivities. Security and risk has however become the dominant factor in many urban projects. In recent Cultural Literacy workshops in London it was nominated as the single most important issue confronting planners and designers and the factor that mitigated against delivering quality urban design outcomes.

Another significant development in my thinking about planning culturally came in 2002 when I was involved in a Cultural Layering Study for the City of Adelaide. At the time I was cultural strategist to an urban design team developing new public space plans and traffic management studies for Victoria Square/Tarndanyangga, the City of Adelaide's most important public place. The city of Adelaide was laid out in 1837 by Colonel William Light the state's surveyor general; it is one of the classic grid form cities. The central city has four radial squares and one major central square, Victoria Square, named after the reigning monarch Queen Victoria. As with many colonial cities, a statue of Queen Victoria has centre stage in the square and has a supporting cast of bronze statues of early European explorers. The square therefore currently has a dominantly colonial feel to it.

Prior to this project the city had recognised the square's pre colonisation significance for the local Kaurna people, the indigenous people of the Adelaide plains. As a consequence the square had been given the bilingual name; Victoria Square/Tarndanyangga. In

addition the city installed two large flag poles in order to fly both the Australian flag and the Aboriginal flag.

The Cultural Layering Study was undertaken in recognition of the significance of the Square to the people of the city. It sought to understand the cultural significance of the square to different cultural groups that make up the city.

While the commissioning of the specific Cultural Layering study was a significant initiative it was unfortunately undertaken after the master planning project had already started. The layering study took a long time to get underway as there were quite complex cultural protocols to be established especially with the Aboriginal community. The outcomes of the study greatly informed the cultural filtering process throughout the design development. It would however have been preferable to have had the time to complete the cultural layering study prior to the commissioning of the master plan. In order that cultural thinking could have provided greater input into the original project brief and ensured the use of cultural filters throughout the design process.

These examples demonstrate the gradual evolution of thinking about Cultural Literacy and the need for a structured and early application of the principle.

A major breakthrough presented itself in 2003 when our company in association with Charles Landry won a tender to develop an innovative Cultural Literacy action learning program for Brisbane City Council's business unit, City Design. In 2002-2003 we had developed the *Creative City: Brisbane City Council's Cultural Strategy 2003-2008,* a whole of council creativity strategy. In the course of developing this strategy we undertook extensive consultation with both internal staff and external stakeholders. It became evident to our team that there was great enthusiasm for the creative city concept and a strong recognition of the importance of culture in the future development of Brisbane as a unique and vibrant city. It was also clear that people didn't feel they had the skills and depth of understanding to fully deliver in this vital area.

In a discussion paper prepared for the *Creative City Strategy* consultation program we wrote of the need for Cultural Literacy in government.

> *"This is the ability to read, understand, find significance and evaluate, compare and decode the local cultures in a city. This allows one to attribute meaning and significance to anything seen, analysed and produced. .."*

This notion was later included in the final strategy document as a project idea for 'investing in people and building capacity' and subsequently put into practice by City Design.

The Cultural Literacy program undertaken in association with Sue Shaw of Ibis Consulting provided an opportunity to refine much of my earlier work. The action learning process involving three City Design project teams generated a Practice Framework that aims to provide staff with the tools to better understand the requirements of their project briefs in the context of local cultural life. The success of the Cultural Literacy program and the amount of interest I have received when discussing the concept at conferences has led me to undertake this publication.

More Than Just a Bridge argues for the repositioning of culture as the central factor in thinking about our cities, in approaching urban planning in its many forms, and to influence the design of the built environment. We explore the need for Cultural Literacy and provide practical strategies and deliverable outcomes to public and private clients.

PART ONE

Cultural Context

Cultural Literacy: the concept

> *.. the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension.*
>
> *It is cultural literacy that allows understanding of both surface and contextual meaning.* [E.D.Hirsch Jr 1988]

Hirsch and other North American educators have been engaged in a lively debate about the merits of Cultural Literacy. In this context, the notion of Cultural Literacy is primarily associated with literature and seems to have polarised camps. Those who believe in the need to be literate in the classics and contemporary culture, and those who believe it is most important to know one's own culture especially for the blacks and Hispanics in the USA.

Hirsch's theory is that in order for an American to truly communicate with any other American, he or she must share a common set of background knowledge.

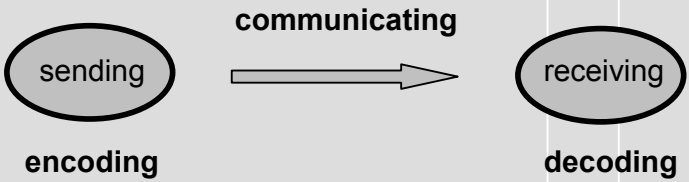
He bases his approach on "schema theory". This theory asserts that knowledge is organised into mental units called "schemas." In the process of learning people build knowledge, they either create new schemas based on personal experience or gather shared schemas of community experience. It is, for Hirsch, the gathering of these shared schemas that constitute an important part of our cultural knowledge. When people communicate, they depend on these shared schemas as a cognitive base line, therefore only needing to explain new and original thoughts or actions.

> *literacy is more than a skill it is based upon knowledge that all of us unconsciously have about language. We know instinctively that to understand what somebody is saying, we must understand more than the surface meanings of words; we have to understand the context as well. The need for background information applies all the more to reading and writing. To grasp the words on a page we have to know a lot of information that isn't set down on the page.* [Hirsch 1988]

The concept therefore relies on knowledge understood by both parties involved in an exchange of communication. Here it is important to also introduce the concept of encoding and decoding. When communicating we are transferring “messages” from one person to another and this involves the sender in a process of encoding and the subsequent decoding on the part of the receiver.

In order to communicate an abstract idea we have to structure the various elements of the idea into a message that can be understood by the intended audience. Therefore for successful communication to take place the sender must encode the message into the appropriate language. The receiver’s language might be different to the sender’s either linguistically or technically and therefore the encoding will need to take into account these differences. The receiver will equally need to employ decoding skills based on their individual knowledge to fully understand the message.

Making communication all the more complex, especially intercultural dialogue, are personal value filters which can be a barrier to communication. We have all accumulated a wide range of filters based on our life experiences and education, on our cultural upbringing, and on our political leaning or religious beliefs.



The filters will not only impact upon intercultural and intergenerational dialogue but can also be a barrier to meaningful dialogue between professions in the workplace.

The value filters associated with professional communication are often based on shared knowledge and education/training and may manifest through the use of jargon or industry shorthand. All of these can make communication difficult outside of the profession, especially in interdisciplinary teams.

While Hirsch and the discussion above is directed to spoken and written literacy the same can be said of our need to have Cultural Literacy for all our interpersonal transactions and to build a Cultural Literacy level in regard to our engagement with the urban environment.

In the same way that we read a book, we read a city and understand the way the built environment is laid out and organised on cultural grounds. For example, think of the differences in the internal structure of houses in spatial terms as seen in different cultures. Obvious extremes are the traditional Japanese home organised on the basis of movable walls and rooms designed to Tatami mat modules of 71" x 35.5" and the middle eastern and North African courtyard houses with high ceiling rooms and flat roof gardens designed for private internal life away from the bustle of the streets and medina.

Like the house, cities have also been traditionally laid out along cultural lines. For example the contrast between the formalities of grid pattern cities in North America and Australia resulting from the desire to create a new world of order and structure in new lands as opposed to the organic nature of a walled Tuscan hill town with narrow streets radiating out from the central piazza.

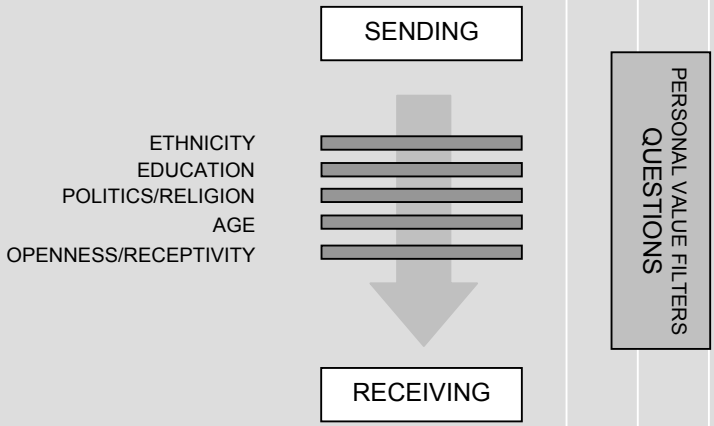
In Indian cities physicality and myth come together in a dialogue about a 'cultural urbanity' as discussed by Bharne.

> *In India where the 'public' and the 'private' are perpetually intersected by the 'sacred', physicality is more supernatural than real. Hence a tree is never just a tree, rather the abode of a sacred spirit that guards its environs; a mountain is not a mountain, but the dwelling place of a God. This deepens the notions of 'genius loci', and hence an ancient tree in a village*

center is catalytic enough to incept a shrine under its branches. The shrine may transform into a larger temple, the temple catalyze the making of a campus, and in time, incremental accretions nurture the organic inceptions of entire towns.
[Bharne 2003]

As with spoken literacy, urbanists need to develop a shared knowledge of urban behaviour, how people behave in crowds, how they conform to the nonverbal communication of street signs and traffic lights, how to follow the local form of street naming and building numbering protocols. In Helsinki the street names are both in Swedish and Finnish, a historic reminder of past Swedish occupation. Tokyo, a city of over 12 million people, has a chaotic built form which lacks a coherent system of street names and building numbers.

To the locals all of this becomes shared knowledge and requires little or no explanation, while the visitor may be completely perplexed by systems that do not seem to have any obvious logic. While New York street names seem to go on for ever, they are logically divided into sections defined by a geographical suffix, hence you might have to find an address such as 125 West 32nd Street.



Other cities have streets that change names along their length. A tourist In Adelaide can get disorientated, despite the simple grid layout, because all the streets running east west change their name where they intersect with the central north south boulevard. Even worse is the Queensland city of Townsville where some major roads seem to change their name almost at every major intersection.

Charles Landry, in *The Creative City: a tool kit for urban innovators* [2000] referred to "Urban Literacy" as "the ability and skill to 'read' the city and understand how cities work and is developed by learning about urbanism". Landry theorises that urban literacy develops knowledge and understanding of underlying cultural ideas, beliefs and values as expressed through the built environment.

The focus on Cultural Literacy or "Urban Literacy" is important both from the perspective of being able to understand and read the ways in which your own and other cultures express themselves through their buildings and city form and for the professional planner and designer to be able to build on this shared knowledge when undertaking development work.

On another level Cultural Literacy is associated with symbolism, visual knowledge and artistic expression.

> *Some visual symbols are obscure, even hermetic, recognizable only to members of a culture or to initiated ones, defying outsiders and forming an invisible wall of defence. Others are clear, universal symbols stressing the common experience of humankind and inviting outsiders to share.* [Lozano 1990]

Each culture has its shared visual language built up over generations and highly influenced by geography, history and religion.

Take for example the differences between the Christian church iconography and the formal pattern designs of the tiles and pierced stonework found in an Islamic mosque and the dot paintings or cave art the Australia Aborigines. A culture of shared knowledge provides the literacy required to read, enquire and gain an insight into the meaning in such artistic expression and craftsmanship.

To the contemporary art world the dot painting is a ‘hot item’ of commerce but its true meaning is known only to those with the Cultural Literacy to understand the story and to relate to the totems and the land.

We can see also that the very form of religious architecture provided visual knowledge to the people; if there is a sufficient degree of Cultural Literacy, there can be no confusion between a Hindu temple and a Buddhist temple or between a Mosque and a Greek Orthodox church.

In addition to the visual literacy concept we need to recognise that there are significant cultural differences in terms of sensory perceptions. The experience of the body in space and especially the sense of touch and the sense of smell greatly influence our experiences of public places and interaction with others. For a westerner the experience of squeezing through the mass of people shopping in the spice Souq of Fez in Morocco is a total sensory overload of sights, sounds and smells.

Therefore if culture is the very foundation of our lives, how does it manifest itself through governance and policy frameworks, through the arts as cultural expression and through the physical forms of our cities and suburbs? We are consciously and unconsciously influenced by our own cultural background and the culture of others. This influence can either be a barrier to innovation and change or it can be a point of inspiration and strength in the task of building tolerant and fulfilling communities and sustainable urban environments.

> *Yet we tend to speak of, and deal with, the arts and culture generally as if they were optional extras in the life of Australia. Of course, they are not, nor are they luxuries for a minority. They are vitally important to us now and they will be even more so in the future of Australia. We need to put cultural considerations into the mainstream of decision making.*
> [Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia 1993]

Sadly this quite profound statement by the then Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating provides an insight into the basic struggle faced by cultural strategies in many western nations. There is a deep lack of Cultural Literacy among the nation's decision makers. Time and time again we have to argue the case for cultural thinking and the importance of putting "cultural considerations into the mainstream of decision making". Indeed over the life of the current Australian government there has been a serious lack of interest in cities generally, let alone culture in its deepest sense.

Clearly there is a major challenge ahead to change many of the institutional and professional mindsets of those who dominate city development and management. This book poses the argument that the myriad people involved in the design, planning, management and politics of a vibrant and sustainable city approach their respective tasks from a cultural perspective and provides the Cultural Literacy model to assist this process.

Building on City Culture

> *Culture is the expression of human values. When we express ourselves we create meanings where there were none, and consequently change the way in which we and others behave. In shaping European society, and the values of nations and communities within it, culture is of the utmost importance. It is, indeed, perhaps the only thing which can save the city.* [Matarasso 2000]

Perhaps there has never been, in Western cities, a greater expression of cultural values than in Italy during the Renaissance, a time of great culture and creativity, a time when civic places evolved, when culture was not the sole domain of artists and the cities were of their 'time and place' and reflected the prevailing culture.

It is always interesting to look back at Renaissance Italy and see that much that we aspire to today appears to have been taken for granted then. There appears to have been a strong expression of culture and total cultural underpinning of city planning and design. There are many examples of totally integrated artworks in the buildings and public spaces.

Who can enter through the narrow alleys into the Campo in Siena without being overwhelmed by the culture and palpable history of the place? Cities such as Siena, Milan, Florence and Venice are so obviously the result of creative and culturally aware artists, craftsmen and civic leaders who were of their moment in time and the resulting cities projected the prevailing culture to the citizens.

The focus of artists shifted in more recent times from a servant of the city to seeking a greater level of personal expression. Instead of being a cultural worker in the city the artist focused on the production of marketable moveable cultural product, with a corresponding decline in their involvement in the built environment. Social changes in the concept of work and professions may have been a contributing factor, the rise of the dedicated professions of town planning, architecture and engineering shifted the emphasis away from the multi-skilled creative individual to discipline based approach to professional expertise. This, for instance, brought about the demise of the skilled craftsman mason who would have dealt with engineering, design and aesthetic issues on a daily basis.

Following the Second World War with major activity in the cities of the Western world there was a push for artists to re-engage with the built environment. Commentators such as Herbert Read spoke eloquently of the role the artist should assume in building a cultured city:

> *The sculptor must come out into the open, into the church and the market place, the town hall and the public park; his work must rise majestically above the agora, the assembled people.* [Read 1948]

However Read's dream was not quite fulfilled. When we do see the artist re-engaging with the city starting in the early 1960-70s it results mostly in major stand alone sculptural works. The sculptors had emerged from their studios but by and large they emerged with ego intact and brought with them large versions of their studio work with which to contest the public space in front of and between the Modernist movement's corporate towers.

The majority of these works, the large scale steel sculptures that still punctuate our cities today, have increasingly come under criticism as "Plonk Art", the "Lipstick on the Gorilla" or the "Turd in the Plaza".

While it can be argued that the majority have little or nothing to do with the places they inhabit there are those that provided an interesting counterpoint to the Modernist architecture of its time.

Despite the questions raised about varying success of these works they are clearly a manifestation of their time and it is difficult to see how the artist could have responded differently to the Modernist movement.

Today artists appear to be far more conscious of their role as civic citizens and many public artists seek to engage with the local context and or utilise their creativity as a form of activism. In Seattle, artists like Jack Mackie and Buster Simpson have worked as community activists on sites such as First Avenue with the aim of changing perceptions about public spaces, community engagement/ownership and the approach to planning and design.

Many contemporary public art projects attempt to draw on and interpret the past history of the place. Indeed public art projects most often arise from a desire to engage an artist to provide an artefact that adds to the cultural richness of the place, reflect local context or to specifically celebrate, interpret or explore a historical event or person.

An excellent example of a contemporary commemorative artwork is that of the monument to mariners at Cardiff Bay redevelopment by artist Brian Fell.

While there are many such examples of excellent contemporary interpretive or commemorative work in cities around the world there is also the danger of the artist and client developing work that is literal and shallow without real cultural depth of understanding.

It is interesting to see how a strong cultural identity such as that found in Barcelona influences contemporary planners and designers. The historic core of Barcelona is through its built fabric and public spaces an expression of the richness of Catalonian culture. Barcelona is a dense city with a strong layout of major boulevards and clusters of narrow residential streets in the historic core. The dominant built form is a three to five storey continuous edge condition with active frontages of small business on the ground floor and apartments above. The major business and ceremonial boulevards are tree-lined, wide and elegant. There are numerous public placas [plazas] that provide the outdoor living space for the city's densely packed population. The public spaces have evolved to suit the people's urbane Catalan culture, to provide the spaces required for interaction, business, socialisation, indeed their very way of life. It is easy for the visitor to soak it up on the streets, promenades and placas especially by visiting the famous La Rambla on any evening of the week.

It is therefore surprising to visit some of the new development areas in Barcelona such as the del Mar district where the streets seem to be lifeless and lacking the vibrancy of active edges and crowded public spaces.

The streets feel too wide, the placas too large, the building too high and the street frontage lacks the shops and businesses that bring life to the older parts of the city.

It is as if the planners failed the Cultural Literacy test in their own city by not drawing upon thousands of years of cultural knowledge.

The task of contemporary artists, architects and urban designers is to help interpret past culture and find ways to help build new city cultures that draw from the past but are living expressions of contemporary life.

Cities and their people do not want to be stuck in a time warp nor should they lose their uniqueness and civic culture in a drive to modernise.

The transformation of Beijing is a case in point. Not only are there vast landscapes of high rise towers fringing the old city but the drive for modernisation is sweeping away the traditional Hutong districts. The Hutongs with their courtyard houses have been a feature of Beijing since the 13th century. Admittedly many of Beijing's Hutongs are very rundown, overcrowded and lacking services but they do represent a cultural way of life that will totally disappear under expensive inner city townhouses.

Presumably with the Beijing Olympic Games approaching the current residents of the Hutongs will be moved out to the high rise towers to make way for the new urban movers and shakers. While it is perhaps inevitable that the Hutongs would be redeveloped due to their proximity to the centre of Beijing and their generally poor conditions it would have been desirable if something of the traditional community way of life that the Hutongs exemplified could have been captured in the new developments.

This is a real design challenge for architects and urban designers; how to develop culturally relevant buildings and public spaces without them becoming a mere pastiche of former styles?

Many cities have gone through the facadism phase where the street frontages of old buildings were retained and new corporate office towers soared from behind. Fortunately this practice has been seen for what it is; a misguided attempt to preserve the past at all cost. There are an increasing number of sensitive contemporary buildings being inserted into existing streetscapes in cities where planning schemes have set out criteria governing basic design principles derived from the existing built form.

The City of Melbourne has had an enlightened approach to retaining its city form by preventing developers from bringing together parcels of adjacent property titles into single super-blocks. This policy has helped to maintain the fine grain of the city's grid and has led to the retention of its network of laneways. In recent years these laneways have been developed as important retail and dining destinations, providing vibrancy to the city's street and café culture.

It is a sad fact of life that many of the places we most admire as culturally rich cities could not be built today, not due to the lack of suitable craftspeople but due to the regulations, codes and standards that currently exist to minimise risk.

One small example of this is the requirement that there be no more than 5mm variation in pavement surfaces in order to avoid the tripping factor, especially for women wearing high heels. This might seem like a sensible standard and no one wants to build in potential hazards, but the consequence is that it greatly restricts the choice of pavements. For example none of the European cities that use granite sets would conform to the Australian standard where projects

using traditional granite sets have had to grind them down to a smooth surface.

Those who know the beautiful pebble pavement designs of Spanish cities such as Seville or Cordoba can therefore imagine the response of a risk manager if such an idea was proposed today.

What this highlights is that it is not always the city planners and designers who have the primary influence over the look and feel of the built environment. Increasingly, it is the people framing the regulations and standards who affect the way a city infrastructure is delivered. In addition a large proportion of public realm infrastructure is in fact created not by the city but by private sector developers as part of development or redevelopment projects and transferred to public sector ownership. Therefore the city not only obtains the long term ownership but also the responsibility for the maintenance and ongoing safety.

This presents a significant challenge to city officials who must establish a clear vision for the city and evolve strong planning criteria to influence the work of others.

Building City Culture

> *"We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."* [Churchill 1943]

So said Sir Winston Churchill during a debate in 1943 on the rebuilding of the Blitz damaged Houses of Parliament. Churchill was arguing for the retention of its form as he believed the very culture of Parliament had evolved from the special dynamics of the building and therefore there was a danger that a new more spacious forum carried with it the potential for change in the very culture of democracy in Britain. In Churchill's opinion the small size of the House and the proximity of oppositional parliamentarians across the "Bear Pit" was important in maintaining the confrontational nature of British politics.

One could speculate that this was indeed the result of building a new Parliament House in Canberra. The new Parliament building was designed to provide far more spacious lower and upper house chambers than in Old Parliament House. It also provided greater security for parliamentarians entering and exiting the building. It is now possible to drive into secure areas, thus removing the need for parliamentarians to negotiate the main public entrances as previously practiced.

There appears to be a number of resulting changes in the way politics are played out in Australia since the opening of the new federal parliament building. The most obvious change has been the evolution of a more presidential style Prime Ministerial press conference. Gone are the impromptu "door stops" press statements among the public as the Prime Minster mounts the stairs to the people's House. In scenes reminiscent of the US White House, Prime Ministers now emerge from the inner sanctum to a lectern in front of the press gallery. Perhaps this is the way that Australian politics was inevitably heading or perhaps the fact that the building was designed by a US architect may have introduced a different cultural nuance to Parliament.

Another interesting manifestation of evolving culture and the physical form of buildings can be seen in the changed culture of banking. There was a time when bank buildings sat along side the town hall and church as significant city buildings speaking of their solidity,

security and social importance. No longer the solid stone edifice, now they might be little more than a “hole in the wall”, the ubiquitous Automatic Teller Machine [ATM] that has shifted banking on to the public street. Perhaps this is the complete cycle back to the origins of banking, the money lender in the market square. This change tells us a lot about the underlying values and culture of contemporary banking.

Designers and planners therefore have a critical role in building city culture. Their decisions can have a profound impact on the way we lead our lives and express our collective and individual cultural values. This also applies to urban land use planning and to the provision of equitable transportation. Effective and accessible transport is necessary to enable individuals engage with city culture.

There are times when existing urban culture comes under threat, perhaps no more so than issues faced by live music venues in many cities around the world. The problem for live music venues is that they generally flourish in the more ‘bohemian’ areas of a city. These areas are attractive to the upwardly mobile young professionals who aspire to a cosmopolitan urban lifestyle. Demand for inner city living and lifestyle areas creates a tension between planning for redevelopment and increased density of residential buildings in and around live music venues with the inevitable conflict between late night music and the need for sleep.

Enlightened city planners are now saying the venues were there first and are part of the cultural lifestyle attractors and therefore it is the developers' responsibility to pay for proper sound proofing of all new buildings and or funding of better sound control of the venues.

Another particularly evident change in urban culture has been the demand for outdoor dining opportunities in many cities. Despite the strong tradition of public dining in Mediterranean cultures the changes have swept through more northern regions such as Britain, Europe and Scandinavia. Wherever one travels today it is possible to enjoy the delights of coffee or a meal at a pavement café or restaurant. Even in the chilly wind swept-streets of Helsinki, a patch of sun in a sheltered corner will feature tables and chairs. Across the northern cities of Scandinavia, Scotland and Canada people have adapted their urban culture to include outdoor dining, even if one needs to keep on the top coat or sit near large gas heaters.

Surprisingly in many Australia cities outdoor dining is a relatively recent but highly popular phenomenon. The change was brought about by a shift in administrative thinking and demand from consumers with a diversity of cultural backgrounds. It is hard to believe that perhaps only ten or fifteen years ago many Australian politicians were resisting the introduction of legislation to allow for outdoor dining and especially the consumption of alcohol in public. Every excuse possible was raised, the weather – too hot or too cold, health risks and public liability insurance. Fortunately sanity prevailed and nowadays it is possible to get a great espresso or a chilled Sauvignon Blanc on the streets of every Australian city.

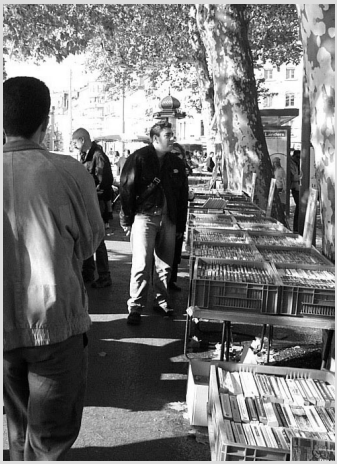
City diversity is a key element of the modern "Creative City". [Landry, Bianchini 1995 and Landry 2000] Diversity encourages multicultural expression, and risk taking and provides for the creative 'rub' between people that leads to innovation and creativity. Public space, as Landry [2000] states, is "at the heart of the innovation milieu", a place where the exchange of ideas can take place.

Diversity of public space is however an urban condition that requires a great deal of care in its development and management, as Jane Jacobs reminds us;

> *So long as we are content to believe that city diversity represents accident and chaos, of course its erratic generation appears to represent a mystery.*

> *However, the conditions that generate city diversity are quite easy to discover by observing places in which diversity flourishes and studying the economic reasons why it can flourish in these places. Although the results are intricate and the ingredients producing them may vary enormously, this complexity is based on tangible economic relationships which, in principle, are much simpler than the intricate urban mixtures they make possible.*
> [Jacobs 1961]

Indeed the elements of diversity can be analysed and Jacobs presents excellent examples in the *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* of diversity at work. She identifies four significant conditions: diversity of activities; fine grain of urban form; diversity of building stock; and the all important critical mass of people. Jacobs' examples of the intricate web of diversity that was inherent in providing life to her street remind us of the parallel importance of diversity in environmental terms. As with ecological conditions, if a city or district becomes too homogenous, it becomes vulnerable to environmental shifts. If for instance one form of activity or business is dominant, and it no longer works in the new environment, the entire city or district is at risk. The classic examples of this effect are the cities of northern England that had been the birthplace of the industrial revolution and had become dominated by a single industry, Sheffield with steel or Huddersfield with the mills. These cities have had to reinvent themselves following the decline of the traditional industries.



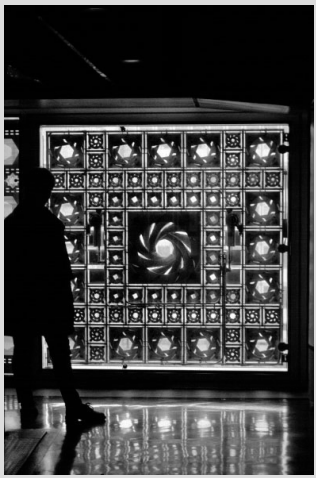
A key factor that can be observed from a cultural diversity perspective is that cities often get carried away with the physical form of public places, putting great responsibility on the urban designer to transform a place through new paving, elegant street furniture and improved lighting. The reality is that many places are dead for reasons other than poor public realm design. We can see many examples where major dockland redevelopments, such as Manchester have focused on iconic buildings as a drawcard but have failed to build in the finer grain of diversity and urban life.

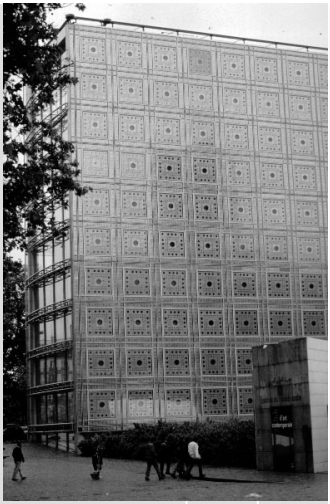
Diversity in its many forms is the primary element of a vibrant place; diversity of business; physical form and visual stimulation. Think of the street markets that you have spent hours browsing through. Markets such as Portabollo Road or Petticoat Lane in London exist in unremarkable settings their vibrancy comes through the interaction between the people and products. The most successful markets are those where there is a great diversity of product, every stall has a different range and somewhere there is a treasure to be found. In the French city of Lyon at the weekends outdoor markets line the banks of the La Saone River. On any weekend there might be a produce market or an art and used book market. A browsers dream!

Today's urban designers and architects are faced with the task of thinking globally and acting locally. The challenge is to work in the increasingly globalised world while being sensitive to local cultural values and heritage. An often quoted example is the Arab Institute in Paris by French architect Jean Nouvel where he successfully transformed the traditional pierced stonework patterns found in traditional Islamic architecture into a contemporary and technologically advanced form. The pierced screen effect has been created using movable metal blades, rather like the iris in a camera. The building's 'irises' open and close as they are connected to electric motors that are activated by changes in available light through the day.

In Brisbane there is a strong design movement focused on architecture and landscapes that are of a contemporary style but that build on and reflect the culture and environment of the sub-tropical city. Local architects are reinterpreting the traditional housing forms of open verandas, cross flow ventilation and dappled light created by lattice work screens. Not only does this contemporary style look right in the sub-tropics but it encourages and supports the relaxed and open cultural life that goes with the climate.

This global/local juggling act relies on a heightened level of Cultural Literacy.





The Intercultural City

> *As a fact, multiculturalism describes the increasing cultural diversity of societies in late modernity. Empirically, many societies and many cities could be described today as multicultural.* [Sandercock 2004]

Australia from the earliest days of European settlement has been a complex and culturally diverse nation. Its cities are home to a huge range of peoples from across the globe. A fundamental change in government policy came about with the publication of *A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future* by the Federal Government in 1973. As a result, Australia has developed a strong commitment to multiculturalism in policy and practice with state and local government having policy positions in support of multiculturalism. Most of the policies in one form or another include strategies relating to valuing diversity, reducing inequality, encouraging participation and promoting the social, cultural and economic benefits of cultural diversity.

To some degree multiculturalism, and its associated government funding, has reinforced the differences and had a cultural heritage focus that is about the past rather than cultural diversity as the way forward. This is quite understandable and valuable, but it does point to the concept of interculturalism as the ideal way to bring about interaction between cultures in order to maximise the benefits to the city of this cultural diversity.

Generally Australia has been a stable society with little inter-racial conflict despite successive waves of migration. Migration has had a major impact on Australian cities as each new wave of migrants tends to settle, upon arrival, in the lower socio-economic areas and in areas where others from their country of origin have previously settled. These “communities of cultural interest” provide access to their peers, to culturally acceptable or religiously required foods, common language and support services. In many Australian cities there are high concentrations of cultural groups especially in the early stages of settlement.

There has been an observable phenomenon of the dissipation of migrant groups over a ten to twenty year period. As families become more successful in business and children form their own families there has been a trend to move out of the inner city areas to more prosperous suburbs.

While this has been the Australian experience clearly migration has led to serious racial tensions and unfortunate violence in many British and European cities. The fear of the "other", based on the lack of shared knowledge plays an important part in such tensions, as does the fear that the "others' are taking away opportunities and employment from the dominate culture. It is interesting that people who migrated to Australia in the 1950s from Eastern Europe often complain about the more recent migrants from South East Asia taking away their jobs, thus, completely ignoring the fact that they themselves were once the most recent arrivals!

This highlights the need for greater Cultural Literacy at all levels of society. Not only do we need to understand our own culture, we also need a basic understanding of, and interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds.

The terms 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism' are often used interchangeably, but in this book they are considered as two quite different concepts. Firstly multicultural is considered to be the recognition and the right of cultural or linguistic communities to retain, express and celebrate their cultural differences. The term intercultural is used in the context of people from different cultural backgrounds coming together in a common desire to build on the cross-cultural potential from a multicultural society with its ethnic and cultural diversity.

The Intercultural City concept has been proposed by cultural theorists such as Franco Bianchini, Jude Bloomfield and Leonie Sandercock. In *Reconsidering Multiculturalism: towards an intercultural project* Sandercock [2004] discusses Interculturalism as an approach that goes beyond multiculturalism, calling for equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences. It focuses on the need for a pluralist re-thinking of public space and civic culture linked with innovative and creative economic development for all citizens regardless of the ethnic origins.

It aims to create city policies and environments that encourage cross-cultural dialogue to promote cultural, social, political and economic innovation. It is seeking to maximise the interaction between cultures not simply respect and support peoples right to diverse cultures.

> *Cultural diversity is a positive and intercultural dialogue is a necessary element of culturally diverse societies. No culture is perfect or can be perfected, but all cultures have something to learn from and contribute to others. Cultures grow through the everyday practices of social interaction.*
> [Sandercock 2004]

The rate of international migration is increasing rapidly. The statistics in the "International Migration Report 2002" [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs] show that the number of migrants has doubled since the 1970s. The report also says that "around 175 million persons are residing away from the country of their birth and one in every 10 persons in the developed regions is a migrant". This has brought about considerable change in the nature of migration to countries such as Britain where the traditional Commonwealth migration has shifted to migrants from Eastern Europe and refugees from the horn of Africa.

Migration may be a choice or it may be a necessity due to economic, political or increasingly environmental pressures. The undeniable fact is that international migration has become a fact of life and we need to address the reality that we live in an increasingly heterogeneous society.

> *In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential that persons and groups having plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities should live together in harmonious interaction and proper accord. Policies that seek the integration and participation of all citizens are an earnest of social cohesion, vitality of civil society and peace. Defined in this way, cultural pluralism is the policy offshoot of cultural diversity. Since it is inseparable from a democratic context, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and the flowering of the creative potential that sustains life in society.* [UNESCO web site]

It is clear that this growing heterogeneity is putting pressure on those in the dominant culture who feel insecure. In Australia there have been periods when there were calls for integration not multiculturalism, with commentators and politicians suggesting that migrants should give up their funny foreign cultures and become "true blue Aussies". Luckily it would seem that the majority of Australians are not threatened by the concept of multiculturalism. In fact, it seems that most people go beyond simple tolerance preferring to embrace diversity and the richness it brings.

Looking at diversity from a business perspective the Australian Federal Government's multicultural policy approach has had a focus on "Productive Diversity" which is based on the understanding that workforce diversity can enhance market understanding, stimulate creativity and foster innovative thinking.

Cultural diversity enables employees to provide different perspectives for the performance of creative tasks. In addition it is proposed that employees who feel valued and supported by their organisation tend to be more innovative and such companies benefit from the superior performance benefits of culturally diverse teams, especially when they are engaged in complex tasks requiring innovation and creativity.

> *The Government is committed to promoting the economic benefits that can be derived in both the domestic and international markets by capitalising on Australia's wealth of cultural and linguistic skills and on the social and business networks of Australia's migrants. This is pursued through the Productive Diversity program.*
>
> *The main emphasis of the Productive Diversity program in the last three years has been to articulate a sound business case for diversity management. The achievements to date will be built on through further development of business case studies and tools to support Australian businesses to maximise the benefits of diversity in the workplace and the community.*
> [Multicultural Australia: United In Diversity 2003]

In order to maximise the benefits of diversity in developing our cities we need to recognise that cultural difference is a valuable resource, a resource through which we can learn new ways to plan and design our built environment. People with different cultural backgrounds will have different ways of seeing and reading the city. This diverse awareness can be a valuable tool in creating rich and inclusive civic spaces.

However observations of public spaces suggest that regardless of the design of space there is very little likelihood of strangers interacting even among those of the dominant culture. This is perhaps more a result of social behaviours generally rather than with the design. Interaction with strangers usually requires a reason, to buy, to seek directions or ask for information. Feedback from focus group sessions in Australia and New Zealand suggests that people feel

markets and festivals are very intercultural, although they are not necessarily experiencing high levels of interaction there is excitement in mingling with people from many different cultures.

In Queensland, Logan's Woodridge Station Markets is an example of a street market that is both run by a group of local traders from a number of cultural backgrounds and attracts local residents and visitors from extremely diverse backgrounds. There are many such multicultural spaces although this does not mean they are intercultural spaces. There appears to be a number of factors at work in markets: there is a diversity of product available that attracts people from a range of cultural groups; shopping generally requires varying degrees of personal interaction between buyer/seller; main street shopping is more likely to involve literally 'rubbing shoulders' with people from all walks of life and cultures. None of these factors are in themselves truly intercultural activities but they lead to an acceptance and increased openness to the "other".

Festivals do present cultural groups with an opportunity to celebrate and showcase their heritage and arts in public spaces. The Hindu Diwali festival staged in Auckland's Aotearoa Square brings together a wide variety of people to engage with the local Indian community in the city's most prominent public space. Festivals such as Diwali and the many examples of multicultural markets present the potential for the chance encounter and cross-cultural experience.

To date there has been limited research and analysis into this complex dimension of the city. There is some evidence from the United States that diverse cities also tend to be the most competitive cities. Richard Florida has explored this issue in the *Rise of the Creative Class* with his concept of the 3 Ts of economic development; Technology, Talent and Tolerance.

In order to provide a means of measuring the range of factors that constitute a creative city, Florida proposes a range of creativity indexes for use in undertaking comparative research into US cities.

These include the High-Tech, Innovation, Talent and creativity indexes that one might expect but also includes the Gay, Bohemian, Melting Pot and Diversity indexes.

Florida's basic argument is that levels of creativity and innovation are linked to the openness and tolerance of the environment where creative people work. Therefore bringing together measures of population diversity with measures of creative outcomes such as the number of patents registered provides an overall creative city rating.

While it may be that Florida can support his proposition with economic evidence from cities that have successful creative industry sectors, it is a concept that raises many questions concerning socio-economic factors and the equity of elite "creative classes" dominating urban planning. For example are diversity, cultural complexity and quality public space simply there to create a vibrant environment for rich creative professions to work and live in? Where do the diverse, bohemian and vibrant neighbourhoods in the poorer areas of cities rate on the Florida index?

It is interesting to consider how this cultural diversity and "Bohemianness" is made manifest in cities. It is fascinating that in countries such as England, USA or Australia, with such a rich and diverse cultural mix, there does not appear to be much evidence of a changing approach to developing public spaces or building form.

When individual cultural groups make their mark on the built environment it is often in cultural quarters such London's Brick Lane with its large Bangladeshi population or in the ubiquitous China Towns.

The Chinese Diaspora seems to have led to the creation of a Chinese quarter in almost every city outside China. In cities all over the world there is a precinct with identical traditional gateway structures and clusters of restaurants. In Australia the origins of China Town date back to the early colonial settlement and gold rush days when the Chinese were forced to live in their own enclave.

Today they are often little more than commercial precincts where the existing building fabric has been dressed up with a romanticised or historically frozen image of the old country that can at times border on an oriental Disneyland with their traditional and instantly recognisable gateways.

The Chinese Diaspora have also been highly successful in taking their culture to all corners of the globe as can be seen by the sight of faux traditional Chinese doorways leading to the ubiquitous Chinese restaurant. They are to be found in Baroque buildings in Prague, in the side streets of Siena and even across the road from the Vatican. These are wonderful examples of “Cultural Cross-dressing”. While these Chinese doorways are very photogenic and a bit of fun, they are little more than cultural signage. One might ask, is there any difference between the faux pagoda doorway to a Chinese restaurant or take-away than the golden arches of McDonalds?

A more organic and genuine expression of community cultural life can be found in local precincts such as Melbourne's alternative lifestyle Brunswick Street, the Lanes in Brighton, England or Montreal's rue St Denis in the 'Latin quarter'. Here the local community has gathered as a community of interest of like-minded people who have been attracted to a "Bohemian" street atmosphere. Local traders have expressed this sense of place through the style of shop signage, window display and merchandise range. All of these areas have become sustainable because they have achieved a critical mass of choice and diversity which is supported by a changing population seeking a point of difference.

These alternative quarters often develop organically and without official sanction or planning. Diversity of built form in terms of height controls, land use and density are all standard tools of city planners and can have great influence on the economics and to some extent the vitality of city precincts but these statutory controls do not work at the fine grain level.

We should seek to draw out the richness of our cultures in a deep and meaningful way that would lead to the development of a uniquely intercultural built form.

It is important to ask the question, how do planners, architects and legislators approach 'controlled' cultural diversity? And what knowledge do they need to undertake such a task?

PART TWO

Thinking Culturally

This section will bring together the various threads under the title "Thinking Culturally" and focus the spotlight on the relationship between culture and the built environment.

It is important at this point of the book to introduce a word of caution. While we tend to speak of cultures in the context of a national, geographic, linguistic or religious grouping we need to keep in mind that the notion of culture is not that simple. Cultures are ever changing and evolving over generations and across cities. Also many cultures that seem to be relatively monocultural are in fact quite diverse due to clan, caste or class structures. Nor for that matter do individual human beings always fit neatly into cultural frameworks.

What UNESCO's *Our Creative Diversity* study reminds us is that we should avoid clichéd or romanticised notions of a culture and remember that they are neither homogenous nor formulaic.

> *First cultures overlap. Basic ideas may, and do, recur in several cultures because cultures have partly common roots, built on similar human experiences and have, in the course of history, often learned from each other. In other words, cultures do not have sharply delineated boundaries. Secondly, cultures usually do not speak with one voice on religious, ethical, social or political matters and other aspects of people's lives. What the meaning of a particular idea or tradition may be and what conduct it may rejoin is always subject to interpretation. This applies with particular force to a world in rapid transformation.*
> [Pérez de Cuéllar, et al, 1996]

The task is to develop sensitivity to cultural diversity both between defined "cultural groups" and also between generations and genders.

With this in mind, the arguments presented in this section all lead to culturally informed planning and designing of city spaces and infrastructure, and explore different ways of seeing, feeling and thinking about buildings, places and people.

Cultural Literacy: and the built environment

"Culture is a people's way of life. It is people's "ways of being". It has five core components:

- ***Customary ways of behaving;*** *of making a living; eating; expressing affection; getting married; raising children; responding to illness and to death; getting ahead in society; and dealing with the supernatural;*
- ***Codes or assumptions;*** *expectations; and emotions underlying those customary behaviours;*
- ***Artefacts;*** *things that members of the population make or have made that have meaning for them;*
- ***Institutions;*** *economic, political, religious and social; the imperatives of culture that form a recognizable pattern requiring know-how, skills, and customary behaviours in a fairly predictable manner; and*
- ***Social structure;*** *the patterned ways that people relate to one another"*
  [Ogbu 1995]

In order to explain my concept of Cultural Literacy as a tool for designers, planners and managers I will utilise John U Ogbu's definition as a format for considering culture from a built environment and public place perspective.

Each of Ogbu's core components has a relationship with cities, these might be physical manifestations of existing local culture or evidence of past cultures or they may be behaviours and cultural attitudes that will influence the thinking of the city's planners and managers.

In many modern cities the pressures for development are led by demand and cost whereas cultural behaviours and attitudes are often overlooked. It is the intent of Cultural Literacy to surface cultural considerations so that they can be realistically integrated into planning and design outcomes.

Customary ways of behaving; *of making a living; eating; expressing affection; getting married; raising children; responding to illness and to death; getting ahead in society; and dealing with the supernatural;*

Every culture has defined customary ways of behaving in public places that have in most cases evolved over generations. For example, the Spanish tradition of the evening promenade, late dining and socialising in public spaces such as La Rambla in Barcelona. The design of Spanish cities has evolved over time to accommodate and reflect the Spanish style of cosmopolitan living.

Likewise the various traditions associated with the produce market square in a Tuscan hill town or the huge range of herring stalls on the Copenhagen waterfront provide us with insights into the daily lives of the people in those towns and cities.

In western cities the concept of outdoor dining has become a significant trend with public places sprouting tables and chairs even on the narrowest of footpaths. This trend has led to a shift in urban design thinking and city planning in order to accommodate and support the expansion of outdoor dining because it provides increased animation and interest to our streets.

In most Asian cities the streets are home to vendors offering a bewildering range of foods, where footpaths may become a combination of living-room, department store and pedestrian movement system. These vibrant environments are a wonderful example of the city as the “stage set” in which people play out their cultural life.

In Indian cities the religious life of the community is very much in evidence, with sacred cows wandering among the traffic and people and the ever present holy men practicing their faith. In a western city it might once have been the Salvation Army band but today it is more likely to be the singing and drumming of a Hare Krishna group winding their way through the crowds along London’s Oxford Street.

Customary ways of behaving also include significant local and national civic events. Streets and public spaces can also be seen as places of celebration and remembrance. Locally the village or town square is the site for festival, weddings and political rallies.

On a grander scale, urban designers need to factor into city plans, processional spaces such as The Mall, the Champs Elysees or St Peters Square for state funerals; political demonstrations; parades of returning adventurers, sporting or military heroes and religious processions.

Let's not forget that a city's vitality might also have a lot to owe to those individuals within society that challenge the customary ways of behaving. Indeedcities such as San Francisco and Sydney, where there are significant gay communities, have benefited greatly from the community's contribution to city vitality. The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a classic example of how a small expression of minority pride and resilience grew to be an event of national and international significance, along the way bringing considerable economic benefit to the city's homosexual and heterosexual businesses alike.

Codes or assumptions; *expectations; and emotions underlying those customary behaviours;*

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of Cultural Literacy is the ability to identify relevant codes and assumptions that define behaviour in public places. In the streets there may be quite different attitudes to dress codes, eating in public and acts of intimacy or affection. We need to be able to pick up the messages that inform us of the codes of behaviour; is it appropriate to eat while walking in public; are acts of intimacy such as hugging and kissing acceptable?

There are international codes and assumptions such as the standardised iconography of road signs that everyone is expected to understand. At a local level however the tourist can expect to find that local signs often leave us perplexed. The sign makers may have assumed a level of local cultural knowledge, therefore leaving out all the information that the viewer 'will of course already know'!

It is also an assumption in each culture that people understand required behaviour in various institutional settings. Knowledge of how to behave is a prerequisite prior to entering a religious building, be it a synagogue, mosque, temple or church.

Similar accepted behaviours are expected in secular cultural institutions such as the opera house, art gallery or library. Consider the subtle differences in expected behaviour at musical performances of either a classical concert, a jazz jam session or an outdoor rock concert. All these codes must be learned, through observation of adult behaviour or taught through the home environment, the education system or observed in the media.

It is also important to remember that codes and assumptions can present barriers to economic growth, tolerance, creativity and innovation. Xenophobic attitudes lead to a closed mind about the "other" and becomes resistant to change and risk taking.

Indeed codes of behaviour can be used by religious, social or sporting groups to create a sense of group belonging and to exclude others. This has always been a factor in sustaining the social class systems in many communities.

In an intercultural society codes of behaviour can be a significant barrier to cross cultural activity.

In an Australian city where there might live people from close to two hundred different ethnicities there will be inevitable conflicts between needs and expectations. People in focus groups have said that it is impossible to design for everyone or the city would end up a complete mess trying to meet all the demands.

While it is not realistic to expect city planners and designers to have knowledge of all the codes relevant to their community, especially as many cities will have a hundred or more different ethnic or linguistic groups to consider, it is important to be sensitive to and consult on potential behavioural issues.

Artefacts; *things that members of the population make or have made that have meaning for them;*

Every city around the world has significant artefacts, especially monuments to past kings, leaders or equestrian heroes in piazzas or in front of the parliament building.

Equally religious monuments to saints or gods have pride of place particularly those representing the dominant religion.

Almost every Australian town however large or small has its ANZAC war memorial to those who served and died in the World Wars. These memorials have great significance to the local community as they are specifically commemorating the death of soldiers from the town or region and become the civic focus for memorial events.

While we accept many of these artefacts as part of the urban environment, a contemporary interpretation of history will at times render many anachronistic to contemporary society. In Australia we have many monuments to early European explorers who supposedly "discovered" parts of the continent that in reality were known to the Aboriginal peoples for over forty thousand years.

Cities and cultures are constantly evolving and therefore over time the meaning of artefacts can be seen to change as new interpretations of history form.

Under totalitarian regimes the artefacts glorifying the "Great Leader" reached great heights in scale if not aesthetics. Social realist art has been responsible for many heroic artefacts to the workers of the state. Beijing's Tiananmen Square is the site of a number of very large artefacts celebrating the deeds of the workers and the People's Liberation Army.

The artefact flourishes untill the regime topples and then the artefacts come tumbling down. This was graphically shown in the world's press during the collapse of the former Soviet Socialist Republic. Who can forget the images of monumental statues of Stalin and Lenin tumbling before the masses?

Interestingly in both Prague and Budapest designers have expressed regret to me that there now remains little evidence of the communist period in the city's public places. While it was a dark period, it was still an important chapter of their history and should be acknowledged.

Today in most modern western cities the artefact is more likely be a Henry Moore or Alexander Calder sculpture sited in front of downtown office towers, symbolising the wealth and power of corporate capital.

Iconic buildings, such as the Kremlin, the White House, the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower or the Sydney Opera House are also potent cultural artefacts.

Institutions; *economic, political, religious and social; the imperatives of culture that form a recognizable pattern requiring know-how, skills, and customary behaviours in a fairly predictable manner;*

Civic institutions have always played a important role in the form of the city, a classic example being the Agora as the epicentre of Athens and the growth of Greek culture and democracy.

In medieval Europe the layout of the town's civic centre or market square was dominated by the key civic institutions: the town hall, the guild house, the cathedral and the inn.

Major symbols of power such as Buckingham Palace, the Kremlin or St Peters Cathedral are sited so that the people can gather in huge numbers to pay respect, celebrate or mourn. Having been among the masses in St Peters in Rome when the Pope performed a beatification service I was enthralled at the urban design of the space, its sense of containment and its ability to hold such a huge gathering of people and keep the focus of the crowd on the Papal balcony.

Interestingly by contrast, in the development of the Australian colonial city, the Town Hall and State Parliament buildings were mainly built facing onto roads not civic squares. We might speculate that either the founding governors and town planners wanted to discourage the populous from gathering in front of the parliament or they assumed that they were building such egalitarian societies people would have no need for political demonstrations.

If we consider the location of religious institutions in the city we can see that the civic planning patterns that governed the positioning of places of worship: the cathedral on the high ground, closer to god and maximising its impact on the skyline; the need for the Mosques to be central to homes, shops and workplaces so as to be close to the people to meet their need to pray throughout the day.

It has become increasingly difficult in established cities for religious groups to gain planning permission to build new places of worship in existing suburbs due to strict zoning laws, concerns from local residents about noise and issues of demand for increased car parking in residential streets.

While commerce obviously takes place throughout a city it is not uncommon for there to be a focused commercial precinct where the major economic institutions are located. London of course has 'The City' with the major banking institutions and corporate towers housing the head offices of global business.

The business of cultural expression has it's cultural institutions; the art gallery; the museum; and the theatres. Like commerce, cultural quarters often develop around an artform such as the theatre districts of the West End in London or Broadway in New York. Indeed a cultural institution such as the Sydney Opera House has transcended its role as simply a place for the enjoyment of the performing arts to become an "icon" of the city.

Social structure; *the patterned ways that people relate to one another*

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the ways different cultures relate to one another in public is the difference in concepts of personal space, behaviour of crowds and making or not making eye contact with strangers. The British have a penchant for orderly queuing for almost anything from buying and ice-cream to a ride on the London Eye. Whereas in Italy, you can experience the all-in scrum at the train station or the press of customers just buying an espresso in the local cafe. These differing patterns of interpersonal behaviour are classic examples of the interaction of people in public.

In the Souqs of Fez and Marrakech there is an almost medieval sense of place where the crush of people going about their daily lives provides a fascinating insight into Moroccan culture. The sheer number of people coexisting in the cramped quarters of the medina means that interaction between people in the narrow streets and crowded market squares is inevitable.

It is clear that people in these cities have developed a minimum personal space requirement and are completely comfortable with the constant physical contact that is required in simply moving down a narrow lane or entering the tiny shops. By contrast our western cities are designed to provide maximum personal space and to accommodate unhindered movement along footpaths designed to meet required regulatory standards.

The interrelation between people greatly influences the choice of where to live and bring up your family. There are those who thrive on the stimulation and buzz of cosmopolitan cities where you are constantly mixing with people from other cultures and experiencing different ways of living.

However not everyone wants to live with people who have different social structures to their own. Not dissimilar to the walled medieval town or Moroccan medina is the emerging trend to planned gated communities. The high surrounding walls and security guards at the entry are evidence of social structure and the desire to avoid unnecessary contact with the ‘general public’ or the ‘other’.

Similar social patterns manifest themselves in areas such as public transport which in many cities has a class association linked to perceptions of danger. In Los Angeles it seems that the very efficient, inexpensive and extensive public transport system is mainly used by the lower socioeconomic groups in society; if you have money you own a car or can afford the horrendous taxi rates.

Tolerance of the urban homeless and street beggars is another area where we see evidence of social structure being played out in public.

The design of street furniture that can be sat on but not slept on sends a clear signal the city does not want undesirable elements messing up their public space. In Deptford High Street, London, a perceived problem of antisocial drinking in public led to the removal of all the street seating. A simple solution, but one which had the unfortunate consequence of depriving the public of a place to rest; or a place to sit and soak up the wonderful multicultural atmosphere.

These are a few examples of how culture is at the heart of every aspect of a city, its planning; its building; and its ongoing life. It is the underlying cultural influences that make a city unique, through its built form, artefacts and cultural life of its citizens.

To fully appreciate the differences across cultures varying levels of Cultural Literacy are needed. For the visitor, sufficient understanding of the codes and assumptions are required to enjoy a short visit in a vastly different culture. But for the architect or artist wanting to engage with a culture other than their own requires a much deeper level of Cultural Literacy.

What we need to recognise is that we must also be culturally literate in our own cities. Modernity has brought with it professional classifications and boundaries between professional behaviour and responsibility. As a result of specialisation it appears that there has been a loss of Cultural Literacy within the built environment professionals. This has therefore lead to buildings as personal statements, rather than culturally relevant outcomes. Ideally an architect should be deeply engaged with his or her local culture since of all the arts "architecture has an immediate relationship with dwelling as social act, with construction as a practice" [Lefebvre 1996] therefore having a dramatic and lasting impact on our cities and way of life.

In addition to the impacts of professional practice the increased level of rules and regulations governing every aspect of our lives also needs to be revisited and assessed from a cultural perspective. There are many instances where seemingly practical regulations have been imposed on building design for the public good, such as the requirement to provide privacy screens on suburban house windows overlooking neighbours. An elderly woman who moved from a small Greek village to live with her son's family in Adelaide complained of feeling isolated and cut off from the world around her because the privacy screens prevented her from observing and participating in the life of the community as would have happened in her culture. We might therefore ask if the planners who drew up the regulations considered notions of community and people's values or simply looked for a technical solution to a perceived problem.

The city of Auckland is home to a large population of people from the South Pacific such as Samoans and Tongans. These cultural groups have a strong sense of family and community. The church is a key

factor in their lives and large gatherings are an essential ingredient in socialising and shared culture. Large extended family groups are the norm with a great emphasis on communal living. The concept of communal property and large family groups has created a significant challenge for the statutory planners who have rather narrow regulations regarding house sizes and the number of people living on a single property title.

It can be seen from these examples that it is important for city planners to be culturally literate. It is also important that we have an informed debate regarding the implications of existing regulatory planning requirements on the lives of different cultural groups in our community.

Proxemic and Distemic Space

> *Cognition is the act or faculty of knowing, of consciously gaining and storing new information in the memory. The physical environment "sends" information to the observer, who then processes it. In some cases the information is new and may add to the knowledge of the observer; in others, it is partly known and may reinforce (or alter) the observer's previous knowledge; in yet others, the information is simply redundant, so well known to the observer that he may even fail to register it. Whether an environment creates pleasure or fear, interest or boredom, reassurance or anxiety depends on how the information is perceived.*
> [Lozano 1990]

In the late 1960s US anthropologist Edward T Hall wrote a series of books presenting his theories on culture and human behaviour. He provided the groundwork to areas that have continued to be researched and discussed such as 'non verbal communication' and proxemic space.

Hall in *Beyond Culture* defines proxemics as:

> *"Proxemics refers to man's use of space as an aspect of his culture; i.e. conversational distance, planning, and the use of interior spaces, town layout, and the like."* [Hall 1969]

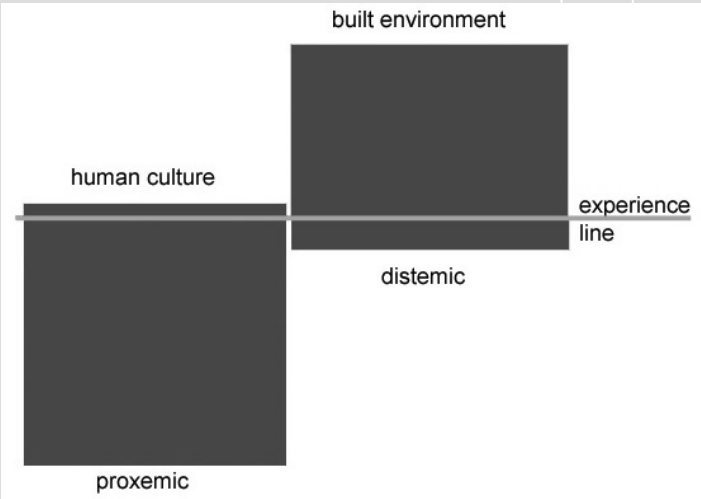
Hall clearly intends that the concept be applied across all aspects of spatial use and creation in the urban environment as he further contends that;

> *".. all situational behaviour has a temporal and spatial (proxemic) dimension"* [Hall 1969]

The majority of writing about and critique of Hall's proxemic theories has concentrated on his analysis of the influences of cultural nuances on conversational distances or sense of personal space. This notion of response to space associated with different cultures has been simplistically interpreted by many into 'keep your distance' formulas for interpersonal behaviour between people from different cultural backgrounds.

I believe there is greater depth to the proxemic theory than this especially when we consider the built environment. All planning and design decisions are made in the context of space: space for buildings; spaces between buildings; spaces to travel through; spaces to gather in; and spaces to play in. Spaces have a story to tell: some very old stories others new; some are associated with painful memories of revolution or accidental death; other of moments of joy or new found love; while others speak of decaying public infrastructure and neglect. All of which bring with them a cultural dimension that is of importance to city managers, planners and designers.

The following diagram illustrates the concept of proxemic and distemic space by showing how culture is essentially an experiential "proxemic" quality with a depth we know to be there but that cannot be easily experienced while the physical nature of the built environment is such essentially distemic, although there are hidden depths, essentially it is there for all to see.



In his book *Spaces; dimensions of the human landscape* Barrie Greenbie, has expanded on the work of Hall and developed proxemic theory in relation to his practice as a landscape architect. He states:

> *"The essence of civilised life is sharing space with others without intruding or being intruded upon".* [Greenbie 1981]

Greenbie uses the term proxemic to describe those places which have particular cultural resonance to individuals or specific groups of people, implying an intimate relationship exists with the space or a deep knowledge and understanding of the space as a cultural place. In this context, proxemic would also imply that the user of the public space understands the appropriate situational behaviour expected in that culture.

Conversely, Greenbie uses the term distemic places in reference to cross-cultural behaviour on all social or economic levels, including the diversity of social and cultural experiences. This is a useful counterpoint to proxemic when considering those universal public spaces that are part of many world cities - spaces understood by all!

> *"Those parts of the city which are actively shared by people with diverse cultural values and codes of conduct must be readily intelligible to all."* [Greenbie 1981]

The provincial city, small village or closed community might only have proxemic space, spaces that are full of meaning to local residents who have lived there all their lives. These spaces might be rich with personal and communal history and governed by very specific cultural mores. So much so that visitors from outside that community would find it hard to identify with the cultural context of the place and therefore feel alienated.

Obviously the concepts of proxemic and distemic space are not mutually exclusive, a space can be distemic to the one time visitor while being proxemic to residents who use it on a regular basis, or are well aware of the historic importance of the place.

Both an urban village within a major city or an untouched medieval hill town in Tuscany can be highly proxemic for its residents and distemic for visitors. Indeed, a city such as Siena with its overwhelming tourist visitation could also become distemic for its residents. The residents who provide the necessary services or sell

commodities to the tourists who flock there in droves would inevitably lose their sense of connectedness as a city takes on a Disneyland aura.

Likewise places such as holocaust memorials and war memorials can be both highly proxemic to those who were actually involved in or lost loved ones in the specific conflict while still being highly evocative and distemic to the average visitor. For example the Vietnam memorial in Washington DC is highly moving for any visitor but overwhelmingly powerful for Vietnam veterans because of the wall of names and the memories recalling all those they knew but did not return.

Most people cannot but be conscious of a spirit of place when visiting a war memorial or historic place regardless of their knowledge of the events being commemorated. While war memorials are symbolic public places, on a more personal level is the interesting recent phenomenon of the proliferation of roadside memorials to victims of traffic accidents. These roadside shrines are examples of a proxemic space within a hostile and distemic environment. Despite the undeniable "publicness" of the place the 'situational behaviour' of the family and friends of the victim gives the memorial a tragic proxemic relationship with the accident site.

City spaces can at times be soulless and distemic in nature, where nobody feels any sense of personal association with 'place'. It is not just large urban spaces but many small more intimate spaces can be "deserts of space" as described by a group of young people in Deptford, London. The same young people discussed the concept of "fugitive space", that space where they can gather and interact away from adult supervision. The interesting aspect of this discussion was that they would have preferred to have been able to be able to gather on the edge of well used public space where there was a degree of adult overseeing and community acceptance, rather than being in effect driven into the "fugitive space" by pressures from judgemental authorities.

City planners seeking to create more of a sense of place, or generate proxemic space, often call upon artists to create work that is contextual or commemorative. However it is not always possible to artificially transform what is essentially a distemic space into a proxemic space. Artwork can help the visitor to interpret space and to absorb meaning but this alone does not make truly proxemic space.

In Prague I was told that public spaces such as Wenceslas Square do not need interpretive artworks for the people to understand the power of the space as a 'democratic place", the space that became the focal point of people power and dramatic political change. In deed they did not want to clutter the space up as there may come a time when they need to take to the streets again.

Likewise 'Ground Zero' in New York and the dramatic media images will be indelibly imprinted on the world's imagination for generations. So powerful was the 'iconic act' of the World Trade Centre destruction that the site has become perhaps the first truly universal proxemic space.

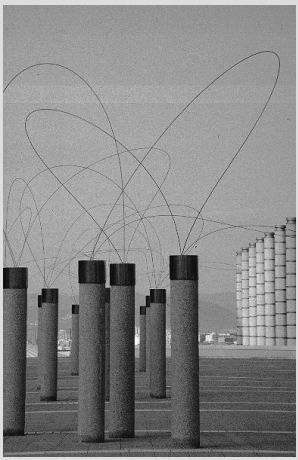
It is easy to provide examples of urban spaces from European cities which demonstrate many of the points raised, but it would appear to be much harder when it comes to more modern cities and younger cultures. But is that because we are not being sufficiently sensitive to evolving cultural diversity of our cities and the rather unique multicultural/cosmopolitan life style which is developing?

It has been shown over and over again in the history of modern urban development that one cannot create a rich people place, both proxemic and distemic, simply through good architecture or urban design. What good urban design can do is create the stage upon which the city's culture can be played out, thus building resonance and proxemics over time.

Richard Sennett in *The Conscience of the Eye* [1993] talks of "narrative space" and of the need to "permit space to become thus encoded with time" thus, recognising that it take time and unplanned use to build the narrative.

The essential message from Sennett is that great cities need to allow for the human experience to incrementally build layers of meaning and complexity through community interaction and not settle for the over designed architectural statement or the bland "neutralising spaces" found in many modern cities and especially in shopping centres.

The problem faced by major redevelopment projects today is that they are expected to deliver both a commercially viable product for the marketplace but also places with amenity and themes. However it is extremely difficult to create space from scratch that reaches beyond newness; that has a unique narrative; and feels proxemic.



The concept of the city "narrative" was the basis for the development of Brisbane City Council's *Creative City Strategy* [2003] which is primarily about cultural influence across the whole of council.

> *Council believes that 'culture' can be broadly defined as the full range of practices through which we give meaning to our lives and through which our community expresses its identity.*

It has been developed as a 'narrative policy' that is, a policy that tells the story of the city's people, style, feel and ways of doing things. The document is less about laying out a work plan and more about using culture and creativity as a change agent.

> *The challenge for Brisbane is to shape its own creative approach and move beyond established practices to new ways of thinking that enrich the life of the city.*

It is this "journey of creativity and culture" that the strategy aims to support. It is structured around four "Outcome Areas": Brisbane People; The Brisbane Experience; Brisbane Style and The Brisbane Way.

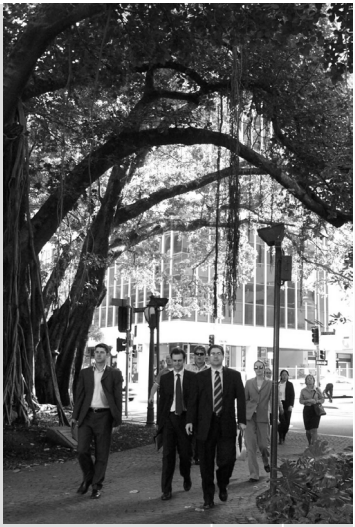
Brisbane's People; recognises that "like most cities Brisbane is made up of a patchwork of diverse neighbourhoods and overlapping communities of interest" and seeks to address strategies that focus on building vibrant neighbourhoods and creating a city of opportunity. It presents opportunities for local projects with proxemic qualities.

The Brisbane Experience; centres around the fact that the city is uniquely sub tropical in nature and as a result is unlike any other Australian city, therefore this outcome area focuses on building on this experiential base to celebrate difference.

Brisbane Style; acknowledges that a "distinctive Brisbane style is emerging in everything from the programming of cultural festivals and events to architecture" and therefore seeks to support local creative industries and a sense of connectedness across the city.

The final outcome area, The Brisbane Way; focuses on the city's 'can do' approach to social, economic, environmental and cultural planning and development. This outcome area has great strategic importance as it confirms Council's commitment to the concepts of "innovation and risk taking" and "investing in people and building capacity".

The Brisbane *Creative City* experience demonstrates that cities are looking beyond the traditional arts/cultural policy approaches to more meaningful and visionary alternatives. The challenge then, for planners and designers is how to understand and work with the concept of distemic and proxemic space, in both the maintenance of existing city fabric and in the planning and design of new built environments.



Decoding and Encoding

> *"There are other levels of reality which do not become transparent by definition. The city writes and assigns, that is, it signifies, orders, stipulates. What? That is to be discovered by reflection."* [Lefebvre 1996]

Planners, designers and artists are involved in both encoding and decoding cultural knowledge. The process of research and analysis is essentially one of decoding content from previous or current generations, while the artist or designer will encode his or her work with layers of cultural meaning for others to decode.

Cultural Literacy can be seen as the skill base associated with understanding both the encoding and decoding required to develop culturally meaningful products, places or programs.

Encoding and decoding is the basic transaction of all forms of cultural expression, be it a book, a painting or piece of music. In all art making the artist is striving to imbue the artwork with symbolic meaning of either a personal or societal nature in an effort to enter into an intellectual and often non verbal dialogue with the viewer, reader or listener. This exceedingly complex process is highly dependent on firstly the creator having the skills to encode the intended meaning in a symbolic manner, utilising appropriate cultural context and iconography that has an element of shared knowledge associated with it. The creator then has an expectation that the 'consumer' will be sufficiently literate to read the encoded symbolism and therefore will be successful in decoding the intended meaning.

The artist's role can be seen primarily as one of communication, to provide clues and distil meaning through their work. As Hall describes it is "to help the layman order his cultural universe". [Hall 1969]

These processes go on every minute of every day as people read books, visit art galleries, listen to music, watch a play or attend religious services. The transference of meaning through decoding will obviously be achieved with varying levels of success in a large and complex society. The process is, as previously stated, highly dependent on the individual's level of Cultural Literacy and their

ability to read the context and iconography. A work of literature may have as many 'readings' as there are readers, not only because of levels of Cultural Literacy but because each reader brings to the decoding their own prior knowledge, values and experiences.

Similarly the city is alive with layer upon layer of histories, narratives and meanings. As has been discussed, some of this history and meaning will be of distemic nature and therefore easy to read or interpret by the casual observer or short term visitor, while other layers will be deeply proxemic and only readable to culturally connected residents or trained researchers. Perhaps informed visitors will 'sense' the depth of the layering of meaning in a place but lack an adequate level of Cultural Literacy to be able to decode the proxemic meaning.

This also applies to the designing of city buildings where cultural messages have been encoded. The classic examples are the Gothic and Renaissance Cathedrals. Here, man and engineering came together to create a physical expression of a love of god. The creation of soaring naves and flying buttresses expressed the uplifting qualities of the builder's religious belief. The Cathedral is also adorned/encoded with religious iconography for an audience with visual literacy if not written literacy.

In more recent times architects for the giant corporations utilised similar spatial volume and encoded messages of awe through the use of internal atriums in office towers, hotels and shopping centres to demonstrate their wealth, power and modernity.

Cities around the world vary greatly in age. There are those that have existed for millennium such as Damascus, Athens or Cuzco in Peru. The ancient cities of Asia are excellent examples of how cultural period build upon one another to create rich and vibrant thriving urban environments.

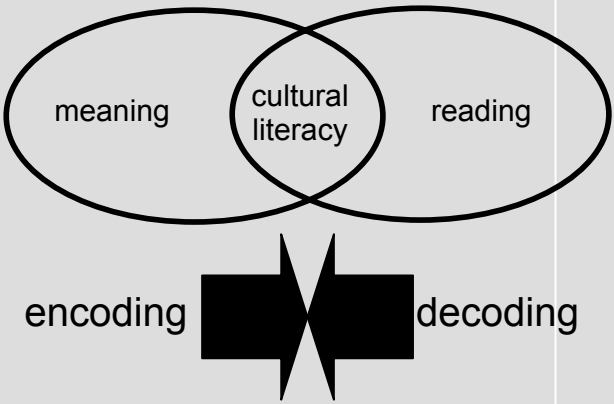
Others have been established in more recent times following European invasion and occupation of North America or Australasia where there were previous civilisations that coexisted with the land as hunters and gatherers or agrarian lifestyles. The lack of obvious pre-colonial permanent settlements does not mean that Australian cities lack pre invasion history, they clearly do and it needs to be read as one of the city's significant layers of history and meaning.

We also learn to read and decode messages about the nature of place in terms of felt qualities. Experience during community consultation associated with place making projects shows that whilst people may not know what urban design elements are required to make their place special, they are very articulate about places they feel good, welcome or safe in. They have instinctively felt the places where all the positive design qualities have come together.

In all cities there are places that say "Yes" and places that say "No". In many US cities there can be a dramatic change from one block to the next, between rich and poor neighbourhoods, between thriving commercial streets and derelict streets. We soon pick up the "vibes" of which streets or districts say "No".

While downtown Los Angeles is dominated by high rise commercial towers housing many thousands of office workers there is a surprising lack of pedestrian activity on the streets. This lack of street vitality, while not necessarily signifying actual danger, does send a negative message. Other American cities such as Chicago or New York have the massive skyscrapers and a very active street life, a vibrant environment that defiantly says "yes".

These complexities highlight the difficulties that exist for designers and planners of city spaces. They must be suitably literate to understand the cultural context that they are to work with and equally skilled in the art of encoding.



Cultural Knowledge and Awareness

> *Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants. Years of study have convinced me that the real job is not to understand foreign culture but to understand our own.* [Hall 1973]

Picking up on Hall's point that we may not fully understand our own culture we can find parallels in John Ralston Saul in *On Equilibrium* where he discusses common sense as shared knowledge and observes that "we can know something we don't understand". This is true of most shared cultural knowledge and is most evident in non verbal communication. Sense of place is most often something we can feel but we do not necessarily understand or even attempt to analysis it.

Saul states that:

> *Common sense has never been easy either to explain or to exercise. While reason may be the easiest of our qualities to deform, common sense has always been the easiest quality to turn into nonsense; the easiest to capture for ideological purposes. Why? Because a pretension of simplicity and truth can readily be presented as self-evident, meaning that we can but agree. This is false common sense, a manipulative mechanism to ensure the passivity of others.*
> [Saul 2001]

He is talking about cultural knowledge, codes and Cultural Literacy and reminds us that it is important to consider the inherent dangers of ideological or political manipulation of culture and the trivialising of cultural meaning through superficial pastiche and pseudo-iconography. Perhaps one of the most horrific forms of appropriation and misuse of cultural iconography was exhibited by the Nazi party in Germany. They built political mystique and played on the people's desire for connectedness to their heritage. The party leaders understood well how to utilise the power of symbols, ceremony, theatricality and architectural form to weave their desired narrative.

In a completely different context and time we can observe that there has been a trend in many recent urban developments to draw upon

some historic event or environmental aspect and include artwork or design elements that feature some representation of the history. Although Sandercock [1998] is especially critical of modernist planning professionals, suggesting that in their eagerness to remove all traces of the past in redevelopment projects they have become "thieves of history". Today there appears to be a shift in master planning towards a greater recognition of the past as a valuable source of design, although it is sometimes limited to superficial place marketing.

This is particularly evident in new residential marketing, where the name selected for the development and the branding images will often be based on the site's past history or environment. In Australia there is a trend to look to the past in residential planning and house design in an attempt to meet people's aspirations to own a home that has the qualities they associate with their parents' or grandparents' generation. As a result, the bulk of housing stock is based on a reproduction of the early 1900s federation style house, but with a modern air conditioner stuck on the roof and a four wheel drive in the carport.

While this is not inherently a bad thing it may be rather superficial and manipulated for marketing or 'point of difference' reasons rather than a meaningful attempt to preserve the past or provide interpretive understanding of the past.

High and Low Context
The following diagram is an attempt to graphically represent the concept of knowledge and awareness when reading the context of a "place". It shows that this is a variable scale of knowledge and awareness.

Regardless of the contextual richness of the "place" without knowledge and awareness only the peak of the 'contextual iceberg' is visible. As we gain knowledge and develop awareness then more and more of the contextual content is revealed to us.

For most people, without the advantage of detailed research, much of the high context knowledge associated with a place may remain hidden. This is especially true with regard to indigenous cultures that may not be able to share their cultural knowledge in a contemporary city. However as previously discussed in the section on proxemic space, an aware person while not fully informed of the knowledge content will often 'feel' the richness of place.

This is especially difficult where past cultures have been conquered, dominated or displaced yet their cultural significance is still in evidence or can be sensed. Most Australian cities have failed to surface the depth of Aboriginal culture that is inherent in the land.

Our understanding of place and the built form generally relies heavily on our cognitive skills. As "Cognition is the act or facility of knowing, of consciously gaining and storing new information" it has to be considered as essentially a cultural activity. Lozano explains that the critical role of culture in the "selective screening of sensory data" is to either filter out irrelevant data or amplifying what is perceived to be essential data within the cultural context of the site and the experience of the observer.

> *At the most concrete level, we perceive the physical characteristics of forms; at the most symbolic level, forms have culturally bound meanings.*
> [Lozano 1990]

The relationship between the physical form of cities and the lives that are lived in and between the buildings and structures of a city will also be heavily influenced by cultural knowledge. The built environment can be seen to play a significant role in influencing the way we respond and react to each other and to the physical structures of our

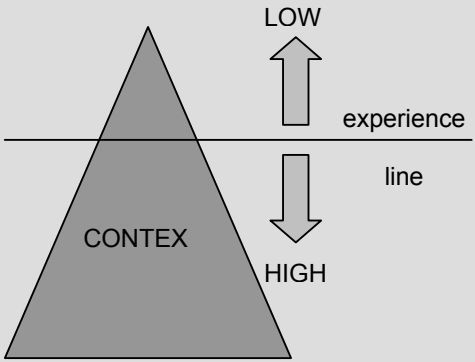
cities. Lozano refers to this as “a complex interface between built environment and human behaviour”. [Lozano 1990]

In Western cities planners and designers are greatly interested in active frontages to public spaces and suburban environments from a city animation perspective and in terms of crime prevention through environmental design. However in many cultures blank street frontages have been the traditional city form for centuries.

For example, when we walk through the narrow streets in the Medina of Marrakech or Fez we move between two story high walls with only the ornate wooden doors to indicate an internal domestic world. This urban form evolved through environmental influences and the development of North African culture and values, a culture of courtyard Riads with private internal spaces and no external expression of the domestic life within.

A culturally literate planning or design professional needs to develop the tools that assist in developing the knowledge and awareness of cultural influences and to be able to tap into the shared knowledge associated with the place they are to work with.

HIGH AND LOW CONTEXT



> *To enter into negotiation across the gulf of cultural difference requires all participants to be fluent in a range of ways of knowing and communicating; from storytelling to listening to interpreting complex visual languages as well as tribal language.* [Sandercock 1998]

There is a real need to think about gaining knowledge prior to the formulation of a brief for master planning from as many different sources as possible. A mosaic of knowledge gathered from people of different ages, cultures and association with place needs to be considered.
The Listening and Learning Circles approach I have developed has as its focus opening up an iterative process of listening to the built environment needs of diverse community and learning new ways to plan and design so that can deliver unique architectural and public realm solutions that provide an open and equitable city that reflects its diversity.

Step 1: listening circles of different cultural groups should be encouraged to talk about their cultural lives and how they are played out in the built environment. This would not be formal consultation about any specific project or place, rather seeking to gain an insight into the interrelationship between people and place.

Prior to any community discussions it will be important to establish, with community advisors, culturally appropriate ways in which the questions are presented and consideration of different ways that questions might be answered. It will also be important to establish what cultural limitations might exist in talking to young people, women and the elderly. Also careful consideration must be given to ensure that the questions are not likely to be interpreted as too personal or seeking a higher level of cultural disclosure than might be uncomfortable for the participants.

Step 2: Inter-disciplinary workshops with professional designers, town and social planners and other relevant service providers, where the lessons learned from Step 1 are reported and discussed. The key purpose of this step is to expand people's thinking and knowledge about their community's needs and aspirations.

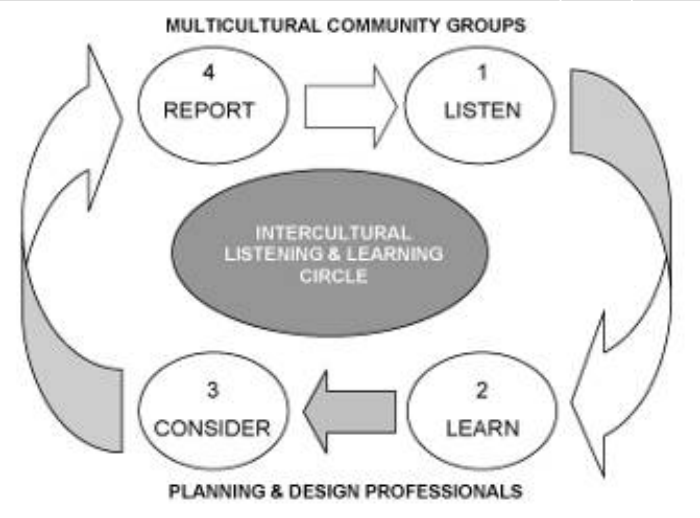
Step 3: This step could involve both internal officers and workshops with external consultants and professional organisations. The workshops are to consider all the issues raised and assess their

implications for planning and design of; new public realm projects and civic infrastructure; redevelopment of existing spaces; and place management initiatives etc.

Step 4: Report back to the community groups on how their issues might be considered in future planning or why there are sound reasons that prevent changes to planning approaches. The process could then be repeated to refine outcomes.

The listening and learning circle approach can provide a valuable insight for design professionals and help to build an in depth understanding of the culture of the local community to inform future development. However, It must also be acknowledged that we each carry a lot of 'cultural baggage' with us. There are many cultural influences such as the traditions, values and beliefs of the groups who we have grown up with, our political affiliations, education and evolved aesthetic preference.

The following section deals with some of the relevant competencies associated with ensuring that cultural and creative opportunities are developed in city planning and design. It considers the ability to take that awareness and then facilitate creative processes that enable the reading and recording of the specific dynamics, signs, themes, design and collective psychology of a place.



The following section deals with some of the relevant competencies associated with ensuring that cultural and creative opportunities are developed in city planning and design. It considers the ability to take that awareness and then facilitate creative processes that enable the reading and recording of the specific dynamics, signs, themes, design and collective psychology of a place.

In the context of the contemporary intercultural city with its highly diverse cultural mix it is clearly impossible for individual urban professionals to accumulate an in depth cultural knowledge of every group represented in their city, therefore we need to evolve new forms of intercultural dialogue. This dialogue must take place across cultural and linguistic communities and across gender and generations.

It is also necessary to understand our own personal assumptions, as they will influence the reading of the qualities and stories associated with place. In addition a designer needs to understand how these personal assumptions and levels of awareness might influence the design outcomes. We must therefore ask how we can assist designers develop a greater awareness of culture nuances in relation to project outcomes.

In order to create meaning, and dialogue through aesthetics and form of the project the designer needs to consider what will resonate with the cultural elements of place and people.

PART THREE

Planning & Acting Culturally

Having explored some of the issues associated with thinking culturally it is now time to consider how this thinking can translate into the urban environment through planning and design. There are a number of highly qualified commentators such as Jacobs, Hall, Lezano and Sandercock et al who have written extensively on culture and creativity and the city. While many have written about the urban condition few provide practical advice on how to address perceived issues.

In *The Creative City: a toolkit for urban innovators* Landry attempts to not only comment on the complexity of managing and developing cities but he also provides a framework for the "Creative City Strategy Method" that involves a five phase planning process, a set of analytical tools, a series of indicators and a range of techniques to aid creative thinking and planning.

Landry provides insights into the importance of developing a big picture and holistic city strategy through the use of a "Conceptual Toolkit", which he describes as "a set of concepts, ideas, ways of thinking and intellectual notions to make understanding, exploring and acting upon a problem easier". [Landry 2001]

This part of the book will explore a range of approaches to planning and acting culturally with emphasis on practical models appropriate to project teams and the implementation of public infrastructure and development projects.

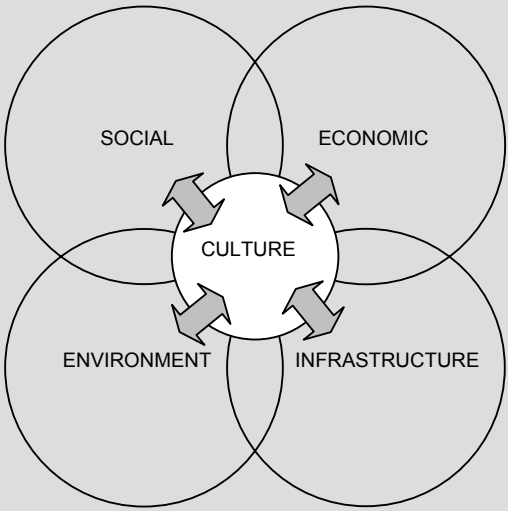
I will then consider the role of planning culturally with the aim of shifting culture to centre stage in urban planning activities and how concepts such as Cultural Literacy are put into practice.

Putting Cultural Literacy into practice involves assessing the context and significance of culture which will be discussed under the heading of Cultural Layering. We will then consider how to process accumulated cultural knowledge through the use of a technique of Cultural Filters. Finally this chapter will consider the impact of urban development and policy on culture and look at potential indicators that may be used in review processes.

Planning culturally

> *"Cultural planning is the process of identifying projects, devising plans and managing implementation strategies based on cultural resources. It is not intended as 'the planning of culture' – an impossible, undesirable and dangerous undertaking – but rather a cultural approach to any type of public policy."* [Landry 2001]

The concept of planning culturally places culture at the centre of all thinking on urban development. As culture is what gives meaning to our lives then everything we do will have a cultural dimension. Therefore, I would argued that all planning is or at least should be cultural. Culture should be at the very centre of thinking about cities, not just about our social or civic life but also about the environment, infrastructure and economics of the city.



As previously discussed it is in fact almost impossible to divorce ourselves from culture as it permeates everything we do and think about. However the idea that culture is important in planning is still too often an after thought or luxury add on. Administrative thinking tends to believe that the technical and practical requirements and constraints must be resolved first, and then perhaps the cultural and social dimension of the project be considered.

I am arguing that the technical and practical requirements can actually only be resolved when the cultural context is understood. After all why do we develop our cities if it is not for the common good of the population? Therefore the culture, the values and aspirations of the people are critical and intrinsically interlinked to the form and outcomes of any urban development.

So how do we plan culturally and how do we develop the skills required to plan and design cities that can speak to many people at many different levels and express multiple cultures in ways that are not crass and literal?

The ability to read, understand and decode the subtleties of local cultures in a city is critical to developing Cultural Literacy. By seeing things culturally it is possible to plan with a cultural perspective which will lead to the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive outcomes. It is essential that Cultural Literacy is gained by policy makers, planners and designers working at all levels in the city so that decision making is based on building cultural capital for the community through the processes of development.

To achieve these goals it is important that we turn the traditional planning processes on their head and see the role of cultural planning, undertaking scoping and cultural layering studies as the first task required before a project brief can be formulated.

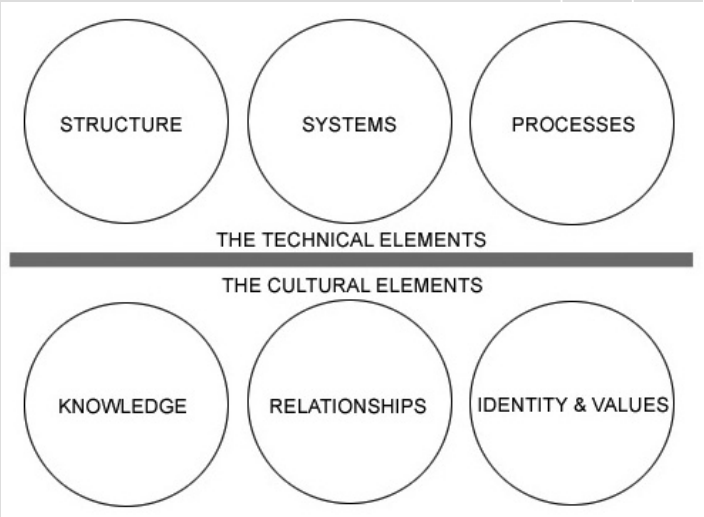
Cultural Literacy is about highlighting cultural knowledge.

For designers and planners there is always a high degree of practical project delivery associated with their professions. There is a premium on delivering a functional and conforming project on time and within budget. This pressure does make it hard for design teams to step back and consider the contextual and cultural dimensions.

From a practical perspective there are numerous business models from which we can learn skills in thinking creatively and holistically. These models seek to explain corporate culture and the need for find a balance between the rational mind-set associated with practical delivery and the corporate culture, ethical values and shared knowledge of good management.

The model illustrated below is based on the work of American management consultant Margaret Wheatley. It identifies the key technical elements such as corporate structure, quality or efficiency systems and implementation processes and groups them as 'rational' and practical considerations of a business. Below the line Wheatley groups the 'emotional' elements of the organisation such as information and knowledge, relationships between people and actions and identity and values.

In business, getting the right balance and interconnections between the above the line and below the line elements can mean the difference between success and failure. A business with highly developed technical elements but poor cultural basis may produce viable and technically advanced products, but may not be able to keep or attract the creative and skilled people it requires because there is a prevailing negative culture or obvious lack of values.



I suggest that there is a similar nexus between the technical and cultural elements in businesses, as with the built environment. This challenge exists for architects, urban designers and landscape architects. Indeed in thinking about the needs of cities the model demonstrates culture as the foundation of thinking, while the technical elements are the means through which the cultural elements can be realised.

It is important therefore for design teams to not only consider verifiable and objective knowledge but also to consider the subjective, emotional and experiential views people may have about their city.

These cultural elements are often not explicit, but through the use of creative processes we can consider these elements in all their potential. Achieving the right balance between the above and below the line elements will vary from project to project.

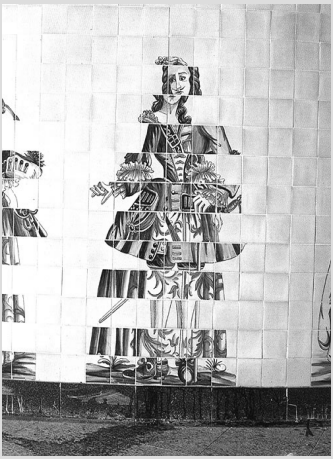
In major infrastructure projects the engineering requirements will require a greater focus on the 'technical' elements and be perceived to focus less on the 'cultural' elements. However a culturally literate team will see the potential for cultural elements regardless of the nature of the project. While there may not be explicit cultural elements encoded into the physical environment there may be considerable impact on local culture through the development of the infrastructure which could be mitigated by a culturally literate development team.

For example in Lisbon and in Stockholm the cities' metros have been developed as an efficient transport system and the planners and designers have over the years utilised the creative talents of local artists.

In Lisbon local ceramic tile manufacturing skills and respected Portuguese artists have been commissioned to designed tiles for the walls of the city's underground metro stations. This makes a potentially dreary or threatening underground space emotionally enjoyable. While also demonstrating the continuity and strength of a local cultural craft tradition.

However large or small, urban development projects have an impact on existing cultural life, or will influence the patterns of future cultural life in the city. Cultural planning should be the underlying practice associated with city management and development.

Ideally every city should have its cultural plan, a plan that is informed by meaningful community consultation and research into the history, values and diversity of the city. A plan that not only speaks of the people and culture but one which clearly identifies community ambition and vision. Having such a plan in place means that as “strategic opportunities” arise the planners can grab the potential to build on the plan. The Stockholm metro sytem, the T-Barn is an excellent example of long term planning where collaborations between artists and engineers has led to the gradual role out of artist designed station across the city that has now resulted in, what the city claims to be the longest art gallery in the world.



Cultural Literacy: the practice

> *There is our sweep of memory, which reminds us of what shared knowledge has meant and can mean. There is reason, which provides a counterweight of conscious analysis. Imagination, which allows us to give shapes to what we are not certain we know. Ethics, which can protect us from destructive conclusions.*
>
> *These are the corrective effects which we gain by examining a quality through the light of another, as opposed to the isolating reflections produced by self-analysis.* [Saul 2001]

The aim of Cultural Literacy as discussed in this book is to raise skills in thinking, planning and acting culturally with regard to the city. The ultimate aim is to create great cities that are complex and rich in contemporary cultural life and that reflect and express the depth of cultural heritage. To achieve this goal we can put in place practices that ensure the decision making process is dynamic and informed by history and memory. This can be achieved by gaining an understanding of shared knowledge and encouraging imagination and creativity.

Structured processes, although at risk of slipping into formulaic thinking and tokenism, are useful in providing city governments with a continuity of intent regardless of the changing circumstances of multidisciplinary project teams and staff changes across an organisation.

The Cultural Literacy process presented here should be seen only as a framework for thinking and not a formula for success. As previously discussed culture and the built environment are both far too complex to be reduced to a series of simple step by step analytical processes.

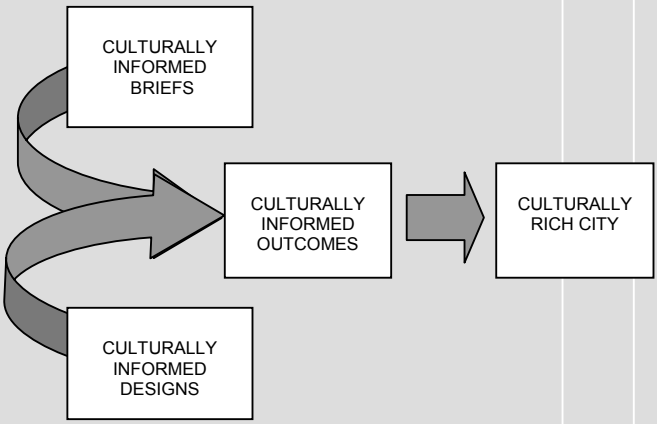
The proposed process is therefore a starting point from which a planning or design team can build their approach to a specific project or to large scale masterplanning of cities. It can provide a starting point for the “conscious analysis” and focus the “the light of another” on to the aims, objectives and outcomes of a project.

If the ultimate aim is to create culturally rich cities then it is necessary to think culturally from the very inception of the project. We need to

have culturally informed project briefs coming from the client group. The design team must also fully appreciate the cultural intent and be able to deliver outcomes that build on the city's culture while also ensuring that the effects of the new development work does not at the same time have undue negative impacts on existing cultural life.

To achieve the above we need to consider a three staged process. The first stage is a knowledge gathering period where research into the cultural context is undertaken to gather the cultural knowledge necessary to inform the development of an appropriate brief for the project. This might include a review of heritage buildings, streetscape character analysis and demographic analysis to establish the ethnic and linguistic mix of the catchment area. Where there is the time and money, a contextual review might utilise aural history projects with local people to learn about the things that matter to them about the area or to identify community history and the proxemics of local places.

Secondly, once the brief has been provided to the design team there needs to be an iterative process whereby the design team reviews the brief against their professional knowledge, personal assumptions and practical understanding of the brief and feeds back to the client their assessment.



Once the client has confirmed agreement with the assessment then the design team needs to undertake a regular cultural review of their design work to ensure that it is meeting the expectations of the client.

The final phase is that of undertaking some form of review to ensure that the design outcomes proposed do not impinge negatively on the existing cultural condition or bring about changes in the built environment that will effect the way the community goes about its cultural life. Where there has been contextual research it should be possible to establish local indicators that can be reviewed as the project proceeds.

For example if the project was to redevelop a local park it is critical to know the make up of the community; is it predominantly elderly, are there lots of children and what is the cultural mix? It is obvious that the elderly and children have different expectations from a park, but cultural expectations are not always clear cut and therefore need community consultation. A Sydney park in a region with a high Muslim population was well used but, despite Council providing a large number of electric BBQs for people to cook on, they were perplexed by the number of people who brought their own portable BBQs. When asked the answer was simple the Muslim park users did not want to cook their halal meat on the communal hot plates.

The following sections will explore these three aspects in greater detail under the headings of “Cultural Layering”, “Cultural Filters” and “Cultural Impacts”.

Cultural layering

> *"But a choice without a context is not choice. How can we be judged on our actions when the options are presented without memory, without an ethical foundation, without opportunity of imagining a broader uncertainty?*
> [Saul 2001]

We need, as Saul reminds us, to make decisions with an understanding of context, knowledge of historic background, consideration of values and to explore future visions. Throughout this book there has been an emphasis on the thickness of culture. It is not a single entity but a very complex and layered notion that requires time and sensitivity in researching or mapping. This position is reinforced by the quote below from Leonie Sandercock, in *When Strangers Become Neighbours: Managing Cities of Difference.* Here Sandercock suggests that planners need to learn from anthropologists.

> *First, they tell us that getting to know another (group, or culture) takes more than a few meetings and/or a needs assessment survey. Understanding, and building trust, depends on spending time in a community; and it calls for in-depth talk, and not just discussions with formal leaders. Second, they tell us that every group we encounter has a culture (as does every observer/planner), which may be thick or thin, thoroughly or only partially defining and directing actions. Learning about any culture is an empirical, and time consuming, task which requires a special attitude (Baum 2000:133). Planners need to learn about culture:- what it is and what shapes and maintains it, how and why it changes, and how one's own culture affects one's ability to understand that of others.*
> [Sandercock 2000]

One technique often utilised in cultural development programs is cultural mapping. Cultural mapping is a term used to describe a range of consultation, research and mapping processes. In Australia, as in other countries, the process of cultural mapping has evolved through the community cultural development and community arts approach to local development by city governments. These practices

are often linked with social development programs and involve a high degree of community engagement.

Cultural mapping is however far more than simple research gathering; it is often a process of engagement through community art projects where the community explores its history or current cultural values through artistic expression. The process seeks to uncover the local context, release “memory”, and establish the ethical foundation upon which community development can take place.

They may take the form of oral history, performance events or collective involvement in creation of a physical narrative artwork such as a cross cultural gathering of women engaged in a quilt making project. The value of such processes is that it uncovers and exposes the community to multiple histories, values and aspirations. It can therefore be as much a community bonding experience as a research tool. Providing both contextual planning knowledge to inform future physical planning, and at the same time enriching the lives of the community participants.

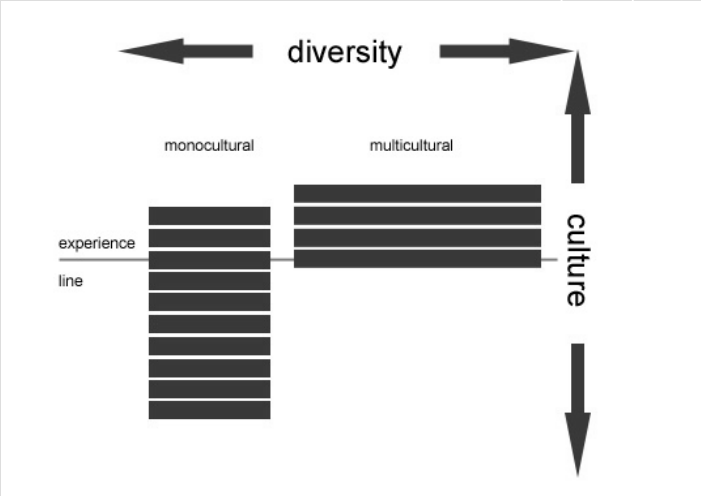
The notion of a Cultural Layering study is specifically associated with the initial stages of urban development projects and may include Cultural Mapping where appropriate. It is my belief that one of the keys to Cultural Literacy in the built environment is the realisation that there are always many layers of cultural context that require understanding. Ideally at the very beginning of an urban development project these layers should be identified and become a key influence on the formation of the project vision, inform the scope of work and clarify the desired outcomes in the project brief.

Cultural Layering needs consider a city’s cultural depth and its breadth of diversity. Every city and place within a city will have a variation on depth+breadth.

In a predominantly monocultural and ancient city such as Rome or Athens, the layering might be seen to be deep but relatively narrow; it might also be seen to have great depth below the experiential line as shown in the depth+breadth diagram 1.

Therefore a cultural layering study in a monocultural city or place would primarily be of a historic research nature with little intercultural consideration required. The research skills required would be those of a traditional historian or archaeologist and be governed by well established research criteria.

Alternatively a city or place with less of a historic base but with a greater mix of cultural groups such as New York or Sydney would present a very different picture and challenge to the researcher. depth+breadth diagram 2



In the intercultural city Cultural Layering would require quite different skills to those of a historian. While there may be an element of historical research required in all Cultural Layering studies, here the focus might be more on researchers with a background in geography, anthropology or sociology. The goal would be to understand the 'cross cultural rub' resulting from the "Breadth" rather than deep cultural context.

This is not to suggest that the two models illustrated here are the norm or that Cultural Layering is a simple formulaic research method. Indeed every city and every place will have its own combination of depth+breadth. In some places for instance the city's history might be monocultural but becoming increasingly complex and diverse over time.

In New Zealand, for example there is a very strong Bicultural relationship between the Maori people and the Pakeha [descendants of European settlers] that is at times both very powerful and problematic. The country, now an increasingly multicultural society, has to come to terms with how to balance both the traditional Bicultural with the contemporary intercultural.

There are many other countries around the world that have dominant cultures that are still trying to come to terms with the indigenous people and with more recent increases in diversity.

> *A land can bear any number of cultures laid one above another or set side by side. It can be inscribed and written upon many times. One of those forms of writing is the shaping of a landscape. In any place where humans have made their home, the landscape will be a made one. Landscape-making is in our bones.*
> [Malouf 2001]

Australian cities are built on land that has sustained thousands of years of Aboriginal society prior to the establishment of permanent towns by the early European settlers. Australia has become more and more multicultural as waves of migrants from across the globe have settled in our cities. Therefore the model can be seen as one that has great indigenous cultural depth underlying an expanding breadth of cultural diversity.

As mentioned at the start of the book the City of Adelaide commissioned a cultural layering study as part of the master planning

for Victoria Square/Tarndanyangga. This was in recognition of the square's cultural significance to the city.

The city's urban design team and the project team developed and agreed to a vision and set of outcome statements to steer the project:

> *As the symbolic heart of Adelaide, Victoria Square should reflect our civic, democratic and cultural values and provide a special central place for people to gather, interact and celebrate as a community.*
>
> *Victoria Square will achieve this by:*
>
> - *reflecting its historic, cultural and civic importance to the people of Adelaide*
> - *recognising its special cultural importance to Aboriginal people*
> - *reflecting the City's rich and diverse society*
> - *being a welcoming, attractive and memorable place*
> - *being a functional, safe and accessible gathering space for small groups, public demonstrations and major events*
> - *being an effective part of the City's pedestrian and public transport network."*

As can be seen from the focus on culture in the vision and outcome statements it was critical to understand just what the square's symbolism and meaning was to the people of Adelaide. The "Cultural Layering" study sought to build up an understanding of the layers of meaning associated with the square including indigenous and migrant community meaning. This included not only establishing the significance of the square to the Kaurna people but also the broader Aboriginal community that link into the city from across the state.

The indigenous consultation was a relatively slow process partly due to the lack of adequate Council protocols for the sharing of cultural knowledge and also due to the diversity of groups needing to be consulted. It was also clear that there were significant Kaurna cultural sensitivities associated with the site that are not able to be shared. Therefore we need to acknowledge what we are enabled to know and to be sensitive to that which we cannot be told.

Consultation was also undertaken with a wide range of ethnic communities to gain an insight into the Square's significance to the different migrant groups in the city. Through the Cultural Layering process we did build up a very complex picture of people's relationships to the square from its pre-colonial significance to more recent importance of the square as the gathering point for political demonstrations. We were able to ascertain that the square held differing meaning to different cultural groups. While to most people of British heritage it functions as the civic ceremonial heart of the city we discovered that the real significance of the square to some of the migrant groups, who had fled to Adelaide as refugees from political repression, was access to and the right to hold events in the very centre of the city was meaningful as a sign of freedom and acceptance into a democratic welcoming society.

The Victoria Square/Tarndanyangga example demonstrates the complexity of Cultural Layering in an evolving city where the traditional culture is increasingly layered with diverse influences and meaning added over time by successive waves of migration. This is very much the urban condition being experienced by Australian cities where the indigenous association with the land has been impacted upon by a highly urbanised contemporary society with an increasingly diverse multicultural community. Therefore a representation of the depth+breadth diagram might show great depth

of the Aboriginal culture mainly remaining below the experience line and the layers of diversity expanding in breadth above the line.

In my experience, studies of the scale and complexity of the Victoria Square/Tarndanyangga project are rare and perhaps only likely to be associated with major civic projects. However it is possible to build up knowledge of the cultural context at an overall city level as the basis for more focused local layering studies as required.

The Brisbane City Council has for some years implemented a program of Suburban Centre Improvement Projects where they work with local suburban shopping precincts to improve their local character, urban environment and economic viability. An important part of this initiative is a cultural, social and historic "Scoping Study" format that is intended as a contextual guide to the urban designers and artists engaged on the project. These scoping reports have proved to be a realistic and useful undertaking in the context of small scale development projects.

Cultural filters: concepts & usage

> *The situational frame is the smallest viable unit of a culture that can be analysed, taught, transmitted, and handed down as a complete entity. Frames contain linguistic, kinesic, proxemic, temporal, social, material, personality, and other components. The framing concept is important not just because it provides the basis for identifying analytic units that are manageable when put in the hands of the expert, but framing can be useful when learning new culture.* [Hall 1969]

While Hall mainly relates the use of "Situational Frames" to interpersonal communication and learning new languages, he does state that "framing will ultimately be the basis upon which towns and buildings are planned".

The concept of the "Situational Frame" holds true of the need for an analytical approach to support urban Cultural Literacy. One of the difficulties of proposing culture as the very building block of the city and the "meaning of everything" is that it has shades of "Deep Thought" in Douglas Adams wonderful exploration of universal themes and intergalactic planning, *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy and becomes increasingly difficult to explain and indeed defend. Being able to break down complex concepts into "analytical units that are manageable" means that the task is not overwhelming and relevant frames can be identified for further detailed research.

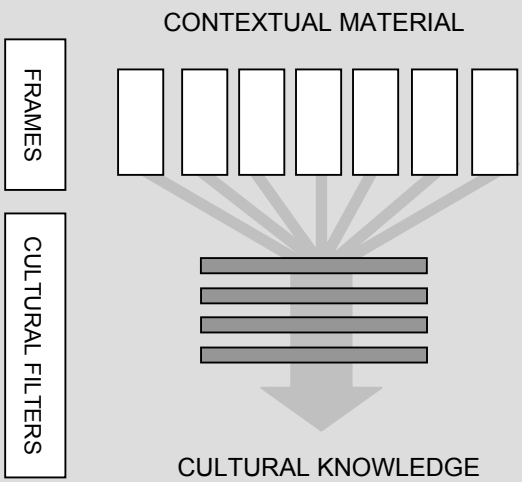
With situational frames as an analytical structure I have evolved the concept of Cultural Filters. The approach which will be explained in greater detail later involves four categories of filters; values, experiential, observational and relational. The filter analogy is appropriate as the Cultural Filter is used, in association with strategic questions, to filter out and focus down to the core cultural knowledge and contextual meaning required for a specific project.

There is always a vast amount of contextual material to be processed when assessing what is of relevance to the project at hand; while there may be context of great interest it may not be immediately relevant.

As we all know there is no objective world. We all see a subjective world that is influenced by our personality and our cultural experiences. Therefore our view of any place and any other person is determined by the intermixing of our personality and our collective cultural perspective.

From a personal perspective our perceptions and interpretations are influenced by events 'filtered' through our cultural experiences. These cultural filters develop from racial and ethnic background, as well as gender, sexual orientation, age, economic status, religion and geography. Not surprisingly therefore, we judge the world around us within the bounds of our own experiences and beliefs. Our, filters predispose us to assess our city environment and public behaviour in terms with which we are already familiar. As a westerner who accepts public displays of intimacy on the part of gay men it is easy to misconstrue the sight of a pair of Middle Eastern and North African males walking down the street hand in hand.

For the most part, people are unaware of these cultural filters and normally do not stop to consider where they developed a liking for particular types of food, an ear for certain styles of music or an appreciation for contemporary art.



The danger of personal cultural filters, if not understood, can be that we allow them to influence our design and planning attitudes and our understanding of the needs of other people and other cultures. We have all gathered experiences on a wide variety of topics; politics, education, vocabulary, travel, cultural traditions, family, heritage, ethnicity and sexuality habits to name but a few of the potential influences. All these influences go into forming our own unique cultural filter. It is not surprising that interaction with people of different cultures, whose patterns of belief and experience are quite different from our own, can easily lead to misunderstanding or distrust.

Perhaps this is best demonstrated in people's sense of personal space. Not only are there significant differences between cultures, but an individual's sense of self confidence and social standing will greatly influence their perception of a comfort zone with others of their own culture. For an Australian who enjoys plenty of personal space and is accustomed to moving freely through public places it is quite a challenging experience to brave the dense jostling crowd at a Kowloon street market. It is therefore easy to see how our personal experiences and filters could influence public space design and planning.

As Hall in *The Hidden Dimension* reminds us "people from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, *inhabit different sensory worlds*" and therefore we are always in danger of assuming we are in the same space and we share the same experiences. Clearly this is not necessarily the case.

The task in city building is to go beyond the limitations of our own personal Cultural Filters. In conjunction with Cultural Literacy, we need to develop the skills that allow us to know our own assumptions and be open and receptive to the assumptions and needs of others. A structure of filters and strategic questions is proposed to transcend the personal and seek to understand a diversity of influences.

Applying Cultural Filters

The following framework aims to bring together the elements of the Cultural Filters and Strategic Questions into the two main stages of a development project: firstly the project initiation stage where the planners identify the scope of work and desired outcomes and anticipated deliverables are considered in the project brief. The second stage involves the design team in assessing the brief and

determining the aesthetic, spatial and experiential needs of the project. Strategic questions need to be asked at both these stages.

There are several interesting examples of approaches to formulating questions aimed at understanding people's needs and aspiration with regard to the built environment. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment [CABE] in England has developed '*The Place Consultation Tool*'. This is a survey form that has been designed for use in workshops about open space planning and asks a wide range of well conceived questions to establish what people rate most highly in their parks and public spaces.

Introductory questions relate to:

- *Relationship to place*
- *Usage patterns*
- *Personal questions including age and ethnicity*

The main part of the form is structured around the following three key areas:

Usability: Access – Use - Interaction
Physical Quality: Maintenance – Performance - Made From
Impact: Environment – Community - Individual

Of special relevance to the concept of Cultural Literacy are the following questions in the Usability section:

- *Use – This Place is good for everybody [Is this place popular with different people – children, teenagers, adults, older people, disabled people, people from different ethnic communities, etc]*
- *Interaction – Different things happen here at the same time and people do not argue over space [think about whether people from different backgrounds and ages respect each other's space]*
- *Interaction – People mix well here [Think about whether people from different backgrounds and ages enjoy being together here]*

While the *Place Consultation Tool* appears to be a very useful consultation approach to establishing community satisfaction and to undertaking needs assessments on local parks it does not appear that the survey format would provide a lot of cultural knowledge for designers and planners.

Also in England, the Urban Design Alliance and Rob Cowan from Urban Design Group [UDG] have developed *Placecheck,* a booklet that provides a useful introduction for people to make an assessment of their urban environment. It is a self help booklet with three parts. Part A simply asks three basic questions; "*what do you like about this place?, what do you dislike about it?* and *what needs to be improved?*" Part B and C then go into more detailed questions under the headings of *"The People"* and *"The Place"*. The booklet is being used widely across England by councils and communities and provides a valuable tool for community engagement and discussion. *Placecheck* does not engage in questions relating to diversity or how Black and Minority Ethnicity community needs might vary from mainstream usage.

In the USA, the concept of strategic questioning has been explored in detail by Fran Peavey in her book *By Life's Grace: Musings on the Essence of Social Change* which provides a useful framework for thinking about strategic questions. Peavery identifies a layered structure where one starts by defining the problem or opportunity and then moving down a layer to questions that unearth finer grain information. Her framework is as follows.

The First Level: Describing the Issue or Problem

1. *Focus Questions*
2. *Observation Questions*
3. *Analysis Questions*
4. *Feeling Questions*

The Second Level: Strategic Questions....Digging Deeper

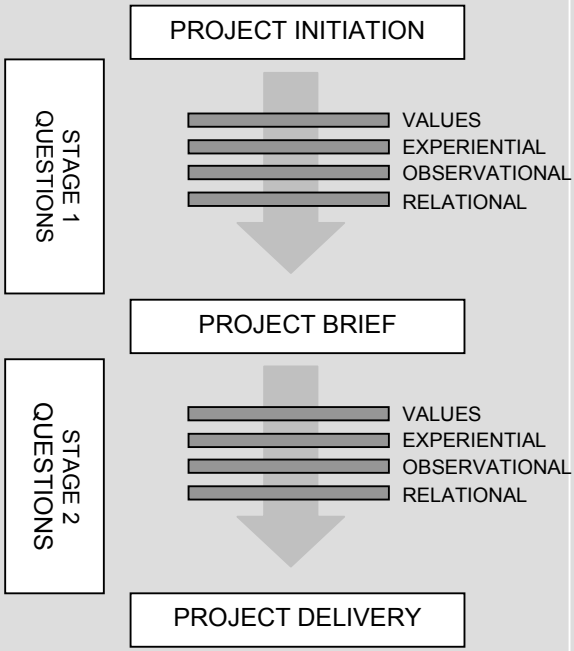
5. *Visioning Questions*
6. *Change Questions*
7. *Considering the Alternatives.*
8. *Consider the Consequences*
9. *Consider the Obstacles*
10. *Personal Inventory and Support Questions*
11. *Personal Action Questions*

[Peavey 1994]

The above examples provide useful background to my development of Cultural Literacy questions. Based on project experience there is a need for the Cultural Filters and associated strategic questions to be utilised during both the brief writing and the design phase. That is not to suggest that we simply repeat the same Strategic Questions in

both stages. What is needed is the application of the same Cultural Filters applied with a different focus to the Strategic Questions, rather like Peavey's first and second levels.

In stage 1 we need to ask questions that are focused on understanding the cultural environment and the cultural implications of the project. The questions are to surface and test any assumptions relating to values, memory and legacy, and identify what might be experienced by the public. The objective is to gain an understanding of likely visual language and understand the community, institutional and physical interrelationships associated with the project. In stage 1 the questions will be of a "What" nature. For example the "What" question for a new community centre might be: what sort of feelings do we want people to experience when they visit the centre?



In stage 2 the questions shift into a “How” nature, for example: How do we design the community centre to ensure a welcoming and accessible entrance experience is created? Therefore focusing on “how” can the design solution meet the identified expectations and aspirations, deliver the anticipated experiences, reflect the visual language called for in the brief and ensure the project addresses the identified relationships between people and place.

Cultural Filters: their structure
Having established the role of the Cultural Filters in a project delivery process the following will provide a more detailed explanation of the thinking behind each of the four filters.

The Values Filter

> *.. the first step in a planning process has to be an engagement with the values and aspirations of those who will be affected by the plan; unless we are clear about what the values are that inform our vision (plan), then it’s unworthy of the name and possibly unworkable in its realisation – or, at the very least, likely to generate results at odds with it original (often unvoiced) intentions*
> [Hawkes 2001]

The “Values Filter” is without doubt the most important but also the most difficult and risky of the four. The aim in using this filter is to focus the designer or planner on the identification of diverse community values that might influence the project aims or to understand the impacts the project might have on those values. For example “bohemian” street life most often develops in run down areas of a city, where businesses and life style develop largely as a result of planning authorities leaving them alone and or the fact that properties have limited economic value.

An over zealous city administration could kill off the very quality and expression of counter culture values by initiating civic improvements such as civil works to upgrade pavements in a well meaning attempt to meet standards. The result might be raising the value of the properties but destroying the values and qualities of the place through sensitising the public realm.

The concept of values is of course extremely problematic. After all whose values are most valued? Are the values of the dominant culture the most valuable? Or should minority values receive preferential treatment?

A consideration of values in this context should include an assessment of past history, community stories and cherished heritage items. It will also seek to understand the diversity of community ideals, aspirations and dreams.

In considering values it is important that questions regarding the lasting legacy of the project be asked. What might be the future impact of the project be on the community? While no design team has a crystal ball it is possible to make a considered assessment of future impact. For instance can a building be retrofitted in the future if community needs change? Or will a new development through its large footprint prevent future communities from having access to public gathering spaces?

Experiential Filter

> *..we need an environment which is not simply well organised, but poetic and symbolic as well. It should speak of the individuals and their complex society, of their aspirations and their historical traditions, of the natural setting, and of the complicated functions and movements of the city world.* [Lynch 1994]

The "Experiential Filter" focuses on the felt qualities associated with an existing place and establishes what qualities should be aspired to in the future.

The existing felt qualities might include an exploration of the experiences that go to make up the sense of place and degree of proxemic or distemic space qualities detected. Equally it is about the experiences of sound, smell and tactile sensations experienced through the interaction with other people, space, planting and material selection. Consider for a moment the difference between the experience of entering a fruit and produce market with the bustle, noise and aromas and shopping in a sanitised, air-conditioned and orderly supermarket.

The built form will feature strongly in any assessment of Experiential Filters as the building mass and urban form will communicate strong experiential lessons through its uniformity or diversity, density or openness and negative or positive messages.

It will be necessary to observe and consider the proxemics and interpersonal behaviour.

Therefore the "What" Strategic Questions in Stage 1, that are used to investigate the existing sense of place, will be based around what feelings are aroused, what sense of history is communicated and what impact does the built form have on people using the space. In framing questions to interrogate a proposed development the emphasis will shift to questions that explore what the impact might be on the quality of the place through the introduction of new or redeveloped elements. Therefore the team would also need to ask what they want people to feel when they visit the new place.

In Stage 2 the Strategic Questions will focus on how the new place can de designed to maintain the existing sense of place or to contribute the desired experiential qualities identified in the brief.

Observational Filter

> *.. image is the product both of immediate sensation and memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action. The need to pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual.* [Lynch 1994]

The "Observational Filter" focuses predominantly on the visual world of architecture, landscape and the arts. It is associated with both the existing and proposed built and natural environment.

This might include, but not be limited to, existing coded information that can be currently observed and decoded – such as heritage material, artworks, memories and local stories.

It is also about the encoding of new artefacts and place, those elements that the community will have to decode when the project is finished. This includes considerations of the aesthetic style of architecture, iconography and narratives included in artworks and wayfinding and interpretive signage.

The design of space has, a major impact on the way people behave in public. People's behaviour as individuals and as groups must therefore also be considered as it relates to the very form and function of the public realm.

This filter is highly relevant to the design profession and most designers will be well equipped with the visual language and site analysis skills to undertake this process. It may be necessary for designers to test their own assumptions and aesthetics against those of the community.

The sort of strategic questions relevant to the Observational Filter in stage 1 might be "What" questions that help to gain an understanding of the existing built environment, its diversity, its cultural characteristics and historic character. For instance, questions concerning buildings of significance or places of intangible historic importance or significant streetscape character that needs preserving.

In stage 2 the "How" questions will relate to the desired visual language and aesthetics through the design or new built form and artefacts. This can, in fact, be very difficult for individual architects and urban designers and especially contemporary artists as they will have honed their own personal design aesthetic over many years of practice. This is not to suggest that the outcomes should be some form of historic pastiche of local character; rather it is a challenge for the designer to sensitively develop their work to provide the anticipated experiential qualities within their contemporary design practice.

Relational Filter

> *Most of us would agree that cities should have clear identities and sense of community, that they should be distinctive and true to themselves. We would concede that participation and involvement in decision making increases motivation, commitment and civic pride, but how many would take that so far as to accept that fairer distribution of resources and power leads to a decrease in crime and social stress?* [Landry 2001]

Perhaps the most rational of the Cultural Filters is the "Relational Filter" which focuses on the existing and potential relationships

associated with the project. This includes political, economic and social relationships.

Robert Putnam in *Better Together: restoring the American Community* reminds us that "urban designers can make a significant contribution to community life and social capital supporting the potential for multistrandedness by creating opportunities for encounters that knit together existing ties". [Putnam 2003]

It is critical for the Relational Filter to be used to identify the institutions and functions of place that relate to community intercultural and interpersonal relationships within the proposed development environment. A public park might be an important gathering point for the city's homeless, a place where there are plenty of benches and a space for a volunteer soup-kitchen to park and dispense sustenance and social interaction. The design of public space in an area of a city with large numbers of boarding houses might need to give special consideration to gathering nodes to meet the needs for the boarding house residents who often do not have access to their rooms during the day.

When analysing the Strategic Questions for Relational Filter in stage 1 the design team might seek to understand what role the current urban form and public space has on interactions between people and in Stage 2 how would the proposed project impact on those interactions. Will the proposed spaces continue to support community activity and the building of Putnam's multistrandedness?

It is important to understand that the preceding discussion is about the relationship between public good and city visions. It is about providing tools for designers and planners who must generate city visions that are at the same time strategic and responsive to community need and change. It is about people in power learning to let go of some of their power in order to address common good through responsive design.

This does not necessarily mean that the perceived needs of minority groups be accommodated at the expense of the majority, nor should the majority view overrule all other aspirations. What it does mean is that all these diverse views must be gathered, considered and understood before a decision based on public good is arrived at.

It is after all quite possible to design a park with extensive play facilities to meet the needs of a large and growing population of young families, while at the same time designing sheltered and peaceful areas where elderly citizens can meet friends, talk and enjoy the sights and sounds of the young at play. It just needs understanding, thought and design skill.

cultural impact

> *research in how space is used reveals that failure to get detailed data on the action chains and situational frames in which they occur can result in breaking the chain. This happens when architectural spaces don't fit the activities they house.*
> [Hall 1969]

In this last section we need to consider the impacts of cultural thinking and acting on the city and explore assessment criteria and performance indicators that might assist in reviewing and measuring the positive and negative impacts. Just how might we assess, for example, the appropriateness of the architectural spaces to ensure they "fit the activities they house" from a cultural perspective. In Auckland, New Zealand, the architectural plan for a city hospital was redesigned following discussions with Maori people about cultural perspectives and respect for the dead. The architects designed a 'tupapaku route' allowing families to remove the deceased to the mortuary in privacy and also created enlarged spaces in the mortuary for extended family groups to gather with the deceased. [Snedden 2005]

While there are many different sets of indicators, most appear to have all arisen from a political desire to justify a particular perspective. For example most of the Cultural and Arts measures seem to be focused on justifying the expenditure of public funds on arts activities and for the continued support of cultural institutions.

In most advanced economies where there is a reasonable level of public support for the arts there has been a concerted effort to gather statistics on participation, audience numbers, employment opportunities and importantly the value of the multiplier effect on the broader economy. All of which assist the arts lobby to justify continued or increased subsidy.

These measures are interesting and providing a sound understanding of the scale of the Cultural Industries. When linked to the broader Florida "Creative Class" indicators they can also highlight what has become a significant economic sector in most cities. Indeed the cultural or arts industries approach has been both a good thing in raising awareness of the value of cultural expression and

demonstrating its economic significance to the economy. However, on the down side it tends to once again confirm that culture and the arts are something separate, contained and therefore measurable under its own set of indicators.

The same issues apply to the gathering of indicators with a social or environmental bias. If we are to consider the outcomes of culturally focused civic development it would appear that we need to bring together elements from across the different groups of indicators in order to consider factors such as the diversity and richness of cultural life of the community; the levels and accessibility of cultural expression as practiced in the city; the cultural relevance and appropriateness of the built environment and the sustainability, robustness and commitment of policies and governance associated with the city.

Vitality and Viability Criteria

Useful work in this direction has been undertaken by Franco Bianchini and Charles Landry who have since 1995 been refining and demonstrating the use of a set of Vitality and Viability criteria that can be utilised as the indicators of a successful Creative City.

Explaining the Vitality and Viability concept in cultural terms Landry states:

> *Cultural viability and vitality concerns the maintenance, respect and celebration of what a city and its population is. It involves identity, memory, tradition, community celebration and the production, distribution and consumption of products, artefacts and symbols, which express a city's distinctive nature*. [Landry 2001]

The Bianchini/Landry Vitality and Viability criteria are;

- critical mass
- identity and distinctiveness
- innovative capacity
- diversity
- accessibility
- security
- linkage and synergy
- competitiveness
- organisational capacity and leadership.

These criteria headings provide for both objective and subjective evaluation and are very versatile criteria that can take a cultural, social, environmental or economic perspective. The criteria relating to vitality "involve levels of activity" while "viability is concerned with long-term self-sufficiency, sustainability, adaptability and self-regeneration". [Landry 2001:244]

How then can we utilise this approach to considering the impact of cultural thinking, planning and acting on the city and conversely, how do we measure the impact of city development and decision making on the cultural life of the city?

I believe that it is important with the Vitality and Viability criteria that each aspect of a city must be considered from both the vitality and viability perspectives. Therefore if we consider the vitality and viability of a place such as the Latin Quarter in Paris we see that they are interdependent. As Lefebvre reminds us places such as the Latin Quarter:

> *… not only contain monuments and institutional headquarters, but also spaces appropriated for entertainments, parades, promenades, festivals, In this way the urban core becomes a high quality consumption product for foreigners, tourists, people from the outskirts and suburbanites. It survives because of this double role: as place of consumption and consumption of place. Thus centres enter more completely into exchange and exchange value, not without retaining their use value due to spaces provided for specific activities. They become centres of consumption.* [Lefebvre 1996]

Therefore when we consider criteria for critical mass it is not simply a measurement of numbers rather there is a need to develop a 'critical' number of specific activities, suppliers or consumers to generate a desired level of vitality and viability.

We can interpret the Vitality and Viability indicators from a Cultural Literacy and built environment perspective as follows:

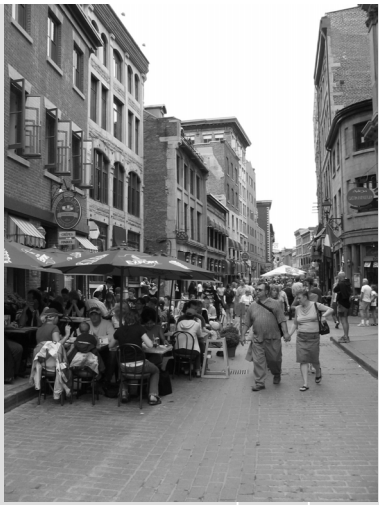
Critical Mass Criteria
Critical Mass can be partly thought of as an objective measure of many aspects of the city, such as the number of cars on the road, the total number of city residents or the number of sex shops in the 'Red

Light' district. Equally it might be the consideration of the number of artists in a cultural precinct or live performances in the theatre district.

The number in itself is not the critical factor. The critical factor of interest to us here is; does the volume of cultural activity taking place in the streets of public spaces provide a sense of vitality and at the same time generate sufficient patronage and or commerce to be sustainable?

There is quite often a significant difference between a public cultural institutional quarter and an area of the city that has become a centre for small commercial galleries and artist's studios. The cultural quarter may be a cluster of major cultural institutions thus generating a critical mass but such quarters have a tendency to become a self contained part of the city and with a primary focus on cultural product.

Art galleries and studios in a precinct with other commercial activities such as dining, retail and residential accommodation will bring the city the benefits of both critical mass and diversity.



We can also see the benefits of critical mass in a place such as Hay on Wye, England, which has become famous as a centre for books. A visitor can spend hours browsing through dozens of second hand book shops around the town. It is not just that there are a large number of shops it is the combination of retail outlets and the diversity of books on offer that makes Hay on Wye such as success both from viability and vitality perspective.

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of critical mass and integrated cultural thinking comes with attitudes to dining out in a city. People are always attracted to clusters of restaurants or to city precincts where there is a high concentration of restaurants and cafés especially where there is also a diversity of foods on offer. It is not just the access to choice but also that we are drawn to the vitality and buzz of the place, a product of the critical mass. This is especially true of areas where there is outdoor dining on the pavements where the diner experiences the buzz and colour and movement of the passing parade over and above that of the food and wine.

Diversity Criteria

Cultural diversity, as I have argued throughout this book, is of critical importance to a vibrant community. Diversity is the very breadth of the depth+breadth equation.

It is about both ensuring that a city can offer a diversity of people the things that matter to them and in offering sufficient choice of product and activity to ensure the viability of commerce in the city. In addressing the needs of a diverse community planners and designers must consider not only people from diverse cultural backgrounds but also the diversity of cross-generational needs. How often do the needs of young people get considered when a new development area is being planned?

Diversity is therefore a key consideration when designing a new public space, especially in terms of meeting community needs for seating and gathering spaces. The needs of the elderly who require an individual resting place, in the shade and away from the hurly-burly differs greatly from the requirement to have hang-out space for groups of young people where they can gather and interact without being moved on by over zealous security personnel.

Cultural diversity is also visually expressed through the city's architecture, design and art. Singapore for example is a wonderfully diverse city with many architectural forms and styles crammed into the city centre. Chinese temples, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples and Christian churches jockey for attention among the almost unlimited diversity of shops, markets and street vendors. All are overlooked by the massive modernist towers of 21st century commerce.

In less tangible and physical terms the viability of a city or organisation relies on a diversity of ideas, opinions and ways of seeing the world. Society values its artists because they present a different perspective on our world. We value our scientists because they explain nature's hidden secrets and we value the inventor for his or her ability to come out of left field with a new gizmo. For the city to be both an exciting place and a sustainable structure it needs all the diversity of thinking and creativity it can get! This is the very basis of the Florida Creative Class thesis.

Identity and Distinctiveness Criteria
Unlike the diversity criteria Identity and Distinctiveness is more about what it is that sets the city or precinct apart from others. It may have diversity but does it have an essential point of difference that can been seen and felt? In the majority of cases it is the culture of a city that provides the unique identity either through the physical form of the buildings or through the public expressions of cultural values and practices.

Examples are many, the dazzling white Greek villages hanging like guano to the island cliffs, the conical roofs of houses in Italy's Alberobello region, the Mezquita in Cordoba, Spain, the North African mud architecture, the Medina in Fez to name but a few. At times this architectural/design distinctiveness may be endemic to a whole region or nation as in Moroccan architecture or it might be highlighted by an individual city or the result of a single creative genius working within a city as in the case of Gaudi in Barcelona. Although Gaudi was very much the product of a long Catalonian artistic tradition his identity is without doubt stamped so strongly on the distinctiveness of Barcelona that they have become inseparable.

While the modernist school of architecture has created some remarkably elegant and technologically wonderful buildings its down side has been the loss of cultural distinctiveness. Modernist office towers in Seattle, Paris, Sydney, Tokyo or Shanghai are often indistinguishable from one another. That is not to suggest that every building must be culturally "quaint" and regionally specific, rather it is to challenge modern architects to strive to create contemporary buildings that are distinctive and relevant to the culture. I have previously referred to the example of how the architects in Queensland, Australia are responding to the needs of their tropical environment and to the cultural life of the people living in their region. The forms and the function of the buildings are directly responsive to the climate and the needs of an outgoing and diverse culture while exploring modern typologies, materials and design values.

Accessibility Criteria
As with many of the other criteria accessibility is multi-dimensional, while in most cities it has become synonymous with addressing the international standards associated with disability access. It is in reality much more that ramp grades, tactile indicators, handrails and meeting regulatory requirements.

Accessibility has social, cultural and economic dimensions that are at the core of vitality and viability. What is the point of having a critical mass of great diversity and distinctiveness if the people cannot get to it and take part in it? Therefore we see that transport and movement systems also become cultural.

Libraries are the cornerstone of most communities, the repository of great knowledge and in principle accessible to all citizens, but are they? If the city builds a new library in a growth area without a holistic and culturally literate approach to consideration of practical and psychological accessibility then they may present real barriers to some in the community. A lot has been written on physical accessibility issues but not a lot of discussion has taken place regarding the psychological barriers that architectural design, building form, location of institutions such as libraries and the symbolic messages presented.

Previously I have made references to the potential impacts of the built form on institutions such as government and banking, similar issues relate to ensuring that all governmental, cultural and social institutions send the right 'yes' messages to the community. We only have to look at the retail sector; they know how to make their outlets inviting, welcoming and irresistible to the buying public.

Therefore the notions of inclusiveness and tolerance are critical elements of accessibility. Once again it is a Cultural Literacy challenge for the design profession to ensure that their practice is underpinned by awareness of cultural sensitivities and that they attempt as far as possible to create places that are physically and psychologically accessible to those in the community who wish to have access. The great opera houses and art galleries of the world may be physically accessible but do they say yes to all citizens or do they send messages about access only for the elite and "acceptable" in society?

A further dimension to the accessibility criteria is the issue of communication of cultural messages. We must once again consider the concepts of proxemic and distemic space and encoding and decoding, this time against the accessibility criteria. Identity and distinctiveness may be about cultural expression especially as it is manifest in the city, but to be of impact beyond the immediate proxemic community the symbolism and cultural knowledge must be accessible to others to decode.

Linkage and Synergy Criteria

As discussed many western cities pride themselves on their cultural institutions which are often safely tucked away into a cultural precinct away from the life of the city as a whole, demonstrating a failure of linkage and synergy. In great cultural cities such as Paris and London the galleries and museums are there in the centre of the city to be stumbled across while exploring or going about daily business. They are part of the city interwoven into the life and very fabric of the city.

The linkage between dominant and minority cultural groups is a key issue for the intercultural city. Migration to a new city naturally leads a person to seek out people of similar cultural traditions and with shared knowledge. The result in many cities is visual evidence of communities of interest where groupings of culturally specific grocers or butchers are in evidence.

Likewise cultural groups form their own institutions and sporting groups to create community linkage and support. It is also evident that for many migrants the synergy with the broader community is a gradual process. The vitality of cities is linked to synergy, interaction and the intercultural 'rub' that creates a dynamism not often

experienced with limited diversity. The design of public institutions and public space that support ad encourage social capital and interaction can therefore be seen to be a synergistic element in city vitality and viability.

Innovative Capacity Criteria

Mention innovation and creativity and most people will immediately equate those qualities with artists and craftspeople. It is true that they are essential qualities of the Richard Florida's "creative class" but equally innovative capacity is the very life blood of a city. Without creativity and innovation there is stagnation and decline; with it there is renewal, dynamism and risk taking.

The example of the Copenhagen traffic engineer who was committed to the vision of walking streets is quoted as having a very novel response to solving traffic delays in the city. Instead of responding as most engineers would by widening the road at the point of constriction, he would further constrain the traffic and take back road areas for pedestrians. This radical approach made the drivers think twice about taking their car into that part of the city, therefore increasing the number of people walking in the city, thus justifying the need for more walking streets and making a significant contribution to the cultural life of Copenhagen.

We need everyone involved in the city to be innovative, to turn problems into opportunities and to remove barriers to cultural life. Previously there has been mention of the ridiculous administrative barriers experienced in Australia over the question of outdoor dining in the streets. In recent years the spectre of litigation has introduced a high degree of caution into civic administration with the risk assessor attaining new powers and prominence.

While public risk is an important issue it can be taken to extremes and become a barrier to new innovative ideas that might enrich a city. Again in Copenhagen there is a program of city bikes, one can pay a deposit and take a bike from a rack and ride wherever you wish, return the bike to a rack anywhere in the city and get your deposit back. A great idea in a safe cycling city such as Copenhagen. However when the idea was proposed for the City of Adelaide it was blocked by the risk assessors on public liability grounds as someone might injure themselves while riding a city bike and seek damages from the Council. There are many examples where narrow opinions or sheer laziness have stood in the way of change for the public good.

Competitiveness Criteria

Clearly all of the preceding criteria have viability factors that are central to the idea of competitiveness. Having a critical mass of product, activity or consumer demand are essential, as is having a diverse and unique good to offer.

As we live in an increasingly global marketplace culture can provide a competitive edge and point of difference through the distinctiveness and innovation associated with the Creative Class living and working in the city. While it is easy to empathise with the non English language countries who wish to read books and watch films that are of their own culture and not a Hollywood export, it is just as important for countries such as Australia and New Zealand to maintain a viable film culture, one that represents our cultural values, speaks in the voices we hear in the street and provides viability to our creative writers and film makers.

Cultural industries are becoming major economic contributors to city viability. The “symbolic economy” generated through the mainstream arts has become a significant part of many city economies, especially the big cultural events such as festivals, and blockbuster exhibitions.

There is tangible evidence of the multiplier effects of major festivals such as the Edinburgh Festival and cities involved in catalytic events, for example Glasgow wining the title of European City of Culture in 1990. However it is not just the blockbuster events that make for a thriving cultural industry, indeed it is often the diversity of cultural workers producing craft or specialist design goods that provide a sustainable cultural economy.

It is interesting in Finland to see the existence of a thriving publishing industry that published a wide range of original Finnish literature and translations into Finnish. The demand for Finnish language books comes from a multilingual community that could easily read books in English or Swedish, but chose to read in their native language, thereby sustaining a unique language and national culture while supporting the local industry.

Globalisation at its most obvious is the ubiquitous product marketing of the multinationals to be found in most cities and towns across the globe. Competitiveness though is not just about globalisation and US dominance; it is as much about the intricate layering and diversity of a single city or precinct. In a street of cafés and restaurants, why do some establishments always overflow with patrons and others have a short moment of vitality and viability then go into terminal decline till a new and enthusiastic owner comes along to give it renewed life?

What might be the point of difference; perhaps the quality of the coffee, the attitude of the waiting staff, the restaurant's ambiance or maybe serving the freshest and most interesting food at the right price? The theatre district's and a city's live music venues' competitiveness rely on maintaining a critical mass of audience, a diversity of innovative and unique shows over the year to ensure their vitality and viability.

Security Criteria

Security like accessibility could be taken as basically a practical issue to be resolved by covering all public places with Closed Circuit TV cameras, that provide surveillance but at the cost of the public's civil liberties. It might be through employment of heavily armed, bored, security guards who stand in the doorway to the bank or public institutions and patrol shopping centres in search of misguided youths who might be loitering without intent to buy.

There is safety in numbers as we all know. Places where there are lots of people are magnets for more people. The café that is at least half full will attract more people compared to the empty café. People flock to major cultural events in city streets, parks and plazas and feel secure. While in a crowd there might be the risk of pick-pockets but it is highly unlikely you will get mugged in front of hundreds of people. The same holds true of those cultures that have active street societies, where people sit on their front doorsteps reading a book or line the edges of the footpaths watching the passing parade, crime is less likely to happen. There is clear evidence of the value of active frontages in designing safer places and culture clearly plays a vital role in generating that sense of public vitality.

We should spend more design time on creativity, community engagement and Cultural Literacy. Taking the time to understand the needs of the diverse community and designing safe, welcoming and accessible places that do not need CCTV or armed guards.

Organisational Capacity and Leadership Criteria

So we come to the last of the Bianchini/Landry criteria, Organisational Capacity and Leadership. Without flexible and culturally aware management and innovative and visionary leaders a city can have all the factors in place and still lack vitality and viability.

Visionary leaders do not have to do a Baron Haussmann and undertake the grand projects, but they do need to be in tune with the city's culture, and they need to be culturally literate. They also need to think beyond their period of stewardship and understand the long term needs of a city.

While it is a commonly held belief that the Guggenheim Gallery in Bilbao, Spain was the making of the city, it was just one, albeit an iconic element, of a long term vision put in place by Bilbao Metropoli-30, the association for the revitalisation of metropolitan Bilbao. Attracting the Guggenheim to build a gallery in the industrial city was part of the bigger plan, based on the understanding of the power of an icon or a catalytic event on the revitalisation of a city. Many cities have attempted a similar strategy but many have failed, mainly due, it would appear, to the lack of the long term vision and planning.

Also in Spain the small city of Figueres has built its reputation around the creativity of one man. It is the home to the Salvador Dali museum and an extraordinary collection of visionary creativity.

For the city of Brisbane, a pivotal point in its history was the 1988 Expo that the city's leaders recognised could prove to be a catalytic event which would bring radically changed attitudes as to what the city could be and how it could move forward with a new confidence.

Landry has written about great leaders being people who "trade power for creative influence". They are the leaders who build up a team of innovative people and do not seek to control every aspect of their administration. Their power is in the ability to see potential and to create a milieu where ideas flourish and challenges become opportunities. Landry has also proposed that a city needs many leaders, leaders in the various communities of interest, leaders in the professions and leaders across the city administration.

It is also important to point out that in the context of organisational capacity and leadership that Cultural Literacy is especially important not just from the point of understanding the needs of a diverse community but in understanding the organisational culture.

PART FOUR

Reflections

> *A massive cultural literacy movement that is not imposed, but which springs from within is called for. We can all benefit from a deeper knowledge of what an incredible organism we are. We can grow, swell with pride, and breathe better for having so many remarkable talents. To do so, however, we must stop ranking both people and talents and accept the fact that there are many roads to truth and no culture has a corner on the path or is better equipped than others to search for it.*
> [Hall 1969]

Although Hall first published *Beyond Culture* in 1969 the statement is still very relevant today. This book has attempted to highlight the need for greater cultural knowledge and especially the need for us as individual members of the community to gain cultural knowledge to assist in the process of creating culturally rich cities.

Cultural diversity is both a vital element of a vibrant city and increasingly a fact of life as the intercultural city becomes more and more the norm rather than the exception. We in Australia pride ourselves on having created a multicultural and peaceful society where the concept of multiculturalism receives bipartisan support. The importance of cultural diversity is also enshrined in federal and state government policies.

> *The key to the success of Australian multiculturalism is inclusiveness. Every Australian benefits from our diversity and all Australians have the right to be active and equal participants in Australian society, free to live their lives and maintain their cultural traditions.*
>
> *Australia's Indigenous people and their culture have made and continue to make a unique contribution to this country. Their contribution together with the significant contributions of the early settlers and more recent migrants have helped build the nation we belong to today.*
>
> *With 43% of the population born overseas or with at least one parent born overseas, and with some 200 languages between us, we have one of the most cosmopolitan populations in the world. Multiculturalism celebrates Australian traditions, recognising that our culture is vibrant, multifaceted, living and constantly evolving.*
> [Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity, 2003]

While polices such as *United in Diversity* demonstrate a strong policy commitment to multiculturalism, it is important to ask: is there evidence that the richness of the hundreds of cultures has permeated our day to day thinking and decision making? We find it easy to embrace culinary diversity, we flock to World music events, we enjoy the diversity of multicultural festivals and we respect peoples' right to retain their cultural heritage. But where is the evidence that we are taking cultural diversity into account when we plan our cities, design new buildings, malls or parks?

This is not just about the context of place or the embellishment of artworks celebrating a diversity of narrative and symbolism. It is about rethinking the very physical form and style of buildings and public spaces and take into consideration the needs of the dominant cultural groups and the specific needs of minority groups in the community.

Without doubt, people are incredibly adaptable and innovative when it comes to making the best of existing conditions. This is evidenced by the adaptation of existing retail building stock by people from a wide range of backgrounds to meet their needs. Indeed it may be that there is no desire to create a different type of environment, but do we ask the critical questions to establish people's needs and aspirations?

As has been discussed throughout the book, we can gain an understanding of the different needs and influences of others when we go beyond our own cultural knowledge and personal value filters. Appreciating the subtleties of interpersonal behaviour and proxemics of others we can become aware of the potential cultural impacts of our planning and design decisions.

Cultural Literacy can and should play a vital role bringing about institutional and systemic change in the way cities are developed and managed. However change relies on people who wish to bring about change.

Shakespeare wrote “What is a city, but its people...” and indeed it is the challenge for every planner, designer and all the other built environment professionals involved in creating and managing cities to make an individual commitment to creating a culturally rich city.

It is my experience from working with dozens of city administrations that the true visionary leader is a rare beast, but there are, and I have had the pleasure of working with, a great many innovative and creative people dedicated to creating better cities. Often these people are frustrated by regulations, narrow agendas and limited institutional foresight. What is required is the equivalent of the City of Brisbane’s *Creative City* strategy platform that focuses on “investing in people and building capacity”. To create the culturally rich city we need a combination of vision, risk taking, the creative milieu and culturally literate people.

We can each individually ask the Cultural Literacy questions next time we sit down in a planning meeting or start to design public space, civic infrastructure or new residential developments. While you may not know the answers, asking the questions is the first step.

There are no formulas or quick answers but there are tools, such as Cultural Literacy, to help start the process and to guide thinking about how to do things better, and how to think about a park being more than just a park, and the bridge being more than just a bridge - then we can look forward to culturally literate people impacting on our cities and towns by thinking, planning and designing culturally.

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