

planning culturally

RESEARCH REPORT 3:

Cultural Impact Assessments for Urban Planning/Design

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Since the early 2000's one aspect of his consulting and research has focused on Cultural Literacy being essential for Planning Culturally. Richard believes that all urban planning decisions will have either a positive or negative impact on our increasingly culturally diverse communities. Therefore, he has prepared this Research Report to focus on the potential for "Cultural Impact Assessments" (CIA) to be part of standard planning practice. The report provides a review of academic and sector writing on the subject and outlines existing impact assessment approaches with the aim of establishing a potential model for a practical "CIA Framework" relevant to urban planning and design.

1. Introduction

My focus during the last thirty years of consulting practice and my current independent research has been on the role of culture and creativity in the context of urban planning and the development of culturally rich public places and built infrastructure (Brecknock 2006). In my work promoting the notion of “Planning Culturally” I have argued that all planning and design decisions have a cultural dimension, for example every built environment practitioner brings their own ‘cultural world view’ or Planning Culture, in addition to their professional training and skills to every project. We must also acknowledge that here in Australia with our First Nations culture and increasingly culturally diverse population every decision and intervention in the urban fabric of our cities will potentially have an impact on multiple communities of interest. These impacts may have either a positive or negative effect on the communities’ ways of life. Therefore, I believe we need to not only be ‘Culturally Literate’ and sensitive about our diverse community’s built-environment needs but also to establish a *Cultural Impact Assessment framework* as a tool for urban planners and designers to assess potential positive and or negative impacts of their professional decisions.

This Research Report is the third in the series to inform an in-progress book on Planning Culturally, (Reports 1 and 2 are available on www.richardbrecknock.com). The report brings together some of the academic discourse and various industry impact assessment models to distil the various options towards a workable *Cultural Impact Assessment Framework* tailored to urban planning and design.

1.1 Culture and the Built Environment Context

I have argued that Planning Culturally refers to the work of professional urban planners, having an awareness of and applying a wholistic cultural perspective to the planning process, resulting in cultural values being placed at the heart of urban development and planners being trained to not only ‘*recognize differences between interests and values in their practice but also how to resolve conflicts emanating from such cultural differences*’ (Burayidi, M. 2003:262). As such, Planning Culturally highlights the need for cultural awareness and competencies to encode and decode cultural values and behaviours that are inherent in the concept of cultural literacy. The concept of encoding and decoding (Hall, E. 1973) relates to the process of extracting and embedding meaning and behaviours. A culturally literate planner would possess the skills to decode a community’s cultural frames of reference to inform planning decisions and outcomes that are culturally relevant, sensitive to, and supportive of diversity and First Nations Peoples’ culture. As Ed Wensing remind us; *planners as key players in land use planning, land management and development decision making will need to understand the contextual history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in the location they are working in, as well as how to engage constructively with the relevant people and understand how they absorb information and make decisions.* (Wensing 2011:8)

1.2 The Need for Cultural Literacy & Cultural Awareness

Cultural literacy has been defined as ‘*the ability to read, understand, find significance and decode cultural values and meaning*’ (Wood, P. and Landry, C. 2008) and ‘*to equip students and professionals with the ability to read and understand their ever-evolving cultural and disciplinary contexts*’ (Ochoa, G. 2016: 167). If we are to successfully Plan Culturally then we need to establish if our planning decisions will have a positive or negative impact upon the diverse communities that exist across our country. Therefore, there is a need for a workable Cultural Impact assessment model that urban planners and designers can apply during the planning process.

I believe that one of the first steps towards Planning Culturally is to develop culturally aware and competent professionals who are sensitive to the diverse needs of their communities. Van Boeijen and Zijlstra (2020) remind us that ‘*culture sensitive design must not be seen as simply a hobby for designers who are curious about ‘otherness*’; it should, in particular, be seen as a requirement to identify the positive and negative role of design in cultural processes. This is a critical point and highly relevant in urban development, as every planning and design decision will have either a positive or negative impact on the community’s way-of-life. Therefore, I suggest built environment professionals need to be culturally literate in order to develop an awareness of local culture and issues such as the diversity of values and behaviours found in a community and the ability to recognise the potential positive and / or negative Cultural Impacts their planning and design decisions may have on a community’s cultural life. (See *Research Report 2: Cultural Competence & Urban Planning* (2022), www.richardbrecknock.com)

1.4 The Need for Cultural Impact Assessment

While it is important to acknowledge the development of cultural competences and the variations on the models developed by the various theorists, it is also important to recognise that they are only part of the equation. While these competences are needed to be culturally effective in planning and designing with people from other cultures, built environment professionals also need to behave with empathy, openness, and sensitivity to difference, when collaborating with diverse communities. Therefore, cultural awareness competencies are critical skills in the ability to Plan and Design Culturally. They are also essential to the process of Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA).

In the article, *Framework for Cultural Impact Assessment* (2004) for the International Network for Cultural Diversity's Working Group on CIA, Burama K. Sagnia offered a definition of CIA and he suggested that it is:

... a process of evaluating the likely impacts of a proposed development on the way of life of a particular group or community of people, with full involvement of this group or community of people and possibly undertaken by this group or community of people. A CIA will address the impacts, both beneficial and adverse, of a proposed development that may affect, for example, the values, belief systems, customary laws, language(s), customs, economy, relationships with the local environment and particular species, social organization and traditions of the affected community. (Sagnia 2004:9)

In exploring the literature associated with cultural impact assessment Adriana Partal & Kim Dunphy provide a valuable systematic literature review of current methods and practice around the world (2016).

2. Introduction to Impact Assessment

The following is the result of desk-top research and provides insights into a range of impact assessment approaches, theory, and practice. There are a number of selected international and Australian examples; however, it is by no means an exhaustive literature review, rather a selection of different policy and framework examples of relevance to the needs of urban planners and designers.

On the basis of this review Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) were first introduced followed by Social Impact Assessments (SIA) and more recently the introduction of Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA). In a 1990 article, *Integrating Impact Assessment in the Planning Process: from Rhetoric to Reality*, Audrey Armour reminds us that:

The whole idea of doing impact studies sprang from the recognition of the need to ensure that the full implications of development proposals - ecologic, social, and economic - were taken into account before decisions were made to proceed so that wise actions could be taken. In other words, the aim is to ensure that these considerations are an integral part of planned undertakings.

And that:

It is generally acknowledged that, if built into the early phases of planning processes, impact assessment offers considerable potential for ensuring that resource management and land use decision are environmentally sound. However, despite nearly two decades of impact assessment experience, it can be said that in most parts of the world progress towards such integration has been slow. It is standard practice for impact assessment to be conducted as a process separate and apart from the planning process, as a means of justifying planning decisions rather than contributing in any meaningful way to them. (Armour, A. 1990:5)

Armour also reminds us that the reality is, it has proved difficult to implement integrated impact assessment programs as; *Integration does not come easy in a world characterized more by competition than cooperation, where mastery of means has not been coupled with a clear sense of ends, and where a shared environmental ethic or consensus on principles of social justice are still woefully lacking. (Armour, A. 1990:5)*

With the increasing focus on sustainable development the notion of 'strategic impact assessment' has become associated with Impact assessment processes that are an integral part of the design of the planning. Assessing impacts does not mean simply recognizing impacts but also taking impacts into account in the planning process. In this context, strategic impact assessment is highly relevant to the process of developing urban land-use planning especially for culturally diverse populations.

2.1 International Impact Assessment Examples & Discussion

2.1.1 International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) <https://www.iaia.org/index.php>

The IAIA is a body representing and lobbying for the integration of Impact Assessment internationally, be it Environmental, Social or Cultural.

Their website describes the IAIA as:

... an organization with a voluntary membership of professionals from a diverse array of interests and organizations, all of whom are concerned with environmental stewardship and sustainability. Collectively, our goal is to protect, not harm, the earth and its environments and peoples.

Their stated vision is to contribute to: *a just and sustainable world for people and the environment. And their mission is to provide the international forum to advance best practice and innovation in impact assessment and advocates for its expanded use for the betterment of society and the environment.* <https://www.iaia.org/index.php> To this end the IAIA has an Indigenous Peoples Section that considers impact assessment in the context of reconciling development with the protection of Indigenous culture and lands.

Research suggests that SIAs have been incorporated into the formal planning and approval processes in a number of countries, to categorize and assess how major developments may affect people and places. The IAIA state that SIA includes: *the process of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment.*

In 2015 the IAIA published a report titled *Guidance for assessing and managing the social impacts of projects*, edited by Frank Vanclay. The Guidance Note states that:

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is now conceived as being the process of identifying and managing the social issues of project development and includes the effective engagement of affected communities in participatory processes of identification, assessment and management of social impacts. Although SIA is still used as an impact prediction mechanism and decision-making tool in regulatory processes to consider the social impacts in advance of a permitting or licensing decision, equally important is the role of SIA in contributing to the ongoing management of social issues throughout the whole project development cycle, from conception to post-closure.

SIA arose in the 1970s alongside environmental impact assessment (EIA) and originally attempted to emulate EIA as much as possible. Often SIA was done as part of EIA, usually badly. Over time, however, the practice of SIA has diverged from EIA because of the growing realisation that social issues fundamentally differ from biophysical issues; that the primary task of SIA should be to improve the management of social issues (rather than to only influence go/no go decisions); and that the effectiveness of SIA in terms of achieving better outcomes for affected communities will be maximised by being relevant to the proponents (commercial and public sector developers) who initiate and implement projects. (Vanclay, F. 2015:4)

Vanclay, writing in an earlier 2003 article titled; *International Principles for Social Impact Assessment*, proposed that:

The role of SIA goes far beyond the ex-ante (in advance) prediction of adverse impacts and the determination of who wins and who loses. SIA also encompasses empowerment of local people; enhancement of the position of women, minority groups and other disadvantaged or marginalised members of society; development of capacity building; alleviation of all forms of dependency; increase in equity; and a focus on poverty reduction. The SIA community of practitioners considers that all issues that affect people, directly or indirectly, are pertinent to social impact assessment. (Vanclay, F. 2003:7)

In terms of inclusions in social impacts assessments, Vanclay proposes that this includes positive or negative impacts that relate to one or more of the following: *people's way of life – that is, how they live, work, play and interact with one another on a day-to-day basis; their culture – that is, their shared beliefs, customs, values and language or dialect.* Clearly these issues are of considerable relevance to Planning Culturally and elements for inclusion in a Cultural Impacts Assessment approach.

In addition, Vanclay reminds us that when considering the impacts on people's way of life it is vital that planners keep in mind that: *Communities and societies are not homogenous. They are demographically structured (age and gender), and they comprise different groups with various value systems and different skills. Special attention is needed to appreciate the existence of the social diversity that exists within communities and to understand what the unique requirements of special groups may be. Care must be taken to ensure that planned interventions do not lead to a loss of social diversity in a community or a diminishing of social cohesion. (Vanclay 2003:10).*

These statements highlight the importance of a diversity of cultural perspectives in impact assessment if we are to Planning Culturally. Joost Dessein et al. in *Culture in, for and as Sustainable Development* (2016) remind us:

... people have for thousands of years designed their architecture to contain their specific, culturally constructed lifestyles and economic activities; yet once built, the architecture in its turn shapes and changes how people live, so that their future 'ways of living', their culture, fit into the (by then) pre-existing structure. (Dessein et al 2016:25)

With Dessein's statement in mind we need to consider how built environment professions can address the issue of Cultural Impact Assessment.

Paul James, Director of the United Nations Global Compact, Cities Programme for United Cities and Local Government (UCLG), in his 2014 article *Assessing cultural sustainability* proposes that:

The 'social capital' metaphor treats cultural issues as if they are centred on the accrual of value, akin to accumulating money in the economic domain. In the 'triple bottom line' understanding cultural questions are relegated to a grab-bag of extra considerations lumped under their third generic heading of the 'social'. The triple-bottom-line approach problematically presents three domains—economics, environment and the social—and incorporates the domain of culture as an extra consideration inside the social. (James, P. 2014:7)

James further suggests that:

We need a self-evaluation tool for cities, based on a four-domain model, that treats culture as a social domain equal to other social domains: ecology, economics and politics.

2.1.2 SIA in Finland

A Finnish contribution to the discussion supporting the importance of Impact Assessments in the urban planning and design context is made by Rauno Sairinen, a professor of environmental policy at the University of Eastern Finland. In his article *Social impact assessment in urban planning (2004)*, Sairinen provides the following insights into the role of urban planners and designers in the assessment process:

Impact assessment generally takes place in a way that a planner her/himself assesses the impacts of the plans on the basis of studies conducted and visits to the locations concerned. A vital element in the assessment process is supplied by cooperation with other branches of administration and involved parties etc. If the person drafting the plan is a consultant, she/he is also generally responsible for assessing associated impacts. In particular areas of investigation demanding special expertise or in otherwise complicated assessment tasks a consultant is also frequently used. Impact assessment is part of the design of the plan, a way of conducting work. Assessing impacts does not mean simply recognizing impacts but also taking impacts into account in the planning process. ... Social impact assessment provides answers to questions: what will change, what will happen as a result, are there other options, what will be gained, what will be lost, who will benefit, who will suffer. (Sairinen, R. 2004:428)

2.2 Australian Impact Assessment Examples & Discussion

In Australia there are a range of SIA policies and frameworks at State and Local Government levels which generally set out when a development project requires a SIA as part of its development approval process. The SIA policies sighted also provide a breakdown of the key areas of potential impact that should be addressed in a SIA report.

2.2.1 SIA in Queensland

An example of SIA Guidelines in QLD are available from the Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (2018) *Social Impact Assessment Guideline*.

<https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/strong-and-sustainable-resource-communities/social-impact-assessment>

In the case of this QLD SIA and guidelines they are a requirement associated with projects subject to an:

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971 (SDPWO Act) or the Environmental Protection Act 1994 (EP Act).

The purpose of an EIS is to assess and report on a project's social, economic and environmental impacts and the measures proposed to mitigate the potential impacts of the project. This includes the Coordinator-General's evaluation of the social impacts of a project and the decision whether or not to allow the project to proceed.

The Guideline covers the identification and assessment of potential social (including Cultural) impacts, as well as their management and monitoring. The guideline document states that: *SIA is a process for the identification, analysis, assessment, management, and monitoring of the social impacts of a project, both positive and negative. The social impacts of a project are the direct and indirect impacts that affect people and their communities at all stages of the project lifecycle.*

The following cultural impact references are included in the Guidelines:

- *impacts on culture, history, and ability to access cultural resources. and*
- *impacts on communities' physical and mental health and well-being, as well as their social, cultural, and economic well-being community lifestyles and cultural practices, amenity value, social character, and community cohesion.*

Research by Evonne Miller & Laurie Buys into how social impacts have informed development appeals in Queensland, focussing on ten cases from the Queensland Planning and Environment Court (QPEC) and reported in their 2012 article, *Making a case for social impact assessment in urban development: Social impacts and legal disputes in Queensland, Australia*, concluded that:

... these ten court appeals demonstrate that the experience of social impacts is legislatively and legally significant in the DA process. First, the issues in each case are clearly social: incorporating impacts on amenity, character of an area, needs of different social groups, perceptions of risk as well as a range of other issues socially relevant to people's lives. Second, the outcomes and recommendations from each case, such as negotiating agreements, modifying plans and accommodating community concerns would have been equally served thorough SIA. Compared to a lengthy and often adversarial court case, SIAs provides the opportunity for community engagement and can be a significantly cheaper, quicker and more cooperative strategy to address, manage and mitigate community concerns. (Miller & Buys 2012:289)

While the Queensland research focused on the use of SIA in the formal planning process it does provide a valuable insight into the potential benefits of SIA application in urban development.

2.2.2 SIA in New South Wales

The following examples are from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment SIA Guidelines 2021. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/under-review-and-new-policy-and-legislation/social-impact-assessment>

Of relevance to built-environment professionals are the NSW set of *Social Impact Assessment Guideline for State Significant Projects*, first published 2021. Although the guidelines are for SIA there are some valuable issues to consider from a built environment and cultural perspective. For example, one of the identified principles is to be Culturally Responsible and develop: *culturally informed approaches and methodologies to ensure Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities are engaged appropriately, and their perspectives, insights and feedback are valued.*

The NSW SIA Guidelines list the following factors to be considered:

- *who may be affected by the project; how they may be affected; their social, cultural and demographic characteristics (including Aboriginal populations); their relevant interests and values; the things that differentiate groups (such as cultural diversity) as well as things that they have in common; and the broader community and public interest*
- *whether any vulnerable or marginalised people may be affected by the project, including people on low incomes; people living with disabilities, chronic medical conditions or in poor health requiring access to services; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are homeless or in insecure housing; people who are unable to represent themselves; or other vulnerable people such as elderly people, children or single-parent households.*
- *built or natural features on or near the project that could be affected, and the tangible and intangible values that people may associate with these features, such as a sense of place or belonging, rural character, connection to Country and value of stories within the cultural landscapes, community cohesion, and use of natural areas and resources.*
- *relevant social, cultural, and demographic trends, and other change processes now or in the past near the project and in the broader region, including how people have felt or experienced these changes; community resilience; how Aboriginal people engage in the area (past and present); different trends and patterns around issues like rental affordability, employment, shifting land uses, or population and demographic; or experiences of extreme weather and natural hazards.*
- *the history of the proposed project and the area, and any similar experiences people in the locality have had, including change prior to, or created by, the project's planning assessment; how people reacted to early discussions; how these discussions and other experiences affected the broader community; and the traditional Aboriginal use of the place, recent history of the place and people and any ongoing traumas. (NSW Planning 2021:16)*

The above culturally relevant factors influence the focus and scale of the impact assessment process.

However, as Lara K Mottee & Richard Howitt's 2018 research report into the *Follow-up and social impact assessment (SIA) in urban transport-infrastructure projects: insights from the parramatta rail link*, found SIA's on projects of State Significance and major transport infrastructure projects are often 'limited by political forces and the constraints placed upon their practice by their client or the relevant government department. This all too- familiar context for practitioners and urban planners, frequently limits their role in government-led project decision-making'.

2.2.3 Australian Local Government SIA examples

The research has established that a range of local government Councils have SIA policies and or guidelines for prospective developers and planning teams. For example, the City of Parramatta in NSW requires a SIA to be undertaken and submitted for a range of development classifications, and states that:

The SIA process involves identifying, analysing, monitoring and managing the social consequences, both positive and negative, or a proposed decision or action (in this case a development proposal), and any social change processes invoked by them. Council requires the SIA to be an effective tool to aid decision making and any assessment must therefore address the following: Relevant policy and legislation and integrate policy priorities in the assessment; Acknowledgement of the makeup and values of local communities. That is, be informed by the things that are likely to impact on local community wellbeing; Identify impacts that are directly related to the proposed development (demonstrate the connection between the intervention and likely impact)

A further example is from the City of Hume in Victoria, which has 2 levels of assessment requirements, in addition to a full SIA it has the options for an initial assessment by the professional team which known as a Social Assessment Comment. This initial assessment forms the basis for Council to make decision regarding the appropriateness of the proposed development.

In preparing a SIC the applicant should demonstrate that the following issues have been considered and assessed:

- *How does the development impact on the local area?*
- *What is the extent of the impact? What are the positive and negative impacts of the development on the local community?*
- *Community participation in the project proposal will only be required from person/s directly affected i.e., neighbours and key stakeholders.*
- *Describe the negative and positive aspects of the proposal, highlighting how the negative aspects will be resolved in the interests of those affected i.e., neighbours, occupants or the wider community.*

In the case of major development application Hume may require a full SIA undertaken by qualified practitioners with the following skills, experience, or qualifications:

- *Have social science training and or extensive experience in the field of community needs analysis and community consultation.*
- *Have experience in the use of rigorous social science methodologies with a degree of public involvement.*
- *Are familiar with the types of information required; and*
- *May work in a range of fields including town planning and social planning.*

2.2.4 PIA SIA Position Statement 2010

<https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/250>

Of relevance to built-environment professionals such as urban planners is the position of their professional body, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), which in its 2010 SIA Position Statement acknowledged that:

To date, most planning practice has given less attention to social impact assessment than to environmental and economic impact assessment. Many impact assessments omit social issues altogether while others consider to narrow a range of issues.

And that because of these practices:

... PIA is concerned that actions have sometimes been taken, and decisions made, on an ill-informed basis and which did not foresee some serious social consequences before they eventuated.

Therefore, PIA supports the following objectives:

1. *Impact assessment is an important part of planning and decision-making processes.*
2. *Proposals for change which require an environmental or economic impact assessment also require a social impact assessment*
3. *Social impact assessment of policies or plans should be sufficiently robust to anticipate the impact of proposals made under the plan and minimise the need for further assessment.*

4. *Without limiting the matters in regard to which a social impact assessment may be appropriately required, proposals for:*
 - *larger developments, including: major retail, sports or social infrastructure proposals,*
 - *a significant change of land use, including: new highways, loss of agricultural land,*
 - *sale or rezoning of publicly owned land,*
 - *new planning policies and plans amendments to them, and/or,*
 - *controversial uses or increases in intensity (e.g., brothels or gun shops, or of gaming or liquor outlets), should be fully assessed for their social impacts in a SIA.*
5. *Social impact assessment should be undertaken by appropriately trained and qualified personnel using rigorous social science methodologies and with a high degree of public involvement.*
6. *A social impact assessment should be a public document.*

Within the PIA Position Statement there are only two references to culture as a component of the “Social” assessment domain. Unfortunately, this is now a 13-year-old position statement with no evidence that PIA has revised or further developed its position on the role of impact assessment in urban planning. Although to its credit it has established the *Planning with Country Knowledge Circle* to provide guidance to PIA on planning issues that impact on First Nations People and especially their relation to Country. This initiative will hopefully lead to greater cultural awareness among the planning fraternity and influence the notion of Cultural Impact Assessment as a core principle of the planning process.

3 Cultural Impacts Assessment Discussion and Examples

The term “Socio-Cultural” appears in social impacts discourse and references a broadening of the typical notion of social agendas and can, in the absence of a Cultural Impact Assessment, provide a useful addition to general SIA assessment processes. However, as Dessein Joost, et al, suggest:

Until now the cultural aspects of sustainable development have mainly been discussed or elaborated as a part of the social pillar of sustainable development, or else combined with social sustainability (socio-cultural sustainability). In the former case cultural issues are solely considered as part of the social dimension; in the latter there is recognition that culture is different from social but the difficulty of separating them in practice or existing policy means that they are kept linked. (Dessein Joost, et al. 2016:24)

Indeed, as the Mackenzie Valley Review board in Canada found, there is value in having a dedicated CIA rather than simply imbedding cultural issues in an overarching SIA with its already wide range of assessment categories.

The literature since early 2000 would suggest there is an increasing acknowledgement of the need for CIA, however, the reality is that culture is often seen as a subset of Social Impact Assessments and not a dedicated process. Writing in 2014 Paul James reminds us that: *Culture is a fundamental domain of social life. However, there are currently no developed guidelines for assessing the cultural impact, sustainability or vibrancy of cultural development. While well-established economic and environmental impact assessments exist, in the domain of culture there are no more than a series of beginnings in the fields of heritage and indigenous studies. (James 2014:3)*

Burama K. Sagnia writing in the article, *Framework for Cultural Impact Assessment* (2004) for the International Network for Cultural Diversity’s Working Group on CIA provides the following definition:

The term “cultural impact” refers to the consequences to human populations of any public or private policies and actions that significantly change their norms, values, beliefs, practices, institutions as well as the way they live, work, socialize and organize themselves as part of their cultural life. (Sagnia, B. 2004:5)

The notion of including culture only as a domain of SIA raises the question: is this sufficient? Sagnia proposes that for Cultural Impacts Assessment to be successful:

A separate set of principles and guidelines that could provide common standards for addressing the cultural concerns of communities in a broad-based, holistic and participatory manner is what is required. (Sagnia, B. 2004:5)

Sagnia also suggests that: *On the basis of an examination of the cultural and socio-cultural impact assessment carried by certain agencies in selected countries, we are able to provide a tentative list of cultural variables under the following three general headings:*

- 1 – Cultural Life.
- 2 – Cultural Institutions and Organizations; and
- 3 – Cultural Resources and Infrastructure

3.1 The IAIA CIA discussion

The IAIA state that Cultural Impact Assessment can:

- *Identify the effects of a proposed activity.*
- *Identify methods to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse impacts on cultural values and heritage places; and*
- *Assist proponents, decision-makers, and the communities in overall (go/no-go) decision-making and planning for developments with minimal impacts on the cultural environment.*

The IAIA also identify “Six Steps” of good cultural impact assessment:

In summary the Six Steps are:

1. *Scoping:*
2. *Baseline data collection:*

3. *Impact identification and prediction:*
4. *Identifying appropriate mitigation:*
5. *Significance determination:*
6. *Follow-up and Monitoring.*

The first Step listed “Scoping” aligns with the concept of Cultural Literacy or the term Cultural Competency as I explored in the second of my Research Reports, titled *Research Report 2: Cultural Competence & Urban Planning* (2022). Among the research findings was the work of Dutch industrial designer and academic, Annemiek van Boeijen and graphic designer Yvo Zijlstra, and their 2020 publication *Culture Sensitive Design: a guide to culture in practice*. In the book they state that ‘*Culture sensitivity is the competence to be aware of and to experience differences and similarities between people – their values, and practices – and that are based on what they have learned as members of groups.*’ (2020:20).

3.2 United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) CIA discussion

The 2014 Agenda 21 article *Assessing cultural sustainability* by Paul James, proposes that Culture is the foundation rather than just another social domain. James goes on to suggest that in the current framing of Cultural Impact Assessments: (<https://www.agenda21culture.net/documents/paul-james>)

The cultural is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses, and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held-in-common. In other words, culture is ‘how and why we do things around here.’ The ‘how’ is how we practice materially, the ‘why’ emphasizes the meanings, the ‘we’ refers to the specificity of a life held-in-common, and ‘around here’ specifies the spatial, and also by implication the temporal particularity of culture. (James, P. 2014:5)

James proposes a framework for assessment and action with seven subdomains of culture, these being: 1. *Identity and Engagement*; 2. *Creativity and Recreation*; 3. *Memory and Projection*; 4. *Beliefs and Ideas*; 5. *Gender and Generations*; 6. *Enquiry and Learning*; 7. *Wellbeing and Health*

He also outlines a template model based on the *Circles of Social Life* as a practice framework and suggests that:

The Circles of Social Life approach offers an integrated method for practically responding to complex issues of sustainability, resilience, adaptation, liveability and vibrancy. The approach, which includes Circles of Sustainability, takes an urban area, city, community or organization through the difficult process of responding to complex or seemingly intractable problems and challenges. Circles of Social Life treats all complex problems as necessarily affecting all domains of social life— economics, ecology, politics, and culture. (James, P. 2014:14)

The Circles of Social Life model includes the following seven phases: Commit: Engage: Assess: Define: Implement: Measure: and Communicate.

It seems clear from this research that Cultural Impact Assessment is generally an under-developed and poorly conducted field of enquiry and lacking in workable implementation models. This, I suggest, is a major problem given that, particularly First Nations people, and multi-cultural groups, adverse changes to the places they value and have significance to them may have considerable impact on their ways of life.

Interestingly, the research has found that Countries where CIA is more of an accepted practice include New Zealand Aotearoa (Jolly and Rinfret 2022), where there is evidence of numerous CIA studies considering development options through a Maori lens to meet the CIA statutory obligations under the Resource Management Act and Canada where Aboriginal culture has also been identified as an important CIA consideration.

3.3 International CIA Discussion & Examples

3.3.1 CIA in New Zealand Aotearoa

In 2022 Païlin Chua-oon Rinfret et al undertook a review of 20 NZ Cultural Impact Assessments. They found that they were generally intended to cover all tangible and intangible impacts of projects, and state that:

Cultural Impact Assessment presents an opportunity for Indigenous influence over the IA process when iwi (tribal groups) and hapū (sub-tribal groups) manage the assessment themselves, ensuring

matters important to the community are adequately addressed. This allows iwi and hapū to determine what are classified as cultural impacts and how these should best be articulated to protect tangata whenua (people of the land) values.

The report also argues that:

... the CIA process is unique in that it is not only about identifying cultural impacts, but that it can also be employed as a mechanism to educate decision-makers regarding Māori worldviews and promote the re-indigenization of stewardship concepts within the broader planning system. (Rinfret et al. 2022:156)

While the above report related to the New Zealand Aotearoa cultural environment there are lessons to inform CIA processes in Australia. For example, the report identifies that there is a tension between the holistic Māori worldview and the narrow focus of an assessment model that is part of a positivist and rationalist planning process. The authors remind us that; *This tension is exacerbated by the fact that from an Indigenous perspective, there exists no distinction between social, cultural, and environmental impacts.* (Rinfret et al. 2022:160).

3.3.2 CIA in Canada

Mackenzie Valley Review Board SIA Guidelines

https://reviewboard.ca/process_information/guidance_documentation/guidelines

Through consultation the Review Board identified that their existing *Socio-economic Impact Assessment Guidelines* (2009) which included references to cultural impacts and their assessment, did not however, address the increase in cultural concerns raised during environmental or social impact assessments. Therefore, the Review Board decided to develop an additional set of *Cultural Impact Assessment Guidelines* to help the Review Board, developers, researchers, and others to better understand and assess impacts on culture during environmental impact assessment.

The assessment of 'Valued Cultural Components' includes:

- Physical Heritage
- Cultural landscapes and other special spiritual spaces/places
- Overall relationship to land and traditional activities on the land (including practices of traditional economy)
- Values
- Methods of cultural transmission, and
- Sense of self; sense of place; overall wellbeing.

The Mackenzie Valley Cultural Impact Assessment Guidelines have a strong focus on the region's Aboriginal peoples and state that: *Adverse cultural impacts can come from a variety of development-related factors, and can have a variety of impacts on culture holders.*

3.4 Australian CIA Discussion & Examples

Jane Munday in her (2020) article *Guide to Social Impact Assessment* has a core focus in her work on impacts of development activities on the cultural life of Australia's First Nations People in the Northern Territory. While providing a useful guide to developing and applying SIA Munday also advocates for the need to undertake CIA studies. She provides the following definition:

Cultural impact assessment is a dedicated approach to defining how projects impact on both traditional and living cultures. Cultural impacts may include reduced capacity to pass on culture. They include impacts on commonly held values such as respect for elders, oral history, spiritual practices, language, values associated with the land and intergenerational relationship patterns, practices, knowledge and skills. (Munday, J. 2020:46)

As with a wide range of other current impact assessment models, Munday's guide is based on cultural considerations being integrated into a SIA process.

Currently within the built-environment professions the focus has been on the application of EIA and SIA policies and processes, for example the PIA position statement and the NSW and QLD government SIA guidelines.

Munday's writing is focused on the development environment in the Northern Territory and therefore she addresses issues effecting Aboriginal cultural life and association to Country. Munday argues for the need to develop what she calls "Culturally Competent Systems" that she suggests is a system that has:

... the skills, knowledge and respect for other cultures. Barriers to cultural competence can be organisational (the degree to which leadership and the workforce reflect the composition of the population), institutional leadership (including diversity) and structural (bureaucratic processes, use of interpreters and communication).

Munday goes on to argue that a culturally competent system would include:

- *a mandate for cultural impact assessment, which considers a broader set of values and impacts than are covered in mainstream scientific studies.*
- *alternative governance structures that give Aboriginal people real input to decision-making.*
- *intercultural capacity, or the skills, knowledge and aptitude to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge systems, shared decision-making and co-managed natural resource management.*

The above selection of writing focused on Cultural Impact Assessments relate to the typical application of impact assessment processes in relation to development proposals. The next section will place a specific focus on the application within the urban planning and design context.

3.5 Potential Cultural Impacts in the Built Environment

It is reasonable to assume that every urban development intervention in the built environment will have an impact on the community's cultural life. It is also important to remember that cultural differences influence perception by creating lived experiences that teach certain beliefs, values, behaviours, and communication styles. These differences influence the way that people view the world around them and therefore perceive potential impacts.

These impacts, both positive and negative, may be small incremental effects or major life changing effects. Therefore, it is critical that the planning and design teams involved undertake some form of impact assessment both during the project inception stage and during the various planning and designing stages to ascertain potential impacts. These assessments might be, as the NSW technical supplement identified, not just potential '*Physically observable impacts*' but also '*Rational or justifiable fears*' on the part of the community (2023).

Potential Negative Cultural Impacts

Negative social impacts may include but are not limited to:

- Land use changes that might negatively affect community character and people's sense of place, especially a sense of cultural loss for First Nations people etc.
- A reduction in the sense of place through the destruction of existing character in built form and replacement with new buildings and public spaces that lack local relevance etc.
- The loss of culturally specific services and retail outlets such as cultural precincts and or speciality sources of culturally relevant services and foods such as Halal or Kosha butchers etc.
- The loss of local cultural facilities such as community art centres and places of worship etc.
- Reduced access to public open space for group gatherings, community festivals, events etc.
- The loss of local tangible heritage through the destruction of First Nations sites, heritage buildings, monuments, public art etc.

Potential Positive Cultural Impacts

Identifying the positive Cultural impacts of proposed development are also important. This includes the assessment of the positive cultural consequences of change (e.g., improved sense of place and cultural expression resulting from increased public space). It is important to assess positive impacts impartially and not to overstate or understate them. Positive cultural impacts may include but not limited to:

- Developing a stronger sense of place and community cohesion through community investment in cultural infrastructure and public places.
- Supporting community cultural development initiatives, capacity building and stronger community cultural institutions.
- Providing improved access to and preservation of places of cultural significance and built heritage.
- Creating opportunities for the integration of cultural expression that reflect the diversity of community culture and creativity through the visual arts and design symbolism in the built environment.
- Assisting community members and visitors to decode local cultural symbolism and build awareness of community values, behaviours, and ways of life.

It is important to remember that impacts may be experienced positively by some and negatively by others and therefore we must consider how the identified impacts are distributed differently between different social groups, and each group's capacity to respond to these. This includes impacts on First Nations communities, with consideration of livelihood and wellbeing of those communities as well as traditional cultural impacts. It is important during the research and consultation phase of an assessment process to remember that; *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have different ways of making decisions and different community structures, and it is important for planning processes to take account of these cultural differences.* (Wensing 2011:13)

Depending on the project, it may be necessary to consider and assess reasonable and justified fears and concerns held by the community in relation to any of the above categories.

4. A CIA Framework for Urban Planning & Design

There is no question that changes, minor or major, will occur in the cultural life, institutions, resources and infrastructure of human populations and local communities because of urban development projects. Therefore, highlighting the need for Cultural Impact Assessment analysis at the early stage of a projects implementation to identify all those likely to be affected by a development. While there may be varying impacts for almost all affected by a proposed policy or action, the assessment has a special duty to identify those whose adverse impacts might need the greatest attention.

Cultural impact assessment works best as a planning tool to make sure a community is ready for development and that the proposed development fits into the community and region without creating adverse impacts or significant public concerns. (Mackenzie Valley Review Board, 2009)

Several of the sources referred to in this discussion, including the PIA, have proposed that Social/Cultural Impact Assessments should only be undertaken by trained Specialists using appropriate professional methods, to provide the best results. In the case of Cultural Impacts these specialists might include practitioners such as anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnographers, cultural geographers, social and cultural planners. This level of specialist involvement will realistically only happen on major urban master planning projects. Particularly in relation to land use planning, re-zoning, metropolitan master-planning, transport planning etc.

As quoted earlier James suggests that: *We need a self-evaluation tool for cities.* At a practical project by project level, there is also a need for a cultural impacts tool that can be used by planning and design professionals to undertake a practice level assessment of possible project impacts at an early stage of planning and designing, ideally during the stakeholder consultation phase. For example, the previous reference to the City of Hume in Victoria which has the option for an initial assessment by the professional team in the form of a *Social Assessment Comment* (SAC). Therefore, I am proposing the need for a Cultural Impact Toolkit with both full CIA Guidelines and a project specific self-evaluation tool such as what I have termed a *Cultural Impact Evaluation* (CIE) Guidelines. I envision the CIE as a more robust assessment process than that proposed for a SAE. These varying levels of assessment are aimed at assisting built-environment professionals in evaluating the potential/perceived negative and / or positive impacts of their planning & design proposals.

4.1 Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) Guidelines

An alternative to the IAIA set of cultural domains this CIA could be structured around the following Domains:

- **Cultural Practices:** Relating to individual and community beliefs/values, behaviours/ways of life etc.
- **Cultural Expression:** Relating to the look and feel of a place through the community's use of art, design, and cultural symbols etc.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Relating to both tangible heritage such as architecture/landscape and keeping places, and intangible heritage such as stories, sacred/spiritual places etc.

Some projects may have impacts in all these categories, but others may only have a few. For example, an influx of new migrants may affect both 'ways of life' and 'community'. Neatly categorising impacts is not as important as identifying and assessing them. The categories simply provide prompts to consider possible additional cultural impacts.

For example, consider how benefits and impacts are distributed differently between different community groups, and each group's capacity to respond to these. This includes impacts on First Nations communities, with consideration of livelihood and wellbeing of First Nations communities as well as cultural impacts. Built environment professionals involved in projects requiring in depth consultation with First Nations people can gain guidelines on interaction with communities via the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020) and Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute (AHURI) have developed *Ethical Principles And Guidelines For Indigenous Research* as part of their National Housing Research program.

Depending on the project, it may be necessary to consider and assess reasonable and justified fears and concerns held by the community in relation to any of the above categories.

PROPOSED OPTION 1: Based on a possible 7 Step process that might be suitable as a CIA Practice Framework for qualified professional cultural specialists to use when reviewing the potential impacts of major projects.

Following the guidelines outlined by the IAIA's approach would require the CIA team to address the following steps.

POTENTIAL CIA PRACTICE FRAMEWORK GUIDELINES	
STEPS	EVALUATION PROCESS
STEP 1: COMMIT	Affirm commitment; Establish management structures; Define scope of assessment; Resource the project.
STEP 2: ENGAGE	Consult key groups & individuals; Form reference groups; Empower local communities; Accord recognition to partners.
STEP 3: ASSESS	Research Cultural Context; Assess proposed Project Outcomes against community expectations.
STEP 4: DEFINE	Clarify and seek agreement on proposed project deliverables and identified potential cultural impacts.
STEP 5: IMPLEMENT	Planning and design team to identify impact management options and revise the plans / designs accordingly.
STEP 6: MEASURE	Monitor indicators; Document project implementation; Reassess profiles & processes; Evaluate project.
STEP 7: COMMUNICATE	Translate themes & learnings; Publicise the outcomes; Report to constituents; Advise communities & governments.

Step 6 & 7 represent good practice methods for post-approval management of Social Impact Assessments. As Motte & Howitt (2018) remind us, this requires the preparation and implementation of Social Impact Management Plans (SIMPs) that include continued engagement of impacted communities during monitoring and management as important in achieving successful social outcomes. In the case of EIAs the practice of post-approval Environmental Management Plans is an accepted requirement.

4.2 Possible Cultural Impact Evaluation (CIE) Guidelines

For a practice-based evaluation of possible cultural impacts there is an argument that a simplified process would encourage the application of the guidelines during project planning and design.

For example, rather than the IAIA's "Six Steps" I think that for a practical practitioner format, this could be further refined down to the following "Three Steps." These being: an initial gaining of an 'awareness' of potential cultural issues, followed by an 'analysis' process to identify aspects of the proposal that might impact on cultural aspects, and finally develop planning and design options for 'actions' that might avoid, limit, or minimise the perceived impacts.

It is also important to acknowledge that planning projects are often at a local government level and may be either a municipal, suburb or local area level, in each case planners and clients need to assess the scope of each of the proposed three steps in the following CIE model.

A possible model for this application is provided by Alba Colombo (2015) from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona when she explores models to assess cultural impacts of events. Key to Colombo's model, which she calls *Cultural Impact Perceptions* (CIP), is that it proposes to assess the cultural impacts based on the 'perceptions' of residents; and validating the existence, or not, of cultural impacts on 'perceptions' through the eyes of the host society. Colombo makes the point that:

it must be highlighted that CIP proposes a methodology based on the perceptions of individuals from a host society, and therefore the results are based on subjective and personal perceptions. Thus individual perceptions is the most appropriate indicator by which to measure cultural impacts, since these impacts, due to their specific characteristics, are more subjective than other impacts such as the economic ones. (2015:15)

Building on the concepts of *Social Assessment Comment* (SAC) and Colombo's *Cultural Impact Perceptions* (CIP) proposal I believe that the concept of *Cultural Impact Evaluation* (CIE) is applicable to the built-environment and especially individual projects with identifiable host societies from which to gather impact evaluations.

Colombo's evaluation model is structured around community and practitioners' perceptions of impacts, as opposed to detailed research evidence, on the key questions of impacts on the 'Preservation or Loss of Cultural Tradition's and the 'Construction or Loss Cultural Identity'.

The following Cultural Impact Evaluation (CIE) model is based on the recognition that a manageable impact assessment process is based on three broad functions:

1. To identify local cultural issues and potential impacts relevant to particular aspects of the communities' cultural ways of life;
2. Assessing those impacts, in terms of their magnitude, duration, and the probability of their occurrence; and
3. Recommending measures that will reduce negative impacts and enhance positive impacts of planning/design proposal.

Therefore, the following model is structured around a 3 Step process;

1. Awareness: Consult with local community members to identify the existing state of the community's Cultural Domains in the local built environment context
2. Analysis: Consult with local community to identify Perceived impacts on the community's Cultural Practices, Expression, Heritage, and local built environment.
3. Actions: Identify appropriate Impact Management strategies to address the identified impacts

In relation to 'Actions' CIEs need to be practical and include a range of strategies and actions, such as variations to the proposed plans and or designs which can mitigate against any negative consequences and maximise the opportunities and benefits. Importantly, CIEs also need to provide clarity about the responsibility for cost of implementing these strategies and actions.

The following potential CIE model is an attempt at a set of guidelines suitable for urban planning and design which draws on both (CIP) and (SAC) approach.

PROPOSED OPTION 2: A three step CIE process.

CULTURAL IMPACT EVALUATION (CIE) – GUIDELINES	
1. Awareness: Consult with local community members to identify the existing state of the community's Cultural Domains in the local built environment context.	
Cultural Domains	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural Practices 2. Cultural Expression 3. Cultural Heritage
2. Analysis: Consult with local community to identify Perceived impacts on the community's Cultural Practices, Expression, Heritage, and local built environment.	
Impact Classification	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative: High – Medium - Low 2. Neutral: 3. Positive: High – Medium - Low
Impact Likelihood:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Likely 2. Possible 3. Unlikely
3. Actions: Identify appropriate Impact Management strategies to address the identified impacts	
Management Options	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Avoid, 2. Minimise 3. Eliminate.

Ideally actions 2 and 3 should be undertaken at the early planning stages to influence the development of plans and designs and then again during community consultation and client review of draft proposals to provide the opportunity to demonstrate that the identified Management options have achieved the anticipated impact minimisation sought.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Key Research Findings

While this desk-based research does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis of the literature and proposals relating to impact assessment theory and practice, it has provided an insight into the current thinking and application of impact models in Australia and overseas.

The research would suggest that:

- a. There is a range of well-established impact assessment models applied internationally. These models include the existing Environmental, Economic, and Social Impact Assessment models promoted by the IAIA. Until recently the cultural dimension had not been factored into the assessment process other than some references in SIA models. For example, in the Planning Institute of Australia's 2010 SIA Position Statement there are only two references to culture.
- b. There are however a range of Socio-Cultural formats for SIA's where an increased number of cultural criteria are included along with the traditional SIA criteria.
- c. The IAIA have also provided discussion and proposals towards the development and application of Cultural Impact Assessment models such as the Mackenzie Valley example from Canada.
- d. There is a perceived need for a greater emphasis on applying cultural impact assessments during the planning of urban development projects alongside rigorous SIA and EIA processes, especially in relation to the issues and changes effecting First Nations communities.
- e. The application of SIA and CIA processes are not widely adopted and when they are there is limited evaluation of their final outcomes.
- f. In addition to comprehensive CIA processes there is a perceived need for an impact assessment tool that could be applied by individual planners and designers in both the early scoping phase of a project and then again for reviewing the draft plans and designs.
- g. Examples of existing proposals for a practitioner based preliminary evaluation tool included the concept of a Social Assessment Comment (SAC) for application in Local Government planning approvals and the *Cultural Impact Perceptions* (CIP) proposal.

In summary the research suggests that there are three assessment options of relevance to Cultural Impact Assessment for urban planning processes, these are:

- Level 1: SIA with heightened cultural criteria.
This option can be based on established and successful models with enhanced focus on questions relating to community cultural ways of life, sense of place and belonging. Especially in relation to First Nations cultural perspectives.
- Level 2: CIA high level for use by professional cultural impact assessors.
This option would be specifically focused on potential impacts on the community's cultural life from major urban development proposals. A CIA might be undertaken in parallel with a traditional SIA.
- Level 3: CIE as a tool for individual planners and designers and urban development project teams.
This option is intended to be a practical model suitable for urban practitioners to undertake on smaller scale projects that cannot justify the time and cost of a full CIA.

Further Research & Development Required

The research has built the argument for greater application of cultural assessment by planners and designers engaged in built-environment projects and hopefully presented realistic options for suitable assessment models to fit a range of planning and design processes. There is further work to be done to formalise these cultural assessment models to a fully functioning professional Toolkit for the profession to adopt and apply.

Among the areas for further research and development are, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Development of a Cultural Impacts Toolkit suitable for urban planners and designers that provides workable models for each of the three proposed assessment levels.
- b. Develop a Criteria Framework that can inform the selection of key criteria to focus on during the gaining awareness phase and again during the analysis phase. This framework should include a guide to strategic questions that could be used to gather practical and perceptual understanding of potential positive and negative impacts.
- c. Develop follow-up review criteria to establish if mitigation management delivered required outcomes.
- d. To encourage professional bodies and government authorities to adopt an appropriate level of Cultural Impact Assessment processes as 'best practice' on all relevant urban planning and design projects especially those involving First Nations and culturally diverse communities.
- e. Encourage the inclusion of Cultural Impact Assessment training at a tertiary and industry professional development levels.

Disclaimer:

This Research Report is the result of independent research without support from any institution and therefore has been limited to academic open access literature available on-line. It is therefore acknowledged that while the findings have been limited to the available sources of information and perspectives it is hoped that the overview provides a balanced and thoughtful perspective on the issues associated with developing Cultural Impact Assessment models for urban planners and designers.

6. APPENDIX:

6.1 Acronyms

AHURI	Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute
AIATSIS	Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies
CIA	Cultural Impact Assessment
CIE	Cultural Impact Assessment
CIP	Cultural Impact Perceptions
DA	Development Application
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Act
IAIA	International Assessment
PIA	Planning Institute of Australia
QPEC	Queensland Planning & Environmental Court
SDPWO	State Development & Public Works Organisation
SAC	Social Assessment Comment
SIA	Social Impact Association of Impact Assessment
UCLG	United Cities and Local Government

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