

URBAN PLACES PAPER 4: why plan culturally



“People and their cultures define place and place shapes its people.”
[UNESCO: 21]

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Introduction: This Discussion paper will consider the question why plan culturally? And discuss the concept of Planning Culture before exploring the importance of culture in urban development, revitalisation and economic development and makes the argument for the concept of Planning Culturally.

Why plan culturally?

the voice of culture in planning remains a feeble one. Yet the power of culture as an organizing concept for planning – as for other key sectors such as human geography, sociology and public administration – offers enormous possibilities and is only beginning to be perceived. (Young, G. 2008)

From my perspective the WHY is simple, if we accept that all our actions have a cultural dimension to it, then every time we design or plan, we do so from a cultural perspective. More importantly all our planning and design decisions will have either a positive or negative impact upon the diverse communities who use the resulting public spaces or buildings. Therefore, we need built environment professionals who can Plan Culturally in a deliberative manner with an awareness of the potential outcomes within a cultural frame of reference. Michael Burayidi (2003) explores the planning perspective in a Multi-Cultural urban context and sets out an argument consistent with the aims of developing cultural competency in the planning profession. Burayidi states that it is vital that we appreciate that *‘planners have a culture*, which can be described as a “Planning Culture” and *This culture influences the way they see the world, how they interpret their environment, and how they go about reshaping this environment through their practices’* (2003: 260). Michael Crotty (1998) also reminds us that our view of the world and lived experience is *‘inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture’* (1998: 52).

Planning Culture

The social, cultural and physical setting in which individuals are born and raised exercises the influence over and conditions the way they perceive the world, their thoughts and behaviour. This conditioning affects individuals on both a personal and professional level.

(Glusac, T. 2015: 32)

All humans develop a cultural frame of reference based on their life experiences such as the environment and society they grow up in and their education and employment situations. Indeed, every industry and profession have evolved a culture that influences the way that its practitioners see the world and their profession's role in society. Therefore, in essence "Planning Culture" refers to how planning professionals undertake their practice affected by both individual and collectively shared cognitive frames of reference that shape their view of the world. As planning processes and built environments are highly subject to political influences and institutional structures, planning cultures vary significantly around the world.

In Australia, a 2011 report by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) posed the question, 'What is the Culture of Planning?' The report proposed that: *The 'culture' of planning is an often referenced, yet little understood concept. Similar to the concept of planning as a profession, the culture of planning is difficult to define, has many different facets and can be subjectively interpreted.* It also argued that there is a need to recognise that planning today is made up of "a combination of many different cultures." *These cultures are created by planning professionals, the political process, the community and property industry* (PIA 2011:3). Frank Othengrafen and Mario Reimer suggest that:

With regard to spatial planning, it can then be assumed that planning culture stands for collective modes of thinking and acting of 'built environment professionals', stemming in particular from a shared professional ethos but also from more general societal values. This includes informal (traditions, habits, and customs, etc) and formal aspects (legal context, political-administrative structure, spatial planning system, etc.) as far as they are a result of the accumulated attitudes, habits and customs shared by the group of people involved. (Othengrafen, F. & Reimer, M. 2013:1273)

Literature on Planning Culture and its impacts on urban planning appear from the mid 1900's and increasingly through the 2000's with authors such as (Sanyal, 2005) (Friedmann, 2005). Joerg Knieling and Frank Othengrafen propose that Planning Culture can be considered as a specific sub-culture because the professionals involved in *planning processes are conditioned by the system of planning they act in, including the interpretation of planning tasks, the way of recognizing and addressing problems, the handling and use of certain rules, procedures and instruments, or ways and methods of public participation.* Therefore, the suggestion that Planning Culture stands for the *collective modes of thinking and acting of "built environment professionals", stemming in particular from a shared professional ethos but also from more general societal values* (2015:2137).

Although Tanja Glusac's (2015) focus is on the proposition that the architectural profession is failing in relation to providing outcomes that are relevant to place and community, her critique of modernism and globalisation and their impact on sense of place and culture is equally relevant to the debate around Planning Culture. For example, she reminds us that:

... it can be argued that architects, as professionals responsible for creating, stylising and making the built environment effective, are themselves conditioned by the surroundings in which they live, by what they have been taught and by the prevailing theories and philosophies on architecture to which they subscribe. These affect their approach to architecture, the built environment and the designs they produce, further strengthening and influencing their own sense of identity in the process. (Glusac, T. 2015: 32)

As with the architectural profession's culture and behaviours, Othengrafen and Reimer (2013), propose that there is a Planning Culture within the planning profession which *'involves not only the learning of technical skills, but also the adoption of certain values and norms that define our occupation.* In the 2011 PIA report, it was noted that *planning and planners had become increasingly focused on regulatory outcomes* and as a consequence, *the culture of planning has become reactive and can be readily and frequently undermined by plans that have lost their currency or do not have up to date visions* (PIA 2011).

Othengrafen and Reimer also suggest that Planning Cultures social values include: *'planning artifacts'* (manifest culture), *'planning environment'* (both manifest and nonmanifest) and *'societal environment'* (nonmanifest culture). They further suggest that these *three dimensions seems to be useful for making planning processes and outcomes more transparent and comparable, and for explaining how spatial planning is influenced by culture.* (Othengrafen, F. & Reimer, M. 2013:6)

The preceding discussions highlight the importance of recognising there is a Planning Culture that informs the way planning professionals might consciously or unconsciously approach their work, it is not however the same in my opinion as Planning Culturally.

Culture in Urban & Economic Development

Culture lies at the heart of urban renewal and innovation. Culture embodies the soul of a city, allowing it to progress and build a future of dignity for all.

(UNESCO, 2016b)

The above statement by the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, relates to the focus of the UNESCO *Human-Centred Cities* initiative, which positions culture at the centre of, and therefore influencing, all aspects of urban development and the lives lived within these constructed environments. This initiative was preceded by the 2005 UNESCO "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" which set out the following Guiding Principles:

Principle 5: Since culture is one of the mainsprings of development, the cultural aspects of development are as important as its economic aspects, which individuals and peoples have the fundamental right to participate in and enjoy.

and

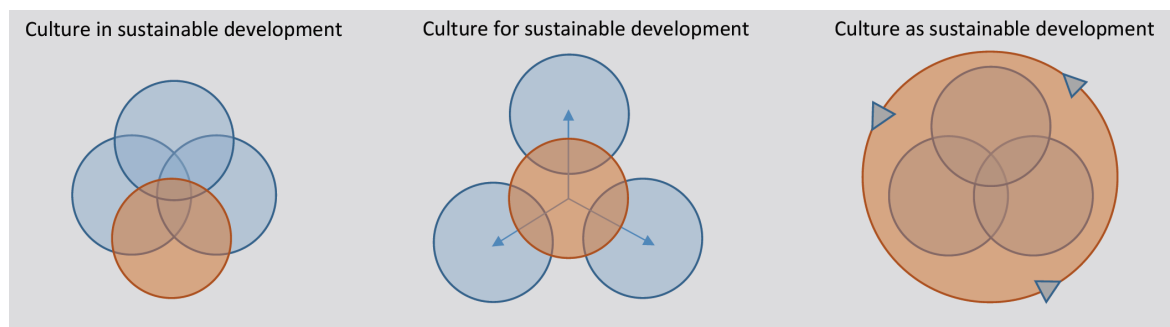
Planning Culturally: A resource for Urban Planners & Designers

Principle 6: Cultural diversity is a rich asset for individuals and societies. The protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations. (2004:8)

In his 2001 publication, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning*, Australian Jon Hawkes proposed that Culture should be seen as a fourth pillar alongside the Society, Economy and Environment agendas, to ensure that a 'Cultural perspective is the essential basis of all public planning'. (2001:32)

However, Joost Dessein et al, suggest the Fourth Pillar concept has limitations in placing culture alongside the other pillars, as it 'encourages the view that culture is a marginal concern in sustainable development' (Dessein, J. et al. 2015). Dessein et al, therefore, argue for an approach that not only considers 'Culture's essential role in public planning' but culture's role 'for' and indeed 'as' sustainable development.

In this model, see below diagram, culture is either positioned to mediate between the three pillars or shown as encompassing all the other three.



Dessein, J. et al. (2015: 29)

If Culture is to be considered in its wholistic sense, as 'that which gives meaning to our lives,' then the argument for Culture 'As' the foundation on which sustainability is situated is a strong one, as this publication seeks to demonstrate. I would suggest that in acknowledgement of cultures central role as shown in Dessein's "for" and "as" models above are more appropriate in this context than Hawkes "Fourth Pillar" approach which was an important proposition when initially proposed, but not, in my opinion, so relevant to urban development context. Indeed, I would propose that we consider 'culture' to be the 'foundation' upon which to place the social, economic, and environmental pillars, as there is a cultural dimension to all three pillars.

A 2006 report for the European Urban Development Network (URBACT) titled "*Cultural activities & creative industries, a driving force for urban regeneration*" prepared by Paul Rutten explores the significance of culture as a foundation on which to build a viable creative industry sector, he proposes that:

Culture is an important location factor to attract talent to regions and cities. Availability of creative personnel is a precondition for a competitive and innovative region. Therefore, regions try to attract talent. Specifically, an open and tolerant climate and culturally laden and active environment is attractive for the creative talent that is, together with a strong technology base, indispensable for an innovative region. Investments in cultural activities and creative industries may therefore lead to a more innovative and competitive regional economy.

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The quote above is very much in sync with the work of Richard Florida and his notion of the “creative class” being attracted to city of 3T’s, “Technology, Talent and Tolerance”. In his 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class* Florida argued that the city’s culture and creative milieu were critical factors in attracting and retaining creative industries which he proposed were the source of future economic prosperity and employment. The debate around Florida’s work not only focused on the negative connotations associated with the notion of “Class” but also created some confusion around terminology such as Cultural Industries, Creative Industries and Creative Cities (Landry, C. 2000).

As Greg Young in *The Culturization of Planning* (2002) reminds us:

The twin concepts of the creative city (Landry, 2000) and the creative class (Florida, 2004), both stress the role of cultural knowledge in creativity and the urban economy. Landry not only recognizes the relationship between creativity and the city but also the importance of the historical component of culture. Connecting the past with the present (Landry, 2000) is a source of creativity and a resource for adding value in planning. Florida sees cultural qualities (in terms of all of the categories of culture I describe), as the source of cultural differentiation for cities that is directly reflected in their global competitiveness (Florida, 2004). (Young, G. 2008: 87)

To fully explore the proposition that culture represents profoundly important aspects of our society and its constructs it is important to explore a range of cultural dimensions, such as:

- a. Cultural Planning - the concept of strategic planning for cultural activity, cultural infrastructure etc.
- b. Cultural Heritage – the concept of planning for the preservation and restoration of tangible and intangible heritage etc.
- c. Planning Culture – the diversity of cultural influences within professions related to the built environment disciplines; and
- d. Planning Culturally – the bringing together of Cultural Planning and Planning Culture principles to deliver a culturally appropriate urban planning outcome.

The inter-relationships between these cultural dimensions will be considered to understand how they contribute to culture ‘As’ a foundational principle in the Human-centred City.

In these changing and challenging times, it is important to also consider a range of disruptive factors that are impacting on our cities. We therefore need to explore questions such as, what the increasing Culturally diverse populations, increasing emphasis on digitisation and global environmental and health disruptions hold for culture as we know it today?

There is a significant body of literature focused on Culturally diverse and Intercultural discourse relating to urban planning such as Ruth Fincher, who reminds us that ‘*The increasing ethnic and racial diversity of contemporary cities challenges urban planners*’ in their approach to urban planning and design of cities. (Fincher, R. et al. 2014). Other significant contributions are from Leonie Sandercock (1998) and Ted Cattle (2012).

In addition to the Culturally diverse/Intercultural discourse there is a growing awareness that the notion of the Smart City needs to be considered from the human-centred perspective. Therefore, the question needs asking, will the Smart City (Álvaro Oliveira and Margarida Campolargo. 2015) and Surveillance-Capitalism (Shoshana Zuboff. 2019) inevitably bring major impacts to our understanding of culture? As Charles Landry reminds us ‘*Digitization represents a tectonic shift providing computing with an immense force. Its devices are changing*

Planning Culturally: A resource for Urban Planners & Designers

society and social life, culture, levels of connectivity, the economy as well as cities. These devices are both liberating and potentially invasive' (Landry, C. 2016).

We need to explore the complex range of cultural influences on the form and nature of human settlement, with a particular focus on the evolving contemporary urban form. Including viewing the built environment through a cultural lens to explore consequential impacts of current urban planning and design practices on the cultural life of individuals and communities. This will encompass relevant professional practices, including but not limited to; urban planning, architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture etc. and explore culture in the context of liveability, inclusiveness, sustainability, and city management.

Sources of relevant literature include the UNESCO's 2016 *Culture: Urban Futures Report* (UNESCO. 2016a) and the European Union's (EU) *The Human Centred City: Opportunities for Citizens through Research & Innovation* report (2019). In addition the *Agenda 21 for Culture* which focuses on the role of culture in sustainable development contributes to the debate regarding the important role played by culture in urban development (Duxbury et al. 2016).

The *Culture: Urban Futures Report* explores the role of culture in sustainable development and provides a wide range of case studies from across the world. Much of the report focuses on examples of cultural heritage and cultural activities that are primarily situated within the "fourth pillar of sustainability" model. This is highlighted by statements in the report such as: 'Cultural activities can foster social inclusion and dialogue among diverse communities. Tangible and intangible heritage are integral parts of a city's identity, creating a sense of belonging and cohesion. Culture embodies the soul of a city, allowing it to progress and build a future of dignity for all.' While the Report demonstrates the value of this perspective of culture in sustainable development, Dessein (Dessein, J. et al. 2015) reminds us that this approach 'is sometimes too easily limited to a narrow definition of culture as the arts and creative-cultural sector.' He proposes that culture also has an important connecting or 'mediating role' to play as well as having a critical 'transformative role' in sustainability. Dessein therefore proposes that we need to understand that culture can be seen as having the three roles of being 'in,' 'for' and 'as' sustainable development. This is a valuable contribution to this research proposal as it provides a useful model within which to locate the diverse cultural theories and activities.

Additional discussions on the nature and complexity of defining culture are addressed by Duxbury whose position embraces the *UNESCO Human-centred City* and the *Agenda 21 for Culture* approach to the importance of culture in sustainable development. Duxbury reminds us that there are many different meanings and or ambiguities surrounding the use of the word 'culture as way of life and culture as art' (Duxbury et al. 2016). *Agenda 21 for Culture* embraces the concept of culture as the 'Fourth Pillar' (Hawkes, 2001) of sustainable development a concept position that is challenged by Yudhishtir Isar who questions both the approach of Agenda 21 and Hawkes and questions if:

The pairing of 'culture' and 'development' is ambiguous as well. Is it 'cultural development,' 'development for culture', 'culture for development', or 'culture in development'? Are we talking about cultural development as the flourishing of the arts and culture sector, e.g. the long-standing French understanding of the term, or as the flourishing of a way of life as a whole? (Isar. 2017)

In a 1995 contribution to the work of the World Commission on Culture and Development, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins reminded us that:

A great deal of confusion arises in both academic and political discourse when culture in the humanistic sense is not distinguished from 'culture' in its anthropological senses, notably culture as the total and distinctive way of life of a people or society. From the latter point of view, it is meaningless to talk of 'the relation between culture and the economy;' since the economy is part of a people's culture. (1995)

Other sources of worth investigation include *CITIE: A resource for city leadership*, NESTA (Gibson et al. 2015) among others. The *Pact of Amsterdam* (EU, 2016) states that 'The Urban Agenda for the EU acknowledges the polycentric structure of Europe and the diversity (social, economic, territorial, cultural and historical) of Urban Areas across the EU'. This is further evidence of the European focus on the importance of culture in the urban agenda and particularly issues of cultural diversity in the human centred city.

Planning Culturally Matters

... why culture matters in planning is that multiculturalism has become practically necessary. Put differently, different groups insist on being treated differently. (Burayidi, M. 2000)

In this section we will explore the question, why do we need to be Planning Culturally in our culturally diverse cities, or more importantly asking the question why have we stopped Planning Culturally? Throughout history the built environment was influenced by local cultural life, the buildings and layout of urban settlements responded to the needs of the community's cultural way of life, its values, customs and of course responsive to the climate and geography. Think middle eastern courtyard housing, Italian hill towns or the canal side housing of Amsterdam, while these are examples of traditional building forms, the essence of how these typologies meet the cultural frames of their communities can inform contemporary planning and design.

First it must be stated that to Plan Culturally is not about a cultural pastiche of traditional urban forms, or as I have suggested in previous writings, applying what I call 'cultural cross-dressing', that is sticking a faux frontage on an existing building stock as often happens when an area of the city that becomes a 'little Italy', 'little India' or a 'China Town'. This is not, from my perspective, Planning Culturally, it is place marketing and serves a function in many cities as defining an area with a concentration of a particular cultural group and providing access to culturally relevant products and produce especially for recent arrivals to the city. In addition to providing for the needs of locals, such cultural precincts can contribute areas of vibrant street life especially for city marketing and tourism.

Highlighting the essence of Planning Culturally, Louis Mumford reminds us in the *Culture of Cities* that culturally aware planning professionals:

... will be actively interested in the form and culture of their locality, which means their community and their own personalities. Such people will contribute to our land - planning, our industry planning, and our community planning the authority of their own understanding, and the pressure of their own desires. Without them, planning is a barren externalism. (Mumford, L 1938)

Referring to Michael Burayidi's statement above as to why culture matters in planning in culturally diverse environments, I would like to reinforce this position with the notion that every planning and design decision has an impact on the culture of the community, this may be positive or negative, deliberate or unintentional, but it is inevitable!

Gentrification:

One of the, is it negative or is it positive questions, is the impact of gentrification on a community and their place! This is a critical issue facing urban planners and designers as the acts of revitalisation and urban enhancement to improve the quality of local infrastructure with the goal of improving the community's quality of life can be the first step towards gentrification and an increase in land values. In an article titled *Is your suburb ripe for gentrification? How to tell if higher property prices and high-rises are on the horizon* by ABC journalist Annika Burgess, she quotes William Thackway, from the UNSW City Futures Research Centre, who says there are typically three waves of gentrification.

Thackway suggests these are:

1. *The displacement of lower income residents, which can often be artists or people with less stable employment types.*
2. *The physical transformation of the neighbourhood — mostly through the upgrading of housing and commercial spaces.*
3. *The changing cultural character of the neighbourhood, which can also push into "hypergentrification" — an area has transformed from industrial or working class, into a luxury suburb.*

It is ironic that quite often the quirky "sense of place" created by the artists and diverse local communities that is the very thing encouraging the gentrification is also one of the major casualties of the transforming of the cultural character of the area. There, it is not just the inevitable displacement of original residents who can no longer afford to live there but the impact of gentrification leading to inevitable and significant "loss of place". Also as a result of the growth of the cultural and creative industries, as promoted by Richard Florida and his concept of the "Creative Class" leading to vibrant and wealth generating urban regeneration, Allen Scott suggests that when these places become:

... dominated by high-end segments of the new economy; cultural amenities (in the guise of museums, art galleries, concert halls, multifaceted entertainment districts, and so on) are almost always present in some abundance; and the visible form of the city is generally dominated by up-scale streetscapes, expensive shopping facilities, and well-appointed residential enclaves, the latter frequently coinciding with gentrified inner city neighborhoods. (Scott, A. 2006:4)

Acknowledging this issue, Dr Sidh Sintusingha, from the Melbourne School of Design suggests that for gentrification to be done better from a cultural heritage perspective, *the approach needs to be place-driven, involving councils and the local government to enhance the character of an area — not overtake it.* Dr Sintusingha further proposes that there is a need to protect a place's "intangible heritage", and suggests that, *Culture that is not a heritage or history that is tied to the buildings. It's tied to the people.* While the notion of the place / community connection is an important consideration we have seen many gentrification projects

revitalising unused of non-residential derelict buildings and infrastructure, especially in former industrial and dockland areas of many cities. The repurposing and adaptive reuse of building stock can, when developed with respect for the past result in a new but referential sense of place.

Conclusions:

From the perspective of Planning Culturally this paper has a focus on the planning and design profession and their personal and professional cultures. Including considering the potential impacts of these beliefs and values in the context of culturally diverse communities which highlights the need for cultural awareness, knowledge and competency. Especially in the context of urban and economic development projects, including projects leading to the gentrification of places, where I argue there is a need to position culture as the foundation upon which the sustainability pillars of Social, Economic and Environmental are built.

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Author's Note

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