URBAN PLACES PAPER 3: culture & cities

"culture is a means through which citizens feel they belong to their city."
Nancy Duxbury. et al. (2016)

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2024

Introduction: This Discussion Paper seeks to better understand why we need to plan culturally and addresses why we need to understand the culture of cities! Firstly, the discussion will explore the different interpretations of 'Culture & Cities' including the notion of the 'Culture of Cities' vis a vis 'Cultural Cities'. The concepts of the Human-Centred City and the Intercultural City will also be reviewed.

Culture of Cities v Cultural Cities

> *The culture of cities is an amalgam of differences. Some of these are historically given, others arise in the course of urbanization through migration, cultural exchanges, and the images that modern technologies disseminate worldwide. In addition, population is diverse, with different needs in the course of the human life cycle.* (Friedmann, J. 2005: 47)

In my work I consider the concept of 'Culture of Cities' as referring to a *"complex whole"* as exemplified by and informing the work of UNESCO's Human Centred Cities program. Whereas the notion of 'Cultural Cities' encompasses cultural expression which includes cultural activities such as the arts, particularly variation of Public Art and cultural assets such as tangible and intangible heritage. Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach explores this approach, in *Cultural Resources and the Idea of the Creative City* and suggests that:

> One of the most common creative city strategies related to space is the renewal and promotion of the built environment, mainly the architecture and urban landscape in order to attract affluent visitors, new inhabitants or capital to a particular district. It also targets some segments of tourists who search for "cultural entertainment," and are enchanted by icons of culture. his approach includes, among many others, the grand "Cultural capital" project, which brands certain European cities as "cities of art." Cultural assets and activities are also used in revitalising districts and places which were in decline. (Wiktor-Mach, D. 2013:461)

As discussed by Wiktor-March the European Union have an annual program titled 'The European Capital of Culture' which was initially called the European City of Culture and was conceived in 1983. The program involves cities within the European Union competing for selection as the Capital of Culture. The selected cities hold the title for a period of one year during which it is expected to organise a series of cultural events with a strong pan-European dimension. Being a European Capital of Culture is seen as an opportunity for a city to generate considerable cultural, social, and economic benefits, and raise its visibility and profile across Europe.

From the perspective of cultural cities and culture led urban development Nancy Duxbury (Duxbury et al. 2016) reminds us that '*The distinctive features and benefits of cultural expressions, activities, and a diversity of approaches must be appreciated and nurtured'* in urban development. A Further example comes from Sacha Kagan et al, who argue for greater recognition of the importance of a cultural dimension to Sustainable Urban Development, particularly in relation to and its implications for the role of Cultural Policy informing Urban Policies (Kagan et al. 2018).

The focus in this paper is on the Culture of Cities and developing a greater understanding of the proposition that there is a need to create a Culturally Literate built environment profession to deliver culturally appropriate urban form that is relevant to an increasingly culturally diverse world. This need is especially important in Australia, where the ABS 2021 census statistics show 30.7% of the population were born overseas. Therefore, it is proposed that we need not only to respect the cultural diversity of the community, but to importantly embrace the notion of Interculturalism (Phil Wood & Charles Landry. 2008) and (Ted Cantle. 2012). Interculturalism, provides the opportunity to create a 'diversity dividend' (Wood & Landry. 2008) that can contribute to developing a built environment that captures and builds on the rich cultural diversity of contemporary urban communities. As Wood and Landry (2008) propose, "*the intercultural city will be one in which cultural literacy is wide-spread so that people can understand and empathize with another's view of the world*" (2008:250). I suggest that this is why it is not only important that the culturally diverse community can '*understand and empathize'* but importantly the people responsible for the planning, design and management of the urban environment in which the community live are also able to '*understand and empathize'* in order to deliver and manage human-centred cities that are culturally relevant, sensitive to, and supportive of local diversity.

Leonie Sandercock (1998) reminds us that it is important that urban planners are Culturally Literate in order that they can '… *enter into negotiations across the gulf of cultural difference requires all participants to be fluent in a range of ways of knowing and communicating*'.

Cultural Literacy requires the skills and ability to both decode and encode cultural significance, especially in Culturally diverse environments with their ethnic and or religious differences and complex cultural contexts.

(Brecknock 2006)
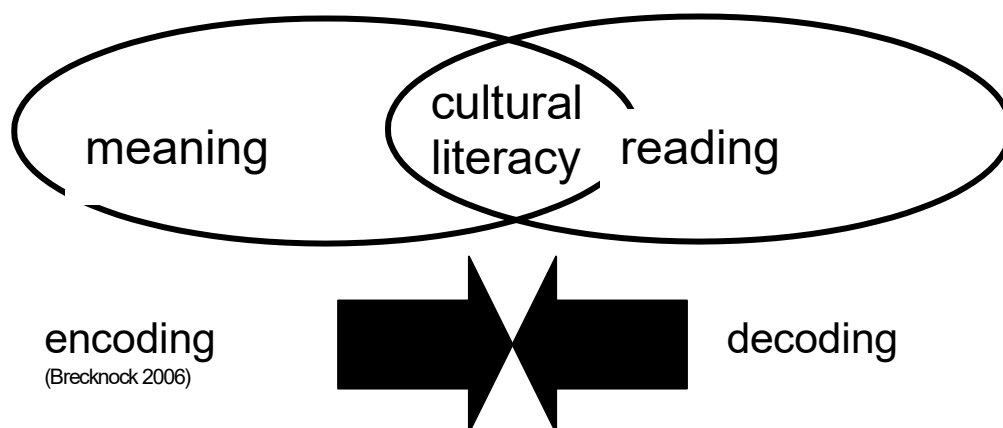
As the diagram above shows the suggestion is that Cultural Literacy requires both the ability to encode meaning and to decode to enable a reading of the encoded meaning. This is the basic transaction involved in the creation and consumption of cultural expression, it not only applies to the visual arts, literature and music but also, I suggest to architecture and design in urban environments.

In the Australian context, there is a significant challenge facing planners and designers who wish to apply Cultural Literacy to their collaborations with First Nations People as there is, understandable reluctance in sharing sensitive cultural knowledge. Therefore, requiring meaningful relationship building between the parties to establish a level of trust to establish a basis for encoding and decoding of relevant cultural knowledge.

Indeed, addressing the first peoples' association with 'country' presents a major challenge for contemporary planners and designers. In terms of the needs of Australia's First Nations People the 'why' Plan Culturally question is vitally important as Libby Porter et al. remind us, that '*an important struggle is to make more visible the fact that 'country' is still here, still present* (2017: 651). Meaning that for Aboriginal people the land upon which our major cities are built is still considered 'country' and as we are reminded by First Nations people the Australian continent 'always was, always will be Aboriginal land'. This highlights the need to work with the First Nations People to ensure this association to Country is genuinely considered in urban planning. Presenting a significant challenge to the planning profession as it calls for a high level of cultural literacy and meaningful dialogue. Indeed, the challenge is how to understand that traditional western planning approaches not only do not provide for the practical settlement needs of First Nations communities but place significant social pressures on these communities. Elle Davidson reminds us that:

> *Due to the imposition of European planning ideologies, traditional socio-spatial organisation has been detrimentally impacted, as the zoning of distinct family, women's and men's camping areas has not been incorporated into the planning mechanisms. This places additional pressure on the residents of these settlements as further negotiation tactics are required to ensure that the traditional practices are complied with in some respect.* (2009:75)

And therefore:

> *By not considering Aboriginal preferences throughout the planning process, Government officials are causing undue stress and are requiring the Aboriginal people to constantly adapt to unfamiliar environments. With careful consideration and community consultation, discrete Aboriginal settlements can be planned and designed to permit traditional practices whilst delivering the basic standard of living expected by all Australians.* (2009:84)

This raises the critical question how do urban planners and designers address these cultural blindness issues? Michael Burayidi (2000) calls for a focus on 'culturally sensitive' planning, including addressing the need for planning to be '*sensitive to diverse cultures and yet maintain a unified public realm'.* Burayidi suggests that one of the reasons why culture matters in planning, is that:

> *… multiculturalism has become practically necessary. Put differently, different groups insist on being treated differently. Traditional minority groups in the United States, such as African Americans and Native Americans argue, and rightly so, that the plight of these groups in society today cannot be understood aside from the historical context of the groups in the country.* (Burayidi, M. 2000)

There are encouraging signs that culture is being seen as a central plank of urban planning, two drivers of this change are UNESCO and the European Commission. Both organisations have initiated 'Human Centred City' programs since 2016.

The Human Centred City

> *Culture lies at the heart of urban renewal and innovation, Culture embodies the soul of the city, allowing it to progress and build a future of dignity for all.* (Irena Bokoba, Director-General of UNESCO, 2016)

In a possible response to the current global and transformative pressures brought about by globalisation and rational planning approaches, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have initiated a *Human-centred City* report. The UNESCO Human-Centred Cities initiative positions people and their cultures at the centre of, and therefore influencing, all aspects of urban development and the lives lived within these constructed environments. As proposed by UNESCO culture can be seen as a fundamental dimension of the urban development process and can help to strengthen the identity of places. However, unfortunately to often development has considered in quantitative terms, without considering its necessary qualitative dimension, namely the satisfaction of the community's spiritual and cultural aspirations. Therefore, the notion of Human Centred development agendas is critical to Planning Culturally.

The UNESCO report states that:

> *Our guiding principle is that cities should be more human-centred. This is not just a right, but also involves responsibilities, obligations and duties. To be a city for citizens where citizens become city-makers and shapers, makers and co-creators of their evolving urban development is not an entitlement. It means being an active citizen concerned with the local and European context and with the urgency of the global context.* [UNESCO: 16]

In a statement reminiscent of Sir Winston *Churchill's* 1943 speech in defence of rebuilding the Commons chamber, after war damage, in the original adversarial rectangular pattern, stating that "*We shape our buildings*; thereafter *they shape* us". UNESCO suggests that "*What happens in a city is both tangible and intangible. People and their cultures define place and place shapes its people*". [UNESCO: 21]

In a similar vein to the UNESCO report the European Commission (EC) has released the *Human Centred Cities: Opportunities for citizens through research and innovation (2019)* report which states that:

> *The people dimension looks at making the most of cultural diversity, building community and social bonding, creating an inclusive city for all to avert inequalities and spatial segregation, addressing demographic dynamics and fostering good living conditions and accessibility to services. At the same time, it recognises the real and symbolic significance of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the importance of individual and collective memory for the life of the city.* (2019: 26)

And further suggests that:

> *The built environment communicates the collective intent, ethos and culture of those who have planned and designed their city. It reflects the ambition and priorities of all the stakeholders – public, private and civic – and the extent to which the common good can be experienced. Cities are more balanced when they acknowledge and plan by going with the grain of their distinctiveness, their genius loci and when they value their heritage.* (2019: 60)

The UNESCO and EC "Human Centred City" reports propose that culture is a critical factor in urban development from the perspective of "cultural planning" contributing to the 'look and feel' of a place, and from the perspective of "Planning Culturally" addressing the inherent cultural values in planning public places.

Both reports propose that to balance the rational planning paradigms, culture is a critical factor in urban development. There is however, an important difference between the way culture is used in these two reports, for example the UNESCO report primarily considers culture from the perspective of cultural activities which contributing to the look and feel and authenticity of a place particularly in relation to urban development (Nancy Duxbury, 2016). While the EC report's approach to culture can be seen primarily from the perspective of planning that addresses the inherent cultural values of the European population.

The Intercultural City

> At what point do cities start to see diversity as less a cost, a drag on scarce resources, and a mind-numbing complexity and start to see it as a force, a resource and an opportunity? (Wood, P. & Landry, C. 2007: 63)

Observing the growth of Intercultural planning thinking and practice, Julian Agyeman and Jennifer Erickson in *Culture, Recognition, and the Negotiation of Difference,* (2012) noted that:

During the last decade, a collective of urban geography and planning scholars (including Ash Amin, Peter Hall, and Leonie Sandercock) and practitioners (including Charles Landry, Phil Wood, Richard Brecknock, and G. Pascal Zachary) have been researching and promoting interculturalism. The group noted that approaches rooted in the multiculturalism frame have been effective for cultural preservation, celebration, and tolerance yet have produced culturally and spatially distinct communities (Council of Europe n.d.). Bloomfield and Bianchini (2002, 6) make perhaps the most eloquent argument, the full implications of which should be fully understood by politicians, planners, and planning educators:

The inter-culturalism approach goes beyond opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences, to the pluralist transformation of public space, civic culture and institutions. So, it does not recognise cultural boundaries as fixed but as in a state of flux and remaking. An inter-culturalist approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds. Cities need to develop policies which prioritise funding for projects where different cultures intersect, "contaminate" each other and hybridise. In other words, city governments should promote cross-fertilisation across all cultural boundaries, between "majority" and "minorities", "dominant" and "sub" cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, political and economic innovation.

Interculturalism demands what Wood and Landry (2007: 264) call "intercultural competences." They argue that "schools and local authorities [should] develop structures and processes that would enable them to translate, adopt, and adapt their existing practices to take account of the changing realities of their communities" (264). Of the intercultural competencies, the key one is cultural competency. (2012: 361)

In 2004, with support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the UK Think Tank, Comedia conducted a two-year research programme entitled 'The Intercultural City: Making the Most of Diversity'. Its aims were to:

- *consider the extent to which cultural diversity is a source of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship and how this can become a positive force releasing new energy and resources for the development of cities.*
- *understand how the combination of different cultural skills and attributes leads to new and divergent thinking and what are the conditions that most encourage this.*
- *explore the extent to which increased intercultural dialogue, exchange and activity is the catalyst for this process.*
- *seek to understand the role of intercultural networks and intermediary change-agents, finding out who they are, how they work and what are the conditions which either encourage or hinder them.*
- *explore the institutional barriers and opportunities to maximizing economic benefits and aim to provide guidance for future policy on diversity and wealth creation in cities.*

The project was directed by Phil Wood and Charles Landry from Comedia and included research projects in the UK, United States (Gregg Zachary), Norway (Benedicte Broegger & Peter Wiberg) and I was fortunate to have led the case studies in: The London borough of Lewisham, England; The City of Auckland, Aotearoa – New Zealand; and the City of Logan, Queensland Australia.

The *Intercultural City* project included the publication of a series of Intercultural City books, including Book 1: *Intercultural City Reader* (Wood, P. 2004), Book 2: *Planning for the Intercultural City* (Bloomfield, J. & Bianchini, F. 2004), Book 3: *More Than Just a Bridge: planning and designing culturally* (Brecknock, R. 2006), and Book 4: *The Road to Interculturalism: tracking the arts in a changing world* (Khan, N. 2006).

Referencing these projects and books the *Routledge Research Companion to Planning and Culture* (2013) notes:

> *'… both Richard Brecknock (2006: 81–5) and Charles Landry (2010: 33) prefer the notion of 'planning culturally' to 'cultural planning'. Brecknock in particular emphasizes the importance of 'cultural literacy' (2006: especially 47–59 and 86–8) for urban planners, in a context of growing multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism in cities in the West' (2013: 397).*

The final project report *Cultural diversity in Britain A toolkit for cross-cultural co-operation* (Phil Wood, Charles Landry and Jude Bloomfield) was completed in 2006. Subsequently Wood and Landry published *The Intercultural City Planning for Diversity Advantage* in 2008.

Following the completion of the Intercultural City project and based on the findings of the project the Council of Europe (CoE) developed its ongoing Intercultural Cities Network (ICC). The ICC website shows that since 2009 129 cities had become members by 2023 and in the introduction to the program, CoE states that:

> *The Intercultural cities programme supports local and regional authorities worldwide in reviewing their policies through an intercultural and intersectional lens, and accompany them developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realise the diversity advantage. The*

programme proposes a set of analytical and practical tools to help local stakeholders through the various stages of the process. https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home

In the context of Australia it is important to acknowledge not only cultural diversity and the recognition and celebration of multiple cultural community identities (Modood, 2014), but also the more inclusive notion of Interculturalism with its focus on interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds (Cantle, T. 2012). It is also important to acknowledge the notion of the 'Intercultural City' with its focus on cities taking advantage of a 'diversity dividend' gained from cross cultural activities leading to greater creativity (Wood, P. and Landry, C. 2008) and as a basis for community cohesion in cities addressing increasing migrant populations (CoE, 2020). Previously I have argued that cultural diversity refers to a statistical reality of a place as opposed to being Intercultural which I believe to be a practice, reliant upon dialogue and understanding between people with diverse cultural frames of reference. Which importantly leads to the "Diversity Dividend".

The preconditions for an Intercultural City are as stated above, the statistical reality of a culturally diverse population and a city administration and city planners who are committed to the practices of gaining "Cultural Knowledge" of their diverse populations through "Intercultural Dialogue". The Intercultural City study for the London Borough of Lewisham final report titled "Knowing Lewisham" included an Intercultural Toolkit which stated that:

> *Underpinning the Intercultural City concept is a new approach to inclusive communities that seeks to plan for all citizens regardless of ethnicity and circumstance while celebrating the richness of cultural diversity. As has been highlighted in this document, one of the keys to achieving this outcome is a culturally literate planning team that not only knows the demographic nature of the community but has an in depth knowledge of the community's values, needs and aspirations.*
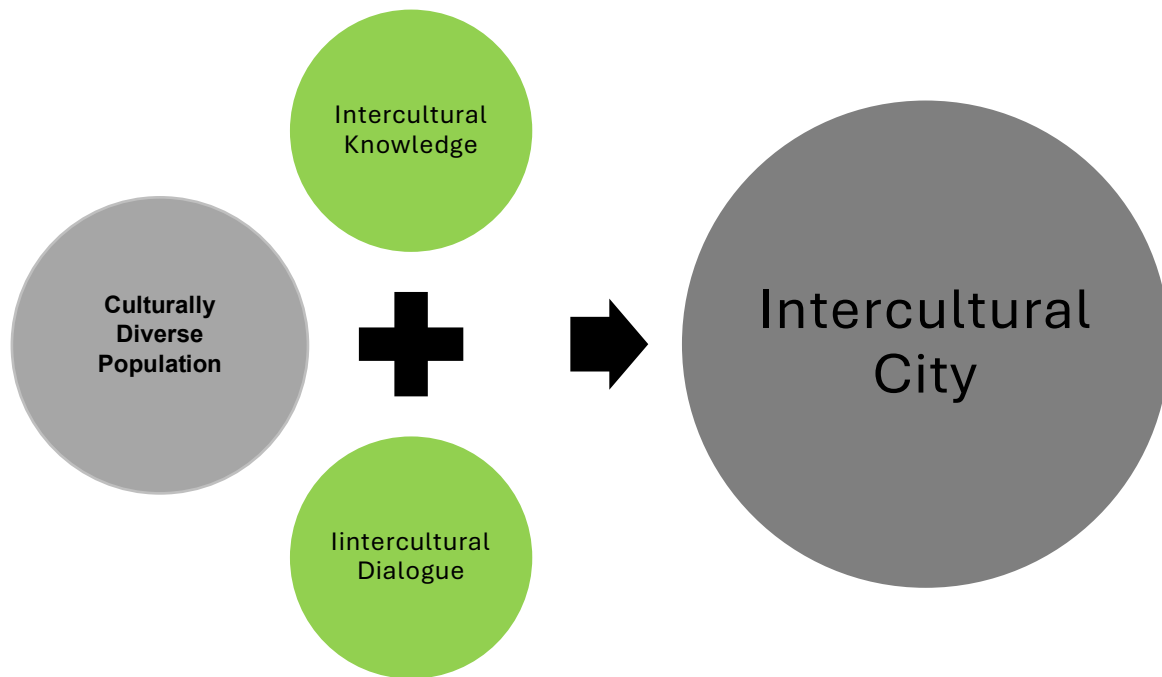
And that:

> *"Knowing" is about building the planning and design team's cultural literacy through new forms of contextual research and listening to the community. This is an ongoing process of building knowledge of people's lives and how the built environment impacts on or heightens cultural life. Gathering of knowledge needs to be done before planning takes place and therefore will inform the initial planning decisions. Project planning based on sound knowledge of local culture will result in proposals that the community can see has considered and attempted to balance the diverse needs and lifestyles of the many cultures living in Lewisham.*

(https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680492592)

Therefore, I suggest that graphicly the elements of the Intercultural City can be illustrated as below.

The Elements of an Intercultural City

Jude Bloomfield and Franco Bianchini (2004) have explored the issues associated with planning in the Intercultural City and propose that:

> …citizenship is the connective tissue of Intercultural planning. By this we mean not only equality of opportunity, but also critical respect for other cultures, reflecting the cultural diversity of the city fully in public policy, public space and institutions. Interculturalism goes beyond equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences, to the pluralist transformation of public space, institutions and civic culture. Cities need to develop policies which prioritise funding for projects where different cultures intersect, 'contaminate' each other and hybridise city governments should promote cross fertilisation across all cultural boundaries, between 'majority' and 'minorities', 'dominant' and 'sub' cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, civic and economic innovation. (2004:12)

Everyday Intercultural Encounters

So far, we have considered the Intercultural City from the perspective of interaction between people from a diversity of backgrounds, but now I would like to turn our thinking to the physical built environment spaces and places within which these Intercultural interactions happen! Places that are busy with activity such as shopping strips or marketplaces are frequently considered to be addressing ethnic diversity in public space as they can encourage what we might call 'intermittent mundane contact'. Indeed, as Clare Rishbeth et al. remind us:

> Intermittent mundane contact is not usually location specific – it can happen along a street, in a bus, in a shop – but chances are increased when a location is busier, when there are established temporal patterns of use, where there are nodes (paths crossing or points of gathering), and where the atmosphere of the space is relaxed rather than stressed (Rishbeth et al. 2018).

Studies have shown that locations for children's play and sports provide opportunities for spontaneous encounters between people of all ages and diverse backgrounds. Regular visitation and interaction also offer the potential for the everyday encounter to develop into more meaningful relationships over time.

Peter Dirksmeier and his colleagues in their 2014 paper *Situational places: rethinking geographies of intercultural interaction in super-diverse urban space* suggest that; *Situational places could be defined as situated performances of interactions between strangers arising out of bodily encounters in urban space.* (2014: 299) Dirksmeier also argues that contemporary cities can be seen as both places that enable encounters between different social and cultural groups and as places that diminish the possibility of encounters due to the increasing privatisation of formerly public urban spaces such as the transition from Main Street shopping to large privately owned shopping complexes or gated communities and the *increasing segregation of multiple publics.* (2014: 299)

Conclusions:

From the perspective of Planning Culturally this paper has argued that that culturally diverse communities are a contemporary reality and therefore urban planners and designers need to be culturally literate to respond to the needs of these diverse urban populations, be it in a "Human Centred City" or an "Intercultural City" context. It is critical that planning acknowledges that the diversity is not seen as a negative but rather seen as the diversity dividend that can ideally lead to positive intercultural interaction and culturally richer urban places.

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Author's Note:

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