

Future Urban Visions and local realities in WA.-

Future urban living environments in our advancing civilisation should ideally be the outcome of creative integrated design of buildings and spaces between them, in purpose-built comprehensively designed assemblies that are both highly functional in use and provide a kaleidoscope of joyful living experiences to the inhabitants.

Social and technological change is now accelerating rapidly with universal 'connectivity' and that brings us amazingly face to face with urban and natural environmental experimentation world-wide.-

- * Humans are naturally social species;
- * Smart devices offer new social collaborative possibilities;
- * Social media can and will have cascade effects driving extended social connections in new and unconventional ways - designing, building and creating things with other people and offering -
- * Huge benefits of pooling experiences from experimentation.

The challenge of these new and evolving 'realities' is both extraordinarily exciting and liberating to any professional designer, but must somehow be communicated to Planning decision-makers and financial facilitators. That will only be achieved if we can simultaneously engage genuine Community support. It is ultimately the Community who will have to experience and pay for the resulting outcomes.

Realities today in WA.

Official 'Planning', in the sense of developing future environment is generally not sponsoring creative design and environments of direct future relevance to people's lives. While the WAPC undertakes basic 'framework' research on future economic and strategic forecasting, placement of industries and transportation routes; massive priority is given, through a 'command and control' management style, to 'Building and outline schematic Control'. That occupies almost all of the time of numerous 'Planning Officers' employed by Local and State Government agencies in WA, and most of them will readily admit they don't do any actual creative planning at all.

Those people are actually the 'front-line foot soldiers' helping to administer an elaborate set of didactic Policies, Guidelines and Strategies, derived almost exclusively from 'desk-research' remotely from all the actual sites and people in the Community who actually are being planned-for.

While building control is of course necessary to safeguard public health and safety; in the overall purchasing- priority sense for People as the consumers, that level of Planning could be compared with the 'compliance plate' on a car.

However, since our future personal living environments become a major determinant of our future lifestyles and that of our children, we should naturally expect far more than a 'compliance plate'. We expect up-to date design derived from intelligent assessment of user-needs, imaginative creativity in tune with technical capability and closely matched to our various overall lifestyles. That can only be achieved through first hand involvement with people and actual sites.

Devising the rules for and administering 'building and development control' can never replace creative Planning of Future Environments, yet most of us in WA today would be hard-pressed to find where the actual creative part occurs?

The reality is that it is currently ad hoc and mainly relies on the whim of individual Developers and Builders as to what extent they will risk maximum profitability by gambling 'selectively' on engaging, then following, - the advice of creative private-sector professional urban planners, architects and designers - who are usually the only ones who make comprehensive planning specifically their business.

So often in large areas of suburban Perth there is no real creativity evident. Genuine professional designers are not engaged at all; just repetition of standard designs and crude layouts that maximise profitability and minimise risk to entrepreneurial Developers, oblivious to practical social and community potential (but marketed with imaginative fashionable images). They typically flat-clear sites of bio diverse natural vegetation, put in roads sewers and street lighting, sell off the lots, then pocket the proceeds and depart with no responsibility whatsoever for incomplete, uncoordinated, socially inadequate and impractical Community outcomes.

The alternative professional design team approach is absent. - That would for instance include - detailed site characteristics assessment; intense survey recording of functional user needs in face to face community interaction; team-evolved alternative purpose-designed outline presentations; costing and testing against essential external adjunct services timeline provision; and costing overall financial viability - for both Developers and Community users.

Except in a few very recent urban central area projects with visionary Developers, there is no multi-building and spatial master-planning that would allow comprehensive development, just uncoordinated new buildings dropped into vacated gap-sites with no relationship with each other or any possibility of providing comprehensively linked spaces or collective servicing.

Present-day consequences.-

We are almost universally, in suburban areas of Perth not creating **Communities** that foster and grow a sense of place and local belonging. Too many young people are being denied that. Through lack of choice, their families live in either outdated early 20th century 'garden suburbs' or unsociably planned and poorly serviced sprawling new housing estates that today massively dominate suburban Perth.-

Either way families being obliged to retract into self-centred dependence and inevitably breeding children with a similar outlook on life. The current built outcomes of the Planning system are actually inducing social fragmentation and reinforcing petty crime and anti-social behaviour amongst youth. So while the legal determinants of Official Planning are supposed to ensure 'fair and equitable development' - where is the fairness and equity in that sort of community planning?

The origin of today's actual urban context in WA has few parallels with other cities. In looking to the future and how planning might be more creatively managed, we need to take a self-possessed look at what urban environment we have, the origins of it, the relatively small population and lack of long established industrial and productive diversity.

Comparative advantage being lost.

For instance, we don't have in WA, even one long-established large city – as many States world-wide have; or a major conurbation that has gone through centuries of rapid cyclic growth; - e.g. through the industrial revolution most have experienced long periods of major social disruption and physical decay.-

Old and outdated heavy industries that attracted massive urban population concentrations subsequently experienced social confusion, decline and then painful attempts at urban renewal - but many now at length emerging re-vitalised by a new release of creative free- thinking, chastened by their planning mistakes of the past.

We are fortunate today not to have those disrupted social conditions or costly dereliction to replace, but we are carelessly squandering valuable bio diverse landscapes with wild abandon and creating different urban social problems for the future.

Much of this is the result of excessive centralised authoritative planning conformity in WA, combined with very low levels of social engagement and intimidation of local planning initiative. These are stifling the creativity that is essential for future relevance.

The world outside WA has changed dramatically and will do so at an increasingly exponential rate. We can try to emulate some of the recent creative social and technical experiments in much larger and older urban centres, that are resulting in 'smart' and 'connected' cities elsewhere mainly in very high density urban communities, but must also remember to be grounded in our own local realities.-

We also don't yet have the advantage of large numbers of **creative thinkers and designers** with powerful self-belief, or **access to large financiers** that can afford to gamble on brave new built-environment experiments. While we do have some in both categories we don't yet have enough actively engaged to drive urban experimentation forward.

In summary - the actual outcomes from the Official Planning system we have in WA are now becoming anachronistic and indeed **neither fair nor equitable** when assessed against current social outcomes and potential environmental quality.- For a future equal to the challenge of our magnificent location, enviable natural environment and a history free from industrial and social dereliction; fresh clarity of Planning purpose must be secured at the highest levels from revised political leadership objectives and translated through constituencies built throughout the system, to achieve maximum efficiency of response to opportunities - that most of our professional designers do already understand.