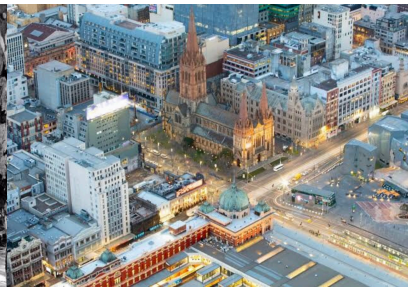
Investing in the Centre: Understanding Urban Design so that local neighbourhood, high streets, the mall and city centres flourish.



Abstract

In urban design understanding scale is everything. Our lives are lived on various scales, domestically within the home, locally within the neighbourhood, perhaps walking distance from the high street, and transit distance from the indoor shopping mall and the business hub in the city centre? All these urban scales are important and have their own logic in a vibrant liveable sustainable city.

Howard Davis in *Living over the Store*, explores the hybrid building type, the storehouse. This building type, and its variants, the corner store, the single-storey store house and the converted house as shop, is an essential component of neighbourhood commercial and social vibrancy. It belies the rigidity that planning schemes with inflexible land use regimes sometimes try to impose on the spontaneous life of the neighbourhood.

At the next scale up, the high street, this building typology and its variants persists, with living or working over the store becoming more dominant. Again at this scale, and perhaps while still being accessible by foot, or combining a transit node, what brings vibrancy and promotes flourishing are human relationships and interactions promoted in the surrounding neighbourhoods. Importantly the high street is the locus of postcode identity.

That invention of the car age, the indoor shopping mall, responds to a different commercial and social logic. The mall has its precursor in the department store and the arcade. It is a collector, or destination venue, often with little relationship to the urban fabric within which it is situated. It vies to be an indoor oriented 'place' in its own right, like a casino or cinema, mostly cut off from the reality of the external world. It aims to be that all encompassing one stop shopping destination.

Finally, there is the central business district, or CBD, which has been the focus of much planning and design attention recently, particularly since *Postcode 3000*[1]. The goal was to transform the previously exclusively business and commercial geography, into a mixed use space and prime or service residential area. Success bought with it the seeds

[1] Post 3000 is the City of Melbourne's Policy from 1992 which was created to fill vacant city office blocks with students after the property and economic crash of the [late 1980s] early 1990s. "The initiative was a victim of its own success' with...the relaxation of codes...and how close buildings were being allowed to be built close to the street. Brendan Bale, Twenty-five years since Melbourne's Postcode 3000 started, the city is hotter than ever, Oct 25, 2017 domain.com (15/12/19)

of the demise of the Melbourne CBD with too much of a good thing, and poor quality building and urban outcomes.

However to ignore the greatest challenge to retail at all scales, is to miss the driver of transformation in the contemporary city all together. Shopping has also gone virtual. And as the #buyfromthebush campaign illustrates, the virtual shopfront brings with it as many opportunities as it does challenges to the survival of different scales of 'traditional' commercial activity, that have historically shaped our urban fabric so powerfully.

So in this paper I am going to discuss how to understand the distinctions between the various scales of urbanity, so that all flourish, and the centre doesn't destroy the periphery and vice versa. That is, inner city renewal should not destroy neighbourhood life, and the suburb should not leave the centre empty, when workers return to their homes. And the same for everything in between. In doing so, we can make sense of density (and sprawl), so that density is not simply regarded as a numerical value with little relationship to the quality of life we experience in our cities, and the supporting role rural Australia plays in making this lifestyle possible is recognised.

Introduction

In most discussions of density the measure is often given of people per hectare living[2] in a city - the population density based on census data. Another measure of density is dwellings per hectare, with urban planners focusing on the net density of a site. For Dovey and Pafka, gross density is the measure that "matters in debates about urban density."[3] Dovey et al conclude that while there is no single scale at which urban density is best measured, generally, "the larger the scale the lower the density".[4] They conclude;[5]

> "The best approach to understand density is multi-scalar, for any location there is an internal density, a net density, a walkable density and a metropolitan density[6]."

When we are concerned with public health outcomes, as in the current pandemic, social space is the important metric, with advice being given to maintain a social distance of 1.5m. However, whether indoors or outdoors, static or in motion, makes a difference as the critical public health component of concern is the dynamics of airborne transmission.

None of these measures as Dovey et al recognise are really useful, taken exclusively and perhaps even in combination, for considering the life and vibrancy of our cities. This is partly because our cities are unique as entities on many paradigms beyond simply the

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[2] The measure is of statistically 'permanent' residents.

[3] Kim Dovey and Elek Pafka, Urban density matters but what does it actually mean? 1st July 2016, citymetric.com 14/03/20.

[4] Kim Dovey and Elek Pafka, Urban density matters but what does it actually mean? 1st July 2016, citymetric.com 14/03/20.

[5] Kim Dovey and Elek Pafka, Urban density matters but what does it actually mean? 1st July 2016, citymetric.com 14/03/20.

[6] Metropolitan density may include 'Street life density' as a subset. Street life density is people in the public space and is concerned with crowds and crowding. Kim Dovey and Elek Pafka, Urban density matters but what does it actually mean? 1st July 2016, citymetric.com 14/03/20.

built environment and the population count. Cities are, for example, geographically located, cultural and historical entities also, with a social and economic life.

By exploring the phenomenon of 'living over the store', and the building types that support this phenomenon, we are given a unique dynamic and multi-scalar window into the life of cities. And an opportunity to see density in a more meaningful way. As Davis says, shop houses around the world exhibit a common idea, "they are located in places where densities allow for commercial activity."[7]

In considering the store house at this time, we are also given a unique opportunity to review the resilience of our cities within an extreme historical event, a global pandemic.

The History of the Stop House Typology

According to Davies the shop or store house is special because it combines two fundamental living requirements in a single building - dwelling and working;[8]

> "The building is found in cities, towns and villages throughout history and across the world. It is the spatial manifestation in one structure of two common economic conditions of a city: it puts commerce on the street, and lets people live where they work. The prevalence of the building across cultures comes as a result of the commonality of these fundamental economic and architectural relationships."

As detailed in the abstract, I am proposing to explore this typology more broadly, to investigate the multiple scales at which retail activity occurs. I am interested not only in the purpose built structure of the combined store and dwelling, but the transitional structure where the dwelling is used for commercial activity. And also, the collective phenomenon of strip shopping at neighbourhood and high street scales, as well as the predominantly enclosed retail hubs that are known as 'Shopping Centres' or Malls, and the retail centres within Central Business Districts or CBDs.

A linked phenomenon that has characterised the global pandemic is the move towards working from home, where the residence has become, at population scale, at least on a temporary basis, both home and workplace for its occupants.

But first, let us return to the building type which will ground this exploration. In rural areas the first building to spring up to cater for the retail needs of the surrounding district is the General Store. In its most basic modern form it may also be combined with two other essential functions that support rural life and passing highway trade, the distribution of petrol and the provision of casual dining. However, we will turn our attention to the urban context, where the general store re-emerges as the corner store, anchored within its neighbourhood context.

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[7] Davis, *Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, intro.

[8] Davis, *Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, intro.

Interestingly, the corner store in 2013 was reported by BIS Shrapnel to be on the wane in Australia due to competition from large petrol stations combining with the major supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths;[9]

> "An estimated 2,725 corner stores remained, with the average annual takings decreasing from $985,000 to $750,000 in the two previous years."

We will return to this reported phenomenon and metric later.

The Corner Store was predominantly located, as the name suggests, at the intersection of two streets on the corner.

The Shop House Typology

According to Davies the shophouse evolved out of variations of dwelling houses.[10] The urban shophouses in the US he says find their origins in rural long houses in the UK;[11]

> "...many urban buildings of North America can trace much of their lineage to England - and English urban buildings have some of their own roots in buildings of the countryside. The English urban shophouse has its origin in the farmhouse, itself a descendant of the longhouse[12] that existed all over Northern Europe."

In Nicholas Pevesner's famous analysis of building types, his taxonomy of pure types was based on function.[13] However, as Howard Davies said "an important feature of this kind of building is its flexibility to different family circumstances and economic change."[14] Across cultures Davies points out these buildings exhibit no singular form, function or geometry, rather they embody common ideas.[15]

- They are located where densities allow for commercial activity.
- They put commercial activity on the ground level and prioritise it over domestic functions.
- They support the diversity of urban neighbourhoods.
- They exhibit flexibility of use over time.

A continuum exists between the various uses and forms of the shophouse that allows for various combinations of owner occupation and leased space, with the ability to change these conditions over time. The building could be fully occupied residentially and

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[9] Australian Food History Timeline, 2013 Corner-stores on the Wane, australianfoodtimeline.com.au 19/02/21

[10] Howard Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 31.

[11] Howard Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 123.

[12] The longhouse was a linear building that originally housed people and animals, until the animals were eventually moved into buildings of their own. Howard Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 123.

[13] See Nicholas Pevsner. *A History of Building Types*, 1979.

[14] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 1.

[15] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life,* 2012, 14.

commercially by the owner, or partially leased and partially occupied, or alternatively fully leased, with the owner living and working elsewhere.

The change in the social conditions which promoted the shop/house prior to the industrial revolution, also resulted in the evolution of a myriad of retail conditions which are identified with the high street, the mall and the CBD.[16] According to Davies it was the social conditions that separated different classes that bought about "retail establishments of different levels and types."[17] These conditions evolved into new urban environments eventually promoted and supported by Modernist planning principles that were characterised by a lack of functional ambiguity and overlap.[18] The social conditions arising out of the Industrial Revolution, we speak of, were not merely class difference, but qualitative and quantitative conditions of living and working that impacted on private and public health and safety. Modern planning for all its rigidity and inflexibility promoted public and private goods. However, there is room for nuance in modern planning schemes without losing either the public or private goods they embody. Howard says of the shop house in the UK;[19]

> "...if the building were built with a front garden adjacent to the street, it could be extended forward with a one storey shop if the street developed into a commercial street."

Commerce on the Street

While this paper focuses on retail, there are a few other predominantly car centred forms of 'big retail' that will not be addressed in this paper. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's series of studies of 'retail strips' formed the nucleus of their book *Learning from Las Vegas*. We might add to that list the phenomenon of DFO's and other destination Superbox retail outlets like Bunnings and Office Works. These outlets are derivative of the mall shopping complexes, are car centred, dependant on industrialised 'warehouse' style concepts and have left the shophouse and the domestic scale far behind. These retail outlets, as the popularity of Bunnings as a destination in the pandemic attests, also have their place in the retail ecosystem.

Davies says of the shophouse, "it puts commerce on the street and lets people live where they work."[20] The impetus for this phenomenon often started in unlikely places.

Mick Adams, a Greek entrepreneur, is credited with bringing the first milk bar to Australia in the 1930s. He was influenced by the American diner culture, and decided to sell milkshakes instead of sodas.[21] This incarnation of the corner store was less grocer and

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[16] See discussion on changing urban conditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 22.

[17] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 22.

[18] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 25.

[19] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 128.

[20] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 13.

[21] The milk bar was called The Black and White Milk Bar. Gian de Poloni, The Slow Death of the Australian Icon that is the Corner Store (or milk bar or deli), 21st July 2019, abc.net.au 19/02/21.

more restaurant or cafe. And it was located first not in the suburbs or neighbourhoods, but in the centre of the Sydney CBD, at Martin Place.

The idea of selling milk shakes caught on...and was perpetuated at the local level within the neighbourhood convenience store, the Milk Bar.

According to Eamon Donnelly every country has their own corner store version of the Australian Milk Bar;[22]

> "New Zealand has their dairies, the USA has their mom and pop stores, in New York they have Bodegas."

In the US, mom and pop stores were "small, family owned independent businesses" that proliferated in the 18th and 19th centuries.[23]

With the decline of the milk bar, as corner store, many of these buildings have been converted into coffee shops or homes.[24]

In the mid-twentieth century in the era of the housewife, before the two car family and it became fashionable for women to continue working after marriage, the neighbourhood shopping strip serviced a suburb with local amenities, a grocer, a butcher, a chemist, a baker and a newsagent. As the century continued commercial pressure was felt from large supermarket chains which combined all these offerings in a single retail space. Price competition was the main differentiator, but also convenience and product choice.

Eventually these local strip shops became filled with either restaurants or professional services like doctors, real estate agents and hairdressers, as suburban lifestyles changed. In other locations coffee shops, florists and specialty stores including travel agents have until recently filled the gap. The demise of the strip shops as local amenity in mid-century Australia is being paralleled by the disappearance of New York's mid-sized grocers in the early twenty first century. The longtime grocers point to rising rents and falling profits;[25]

> "What the environment has been good for though, is the slow influx of big box grocery giants. 'What's transpired over the last number of years is you've seen the entry into the market of two major players, Wholefoods and Trader Joe's, said Alan Schmerzler, vice chair of the commercial real estate firm Cushman and Wakefield, in an interview with *New York Business Journa*l this summer: Wholefoods has continued to be quite aggressive - Trader Joe's the same thing."

So the rise of Big Box grocers in Australia depended on the daily influx of workers commuting from the dormitory suburbs to the Central Business Districts. While in New York with its unique mix of urban neighbourhoods, walkability ensured the longer survival

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[22] Gian de Poloni, The Slow Death of the Australian Icon that is the Corner Store (or milk bar or deli), 21st July 2019, abc.net.au 19/02/21

[23] Susan Meyer, The History and Evolution of Retail Stores, bigcommerce.com (15/05/21)

[24] Gian de Poloni, The Slow Death of the Australian Icon that is the Corner Store (or milk bar or deli), 21st July 2019, abc.net.au 19/02/21

[25] Rachel Sugar, New York's Grocery Stores are Uniquely Weird. That's Why they are Important March 11, 2021 grubstreet.com 25/05/21

of midsized grocers, until the 'metro' Big Box supermarket concept became firmly established.

With the advent of COVID and working from home, as well as the flight from the crowded cities, how might this change? Is there a way to promote a balance between institutional investment which enters at the retail strip scale[26] and individual ownership of smaller scale retail that promotes vibrancy, the trialing of new ideas and incubates new businesses?

Living Where You Work.

In the preindustrial US shophouses in cities were a major facilitator of the retail and craft economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[27] What we are asking in this paper, is what role this typography might play in the twenty first century knowledge economy?

What we are describing is the conditions which favour the establishment of individual micro businesses - often family enterprises - and the conditions which favour corporatisation and larger scale enterprise. To suppose that the two cannot co-exist within the retail eco-system is to misunderstand the nature of ideas and business altogether. What became of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker? We still eat bread and meat, but candles are today an indulgence rather than a necessity. Electricity and industrialisation transformed everything.

In 2012, while Davies was publishing *Living Over the Store*, well before COVID19 was on the radar, two Clemson University students, Eric Laine and Suzanne Steelman, coined the term LiveWork to describe their design for a flexible space with living above and commercial activity below.[28] The concept had parallels to my own student project in the early1990s for an area called Cotton Trees on the Sunshine Coast. My proposal was for a walkable garage or shared 'Street' below the residential level that could also be used either for garaging the car or for a commercial enterprise. Or even for the genesis of a garage band! The possibility exists within both concepts of allowing micro start ups and businesses to incubate as an extension of the living space, with slightly differing degrees of formality and informality. Perhaps it is an idea whose time has finally arrived to be realised commercially? The planning and zoning environments and framework to support these newer shophouse typologies would require a little more research;[29]

> "The ease with which a business could be accommodated in a house before the industrial revolution had to do as much with the small size of businesses as with the fact that houses were not as functionally determined as houses are today."

This paper is an attempt to start to unpick that framework with case studies of shop houses in their unique urban environments, illustrating their day to day economic viability

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[26] US Shopping Center Classification and Characteristics costar.com (28/05/21)

[27] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 141.

[28] Andrew Price, LiveWork: The future of living where you work and working where you live. 14th February 2012. fastcompany.com 3/05/21

[29] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 32.

through one of the most challenging historical periods - the pandemic of 2020 and 2021. Suddenly working from home was given a whole new relevance. Could family life and commercial life, once again, be successfully combined?

The reason Davies gives that there is an awkward fit between this most traditional of building forms and modern planning laws and theories is that;[30]

> "since the beginning of the twentieth century, zoning laws, building codes and lending policies have favoured buildings with a single function, resulting in urban monocultures."

In Australia, life on the street is a little more complex the the monoculture description. However, the shophouse sometimes does struggle to survive amongst local inflexible planning rules and zoning policies, when it has much to contribute socially, environmentally and economically to the life of cities.

The Neighbourhood - Toowong

The shophouse building type, and its variants, the corner store, the single-storey store house and the converted house as shop, is an essential component of neighbourhood commercial and social vibrancy. It belies the rigidity - of singular purpose built shopping strips - that planning schemes with inflexible land use regimes sometimes try to impose on the spontaneous life of the neighbourhood.

The social (family friendly) and environmental (walkable neighbourhoods) benefits are only part of the attraction of this form of shophouse. Small family neighbourhood enterprises can have a big economic future; they are incubators for business. In the US the Baskin Robbins ice cream franchise started with two brothers-in-law opening separate neighbourhood ice cream stores, one of whose father had also run a neighbourhood ice cream store! The brothers in law shared a dream to create "an innovative ice cream store that would be a neighbourhood gathering place for families."[31] The Baskin Robins business now has over 8,000 stores internationally, generated a turnover of $115 million in 2018.[32]

The dynamics of micro[33] and small business growth benefits from an attitude of fluidity towards building use allowing business owners "to develop businesses in their houses with a minimum of financial investment, and to expand and contract the space devoted to the business as necessary."[34]

In Queensland particularly, with its iconic 'Queenslander' timber building type, the inherent flexibility to add rooms, to build under and to lift or even relocate a building,

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[30] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 21.

[31] Baskin Robins: Our History, baskinrobins.com.au (15/05/21)

[32] Baskin Robbins, Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org (21/05/21)

[33] A micro business is variously defined as a business with up to 10 employees.

[34] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 32.

allowed a variety of uses to occur. In other cities timber buildings were seen as transitional between rural and urban life;[35]

> "There was a continuous transformation from rural house types to the urban street - and in like manner the wooden house, two storey streetscape was eventually to be supplanted by taller buildings of brick."

The demands of the pandemic accelerated this need of businesses to 'pivot', expanding, contracting, changing their offerings and rearranging their spaces, as lockdowns and restrictions on trading conditions demanded. In a sense, this dynamic was like a fast forward time lapse of the challenges all small businesses confront over time.

The High Street - North Fitzroy/Leura

Within the high street, the shophouse building typology and its variants persists, with living or working over the store becoming more dominant. Again at this scale, and perhaps while still being accessible by foot, or combining a transit node, what brings vibrancy and promotes flourishing, are human relationships and interactions encouraged in the surrounding neighbourhoods. Importantly the high street is the locus of postcode identity.

However, in Australia, historic shopping strips are falling victim to their own popularity, with changes to the planning regimes increasing the threat of development which will compromise the integrity of their urban form and character. Referring to Queen's Parade in North Fitzroy;[36]

> "This problem has come to a head with Planning Scheme Amendment C231 for the Queen's Parade Shopping Strip in North Fitzroy. The ostensible aim is to conciliate heritage and development. But the method proposed is to encourage six storey development just six metres behind the facades of heritage buildings. This is virtual façadism. Little of the historic buildings will remain and the new development will loom over the typically double storey streetscape."

In the 'village' of Leura in the Blue Mountains, Leura Mall represents something of a triumph and a defeat in urban design and development. Some of the historic shopfronts have fallen victim to façadism[37], while a contemporary Coles supermarket has been so successfully integrated into the urban pattern that the development has created a quasi village square, enlivening not simply a street, but a block of historic properties, creating in economic terms not only an increase in valuable street frontage, but micro patterns of rear, pedestrian and laneway access onto the "square', allowing many buildings to achieve a double frontage. The 'square' surprisingly is actually parking for the supermarket!

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[35] Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life*, 2012, 141.

[36] Royal Historical Society Victoria, C231 Would Destroy the Character of Historic Shopping Strips, 30th November 2018, (15/05/21)

[37] Facardism occurs when only the street facing wall of a building is preserved and behind it new development, usually defying the scale and character logic of the original is allowed to occur. Often the primary motivation for retaining only the facade is to increase the available floor space beyond the historic envelope.

The supply and demand challenge that presents in this scenario is that the boutique offerings of individual businesses create a retail environment that is attractive and draws people. Rents increase. Franchises are attracted to the areas' promise of high footfall. They seek to redevelop small retail spaces into medium spaces often favouring facadism. Rents begin to become unaffordable to the boutique businesses located there. Franchises start to predominate. The retail environment loses its charm, interest and vibrancy and people start to look elsewhere for the disappearing or missing atmosphere that drew them in the first instance. The retail area filled with medium sized franchise offerings starts to decline.

Is there a way to avoid this inevitable spiral? Is there an ideal mix of boutique to franchise businesses on the High Street? Does this mix differ between neighbourhood and tourism postcodes?

The Suburban Mall - Castle Crag

That invention of the car age, the indoor shopping mall, responds to a different commercial and social logic. The mall has its precursor in the department store and the arcade. It is a collector, or destination venue, often with little relationship to the urban fabric within which it is situated. It vies to be an indoor oriented 'place' in its own right, like a casino or cinema, mostly cut off from the reality of the external world. It aims to be that all encompassing one stop shopping destination.

Although I am not directly addressing this form of retail in this paper, these forms of retail, from the arcade, department store and big box retail shopping centre all have their own important urban and consumer logic and position within the retail ecosystem.

In Castlecrag, one of Sydney's leafy, harbourside northern suburbs, the possibility of an internally oriented Big Box Aldi supermarket being developed in their neighbourhood is what residents fear.

Between the High Street and the Big Box mall is the local shopping centre. Castlecrag shopping centre in Sydney's northern suburbs sits on the corner of Eastern Valley Way on the southern side of the Castlecrag high street, Edinburgh Road. The centre is well integrated into its environment in form, while lacking somewhat in character, due to the obvious and perhaps not well handled contrast in architectural treatment with the northern side of the High Street.

The site is proposed for redevelopment. In its current form it serves the neighbourhood. If the scale of the redevelopment is increased, the centre will be expected to draw people driving from surrounding areas and living within walking distance in a residential densification of the suburb. The current redevelopment proposal includes 67 new residential apartments above the shops. Castlecrag has very few multi residential developments and is mostly comprised of single residences on sizeable blocks.

The Willoughby Council and the North Sydney Planning Panel has rejected a mixed use retail/residential redevelopment proposal, 'Quadrangle Castlecrag', which was based on a limited ideas competition for the site. The Council deems the proposed redevelopment at

5 storeys to be an overdevelopment of the site[38], limiting the height of any proposed developments to 3 stories after the competition was held. The developer says anything less than 4 storeys is economically unviable and he will resell the site.[39]

Of particular note, the suburb of Castlecrag was master planned and developed in the 1920s by American architectural husband and wife duo, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney. The couple were in Australia at the time to implement their scheme for the nation's capital, Canberra. Importantly, the suburb showcases their groundbreaking urban planning, landscape architecture, and architecture.[40] The Quadrangle Shopping Centre sits alongside the Griffin Centre built by the couple in 1924.[41] Thus the redevelopment response needs to be sensitive, not only to the local community identity[42] and its needs, but also to the extraordinary Griffin legacy.

The fundamental question is not of architectural quality,[43] but of the scale and type of the redevelopment and its implications for the suburb and its surrounding areas. When should urban densification occur in a local area? How should it be integrated and implemented? What factors should be considered and what guidance should Councils provide?

The Leisure Retail Precinct - James Street

Relatively new to the shopping experience, but with a pedigree linked to the high street, is the retail precinct. It is the extension of the high street in that it often evolves from a popular shopping High Street which continues to populate its neighbourhood with successful retail offerings. Two such famous precincts in Queensland are James Street, Newstead in Brisbane, which has its retail origins in development of the early 1900s,[44] and Hastings Street in the beachside town of Noosa on the Sunshine Coast, two hours drive from Brisbane. Like Leura Mall they can both be characterised as leisure shopping destinations.

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[38] "The Local Centre's Strategy (LCS) limits a structure on the site to 3 storeys above Edinburgh Road and a floor space ratio (FRS) of 1.8 times the site area." Castlecrag Progress Association, The Crag, Issue 207.

[39] He purchased the site for $25 million in 2016, and is proposing to spend $75 million on the redevelopment. There are also local rumours that he applied to appeal to the Supreme Court but his grounds of appeal were found to be invalid.

[40] Buildings of note include the Incinerator, Griffin Centre Shops and several residences.The area is also the location of a considerable number of residences designed by well known architects.

[41] "The south side of the shopping centre contains the Griffin Centre, designed by Walter Burley Griffin and built in 1924. Lot 2 contains two shops built in 1926, and a shed built in 1928 which was converted into an Esso Service Station in 1952 by the owner, John Henry Foster Bennet. In 1956 an Ampol petrol station opened on the site of the timber sheds of T J Warner's Waratah dairy. In 1979, the petrol station sites, together with the Commonwealth Bank, became the Quadrangle." libraries.willoughby.nsw.gov.au (31/05/21)

[42] It is supposed by local Northbridge Real Estate Agent that the area has become popular with eastern suburbs buyers recently because it is quirky and retains a 'village feel'.

[43] Both the developer and architect for the site are renowned for the quality of their work.

[44] New Farm queenslandplaces.com.au (30/05/21)

The precinct as a destination and drawcard to persons residing beyond its boundaries is dependant on locational and peacemaking qualities for its success. The predominant building typology is a quiet contributor;[45]

"Brisbane's James Street is long and narrow and largely flanked by timber houses."

James Street bills itself as "Brisbane and Australia's foremost shopping and lifestyle precinct."[46] The street and area is bounded by Brisbane's secondary CBD, Fortitude Valley, and the trendy inner city suburb of New Farm, developing organically from an area formerly considered fringe industrial, long favoured by the building industry, artists and designers;[47]

> "The precinct contains a curated range of over 110 specialty retail stores, including an impressive range of design showrooms and fashion boutiques, award winning restaurants and cafes, in addition to art galleries, design havens and grooming emporiums."

While its roots were in organic growth, the area has since been steered in its development as part of urban renewal efforts. The area was developed by property stakeholders under a not-for-profit business founded in 2010, The James Street Initiative Pty Ltd.[48] James Street has several locational attributes of note: it is within walking distance to Brisbane's premier entertainment district in Fortitude Valley and to the Brisbane CBD. The surrounding residential suburbs of Newstead and New Farm are located near or on the Brisbane River.

In the second stages of the Precinct's development 2001-2015 the developers focus shifted to creating walkable residential high rise apartment living. The residential component was targeted to the predominantly younger demographic locating to the James Street lifestyle area. This demographic was exhibiting an increasing number of high income - up from 12 to 47% earning over $104k - purchasers in their 30s.[49] While not strictly living over the shop, the precinct demonstrates an urban renewal principle, that once having created amenity in co-locating a critical hub of retail and design workplaces, this environment then becomes an attractive area to reside for young professionals.

A critical lesson arising out of both Leura Mall's successful integration of a Woolworths supermarket and the creation of the James Street shopping precinct is that they both nearly didn't happen. Of James Street it is said;[50]

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[45] Antony Moulis and Silvia Mitchel, 24th February 2017, Incremental Civic-ness: James Street Precinct, *Architecture Australia*, architectureau.com (31/05/21)

[46] James Street jamesst.com.au (30/05/21)

[47] James Street jamesst.com.au (30/05/21)

[48] James Street jamesst.com.au (30/05/21)

[49] Urbis, James Street Precinct Brisbane projectmarketingaustralia.com.au (31/05/21)

[50] Antony Moulis and Silvia Mitchel, 24th February 2017, Incremental Civic-ness: James Street Precinct, *Architecture Australia*, architectureau.com (31/05/21)

> "Plans were well advanced to develop this large city block as a singular shopping centre but the collapse of funding triggered by the global financial crisis in 2008 meant that the project needed to be reconceptualised. Here the enlightened client - a Brisbane based consortium - began working more closely with its inventive architects, generating a creative response to what seemed like at first to be a less than ideal situation."

How should the Local Governments consider organic v planned and/or urban renewal initiated growth? The critical questions here for urban renewal is what mix of workplaces can be successfully co-located? What types of amenity supports will allow them to thrive and become their own destination? Is there a critical mix of workplace and street facing retail needed to create vibrancy? At what point does the area become attractive as a residential destination? Given the areas renewal began with a 20s demographic, how will the precinct fare over time? What demographic changes can be expected and what will be their impact?

The CBD - Melbourne and Perth

Finally, there is the central business district, or CBD, which has been the focus of much planning and design attention recently, particularly since *Postcode 3000*[51]. The goal was to transform the previously exclusively business and commercial geography, into a mixed use space and prime or service residential area. Success bought with it the seeds of the demise of the Melbourne CBD with too much of a good thing, and poor quality building and urban outcomes.

During the pandemic the city of Melbourne has been particularly hard hit, enduring four lockdowns;[52]

> "There's a push to revive the Postcode 3000 campaign of the 1990s in a bid to spark Melbourne's CBD back into action after COVID19."

However as I am writing Melbourne is in lockdown again grappling with the Indian variant of COVID19 introduced into the community through flaws in the South Australian Hotel Quarantine system.

Hard hit by the pandemic many offices in the CBD remain vacant and prices are starting to fall.[53] The seeds of its previous success have also been the seeds of Melbourne's current challenge. The Postcode 3000 challenge started as "a 10 year plan to turn unused

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[51] Post 3000 is the City of Melbourne's Policy from 1992 which was created to fill vacant city office blocks with students after the property and economic crash of the [late 1980s] early 1990s. "The initiative was a victim of its own success' with...the relaxation of codes...and how close buildings were being allowed to be built close to the street. Brendan Bale, Twenty-five years since Melbourne's Postcode 3000 started, the city is hotter than ever, Oct 25, 2017 domain.com (15/12/19)

[52] Tom Elliott, Why there's a push to revive the Postcode 3000 campaign of the 1990s, 28th April 2021, 3aw.com.au (31/05/21)

[53] Tom Elliott, Why there's a push to revive the Postcode 3000 campaign of the 1990s, 28th April 2021, 3aw.com.au (31/05/21)

commercial buildings into stylish apartments plus add some modern new high rise buildings to the mix."[54]

Since the 1990s Melbourne has seen a significant increase in population weighted density. Density is both difficult to measure and difficult to manage. Population density, as we have seen, is particularly difficult to manage in a pandemic.

'Postcode 3000' transformed Melbourne from a city with almost no residential component in the 1980s to a city prior to COVID19 faced with the challenge of "preventing residential development from damaging the city and displacing other uses."[55] Even before the pandemic planners recognised;[56]

> "Hyper dense projects that damaged adjacent public spaces are blighting some parts of central Melbourne."

It is now recognised that the threat of over development remains a key challenge.[57] Not only has the threat of over development been recognised, but so has the 'taming' of urban life for global consumption;[58]

> "...as laneways become gentrified and branded for global consumption, the street art becomes curated and the real urban life moves on."

Perceptively the central question has been framed as achieving the ideal balance between regulation and market forces;[59]

> "Over regulation...paralyses creative and productive forces and under regulation ...unleashes over development and privatisation which can kill urban life."

After the work from home phenomenon the question has been posed in response to rising commercial vacancies, what if you could "live in the building that employs you"? The question is not posed as a shophouse typology, but rather questioning whether offices and apartments could occupy the same building.[60]

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[54] Sue Saunders, Residents to the Rescue! November 25,2020, CBD News, cbdnews.com.au (31/05/21)

[55] How a Three Decade Remaking of the City Revived the buzz of 'Marvellous Melbourne', The Conversation, theconversation.com (31/05/21)

[56] How a Three Decade Remaking of the City Revived the buzz of 'Marvellous Melbourne', The Conversation, theconversation.com (31/05/21)

[57] How a Three Decade Remaking of the City Revived the buzz of 'Marvellous Melbourne', The Conversation, theconversation.com (31/05/21)

[58] How a Three Decade Remaking of the City Revived the buzz of 'Marvellous Melbourne', The Conversation, theconversation.com (31/05/21)

[59] How a Three Decade Remaking of the City Revived the buzz of 'Marvellous Melbourne', The Conversation, theconversation.com (31/05/21)

[60] This theme was also explored conceptually at this year's Architecture Bienniale in Venice with Nicolas Laisne's open platform tower for living and work.

With a downturn in the resources sector in 2917 causing rising inner city commercial vacancies, Perth asked itself if it could follow Melbourne's lead and revitalise the CBD with a greater residential population.[61] The problem was framed in terms of amenity and sprawl;[62]

> "...sprawl is in essence being encouraged because housing on the fringe is often offered better amenities than the inner city....These include things like parks and open space, and things like pools, community centres, schools and retail centres."

In Melbourne residential owner/investors vacancy rates in Postcode 3000 peaked at 10.8 in September of 2020.[63] Following the example of the shophouse typology, is there a way to create a hybrid high rise which enables flexibility between living and working functions?

The Virtual Store - Rural Australia and Shopify

However to ignore the greatest challenge to retail at all scales, is to miss the driver of transformation in the contemporary city all together[64]. Shopping has also gone virtual. And as the #buyfromthebush campaign illustrates, the virtual shopfront brings with it as many opportunities as it does challenges to the survival of different scales of 'traditional' commercial activity, that have historically shaped our urban fabric so powerfully.

Before the pandemic e-commerce accounts for upwards of 10 percent of the retail spend and was growing.[65]

With the flight from the city to the regions well underway since the pandemic, rural retail looks set for a revitalisation both virtual and physical. Rural house prices are increasing faster than metropolitan areas for the first time in fifthteen years.[66] During the recent droughts the #buyfromthebush campaign took off;[67]

> "City consumers are engaging with rural producers in an unprecedented way, and this is turn has shown metro media there's a very real appetite for stories beyond the burbs."

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[61] Perth had a inner city population of 20,000.

[62] Cameron Jewell, Postcode 6000: Perth wants to follow in Melbourne's Footsteps, 29th June 2017, thefifthestate.com.au (31/05/21)

[63] Michael Bleby, Rush Back to the Cities has Begun, April 13 2021, AFR. afr.com (31/05/21)

[64] "Retail Precinct footfall had been in decline for years as e-commerce penetration grew, recording 8.1 percent in cumulative footfall loses over the three years to 2920." KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 18.

[65] Australia Post, Inside Australian Online Shopping, 2018, overview 07. auspost.com.au (31/05/21)

[66] Michael Bleby, Rush Back to the Cities has Begun, April 13 2021, AFR. afr.com (31/05/21)

[67] Georgie Robertson, Could the Bush be (dare we say it) Trending?, buyfromthebysh.com.au (31/05/21)

Five million dollars of revenue was generated from the platform in the first 4 months.[68]

Buy from the Bush is an online portal - 'marketplace for Australian bush business' - selling a mix of goods from gifts and fashion, to food and produce. Buy from the Bush hopes to be an inspiration for businesses across the nation emerging from COVID. And yes, it is about the ability to 'pivot' in times of crisis and the value of communities supporting each other.

An additional benefit for consumers in the #buyfromthebush campaign is a sense they are able to purchase from an ethical source, high quality goods without ethical or supply chain issues, while doing good!

Shopify is an e-commerce company founded in Ottawa Canada to help businesses build their own online store. At the centre of e-commerce, in common with physical stores, is traffic and sales volumes generated from that traffic. The virtual and the physical experience as COVID19 lockdowns and zoom meetings have taught us, are distinctly different experiences. Thus, to survive the disruption of e-commerce, physically located businesses need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each experience. Cafe's and restaurants pivoted during COVID to using delivery platforms, Uber Eats and Menulog for takeaway, when instore dining was no longer possible.

Some retailers who pivoted to online sales during the pandemic, against expectations, outperformed their goals, with some well established in e-commerce experiencing record sales.[69] The enhanced trend to e-commerce was supposed by the lockdowns and restrictions with more people at home to receive deliveries.[70] How this trend evolves will depend on which flexible working arrangement remain after COVID.

Businesses have also started to understand that e-commerce expands their geographical reach. Buying from the Bush without travelling to rural and remote locations is now possible because of a range of support infrastructure, including the surge in the volume of shipping and parcel deliveries. However COVID19 has also uncovered supply chain issues which can occur when global supply chains are disrupted, or trade tensions disrupt international markets, or even that it is possible for a ship to get wedged in the Seuz Canal!

Challenges to the corner store

According to Van Buren the closure of long established 'Bessemer' corner store was precipitated by a confluence of circumstances, rising maintenance costs, difficulties securing a loan for renovations, relocation of competing businesses to a closer proximity, and a sharp decrease in the number of people cooking at home.[71]

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[68] About Us buyfromthebysh.com.au (31/05/21)

[69] KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 5-6.

[70] KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 15.

[71] Davina van Buren, Evolution of the Corner Store, 10th July 2018, strongtiwns.org (17/04/21)

Van Buren also points to the sentiments of local communities that lose treasured local places which embody inter generational memories and relationships;[72]

> "The resentment towards city planners who embrace new, 'shiny' projects aimed at stimulating economic growth in certain areas, (particularly downtowns in the midst of redevelopment projects that often contribute to gentrification), instead of investing in family owned businesses who are already there is not new. In fact, zoning laws have a lot to do with why the corner store is in danger - long before the economic decline attributed to the big box stores and Americans fondness for quick eats, zoning laws were the dreaded foe of the corner store."

The flexible spatial planning of the city according to principles of urban economics has a considerable contribution to make to allow retail to thrive across all scales from the micro to the Big Box indoor shopping complexes. By asking spatial allocation questions, and testing out theories in real world scenarios, with insights and good data, we are likely to gain a better understanding of the economic and social life of the city, and the seemingly invisible relationship between rents and capital (investment), population and profit (business), that interplay's with the quantitative aspects of the places we create and are attracted to (urban design).

Diversity in the modes of available transit, from walkable neighbourhoods to locations accessible by car or on transit nodes, supports retail at all scales and suited to a myriad of lifestyles. The important questions are the drivers of growth and decline, and their meaning. Lifestyle change and technological change are the biggest drivers of permanent market change. Inflexible planning schemes which fail to recognise transitory conditions implicit in incremental organic growth, and unbridled or unrestrained competitive forces which defy the underlying logic of the market are another. Demographic change is an outlier, as is the introduction of AI to customise the consumer experience.[73]

Ultimately, people require a variety of fast and slow experiences. Opportunities for the time poor as well as opportunities to savour experience rich with human connections. The corner store can offer both convenience and personalised service, it can expand and contract. The corner store is the master of reinvention. As a typology the shophouse has been around for millennia, it is likely to survive disruption in the twentyfirst century;[74]

> "History shows that society shifts and new things are born when crises hit, and while complete with its challenges, times of disruption offer offer unique opportunities to rethink the way you do what you do and really lean into innovation."

The impact of COVID19

During COVID19 consumers were "living differently, purchasing differently and thinking differently."[75]

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[72] Davina van Buren, Evolution of the Corner Store, 10th July 2018, strongtiwns.org (17/04/21)

[73] KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 16.

[74] KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 6.

[75] KPMG, Australian Retail Outlook, 2021, 5.

According to *The Australian Food History Timeline*, the corona virus marked a return to local shopping, with customers preferring to avoid the queues and crowds at the larger supermarkets. However, they reported access to stock was more difficult for the smaller stores.[76] Arwa Haider, in her article for the BBC online, *The Beloved Corner Shop,* said;[77]

> "one of the countless effects of the global corona virus pandemic is that the world now feels hyper-localised...[and]...a simple and steady landmark re-emerges: the comforting, handy, corner shop."

However, it was well before COVID19 that the unique retail environment of NSW's popular Blue Mountain's village of Leura, caused me to reflect on its tourism appeal as a retail precinct. It was partly the unique boutique offerings, heritage charm and fortuitous evolution of the urban structure of the mall that engaged visitors, but it was also the traditional values associated - if for some only in memory - with small retail enterprise;[78]

> "The bustling corner store greeted customers for more than 60 years with bountiful baskets of colourful produce before they even stepped foot in the store. Once inside - the employees - many of whom had worked there for decades, greeted visitors by name, asked about their families, sharing recipes, catching up on neighbourhood goings on."

Gone from the labour starved department stores and large format franchises is the ethos of intimate product knowledge and discreet friendly customer service. Online is king and the bricks and mortar experience was vastly diminished.

COVID19 and lockdowns have forced a radical rethink about the way we interact with each other and our environment that may have given us the opportunity to radically reset our lifestyles for the better. People participated in activities together that they previously had either no time for, or had not acquired the skills to participate in. Baking from home soared. Supermarkets regularly ran out of flour and baking staples. Families cooked and ate together. People also shopped locally and frequented neighbourhood cafes. Will some of these lifestyle changes stick?

Certainly, the cornerstone was able to demonstrate its resilience, pivoting to provisioning, e-commerce delivery models, enhanced outdoor spaces and generating a loyal following at the local level. The local retail spend figures surged.

Conclusions

Planning or zoning laws are not the enemy. These regulatory controls evolved historically for very good reasons, mostly related to public goods, safety, sanitation and public health. Where localised self-interest ended and where the common good required an overarching perspective of the urban environment and its interface with the rural, town planning

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[76] Jan O'Connell, Corner Stores on the Wane, *Australian Food History Timeline*, 2013. (19/02/21).

[77] Arwa Haider, A Cultural History of the Beloved Corner Shop, 25th March, 2020, bbc.com (19/02/21)

[78] Davina van Buren, Evolution of the Corner Store, 10th July 2018, strongtiwns.org (17/04/21)

stepped in. Modern zoning laws were a child of this process, as is local government control of development and building applications. All of these, have benefited us all enormously. The public participation and debate that is generated in the process of projects gaining planning approval - no matter how much they are the bane of architects and developers - are an essential element of our democracy.

What is needed is not less planning, but rather more and better. A planning approvals system that is able to negotiate nuance, and seeks to find the sustainable development balance between under and over development, the hopes and desires of local communities and the needs of the economic life of cities and thus that take risks to fund their development.

With the advent of the knowledge economy this ability to support the micro, the middle and the macro, in fact all the differing levels of retail, to ensure not just competition within markets, but fair competition, that benefits all, will be crucial. Lorna Jane, Perfect Potion, Flight Centre etc, were all small retailers at their beginning. Harry Seidler designed the Rose Siedler House for his mother in 1952. A small, if brilliant, beginning.

While creative architects desire an enlightened conversation about their projects, not every architect, building designer, builder, draughtsperson or owner home builder is equally informed and can imagine and act with the same degree of sophistication and insight. The planning regime needs to accommodate and respect all abilities, to let all thrive, and to ensure the public good continues to be protected. Even architects are subject to economic pressures, as are their clients. Good governance structures, evolving cross-disciplinary knowledge and robust research can help us all.

“From little things, big things grow.”[79]

Bibliography

[79] Song title by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody.