

Changing Places

The Cost of Actualizing the Imagined

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Abstract The tension between proposals for urban change and a desire to protect the existing 'place-identity' of established neighborhoods is a key issue of contention in many communities, with a broad range of developments resisted on the basis that an existing place-identity would be damaged or destroyed. This paper sets out to explore some of these tensions, and to uncover ways in which urban design and development might contribute to the creation of new identities that do not destroy the existing meanings and experiences of place. Reporting the findings of empirical research undertaken at the highly-awarded 'Subi Centro' development in Perth, Australia, the paper discusses how conceptions of place have in this case both shaped and been shaped by urban redevelopment. Subi Centro is found to have helped construct, and to an extent actualize, a place-identity that had previously been based less on contemporary experiences in place, than on an imagined, and largely fictional, lifestyle. A perceived disparity between this lifestyle-based place-identity, and the lifestyles and attitudes of Subi Centro's residents is now a significant part of the scheme's narrative of place. Through an investigative approach combining extended interviews, document analysis and detailed mapping of the urban form, the paper sets out to unravel some of the complexities of place. The findings of this work raise questions over the ability of planners and designers to incorporate notions of place in the redevelopment of existing urban areas.

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The Significance of Place

The imperative for more compact and sustainable forms of urban development has brought issues of place more sharply into focus in recent years. As cities worldwide have adopted strategies of urban concentration and redevelopment, so an increased awareness and sensitivity to the specificities of place has emerged as a response. Place is seen by many to offer an antidote to the standardising effects of rationalism and globalization, and 'place-making' has become a key area of concern for academics and practitioners. An increased sensitivity to place clearly has many positive dimensions, but is also manifest in the way that a perceived threat to the existing character or identity of a place is increasingly used to defend certain areas from change. Such a desire to protect the character or identity of a place can have a paralyzing effect on processes of urban redevelopment, inhibiting the move towards a more compact and sustainable city. The issue of resistance to change also has a bearing on broader debates about diversity and social integration. A multiplicity of cultural values are played out in debate over the identity or character of a place—community solidarity can act to exclude difference. In such a context, reconciliation of this tension between an imperative for more compact urban forms and a desire to protect the identity or character of existing places becomes a key challenge for urban designers.

Place, at first glance, can appear a merely commonsense notion. It is a word widely used in everyday discourse: in many ways, this familiarity and frequency of use renders the concept more slippery as an object of study. Place can be used to describe particular physical locations such as cities, neighborhoods or buildings, or it can refer to social positions or hierarchies—a person can feel out of place, or can be put in their place. In architecture and urban design, discussion of place most usually begins with a focus on the experiential qualities of the concept, as outlined by Martin Heidegger in his influential work on the phenomenology of place. Rejecting positivism and allied scientific thought, Heidegger was interested in the existential qualities of space and place, arguing that the world could only be understood through human experience. For Heidegger, there could be no transcendental subject standing 'outside' the world, because human understanding of space could only emerge from action and experience—no world could exist prior to

our lived experience of it. The kind of place at the centre of Heidegger's phenomenological investigation was one of rootedness and authenticity; a place of tight and enduring connection between person and site. Ontology, for Heidegger, was rooted in place.

For Henri Lefebvre, phenomenology was a necessary but somewhat limited approach to the understanding of space and place. Lefebvre criticized the phenomenological position for its blindness to the effects of social structure and ideology, and understood space as the product of both experiential and socio-structural forces. For Lefebvre, spaces were produced through the dialectics of three dimensions of space—perceived, conceived and lived. Perceived space is made up of the routine spatial practices that produce and reproduce societal space. Conceived space is that which has been conceptualized and intellectualized by technocrats—the space of representation and image. Lived space is the space of direct sensual experience, and is lived rather than being perceived or conceived. Within such thinking, space is both a social product and a means of social reproduction; spaces and places are the product of relations between human experience and social structure—we make places but are also made by them.

In these terms, places can then be seen to operate through reiterative practice. Places come to us pre-structured, but at the same time are not operational without our practices—neighborhoods, parks and schools are clearly social constructs in one sense, but they cannot be understood outside the practices that occur within them. Place in this sense is open and fluid; the product of interrelations between experience and structure. Doreen Massey takes such an understanding of space and place, and uses it to develop the notion of a 'global sense of place'. Massey casts place as the product of local and wider social relations—the interactions between people and objects over time; places are formed from 'layers' of linkages. For Massey, the social relations working towards the construction of places are dynamic; places remain unfixed and have no formal boundaries or single identity. Rather, places are 'performed' through everyday social practice; place then becomes the basis from which identities can be created, as opposed to being a fixed and bounded pre-determinate of identity as is the case in Heidegger's work.

On such a reading, place is then a complex and multi-layered concept; places are subjective, and are shaped by a potentially infinite range of experiential and socio-structural forces. A single place can have many different identities, many different meanings. A neighborhood may be a place of belonging for a long-standing resident, a place of excitement for a visitor, or a place of hopelessness for an unemployed youth. Clearly, each of these individuals would, in turn, have very different ideas about what any potential changes to this area should hope to achieve, and of how change should be managed. The social theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari provides a useful way into this issue of changing places. For Deleuze and Guattari, all things are the product of unlimited flows of desire. These flows of desire become meaningful as the interaction of difference between them creates the possibility for perceptual classification—this classification is the means by which a subject can reduce an infinite range of differences to a range of classified ‘things’, which Deleuze and Guattari term ‘assemblages’. It is through the reduction of this infinite difference to a range of assemblages, that we are able to perceive our world. One assemblage differs from another through the sensual qualities, or intensities, that it exhibits. Within such thinking, places are bundles of intensities such as buildings, people and roads that can be perceived through their specificities; these specificities are themselves a product of the interaction between different flows of desire – desires for profit, power, enjoyment, community, safety. Tension over urban change can then be understood as an intersection of competing desires in place; different aspirations for how the intensities in a given place should be managed, of how that place should or shouldn’t change. The property developer is driven by the desire to maximise profit; the urban planner by a desire to create community; the local resident by a desire to protect the existing character or identity of a place—clearly these desires cannot always be compatible.

Cast as an assemblage, place is then an intrinsically defined bundle of intensities shaped by competing desires—places are perceived by actors through their intensities; these drawn from a potentially infinite range. Thinking about place in this way can help understand the tensions that emerge through processes of urban change, as well as the fluidity and complexity of the concept. Within such an understanding, the meanings of

place will vary between, and even within, individuals. To return to the example above, the different individuals in the case of the neighborhood would each have a different conception of the neighborhood, of its intensities, of how urban change should be managed, and of what that change should hope to achieve.

The changing of existing places then becomes a process of exploring existing and desired conceptions of that place, the differences between them, and how these differences might be reconciled through urban design and development. This paper sets out with such an agenda; to understand and elucidate the tensions and conflicts that emerge over place-identity, and to explore ways in which existing place-identities can be used to shape and inform urban design. Based in a notion of place as assemblage, the study combines experiential, morphological and discursive modes of analysis to investigate the relations between urban change and place-identity, as they played out in an Australian suburb. Empirical research entailed a series of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and designers¹, detailed mapping of past and present urban form, photographic surveys, and an analysis of media and professional representations of the redevelopment scheme, planning and design documents and promotional material.

Changing Places

The 'Subi Centro' scheme in Perth is one of Australia's most celebrated urban redevelopment projects². Located in the inner-suburb of Subiaco, the scheme comprises 80 hectares of former industrial and railway land adjoining Subiaco's commercial and retail centre. Subi Centro is home to 1500 residents, and provides employment for over 3000 people. Even its detractors accept that the scheme has contributed to a marked shift in attitudes towards inner-city living in Perth; a city with a tradition of low-density suburban development and high levels of automobile-dependence.

Subiaco was established by Benedictine Monks in the 1840s. Arriving from Italy, the monks named their new monastery Subiaco, after a small village close to Naples. Subiaco grew rapidly in the late 19th Century, due to the opening of the Perth to Fremantle rail line through the area and an increase in land grants. New industrial uses were established close to the rail station,

with residential and commercial uses concentrated in the area to the south of the rail line. This part of Subiaco developed an urban form based on a strong cardinal grid formation, and a dominant north-south commercial 'Main Street' (Figure 1). By the early 1930s, Subiaco had become a vibrant civic and commercial centre, with a population of 17000 people. A period of steady growth followed in the 1940s, and Subiaco was granted city status in 1952. The 1960s and 1970s were, however, a period of significant decline for Subiaco—the city suffered the effects of widespread economic and population dispersal, losing much of its employment base and many of its wealthier residents. Older buildings fell into disrepair, and were demolished to make way for new homes and apartment blocks, changing the physical and social fabric of the city. Industrial and commercial decline continued through the 1980s, prompting a series of revival programmes for the city centre. These ultimately led to proposals for the lowering of the railway line, and the redevelopment of lands surrounding the rail station. At the time, the rail line formed a significant barrier to pedestrian and vehicular movements through Subiaco, and the station was accessible only via footbridge. The line was lowered in 1997, and a new station completed in 1998.



Figure 1: Subiaco

Image by author.

Much of the land surrounding the rail station had lain vacant or under-utilised in the late 1990s, but there was intense opposition to proposals for its redevelopment. The site lay adjacent to the oldest part of Subiaco, and there was concern amongst local residents and traders that redevelopment would have a damaging effect on the existing character and identity of 'Old Subiaco'. A community group named 'Uniting Subiaco' was set up to represent local interests through the course of redevelopment; the aims of this group were specifically to protect the special 'values' and 'feeling' of Old Subiaco. As a response to concerns over the potential effects of redevelopment on Old Subiaco's place-identity, original plans for the site's redevelopment were abandoned, and new proposals for a mixed-use 'urban-village' were prepared. The new scheme was to be called 'Subi Centro', and its design would be based in a conscious effort to reflect and respect the existing place-identity of Old Subiaco—this was made explicit in promotional material:

'Subiaco is a special place. It is like a village within a city, with its unique strip shopping, traditional housing and theatres, restaurants and ambience...Subi Centro's clever planning and design will embrace the very essence of Subiaco and ensure that nothing of its uniqueness is lost as the development grows...Subi Centro has been designed to amplify and add to the lifestyle and traditions of Subiaco: Subi Centro: Where tradition and vision come together'

Unpacking Place: Old Subiaco

At the time of proposals for redevelopment, the identity that existed in Old Subiaco was one based foremost in a set of social and cultural understandings of the place that were linked to particular experiences, attitudes and histories. Old Subiaco was understood through the lifestyles of people living, working and relaxing in the city, with few physical forms or features specifically associated with the place. Central to understandings of the place were notions of a socially and culturally mixed population, and a community that was cohesive and highly social; this strong sense of community was seen to impart a distinct 'village feel' to the city. Related to these perceptions of

social and cultural mix was an attitude of tolerance and social inclusiveness amongst Old Subiaco's people that was seen to be defining of the city—social progressiveness and a positive attitude towards diversity were central to Old Subiaco's "special feel".

Linked to these social and cultural understandings of the city was a strong sense that Old Subiaco's uniqueness lay in the way that the city combined this 'village feel' with a level of cosmopolitanism that belied its small population. Cosmopolitanism was closely linked to the social progressiveness of residents, but also to the rich mix of attractions, services and facilities in the city, and particularly to the vibrant mainstreet commercial strip of Rokeby Road (Figure 2). There was a sense that the broad range of cafes, restaurants and entertainment venues made Subiaco a vibrant and exciting destination, and afforded the city a level of urbanity that was rare in Perth.

Old Subiaco's identity was closely linked to a set of inter-related memories, histories and characters associated with the place, and particularly with its



industrial and railway heritage. The mixed population—now defining of the city—was understood to have been partly fostered by industry and rail, as the result of the varied building and plot sizes that had developed in the city's industrial heyday. This link between the identity of the city and its mix did not, however, extend to discussion of architecture and building types. Despite there being large numbers of post-war residential, commercial and institutional buildings dotted throughout Old Subiaco's central area, the urban form was perceived to be relatively uniform, and of high heritage and aesthetic value throughout.

Social and cultural understandings of Old Subiaco were very often linked the experience of actually being in the place. Experiential understandings of Old Subiaco centred on the strong sense of community and social progressiveness of residents, which was believed to be exemplified by personal or anecdotal interactions with neighbors, shopkeepers or people on the street—'knowing your neighbor' was fundamental to many conceptions of the place.



Figure 2: Rokeby Road, Old Subiaco's mainstreet commercial, retail and entertainment centre. Image by author.

The experience of being able to live, work, shop and relax all within close proximity was also significant to Old Subiaco's identity, and a sense of self-containment and walk-ability was seen to distinguish the city from most other areas of Perth. Notions of self-containment were closely linked to the broad range of services and opportunities that were available in the city centre, and to the presence of a strong employment base that centred on industry and rail. Subiaco was seen to retain a significant role as a local employment centre, despite the city having lost much of its industrial, distributive and manufacturing base in the 1960s and 1970s.

Place-identity was also bound up in experiences of the city's weekend markets and football stadium. Visiting the markets, in particular, was central to understandings of the city, with the wide range of people and goods seen to exemplify Subiaco's social and cultural diversity, and the vibrant and informal atmosphere linked to notions of cosmopolitanism. The Subiaco Oval, Perth's largest sports stadium, lies adjacent to the redevelopment area, and in addition to itself featuring prominently in constructions of the city's identity, was seen to play a crucial role in generating the vibrancy and diversity that formed a central theme running through almost all understandings of the place.

In short, Old Subiaco's identity was then based more in a set of social, cultural, historical and experiential associations than it was in physical form or appearance. The city was characterized by a rich social and cultural mix, social progressiveness, and a strong sense of community. This mix and attitude were linked to Old Subiaco's history in industry and rail; the mix of building and plot sizes in the city understood to have emerged during early periods in the city's development. Old Subiaco's identity was also closely linked to its vibrant commercial, retail and entertainment centre, and particularly its traditional mainstreet 'strip' shopping. A series of inter-related social, cultural, historical and experiential associations had then combined to impart Subiaco with an identity that was based in a blend of cosmopolitanism and community—an urban-village. Subiaco was vibrant, diverse, and socially progressive, yet maintained a sense of community cohesion and self-containment more commonly associated with small towns or villages.



Figure 3: Subiaco's weekend markets. Image by author.

Designs on a Lifestyle

There were, then, few physical forms or features associated specifically with Old Subiaco, the city's identity was most commonly understood through social, cultural and historical associations. Even where links were made between the identity of the city and its urban form, these were typically through intangible or lifestyle-based understandings such as 'suburban', 'walkable', 'semi-urban' or 'mainstreet', rather than through specific architectural types or styles. Subiaco City Council had no formal guidelines for the design of new development in the redevelopment area, although there were a number of buildings in the city centre with heritage listing. Few physical or visual design cues could then be taken from existing understandings of the place, and yet an effort to reflect the existing place-identity of Old Subiaco was a key concern for designers of Subi Centro. In the absence of tangible design cues for physical form, the scheme's designers instead sought to base their reflections of Old Subiaco on a particular lifestyle that was seen to predominate—Subi Centro would be reflective of a lifestyle-based place-identity:

Subiaco is a special place, unique in character and one which holds fond memories and meaning for residents, workers and visitors. Its village atmosphere and community qualities have made Subiaco a fine example of urban living. It is this lifestyle that the Authority [SRA] aims to now extend north over the railway line and into the heart of the redevelopment area.

Reflecting Place

A particular lifestyle was then perceived to encapsulate Old Subiaco's place-identity, and the task for designers of Subi Centro was to create a scheme that would enable the range of experiences and meanings of place bound up in that lifestyle to be extended and reproduced. Whilst there were few explicit links made between Old Subiaco's identity and its physical appearance, many of the social, cultural and experiential characteristics that featured in understandings the place were indeed linked, albeit subconsciously, to urban form. Notions such as social mix, walk-ability and mainstreet, as well as the range of opportunities for working and relaxing are clearly bound up in, and dependent on, the urban structure of the city. Lacking institutional guidance from the city's planning department, the designers of Subi Centro undertook an analysis of Old Subiaco's urban built form, setting out to understand the ways in which particular physical features or forms were linked to the city's place-identity. Based on these observations, design principles were established for the layout, composition and physical appearance of the scheme:

In developing the direction for the project, it was important that the redevelopment mirrored Subiaco's wider cultural and historical attributes. Housing mix, densities and land use must all be in keeping with the wider community

Subiaco Redevelopment Authority

Subi Centro was envisioned as an 'urban-village' that would be integrated with, and reflective of, its context. The scheme was to be located on 80 hectares of former industrial and railway land directly north of Subiaco's retail and commercial centre. The lowering of the rail line had removed a significant barrier to pedestrian and vehicular movement, and had created a developable area of land between former industrial areas to the north of the railway line, and Subiaco's mainstreet strip to the south.

Subi Centro today comprises 800 residential dwellings, 80,000 square meters of commercial space, 9,000 square meters retail space and 5 hectares open space. The organising principle for the scheme is a new civic square directly above the sunken rail station—Subiaco Square. This square is

framed by retail and commercial uses, and is visually and physically linked to Old Subiaco, the Subiaco Oval and the weekend markets. The layout of the Subi Centro scheme formed new north-south and east-west pedestrian and vehicular connections, and improved access to the rail station from adjoining areas.

The 'village feel', central to both experiential and discursive constructions of Old Subiaco, was closely linked to notions of social mix and community cohesion. The designers of Subi Centro attempted to extend and reflect this social mix through the range of dwellings and the provision of 15% affordable housing. There is significant variety in dwelling types, ranging from single-bedroom apartments through typical suburban homes to extremely large single-family homes. There is also a range of housing tenures – high levels of renter-occupation in Old Subiaco were understood to have contributed to the city's social mix, and this was reproduced at Subi Centro. This mix of building types, tenures and lot sizes was intended to reflect the 'village-like character'³ that was perceived to exist in Old Subiaco, but also to foster social diversity within Subi Centro. However, levels of building coverage on lots in Subi Centro is typically far higher than in Old Subiaco—new homes are typically much larger than their equivalents in Old Subiaco, even where lot sizes are similar.

Subi Centro also incorporates a series of linked open spaces designed specifically to foster social interaction, with an emphasis on creating communal spaces through a network of pathways, and public facilities such as barbeques, gathering places and play areas. Subiaco Square is linked to the mainstreet strip of Old Subiaco, and was designed to function as the main meeting and event space for the city of Subiaco as a whole. The square also forms the key transport interchange for the city centre.

Conceptions of Old Subiaco as vibrant and cosmopolitan were based in similar notions of social mix, but were also linked to the attitudes of the city's people, and to the range of opportunities for working, shopping, dining and relaxing in the commercial centre; particularly along the mainstreet strip of Rokeby Road. Subi Centro was designed to add richness to this mix, and to improve the viability of the existing commercial centre, by increasing the

Multi

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Figure 4: Subiaco Square. Image by author.



Figure 5: 'Mainstreet' urban form in Subi Centro. Image by author.

city's working and resident population. Subiaco Square is framed by retail units and cafes on the ground floor, with offices and apartments above. The retail element of the scheme includes several specialist and novelty retailers, but there is also strong representation by convenience retailers and local independent traders. In the areas adjacent to Subiaco Square there are several large office buildings and apartment blocks, with these tapering away to lower-density single-family dwellings further from the station area.

The streetscape design of Subi Centro's main thoroughfares is intended to reflect the 'mainstreet feel' of Old Subiaco through proportion and detailing. Retail units have narrow frontages, exterior street roofing, strong vertical building rhythms, and corner-buildings are prominent. All commercial and retail uses are accessed from the street directly, and on-street car parking and median bays are incorporated into street layouts (Figure 5).

Detailed guidelines were also prepared for the design of new residential buildings in Subi Centro, despite there being very few acknowledged links between the identity of Old Subiaco and its physical form or appearance. These guidelines were based on the observations of designers, and drew cues from Old Subiaco in specifying standards for density, height, lot-development ratios and levels of open space. Features such as verandas, pitched roofs and eaves that were perceived to characterise Subiaco's existing built form were required in all new homes, and building materials were specified for walls and roofs. Residential streetscapes were intended to be reflective of those in Subiaco, incorporating on-street car parking and rear access laneways, and with homes set back from sidewalks. Particular plant species were recommended for front gardens.

In addition to detailed and very specific architectural and design guidelines for new buildings, the configuration of land uses was also intended to be reflective of Old Subiaco. New employment uses were established in the area around the rail station, which was consistent with the traditional use of land in these areas, and commercial and retail uses were concentrated along key routes through the scheme, continuing a sense of 'mainstreet'. The retail uses in Subiaco Square were also designed to be reflective of the adjoining city centre; to provide a mix of everyday and specialist goods, and

to compliment the city's existing retail offer. The original street pattern was largely retained, and the new roads that were built were aligned to ensure that major through-traffic continued to pass around Subiaco, reinforcing a sense of self-containment and protecting the city's 'village feel'.

Actualizing the Imagined

A rich mix of people, a strong sense of community and an attitude of social progressiveness were central to the 'village feel' that existed in Subiaco, and Subi Centro then attempted to reflect this through the provision of a range of dwelling types, a series of social spaces and through built form and structure. Yet there are questions over the extent to which perceptions of a mixed and highly social community existing in Old Subiaco prior to development were entirely accurate. Certainly, there is some variety in the range of housing options available in Old Subiaco, but the vast majority of homes are single-family suburban types, and residential property prices in the city prior to redevelopment were significantly higher than in neighboring suburbs, despite the city's commercial and industrial sectors having been in a period of decline. These relatively high prices were due to Old Subiaco's popularity amongst young professionals, for whom the city's proximity to Perth Central Business District (CBD), along with the scarcity of other inner-urban residential areas in the Perth region made Subiaco attractive. Put very simply, the range of different lifestyles that the city's urban form and structure could have supported at the time was very limited.

A sense also emerged that the social mix at the heart of Subiaco's identity was, in fact, something that was provided more by Old Subiaco's street-life than it was by the mix of residents. The markets and football stadium were felt to epitomise the city's diversity, but these were based on the diversity of groups that were attracted to the city from other parts of Perth. Census data for the city in the mid 1990s indicates that the population was predominantly Australian-born, and that British nationals accounted for over 30% of those born overseas—Perth is a very popular destination for expatriates from the UK⁴. Perceptions of Subiaco's social and cultural mix would then seem to have been based in the diversity of visitors, and in that sense, the city's diversity was highly controlled. There is then an issue of whether social mix and diversity may have been so highly valued by residents of Old



Subiaco, precisely because they were present only at specific times and in specific locations – social and cultural mix for residents of Old Subiaco was a choice, rather than an obligation. Linked closely to notions of mix were understandings of Old Subiaco based in a strong sense of community, and yet no formal community or neighborhood groups existed prior or subsequent to the development of Subiaco. ‘Uniting Subiaco’ was set up as a direct response to the perceived threat that Subi Centro posed for Old Subiaco’s existing place-identity, and the group was disbanded following the scheme’s completion.

There was a strong sense that Old Subiaco offered a level of cosmopolitanism that was rare in a city of its size. This was closely linked to social and cultural mix, but also to the city’s vibrant commercial centre, and particularly the broad range of opportunities for living, working and relaxing that were available. Subi Centro added new residential, retail and commercial uses to this mix, bringing 3000 new jobs to the city, and the scheme has undoubtedly worked as a catalyst to the wider revitalization of the city centre. Prior to the scheme’s development in the early 1990s, Old Subiaco’s retail and commercial sectors had been in a period of decline, but an influx of cafes, boutiques and national retailers in the period since Subi Centro was completed has seen the city



Figure 6: Residential streetscapes and buildings in Subi Centro. Image by author.

centre transformed—vacancy rates have fallen dramatically, commercial property and rental values have increased, and Subiaco is now one of Perth's major shopping destinations. The city's retail sector had previously served mainly a localized market for everyday convenience goods, but in recent years has become a destination for upscale specialist and novelty retailers, as well as national café and restaurant chains.

This increased vibrancy, alongside the new residential and commercial uses provided at Subi Centro, and improvements to station accessibility, have contributed to a significant increase in levels of rail patronage. Although rail had featured prominently in understandings of Subiaco's identity prior to redevelopment, Old Subiaco had in many ways turned its back on the rail station—the station had become disconnected from the city centre, with access only via footbridge, and the rail line itself formed a major barrier to pedestrian movement and station accessibility. Levels of patronage had fallen to such a level that the line was even closed for several years in the 1980s. By creating a new civic square above the sunken rail line and station, and by contributing to increased levels of rail patronage, Subi Centro has restored the role of the railway as a central part of everyday life in Subiaco. Subi Centro's reflection of Old Subiaco's identity also operated, and was

expressed, discursively through the naming of the scheme, and publicity surrounding its development. As illustrated by quotes earlier in the paper, design briefs and planning documents often used links with Subiaco's existing identity to legitimate particular decisions or actions, with much of the discourse providing reassurance that Old Subiaco's existing place-identity would not be damaged, and could even be enhanced, by the Subi Centro development. The introductory paragraphs of the scheme's planning strategy stated:

'Those characteristics of Subiaco that make it a desirable place are its physical and social identity, sense of history, compactness, living and working opportunities, availability of a wide range of amenities within convenient walking distance, quality of the built environment and its diversity. Continuation of these qualities is sought in the Redevelopment area'.

Subi Centro] builds on Subiaco's rich history and unique atmosphere, transforming 80 hectares of derelict industrial land into a vibrant, cosmopolitan community—a natural extension of the city's heart

— Subiaco Redevelopment Authority

The naming of the scheme was itself also a response to context; 'Subi Centro' was intended to evoke associations with size, modernity and the city's Italian roots, but also to make it clear that the scheme was part of, and complimentary to, Old Subiaco's existing city centre. New residential areas were arranged into a number of smaller 'precincts', with the names of these precincts—'Centro Village', 'Subiaco Rise' and 'Subiaco Village', demonstrating a clear effort to associate new development with the notions of village and community that were so fundamental to constructions of Old Subiaco's identity.

Analysis also reveals that the site of Subi Centro, prior to proposals for redevelopment in the early 1990s, had in fact been part of the neighboring postcode of Jolimont, but that the postcode boundaries were changed in order that the scheme would become part of Subiaco in an administrative sense.

This change of postcode is suggestive of a deeper theme that emerges through this analysis. Subi Centro has added richness to the social mix that had existed in Old Subiaco, and has broadened the city's retail offer and commercial base. The scheme provides new social spaces, including a new civic square at the station, and the wider effects of redevelopment have been to revitalise Old Subiaco's city centre, increase visitor numbers, and to reinstate the role of rail as a crucial part of the city's identity. Subi Centro would then seem to be very reflective of Old Subiaco's identity, and the scheme has undoubtedly worked to reinforce many existing understandings of the place. Yet the findings of this work also suggest that many of these reinforced understandings of the place had, in fact, been based only loosely on contemporary experiences in Old Subiaco prior to the development of Subi Centro. The identity that was perceived to exist in Old Subiaco at the time; an identity bound in social mix, attitude, vibrancy, self-containment and rail, would seem to have been one based more in histories, anecdote and somewhat idealized notions of the place than in everyday experience.

Unintentional Reflections

Alongside these positive reconstructions of place-identity, Subi Centro's development has in many other ways unintentionally re-constructed Old Subiaco's place-identity. The preparation of guidelines for the scheme's development that were based on architectural and design cues drawn from Old Subiaco has acted to increase awareness of these features in Old Subiaco, as well as fostering a misplaced sense that they are widespread. A perceived divergence from this understanding of Old Subiaco's physical form and identity is now a consistent criticism of Subi Centro amongst residents of Old Subiaco—the formal articulation of these features has worked to strengthen the role of physical built form in constructions of Old Subiaco's place-identity. New buildings in Subi Centro that are not congruent with these perceptions of physical form have acted to strengthen the association of these features with the place-identity of Old Subiaco through the contrast that they provide.

Subi Centro has also strengthened certain social and cultural understandings of Old Subiaco through a perception that the attitudes of the scheme's residents differ from those of Old Subiaco. For example, as tensions emerged

from within Subi Centro when some of its residents opposed the inclusion of affordable housing in the scheme, many residents of Old Subiaco saw this to be an indication that the values and attitudes of residents in Subi Centro were markedly different from those perceived to be the norm in Old Subiaco. Old Subiaco residents 'experienced' and celebrated diversity, tolerance and inclusiveness—tensions within Subi Centro were seen to indicate that this wasn't the case in Subi Centro: a juxtaposition which served to further strengthen an understanding of Old Subiaco based in these inclusive and tolerant attitudes.

A perceived difference in lifestyles has, somewhat ironically, emerged as another means by which Subi Centro has unintentionally strengthened Subiaco's existing place-identity. The lifestyles of residents in Subi Centro are seen to differ markedly from those in Old Subiaco, with these differences usually linked to physical form; particularly the larger homes, garages and 'defensive' architecture that are perceived to reflect a less social or cohesive community with a values system and identity based more on property values and finance than on socio-cultural characteristics or attitude. Subi Centro is for most people understood as a suburban living environment, as opposed to the 'urban-village' lifestyles of Old Subiaco. Yet this belies the fact that qualitative and quantitative evidence both suggest the majority of Old Subiaco to be at least as suburban as Subi Centro, in terms of the types of lifestyles that it supports. A perceived contrast between the lifestyles and attitudes of residents in the two areas has then strengthened the lifestyle-based place-identity that existed in Old Subiaco prior to redevelopment. Where Old Subiaco is seen to combine urban and rural lifestyles, Subi Centro is instead understood through its opposition to these, as suburban.

The Cost of Actualizing the Imagined

A picture then emerges in Old Subiaco of a place-identity based foremost in a set of social and cultural associations, memories, histories and experiences. The findings of this work strongly suggest that prior to the development of Subi Centro, this place-identity had been one based only loosely on contemporary experiences in place, and that the Subi Centro scheme contributed significantly to its actualization. Planners and designers set out to reflect perceptions of Old Subiaco through a particular lifestyle that was

understood to encapsulate the city's place-identity. An apparent divergence between this lifestyle, and the lifestyles and attitudes of Subi Centro's residents now forms the basis for much criticism of the scheme. There is then great irony in the fact that Subi Centro is now subject to criticism for its non-conformity with a place-identity that it undoubtedly helped to reconstruct. By reinforcing, and to an extent actualizing, a place-identity based less on contemporary experiences in place, than on a set of imagined socio-cultural and historical understandings of the city, Subi Centro has created conditions within which a perceived opposition to this place-identity now forms a significant part of its narrative of place—the cost of actualizing the imagined.

Notes

¹ Interviewees included planners, designers, architects and financiers of the scheme; city council officials and the city's former Mayor; members of local business groups; local traders; representatives of 'Uniting Subiaco'; a local journalist; and a number of local residents.

² Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) State Award for Excellence; UDIA National Award for Excellence 2004; HIA Green Smart Awards 2004; Commendation in the Accessible Communities Awards

³ Subiaco Redevelopment Authority

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996

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