

DEC10

LAND MARK



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Conversations over the project fence

David Martin AILA

New partnerships for the art and science of adaptation

You could say that I've come full circle.

Prompted by the AILA National President's recent column *'The Good life'* (LAA No/128) which reflected on how we often first connect with nature, I began to think about some of my own 'tree moments' over the last few years and some formative encounters that led me on the pathway to Landscape Architecture.

Early encounters included a 'dad built' tree-house in a big Wattle in the backyard and endless family fishing and camping trips along the then 'mighty' Murray River. School holidays were often at my Aunt's place catching yabbies in farm dams, peeling off paper bark and wandering over salt lakes in the Wimmera. A few years on bit of serious wilderness walking in Tasmania further strengthened the bond.

For today's generation these interactions with nature might be 'packaged' as eco-tourism experiences.

Fast forward to the revelations delivered by Gore and Stern and these tree moments started to develop another dimension—reflection on the future of these special places. Standing in a majestic grove of California Redwoods outside San Francisco I learn that nearly half the water needed by these towering giants relies on absorption from Pacific coastal mists, in the Rocky Mountains I see first hand the consequences of shorter winters on the pine-beetle ravaged hillsides on the road to Vale, visiting a threatened Malaysian mangrove currently home to a Burmese squatter camp or the most northern pocket of Antarctic Beech forest in the Barrington Tops—its hard not to contemplate the impacts on these environments from changing climates.

All trees for thought.

I've also been revisiting some seminal environmental design texts looking to support arguments to government (and an ethics professor) as to why landscape architecture has a strong mandate and leadership role to play in urban sustainability and the transition of our towns and cities to low-carbon living.

Firstly McHarg, who in 1969, said that there is a need for 'a mixture of scientific insight and constructive environmental design' in town planning and landscape architecture. Lewis Mumford in his introduction to *'Design with Nature'* says 'McHarg's emphasis is not on either design or nature by itself, but upon the preposition *with*, which implies human cooperation and biological partnership.'

Eckbo another contemporary at this time was a pioneer in shaping attitudes about global resource depletion and environmental degradation linked to world population growth.

Locally; and a decade on from McHarg, Roger Johnson, (University of Canberra, foundation head of the School of Environmental Design) in his compendium *'The Green City'* was an early advocate for sustainable development well before the Brundland Report coined the term in 1987.

Johnson said *'the world's town and cities have some ten to fifteen years in which to prepare themselves for the coming oil shortage. In the meantime cities are becoming less and less pleasant to live and work in.'*

Fast forward to 2010 and remind ourselves that's its actually been over 30 years since Johnson's prophecy and I guess the score card on the sustainability of Australian urban settlements is mixed; especially when measured by our track record to adjusting to life with less carbon.

On the contemporary front it is encouraging to see that big picture thinkers such as Richard Weller (*'BOOMTOWN'*) and Adrian McGregor's with his *'Bio-City'* urban metrics tool box are again asserting sustainable environmental design into metropolitan scale planning. The challenge now is to understand that if we are to be more effective we can't just have this conversation with ourselves—a core message reinforced at AILA's last national conference.

Landscape architects need to skill up in the art of advocacy and open new doors.

According to Allen Kearns of the CSIRO Climate Adaptation National Research Flagship, landscape architects have the capacity *'to think beyond the project fence'*. Kearns, who was jury chair for the *Sea Change 2030+* ideas competition is calling for more fusion based thinking, interactions and knowledge sharing in what he calls *'the science meets design opportunity'*. This taps into the power of communicating climate science and positive change through the art of visualisation.

We can predict that our skills (when framed around new partnerships and skills) will be much in demand over the next 10–15 year, the critical adaptation window period. As Dr. Jane Tarran argues on our behalf, planning and design for our changing climates has a very 'natural fit' with our everyday professional practice but we just need to get our heads around what these new climates are becoming across our country and learn how to *'scale the science down'*.

Whether revisiting the power of formative experiences when we have connected with nature or the key writings of our leading thinkers, these reinforce the need for us to play a more active stewardship role during this transitional period toward low-carbon and climate adapted living.

As 'constructive thinkers', landscape architects partnering with researchers and facilitating dialogue with other disciplines beyond our normal project boundaries can foster new opportunities for reshaping more resilient environments.

Looking over the fence let the new conversations and partnerships begin.

David Martin is Convenor of the AILA NSW Climate Adaptation Group. He is completing a Masters of Sustainable Development at the Graduate School of the Environment, Macquarie University with a focus on organisational change for climate adaptation.

01

National policy statements

Paul Costigan, AILA Chief Executive Officer

Dear members, check the national web site today. www.aila.org.au/policies

The AILA National Office has overseen the development of a suite of national policy statements. This has kept your National Councillors very busy in recent months—and the work is on-going. This new suite of documents, available online to be printed out, sets the pattern for those to follow and builds on the former initiatives to produce key policy statements on the Australian Landscape Principles, Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Settlement.

One of the key starting points this year was to revisit the former 20 AILA Environment Policies written around the early 1990s. Several of these were used and were updated by the National Office before being discussed and amended by National Councillors and other advisors. There are a few more in the immediate pipeline as well as a whole bunch of others still to be initiated. We have drafts in progress on *Play* as well as on *Roads and Landscape*—and others in the queue. The queue could be endless—so National Council should remain busy for a while yet!

An emphasis on this first lot has been to have national statements on key national issues that traditionally the AILA has not been seen to be invited to participate in the national debates. For instance this may be the first time the AILA has statements on Housing, on Energy Efficiency and on Coastal Landscapes—all part of the Climate Change debate and all related to how we value the landscape.

Through the use of such National Policy Statements, hopefully our collective advocacy to decision makers will enhance the position of Landscape Architecture within the current and future debates. All members are asked to become familiar with these statements and to consider ways in which each of you could use them locally as well as nationally.

Obviously it would be impossible to have statements across all the complexities of the Landscape Architectural areas of practice, so in your individual advocacy please feel free to use whole statements and/or lift sections out to suit your particular purposes.

The big request: please download the documents. They are designed primarily to be single two sided documents. And yes, it has been quite a challenge for the writers to keep to that limit!

So it is over to you, these policy statements are yours. Please take up the advocacy challenge, make appointments, use the documents in submissions and of course to provide feedback on their use. We remain open as always to ideas, to future amendments and to seek writers for new national statements for other areas of practice.

Urban ecology: Taking it to the streets

Catherine Neilson FAILA, National Project Manager

A perfect clear spring afternoon finds your Canberra correspondent reluctantly dragging out the winter woollies once again—in preparation for an (otherwise) eagerly anticipated visit to New Zealand, where I've been invited to speak at a symposium on urban ecological research for the annual conference of the New Zealand Ecological Society.

This year's conference theme, *'Biodiversity: 2010 and beyond'*, recognises and celebrates the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity (IYB)—a topic as significant for landscape planners, designers and managers as it is for ecologists and many other scientific disciplines.

The topic I will be speaking about was inspired by the question running through my head at the point at which I was invited to contribute to the conference—i.e. what on earth might a landscape architect be able to usefully offer a roomful of pointy-headed scientists focussing on the topic: *'Urban ecology: where social and biological sciences need to meet'*? And its unspoken implication (why should ecologists even *care* what landscape architects think about this subject?) subsequently provided the outline for what I hope might spark an interesting and productive discussion at the conference, but—more importantly—hopefully seed ongoing opportunities for collaboration and exchange between two quite distinct professions which have a great deal to share as well as potentially gain in working more closely together.

My immediate thought upon reading the symposium topic was: 'okay, so social and biological sciences need to meet—sure—but isn't the more important issue where they're planning to go beyond that point?' I was curious as to what would be the collaborative ambition—i.e. how the alignment of two previously separate fields of inquiry might lead to improved outcomes for both, over and above what they could individually achieve—especially in terms of bringing about improved urban biodiversity outcomes.

In other words, where might all this meeting and talking actually be taking us? Will the emerging understanding be sufficient to address the magnitude, pace and complexity of looming challenges wrought by population dynamics, climate change, resource limitations, landscape degradation & biodiversity loss?

It seems to me that what is most urgently needed at this particular point in history—especially in terms of setting priorities for the International Year of Biodiversity—is to focus our collective attention firmly upon *what we can proactively do—starting NOW—to drive meaningful progress towards transformational change* in biodiversity outcomes—regardless of scale or socio-geographical settlement context.

In that light, social sciences—those disciplines which explore human motivation, perceptions and desires—surely have a great deal to contribute towards better understanding of how humans operate within the environments which are our most fundamental life-support system. This knowledge will be vital in devising strategies to address the most destructive patterns and effects of human behaviour—not only in relation to reversing negative trends for biodiversity at local, regional and global scales, but also because without such insights, the viability of humanity as a species is ultimately at stake. But will this be enough? What other knowledge and experience might be needed, in order to devise a more sustainable future for humans in balance with other species, especially within the context of a constructed, urban environment?

For the built environment is about more than the cultural expression of human ideas and behaviour. The physical characteristics of our built environment are the legacy of a series of sometimes accidental, but more often *designed* responses to human needs—as the dominant species in the urban ecosystem. It is, for better or worse, a designed ecosystem, whose primary form and function is driven by design decisions—made by humans, predominantly *for* humans.

Which raises the more obvious question, especially for the landscape architect in the room with the pointy-headed scientists... *'What about where design and urban ecology need to meet'*?

What motivates those who create the built component of our urban environments? How do the motivations of developers, designers and communities align or conflict with those of urban ecologists? How can we enable greater collaboration between disciplines to address challenges not only of ecological and social science integration, but also integration of social and institutional agendas to influence changes in decision-making and behaviour around urban sustainability and biodiversity conservation? And what is the role of design in articulating these questions and proposing alternative solutions?

In 2005, the authors of the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment noted:

'...the basic challenge remains that the current economic system relies fundamentally on economic growth that disregards its impact on natural resources'

Five years on, not much has changed. Many of those who drive this flawed paradigm of unsustainable urban development based on endless growth and consumption are still basically talking amongst themselves, while the planet burns. The scale of the solution must necessarily be commensurate with the

scale of the problem. It's time to let our actions speak louder than our words.

My presentation at the conference will take the form of a call to such action—for urban ecologists and landscape architects to begin to proactively work together to articulate and achieve mutual goals—including improved outcomes for biodiversity and a deeper understanding of the broad range of ecological, social and cultural values underpinning the resilience of our built and natural environments and which nourish and enrich our connections to each other and the wider world.

The presentation will cover recent AILA experience in initiating, enhancing and supporting partnerships between design professions and urban ecologists to promote more sustainable urban design typologies for Australian cities and towns. Discussion will also include constraints and opportunities emerging from 'designed experiment' approaches; green infrastructure and climate adaptation strategies; multi-disciplinary collaboration; integrated urban sustainability assessment methodologies and multi-sectoral advocacy and engagement initiatives aimed at enhancing social, environmental and economic outcomes for existing and future human settlements.

But in the end, it doesn't really matter what we talk about—on that day or any other, in whatever country we have the conversation. The real value of our collaborative intelligence and imagination can only be truly measured when we take it to the streets.

02

Roaming your backyard

Paul Costigan, AILA Chief Executive Officer

I took a call recently from a local newspaper. I was being asked to comment on the future my own neighbourhood and a recent meeting between residents and ACT Government officials. What the journalist did not appreciate is that I was sitting on the side of my garden having been interrupted planting the summer crop of vegetables (it was Sunday). However the situation of talking politics from my own backyard was very appropriate.

I have long believed that people involved in larger advocacy matters, while they are prepared to speak out on core national/international issues, should be judged not on the words they use or how wonderfully they craft their sentences using the current language of concern, but on how they behave in their own backyard. How they treat colleagues and those much closer to home. How they speak of others around them and their generosity of spirit towards those who disagree and have alternate views to theirs—how they behave when they attend meetings and are prepared to stand up for core values and issues of real relevance, and to then 'walk the talk'.

In October this year I attended a local residents meeting to which was invited the local Minister for Planning. The local Chief Planner also attended. As it turned out the gathering was also peppered with people imported for the evening to endorse the views to be put by the Minister. (There's a story there for another time)

Such community meeting usually allow for conversations between the residents and their elected representatives and bureaucrats. In this case the residents group made very informed presentations based on thorough research. I make this last point as I have come to realise how much professional expertise lurks behind the leafy front gardens of my quiet suburb.

Up front the residents were acknowledging that this suburb was due for change, due to be effected by infill and that the residents were about to see the suburb take on the challenges of the 21st Century. The main view being put forward was that the residents were open to embrace change and that development was inevitable. The big message was that development must deliver on the needs of present and future generations, the young and the elderly, and need to the full range of human and environmental issues—being health, ecology, transport—and you know the rest. Another major plank was that any planning and subsequent development should be through an integrated approach. That future planning should not be based on treating the residential areas separate from the commercial centre, but that the whole precinct would benefit from a larger integrated precinct planning and design process.

The officials present commenced their responses with broad statements about the bigger picture. Sounded fine so far. Many of the well practiced words were being used. But when pressed to address the realities of local planning and the design of the future of this suburb, the responses quickly descended into talking down to the residents and a rejection of ideas being put forward by the residents. The residents felt that the responses in fact became very patronizing and left nothing open for further discussion. It was very much felt by the residents that as far as their elected government and their bureaucrats were concerned, the case was closed and the residents had better get used to it! Market forces would drive the change! Of course there's more complexity to this—but this was the message received.

On my criteria mentioned above—how people behave in their own 'Backyard', I have to say that the local Government officials failed.

Nevertheless, the residents remained positive, and the debate continued in subsequent meetings. Following a meeting between the ACT Chief Minister, his senior advisors, the chair of the residents group and myself, the residents have been assured that there will be a whole of government response to the issues as raised. The Chief Minister engaged in a very direct, intelligent and open conversation and has identified with the issues and has agreed that matters should be addressed. We are yet to have real outcomes but at least the debate was undertaken with respect for all points of view. It is really that simple!

I have to say that using the same criteria again that the ACT Chief Minister and his senior advisors definitely pass the 'Backyard' test.

For myself as the CEO of a national professional institute, it continues to be a reminder that as we develop national advocacy tools and policy statements to address the bigger picture issues, it is vital that the advocacy has relevance to the 'Backyard'. It is good to walk the policy into local issues. I look forward to hearing reports of registered members using the contents of the AILA National Policy Statements in their own local and Backyard debates.

About Wetlands

A timely reminder recently of the attitude of other national advocates with the ear of local and national governments, and who are very much linked to local planning here in Canberra.

'Wetlands—they are just swamps with street furniture!'

The quote is taken from an uploaded video on the Property Council web site.

For me I am positive about natural swamps—but I do not think the speaker meant that. And as it is a suburban wetland is being constructed a block away from my home. The local community will be celebrating its completion. This wetland is part of a complex of wetlands being constructed around the inner north of Canberra. This work is initiated through a different ACT Government Minister. Just shows that good things can happen in this backyard of mine! Most likely the Property Council heavies will not be joining the local residents in these celebrations—but you never know.

http://www.environment.act.gov.au/water/constructed_wetlands



North Canberra Wetland Under Construction—Photo Paul Costigan

The Green Building Council and Community Frameworks and/or Precinct Tools

There have been several queries about whether the AILA should be involved more with the Green Building Council of Australia in its more recent projects relating to Precinct Tools and Strategies.

The AILA has sent out invites to the Green Building Council of Australia since mid 2007 about how the AILA, representing the Australian Registered Landscape Architects, would very much like to formally engage with the Green Building Council on possible tools relating to landscape values and in current terminology, to the Australian Landscape Principles and Green Infrastructure.

With the Green Building Council conducting project consultations initially in 2009 and 2010 around the topic of Precinct Tools and more lately on the broader topic of Green Star Communities Framework, the AILA has requested some form of formal relationship to enhance AILA Registered Landscape Architects' influence over outcomes. The view being that while the former work on Green Star for Buildings was very much about 'buildings', landscape architects thought that just maybe when the Green Building Council worked on precinct materials that surely this would open up opportunities for real dialogue and for relevant outcomes.

One could speculate that the reason for any resistance to formal AILA involvement would be that the Green Building Council exists to primarily to develop tools for the property industry in the quest to ensure that the property industry can meet the standards as set by the rating tools developed by the property industry—a form of self regulation and far enough. Landscape architects in Australia have measures that could enhance these tools to make them ever so more relevant to landscape values. Of course there could also be the anxiety that once Landscape Principles were to be accepted by the Green Building Council, the previously accepted rating tools for buildings would have to be revisited to ensure that Green Buildings in fact have a positive influence on the total environment and the total precinct, and the landscape, not just to minimize their environmental effect on energy, air etc.

In the 21st Century with the complexities of climate change and the need to address the related biodiversity and ecological issues and to base Sustainable Settlement decisions on the Australian Landscape Principles, the needs of intelligent and forward thinking development and the core values of landscape architects are mutually beneficial to society's future and the survival of this planet. The debate continues.

A case for Integrated Design Commissions in all states and territories

Paul Costigan, AILA Chief Executive Officer

A discussion paper published to seek feedback from the AILA membership.

Much of the text is more or less a direct lift from a South Australian document on the SA Integrated Design Commission.

While most states have some form of Planning Authority or Planning Departments, some now have State Architects and there are a range of specialist Authorities set up for particular planning and development, these are very much the models we have inherited from the 20th Century. It is now timely to follow the lead of the South Australian Government and to look to linking Design, Planning and Development into one overarching commission to work directly to the heads of governments to bring about a far more integrated approach to design, planning and the delivery within all our settlements, large and small, metropolitan, rural, regional, remote, coastal or wherever.

The key objective of an Integrated Design Commission is to advocate for the value of design and to advise on processes to achieve design excellence in the built environment through an intelligent investment approach. Such Commissions should connect the existing strengths of the State, within government, the private sector and professional organisations by building on tradition, embracing global and local challenges, and to bring about change.

The core role of the Commission should be to use models of collaboration and highly inclusive and transparent decision-making processes. Constructive engagement through consultation with communities to raise public awareness of design will be a major part of the Commission's work. Domains and range of scales of design and the built environment include: Regions, Landscapes, Cities, Communities, Precincts, Streetscapes, Buildings, Interiors, and Products.

The Integrated Design Commission model avoids the specialist approach that has been the tradition of Planning Authorities whereby one profession have been mostly in the dominant role. The Integrated Design Commission is intended to engage and integrate all design disciplines and create a trans-disciplinary model of integration in depth and breadth, and not a hierarchy or bias of professions. Decision making processes should engender trust amongst all stakeholders, while fostering mutual respect and understanding of all disciplines. Such a model of integrated decision-making must be up-front and occur throughout the design, planning and development process; engendering a value on design excellence and encouraging innovations.

Disciplines of design include: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Architecture/Design, Community Development; Urban Design; Urban Planning, Heritage Conservation/Preservation/Restoration; Adaptive Reuse, Regional Planning, Rural/Suburban Communities,

Industrial Design/Product Design, Lighting Design, Communication Design/Graphic Design, Interaction Design, Exhibition and Experience Design/Way finding/ Public Art.

Design excellence should be achieved through leadership and recognition that solutions come from constructive partnerships between academia, government, industry, professional organisations, and the community. The Integrated Design operation is based on providing education, supporting evidence and research, professional multi-disciplinary expertise, and best practice outcomes that will improve the quality of life for all levels of society and sustainability of the environment.

The Integrated Design Commission should comprise: A Commissioner who could be appointed from any relevant profession and oversee other key positions such as the Government Architect, Chief Landscape Architect, Chief Planner, Chief Engineer and others and be advised by a multi disciplinary board of about 8 to 10 Design Professionals.

Other areas of interest for the Integrated Design include: Developers and Property Sector, Environmental Scientists and Managers, Heritage and Conservation Specialists, Human/Social Scientists, Infrastructure Specialists, Community/Indigenous Culture Leaders, People with Disability Planners, Service Providers, Social Planners, Housing Specialists, and social Inclusion Consultants.

The Integrated Design Commission model should deliver a whole-of-Government approach in advocating for and advising on design, through advancing and integrating all targets defined in the Government's Strategic Planning. The Commission should bring a high level of expert knowledge to improve understanding in the design, development and delivery of the built environment.

The Integrated Design Commission should provide leadership and independent expert advice and strategic direction to the Premier/Chief Ministers, Ministers, and significant decision-makers in government on all matters relating to design and the built environment including land use, ecology, housing, urban design, green infrastructure, infrastructure, transport, energy.



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04

Not on the agenda (unplanned moments)—we had finished our agenda items for the day and Paul had dismissed us.

Niall Simpson FAILA, AILA National Councillor

We had just been let out for the day and were giggling our way down Alfred street. The girls had had a hot tip from Adam the local with the know: 'Oh did you know the Whitely garden is just over there.'

The others were pumped, unfortunately, me I am a bit of hick to comprehend the significance of the tip and the journey we were about to take. But boy did I get stick when I rang home, what!!! you went where!!! how come you get to go to all these places, you don't even like gardens. Ouch. (This will be the third celebrity garden I have bumbled my way into, Hobbs at 16, Forest hall home of rose guru and now the Whitely garden, so I am well out of brownie points, cause if I was smart I could have been right for life—oh well such is the flip side of unplanned moments).

Luna park was just glitzed past, we were on a mission, the rumor went that just along the boardwalk then under the railway up some steps and its just sort of there. Typical of those explicit directions that can only be given by a local and understood by a local.

So with our secret instructions we set off. Despite the gravity of the mission we could but not help to snap a few shots and marvel at the light that was bathing the harbour and all and sundry. Some fountain grasses were chastised, they are a weed elsewhere, not in Tassie though the cooler climes seems to keep them in check as well as still being a novelty.

Ah ha—which tunnel was it? Try the first, and wallah there it was the legendary (apparently) Whitely garden. We climbed the steps and the scope and context started to unveil itself almost immediately to me. Not only was my learning curve steep but also the site was very very steep, wellingtonian.

Apparently it is Railcorp land that Wendy, that's Mrs Whitely to you, has converted from a sandstone cliff to a unique garden. With no authority other than a passion and her own convictions. It's a lovely eclectic ramble and scramble that I believe would challenge most Landscape Architects, not physically I don't think we are an obese profession. A virtual real playground for the mind as well as the child in us all. The Garden is like a lovely creeper clinging tenuously both physically and statutorily to a lost space. Exploring all the fissures of the space and colonizing all the nooks and crannies with devotion and passionate tenacity.

After getting my bearings and a quick brain spasm of a plan of action I ran (not literally, a national councillor must maintain some sense of decorum) to the furthest corner like any child. One is seduced to drop down into the bowel of the garden and explore the base. After flitting from space to space and marveling at all their little collections the decision has to be made; go up or back the way you came, which is no fun, been there done that. So the myriad of crazy vertical paths must be the go. After a quick but steep ascent one pops out onto a local council maintained lawn and gazetted open space. What a contrast. Which is more fulfilling the right brain tweets? The rest of the group were espied emerging from the slope, we seemed

to have lost Paul Harding. Being the perceptive male that I am I noticed the girls were edging about and another lady working, obviously not a North Sydney council employee. I caught up with the others and entered the discussions mid stream.

Do you think it could be?—is it?—Have you ever met her?

Well only one way to find out so of I barged to approach or affront the odd lady out. I just assumed that she was whom she was suppose to be and started with a neutral anal question about public liability (working in local government does that to you) just in case she actually wasn't the Mrs. Whitely and the rest as they say is history. The girls joined us, we conversed and strolled back to her house where we were requested to sign the visitors book and more warm conversation followed.

Many things sprang to mind, role of design, future of this place, was it a candidate for the AILA awards. Here was a unique place that ticked just about all the boxes but somewhat outside the normal parameters of our consideration. How many other hidden jewels of places are there out there.

Ah its good to be brought back to place. I usually get a bit squirmish about gardening and landscape architecture but this is an exception.

Mmm what's for tea? Chinese? Thai?



The Whitely Garden

Group photo by Paul Harding

Garden Pictures by Paul Costigan

Slumming It Paul Harding AILA National Vice President

05

I was channel surfing the other night and came across a program on ABC TV (I don't have digital) called 'Slumming It', hosted by Kevin McLeod of 'Grand Designs' fame, which also used to appear on the ABC.

The program revolved around the experience of Mr McLeod being dropped in the proverbial, almost literally, by being immersed in Asia's largest slum, Dharavi, a place that occupies 1 square mile, in the centre of India's financial capital, Mumbai. Our intrepid presenter was to live in this slum of over 1 million people for a couple of weeks to observe the life of the residents at first hand. It was arranged that he was hosted by a family who lived there and share in their everyday life.

Fearless Kevin had never even been to India before so the whole experience was to be an experience he would never forget.

After his initial shock at the lack of basic infrastructure and apparent squalor he came to marvel at the 'chaotic yet fine grained nature of life' in this organic settlement. He observed 'real, functioning communities' in a built environment unregulated by Government but self regulated by the people who lived there resulting in vibrant, interactive and safe communities. The dwelling he stayed in was home to 21 people and he had to wait until the family had finished socialising, usually late at night, before unrolling his mattress to sleep on the floor of the single room. He didn't like the rats coming out to play after everyone had gone to sleep though.



Apparently this city within a city hosts 15,000 'factories' producing items from clay pottery to the handles we use to drag our luggage around airports and is responsible for recycling 80 percent of Mumbai's waste. How the place functions seems to be a mystery, but it does function and the people who live there seem happy enough with some being 2nd generation residents.

Kevin questioned the contrast of this urban fabric with modern, western, well planned but sterile, hostile suburbs and high rise developments and posed the question—do we do better?

At a cocktail party he attended later, in a nearby apartment tower overlooking the slum, he came to appreciate that the only experience most Mumbai residents had of Dharavi was from above and they regarded it as an embarrassment to the newly emerging urbane city.

We learned that there were plans to bulldoze the slum and redevelop it into smart new apartment blocks and retail centres. There were assurances that 'some' of the residents would be offered accommodation in the new development but it was obvious that the vital interaction at street level would be lost. At a presentation by one of the developers, Kevin observed that the apartment towers bore a striking resemblance to those built in western cities in the 1970s and '80s and which had contributed to many social problems.

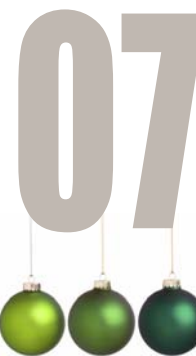
It would seem that the future of this unique place and the communities that made it so are sealed in the same way that the genius loci of other places have submerged beneath past tidal waves of progress. Is this the right way to go; is this the best way forward? Who knows, only history will tell.

2011 AILA National Conference

Brisbane Convention Centre (in the new wing)

Thursday–Saturday, 11–13 August 2011

www.aila.org.au/transform/



2011 AILA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Climate Change: challenges, opportunities and urban design solutions

transform

...considered as the verb, we can think of it in terms of...

Transforming urban landscapes—turning brownfields into greenfields, sprawl v. consolidation, green infrastructure, reconnecting urban precincts, urban design for resiliency in the face of climate change; scales of transformation—from the metropolitan to the backyard.

Transforming attitudes and behaviour—communicating about change, communicating landscape values and principles, spreading the language of landscape; changing from a culture of consumption to one of sustainability.

Transforming communities—through participation and engagement; capacity building and community development; cultural expressions; landscape and public health; pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments; community gardening and other significant shared public spaces.

Transforming practice—working in collaboration with other disciplines, pro bono work, integrated design solutions.

Transforming education—the instrument of change; research and new knowledge, new technologies for delivering education, continual learning, situated and service learning.

Evolutionary v. revolutionary transformations—is landscape architecture destined to be evolutionary because of the time it takes for our work to become apparent?

Technology speeds up the possibility for communicating our ideas and for simulating the development of a landscape over time, but the reality of transformation is much slower.



Photograph by Paul Costigan



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Katharine Nieberler-Walker FAILA

Greg Grabasch AILA

Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

GPO Box 1646
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Telephone: 02 6248 9970

Facsimile: 02 6249 7337

Email: admin@aila.org.au

www.aila.org.au

AILA State Group Contacts

ACT AILA Group President

Michael Reeves AILA
GPO Box 1646
CANBERRA ACT 2601

NSW AILA Group President

Jane Irwin AILA
NSW AILA State Manager
PO Box 655
LANE COVE NSW 2066
02 9427 4669
nsww@aila.org.au

NT AILA Group President

Tony Cox FAILA
GPO Box 3359
DARWIN NT 0801

QLD AILA Group President

Jean Rousseaux AILA
QLD AILA State Manager
PO Box 7342
East Brisbane QLD 4169
07 3040 2452
qld@aila.org.au

SA AILA Acting President

Tanya Court AILA
GPO Box 1584
ADELAIDE SA 5001

TAS AILA Group President

Lesley Gulson AILA
GPO Box 374—D
HOBART TAS 7000

VIC AILA Group President

Scott Graham AILA
VIC AILA State Manager
03 9016 0111
victoria@aila.org.au

WA AILA Group President

Matt Huxtable AILA
PO Box 5680
St George Terrace
Perth WA 6831
wa@aila.org.au

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Chief Executive Officer

Paul Costigan

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