

karres+brands

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Being a European office, we just recently became aware of the intensive discussion around the developments on Federation Square. As the landscape architect of the project we have been involved in the design process from the beginning and feel the need to weigh in on the discussion.

Initially we were surprised by the public's emotional reaction to the plans of the Victorian Government and Apple. Later we understood that the city was faced with the hard fact of demolishing the Yarra building, with no public consultation or debate. And that's where the main problem lies for us. Because the discussion is not so much about architecture, but about culture. Architecture by itself does not often generate real emotion, but culture and cultural identity does! In that way, the public reaction is the biggest compliment for the project. It is a sign that Federation Square moved from an architectural project, to being part of Australian culture. It became a truly cultural public space, successful and embraced by the citizens of Melbourne. An icon for the city, a place to come together, celebrate, protest and share.

In our opinion, Federation Square was never designed to be an icon! It was designed to be part of the lively city of Melbourne. A contemporary interpretation of the Melbourne city block, with its lanes and arcades, permeable and public, that facilitate a mix of cultural program, commercial activities and temporary events. Federation Square is not a single building but part of a vibrant city.

Healthy cities are in a constant state of change. Otherwise they become museums! Like everywhere else in Melbourne, buildings are renovated, transformed or demolished based on new insights and commercial or public demands. "If you don't want to change anything, you will lose what you want to keep" (Gustav Heinemann), is a quote we strongly believe in. This is true for Federation Square as well. The project can, and must handle change. If the framework of public squares, lanes and galleries is respected. If the original intent and scale of the project is preserved, changes are possible. Including demolishing and replacing a building. Especially when the original ambition of bridging the link between the CBD and Yarra River through a lively cultural piece of the city can be improved.

The Yarra building was designed as a commercial building, but was never really successful, as seen by the frequent change of tenants. Furthermore, by having the riverbank and integration of the vaults taken out of the original project, the relation with the river was never fully explored. So, rethinking, and eventually demolishing the Yarra building is in our opinion not a bad thing.

Apples initiative raises another question: the issue of site specificity of corporate architecture. How do you balance brand image with the need for site specific intervention. In our opinion the proposal for the Apple store does not fit in the characteristic design approach. Federation Square could have been the place for the most unique Apple Flagship store. A store that reflects Australian culture above brand image and is respectful of the city. **Think global, but act local!** With a thorough process of consultation,

founded in the original ambitions of the project, a new catalyst could have been added to Federation Square, and that way to the city of Melbourne.

The Karres en Brands team