

Cultural Capital - designing environments that can be sustained across generations

Reading an article in this month's Virgin inflight magazine drew my attention to the issue of what are the key features of our much touted 'cultural environment'. In recent real estate marketing, the mention of a vibrant local village culture can often be seen as a driver of the sales hype - but what does it mean?

Culture is a vital part of our lives, and artists are a vital part of our culture, but rising rents and elite real estate is pushing them further to the fringes of the urban areas where cheaper spaces for galleries and performance venues provide them with essential public interfaces. As the inner urban hype weaves its magic, they have been kicked out of warehouse studios as developers pander to the consumer market for groovy post-industrial chic.

While Lane Cove sometimes feels like a cultural vacuum, it has a rich legacy of artists such as Lloyd Rees and Robert Woodward, as well as many contemporary practitioners in painting, sculpture, jewellery, pottery and the more performance areas of literature, poetry, music, dance and emerging fields of electronic and digital expression....but most of the actual creativity happens behind the scenes, out of the public eye.

Lane Cove Council has recently renewed its Public Art Committee, and there is a huge opportunity for this initiative to regenerate energy and interest in local culture to help the village public domain respond to demands of population increase from new residential development, and to help generate more local participation in many aspects of community life.

Art does not have to be gallery hung – Lane Cove ALIVE ran Voce-n-ale (acronym of Lane Cove) in conjunction with Lane Cove library and Gallery Lane Cove for 2 years (2012/3) in an attempt to enervate and support local talent in visual art, music, social media, poetry and performance.



Galleries and museums alone do not constitute culture - the gentrification of Sydney's inner urban areas removes layers of expressive output and has become synonymous with a creative exodus - there are also many side benefits of cultural investment for economic and community development. Richard Florida, an urban studies theorist in USA, is a strong advocate for the creatives and in his 2002 book 'the rise of the creative class' he rated human creativity as the new raw material, one of our most important future growth industries - *'when most people articulate their image of the world's great communities, they describe them in terms of the arts'*

Robert Lynch CEO of Americans for the Arts In 2012 Florida updated his book, reflecting on the GFC impacts he stated - *'our fledgling creative economy needs to give way to a fully creative society, one that is more just, more equitable, more sustainable and more prosperous. Our economic future depends on it.'*

Sydney real estate is suddenly among the most expensive in the world - but the character of trendy new neighbourhoods can quickly become sterile if gentrification, like smoke haze from bushfires, drifts over the demographic divide. Balancing the aspirant needs for spatial, creative and economic freedom with urban renewal demands is critical if we are to sustain and foster our cultural ambitions, not just for the elite but also at the emergent and start-up levels that can also underpin the local economy via back lane studios, street performance and markets.

Joe Hockey's 2015 budget has tax incentives for small business and start-ups - what better way to stimulate our local economy than encourage more space in our village to accommodate our resident creatives, whether in vacant shopfronts or through more flexible planning to allow operations that produce and sell direct to the public. These can often be collaborative affairs where shared resources keep a cap on overhead and management costs, and can become 'pop-ups' that activate the dead pockets in streets and lanes.

City of Sydney has become a strong advocate for the arts and cultural entrepreneurship, and development of the former light industrial areas around Green Square now integrates a variety of spaces and places that can integrate cultural elements and events. Lane Cove also has the potential to follow such directions with spaces soon to emerge in the Little Street development opposite the Aquatic Centre, and the mooted Rosenthal car park redevelopment could likewise contain a cluster of accessible shells along Birdwood Lane that could emulate the intimate shop-house spaces that are common in Melbourne laneways.



Design thinking is a recently coined term for the type of innovation that can evolve from collaborative frameworks, as an interface between creative and productive energies that can stimulate different ways of sharing our spread of talents and resources to get real outcomes. Is it too hopeful to think such an approach might be possible in our fast changing Lane Cove village, getting the Public Art Committee and other local groups to work with Council and real estate agents to capture some cultural capital!

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