Imagined Cities and Urban Spaces: a future for their heritage with Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) Recommendations

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The Centenary of Canberra in 2013 was a highly symbolic occasion for Australians and Australia’s national capital. To celebrate Canberra’s 100 years of heritage, Australia ICOMOS and two ICOMOS International Scientific Committees (ISCs) combined to have a major professional function of a symposium and a conference.

The symposium titled *Issues and Opportunities for Cultural Landscapes and Routes in the 21st Century* hosted by ICOMOS-IFLA International Scientific Committee (ISC) on Cultural Landscapes and the ICOMOS ISC on Cultural Routes was followed by the Australia ICOMOS Conference titled *Imagined Pasts Imagined Futures*. Together these fora yielded many papers packed with significant information that also raised critical concerns. A number of journal issues are underway. This particular issue of *Historic Environment* brings together a selection of papers that focused on the imaginings of cities and the importance of city urban spaces.

Although the Centenary of the City of Canberra was the catalyst for both the symposium and the conference, many papers from international experts provided perspectives from other parts of the world that help to place the heritage of youthful Canberra and its open spaces in a global context. While Canberra is a city of just over 100 years, and is suffering from a lack of appreciation and recognition of its 20th Century heritage, we are fortunate in this issue to have for comparison the story of the central core of Beijing. In this contemporary world Beijing is able to demonstrate the expression of very ancient city planning dating back to over 2000 years.

In recent years UNESCO developed a tool to aid in the conservation of cities to capture not just the historic architectural and archaealogical core but also the landscape setting, social value, sustainability and more. This is the *UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes* (HUL) adopted in 2011 (http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/638). It is satisfying to note how, in this group of papers, professionals are referring to the HUL recommendations in their research and that two of the papers in this issue chiefly exemplify the policies, tools and capacity-building suggestions.

The papers presented in this particular journal issue are loosely grouped under three themes that capture the spirit of the title of this issue: (i) *imagining cities* – the story of the conceptual planning and ongoing development of cities; (ii) *historic urban landscapes* (HUL) that focus on the application of the UNESCO HUL recommendations; and (iii) *urban open spaces* capturing green systems, green belts and importantly including Indigenous associations in urban spaces. We note that the papers may not necessarily fit snugly into one theme but these thematic groupings better present the important dimensions of this heritage story.
Imagining Cities

The conference in Australia’s capital city during the Centenary year provided opportunities for reflecting on early imaginings, remembering, taking stock and imagining futures. We remembered that Australians by the late 19th Century had begun imagining a new Australia, a new country with a federation of states and territories not dominated by Britain and colonialism. Walter Burley Griffin, winner of the design competition for a capital city for this newly federated nation, said,

I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any government authorities in the world would accept. I have planned the ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the future. (New York Times 1912)

The theme imagining cities dealt with design, nation building and heritage and asked how can we conserve legacy designs and historic urban landscapes, and also encourage ongoing creativity and excellence in heritage-listed cities. Three papers on imagined cities, while differing markedly in scale and time depth identify issues in conserving legacy designs and suggest a range of approaches to adopt. Sheridan Burke, a key-note speaker for the conference responded powerfully to the challenge in her lecture, *Imagineering Canberra*.

Burke’s paper is being published in this issue as it was delivered at the conference. She outlines the design context of the city and the enduring contributions of Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin, assisted by the forester Charles Weston and botanist Lindsay Pryor and generations of planners and landscape architects who have followed their lead. Burke traces the layers of Canberra’s urban planning and the painful realities of translating the Griffins’ ideal into an emerging city. However, by the time Griffin felt forced to retire from the project, the essential elements of the Griffins’ ideal city plan – the geometric avenues, the axes and the form of the central lake – were firmly established. Later influences, Sulman and the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, garden suburbs, post World War II influences of international modernism, the British planner William Holford, the design of Brasilia, the National Capital Development Commission ‘Y’ plan development of new town centres, and city plans made since self-government in 1988 have coalesced into contemporary Canberra.

Burke reminded conference delegates that the year-long 2013 celebration of Canberra’s Centenary promoted its extraordinary history and heritage values to the local and national communities – and yet it is still not officially recognised as a place of national, let alone international heritage significance. She made a compelling case for both National and World Heritage Listing for Canberra, highlighting the lack of a carefully constructed World Heritage tentative list which presents the breadth of Australia’s heritage, and suggested ICOMOS take an interest in this.

Burke identified that increasing ICOMOS activism may not be enough in times of diminishing government engagement with heritage and the adverse impacts on heritage resources. She issued a challenge to us all to use our imaginations and seize new ways to be good communicators of heritage values and community interests.

Bruce Pennay in his paper *Imagining Albury-Wodonga* queries who does the imagining? Using the Albury-Wodonga National Growth Centre experiment in 1973 Pennay outlines some of the challenges encountered in preparing for exhibitions to mark the inauguration of the fortieth anniversary of the project. The exhibitions trace how the story of Albury-Wodonga was imagined, re-imagined and constructed, and how it is remembered. He finds that it was essentially ‘a case study of place-making – a key heritage activity’.

Pennay identifies three stories of national and regional importance that Albury-Wodonga encapsulated, all of which related to the past but addressed present and future concerns: the geography of population growth; a cooperative federalism experiment; and an exercise in place making, both physically and mentally. Each is, in its way a cautionary tale. Selective decentralisation has not been the success that was envisioned and Pennay notes that this affects the remembering of the place. Similarly the story of the complex cooperative federalism initiative stagnated as funding was cut; currently there is a lack of government ownership in the project.
Evidence of place-making is also problematic as the physical fabric associated with the planned rapid development of the 1970s and 80s is the layout of the newly developed areas, which is unremarkable. Few public buildings are associated by the community with the growth centre experiment. Pennay suggests that State cross-border cohesion at a community level is the most enduring effect of the experiment. Interestingly, the exhibitions about the National Growth Centre experiment resonate most strongly with newcomers to the place. He suggests that the ‘fragile’ heritage of the experiment needs constant retelling.

Guo Zhan, also a keynote speaker at the conference presented a paper *Beijing City and World Heritage* that provides an international perspective and bridges the themes of *imagining cities* and *historic urban landscapes*.

Guo’s paper *Beijing City and World Heritage* demonstrates that the central axis of Beijing is an urban landscape containing a significant heritage legacy worthy of consideration for World Heritage listing. Guo notes that town planning for an imagined city such as for Beijing was explained in the *Rites of Zhou* recorded in the 2nd Century BC, with set numbers of vertical and horizontal avenues, central locations for important buildings such as a temple and an imperial palace, and the links of urban planning with aesthetics and ethics of morality. Guo points out that the concept of a central axis, one of the defining characteristics of a capital city throughout Chinese history, continues to influence the layout of the historic city of Beijing. Referencing historic city planning principles and spatial patterns Guo presents international readers with an understanding of the full meaning and significance of the central axis as a Confucian ideal, maintaining the balance and harmony of the imperial capital.

Guo proposes that nominating the Beijing Central Axis as a Cultural Landscape would provide the most logical approach for a World Heritage Listing. He recognises that the nomination process will be challenging, particularly relating to issues of integrity and reconstruction. As a way forward he suggests using the Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) framework as a management and planning approach to assist the nomination proposal.

**Historic Urban Landscapes**

International concern on the modern development pressures on heritage cities stimulated UNESCO to develop the *Recommendations on Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL). The paper by Ken Taylor, *The HUL concept and cities as cultural landscapes: Canberra a missed opportunity* commences with a sound discussion on the initiative of the HUL process. Taylor explains how the HUL process covers ideas embedded in landscape, including the cognitive meanings, the associative values and the intangible values.
Zhuijiajiao, a town in China, is presented by Taylor as example of changing social values in the city where tourism is now an economic driver. But the modern changes have not destroyed the tangible and intangible values and significantly, the community retains a strong sense of ownership. This leads on to a discussion of ‘cultural capital’, a term that arose some years ago, anchored in sustainability and cultural landscapes. The HUL concept in enhancing livability, social cohesion as well as economic development appears to have built on the cultural capital concept.

In the later section of Taylor’s paper the focus is on Canberra, touching on its history but more essentially on its landscape and the way the landscape defines the city morphology. He notes how Canberra retains its city-in-the-landscape origin through planning guidelines that parallel HUL principles. Taylor concludes by criticising the unfulfilled national heritage assessments, strongly articulating concerns resulting from self-government in 1988 and warning of local vested development interests.

The second paper within the HUL theme is Historic Urban Landscape Research in China: the Slender West Lake in Yangzhou by Han Feng. This paper presents a well constructed example of a detailed application of the HUL principles in a study Han conducted with a multidisciplinary team of heritage specialists. The paper commences with an overview history of the city of Yangzhou, noting how its location on the Grand Canal and Yangtze River gave it a strategic and economic trading importance. Although Yangzhou is an ancient city the paper notes that it had lost a lot of its heritage features due to urbanisation. However, Yangzhou was a leading city in the Grand Canal World Heritage nomination, thus presenting an opportunity to investigate the city’s historic importance and heritage values.

Research focused on Yangzhou’s major and ancient landscape feature, Slender West Lake. The research team worked with the municipal governments, land managers and local citizens. Han describes the theoretical and analytical approach that resulted in six reports focusing on Slender West Lake: the dynastic history; the interpretation of aspects of culture as – religious, scholar’s, imperial, political, commercial and civic; the patterns and characteristics of landscape elements; landscape character and text analysis research; and importantly, the authenticity and integrity of the landscape that could direct the limits of acceptable change.

The presentation is well supported with plan diagrams that illustrate the historical changes to Slender West Lake. Han notes how the study has been a rebirth not just for the lake but also for the city and how it has stimulated civic interest. The application of the HUL process demonstrates its effectiveness particularly in terms of establishing management objectives with strong local identity.

**Urban Spaces**

Urban spaces can loosely be considered as the green matrix of urban areas that encompass gardens, street verges, parks, urban plantations, arboreta, urban water courses, urban wetlands, designed water systems or green systems, green belts, urban hills and mountains, as well as the interface areas of cities with rivers, lakes and oceans. They can be formally or informally designed, relict landscapes or natural areas, or intensely used for active or passive recreation. The urban spaces can also be ‘loose’ space – areas used irregularly for impromptu or planned activities. The water catchment courses of the spaces can provide significant ecological communities and climate moderators. As landscape space they provide beauty with numerous complexities of aesthetic evocations in their spatial grandeur or spatial intimacy. Importantly there is increasing recognition of local peoples’ significant associations of past events, memories and meanings that may include cultural practices and obligations, ceremonies and rituals relating to the particular place.

Three papers are discussed within the urban spaces theme and readers will find that they provide stimulating discussions on three very different aspects of heritage. The papers commence with Aboriginal places in cities by Neale Draper. This important paper discusses associational values of Aboriginal people with urban landscapes that hold their community’s memories and culture. Draper points out that the associational and intangible values have been largely unheeded in
the past as Australian land managers focused on the tangible archaeological features or human modifications of landscape places. He mentions how in the minds of the public, Indigenous sacred sites of mythology, ceremony and creation appear to be associated specifically with the outback. Draper further notes that claims by Indigenous communities that their cultural and traditional associations with some Adelaide urban landscapes were rejected by past governments on the grounds that the cultural meanings had not been written down. Such blinkered views of Indigenous cultural values are troubling given that associational values have been recognised in heritage organisations for many years.

To support his arguments on the existence and significance of these places, Draper presents descriptive case studies of Kuarna people in South Australia, their associations with the Adelaide’s river landscapes of the Torrens and Onkaparinga Rivers and the struggle of the Kuarna to have their urban landscape heritage recognised and protected. He recounts some stories associated with specific features within these landscapes. One such place is an area within Adelaide Botanic Gardens that was used as a Kuarna community gathering place in living memory. Draper’s paper reminds us of how important it is for modern and future generations to recognise, respect and safeguard these significant associations of urban spaces.

The second paper in the theme, Historic Urban Green Systems – a yet undervalued topic in the field of the preservation of Cultural Landscapes, is presented by Jochen Martz and is a study of urban green systems that provide type profile examples for a suggested typology. For heritage evaluators a typology is an essential tool for comparative evaluations of heritage places. The paper provides an international perspective on designed urban green systems tracing their quite lengthy history to modern times. The fascinating history provided by Martz well illustrates the scope of green systems that have existed throughout history and the many that continue to function in locations across the globe.

Martz notes how public open green space was considered important in ancient times and although few have survived, St Peter’s Square in Basel has endured as an urban space since 1277 when developed by the friars of St. Peter. Although Martz mentions the ancient green belt system established around ancient Rome, the oldest intact green system noted in the paper is the system of allées in the medieval town of Regensburg with Stadtamhof developed in 1779. Martz further notes how parks existing in London today were once part of a linked chain of parks and how some historic urban fortifications areas in Europe have been transformed into green systems. Also discussed are the changes in recreation uses, some from marksmen’s meadows for practising cross bow shooting, some lawns that become skating rinks in winter, and the many inclusions such as late 19th Century children’s paddling areas. This story encompasses green systems of the USA focusing on the works of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Canberra’s green system is also presented as one of the best international examples.

Martz mentions his concern for the lack of heritage listing of green systems and how even in the World Heritage-listed town of Regensburg with Stadtamhof, the green system is not mentioned in the listing report. In some cases important green systems suffer from development impacts and some are utilised in part as buffer zones to architectural heritage without respecting their green system boundaries. A suggested typology with five types of green systems concludes the paper thus providing a useful reference for landscape heritage specialists.

The discussion on the heritage of green systems leads onto the issues in planning for a future for such systems. Reconciling competing values of urban open space in two national capitals by Andrew Mackenzie and Gay Williamson reviews the planning policies for the open spaces of two national capital cities, Canberra and Ottawa. Although Ottawa is an evolved city, Canberra is foremost an imagined city in which the landscape features set the city layout plan.

Mackenzie and Williamson note the similarities of the cities, their open space governance, planning, and contemporary issues. The history of the landscape planning policies that laid the base for the urban spaces of both cities is discussed. Both cities have shared national and municipal/territory governance and are under pressure from urban expansion and adequate resources to manage their open space systems.
Both cities have a national planning organisation to protect the national values with the open space landscape as central in the concept of national significance. In both cases better understanding of the landscape values have been incorporated into their metropolitan planning. These urban open space areas are national features and known as Ottawa’s National Capital Green Belt and in the case of Canberra, the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS).

For heritage planners the Mackenzie Williamson paper is a refreshing discourse discussing the conservation of the Ottawa and Canberra open space systems from a planning perspective. It mentions how measurable indicators are used in evaluating planning but also points out concerns when only selected indicators are applied. The paper notes issues in managing large-scale urban spaces as a homogenous area, stating that this can lead to degradation. A planning approach is generally based on a delineation of zones, linked to land use policies that cover appropriate activities within each zones.

This Mackenzie Williamson paper is useful for heritage specialists in gauging the difference between the urban planning and heritage conservation management planning. Heritage management – a conservation of heritage values, generally has been a bottom-up approach based on succinct heritage facts relating to a place and the particular attributes that express the heritage value. The heritage facts or values are supported by evidence and each value is scrutinised in its ability to reach the required threshold.

Issues that arise from the heritage conservation approach are that many heritage nominations reflect the interests of the nominator and are at times devoid of enriching data that may have been considered to not quite reach the threshold. An example is the national heritage listing of Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout, one of the first national heritage listings for a large urban space. However, the listing is devoid of the Indigenous values discussed in the Neale Draper’s paper as it is understood that they were not considered ‘outstanding to the nation’.

An issue for future national heritage listings would be to ensure that there be a complementary state listing that includes known values of a slightly lower threshold or ensure that those values are protected in management. As noted in the HUL recommendations, associational and intangible values that have been overlooked in the past can be recognised and respected in management. A successful integration of heritage conservation management planning with land use management planning is desirable in urban landscapes and their open spaces. Heritage specialists who work in these areas can encourage the inclusion of heritage management policies in Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) or other land use planning instruments.

Figure 2: The significant Lake Burley Griffin system of central Canberra. Image: J.Ramsay
Conclusion

Of the 99 presentations at the combined event of the international ICOMOS symposium and Australia ICOMOS conference, this issue covers only eight but we are delighted with this group as they expound on interesting aspects of 21st Century heritage and demonstrate maturing heritage approaches. Heritage is moving from the architecture and archaeology that furnished the early heritage lists, to urban landscapes inclusive of substantial urban spaces and multiple values as described in these papers. The aspirations of the visionary Canberra imagined plan and the astounding continuity of the imagined Beijing city plan demonstrate the potential of ‘imagineering’. A useful typology for green systems is outlined. The HUL recommendation as a process for conservation has been well described and one paper demonstrates the application of HUL recommendations in a large-scale study. Indeed, the HUL approach accommodates issues raised in most of the papers such as the need for inclusion of associational and intangible values, the sustainability of urban spaces, partnerships with stakeholders, cooperative conservation with all levels of government as well as combined heritage and land use planning for extensive urban spaces.

The role of Canberra in our heritage thinking and concerns is ever present in this issue. Canberra is the subject of three of the eight papers and is substantially mentioned in others. Canberra’s national planning has always been for a beautiful city and national planning has, to a large extent, protected the open spaces of its landscape setting that was so expertly laid out in the Griffin plan. However development pressures on this urban space are ever present. Despite several heritage nominations covering over a decade, and the ‘nationally significant’ zoning of central Canberra in the National Capital Plan, Canberra with its brilliant planned heritage legacy, most important open space system, and its major central lake system still lacks the protection of any overarching heritage listing.

Because of the omnipresence of Canberra and its heritage landscape, a Canberra Declaration on the Heritage Listing and Heritage Conservation of Canberra’s Cultural Landscape was developed at the 2013 heritage symposium and conference. At the final plenary conference session Sheridan Burke called on delegates to support the declaration that recommended that Canberra be listed on Australia’s National Heritage List for its national and international importance. (http://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Canberra-Declaration-2013.pdf). The Declaration was carried unanimously.

As a final note, we would like to thank Tracy Ireland for her leadership and hard work in organising the ICOMOS conference. As well, we thank the international members of ICOMOS who participated in both the symposium and the conference, providing enriching contributions and expanding the heritage perspective. We also thank Aedeen Cremin for her editing assistance.

Reference