Italian influence on ‘The Parade’ — Norwood’s main street

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Today, Norwood (the City of Kensington and Norwood) in South Australia is a near-city locale similar to Carlton in Melbourne, whose main commercial centre operates as an outdoor Mediterranean-style main street, attracting weekly about five times its local population of 9000 people. Pavement cafes, reproduction workingmen’s cottages and piazza style shopping malls crowd around the main street, named and well known as ‘The Parade’. The major focus of this paper is the operation of The Parade as a multicultural main street, led by the influence of Italian ownership of this place.

The representation of the physical and social character of a place is part of power and control in urban landscapes. In his book Maps of Meaning, Peter Jackson analysed urban areas as the domains of social groups whose members have exclusive citizenship and all others are outsiders.1 In naming American commercial sites as ‘consumption landscapes’, Sharon Zukin introduced an interesting term which may be just as applicable to The Parade as it is to an American urban landscape.2 Citizenship and consumption landscapes are central to the consideration of cultural diversity in not only The Parade but many Australian cities.

The Italian contribution to the forging of Australia’s urban character, as the largest single non-British immigrant group, has received little attention. The Adelaide metropolitan area provides a very clear social landscape to chart the Italian influence because most postwar British migrants were segregated in the satellite city of Elizabeth, leaving the Italians, Greeks, Balts and other European migrants to occupy the cheap inner-urban areas then regarded as slums. The development of these areas in both physical and social terms is part of our cultural heritage.

Figure 1 Cafe Bravo, The Parade.
Italian activity in Norwood: ‘Little Italy’ or Italian ambiente

The most direct Italian influence on Norwood’s main street is that The Parade is the commercial shopfront of South Australia’s ‘Little Italy’. This Little Italy or Italian ambiente centred on Norwood is the focus of Italian and Italo-Australian activity in South Australia. It contains the co-ordinating headquarters of all statewide Italian activity — the Italian Consulate, the Italian Chamber of Commerce, Co-ordinating Italian Committee headquarters for general, social and welfare needs (CIT), and the headquarters and distribution centre for the major Italian newspaper, *Il Globo*. Also present are prominent Italian commercial premises, including major Italian food distributors, the majority of all the Italian regional and inter-regional clubs and festivals (over 60 per cent), major concentrations of Catholic schools with high proportions of Italian students, and significant numbers of Italian health and other professional services. In total nearly 70 per cent of the Italian places in this Little Italy are in the City of Kensington and Norwood Council area and on its boundary roads. Italian signage and the naming and content of commercial and business activity as listed, identify the high proportion of Italian businesses on The Parade. The extent of the use of Italian is also clear from the Italian signs and notices in local shops.

South Australia’s Italian focus in the Norwood area reflects the criteria Robert Pascoe identified in *Buongiorno Australia, Our Italian Heritage* for the constitution of an Italian ambiente as the place ‘which offers a complete range of Italian goods and services ... and the heart of Italo-Australian social life’. Pascoe mapped the locale of Carlton in Melbourne as Victoria’s ‘Little Italy’, Leichhardt in the inner western suburbs of Sydney as NSW’s ‘Little Italy’ and two major ‘Little Italies’ in Perth, the most prominent in the seaside locale of Fremantle. All the remaining states either have no significant Italian population, like Tasmania and the Northern Territory; or in Queensland’s case Italians are scattered between three major towns over a vast area. South Australia’s Little Italy in Norwood completes the mapping of the major Italian centres in the Australian landscape.

Continuity of Italian activity in Norwood

It is significant that the major commercial focus of Adelaide’s Little Italy is in the area which has the largest continuous concentration in place and over time of Italians in metropolitan Adelaide. Italians have been residing in Norwood from the 1880s to the present day, as documented by Hugo and O’Connor: Antonio Giannoni, South Australia’s first Italian settler, was a horse cab driver in Norwood’s major urban village, Kensington, from 1865 to 1883. By the 1920s Norwood had approximately 50 Italian-born residents including Antonio’s son, Peter Giannoni, Mayor from 1920 to 1922. They formed an Italian cluster and ran some small businesses in the area. The Giannoni family ran an undertaking business from premises in Kensington Village closely associated with St Ignatius Catholic Church. The connection extended throughout the
region as priests from St Ignatius also serviced the further outreaches of the
parish in nearby Magill and Campbelltown. The Italians at Campbelltown were
thus counted as members of a parish which had its Jesuit centre and the priest's
residence at St Ignatius, Norwood, and 'had a strong regional influence
extending from Kent Town to Athelstone' from these early days. 7

In the 1920s people from the southern Italian region of Campania, who 'found
the area north-east of Adelaide was an ideal place to settle', 4 concentrated
around the Torrens River market growing area at Campbelltown (see Figure 2).
During the mass migration of the 1950s and 1960s thousands more Campanians
from five villages in the hills behind Naples settled in the region, many staying
in Norwood on arrival. These migrants, their children and their families,
together with the established Italo-Australians, now constitute between 20 and
30 per cent of all residents in the local government areas in the eastern region:
Kensington and Norwood, St. Peters, Payneham and Campbelltown,
demonstrating that this Italian and Italo-Australian population are the dominant
ethnic group in the region. Many own businesses in the area and the City of
Kensington and Norwood has an Italian-born mayor, Vincenzina Ciccarello,
from San Giorgio la Molara in Campania, illustrating the complex Italian
settlement history and employment infrastructure behind the Italian shopfronts
on the main street at Norwood.
The most visible indicators of Norwood's Little Italy along the main street are a number of Italian food distributors, notably Rio Coffee (Figure 2, No. 30); Grace and Francesco Vare's generi alimentari Italiani (Figure 2, No. 22), Italian greengrocers; several macelleria (butchers' shops); hairdressers called Bellissimo, Arturo Taverna and Joe Romeo, the frock shop Florence and prominent Italian restaurants and cafes (Figure 2, Nos 23, 24 & 29). Chief among these is Cafe Buongiorno (Figure 2, No. 23) in the heart of the mainstreet. Cafe Buongiorno occupies a transformed 1920s drapers store and displays all the common signifiers of an Italian mediteraneo lifestyle. Outside, the Italian colours and fluttering umbrellas over cafe tables are like banners against a bright blue sky. Inside, the insignias of Rome and Venice feature as decorative wall and counter emblems facing rows of small inlaid wooden tables. Everywhere is an abundance of Italian food and wine.

Other major icons are the Italian festivals centring on The Parade. The South Australian Italian Festival has been a week-long event with three days of celebration mainly focussed on the Norwood Oval. Now, as an experiment in commodifying the Italian festival as a statewide cultural tourism event, it is situated in the parklands between Norwood and the city. The San Pellegrino Festival, celebrating the Patron Saint of the people from Altavilla Irpina in Campania, who mainly settled in Norwood, continues to be celebrated each January. The transformation of Norwood's main street into a central piazza and ceremonial place during these festivals has contributed a strong spiritual dimension to both the Italian and non-Italian meaning of this place. During San Pellegrino the trilogy of church, town hall (commune) and commercial centre are circled by several thousand chanting Italians. Yet in blessing the main street, the town hall activity, the shops, the houses and the people of Norwood, the priests, believers and followers, make the place an urban theatre. The Italian activity models the use of urban public spaces as theatres for the display of spiritual, intangible and inchoate aspects of a place, such as its sense and spirit or character of place.

**Italian dominance of ethnic commercial activity**

A survey of premises on the main retail trading area from Fullarton Road to Portrush Road on The Parade, from the 1950s to present day, reveals the extent of Italian dominance of total ethnic occupancy. Figures prior to 1970 were not tabulated — although Vare's general Italian store and one other continental food shop, the first recognisably ethnic foodshops, were established by 1958 — the complex of Italian ownership which now includes lawyers, travel agents and dress shops took decades to be established. Overall, Italian occupancy by ownership or lease has comprised nearly 60 per cent of all ethnic ownership, and approximately 20 per cent of all occupancy on The Parade since the 1970s. This demonstrates how strongly and consistently the Italian occupancy has dominated the ethnic component of commercial activity on the main street of Norwood.
The majority of Italian premises are owned by families or in partnership with families from the Italian region of origin. There are a number of Greek premises while Hungarians, Russians, Polish and other European clusters of mainly postwar migrants are represented by the Russian Community Centre and a variety of commercial and service activities. The area has some recent Asian migrants. However, their numbers are minimal and the multi-cultural citizenship is still characteristically an Italian-dominated European group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of premises</th>
<th>Number with Italian or Australian residence</th>
<th>Percentage ethnic Italian or Australian</th>
<th>% Italian overall total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>limited details</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>62</td>
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</table>

Table 1 Italian dominance of ethnic commercial premises on The Parade at Norwood, 1970s to 1990s.

The Parade today — Norwood’s main street

The presence of the Little Italy and the Italian dominance of ethnic commercial activity, has contributed to The Parade’s transformation from a neglected and rejected main street into a main street noted and marketed for its cosmopolitan style in the 1990s. There are five indicators of the Italian influence on The Parade which in themselves identify the components of a multicultural streetscape:

• Commercial character
• Marketing style
• Small-scale family-based commercial activity
• Public spaces
• Norwood as a regional centre

Commercial character

The Parade is cited as the attraction in all the major marketing of this area. Evidence of user assessment of the Italian influence on the cultural character of The Parade comes from many sources. A marketing survey of The Parade by McGregor Marketing, commissioned by the Kensington and Norwood City Council and the local Mainstreet (Traders) Association, found that most people, especially regular ‘citizens’ identified the Italian influence. ‘Norwood is more cosmopolitan, with an Italian influence.’

So although the cultural mapping of Norwood’s Little Italy is only fully understood by insiders, the nature of The Parade’s multicultural character was
Figure 3 Italian Festival Parade.

interpreted as Italian by its users. They were attracted to 'something like Italian grocery shops'. The larger Italian activity in the area both legitimates and authenticates the 30 or so mainly Italian-named outdoor eating areas and 25 after-hours food outlets established in recent years and operated mainly by non-Italians. This is evidence that the mainstream commercial activity of The Parade has 'adopted' the Italian style. Focaccia and cappuccino in alfresco-style cafes has in high proportion replaced the Australian deli.

Marketing style

The Italians have retained the traditional Australian urban marketing style of having collections of market bags of beans, stacks of pasta, and stalls of fresh fruit and vegetables. This activity was considered radical in the 1950s when in the new outer suburbs of that time, modern supermarkets in purpose-built shopping centres emphasised the superiority of the new over old commercial traditions. Norwood’s main street is quintessentially a market street and the pavement market activity is now commodified as part of the ‘flavour of The Parade’. While the Italian retention of this traditional marketing style has physically developed into a Mediterranean market street, it still represents the commodification of the Italian style.

The Italians do much more than display their goods in their market style. Italian market gardeners grew many of the fruits and vegetables along the Torrens River from Payneham to Campbelltown, or acted as importers of goods from interstate or overseas. The Italian-owned Vari’s Central Market green grocery chain, centred in Adelaide’s eastern region and started in Norwood by a cousin of the owner of Vari’s Alimentaria on The Parade, continues this tradition. The
majority of residents, visitors and shoppers know of the direct involvement of Italians in producing the market goods of this market style. It is part of the ‘collective memory’ of the place, for Italians and non-Italians alike.

Small-scale family-based commercial activity

The Italian influence is most significant in maintaining the small scale and family commercial activity which is heavily marketed as part of the personalised service on The Parade. The small scale and family-oriented commercial activity was an Australian tradition from the 1880s, 1920s and 1950s. Even as recently as 1970/71, 40 per cent of all premises in the commercial area were houses or shop premises with dwellings attached (see Table 1 above), and the majority were run as family businesses. In the 1960s the Italians moved into these older-style commercial premises which had the dual advantage of low entry costs and attached residences. Yet, when the demand for attached housing later decreased, the Italians maintained the ‘facade’ that their premises were still predominantly family owned, managed and staffed — even if through extended Italian families. As indicated earlier, they have their own Italian ‘chains’, mostly family and ‘village of origin’ based. While interiors of the premises of these Italian ‘chains’ are often combined, the small scale of the shop front is maintained as a ‘facade’ of the family tradition. In contrast, the non-ethnic occupancy on The Parade is increasingly dominated by the chain-stores of multinational companies and corporate ownership and their inevitable corporate expression.

The Italians and Italo-Australians are further authenticating this tradition in mostly exchanging ownership with other ethnic people rather than with Anglo-Saxon Australians, thereby retaining the territory for ethnic activity. In both these ways the Italians have retained and transformed the small scale and family traditions of the main street.

Public spaces

The overall effect of the Italian influence on the streets, malls and other public spaces surrounding Norwood’s commercial centre is that these public spaces are now lively places with outdoor space for people to walk, talk, shop, observe and gather right on the streets, the pavements and often at cafe tables. These public areas were ‘lost’ along The Parade in the 1960s when ripping up the tramlines and the replacement of the 1880s verandahs with small modern canopies, reinforced ‘modern’ social attitudes against streetlife. The Italian influence has reinstated and transformed the use of Norwood’s public spaces.

These public spaces can be termed a common ground with The Parade’s 1880s building facades as magnificent backdrops. Reflecting the influence of the Italians, it can be termed Norwood’s multicultural common ground, a central part of Norwood’s new mythology as a multicultural place. This common ground is used for a number of new urban functions, including the parading and celebration of urban life through sharing leisure time, leisurely food consumption and recreational shopping. This new venue is now being used to
complement the traditional practice of communal sharing of earlier generations.

The Italian influence also clearly conveys messages that The Parade has features associated with a working-class place. Its market style, family ‘facade’ and few ‘exclusive’ areas could be claimed as features of an egalitarian place. The recent marketing of Norwood’s main street utilises that connection and its appeal. Perhaps the combination of non-Italian and Italian activity reflects a partnership of cultures, rather than the appropriation of an exotic culture as Kay Anderson noted, observing the Chinese in Vancouver.13 The ‘adopting’ rather than ‘appropriating’ of the Italian style is unlike what Peter Jackson called ‘exclusionary closure’, whereby a marginal group create their own district.14 The cultural agreement reflected by the Italians and non-Italian partnership on The Parade could be termed an ‘inclusive closure’. There is certainly an inclusive quality about the small-scale, family-orientated and market style of Norwood’s main street; this is reinforced by the warmth and exuberance of the Italian people themselves, and the traditions of daily parade or pressagario and festival that they model in public spaces.

Norwood as a regional centre

Though Norwood has a clear role as a regional centre and acts as a symbolic cultural centre for the interconnected Italians of the region, there is no clear indication as to how non-Italians identify themselves as citizens of Norwood. Citizenship is also something more than the benchmark of an economic transaction in a commodity landscape Sharon Zukin identified.15 Firstly, there are overlapping residential, commercial, service and recreational populations of The Parade who have been identified by council and market surveys as comprising 60 per cent local residents, with a further 20 per cent coming from the wider eastern region in a regional shopping and service trip pattern. Another indicator of Norwood’s diverse citizenship is that of approximately 5000 people attending the Orange Lane Market; on weekends, approximately 25 per cent of people were from an even wider geographical range than this regional or district centre functioning with approximately eight per cent of people from interstate and overseas. They were using Norwood as a weekend place for urban cultural tourism in a combination of recreational, shopping and interest visits.

Could it be that this predominantly regional role and regional citizenship are a replacement activity for the parochial and common ground ‘loaf’ in modern urban life? It may be that The Parade is now providing a new form of communal venue and activity to reinforce regional citizenship. This is a vastly changed spatial basis for resident identification than that found by Jean Martin in the same region in the 1960s. Martin found people related only to a neighbourhood block and its services.14 The transformation of The Parade into a regional communal focus has equally expanded its ownership. While Italians consider themselves the ‘symbolic citizens’ of Norwood, do the non-Italians share the same intensity of use and connectedness? The implications of this ‘ownership’ or ‘citizenship’ of the new use of urban main streets can only be
assessed with time. The assessment of such transformations of the Australian urban cultural landscape demands further research.

Conclusion

The influence of Italian activity within Norwood has had a critical effect on The Parade's commercial character, marketing style, small scale and family commercial activity, public spaces and role as a regional centre. The Italian's retention and transformation of key prewar urban traditions has also been significant as part of the inclusive partnership between the mainstream and Italian-led ethnic ownership of Norwood's commercial activity. The Parade's public spaces provide an egalitarian common ground of cultural diversity for both the Italian and non-Italian communities.

Norwood's Italian-influenced multicultural character is often cited as the reason The Parade attracts as 'citizens' a real diversity of people from all class, cultural and ethnic groupings.

Norwood is seen as being more real, more down to earth and the people in The Parade viewed as a real cross-section in a multi-cultural society - they are real people.7

It was the diversity of people found there, both shopkeepers and shoppers, that attracted participants. The casual, multicultural atmosphere is created by the people on The Parade — young, old, and with differing cultural and ethnic origins.10

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**endnotes**

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6 O'Connor.  
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