

REVITALISING THE INNER CITY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION THROUGH URBAN DESIGN: DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND SCALES OF INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the Asia-Pacific Region has witnessed a spate of revitalisation projects as part of a general trend in addressing blight and decay of inner city urban areas. Urban design has been globally recognised as one of the key instruments of physical transformation employed to enhance urban quality and achieve sustainable urban environments. In this article we explore the role of urban design in the revitalisation process. In order to capture a wider urban context, revitalization at a city wide level in Singapore, district level in Brisbane, Queensland Australia and neighbourhood level on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia is examined. The three case studies differ from each other in terms of city size, global context, local economy, urban policy and in the case of Singapore social profile and culture. The study revealed that urban design, not only has role in the revitalization process, but underpins the economic and social regeneration of blighted urban areas in all three cities.

Keywords: urban design, revitalization, street improvement

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary urban design is a multifaceted discipline dealing with a range of social, economic, transport, infrastructure and cultural aspects that have an ongoing impact on the functioning and form of the urban environment. According to Carmona et al (2010) the dominant role of contemporary urban design is to make places for people. It is concerned with producing a functional, high quality urban environment that supports diversity of activities and uses

Urban design expanded, as a discipline, infiltrating not only the traditional professions of architecture, or landscape design and planning but also other disciplines such as traffic engineering, social planning, local economy and transport planning (Kozłowski 2006, Kozłowski 2010). The multi-faceted character of contemporary urban design is further explored by Krieger (2004) in his attempt to identify its territories. Urban design is recognised as an important bridge between planning and architecture and a discipline that defines the architecture of the city. It is seen as a key tool for restorative urbanism, landscape urbanism, place making and smart growth. The levels of urban design intervention have also expanded from the traditional, site, street and neighbourhood scale, to district, metropolitan and even regional (Krieger 2004, Frey 1999)

Simultaneously, a mounting concern in urban development is the consequential impacts on downtown congestion, high land values, restricted open spaces and net loss of population in the centre of the city, which results

in what is commonly called 'blight', the deterioration of areas and property of the central city. This form of urban degradation warranted interventionist activities that focussed primarily on revitalising the physical, social and economic components of the urban environments (Tiesdell, Taner Oc and Heath 1999) Around the World there is noticeable growing demand for urban design, recognised as the most suitable tool to provide a better urban environment and becoming a permanent component of the development and revitalisation process (Kozlowski 2010).

This study focuses on three urban centres of the Asia-Pacific Region and evaluates the role of urban design in the process of revitalization. Although the Asia-Pacific region lacks cohesiveness and strong networking between cities, it has recently been acknowledged as the third most important global region after the European Union (EU) and North America (Newman and Thornley 2005). The region is synonymous with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which includes 23 Nations. Covering a vast area of the globe, the region is divided into a number of sub-regions which differ from each other in terms of political systems, social profile, culture and economic policies. The main objective of this paper is to describe and evaluate revitalisation at different scales of urban intervention and examine the role of urban design in the process. The three different levels of intervention include the city wide level, the district level and the local neighbourhood level. In order to examine inner city revitalisation, the selected cities are based on their global hierarchical function. The cities include Singapore which is an established and recognised World city, Brisbane the capital of the state of Queensland, Australia, and Gold Coast which is an emerging international player and major regional centre in Southeast Queensland, Australia also a renowned international tourist destination.

The first step is to define the concept and scope of revitalisation and also determine its interrelation with urban design.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on identification of the problem and the major objective of this study. In order to address the objective, this study used qualitative research methods. The methods include literature review, qualitative analysis, and field observations using photo recording in the three case study cities. The major portion of this study is based on secondary data sources such as planning documents and research papers, and on information from professional literature and journals. Singapore, Brisbane and Gold Coast are selected as the case study areas. This case study approach is partially based on Yin (2003). Using case studies for research purposes remains one of the

most preferred options as it allows for a better understanding of the physical, social and economic phenomenon (Yin 2003). This study seeks to evaluate different approaches policies, design/planning strategies and final urban design outcomes of the revitalisation process. It also identifies the city-wide, district and local neighbourhood scales of intervention in the revitalisation of the urban environment in terms of their practicality and benefits for the community. This study will expose the important role that urban design plays in the revitalisation process.

3. SCOPE AND DEFINITION OF REVITALISATION

According to the Australian Oxford Dictionary, revitalize means 'to imbue with new life and vitality'. Revitalisation is a response to obsolescence or diminished utility which reflects the reduction in the useful life of capital good. Attempts to revitalise decayed parts of the city must address and remedy obsolescence of buildings as well as the entire economic life of the building stock (Heath et al 1996). Lichfield (1988) points out the obsolescence of urban areas are reflected in the mismatch between the services offered by the fabric and the needs seen through cotemporary eyes. As a result, the major role of revitalization is to reconcile this mismatch which can have its source in the physical fabric or socio-economic activities. In analysing the revitalization of historic precincts, Tiesdell, Taner Oc and Heath (1999) assert that the physical fabric may be adapted to contemporary requirements through various modes of renewal which include refurbishment, conservation, or by demolition and redevelopment. In terms of economic activity, revitalization can also arise from replacing former unsustainable uses with new ones. Although a physical revitalization creates an improved urban environment and physical public realm, a comprehensive economic revitalization is also required as the activities and uses within buildings are the major financial contributor to the maintenance of the improved physical public realm. The authors also stress on the importance of social revitalization as the vitality of the area is of crucial importance in maintaining a healthy balanced and vibrant urban environment.

The term revitalization should not be misinterpreted as urban renewal, although urban renewal can trigger revitalization process. Urban Renewal (similar to Urban Regeneration in British English) refers to a controversial US program of land re-development in areas of moderate to high density urban land use. This process began an intense phase in the late 1940s and continued into the late 1970's, and still occurring in the early 1980's. It has a major impact on the urban landscape. Urban renewal, an innovation of the 1954 Housing Act (USA), is based on the assumption that some of the housing in an area is deteriorated or dilapidated and must be removed in order to ensure the future well being of the surrounding neighbourhood (Pacione 2005).

Consequently, urban renewal is controversial, and typically involves the destruction of businesses, the relocation of people, and the use of eminent domain (known as Compulsory Purchase in the UK) as a legal instrument to reclaim private property for city-initiated development projects. Urban renewal in its original form has been called a failure by many urban planners and civic leaders, and has since been reformulated with a focus on redevelopment of existing communities. However, many cities link the revitalization of the central business district and gentrification of residential neighbourhoods to earlier urban renewal programs. Over time, urban renewal evolved into a policy based less on destruction and more on renovation and investment, and today is an integral part of many local governments, often combined with small and big business incentives (Gibson and Langstaff: 1982; Onka, Dhoti and Sharma: 2008:43).

In the UK the term regeneration has often been used as the preferred general term for revitalising blighted urban areas (Peiser 2007). According to the author, retail and housing revitalizations are the basic components of property-led regeneration which has been the most favoured strategy both in the USA and UK. In the USA the private sector including small local developers have taken leading roles in revitalisation projects. In the UK the Central Government plays a strong role in local redevelopment financing and policy (Peiser 2007). Given its inclusive partnership between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, and its strategic approach, Roberts and Skykes (2000) state that regeneration can accomplish an enabling role in achieving sustainability.

It should be added that revitalization of historic precincts is often labelled under the term of conservation. According to Thiesdall et al (1996) contemporary conservation includes issues related to other basic urban problems such as future land uses, traffic circulation, demographic forecasts, economic activities, and future social infrastructure.

Revitalization can also be in form of total redevelopment. This is often the case when dealing with former industrial areas and abandoned port facilities. According to Pacione (2005) Revitalization often triggers gentrification. Gentrification is understood as the process of neighbourhood upgrading by relatively affluent incomers who move into a poorer neighbourhood in sufficient numbers to displace lower income groups and transform its social identity (Pacione 2005).

Although revitalization of deprived urban areas is very much dependent on successful economic development, urban design plays a key role in its process (Neiman, Andranovich, Fernandez 1997, Peiser 2007). A review of major

waterfront redevelopments in Australia reveal that urban design directly achieves quality built environment and as a result indirectly stimulating the local economy (Vic Urban 2008, Subiaco Redevelopment Authority 2007, Williams 2004, Southbank Corporation 2003, Noble 2001). Similarly, a study of selected inner city revitalization projects in Pasadena, Boston, Los Angeles, and Dallas revealed that good urban design can significantly increase the attractiveness of revitalized urban areas which benefits both the residents and the local business community (Kotin and Szalay 2007, Duval and Monson 2007, McCue 2007, Walz and Wilson 2007).

Peiser (2007) however asserts that many developers are suspicious of the benefits of urban design as it involves investing in areas outside their private domain. On the contrary, Carmona et al (2003) says that urban design plays a major role in the management of public spaces as it is seen as the main tool to combat physical, functional, locational, legal and image obsolescence of the urban fabric.

In fact, Singapore and Malaysia in Southeast Asia and Australia are among countries that have strategically used urban design in recent urban revitalisation projects to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of the urban area. Inadvertently, it improves the quality of life of its residents. The next section outlines the different approaches to inner city revitalization drawing on experiences from Singapore, and Southeast Queensland cities of Brisbane and the Gold Coast and evaluates the urban design tools used in the process.

4. SINGAPORE: CITY-WIDE SCALE OF REVITALISATION

Singapore was established by the British as a trading post in the 19th century and for the next 150 years it became the major city of British Malaya. Gaining independence in 1965, the new city-state shifted away from hinterland Malaya and as a consequence, capitalized on its advantages of locations that would propel Singapore's economic development tripling per capita income in the 1980-1995 periods. By the 1990's, the city-state firmly established itself as a leading World city (Newman and Thornley 2005). The current population of Singapore is 5.4 million and is expected to grow by 6.5 million in the next 40 years (Department of Statistics, Singapore 2014).

In Singapore, one is not dealing with a traditional city; much of its development is completely new and built on reclaimed land. However, due to a concern to maximise the development potential of land, rapid development and redevelopment and the lack of preservation policies during the 1960s,

70s and early 80s, only a fraction of the traditional urban fabric remained intact. According to Guillot (2007), the Housing Development Board (HDB), coordinating body for residential development on the island, strongly promoted high rise residential towers associated with condominium type of development. As a result many traditional housing areas were destroyed to pave way for new modern apartments. Even the establishment of the Preservation of Monuments Board in 1971 did not deter redevelopment given over to systematic large-scale demolition and clearance of parts of the city (URA 1987).

Planning and redevelopment of Singapore, including revitalization of historic and blighted precincts, is the responsibility of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). URA was constituted on 1 April 1974 to take over the functions of renewal and redevelopment from HDB, and is of especially critical importance to the developmental city-state because efficient utilisation of land is a paramount requirement in its pursuit of economic growth. The responsibility of the URA is to prepare city wide long term planning strategies which include the the Concept Plan, the Master Plan, detailed plans in the form of planning-design guidelines and policies, as well as, coordinate and monitor renewal-revitalisation, conservation and improvement projects (URA 2014a, Yuen 2014).

According to Yuen (2014) the Concept Plan contains long term policies guiding the systematic and comprehensive development of industrial estates, housing estates, new towns, the airport, expressways, mass rapid transit and green areas. Since the adoption of the Concept Plan the role of the master plan has been redefined a short term statutory development guide

The Master Plan is a Statutory Plan and the most significant land-use plan guiding Singapore's physical development over the next 5 years by way of steering and controlling development in the entire metropolitan area. It contains a strong urban design program that aims at:

- Educating the public to be aware of design quality and demand for good design in the built environment;
- Encouraging a more vibrant professional design community;
- Elevating the quality of design of the built environment; and
- Enhancing the standing and profile of Singapore's built environment as a distinctive global city (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2014 b).

The Master Plan designated six city regions: the Central, East, North-East, central Area, North and West, focusing strongly on revitalisation of older town centres and older building stock. The key target of the Master Plan 2014

is to build townships for all ages that are green, healthy and connected (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2014b)

In 1976, the URA initiated studies involving the conservation and rehabilitation of whole areas, signifying the first steps towards retaining an areas distinct identity and character (Kong, Yeah and Brenda 1994).

The immediate function of URA is also to evaluate and grant planning approvals for development projects from the public and private sectors. In approving development applications, its goal is to foster orderly development conforming to the planning guidelines as stated in the statutory Master Plan and the existing control factors. The building industry professionals, the general public and the private sectors are also consulted in the planning process. While these representatives views are sought via special committees that are established by URA to better facilitate urban planning (Newman and Thornley 2005), there is substantial agreement that there has been insufficient public input in any decision-making process.

The distinctive feature for revitalization of the urban fabric in Singapore includes large scale redevelopments, city-wide improvements and beautifications along major transport corridors, conservation of historic precincts, promotion of high intensity development around transit stations acting as catalysts for further revitalisation and small-scale street improvements (URA 2008). One major large scale redevelopment coordinated by the URA in 1988 covered 100 hectares of old Singapore, including Chinatown, Emerald Hill, Singapore River, Little India, Kampong Glam, as well as, the Civic and Cultural District (Kong, Yeoh and Brenda 1994: 250-251). Nevertheless, the rejuvenation of such traditional places does not necessarily lead to the achievement of broader revitalisation aims. As in Kampong Glam, Yeoh and Huan (1996) assert that conservation areas often slice up the organic form and texture of the cultural hearth in an arbitrary fashion. However, a clear flow on effect resulted in contemporary redevelopments in the New Downtown situated along the Bay, a new self-contained city located within a city. The New Downtown called Marina Bay is the size of the current Central Area. It comprises mixed uses including commercial, residential and entertainment, a 3.5 km waterfront promenade a 100 hectare creational green area called Gardens by the Bay. It has totally re-casted the image of the city through urban boosterism and labelled Singapore as the 'world tropical city of excellence' (Marshall 2003: 152, Buck Song 2014 Yuen 2014).

The growing emphasis on protecting the remaining traditional urban fabric, conservation of historic and cultural buildings and national heritage sites became a strong component of the revitalisation strategy for the city (Urban

Redevelopment Authority 2008). The Identity Plan created as part of the 2003 Master Plan for Singapore sets out to conserve historical areas and buildings that are of value to the community. Until today URA has given conservation status to 94 areas involving 6823 buildings throughout the island.

URA's role in conservation encompasses five areas. They include: 1) planning and research, 2) facilitating and coordinating, 3) regulatory, 4) consulting and 5) promoting. Planning and research activity includes identifying and recommending buildings of historical, architectural and cultural merits for conservation. Facilitating and coordinating adopts a three-point strategy to encourage the private sector to participate in the conservation program:

- The pilot projects to show government's commitment to conservation and to demonstrate appropriate restoration techniques for old buildings.
- The timely release of conservation buildings to the private sector for restoration through the URA Sale of Sites Programme.
- The environmental improvement works to conservation areas which include street improvement and beautification projects.

Regulatory framework for conservation is supported by documents and manuals to guide individuals and professionals in their conservation works. Promotion seeks the views of professionals and owners of conservation buildings before deciding on policies and guidelines. The idea is to create a better understanding of conservation with regards to the appropriate restoration methods so as to achieve quality outcomes (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2008).

A specific environmental policy oriented at the beautification of Singapore and creating green zones between settlements as well as along transport routes was one of the foundations of the city's urban design. Intensive tree planting program along major road corridors and residential streets is conducted jointly by URA and the Highway Department. Then, systematic streetscape revitalization projects involve widening of sidewalks, floor scaping, and the provision of quality street furniture. Streetscape revitalization works in Singapore have focused on tourist, historic and cultural districts such as Orchard Road, Chinatown, the Malay Quarter, and waterfront areas along the Singapore River. Special detailing of streetscapes includes promenade railing, paving lighting and street furniture. The Bugis area and the Arab Quarters streets were converted into pedestrian streets, physically lifting the appeal of the areas (URA 2008). Newman and Thornley (2005) argue that the beautification of Singapore through creating green zones between settlements and transport corridors was linked to the prime objective of attracting investments in the form of new golf courses and housing estates. The intensive

effort of greening the city and implementing tree planting programs along main road corridors and the creation of small parks has labelled Singapore as the Garden City (Ker 1997, Newman and Thornley 2005). Examples of different types of city-wide revitalisation projects are shown in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1: Singapore city-wide revitalisation (streetscape improvements by sidewalk widening, floorscaping and recycling of existing building stock (above) and beautification along transport major corridors (below).

Urban design has always played a vital role in projects revitalisation in Singapore. At the city-wide level urban design addresses the urban form and structure, greening and beautification of major transport corridors and creating the 'tropical garden city' image. It is now only befitting to examine how urban design plays a major role in the conservation projects at the district level.

5. BRISBANE: REVITALISATION AT A DISTRICT LEVEL

Southeast Queensland (SEQ) is the fastest growing region in Australia and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Garnout 2008). By 2031 its population will grow from 2.8 million to 4.4 million. Characterised by a pleasant sub-tropical climate, the SEQ region covers an area of 22,980 km² stretching from Noosa in the north to Gold Coast and the New South Wales border to the south, and Toowoomba to the west (Department of Infrastructure

and Planning 2009). Planning and development control in SEQ is managed by the local authority with the involvement of the State Government. The latter is responsible for drafting the planning legislation (for the entire State), approving local plans and local planning schemes, initiating and managing catalyst projects and preparation and monitoring of regional plans.

The Southeast Queensland Regional Plan contains a whole section dedicated to sustainability and climate change. One of the priority objectives of the Regional Plan is to conserve land by utilising efficient use of brownfields land for urban development and redevelopment. Regional policies focus on encouraging high densities in and around regional activity centres and public transport modes and corridors. Strong emphasis is placed on urban design and character ensuring that redevelopment in established urban areas reinforces the strengths and individual character (Department of Infrastructure and Planning, Queensland Government 2009).

The local authorities are responsible for the preparation of the local plans and planning schemes (Department of Infrastructure and Planning 2009). The major cities in the region include Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast. Brisbane (population 1.1 million, Greater Brisbane area 2.1 million) is the largest city in the SEQ region and also the capital of the state of Queensland. Over the past fifty years, Brisbane has grown significantly covering 1,331 km². Brisbane is considered a very low density urban environment characterised by suburban sprawl and suburban centres competing with the CBD and the inner city (Brisbane City Council 2014a).

Revitalization of decayed urban areas in Southeast Queensland dates back to the early 1990's. In order to transform Brisbane's inner city, Brisbane City Council established an Urban Renewal Task Force in 1991. Government at all levels have been actively involved. The role of the Task Force was to monitor and coordinate the revitalization process of Brisbane's inner city areas covering 750 ha to the north-east of the central business district (CBD). The area included the suburbs of Fortitude Valley, New Farm, Bowen Hills, Newstead and Teneriffe and Bulimba. Once, a vibrant inner city part of Brisbane, the areas suffered enormous blight in the 60's and 70's due to population and businesses decanting to the outer suburbs and new regional shopping centres (Brisbane City Council 2008a).

The Urban Renewal Task Force introduced an Urban Renewal Program which provided economic certainty by forging strong partnerships with developers, community networks, local businesses and government agencies. The Task Force played a key role in restructuring transport infrastructure which integrates train stations to bus facility and pedestrian links. An AUD

\$230 million Inner City Bypass re-directed much of the through traffic from Fortitude Valley and connects the western suburbs with the airport. The Urban Renewal Program embarked on urban consolidation through Transit Oriented Developments (TOD), an example is the eight-hectare Bowen Hills Railway Station Precinct which will become the main public transport interchange and a new (TOD) for commercial, residential and community hub. The Program embarks on redevelopment through in-fill housing development and master-planned redevelopment. Its redevelopment projects have included conversion of the Teneriffe Woolstores to housing and the construction of major new medium-density apartment projects, transformation of industrial sites for example the old wharves along the Teneriffe and Newstead riverfronts, Boral gasworks and a James Hardie factory, Colonial Sugar Refinery, a naval supply base and marine safety depot in New Farm. The master plan reflects dramatic changes to land use and demographics of the inner north-east with industry moving out and people moving into the area (Brisbane City Council 2008a).

Urban design and planning measures of the Urban Renewal Program highlight streetscape design, design of intimate public spaces, the designation of bikeways and pedestrian walkways, the creation of a continuous landscaped river promenade, and an ambitious effort to upgrade all existing public parks. As part of the implementation phase the local authorities and state government agencies directed several public projects aimed at cutting edge urban design which included improved streetscapes, new bikeways, river boardwalks and paths, floating walkway, upgrading of public parks and providing access to the riverfront illustrated in Figure 1.2. The streetscape improvements included traditional urban design measures such as footpath widening, tree planting, provision of soft landscaping, paving and designation of landscape verges.

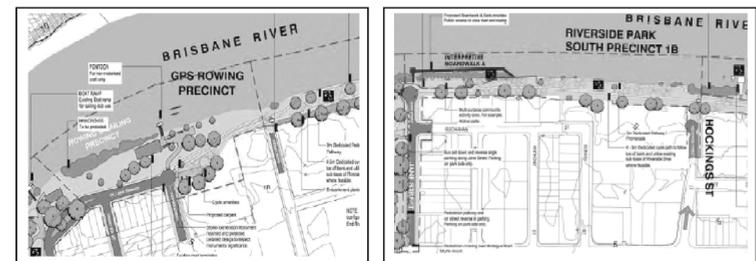


Figure 1.2: West End Riverside Parks Master Plan (Brisbane City Council, 2010)

In addition to the public works program, innovative planning controls and urban design requirements were provided in the Local Plans for New Farm and Teneriffe Hill, Fortitude Valley, Bowen Hills, Newstead and Teneriffe

Waterfront. The aims of these requirements were to ensure orderly and quality redevelopment of the area. The urban design and planning requirements included: promotion of mixed use developments, encouragement of small scale infill housing developments, designation of medium density residential areas, provision of an integrated design approach for all public and semi-public spaces, legibility and accessibility, housing choice and diversity of uses and provision of incentives for conversion of old industrial buildings (Brisbane City Council 2000a, b, c, d). In addition a set of supplementary design codes focused on the provision and design of public spaces, setback treatment and building form and character. In the Newstead and Teneriffe Waterfront Local Plan strong emphasis was placed on the access to the riverfront (Brisbane City Council 2000 d).

The recent Fortitude Valley Neighbourhood Plan, prepared as a result of a thorough community consultation process, incorporates additional urban design requirements into the development principles and design codes. All major new development applications must produce built form and streetscape analysis which show the form and facade treatment of the proposed buildings and their impact on the surrounding areas. Building frontages must address the streets which are supplemented by an additional landscape plan indicating the proposed street-scaping. Detailed design guidelines addressing the transition area between the street environment and the building line have been included (Brisbane City Council 2010a).

The response from the private sector was enormous with over \$3 billion investment in the area in the last 15 years. More than 76 ha of derelict land and abandoned industrial buildings have been converted into vibrant living, working and recreational environments. 80 percent of the Program was privately driven. This pointed to the substantial role of the Task Force in proactively creating viable investment opportunities with the business community. New centres such as the James Street Market and the Emporium were established. The heart of Fortitude Valley was gradually transformed into Brisbane's most popular night entertainment district. Numerous old dilapidated industrial buildings such as the Woolstore in Tenerife, Colonial Sugar Refinery, and the New Farm Powerhouse were converted to residential buildings and entertainment complexes. Major public works included streetscape improvements, provision of a 3.5 km bikeway along Brisbane River, upgrade of New Farm, Merthyr, and Tenerife Parks and the construction of a 4.5 km inner city bypass (Brisbane City Council 2008a).

The Urban Renewal Task Force are currently extending their activities to other parts of the inner city namely South Brisbane and West End (Brisbane City Council 2008a). Recent draft Strategy for South Brisbane Riverside and

Woolloongabba Centre Neighbourhood Plan impose major principles of good urban design integrating streetscape, sub-tropical building design including preference for green walls and roofs, vibrant public spaces, promotion of public art, retaining existing building and street character land use and housing diversity, access to green open spaces, upgrade of exiting parks increased densities, provision of increased public transport services, integrated land use and transport planning and the provision of a pedestrian and cycling friendly environment (Brisbane City Council 2010, b,c).

The Urban Renewal Task Force was dismantled in 2011 and in its place the Urban Futures Board, an independent advisory panel dealing with urban planning, urban renewal and economic growth was established (Brisbane City Council 2013)

However, the intervention of URTF in the Brisbane's inner city suburbs has contributed to the gentrification of the urban environment, and a rapid increase of property prices. This had totally changed the social profile of the Brisbane inner city area (Kozlowski and Houston 2008). Figure 1.3 shows examples of projects coordinated by the Urban Renewal Task Force.



Figure 1.3: Revitalisation with URTF intervention (street improvements in Teneriffe (top); James Street Market and Emporium developments (below)).

The new Brisbane City Plan 2014 incorporating Neighbourhood Plans for New Farm and Tenerife Hill, Brisbane and Tenerife Waterfront, Fortitude Valley, South Brisbane Riverside retains the strong emphasis on good quality performance outcomes for buildings and public spaces (Brisbane City Council 2014)

6. GOLD COAST: REVITALISATION AT A LOCAL-NEIGHBOURHOOD SCALE

Gold Coast is located in the most southern end of the SEQ Region 70 kilometres south of Brisbane. Gold Coast's urban form reflects a typical linear city stretching 60 km from Beenleigh in the north to Coolangatta and the New South Wales border in the south. Gold Coast's history dates back to the middle of the 19th century when the first settlements were established around the sugar plantations. The first seaside resort town called Southport was founded in 1875. The growth of Gold Coast rapidly accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. The resort town in 1966 had a population of 55,000 and by 2013 the population exceeded 530,000, almost ten-fold increase in population during a period of forty years, an unprecedented phenomenon in the league of developed nations (Albert Shire Council 1988, Burchill 2005, Gold Coast City Council 2009, Gold Coast City Council 2014a).

Over the past years, the local authority has made strong progress in ensuring the majority of development takes place within the designated urban footprint, in the principal and major activity centres and around transport hubs (Gold Coast City Council 2014 b). Major catalyst projects, such as the Gold Coast Light Rail and Gold Coast University Health and Knowledge Precinct, illuminate Council's and the State Government's objectives to intensify development on existing brownfield sites (Gold Coast City Council 2004, Department of Health 2009, Gold Coast City Council 2014c).

Gold Coast is a classic example of a revitalised city. For the past decade, the local government has to deal with economic blight occurring in the neighbourhood and district centres. Creating employment and improving the environment, particularly, pose great challenges to local planners in terms of designing places capable to deal with the complex social and economic issues at hand.

In order to address this issue, in 2001, Gold Coast City Council initiated the Centre Improvement Program (CIP). It aims to transform the centres into attractive, vibrant places which enhance community needs and aspirations, create pedestrian friendly environments, local character and promote local

business. CIP links into the new Gold Coast Planning Scheme incorporating a whole variety of provisions intended to improve the environment, quality of life and economic viability by facilitating the physical and social revitalization of Gold Coast district and neighbourhood centres, including:

- Improve environmental performance. Ensure climate change consideration in designing places especially for coastal communities and centres along the coastal areas
- Quality of life. Mixed land use planning that foster equity of access to services, employment opportunity; transportation that advocates efficient connection between places and land use, active lifestyle, space for pedestrians; enhancement of architectural facades and safe streets.
- Involved stakeholders. The CIP partners with property owners, businesses, the development industry and the community to achieve a shared vision. It was based on Suburban Centre Improvement Program launched by Brisbane City Council in 1996 (Brisbane City Council 2009). All commercial owners within a proposed Centre Improvement Project are given the opportunity to vote on whether they are supporting an improvement project in the area. Two-thirds of the costs for all improvement works are financed by the Council and one-third by the property owners. Commercial property owners have the opportunity to maximise the potential gains to their private properties by undertaking upgrade works in partnership with works undertaken by Council (Gold Coast City Council 2014d).

The CIP Projects span four key phases: Phase 1 Consultation which includes liaison and negotiations with the property owners. A Project Reference Group is formed in this Phase; Phase 2 Planning and Design which includes survey work, site analysis, preparation of design concept for Project Reference Group approval and final design solutions; Phase 3 Construction which includes all public and landscape works; and Phase 4 Maintenance – undertaken by Gold Coast City Council. The CIP planning and design phase is based on small scale urban landscape design intervention. In designing the area the following issues are considered:

- Walkability- creating spaces for pedestrian movement
- Accessibility-creating spaces which are easily accessible
- Views and vistas –retaining important views
- Visual amenity – creating attractive spaces for walking, shopping and dining.
- Kerbside allocation- designing landscape build-outs for dining and gardens, designing wider sidewalks
- Landscape and irrigation – providing subtropical planting

and designing innovative floor-scapes for the sidewalks and carriageways

- Public art –providing innovative art works to enhance the centre and create individual character
- Street furniture –providing for seating, shelters, bins and bicycle racks
- Parking –providing effective traffic circulation and parking
- Lighting-providing feature and street lighting
- Safety- incorporating design measures that ensure a safe environment

Since 2001 fifteen districts and neighbourhood commercial centres have been upgraded as part of the CIP. They include Nerang Street, Nerang, Connors Street Burleigh Central, Scarborough, Nerang and Short Streets, Southport, Mugderabba Village, Broadbeach, Miami Currumbin, Paradise Point Centre, Davenport Street, Southport, Burleigh Heads, Oxenford Town Centre, Thomas Drive, Chevron Island, Tugun Town Centre, and Mermaid Beach. The physical improvements stimulated economic activity to all the nine centres (Gold Coast City Council 2014c). The current CIP Projects are; the improvement of Young and Davenport Streets in Southport (the new Gold Coast China Town) Station Street in Nerang, James Street in Burleigh, Tugun Centre, and Mermaid Beach (Gold Coast City Council 2014d).

Figure 1.4 provides examples of CIP outcomes. The outcomes of CIP urban design intervention includes improved streetscapes by the way of tree planting, provision of adequate street furniture, sidewalk widening, upgraded floor paving, landscape build-outs, and provision of quality uniform signage and safety and improved traffic circulation (Gold Coast City Council 2014d). Until now, there has been no audit to gather sufficient data on how the projects stimulated the local economy. However several observations reveal that the improved centres witnessed economic regeneration in which all shops are occupied, shop fronts upgraded, and there is an increased patronage shown by popular use of centres among the local communities.



Figure 1.4: Local scale revitalisation at Gold Coast (Street improvements in Paradise Point (above), street improvements and intimate public places in Nerang (below)).

7. MAJOR FINDINGS

The first case study from Singapore reflects a typical top-down approach where the national planning authority initiates plans and implements the revitalisation of all urban areas. The URA conducts revitalisation on a city-wide, district and neighbourhood-street scale. Singapore, although a show case example of how to adopt and implement a city-wide revitalisation program, cannot be applied in typical urban scenarios. It can be conducted in environments where there is a strong tradition of government planning/development agencies implementing the policies of the state government. The planning/development agency needs to have an uncontested leading role in the planning and development process of the city. The responsibility of such agency includes planning and design, securing development, coordination and management of the entire development process which often involves providing guidance to all key stakeholders. The Singapore model is mostly conducive under a totalitarian political system or under a representative democracy. In the latter the role of the majority is to elect representatives and give the full power of decision making including decisions regarding where and how people live (Moughtin 2003). It would be difficult to apply the Singapore model in political systems which are based on full participation of the community and key stakeholders in the planning and development process.

The Brisbane example indicates a joint venture between local authority and state government that produces initiatives and programs which spark an on-going revitalisation process in the inner city. The involvement and cooperation of the private sector is the key for success. The Brisbane approach can be applied in urban areas where there is a tradition of major local authority engagement in planning and development and a culture susceptible for long term private-public joint ventures. The introduction of urban design requirements for built form requires effective planning tools that can guide private development through a considerable period of time. Under the Brisbane model the objectives of the local authorities cannot be disentangled from the requirements of the development industry and the needs of the community.

The Gold Coast case study illustrates how joint ventures between the Council and property owners can transform blighted commercial centres. It is a good example of how small scale urban design intervention by the local authority can stimulate business and rejuvenate a declining commercial centre. However the Gold Coast approach has to be supported by a strong will to discuss and negotiate the design and implementation process with the property owners. The CIP is built on strong participation with external stakeholders. The Gold

Coast model can be applied in any geographical location, as long as there is an effort from the local authority to work together with the property owners and the business community.

8. ANALYSIS

All three projects indicate the pivotal role of urban design in revitalisation process. The detailed analysis of the three projects is shown in Table 1

Table 1: The Three Levels of Intervention

Project	Scale of Intervention	Role of Urban Design	Benefits for Community	Potential Applicability
Singapore	City wide	Strong guidelines for specific urban areas and public spaces including streets	Benefits all sections of the community within the city. Targets all end users including land owners, business entrepreneurs, visitors, employees and residents	Limited application can be applied only in cities with one decisive local government and a strong top down approach. Difficult to apply this approach in political systems based on participatory democracy
Brisbane	District level	Urban design guidelines are supporting legally binding local plans and as such have a profound impact on future development	Benefits land owners and business entrepreneurs the upper and middle classes. Focuses on revitalisation of selected prime areas of the city mainly located in proximity of waterfronts. The revitalisation of selected areas triggers their gentrification which can have a negative impact low income groups.	Can be applied in cities with one municipal council strong district councils that collaborate with each other
Gold Coast	Local neighbourhood level	Urban design is mainly limited to landscaping guidelines and physical improvements of the public realm	Benefits only the local neighbourhood community and local entrepreneurs and land owners	The approach is mainly based on negotiation between local authorities and land owners can be easily applied in any form of governance

CONCLUSIONS

The three case studies portray different approaches to revitalisation in terms of different scales of intervention, the city wide scale, district scale and neighbourhood scale. The city wide scale has a profound impact on the transformation of the urban environment and benefits all the sections of the community, however can be applied only under specific political conditions supported by a strong and centralised urban management system. The street – neighbourhood scale of intervention represents a piecemeal approach to urban revitalisation which regenerates a fraction of the city targeting only a specific user group however, can be applied in different urban cultures and in most political environments

The common phenomenon in all three case studies is the key role urban design plays in the planning and implementation phases of the revitalisation process. Urban design is used as a tool in streetscape improvement programs, the design of public spaces, identifying key nodes and activity areas and even indicating preferred treatment for building facades. Urban design requirements and guidelines have been introduced to local plans and master plans to guide the development of built form and public realm. In the Singapore and Brisbane case studies the approach includes urban design strategies and guidelines informing local plans and aimed at transforming the entire urban fabric while in the Gold Coast example intervention is mainly limited to landscape enhancements of the public realm.

Revitalisation is slowly changing from traditionally focusing on economic development to creating quality built environments for the people and, at the same time, preserving and retaining older urban fabrics. This study reveals urban design as the primary mechanism that underpins revitalisation process in the three case study areas and that it also stimulates the local economy in blighted urban areas. Urban design is one of the key tools to achieve a high quality built environment. Comprehensive revitalisation supported by urban design has transformed the streets and public spaces of Singapore creating a ‘tropical urban garden’ atmosphere, it has regenerated and gentrified large sections of inner city Brisbane and until today revamped 15 decaying urban centres in Gold Coast. Urban design can also play a decisive role in future city wide, district and local neighbourhood revitalisation strategies. Future design and planning solutions must involve public, private and civic sphere in a multi-stakeholder participatory process

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