

**URBIS**

# **SHAPING AUSTRALIAN CITIES**

**DRIVING GLOBAL  
COMPETITIVENESS  
THROUGH STRATEGY  
AND DESIGN**











# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Australian cities share a common thread.....	5
Ten ideas to make Australian cities more globally competitive .....	7
1. Position, position, position .....	9
2. Connectivity is (almost) everything .....	11
3. Accept and thrive on change .....	13
4. Build on your strengths .....	15
5. Agglomeration is a strategy .....	17
6. Focus investment.....	19
7. Global precincts as catalysts.....	21
8. Creativity and culture counts.....	23
9. The city is the public realm.....	25
10. Design is everything .....	27
A framework for Australian cities? .....	29
Who we are.....	31

# INTRODUCTION

---

We live in an Urban Age; an age in which the pace of change and the proximity in which we live are driving never-before-seen levels of urbanisation and experimentation through policy and technology. Proportionately increasing investment in cities and real estate worldwide is estimated to more than double from 2012 to 2020.

Predictions indicate that by 2050 well over half of the world's 5 billion people will live in cities, placing excruciating expectations on city systems, quality of life and economic performance.

Cumulatively however, this also means that cities globally represent the greatest opportunity to enact and effect change at a planetary scale. Cities are the stages on which to germinate culture and creativity, generate much of the world's economic productivity. They are the most concentrated emitters of CO<sup>2</sup> and locations for social inequity.

Cities are the best and worst of us. Cities, an idea and physical system, are humanity's most significant achievement.

Where do Australian cities sit in contrast to this global context? In a world where competition for talent, capital, innovation, and growth has never been higher, Australia's major cities share a single common strategic advantage – they are young. They offer population, market scale, cultural opportunity and employment at a scale that is globally relevant, and more often than not, within a framework of high amenity.

But as cities become increasingly homogenised through common policy, migration, global trends and technology, how should we shape Australian cities? Sydney's harbour, Melbourne's laneways, Brisbane's subtropical character, and Perth's beaches are all examples of how the physical setting of a city is key

to its identity and, ultimately, its attractiveness as a place to live and invest. Each city has its own specific advantages over and above their natural setting and pursuing and concentrating on these elements is equally important to perform and have relevance into the future. All our cities need to be different – specialising in certain sectors and built around fundamentally different ideas.

This document aims to identify 10 strategic opportunities for Australian cities to address when it comes to their design and place in the world. These insights are based on our international practice, independent research, and the collective view of some of the brightest minds in city shaping.

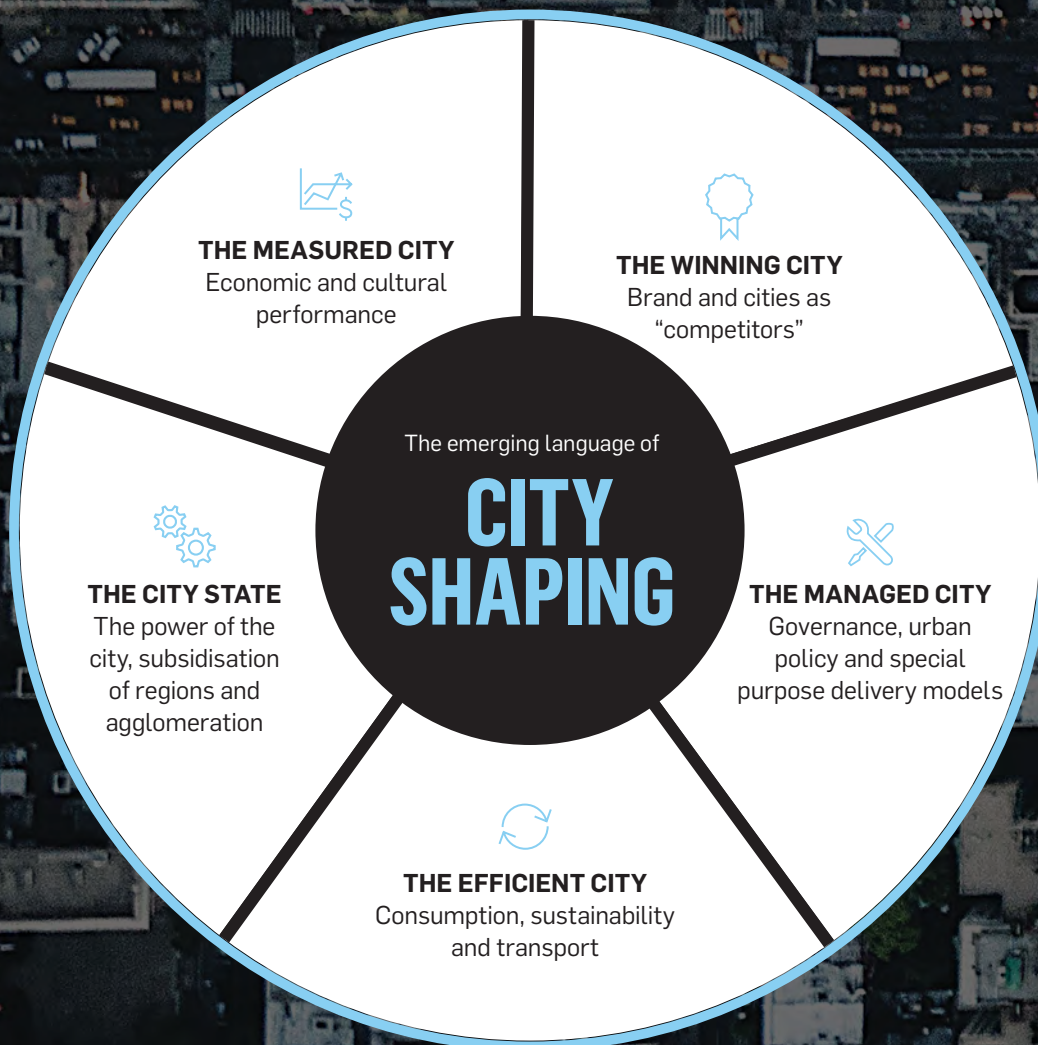


## The languages of cities

The areas of focus, even the language around cities, is in a constant state of flux, so where do Australian cities fit on the global stage set of cities?

We think the following are the five contemporary languages of our cities:

**Cities are human-kind's greatest achievement, and challenge.**







**0.5%**

of the earth's  
surface is  
urbanised



**80%**

of global  
economic output  
comes from  
urban areas



**54%**

of the world's  
population is  
urban (2014)



**89%**


of Australians  
live in an  
urban area

Stat source: Floater, Rode et al. 2014  
"Cities and the New Climate Economy: the  
transformative role of global urban growth".  
LSE / Oxford Economics.

# AUSTRALIAN CITIES SHARE A COMMON THREAD

For all their differences, most major Australian cities share some common attributes. This is not to say that all should adopt similar strategies in finding their place in the global community, but the design and strategic planning clues for this process should share common ground.

**In a world where competition for talent, capital, innovation and growth has never been higher, Australia's major cities share a single common strategic advantage – they are young.**

 **The colonial grid:** The core of most of our cities is defined by a rectilinear 'colonial grid'. Proportions and dimensions vary but the urban blocks of our cities are each around two hectares in size. Some are serviced by laneways and others are perforated by arcades but most are typologically similar at a high level. The skeletons of our cities are largely set; it is the spaces and buildings between that can offer the elements of distinctiveness in any given city.


 **Systems and empathy:** Most major Australian cities share similar systems and governance processes which allow a degree of comfort when making comparisons of successes in one city to another. Our cities also exhibit a high degree of 'empathy'. By this, we mean a generally shared sense of what the city is 'all about' and, more importantly, a degree of flexibility and patience that allow these high complex environments to operate day in, day out.





Image: Gold Coast, Australia



### **Waterfronts in transition:**

Most Australians live in cities, and most cities are coastal with a strong heritage of working waterfronts. The gradual transformation of these edges is ongoing, but across Australia, we are seeking to achieve similar things – using the intrinsic amenity of the waterfront to unlock value that can underpin the vitality of commercial, residential, cultural, open space, entertainment endeavours.



### **Mono-centricity and magnetism:**

With some notable exceptions, most of our major cities are 'monocentric' – having a single major centre or business district that is supported by a system of smaller centres and residential neighbourhoods. Some argue this is an unsustainable model, while others believe the magnetism of our city cores should only be further reinforced.



### **Large distances:**

Our transport and utilities infrastructure works harder than most cities in the world. The vast distances between cities, and even within them, and our comparatively low densities of population makes the delivery of new connectivity and services challenging.



### **Housing challenges:**

The mechanics of the property market and the cost of labour and materials make it hard to deliver true housing affordability in most Australian cities. Most global cities have a similar challenge often for different reasons, but look to more rigid regulation to deliver the required outcomes.



### **Diffuse edges:**

Our cities do not 'end'. The outer suburbs and precincts gradually become more diffuse, landscape and rural areas gradually intensify until, at some indefinable point, the urban area ends and nature begins. This is largely the result of planning policy and the ability of the market and government to deliver infrastructure at any given time.



### **Knowledge and innovation foci:**

The current agenda for most major cities is around the knowledge economy – the idea of transitioning from low value-adding services to an economy underpinned by ideas, research and innovation. But how many cities can succeed in this 'space'? And what other avenues exist to evolve and innovate for our broad range of Australian cities?





# TEN IDEAS TO MAKE AUSTRALIAN CITIES MORE GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE

**POSITION,  
POSITION,  
POSITION**

PG 09

**4**

**BUILD ON YOUR  
STRENGTHS**

PG 15

The 10 ideas and themes outlined here, in our view, provide a strong basis for generating a conversation about how Australian cities might seek to develop their global competitiveness and amplify their role in an age of urbanisation. They are by no means exhaustive and can be applied differently to every place, but we believe they are the foundation stones of creating a compelling national conversation about our shared urban future.



2

**CONNECTIVITY  
IS (ALMOST)  
EVERYTHING**

PG 11

**ACCEPT AND  
THRIVE ON  
CHANGE**

PG 13

3

**AGGLOMERATION  
IS A STRATEGY**

PG 17

6

**FOCUS  
INVESTMENT**

PG 19

**GLOBAL  
PRECINCTS AS  
CATALYSTS**

PG 21

7

8

**CREATIVITY  
AND CULTURE  
COUNTS**

PG 23

**THE CITY IS THE  
PUBLIC REALM**

PG 25

9

10

**DESIGN IS  
EVERYTHING**

PG 27



# POSITION, POSITION, POSITION

What is your city to me? This is the key question. In a competitive global environment, clarity of communication and evocative ideas about the future state of every city is a key challenge.



This is not to suggest that better marketing is required, it is a more fundamental idea about truly knowing the intrinsic advantages that different cities offer. It's about bringing clarity to this as a way of focusing growth, making strategic planning and infrastructure investments, identifying complementary cities with which to partner and trade ideas. Most of all, it's about giving a compelling reason for people to want to be there.

Too often, cities – through their various systems and governance structures – try to be all things to all people and in doing so mean very little to everyone. This is not to say that all cities shouldn't have a thriving cultural scene, affordable high quality housing, a vibrant public realm, good governance and a culture of innovation – but in this now universal context, what is different about your city? In considering this question, our observations, in so far as they can be applied broadly, designing the best city needs the following three things:

Stat source: Tourism Victoria Annual Report 2015–16.

Image: Top– Melbourne, Australia. Bottom – Brisbane, Australia





**Government and industry must share a substantive and common view on the strengths and priorities for the city. Melbourne shines a light in this space, where an embedded sense of itself as a centre for design and creativity and a high quality of life are shared by all.**

### **Clarity: what's the common thread?**

Every city needs a clear view on what it is today and, more importantly, what it is to become. This is a great challenge as, for example, there is no 'one Sydney'. To some it is the world's finest Harbour city, for others the centre of financial and professional services, to others yet again it is the gateway to Australia. All these views are true, but defining the common thread is the key.

**Brisbane's position as 'Australia's New World City' has claimed global currency as the formal measure of cities of its type, and is the platform from which to build links to Asia.**

### **Imagination transcends politics**

Vision and imagination that transcends political cycles is essential. Brisbane's position as 'Australia's New World City' has claimed global currency as the formal measure of cities of its type, and is the platform from which to build links to Asia. This 'New World City' mantra has lasted over many political cycles and is now embedded into everyday conversations about the imagined future state of the city – a powerful tool around which to mobilise thought and prioritise investment.

### **Leaders should share the city's vision**

Government and industry must share a substantive and common view on the strengths and priorities for the city. Melbourne shines a light in this space, where an embedded sense of itself as a centre for design and creativity and a high quality of life are shared by all. When leaders across all sectors and industries have this intangible sense of the city it only serves to reinforce itself, growing in insistency and strength.

 **22%**

Event tourism equates to 22 per cent of all international overnight visitors to Victoria

# CONNECTIVITY IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING



Modern cities still have this notion of proximity at their core, but are challenged by their intrinsic scale which is driven by population growth that is often not sufficiently supported by transport infrastructure. If one looks at the great global cities of the world (New York and London spring to mind but there are many others), they are in many ways defined, experienced through, and energised by, effective mass-transportation systems.

**£42  
BILLION** 

estimated to be added to the UK economy by Crossrail, the major expansion of the London Underground

The discussion around transport in our cities is often couched as a solution to problems of network capacity and other technical matters. Conversely, and rather successfully, many global cities prefer to use language about economic development, sustainability, employment creation, social diversity and knowledge connectivity.

Investment in integrated mass transit has been a challenge for most Australian cities. An immense geographic spread compared to relatively low populations makes

funding every metre of transit more difficult than in more traditional and compact urban forms. There have been inroads in this area over recent times, for example, the implementation of Light Rail on the Gold Coast as – proportionate to the scale and intensity of that city – transformational.

To position Australian cities as true global players, we must measure feasibility not only against commercial return and land value capture. Developing sophisticated mechanisms to measure the value of infrastructure against innovation,

social equity, access to employment and talent retention is also required.

Funding and delivering connectivity infrastructure is probably the largest potential challenge in our cities and requires all levels of government to collaborate, legislate and capture value sufficiently to allow for seamless delivery.

In thinking about connectivity and infrastructure delivery, we have observed the following themes as key for our cities:





### Have vision

The London Underground wasn't delivered overnight. It is often forgotten that is over a century old and has been added to, adjusted, tuned and managed to become the most extensive system in the world. We must begin to imagine large-scale mass transit for all our cities, and starting in any small place will make these noble plans a reality.

### Connect things that matter

It is often the case that, for a range of complex reasons, transport infrastructure when delivered, does not connect the right precincts and places. Connect minds to jobs and beds; start by connecting employment and centres for knowledge and education to homes – this is the fundamental and underlying shift in behaviours required. After this, connect to recreation and culture which are critically important but will not drive the daily modal shifts needed to support ongoing investment in transport systems in the short term.

### Procure well

Once the idea of mass transit in our cities is set, how and what is delivered becomes the key issue. The visual impacts, resultant development parcels, urban design outcomes, and the joy or despair associated with the user experience will determine perceived success and the likelihood of take-up.

The difference between great results and poor results is often simply in how the project is delivered. Often governments will seek to mitigate risk and cost by asking the private sector to be solely responsible for delivery. This makes short-term sense but ultimately drives a 'quickest and easiest' response which is, unfortunately, not how fine cities are made.

**The London Underground wasn't delivered overnight. It is often forgotten that it is over a century old and has been added to, adjusted, tuned and managed to become the most extensive system in the world.**

Image: London, England. Stat source: Crossrail UK

# ACCEPT AND THRIVE ON CHANGE

Change in cities is inevitable; in fact, it is one of their reasons for being – to accommodate the new, to innovate, exchange, develop and experiment. Great cities accept this and use change to their advantage, even celebrate it. This is not to say the intrinsic qualities or heritage of a city are unimportant. It is to say that the status quo is not an option.

Let us look at the competitiveness and attractiveness of London to investment, innovation and youth versus Paris. Both are truly fine world cities. One accepts that change to its fabric is fundamental to its success. The other concentrates change in determined districts to avoid blighting its fine old streets and buildings. Guess which one is growing by all meaningful measures and which isn't? Which has twice the start-ups and patents? Which leads the world in economic output and the creative industries?

London wins. London is the prime example of how it's possible to keep a strong sense of city identity, protect what matters, but also have an adventurous view about the future, take risks, and develop a city-wide spirit that accommodates change. For example, would Adelaide lose its identity as a finely planned city of





two grids in a parkland setting if tall buildings proliferated? Or can future generations look forward to a city that retains those qualities while developing intensity in the third dimension – a changed city without doubt, but also likely a more competitive one. In fact, one may argue that future generations would see a tall skyline as equally important to the city's character as its parks and plan form.

Managing change isn't easy, and every city will have circumstances that drive its approach. However, the three ideas that stand out to us are:



**\$15.7  
BILLION**

**the total annual value of  
the live music industry  
to Australia**

## **The Sydney Laneway Festival showed how engaging events can occur in the city's under-used spaces.**

### **Demonstrate your intent**

The ability to demonstrate your desired intent through action is powerful. Examples such as the Sydney Laneway Festival have showed how engaging events can occur in the city's under-used spaces. Or how a street can be transformed into a new urban park, as with Brisbane's Albert Street Picnic which practically demonstrated the benefits and operational impacts of closing a core city street.

## **It's about benefit, not impact**

Too often the framework for considering change to our cities is driven by a mindset of impacts rather than benefits. This isn't to say impacts should be ignored, but a more balanced perspective would be to ensure our cities' citizens see the positive aspects of increased intensity and change in our cities. After all, the cities we commonly choose to visit on our holidays because of their vibrancy are all up to 10 times more dense than ours.

### **Make design count**

The quality of the design outcome, visually and functionally, is the key to short-term success and long-term sustainability, and moreover, the likelihood of future stages or similar projects. Sydney's inundated design competition process for CBD projects is a wonderful model from which other capitals could learn.



# BUILD ON YOUR STRENGTHS



Singapore has made no secret of its ambitions to become 'a city in a garden'. A simple idea executed extremely well has transformed that island nation into one of the healthiest and most liveable in the world.



Australia's young cities are rich in natural amenity. They don't rely solely on the built environment, as many large cities do, as the framework around which the city can grow. Our harbours, beaches, forests, hills and climate are an incredible natural advantage on the global stage.

However, to date, we've tied these qualities solely to the idea of their benefit to tourism and as opportunity for residential value creation. No doubt this has its place, but if our cities are to emerge as truly global, the message needs to be focused on how these strengths make our cities better places to live, work, perform, invest, play and innovate.

There are other strengths we have, too. With the 'urbanisation' of capital we have become great exporters of 'city services'. Our professional and financial services sectors, particularly in Sydney, are major exports and born entirely out of the notion of 'city making'. The education sector is also strong. Policy and campaigns in Melbourne and Brisbane have seen exponential growth in international students who seek out 'safe' cities that offer a mix of natural and urban experiences.

Health and technology are also key players for the eastern seaboard. Perth remains the natural home of industry associated with resources and innovation in energy production. These elements tell a story and start to differentiate each of the major Australian cities.

There is a school of thought that to succeed, you should amplify your existing strengths rather than be too concerned with improving weaknesses. Perhaps this is true of cities, too. Here's what we've observed along those lines:

### **Dominate where you're already strong**

This needs little explanation. Before looking outward, Australian cities should seek to lead and grow in areas in which they currently exhibit their strengths. The idea of a dollar invested in your established strengths and industries is likely (in most cases) to yield a better 'return' than a dollar invested in others.

### **Find new sectors and ideas**

However, it is always important to have new ideas and industries that will support the city in the future. Currently all cities in Australia are pursuing a knowledge economy platform which, in the context of each city is a strong idea. But can all Australian cities be underpinned by knowledge? Or is a better strategy to be more explicitly different from one another?

Rather than perpetually competing for the same talent and capital, Australian cities may be better

placed by pursuing their own paths. Of course, all cities need to provide similar services, levels of education, healthcare and access to employment, but at a higher level, some cities seem to be better located, skilled, and designed to be clearer (and therefore more globally competitive) about why they exist and what they do 'best'.

### **Green cities**

Singapore has made no secret of its ambitions to become 'a city in a garden'. A simple idea executed extremely well has transformed that island nation into one of the most liveable cities in the world.

Yet, Australia has more biodiversity, more plant species, more coastline and more temperate days per year. Australia's landscapes are diverse, as are our cities, and the opportunity to bring the two together could transform our global position and, more importantly, deliver unique cities in an often-homogenous world. Amenity is now global capital.



**42%**

**of Singapore is public green space**

Image: Singapore. Stat source: World Cities Culture Forum

# AGGLOMERATION IS A STRATEGY

Cities are now the global markets. Institutional investors don't look at countries, states or provinces when making investment decisions; they look at cities. Healthy cities are invested in, and the regions surrounding those cities benefit. In this paradigm, Melbourne 'is' Victoria, and Sydney 'is' New South Wales.





States with many remote and regional cities, like Queensland and Western Australia, are in a more difficult position as their capitals don't singularly generate as much of the states' GDP. In these cases, the idea of the agglomeration economy is key; the principle being to establish an 'alliance of cities to form a city region or agglomeration', which performs the functions and offers the services and attributes of a much larger single city.

Germany and Holland, with their grouping of significant and proximate cities, are excellent examples of the agglomeration strategy and its powerful positioning and economic effect. Closer to home, the South East Queensland agglomeration of Gold Coast, Logan, Brisbane, Ipswich, Redlands and Moreton Bay has

created a significant urban area with diverse industry, employment, cultural facilities and a high quality of life.

The challenge with the idea of an agglomerated city region is with connectivity. The often-extended transport of goods and separation of labour markets from specialist centres can cause inefficiencies and bring with it environmental challenges. However, a great many strengths exist with this approach, including an overall widening of markets, deepening of labour pools, and the ability to develop more specialised cities, which can lead to innovation and the potential for global leadership in those specific areas.

Image: Sao Paolo, Brazil. Stat source: QLD Department of Infrastructure, Local Government & Planning Review of the SEQ Regional Plan

**The South East Queensland agglomeration of Gold Coast, Logan, Brisbane, Ipswich, Redlands and Moreton Bay has created a significant urban area with diverse industry, employment, cultural facilities and a high quality of life.**



**5.3 MILLION**

By 2041, the SEQ population is expected to increase to 5.3 million people

**Listed as an alpha global city, the metropolis of Sao Paolo is the most populous city in Brazil and the Americas. With the eighth largest GDP in the world, this modern mega-city is expected to have the third highest economic rate of growth in the world between 2011 and 2025.**





**Governments, the private sector and media must establish and cultivate a positive dialogue around cities.**



Image: New York City.

Stat source: Roads to riches: better transport investment, Grattan Institute



# FOCUS INVESTMENT

In most cases around the world, it's been shown that major cities have a significant 'tax export' to their regions. In practical terms, this means less money is invested in each city than it generates and the balance is deployed to subsidise its nearby regions. Of course, cities don't exist in a vacuum and need healthy regions to support their growth and consumption.

However, in the 'urban age', the health of 'the city' is, controversially, likely more important than its surrounding regions. A healthy city supports its regions; regions can't return the favour and will ultimately also be diminished if the city fails to perform.

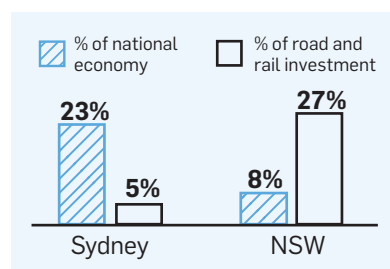
It's critical for Australian cities to be the focus of more investment from the capital they generate.

## Invest for maximum effect

Investment spread too thinly is far less impactful than investment focused in the right place at the right time. Focused investment in infrastructure, marketing, public realm (or anything) that is visible and of a high quality will only spur others to aim higher.

## Contribute to the dialogue around your city

Governments, the private sector and media must establish and cultivate a positive dialogue around cities. They are our future, and the more ideas, voices and debate that occurs around key initiatives and projects, the better.



Australian cities are leaders at creating 'something from nothing' – regenerating urban land and developing well-executed precincts. This skill and intrinsic cultural quality of innovation is a great advantage when considering our role as a collection of cities in a global marketplace. We often export this expertise (which is another example of the idea of 'trading' in city services).

The world's cities are intrinsically slow to evolve. It takes time to develop infrastructure, grow employment and population, and make significant change in cities. In imagining how one might accelerate change, Australian cities, for the most part, have the advantage of their comparative youth, which often mean many government owned strategic land holdings in near-centre areas: rail yards, waterfronts, low-productivity industrial areas and so on. These provide our cities with the unique ability, subject to policy and politics, to quickly reposition and re-imagine large areas that are proximate the established hearts of our cities.

≈ **10HA**

The Quay will cover near 10 hectares of prime riverfront land.

**Elizabeth Quay is a globally relevant lifestyle and mixed use precinct that for the first time, connects the Perth CBD to it's greatest natural asset – the river.**





There is opportunity to be more aspirational about our shared future – bolder and integrated in our collective thinking. This means positioning and envisioning our precincts on a global scale with globally relevant land uses and design outcomes – and more than this – considering the ‘precincts’ of our cities as a broader ecosystem of activity, connected to the form of a greater whole.

The idea of precincts isn't new, but the idea of integrated systems of precincts that have local relevance, a sense of speciality, and that form

a wider system of activity is a new way for Australian cities to think about how they evolve. The main idea here is:

### **The edges and connectivity are key**

While precincts are the focus, it's the edges and inter-relationship between clusters of activity that drive the innovation and unexpected collisions of different sectors and ideas. Make great precincts, but be sure to tend their interconnectivity and the edges where they touch the 'real' city.

**The idea of integrated systems of precincts that have local relevance, a sense of speciality, and that form a wider system of activity is a new way for Australian cities to think about how they evolve.**

# GLOBAL PRECINCT AS CATALYSTS

7



Image: Perth, Western Australia.  
Stat source: Western Australia Building Certifiers and Assessors

# CREATIVITY AND CULTURE COUNTS

There is no shortage of evidence and research that demonstrates the intrinsic and actual value of arts and creativity to the health and competitiveness of cities. Cultural precincts, creative clusters, festivals and events are part of what the global consumer and investor expects to find and enjoy in a global city.





Overall, Australian cities perform well in this area and are seen internationally to punch well above their weight. However, the race isn't over and this is an area often dominated by small-to-medium cities, such as Cannes, Toronto and Vienna. Perhaps in this dichotomy lies the advantage for Australian cities: all are at a scale that can accommodate and promote the arts and creativity in a structured way without the issues of diminishing return that are at play in much larger global cities like New York and London.

In relation to Australian cities, we have observed opportunities in this area that are worth discussion:

### Big and small

The co-location of arts and cultural uses is often undertaken in a way that clusters all the 'big' institutions together. Certainly, this drives critical mass, but the health of these parts of the city is entirely reliant on the 'small' too. A mix of established creative players alongside small start-ups, innovators and artists creates a true 'living' system, where the energy of the place can literally be felt on the streets and permeates the spirit of the wider city.

### Measurement

Although a counterintuitive idea around the creative industries, many cities globally work hard to pinpoint the quantum, location and productivity of their creative sector to assess its health and identify priorities for intervention, incentivisation and policy change.

**US\$250  
BILLION**



in revenue a year worldwide  
generated by creative and  
cultural industries

Image: Cannes, France. Stat source: The Conversation US

**Cultural precincts,  
creative clusters,  
festivals and events are  
part of what the global  
consumer and investor  
expects to find and  
enjoy in a global city.**







**People visit, and choose to stay and invest in a city, primarily because of the experiences they have in the public realm. Streets and spaces are the backbone of these positive experiences and the most successful cities know this.**



# THE CITY IS THE PUBLIC REALM

People visit, and choose to stay and invest in a city, primarily because of the experiences they have in the public realm. Streets and spaces are the backbone of these positive experiences and the most successful cities know this. Recent work in New York, transforming its streets into pedestrian-friendly spaces, and in London, where strategic cycling and pedestrian infrastructure has transformed major traffic routes, have had marked effects on the perceived liveability and attractiveness of those cities.

A high-quality public realm is essential for truly competitive cities. Some ideas about how to achieve this include:

## Choose a strategy

Looking outwardly at high performance and liveable cities across the world, in broad terms there are two approaches to managing the image and liveability of the city through public realm. Melbourne, for example, has chosen consistency and coherence as a strategy, designing the public realm to be a high-quality backdrop to expressive architectural forms.

Conversely, Auckland has chosen a precinct approach where different component parts of the city exhibit different textures and levels of visual expression. Both strategies work well but depend on a consistent strategic approach.

## Have fun and play in the city

All too often, the serious business of making great cities unintentionally creates outcomes that are fine and urban, but a little joyless. Many cities around the world are turning their attention to opportunities for young people in urban places, urban-play, addressing perceived 'nature-deficit disorders' and funding large-scale (and fun) interactive public art installations.

These things do matter – they are the moments that instantly go global through social media, they are things that make a child's day memorable rather than mundane and – for young cities like Australian cities – they are moments that make the idea of urban intensification, density and change worthwhile.

## Execute well

One small piece of well-executed public realm is far more valuable than vast areas delivered in a mediocre way. Early success reinforces expectations of quality and only serves to underline the value created.

Image: Prague, Czech Republic.  
Stat source: Urban Land Institute



# 49%

**dip in commercial vacancy rates following the placement of a protected bike lane in New York's Union Square North**

# DESIGN IS EVERYTHING



Counterintuitively, in a conversation about global positioning and city competitiveness, the detail matters too. Time and again, cities that value, execute and celebrate good design, 'win'. Sydney's rigorous design competition processes, and Melbourne's strong and shared culture of design are highly successful.

But we can be even more aspirational. Looking to Singapore, Amsterdam, and Berlin (as some of many), it's possible to see that good design is part of the currency of these places, and a major reason they're desirable places to live and work.

Image: Brisbane, Australia.  
Stat source: The dmi:Design Value Index





**Brisbane's recently released new world city design guide clearly positions climatically and culturally relevant design as a priority in making the city more distinctive and competitive.**

Design is also an intrinsically human endeavour, and one that's extremely hard to 'disrupt', because it requires intuition, skill, human communication and balance to achieve. So, if one was to invest in a sector or industry (and outcome) that's likely to be the most immune to change and therefore contribute value to a city for the longest period – design is a key area for consideration.

When talking about design, it's in an all-encompassing way. It's certainly not about creating an acrobatic and circus-like skyline, but about the fundamental elements: the streets, the parks, the way buildings relate to each other, the relationship of spaces and buildings to climate, and – most importantly – how new elements of the city provide a view about the city's aspirations and the community's shared culture.

**Over the last 10 years design-led companies have maintained significant stock market advantage, outperforming the S&P by**

**211%** 

**Time and again, cities that value, execute and celebrate good design, 'win'.**

# A FRAMEWORK FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIES?

As Australia's cities continue seeking strategies to improve their quality and competitiveness, the question is raised: are there any common threads that all cities can embrace at some level?

We think so and, although far from exhaustive, suggest consideration of the following key ideas and themes:



## Know what you want your city to be

**Intent:** Take on the stance and attitude of the city you want to become.

**Outcome:** Apply your vision in a singular way to every key decision affecting the city. If you can't, the vision isn't good enough.

**Design ideas:** Use creative processes and ideas to establish a common direction and sense of potential for your city.



## Make bold plans for mass transit

**Intent:** Be ambitious and link your city's greatest assets to create more value, amenity, jobs and innovation.

**Outcome:** Economic growth, social equity and access to employment, environmental gains.

**Design ideas:** Build a high capacity Rail and Metro network, and start as soon as possible. Avoid making it a political idea – it is a city-making idea that transcends market and government cycles.



## Make change a positive dialogue

**Intent:** Make crystal clear the benefits of change to begin to create a positive dialogue about city shape and character.

**Outcome:** A competitive city that can be resilient and aspire – whilst retaining its essential characteristics.

**Design ideas:** Use design competitions to raise the profile of projects and unveil to the community the dialogue around benefits rather than impacts.



## Invest in your strengths if they're unique

**Intent:** Be great at something, not average at everything.

**Outcome:** You are globally famous in that sector or space and much more attractive for it.

**Design ideas:** Bring the regional landscape into the fabric of your city, unlock waterfronts, and support key economic sectors through renewal and incentives.



## Partner with your neighbours

**Intent:** Instantly make your city more globally relevant and competitive through higher-performance agglomerations.

**Outcome:** Partnerships with other cities in your region can drive innovation, deepen the labour pool, and allow for specialisation.

**Design ideas:** High-speed, efficient connectivity between systems to form a web that functions as a single economic and cultural entity.





Image: Melbourne, Australia

### ✓ The city's success is primary

**Intent:** Strong cities make strong regions, never the other way around.

**Outcome:** An irresistible magnetism for investment, ideas, youth and innovation.

**Design ideas:** Invest more capital in the infrastructure, public realm, cultural facilities and quality of life in our cities.

### 🔄 Identify, connect, and grow globally-relevant precincts

**Intent:** Use strategic land to cultivate, and even experiment with, new precincts – one of them will be key in the future.

**Outcome:** A clear and sustainable competitive advantage.

**Design ideas:** Identify and plan for an interconnected network of intense precincts, preferably on large pieces of publicly owned land so they can be delivered holistically and the government can share in the 'upside'.

**Each city has its own specific advantages over and above their natural setting. Pursuing and concentrating on each of these elements is equally important to its performance and relevance on a global scale into the future.**

### 💡 Creativity is your insurance against disruption

**Intent:** Creative cities are just more enjoyable to be in, and therefore more attractive to live in, work in, and invest in.

**Outcome:** Increased quality of life and retention of youth and talent, will create a sustainable economic proposition.

**Design ideas:** Map, measure and understand your creative sectors, then invest in the infrastructure they need to thrive.

### 🏙️ Great streets make great cities

**Intent:** People visit your city, and choose to stay or go, primarily because of the experience they have in the public realm.

**Outcome:** A beautiful city in which people want to participate. Make your city engaging for all members of the community, a place that's memorable.

**Design ideas:** Clear strategies and projects, rolled out continuously, to improve the streets and spaces of the city.

Even Australia, one of the most urbanised nations in the world, still has many lessons to learn by looking abroad at cities old and new, cities that are climatically relevant, of similar scales, and those that are geographically proximate. All these factors form the tapestry of ideas and opportunities that will underpin Australia's next wave of urbanisation and result in the creation of cities that are the envy of the world.

# WHO WE ARE

---

Urbis is a market-leading firm with the goal of shaping the cities and communities of Australia for a better future. Drawing together a network of the brightest minds, our firm consists of practice experts, working collaboratively to deliver fresh thinking and independent advice and guidance – all backed up by real, evidence-based solutions.

Cistri represents Urbis Australia's international business. Through Urbis Australia, Cistri benefits from over 50 years of experience providing property advice to clients located and investing in Asia and the Middle East. The establishment of Cistri in Singapore enables us to better serve our clients' evolving needs and offer the full suite of our services.

Working across the areas of planning, design, policy, heritage, valuations, transactions, economics and research, our expert teams at Urbis and Cistri connect their clients to a better outcome, every time.





## National Directors



**James Tuma**  
Design



**John Wynne**  
Planning



**Linda Kurti**  
Economic & Social  
Advisory



**Clinton Ostwald**  
Property Economics  
& Research



**Sue Say**  
Property Economics  
& Research



**Matthew Cleary**  
Real Estate Advisory

## Regional Directors



**Ben Slack**  
Brisbane



**Peter Small**  
Melbourne



**Ray Haeren**  
Perth



**David Hoy**  
Sydney



**Peter Hyland**  
Cistri



