

by some mysterious and unexplained action, uplift and transform the very consciousness of the people, strengthening community pride and focussing community identity by its very presence.

For the Parramatta Council, in the early stages, a cultural centre located in their very own local government area offered a potentially promising opportunity for them to share in the prestige and exalted status accorded to the arts in this country. This is the major reason why a council such as Parramatta, which had previously displayed little interest in local cultural activity, suddenly decided to accept responsibility for a major cultural institution.

A constant theme within the rhetoric which surrounded the erection of Parramatta Riverside Theatres was the ambiguous notion that the centre

would fill a 'cultural gap'. It was assumed that the arts imposed on a community could potentially become a leisure resource for all sections of Australian society. This betrays a deep ignorance of how the arts operate in their social context. Participation in arts institutions fundamentally constitutes class affiliation, and it will take more than the regionalisation of arts centres to change that. If art is to broaden its audience base then it must tackle the serious image problem it carries within the majority of the population. Even then, without change in the content and context of its operations it will fail to compete with the diverse number of other leisure facilities available elsewhere.

The advent of cultural centres has done one thing. It has resulted in local government emerging as a major player in the public provision of public facilities. Within the field of

cultural provision, local councils such as Parramatta have failed to fulfil their potential to be responsive to local needs and in touch with the unique characteristics of their constituents. It can only be hoped that in future forays into culture, local councils will base their decisions within a sound cultural policy framework which positions cultural centres within their social, political and economic contexts. Today, Riverside Theatres stands imposing yet forlorn in the depressed downtown area of Parramatta. It exists as an expensive reminder that cultural facilities provision requires a policy framework just like any other area of government intervention.

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Green Fields

*New communities require new cultural identities.
Marla Guppy reports.*

For the last hundred years Sydney, in the company of other cities across the world, has attempted to develop some control over the scope and style of urban expansion. Rapid urban growth has undermined successive metropolitan plans. It has placed increasing stress on the

fragile environment of the Cumberland Plain west of Sydney. It has also been responsible for a seemingly unending succession of new communities, many of which have been developed without the attendant infrastructure and services to allow for an acceptable standard of community life.

Large estates of both public and private housing have covered what was previously rural land. Existing towns and settlements have been altered in both character and dimension. Making sense of this changing environment continues to be a consuming task for both older communities and new arrivals.

Much has been written about the level of social and cultural dislocation that has come to be seen as an almost in-

evitable feature of new communities. It could be argued, however, that this depiction of new release areas as 'uncultured' in fact maintains their position as a valued counterpoint to areas (and populations) well serviced by mainstream culture. In her latest book *Worse Than Death* Jean Bedford's intrepid private detective Anna Southwood travels to Liverpool on a case and observes that "In the fading light it looked like a good place for a murder". This line is just one example of a cultural tradition focused around the 'badlands' of western Sydney. So pervasive is this tradition that even documentary material is often accompanied by the epic lyrics of working class despair and rebellion, encouraging the viewer not to understand but to encompass vicariously these 'suburbs of the heart' as the dark side of his/her own cultural experience.

This depiction of the culture of the new community as a necessary adjunct to mainstream culture has had significant effects on cultural development in new release areas. It has resulted in a deliberately interventionist community arts movement which has energetically attempted to support and develop a positive and indigenous community identity. This work, so successful in its own right, has nevertheless been peripheral to a belief that cultural disadvantage is historical and will be alleviated naturally as the community matures and develops a more successful social infrastructure. Hence, the community arts project itself is often seen as both alleviating cultural disadvantage and as indicating the absence of other more valuable cultural activity. A necessary parallel to this is the belief that cultural maturity is indicated by the presence of mainstream cultural activity and facilities.

Given the heavy demands placed on local government and community welfare organisations in servicing new release areas, it is easy to see how these views support the commonly held idea that the provision of cultural services is 'icing on the cake' to be dealt with when other more pressing issues are resolved. The tenacity with which this stance is defended is in itself a testament to battle for scarce resources that determines such nar-

row agendas. Hence, it is argued, child care must take precedence over the cultural needs of the child (and her mother). It is also important to recognise that the beliefs themselves are a consequence of a narrow definition of culture that is more heavily reliant on costly infrastructure than any understanding of community cultural values. The idea that the cultural needs of women and children might be met within the context of child care, shopping or even domestic environments is not considered. The idea that 'real' culture is absent from new communities is an extension of these beliefs.

There are, of course, contradictions in this outlook. On one hand there is an almost total lack of acceptance of a cultural landscape inclusive of such forms as domestic environments, auto decoration and shopping expeditions. On the other hand, there is a gradual recognition that some cultural activity, notably community arts, can have other desirable social or even economic outcomes. These can include increased resident involvement in community life, decreased vandalism and movement towards a more positive community identity.

While these outcomes deserve such recognition it is disturbing that they are not defined as cultural phenomena in themselves. Is not the presence or absence of vandalism an indicator of a cultural relationship to the environment? Is no community involvement a consequence of communication mechanisms that are themselves culturally determined? Can not community identity be described as the collective embracing of cultural signs and relationships?

What is needed is an acceptance, now only partially realised, that community development must extend beyond pragmatic concerns with effective service provision. Cultural venues are an important part of cultural service provision. But in new communities facilitating the emergence of a broader cultural landscape with all its potential for a diversity of expression, interaction and local intervention is an equal priority. Cultural planning at a locality level can not only identify the characteristics of the emerging cultural landscape, it can also be a focus for direct negotia-

tion and advocacy with other planning bodies. This can enable an integration of cultural priorities in all aspects of the planning and management of new release areas. Given the complexities of the planning process and the exaggerated timelines necessary for the provision of services and resources, it is unrealistic to expect sensitive cultural planning to be achieved as an afterthought. It is far more likely that neglect will result in the provision of cultural services or facilities that value mainstream cultural development at the expense of a dynamic culture that is intrinsic to the community and its new population. Integrating cultural planning into the wider local planning framework allows for both the recognition and support of developing cultural identity.

Cultural identity is a fundamental expression of our sense of belonging. It determines how we see ourselves and how we relate to the world beyond. We pay a high price for overlooking its centrality in contemporary urban life. Cultural inequity in new urban developments is a cause for concern to both communities and service providers. By planning cultural futures in the early stages of land release much of this stress can be alleviated.

Glenmore Park is a new residential release area of approximately 800 hectares three kilometres south of the Penrith City Centre, west of Sydney. It will be one of the largest urban releases in western Sydney with an anticipated population of 20,000 when the development is complete.

Both the developers—a consortium comprising Elders Finance and the NSW Department of Housing—and Penrith Council have been anxious to avoid the backlog in the provision of community services and facilities that has been a much publicised feature of new communities. The development of a community plan has been funded by the developers and managed by Penrith Council. The community plan is paralleled by a management plan, a structure plan and an open space plan, and stands in relationship to a local environment plan and detailed development control plans. The cultural plan will form a section of the Glenmore Park Community

Plan. It is also intended as a point of reference for specific sections of the open space plan. The cultural plan was funded by the developers.

Given the comprehensive planning strategies that have accompanied the development of Glenmore Park it is important to note that the cultural plan is a latecomer to the party. The cultural planning consultancy was the outcome of a proposal put to the developers by local workers. Its effectiveness has been dependent on two things: the commitment of the developers to provide funds and support, and the willingness of Penrith Council to integrate the plan into already existing planning processes so late in the day.

The developers and council seem to have supported the plan for several reasons. Penrith Council has been quick to recognise the potential links between community and cultural development objectives—in particular the development of a sense of community identity. They have also recognised the part that cultural activity and facilities might play in enhancing the amenity of the built and natural environment. The developers, while supporting these directions, are undoubtedly attracted by the increased market appeal offered by the promise of a planned cultural environment.

It could be argued that the acceptance of cultural planning has been a process of negotiation, of 'selling' the philosophies and strategies to different players in the planning process rather than merely developing appropriate strategies for an already approved agenda. It can't be denied that opening new arenas for planning cultural outcomes is exciting, but a dependence on individual values and attitudes for an acceptance of cultural agendas is dangerous. What has worked in Glenmore Park might not be accepted by other developers or local governments. Given the complexity of urban planning, the breadth of issues and agencies involved and the inevitable scarce resources at all levels of planning and implementation, there is an emphatic need to position cultural planning firmly within the broader framework at both local and state government level.

Glenmore Park's preliminary cultural plan attempts to establish strategic directions for ongoing cultural planning in Glenmore Park and its environs. It quite deliberately eschews narrow definitions of 'culture' in favour of an understanding of a 'cultural landscape' which is both inclusive and diverse. Such a 'landscape' would include participation in mainstream cultural activity such as theatre attendance, dancing classes and art exhibitions, but it would also affirm the importance of domestic environments, pub culture, graffiti, personal histories and other cultural forms as signifiers of a developing cultural identity. Moreover, it would contest the pervasive view that culture can only be 'provided' by outsiders and encourage a recognition that even the newest communities are capable of an energetic accumulation and trade in cultural values, skills, traditions and commodities.

The plan itself is grouped around five key areas: a projected demographic profile; the built and natural environment; existing cultural services and facilities in Penrith local government area; community services and facilities; and funding and sponsorship options.

The first two of these areas have been developed in close consultation with the community plan and the open space plan. In the first instance the cultural plan makes as realistic an appraisal as possible of the cultural needs of the projected demographic breakdown of the area and makes a series of recommendations as to how these might be accommodated. For example, the presence of a large population of children under 12 not only increases the demand for cultural activity for that age group, it also places stress on the cultural needs of women. This necessitates not only the planning of activities and facilities but also the development of an infrastructure which allows women access to cultural activity—including flexible child care, safe transport, accessible local facilities and an understanding of the shopping complex as a venue for cultural exchange. In a similar way the plan also evaluates the needs of youth, residents from non-English

speaking backgrounds, and the Aboriginal community. The intention is not to be prescriptive about cultural outcomes but rather to encourage an intelligent appraisal of needs that can be reassessed as the community grows.

The focus on the built and natural environment makes some detailed proposals for early resident involvement in the design of local environments. It aims to encourage cultural input into early landscaping work, and to provide an opportunity for residents to develop skills in planning and managing local environments at a time when collaboration between the community and design professionals might have maximum effect.

The plan also discusses the broader cultural environment of Penrith and its interrelationship with Glenmore Park. Two significant issues are raised here. There is a fundamental question of access, of how easily the new community will be able to participate in an existing cultural infrastructure. Equally important is the dilemma of how cultural service providers can adequately address the needs of a local government area that has doubled in size in the last twenty years without additional support.

The ability of the community development sector to support cultural planning objectives is equally dependent on their ability to take on new agendas. In recognition of this the plan also emphasises the need for appropriate skills development and resourcing of community service providers to facilitate their support of and involvement in cultural activity. Again it must be stressed that the success of the cultural planning process will be dependent on a developing sense of ownership by all players. This will depend on an appreciation of collaborative work, creative partnerships and the possibility of mutually beneficial outcomes. But it will be achieved through implementation processes which are sensitive to the demands that new release areas place on both workers and residents alike.

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