 Urbanscape and Public Spaces

Introduction

Many contemporary architectural practices include work on Urban Design. Urban Design does not just focus on individual buildings or spaces; rather it focuses on the design of a neighborhood, precinct, town or city. In this form of architectural practice, architects consider the urban space holistically. They would consider relationships between different aspects of the site, groups of buildings, streetscape, landscape, and public spaces, and how they can be designed to be attractive, functional and sustainable spaces.

Architects would investigate how urban spaces are used and how architects can design these spaces for effective use by the community. They would consider issues such as the constraints of the physical geography of the site, the ways that movement occurs within the site, how transport and other infrastructure systems interact with the site as well as the interests of public and private stakeholders connected to the site.

Creating an identity or sense of place is an important consideration for architects engaged in urban design. Architects consider the social and cultural impact of their design and how their designs can create positive experiences for people and communities as they interact with these spaces or create a unique and significant identity for that site.

Urban Design requires that architects work collaboratively with other built environment professionals including landscape architects, urban planners, engineers and ecologists. Architects work with communities and clients through consultation processes and the interests of these groups would inform their design.
THE FUTURE OF PENRITH / PENRITH OF THE FUTURE
URBAN DESIGN PLAN FOR THE CITY OF PENRITH

Campement Urbain

KEYWORDS

Archipelago: An extensive group of islands
Aspiration: A hope or ambition of achieving something
Circulation: Movement to and fro and around something
Icon: A person or thing regarded as a representative symbol worthy of respect
Place-making: A term used in urban design to describe the ways that a designer will create an identity for a particular site
Urban: Relating to, or characteristic of a town or city
Utopian: Aiming for a state in which everything is perfect, idealistic

Project: The Future of Penrith / Penrith of the Future.
Architect: Campement Urbain.
Rendered Image.

Watch the interview with Tim Williams
http://youtu.be/LqxXbwVeuhQ
URBAN DESIGN PLAN FOR THE CITY OF PENRITH

The Future of Penrith / Penrith of the Future is an innovative urban design plan developed by the French and Australian art and urban design collective, Campement Urbain in 2011. Campement Urbain is a collaborative design group comprising of French contemporary artist, Sylvie Blocher, French architect, Francois Duane and Australian architect, Tim Williams. Together they have developed a vision in their urban design plans to regenerate the city of Penrith, an outer Western Sydney town at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

In 2012, the design plan The Future of Penrith / Penrith of the Future won the Australian Award for Urban Design. This project used contemporary, conventional approaches to urban design in conjunction with practices from contemporary art to develop their final design.

Penrith to Paris

Campement Urbain has worked on other projects in Paris that use art and architecture interventions to unite and regenerate communities in disadvantaged suburbs such as Sevran as well as contribute to visions for the city of Paris.

http://campementurbain.org/cuv3/

Tim Williams

Tim Williams, Sydney architect, has worked on a number of urban design projects. See more of these on his website. Read about the ways that Williams sees his own practice and the network of relationships that makes up his practice under the tab “About”

STARTING FROM ART: ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

Most urban design projects begin with clients such as councils or planning authorities calling for designs through a public competition or by inviting different architects to present proposals. Somewhat unusually, the Penrith of the Future project has its origins in an art project that began in 2006.

The Museum of Contemporary C3 West project invited Campement Urbain members, Sylvie Blocher and Francois Duane to work on a series of artist residencies in Western Sydney. Penrith Panthers Entertainment Group commissioned Campement Urbain to work with their architects on the re-development of the club’s site to extend the vision for the site so it reflected the social and cultural value of this local football club site for the community.

Campement Urbain presented Panthers “with a visionary and utopian story of their future, that explored the possibilities for western Sydney”

Engaging the voices of the community as part of the architectural consultancy in this project became foundation for the development of the architectural plans for The Future of Penrith/ Penrith of the Future plan.

What is missing: Sylvie Blocher

The hopes, dreams and aspirations of members of the Penrith community are captured in Blocher’s video work, What is Missing? This work, commissioned by C3 West, is part of Blocher’s international series of Living Pictures

http://www.penrithregionalgallery.org/What-is-Missing.php
http://campementurbain.org/cuv3/

Sylvie Blocher: What is Missing, 2010 Video work.

C3West Projects

C3 West is a long term program which creates situations for artists to work with business and government agencies to create artworks.

"UNLIKELY" CLIENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Clients for Urban Design projects are typically government authorities, local councils or corporate developers who develop a brief for the architects commissioned to design urban spaces. The Penrith project brought together a diverse set of partners, described by Tim Williams as an unlikely set of stakeholders. They included Penrith City Council, the Penrith Panthers Entertainment Group, the state land development body, Landcom, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the local community.

THE BRIEF: ADDRESSING PROBLEMS ON THE URBAN FRINGE

On the edge of the Sydney metropolis, Penrith faces challenges found in similar fringe suburbs around the world. The lack of public transport and services, fragmented urban sprawl, spaces that are dead at night, disconnected social groups and a need for a positive regional identity were identified as issues that could be addressed with a new approach to urban design.

Acknowledging that conventional approaches to urban design had not worked for Penrith, the group of partners commissioned Campement Urbain to develop a visionary blueprint for Penrith based on the dreams and ideas of the local community.

The project comprised of 3 components; video interviews of local residents talking about Penrith and their ideas for the future, analysis of the geography and urban design of Penrith and the development of a proposal for the urban re-design of the city centre.

We wrote our own brief and then started to look at how we could discover resident’s dreams, concerns and aspirations.

Tim Williams

I live in a suburb like this, near Paris. The centre of Paris is a museum. The suburbs are packed with young people, they are the next generation.

Sylvie Blocher

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: TRANSFORMING THE LOCAL
RESEARCHING THE SITE: ENGAGING THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

In February 2011, contemporary artist and member of Campement Urbain, Sylvie Blocher began the process by interviewing more than 40 residents of the Penrith Local Government Area. She asked them just 3 questions:

1. If you were the mayor of Penrith, what would you change?
2. What is your suggestion for an annual event for the community of Penrith?
3. What is your relationship to beauty?

This collaborative artistic practice engaging the community provided a rich basis for the concepts behind the urban design. People who were interviewed talked of the importance of the river, the need for better public spaces with cafes and parks, access to public transport, the need for more facilities and services such as cultural and social venues as well as creating a better positive identity for Penrith.


Before we drew anything, we listened to the voice of the people.

The people of Penrith have clear and well-articulated ideas about what is important. They speak about re-establishing a connection to the river, of providing better public space and transport, of celebrating the many cultures of the city and its aboriginal origins.

Tim Williams


Super Sydney- Engaging the voices of many communities

As part of the 2012 and 2013 Sydney Architecture Festival, people from across Sydney from each of the 42 councils were asked to talk about where they consider home, their biggest concerns about Sydney and what they hoped for the Sydney of the future. Listen to what they said.

http://www.supersydney.org/
RESEARCHING THE SITE: CONVENTIONAL URBAN ANALYSIS

Alongside the collaborative process of ‘shared responsibility’ with the people of Penrith, Campement Urbain used conventional urban design practices to analyse and research the Penrith area.

The physical and urban geography was mapped and compared to other cities such as Manhattan and Paris to look at the scale of the area and to consider the ways the land was used. The analysis also included mapping circulation routes and main roads, bike and pedestrian access, residential and urban development and public and green spaces.

This mapping revealed a city that was disconnected and isolated with a number of physical barriers that blocked access. The train line in the north and the freeway in the south divided different parts of the city area. Within the central city area, the large shopping mall and the train station created significant physical and social barriers for the interaction of people in this precinct. Only two road bridges crossed the main physical feature of the area, the Nepean River. While the river was considered by those interviewed to be the main feature of the area, access was denied with limited views and access to the river.

The Future of Penrith/ Penrith of the Future Analysis

Download the detailed analysis of Penrith in maps and diagrams

DESIGN SOLUTIONS: 
BREAKING BARRIERS

From their research and analysis, Campement Urbain developed an urban plan for Penrith that used the metaphor of connected groups of islands, ‘an urban archipelago’. Connected ‘islands’ of green spaces, of shared spaces for people within public areas as well as buildings and housing for residents and for cultural and social events were created in the final plan. Green corridors of open space, a monorail and a new pedestrian bridge were part of the final plan to re-connect the city.

Two main axis lines were identified to link the city of Penrith. The Nepean River forms one main axis of public space in the design and the second main axis is the line of the Great Western Highway and the railway line, which also links Penrith to the centre of Sydney.

BRINGING THE RIVER BACK

Overwhelmingly, the people of Penrith identified the Nepean River as the iconic landmark of Penrith. Campement Urbain’s final design reconnects the town centre with the river through a series of canals, fountains and water courses that follow the axis along the railway line from the river. Water is used to create cooling places of rest and to relieve the hard surfaces of the city’s public spaces, creating inviting places to meet.
INVITING PUBLIC SPACES

The final design included a number of new or re-designed public spaces to encourage more connections between the community and the city. Spaces such as the railway station included thoroughfares that connected the north and south of the city with paved and grassed areas with trees that were spaces for relaxing or enjoying a coffee at restaurants and cafes in the area. Hard surfaces were broken with areas of water or green spaces to make them more inviting. Grassed covered roofs provided another green space and a place for people to connect with the view to the mountains. The computer generated visualisations of these spaces also showed an extensive use of glass or open areas to create transparent spaces that broke barriers and allowed for a sense of connection throughout the spaces.

CULTURAL AMMENITIES AND EVENTS

Many of the community spoke of the need for more spaces and structures to be able to gather for community and cultural events. Campement Urbain’s final plans established cultural and education precincts in the city centre with plans for a large multi purpose arena floating sound stage on the river for concerts and other performances.

To refocus the community on the cultural and spiritual significance of the river, they proposed a festival for the river.

GREATER ACCESS

Campement Urbain’s plan also looked at finding solutions for access to the river and included plans for a river beach as well as improving transport around the city. Proposals included extension and development of bike paths and a monorail shuttle. These transport options encourage sustainable ways of moving around the city.
The final presentation of the urban design plan was presented as a short film. The film interspersed footage of interviews of Penrith residents outlining their hopes for Penrith with the analysis of the site in the maps and comparative studies. As it unfolds, the community’s hopes and aspirations are illustrated through digital images and plans showing the different components of the design. Familiar views of the city area were overlaid with the new urban design showing how the design would transform these spaces.

Uniquely, the presentation concludes with the voice of the Nepean River. The narrative speaks of the renewal and regeneration of the river, its significance and place in the indigenous history of Penrith and its importance for the future as an icon and place for Penrith renewal.

**Nepean River Green Bridge**

To link the two sides of the river, Campement Urbain proposed that a pedestrian bridge was built. Their proposal was for a habitable bridge i.e., a bridge that allow for more activities such as viewing platforms and spaces to enjoy the view as well as for pedestrian and cyclists to cross the river.

**Final presentation video**

For the final presentation of the urban design plan, Campement Urbain developed a video presentation that developed a narrative of what the people of Penrith wanted for their city and how this was realised in the plan.


Jane Street looking toward the river. The plan for Jane Street included new medium density housing with grass roofs with access so the green spaces connected to the Blue Mountains. Rendering, *The Future of Penrith / Penrith of the Future*, Campement Urbain, 2011.
IMAGINING PLACE: RE-DESIGN OF LOCAL SPACES

ART MAKING

1. Identify a local site of significance that is currently undervalued or overlooked. The site could be in the local community or in their own school. It could be an area that is currently under consideration for re-development by local authorities.

2. Investigate the historical, cultural and/or social significance of the site through research of local information and archives along with interviews or oral stories about the site.

3. You could interview stakeholders and community groups with an interest in the space to gain understanding of their issues, ideas and hopes.

4. You could develop and present a series of proposals in which you present ideas for re-designing the space to highlight its significance within the local community. You could work individually or in teams.

5. Develop a series of resolved sketches and maps of your site using your own drawings over photographs, illustrations or digital renderings using programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator or Sketch Up.

6. You could present these to the client in an exhibition, in a video or public presentation.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: TRANSFORMING THE LOCAL

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDIES

1. Using the conceptual framework as a scaffold, develop a summary of the urban design practices used by members of Campement Urbain in this project.

2. Prepare a press release that outlines the key features of the innovative practices used in this project.

3. Compare the practices of Campement Urbain with other urban designers (see list of other examples) through a study of particular examples.

4. Critically evaluate the role of urban designers to intervene and positively change our use of public spaces.

5. Present this as a newspaper article, a review of an exhibition of urban design projects or as a set of interview questions for a video conference or news interview.
ART MAKING

1. Develop site-specific artworks that would be part of a local festival celebrating a significant site or community precinct such as a main street, park or natural feature such as a river or beach.

2. Site-specific works could focus on issues and ideas that characterise the site such as environmental, social, historical or cultural significance of the site.

3. You could incorporate the voices, images or views of local people. The works could be a class collaboration or group works.

4. Installation of works could be an event for the local community or the documentation of the works could be presented as an exhibition in the local area.

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDIES

1. Investigate Sylvie Blocher’s work with communities in Penrith and Paris.

2. Consider the relationships between the different agencies of the Conceptual Framework in her artmaking practices.

3. Investigate the ways that artists respond to sites such as Cockatoo Island or how artists create works for the Laneways festival.

4. You could also look at international examples by artists such as works by Christo and Jeanne Claude or Ivan and Heather Morrison’s site-specific events as ways of engaging communities through site-specific works.

5. From these investigations, you could write a newspaper review of the installation of one of these works and the ways in which audiences responded to these works.

C3 West projects across Sydney provide ways of considering how artists and designers engage with sites of significance in their local communities. Artists such as Garry Trinh, Craig Walsh and Sylvie Blocher have created works with C3 West and the Museum of Contemporary Art.


JR Inside Out Project

French street artist JR has created a participatory art project using photo booth trucks. In the trucks or at photo booths in a gallery, community members, often from disadvantaged communities, are invited to have their photo taken. The large format images are then taken into community sites and are used to transform the urban spaces that are important to them.

http://www.insideoutproject.net/en/about