Creating a Centre for the Centre-less City: The Case of the Gold Coast

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Abstract: Most cities in the world have a central business district (CBD) developed organically but there are some exceptions. The city of Gold Coast is distinctive in the Australian landscape for not having a traditional city centre. What makes it unique, however, is the council’s attempt to create a new centre, through the Southport Priority Development Area (PDA) project, for an already established city of half a million people in order to enhance and diversify the economy of the region as well as to provide the city with an official CBD.

This paper examines this unusual case in order to determine how successful a newly created CBD can be and what factors are important in its planning. To do so the paper first identifies characteristics of vibrant and successful CBDs and then evaluates the Southport PDA project against these characteristics using data collected through stakeholder interviews, resident and business surveys and archival research. The findings suggest that while Southport at present has some basis for its claim to be the Gold Coast’s CBD and its case may further be strengthened as a result of the investments and developments attracted by the PDA project, the unique history and structure of the Gold Coast results in the spread of some of the activities traditionally found in city centres to other areas of the city.

Introduction

In the planning literature, central business district (CBD) often refers to the geographic heart of a city, which has a higher concentration of commercial buildings, specialist retail, office buildings, greater urban density and job opportunities than the rest of the city (Mills 1967, Imai 1982, Farst 2003, Park 2004, Shroitman-Sarig 2006, Yaguanga 2011, Daniel and Obadiah 2013). In other words a CBD represents the identity (Robertson 1995), the core of history, culture, economy, administrative, and social aspects of a city. CBDs are playing a vital role in financial stability of local citizens by providing employment opportunities, which enhance the economic conditions of the city (Moe and Wilkie 1997, Farst 2003). In the history of urban settlements, CBDs do not develop suddenly in a particular time following a specific method; they rather evolve progressively as a feedback to shifting knowledge, skills and socioeconomic forms, as well as the relevant local and national policies (Robertson 1995).

Yet, there are some urban areas like the Gold Coast that do not necessarily follow any traditional urban land use formations, and therefore may not have a traditional CBD as such. Some of these special types of cities may be formed as a result of tourism urbanisation (Mullins 1992) and have a Recreational Business District (RBD) (Getz 1993) instead of a CBD. Tourism urbanisation is a unique city formation which is usually linear in shape, established as a holiday destination often along a water body and comprises mainly of holiday accommodation and beach resorts (Mullins 1992, Getz 1993). Examples of such urbanisation can be found on the Mediterranean coast, Florida coastline in the United States, as well as the cities of Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast in Australia (Mullins 1992). RBD commonly refers to the centre of the tourism urbanisation with related retail and services such as souvenir shops, restaurants, food outlets, clubs and bars which cater for the tourists’ shopping and entertainment needs (Stansfield and Rickert 1970, Getz 1993). The development of the city of Gold Coast fits with the theories of tourism urbanisation (Mullins 1992) and RBDs (Getz 1993). While the concentration of high-rises along the coast presents a city centre image the city does not have a traditional CBD as many cities around the world, but a number of smaller centres around the city. This is mostly due to its formation as a city through joining of a scattered number of resorts along the beach each with its own centre (Smith 1991). Surfers Paradise and Coolangatta are the Gold Coast’s RBDs, while historically Southport and Tweed Heads provided administrative and service roles to the north and south ends of the region (Dedekorkut-Howes 2013).

Recently the City of Gold Coast has introduced a number of projects in order to expand the city’s lifestyle, culture and economy. These initiatives include the Southport Priority Development Area (PDA), the Gold Coast Cultural Precinct and Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct. The aim of the Southport PDA is to create an official CBD for the city of Gold Coast. The main driver behind the project is to deliver economic growth for the Southport area by encouraging developers to build there. The Interim Land Use Plan abolishes the existing development assessment barriers and promotes flexibility and innovation that enhance development growth within the boundary of the PDA (City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013). Southport is one of the oldest suburbs of the Gold Coast and currently comprises of a mixed use environment, with residential, retail, commercial,
educational and office facilities, major bus and the new light rail stations. The Plan also argues that ‘Southport has the capacity to deliver the City of Gold Coast’s Central Business District’ (City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013, p. 9).

This research examines this unique case in order to determine whether a newly created CBD can be successful and if so what factors are important in its planning. To do so this research presents the results of mixed methods research including qualitative and quantitative data to examine a set of elements that are essential for the success of the newly created CBD.

What Makes a Good CBD?

In today’s modern society the CBD acts as the functional core of a city with the highest population density of both residents and visitors, highest concentration of employment, building density, business and industrial activities including highest level of retail, high quality employees, highest level of traffic congestion and highest rent and land values compared to the other parts of the city (Robertson 1995, Yaguanga 2011). Furthermore, it incorporates a great concentration of such human activities as cultural, financial, commercial, business, and service-organisational. In order to facilitate these activities the CBD has the highest concentration of business and office buildings, hotels and high-rise apartments within the city, incorporated with associated traffic, relevant communications and other infrastructures.

The question is which one of those features and in what degree will make a CBD vibrant? In order to answer this question this paper explores the common features of successful CBDs through reviewing the literature on successful CBDs and best practice CBD revitalisation approaches.

As the literature review did not discover any attempts to create a CBD for an urban area long after its establishment this study relies on the literature on the elements of successful CBDs and CBD/downtown1 revitalisation. To this end we review the composition and functions and physical and socioeconomic characteristics of successful CBDs as well as CBD redevelopment process to identify the factors which are important in the planning of a CBD.

Land Uses and Functions of Successful CBDs


Physical and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Successful CBDs


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1 In the United States (US) the term downtown is more commonly used in referring to the Central Business District (CBD).
(Re)development Process for Creating Successful CBDs

The above literature review shows that creating a vibrant CBD is not that simple. The right mix of land uses and functions in the right densities have to come together in particular spatial arrangements and these will be different from place to place. Equally important is the process through which CBDs are (re)developed. Literature suggests that stakeholder involvement (Faulk 2006, Whitworth and Neal 2008); public-private partnerships (Gordon 1997, Kotler et al. 1999, Ferguson 2005) and branding the CBD (Paddison, 1993, Wilson 1995, Robertson 1999, Kotler et al. 1999, Anholt 2005, Gardner 2003, Wells 2003, Kavaratzis 2004, 2007, Niedomysl 2004, Hankinson 2007, Havercampf 2008, Whitworth and Neal 2008, Ryu 2010) are important in CBD revitalization program success.

Methodology

This paper undertakes a case study using the mixed methods approach including a desk-top study, document review, interviews, and surveys. Evaluation criteria synthesized from the reviewed literature guided the development of the interview questions, design of the survey instrument and identification of the potential respondents and interviewees.

The target participants of this research were the major stakeholders including state and local government representatives, developers, Southport local businesses, the Gold Coast residents and industry and advocacy groups. Semi-structured interviews collected data from 17 state and local government representatives, developers, Southport Chamber of Commerce members, and urban planning and business scholars. In order to collect the opinion of Southport businesses and Gold Coast residents on the Southport PDA project two survey instruments were constructed containing general demographic questions and specific questions related to the Gold Coast CBD and the characteristics of successful CBDs synthesised from the literature.

The Gold Coast resident survey targeted a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of ±6. For the eighteen years of age and over population of the Gold Coast, which is approximately 390,000 (ABS 2011b), a sample size of 267 selected randomly is required to be representative (Veal 2011). The resident survey was conducted in three locations where the residents mostly gathered: the public space of Broadwater Parklands in Southport, Pratten Park in Broadbeach and the Robina Town Centre in Robina. The resident survey was conducted by two administrators in three full days in 2014: Southport Broadwater Parklands on July 19; Pratten Park Broadbeach on July 20; and Robina Town Centre on August 3. To obtain a more representative sample and decrease bias participants were intercepted randomly in all three locations. To ensure the validity of the survey results visitors of the Gold Coast, persons under the age of 18 or with an apparent mental disability were excluded.

Southport business surveys were administrated at a Southport Chamber of Commerce event on 5 August 2014. 50 participants present at the time of the event were given questionnaires. This was followed by 40 email surveys sent out by the organisation to the participants who did not have a chance to complete the questionnaire during the event. From the 90 distributed questionnaires only 21 were completed, resulting in a response rate of 23.33%.

The data collected was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data collected through interviews and open-ended survey questions were analysed using a systematic approach involving a three stage coding process; open, axial and selective coding (Veal 2011). The quantitative data collected through surveys were manually entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Regarding gender, the majority of the business survey respondents were female (57%). Resident survey respondents were more evenly spread with 51% females. Regarding age, the majority of the business participants were between 46-65 years (76%) whereas the majority of resident respondents were between 26-45 years (58%) making them on average a couple of decades younger. The majority of the business (52%) and resident (67%) respondents were working full-time. Although only 8% of the residents surveyed were born on the Gold Coast, approximately 48% of them have lived in the city for more than 14 years, as opposed to the 35% who just moved to the Gold Coast in the last four years.

Can Southport be the Gold Coast CBD?

It is too early to evaluate the success of the Southport CBD project but we can compare what Southport currently has and what the Priority Development Area Scheme aims to do with the desirable characteristics of a successful CBD to see whether the Gold Coast is on the right track to get a CBD and what areas need improvement. To achieve this we systematically examined the Southport CBD against the desired land uses and functions and physical and socioeconomic characteristics of a successful CBD as well as the characteristics of the (re)development process for creating successful
CBDs. We also reviewed how the expectations of the Gold Coast residents, businesses and stakeholders of the PDA project compare to the reality of Southport and the PDA proposal. The results of these are presented below.

**Desired Land Uses and Functions of the CBD**

When asked what land uses and functions they expect from a CBD, residents and businesses surveyed ranked the same uses in top three but responded somewhat differently regarding the least important uses. The highest scored use for both businesses and residents was office buildings and businesses (81% and 67% respectively), followed by the presence of indoor shopping areas for residents (59%) and cultural and civic centre for businesses (67%) (see Figure 1). The lowest score for residents was for high concentration of hotels (29%) which scored fairly high for businesses (57%). Residents obviously did not regard hotels as an essential component of the CBD on the Gold Coast. This may be due to the abundance of hotels in many other areas of the city. Scores from business respondents were higher for all uses but one (city hall) indicating that businesses had higher expectations from the CBD.

![Figure 1. Resident and Business Expectations of Land Uses and Functions of the CBD](image)

**Business/Office**

Southport has historically been the business centre of the Gold Coast with the highest concentration of businesses in the city and this still holds true today with 4,926 registered businesses (ABS 2011) and 149,240m² of office space (City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013). This is one of the main reasons for choosing the area as the planned CBD. As a result of the PDA project the level of business and office concentration is expected to go even higher as there are already development proposals/approvals for new office buildings in Southport (Potts 2014). As the PDA project promotes more relaxed and efficient business approvals and cost effective developments by reducing the development approval time, amount of paperwork and infrastructure charges the office spaces in
Southport might be more affordable for businesses which will in turn encourage more businesses to move into the area. The majority of the research participants including residents (67%) and businesses (81%) surveyed and stakeholders interviewed expect a vital CBD to have the highest concentration of offices and businesses within the city.

**Commerce**

Presently, Southport has the highest concentration of retail among all Gold Coast suburbs (ABS 2011a), but does not have any up-to-date indoor shopping centre/s or the highest concentration of hotels and functional venues (ABS 2011a). At this stage, Southport PDA project does not have any specific plans to improve the Australia Fair shopping centre or build any new indoor retail centre or hotels.

Both interview and survey results indicate the participants’ belief that in order to have a successful CBD concentration of high quality retail is vital. However, the emphasis was mostly on high quality indoor shopping areas as 59% of the residents and 62% of the businesses agreed with the idea compared to having unique retail shops within the CBD (47% of residents and 52% of businesses). Interviewees’ concerns mostly focused on the condition of the existing shopping centre, the Australia Fair, which they believed to need either full renovation or complete replacement with a very up-to-date mixed-use development in order to have a vibrant CBD at Southport. The presence of unique retail outlets was also emphasised by the majority of the interviewees who suggested the limited variety of stores and availability of goods as the limiting factor in shopping in Southport. The concentration of hotels within the CBD has been marked by the lowest portion of residents (29%) as an expected use from a vital CBD. The interviewee opinions were similar to residents but a relatively higher portion of businesses (57%) found it important. This might be due to the fact that there are high concentrations of hotels within the close by suburbs of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach (ABS 2011a) which are well connected to Southport with the new light rail system.

**Administration**

Southport originally was the location of local government administration for both City of Gold Coast and Albert Shire Council (City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013), but currently the City of Gold Coast offices are split between Nerang and Bundall/Evandale (Figure 2). In July 2014, the Mayor’s office has symbolically been moved back to Southport (GCCC 2014). While only 46% of the residents and 43% of businesses expected to have a city hall within the CBD, the majority of the interviewees believed that it is essential for a successful CBD to include administration offices from both state and local government, suggesting to host, for example, the Queensland Ministry of Tourism.

**Culture and Entertainment**

Currently, Southport comprises of some historical buildings and facades but within the boundary of the proposed CBD there are no heritage listed buildings besides the former Southport Town Hall, now housing the Mayor, and the Southport Bathing Pavilion (see Figure 2) (GCCC 2011, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 2014). These buildings are expected to be preserved during the transformation of Southport through the PDA project, but there are no additions to the heritage listing proposed. Only 35% of the residents and 43% of the businesses surveyed were expecting the proposed CBD to have such buildings. Half of the interviewees believed that historic buildings are a vital part of any vibrant CBD, as they present the history of the city and one of them stated that the absence of these structures would not present a ‘great picture’.

Southport Parklands is the only significant public open space in the CBD area (Figure 2) and Southport does not include public squares in any form (residential, civic and market). Furthermore, there are no plans for creating one in the proposed PDA project. Only 42% of the residents and 48% of the businesses stated they expected the CBD to have a market place as a public space. On the other hand, the majority of the interviewees view public squares as a vital part of any successful CBD. The reasons for wanting public squares/spaces were mainly focused on providing a ‘space for social interaction’ and recreational purposes.

Southport PDA project has no specific plans/proposals to create special entertainment generators such as stadiums, museums, casinos, or movie theatres but at the same time there are no restrictions in place for creating them. Presently, Southport has a new aquatic centre and one of the largest branches of the Gold Coast city libraries including the Local Studies Library within the boundary of the proposed CBD (Figure 2). However, the city’s two major stadiums are located in Robina and Carrara which are quite distant and not well connected to the proposed CBD through public transport. The Gold Coast Convention Centre and Jupiter’s Casino are located in Broadbeach and well connected to Southport via light rail. The Arts Centre Gold Coast located at Evandale next to Council Chambers houses the Gold Coast City Gallery, the Arts Theatre, two Cinemas and the Arts Cafe as well as
function rooms, a chapel and two small performance spaces (The Arts Centre Gold Coast 2014). Furthermore, another council project declared the surrounding area Gold Coast Cultural Precinct with the aim of making it the city’s ‘new cultural heart’ (Gold Coast Cultural Precinct 2014). This area is also not connected to the light rail system.

However, none of the interview participants and less than half of the survey respondents (39% of the residents and 48% of the businesses) see the presence of a stadium and/or convention centre as a necessary component of a vital CBD. The majority of the interviewees mentioned that the existing convention centre is now well connected with the new light rail in place and Southport CBD area is too small to have a stadium within it and there is already the new aquatic centre in the area. The location of the proposed Gold Coast Cultural Precinct in Evansdale outside the new CBD is viewed similarly by the majority of the interviewees as they think Southport could have smaller size cultural centres but having one is not very essential in order to be a vibrant CBD.

Housing

Currently, Southport has 14,568 dwellings which is slightly less than 14,786 in Surfers Paradise and much more in comparison with other suburbs (ABS 2011a). The PDA project will have a significant effect in increasing the number of dwellings as there are two precincts designated for residential purposes. ‘Precinct 2’ includes medium to high-density residential area and ‘Precinct 3’ includes medium density residential district which comprises of townhouses and medium-rise apartment buildings (Figure 2). While only 39% of the residents and 43% of the businesses surveyed would like to see adequate housing in the CBD, the majority of the interview participants confirmed that housing will support the business within the CBD by providing sources of both consumers and employees, as well as providing after dark activity and liveliness to the CBD area.

Figure 2. The Southport PDA Relation to Different Land Uses and Functions (Base map: Google Maps 2013, Inset base map: City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013)
Physical and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the CBD

When survey respondents were asked what CBD characteristics they expect from the CBD efficient public transportation, sufficient car parking, walkability, and high concentration of employment achieved high scores from both residents and businesses, however, high concentration of high rises and industrial activities scored relatively lower by both participant groups (see Figure 3). As expected more businesses regard high concentration of employment and high rises as an important CBD characteristic.

Figure 3. Resident and Business Expectations of CBD Characteristics

Concentration of Functions, Population and Employment

At present, Southport has the highest population among the Gold Coast suburbs with 30,145 residents, however, Broadbeach and Surfers Paradise have higher population densities with 38.7 and 49.2 persons per hectare respectively as compared to 25.6 persons per hectare in Southport (ABS 2011a). On the other hand, Southport has the second built-up density of 83.7% following Broadbeach (97%) and with the PDA plans of creating more high density housing in the area the population and built-up density is expected to rise. On the other hand, Southport currently is the Gold Coast’s major employment location with 22,400 jobs, 16,057 employed persons (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics 2013) and 1,725 employing firms (ABS 2011a). As a result of the PDA project these numbers might increase as the number of businesses will increase in the area. Industrial activities are more concentrated in the suburbs of Nerang and Burleigh than in Southport (ABS 2011a) and the PDA project has no specific plans to increase the figure. While some of the literature suggests this as an important activity in city centres, in practice this only holds true for older CBDs and even in those these functions are leaving the city centres.

Results of the survey show that concentration of functions such as office buildings and businesses were scored highest by both the residents and the businesses (67% and 81%) followed by the concentration of employment (65% and 90%). In contrast, the support for concentration of high-rise buildings was much lower (residents 34% and businesses 52%) and for high level of industrial activities the lowest (8% for residents and 14% for businesses). In addition, the majority of the interviewees indicated that overall concentration of functions and employment is a vital factor for a CBD to be vibrant and successful, since this density and concentration of activities will bring economic enhancements for the city and the whole region.

Walkability and Pedestrian Friendliness

Southport is currently not particularly walkable nor very pedestrian friendly with no pedestrian mall or a public square. The Broadwater Parklands is separated from the CBD with the busy Gold Coast Highway. In contrast both Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach have pedestrian malls and have easier access to the oceanfront parklands and the beach. Nevertheless, there are no plans to enhance the
walkability of the CBD. Still, 77% of the residents and 81% of the businesses are expecting a successful CBD to be walkable. However, if the aspired levels of density and mix of uses is achieved by the PDA project increasing the connectivity and improving the walkability of the area will be much easier. The majority of the interviewees also confirmed that walkability and pedestrian friendliness of a CBD is an essential feature for its success. The reasons for a vibrant CBD to be walkable and pedestrian friendly mainly focused on providing social interactions, networking, spreading the new ideas and health and wellbeing.

**Engagement with Water**
Southport has a wonderful waterfront park, the Broadwater Parklands (see Figure 2), but as mentioned above, the area is not easily accessible from the CBD as a result of the busy Gold Coast Highway creating a deterrent. The majority of the interviewees indicated that it is essential for the vitality of Southport as the Gold Coast CBD to have a better connection to the Broadwater Parklands as a valuable waterfront development.

**Connectedness and Accessibility**
While Southport is well connected to the rest of the city through different modes of public transportation including bus services and the new light rail system it is by no means the hub of the transportation network, nor an area with highest level of services (see Figure 4). It is also not conveniently connected to the heavy rail to Brisbane. Yet, the majority of the survey and interview data confirmed that overall connectivity and ease of access including efficient public transport is viewed as an essential factor for a CBD to be successful by 84% of the residents and 86% of the businesses. The situation is better for parking with on-street parking, a multi-storey facility located in Australia Fair shopping centre as well as a few vacant lots that have been used for parking.

**Safety**
Currently the crime rate for Southport (26,328 total crimes in 2012) is significantly lower than that of tourist hubs of Broadbeach and Surfers Paradise (31,040 and 91,022 total crimes in 2012 respectively) and slightly higher than other suburbs (Queensland Police Service Crime Statistics 2012). The PDA project does not include any strategies to improve the safety of the area. While 62% of the residents and 71% of the businesses referred to safety as an important factor in the CBD, the majority of the interviewees believed that CBDs in general are safe places to live/work in or visit.

**Attractive Physical Environment**
At present, Southport comprises of some historical buildings and facades, as well as a connection to Broadwater, and has a gentler microclimate than Surfers Paradise or Broadbeach which are directly exposed to the ocean. The PDA project is expected to enhance the physical environment of Southport by creating new developments which are required to have pleasant facades and landscaping (City of Gold Coast and Queensland Government 2013).

**Highest Rent and Land Value within the City**
CBDs often have the highest rent and land value within the city (Yaguanga 2011) although there is not enough evidence that this element is vital for a CBD in order to be successful. Rather than an element that makes CBDs successful, a high value is an indicator of the desirability and therefore success of a CBD. Currently the average monthly household rental payment for Southport is $1,451 which is lower than Surfers Paradise ($1,586), Broadbeach ($1,619) and Robina ($1,860) (ABS 2011a). Furthermore, according to Residential Property Data (2014) the average property price in Southport is often lower than the entire city. These figures might rise slightly if the PDA project is successful, however, rents in Southport are unlikely to pass those of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach areas which are closer to amenities like the beach, entertainment and shopping and rental units there also serve as holiday apartments.

**(Re)development Process for Creating a Successful CBD**
Stakeholder involvement, public-private partnerships and CBD branding are important in CBD revitalization program success. In the Southport CBD case, the public were invited to make submissions on the draft scheme of the PDA project from 5 April 2014 to 22 May 2014 (Queensland Government 2014). In addition, Gold Coast City Mayor Tom Tate confirmed that the City of Gold Coast will involve the community and business in revitalising Southport as a vibrant and dynamic Gold Coast CBD (Queensland Government 2014). However, there are no data available on the number of submissions and their influence on the project. The Southport PDA project is a joint project of Queensland Government and the City of Gold Coast to boost the economy of the region through promoting business and development in Southport, accordingly it is expected that a variety of private sector groups participate in the process of developing the CBD by investing in business and/or
development. In terms of branding, currently there is not enough promotion in place for the PDA project, nor any plans to create a brand to promote the Gold Coast’s future CBD. However, the majority of the interviewees stated that branding the CBD is a must in order for it to be recognised and be successful and is also the first step in giving it a sense of place.

The results of this research suggest that in order for the PDA project to be successful in creating a dynamic and vibrant CBD for the city of Gold Coast, Southport needs to achieve certain characteristics as a CBD. To synthesise the individual elements and get an overall view of the picture Table 1 presents scores for each element of Southport and the PDA project from 1 to 10, 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest, according to how well they satisfy each criterion. The scoring was done based on the data collected on each criterion from documents, interviews and surveys.
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<thead>
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<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Scores&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<td><strong>PDA</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Business/Office</strong></td>
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<td>Presence of special entertainment generators</td>
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<td>High degree of perceived safety</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low degree of social dislocations such as graffiti, dirty streets and panhandlers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attractive Physical Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well maintained historic buildings with modern interiors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New structures of architectural merit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rent and Land Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest rent and land value within the city</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder involvement in the process</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public-Private Partnerships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In investments</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In waterfront development projects</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In CBD branding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CBD Branding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of CBD branding programs</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>N/A: Not applicable

Southport and the PDA achieved high scores (7 and higher) for highest concentration of office buildings, businesses, population, building density, employment, employees and retail within the city as well as sufficient housing and efficient public transportation. The PDA did better for safety and
attractive physical environment. For engagement with water, and highest rent and land value, they both achieved medium scores (4-6) and for the other criteria they received low scores (1-3).

Overall, Southport and the PDA project’s scores for CBD land uses and functions are polarised between the high scores for business/office, elements of commerce, and housing; and the low scores for presence of administration offices, culture and entertainment. In relation to physical and socioeconomic characteristics Southport and the CBD project achieved high scores for concentrations of functions and employment, as well as connectedness and accessibility; and low scores for walkability and pedestrian friendliness, and presence of unique retail and street level activities. Regarding the development process, the PDA project attained a high score for public-private partnerships and low score for stakeholder involvement and branding the new CBD.

Conclusions

In the case of Southport and PDA the results indicate that the absence of a high concentration of hotels and industrial activities, as well stadiums, convention centres, and casinos may not undermine the success of the CBD as long as these features are well connected to the district. However, the study suggests that the proposed CBD will gain benefits from improving its public transport connections to the rest of the city through extension of the light rail to the Gold Coast airport at Coolangatta, heavy rail station at Helensvale as well as city’s two major stadiums in Carrara and Robina. In order for the PDA project to be successful, the study suggests that improvements of the following elements are vital as currently Southport and the PDA project fall short in delivering them:

- redeploys/major improvements of the Australia Fair shopping centre
- facilitating more administrative buildings like a town hall
- preserving historic buildings with modern interiors
- creating a network of public spaces including residential, civic and market public squares
- enhancing the overall walkability and pedestrian friendliness of the area including the pedestrian friendly connection/s to the Broadwater Parklands and providing a pedestrian mall
- creating substantial street level activity and entertainment including unique and upscale retail, businesses, restaurant and entertainment
- facilitating programs to brand Southport as the Gold Coast’s official CBD to promote place making
- involving a variety of stakeholders in the different stages of the process including branding the CBD
- completing the proposed extension of the light rail routes to connect to the heavy rail line and the airport

The majority of the literature on CBD revitalization is either descriptive, prescriptive or both. Studies describe successful and unsuccessful policies or projects in a particular city and prescribe the best practice revitalization approaches; however adaptation of such approaches may not be suitable for every city as the result might be successful for one city but fail to establish a ‘sense of place’, that makes a CBD attractive for another (Faulk 2006). In addition, as Gardner (2003, p. 23) states ‘the downtown of one community is fundamentally different than another, and strategies used in one community may not achieve the same level of success in another. Therefore, each revitalization strategy must be designed specifically for the community for which it is targeted’. The Southport CBD project is in its infancy yet and it is not easy to make accurate predictions for its future. While an evaluation at this point may seem premature it provides opportunities to focus on areas that are so far neglected.

References


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