

Report on The Social City

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Overview

Nineteen papers were part of the Social City stream, with a fairly even spread between macro, meso and micro analyses of issues confronting cities. Two papers from overseas (Auckland/Johannesburg) were included. Australian cities included: Sydney; Melbourne; Adelaide; Brisbane; Newcastle and Geelong. It was disappointing that there was nothing received from NT, ACT, Tasmania or Western Australia. The major focus of papers was on public housing, although there was a small, but important, component looking at the impact of large scale developments. Little work is being done on 'elite' housing or the impact of gated communities in wealthy areas particularly in regard to sustainability in design and planning.

There was a reasonable spread between 'theory' perspectives and descriptive papers on projects completed. There was also a strong interdisciplinary component - which is important - as the issues facing the social city are complex and should not be assigned to one particular discipline. Having said that, it is important that those researchers moving into an area for the first time make themselves aware of the history of research in that area, and not present their work as something essentially 'new' when in fact it has been covered by other disciplines and is simply 'new' to the researcher, but not necessarily to the knowledge community.

The other positive factor was the number of papers from students that gives hope for the long term research outcomes.

There was a comment from the workshop that the Social City was in a state of 'renaissance' in terms of research, and it is important that this energy be captured and leveraged into the future.

The papers - What have we learned?

- That place matters - as both a physical and social experience.
- That locating public housing in resource rich neighbourhoods is likely to enhance their residents' life chances
- That social interventions are more effective than physical/spatial interventions in reducing crime in public housing areas
- Where there is social mix, there is an alleviation of the 'grim circumstances' of people's lives in public housing estates.
- Place is contested and place-based partnerships are not 'easy' they need effort and energy. It is one of the great challenges of the social city.

- We need to know more about place and its meanings for all citizens - not just assume from our 'Anglo' perspective that we just 'know'. (The recent Sydney unrest is spectacularly indicative of this).
- We have some spatial data now regarding race and racism - we need more detailed 'ground truthing'.
- The impact of the media on place and stigma associated with place needs to be more fully analysed.

From the papers/workshop - what can we do?

Some of the early lessons from preliminary work in suburban development in western Sydney can inform planners and developers about future proposals. We need to link our research findings to enable action.

Assumptions about place and stigma associated with place/s need to be continually challenged by us all.

The complex social city requires rigor in methodologies to research and interpret.

While the statistical analysis is important it often misses the micro analysis.

We need to look at the city and health in a more holistic way.

The subtleties of change are important. Even neighbourhoods are complex and require more detailed analysis.

The complex city needs good interpreters. We need to ensure that we play our individual part in all the debates.

From the workshop - Future Research

We need to do more research on climate and the social city - we don't yet know enough about both trends and impacts.

The local area scale of sustainability has yet to be fully developed within a social equity framework.

The recent nascent interest by Federal government - both parties - needs to be better leveraged.

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