

Recognising tertiary students in place-making for urban spaces

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Abstract: The presence of students in large numbers in cities is 'planned' for to different degrees, from not at all in some contexts, to overly-determined 'student' places in others. There is general agreement that the lived experience of tertiary students, including their accommodation, social opportunities and experience of place beyond the campus boundaries, is part of their learning. Planning for good public space is as important as planning the location and form of students' private space, and the interface between the two is critical. This paper will review a range of approaches to place-making, identifying and discussing differences in housing provision and arrangement of public facilities and spaces for students in several overseas cities, including in Germany, Italy, Spain and California where practices vary substantially. Then we will propose ways that place-making strategies could be approached for the often temporary and sometimes transnational residents (tertiary students) of university precincts. The example for this proposal is north-central Melbourne. Melbourne receives about 25 percent of Australia's international students, and the City of Melbourne, which contains two of Victoria's largest universities, has a residential student population of 37 percent, increasing to 50 percent in some areas. This case study draws on the policy attention given by the Melbourne City Council and the Victorian State Government to the presence of students there. Using overseas material alongside the Melbourne evidence, the contribution of the paper will be to assess some of the key components of meaningful place-making strategies for the residents of university precincts.

1 Introduction¹

In urban policies and place management strategies of all kinds, recognition of the people in the urban context in question is important. This is a controversial position. A strong tradition in urban design says that good design transcends the question of who uses a space. At one of our research project 'stakeholder workshops' a senior urban designer from the City of Melbourne said the following:

... From the city's perspective what we're doing is creating what we believe to be good quality public space for everyone. I've certainly never looked at any of our briefs and said, 'How can we make this space good for transient or transnational temporary students?'. We're much more interested in just designing good public space for everyone. (City of Melbourne Urban Designer, 31 May 2006)

Reactions to the recent UN frameworks for child-friendly cities, and to the discussions hosted by the UN to produce frameworks for senior-friendly cities, ask why cities can't just be friendly to people of all ages. In this paper, we take the view that if an urban place is inhabited or frequented by a particular group or groups, then, along with any notion of future users, this needs to be taken into account in the planning and management of that place. Efforts are required to ascertain the characteristics of the existing group/s and to engage with their members to facilitate good outcomes. This process constitutes 'recognising' a group. However, on the way to such recognition, efforts also need to be made not to erase the connections of that urban space to past users, or to continuing users of a more minor status. This view is counter to the rather instrumentalist conceptualisation of public space as is taught in our design schools, where the emphasis is largely on creating a functionally predictable working and living environment as far as possible untainted by the claims of local history, local culture and the vicissitudes of change (Fincher et al 2007).

We argue further that recognition should not stereotype the identities and interests of the groups known to be associated with the space, for any group has internal diversity as well as specific interests or needs. How to recognise a group in a place-making process for and with that group, then, without narrowing the focus by giving too much priority to or over-defining the group, is a question to be constantly posed and considered.

Place-making is a policy and planning strategy that lends itself to the recognition of past, contemporary and future users of a place. Perhaps this is because it is a bounded and usually local strategy, one which looks inward to the place and seeks to identify the place socially and physically. This does not mean the scale of place-making is necessarily within the 'municipal' local, for place-

¹ This paper is drawn from an ARC Linkage Project, Transnational and Temporary: Students, Community and Place-Making in Central Melbourne. The interactive website for the project is at www.transnationalandtemporary.com.au The mid-project report is listed in the references as Fincher et al (2007).

making can apply to a far larger area. Nevertheless, place-making initiatives occur primarily at the micro-scale, as it is at this scale that attention can be paid to the precise social interactions associated with a built environment. Place-making is a policy and management activity that assists in giving meaning to a place, both for those associated closely with the place in their daily lives, and those viewing it from outside or using it less frequently. It can help foster community in a place, through encounter associated with that meaning or understanding of the place.

Activities in a range of contexts are labelled as place-making. Place-making can refer to the activity of giving meaning or coherence to a locale through community arts activities, for example, as inclusive cultural planning (Winikoff, 1995). It can refer to the imposed design of an urban landscape with a particular theme, like Chinatowns. It can refer to “the use of events to build communities and to brand destinations” (UTS:Business, 2002:preface, npn) and to the intent to “revamp and re-envision ... underperforming public spaces” (Kent, in ICTC, 2007:1). It is often used in the context of ‘revitalisation’ which sometimes involves displacing—wittingly or unwittingly—incumbent groups. It can have a community development context and purpose, or be associated with place-promotion and advertising. It may stereotype places and their inhabitants, or be a vehicle for the formation of partnerships between local institutions and communities to try to plan sensitively for desired futures. The concept is a slippery one, used for different purposes.

We regard recognition of the groups associated with a place as central to good place-making, and define place-making accordingly as the process of enhancing the meaning of a place, based in particular on recognition of the past and present users of that place.

This paper discusses a specific area and its majority inhabitants. Its initial purpose is to describe the elements of an informal ‘place-making’ going on already, through the activities of residents and visitors as they interact with the social and physical spaces of the area, and through the activities of local social organisations, universities, governments and developers as they mediate public-private interactions. All this ‘place-making’ is not associated with a local planning strategy—perhaps a good thing if unfettered and productive and not guided by the heavy hand of the state! But as we outline the current situation we will discuss ways in which coordinated place-making efforts by governments and other local institutions could improve upon the meaning of this place for recognised groups in the area. Our own efforts to think conceptually and empirically about place-making, and comparisons with overseas cases, will suggest ways in which such an approach might be designed.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section 2 the case study and setting are described, along with our research team’s three-part conceptualisation of what place-making in this setting should consider. Section 3 describes what is presently occurring as the actions of local inhabitants and institutions inscribe the place, and the problems that are associated with this. Section 4 considers how other cities around the world have approached place-making in areas where the dominant group, as in our case study, are students. Finally, in section 5, we suggest some ways forward for central Melbourne.

2 Conceptualisation and case study

The location of our case study is central Melbourne, specifically the northern edge of the City of Melbourne where two major universities, RMIT University and the University of Melbourne, sit some blocks apart (Figure 1). The City of Melbourne, which includes the CBD, has a population of approximately 65,000 of which 36 percent are students—primarily tertiary students (City of Melbourne, 2007). In our case study area the student resident population is closer to 50 percent. Many of these students are from overseas, and are temporary residents here for three years or so while they complete their studies. They have a transnational orientation that makes them at home here at the same time as they are at home in their place of origin.

In this location, a place-making strategy based on recognition of inhabitants and frequenters of the space would take the tertiary student population as its primary focus. In identifying this group, in all its diversity, as the major group to be recognised in a place-making approach to this area, we are proposing that this group has particular characteristics and needs that university and government policies and programs should be taking into account. Our interest is in what happens outside the classroom for the students—clearly, what happens in the classroom-based spheres of teaching and learning are the business directly of the universities in which students are enrolled.

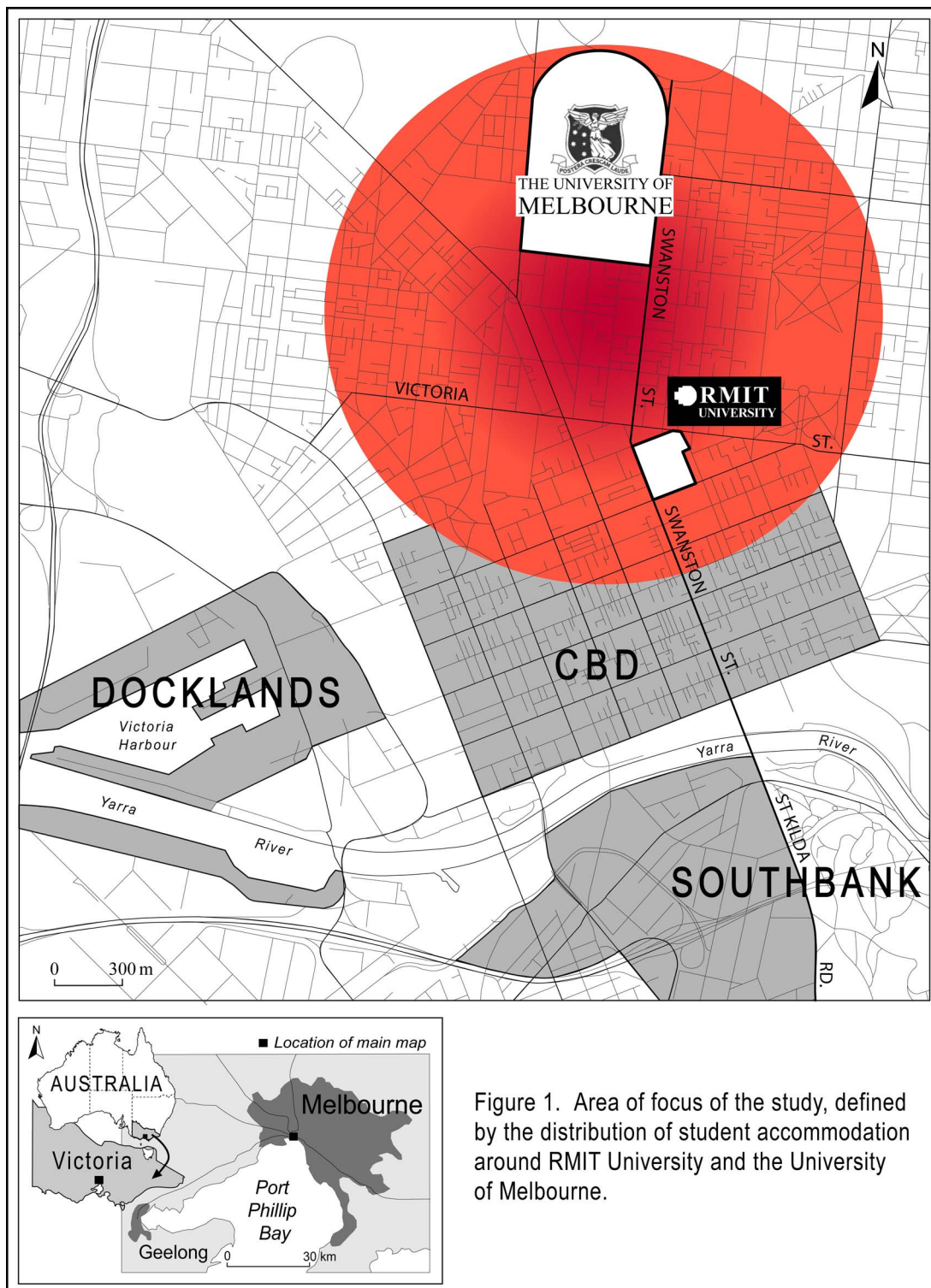


Figure 1. Area of focus of the study, defined by the distribution of student accommodation around RMIT University and the University of Melbourne.

The international students living in the area are new immigrants in many ways, though their stays in Melbourne and Australia are usually temporary—for the period it takes to complete their degrees. Thus the first characteristic in recognising them is that they will not be in central Melbourne long enough to establish a lifelong community here in the way that permanent immigrants can, so place-making efforts are required that host them as newcomers, providing an array of what might be termed (using immigration and multicultural policy parlance) ‘settlement services’ appropriate to young adults here temporarily. The second characteristic of these students is their transnationalism—they are from a range of cultures, cities and countries and so bring to Melbourne the possibility of cross-cultural and cross-national interaction with the many cultures that already make up the population of inner-Melbourne and the two universities. Efforts in place-making to respond to this feature of this local population group must therefore consider carefully the matter of cross-cultural interaction—how can it be fostered, and how can it be defined appropriately?

Recognising the population group in question here—transnational and temporary tertiary students—raises the question of how the physical and social environments of a locality influence the experience of students in that locality, and contribute to their overall learning about the place and their life within it. In the broader study underpinning this paper (see Fincher et al, 2007) we have hypothesised that the form and uses of public space and private spaces and the links between the two are vital features in students' lives. Our conceptual claim here is that the process of recognising this particular population group in this particular place requires that attention be paid to the nature of the social and built environment they inhabit.

The international literature on tertiary student housing and tertiary student life in urban areas delivers certain perspectives of value to our enquiry, but none that comments on a situation quite like the urban Australian one. Consider first the mobility of tertiary students and the urban consequences of this. In many countries of the world in which tertiary students are recognised in planning and place-making, those students are primarily nationals from the country in which they are living, travelling to another city to study and often living in student accommodation there, sometimes forming student-dominated neighbourhoods. In Australia, by contrast, domestic students rarely travel away from home as undergraduates, to another city or state. Rather, they study in their home city or state, often living at home during their undergraduate years. Their familiarity with the city and ready access to the local rental market means that those who do live independently or in share households tend to be distributed throughout the inner-city. When the large numbers of students from overseas countries arrive to study at Australian universities, they come to an urban context in which there is no particular concentration of local tertiary student residents to blend into.

Consider secondly that transnational and temporary tertiary students have need for different and more information than local tertiary students. In Australia, there are legislative requirements of universities to deliver such information to students from overseas countries in particular ways. Provision of extra information is common for international students everywhere, but the size of this group in Australia—25 percent of the total student body—has major logistical impacts on the delivery of this information by the universities. The manner of delivery has a profound effect on the student experience. If students from overseas are treated differently and separately from domestic students in a range of very visible university procedures and practices, this can reinforce their separation.

Third, consider the requirement this group has for useful public space. Because these students arrive knowing few if any people in their new city, their main opportunities for social encounter outside the classroom (and beyond their housing and orientation experiences) are in public space. This situation is universal, but once more, because the temporary population is so significant in this area, the requirement is more like that of a city with a massive tourist base, although different again because of the period most transnational and temporary students stay: longer than a visitor, less than a permanent immigrant. Effective public space design must take these nuances into account.

So, to what extent do the so far relatively informal 'place-making' processes on the northern edge of Melbourne's CBD respond to the particular characteristics of this group—dominant in this area, but still marginal in Australian society as a whole?

3 Informal place-making in central Melbourne

j) ... through housing arrangements

The rapid growth in Melbourne of fee-paying international students over the last decade has resulted in the sudden provision of high-density, high-rise purpose-built student housing to accommodate them. Much of this housing is situated between the two universities along the Swanston Street spine (Figure 2). It is without exception privately developed and managed, and oriented to international students as a block market, with significant assumptions being made about the amount of space they require and the prices they will pay. The housing is furnished and most of these buildings have limited pastoral care services, though these services are not of the kind available to students in the older residential colleges, located to the north of the University of Melbourne, that were established and remain under the wing of university.

Table 1 shows the relative costs of different kinds of housing available to students, with the cost of apartments in buildings like those pictured on Swanston Street listed in the top row of the table. The apartment housing is very expensive. Partly because of the residential patterns of local tertiary students described above, partly because of the inflated rents in this purpose-built student housing, most of these apartment blocks have close to 100 percent international student populations. The

temporary and transnational students are finding themselves the major constituents of the student neighbourhoods around the universities.

Figure 2. Purpose-built student housing in Swanston Street, Melbourne (below)



Table 1. Estimated cost of living for a student at the Parkville campus of the University of Melbourne. Source: University of Melbourne Housing Guide (2007) (below)

Type of Accommodation		No. of Weeks	Weekly Rent Range (\$)	Estimated Total (\$)	Rent and other expenses
One bedroom apartment (eg. College Square)	One bedroom not shared	52	235 – 285	23,400 - 28,000	
	One bedroom shared	52	140 - 190	17,900 - 22,500	
Residential Colleges (near or on campus)		40 wk stay	356 - 481*	21,200 - 26,800	
		32 wk stay	356 - 481*	18,200 - 22,600	
Hostel	One bedroom - shared bathroom/kitchen	52	130 -180	16,900 - 22,600	
Sharing rented house (with 2 others)	Close to campus	52	100 – 150	15,900 - 20,900	
	Within 6 km of Uni **	52	85 – 135	15,100 - 20,000	
	Regional area	52	57 - 77	13,500 - 16,500	
Homestay	Living with a local family	40 wk stay	220 – 230*	14,500 - 15,300	
Home	Living at Home (Board)	52	\$20 - 60	\$7200 - 9,600	

* Includes most meals. Some colleges charge additional fees.

** Estimates assume residence in Zone 1 of transport system. Please note that the transport concession card makes public transport considerably cheaper. International students are not eligible for the public transport concession card.

Students applying from overseas to attend the two universities in the study area are directed by agents in the employ of the universities or the housing providers, and sometimes both, to take up this purpose-built housing because of its proximity to the universities and its 'safety' (entry to these buildings and often individual floors is by swipe card). Students pay their bond before arrival in Melbourne, having seen the apartments only on the internet. The following typical quotes from students indicate how they were directed to the housing. These are followed by comments from students about how what they think of the apartments once they have arrived in Melbourne.

I don't know whether she [the agent] was honest about it or not but she said that 'the only place I know about is A—the only accommodation is A'.

I think they get a lot of money, and on top of that, they will recommend international students—they tell them 'it's very difficult to get an apartment and accommodation in Melbourne, so you better secure a place here for one year before you go there', so a lot of my friends are conned into taking student accommodation which is over-priced and way over-rated ...

... All those students apartments, first they're really small and then they're really expensive. I never really stayed in any student accommodation because they're really expensive—they're out of my budget.

My friend had half an apartment in A, and the table is here and the chair is here and the bed is behind—I didn't believe how small it was when I went to visit her. And she couldn't even lean back, there's no space to rest. So I was like 'oh, I feel that a prisoner has better living space than you. Even in jail, you get better space you know'.

Our first assessment of the place-making currently occurring with students in this part of Melbourne, then, is that it is underpinned by their accommodation in small, expensive apartments, in buildings occupied almost totally by students from overseas countries. There is little communal space to which to invite visitors, or indeed in which to socialise with other residents of the buildings. As noted, the marshalling of students from overseas countries into such buildings, by encouraging them to make decisions about their accommodation before they arrive, assists in this outcome. What this means is that students from overseas are separated from other students, and from daily interactions with non-students living in the city, when they are in their apartments. And because housing and the nature of one's private and semi-public space is an important contributor to one's experience of city living, this first experience of Melbourne is immensely significant. It sets up students with their principal friendship groups, and in those groups, made up almost entirely of students from overseas, they begin to form their knowledge of the city.

The matter of the ownership of this housing is significant. Tertiary student housing all over the world has traditionally been built and managed by universities. Over many decades, the universities (with government support) have used student housing to probe design innovations, and have invested in or subsidised student housing as affordable housing in support of young people and their learning. In contrast, in the situation being examined in Melbourne, the fast pace at which this large population of students from overseas has appeared seems to have caught governments, housing planners, and perhaps the universities, unawares. Private developers seeking out a new market share stepped in to provide expensive housing in a form that does not always meet with the standards that the best student housing has set over the past several decades. Writing in our mid-project report, the architects on our research team made the following comment about the 31 high-rise apartment buildings whose morphological characteristics they have studied in detail:

... there is little evidence within the individual developments examined to date of an overall 'architectural idea' of what twenty-first century student life might be or mean, other than through very small rooms with internet connections and communal areas that are either default outdoor space or TV-DVD watching rooms. (Fincher et al, 2007:30)

The private spaces and social connections offered in these apartment buildings are designed explicitly with international students from South East Asia in mind. Not only are the apartments small but in buildings with almost no communal space. An explanation for this is provided by one housing provider:

Land in Singapore/Hong Kong (sic), Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, where most of the students come from, is at a premium. Most people live in small apartments with all members of their family sharing a relatively small area. Socialising and community in Asia is often found in outdoor eating houses, recreation facilities and public parks as apartments are not ideal for entertaining visitors or holding dinner parties. Hence, the provision of studio apartments for international students reflects cultural sensitivity and represents 'the norm' for many. (Student housing company director, personal communication, 30 May 2007)

Figure 3. *There's small and then there's small, says tenant.* Foreign student Janice Lo (front) visits a friend Kitty Lees in Ms Lees' small Swanston Street high-rise apartment. Photo: *John Woudstra*, courtesy of *The Age*



For a newly-arrived group of young adults housed together on the edge of the CBD, living without their families and often alone in very small private spaces, the features of local public space indeed has considerable impact on the opportunities they have for sociality. We will return to this point.

ii) ... through formal and informal institutional practices

Various organisations in the area provide opportunities for social interaction to students and other residents and visitors. We have examined three kinds of organisational processes: those within the formal structure of the universities; clubs organised by the students themselves; and churches. We have found in all cases that separation of tertiary students into those from overseas and those from Australia is rife. Opportunities for cross-cultural interactions among students, and broader interactions between newcomers and longer-term residents, are not facilitated by these organisations—although there are some exceptions which we will mention.

Although university administrators are keenly aware of the desirability of fostering cross-cultural interaction, the needs of international students are such that enrolment and orientation processes for international and local students are run at different times. Attempts are increasingly being made to merge these: the separate orientations at the University of Melbourne combine in the last few days, but logistics and institutional requirements still encourage some separation. Many of our institutional interviewees have observed that once social networks are established—and they tend to form early in a person's stay—the incentive to 'try' to make new friends or seek new things to do is reduced. Therefore what many describe as a 'natural' gravitation toward people of similar cultural background creates relatively mono-cultural social networks that are hard to disrupt.

Student social clubs also tend to draw together groups of students of similar national or religious background. At the University of Melbourne, for example, more than half the 63 general interest student clubs are culture-specific—the Korean Students Society, Lebanese Students Association, Singapore Students Society, Taiwanese Students Association, etc. At RMIT University, the University actually sets up organisations for different national groups of students, seeing this as a useful marketing asset for future students, as well as of interest to already-enrolled students. Even where there seem ready opportunities for interaction, these appear to be missed, as the following comment from an office-bearer of one university's Indonesian Language Students Society suggests:

We're a fairly small club and have about 90 members. The vast majority of these members are Australian. The few non-Australian members (ones with dual citizenship) are from Indonesia. I would guess there would only be around 5 people in this category. ... I know that the Society for Indonesian Students in Australia are mainly Indonesian nationals, so you might have more luck contacting them.

Churches in the area have used their traditional capacity to welcome strangers, to provide what they describe as a mission to international students. In some congregations, this takes the form of welcoming students from overseas into groups for bible study; in others the emphasis is on attending services weekly and then participating in social outings on weekends or a few times per year. Rarely, however, from what we have been able to discover, is there a mix of people other than overseas students in the social outings and discussions, and sometimes not even in the weekly services. Generally, students from overseas countries are separated into bible study or outing groups. One Minister told us how if a European student should happen to come to his church, whose congregation was of south-east Asian students, he quickly sent them along to a neighbouring church where there were other Europeans:

We work with groups. Sometimes a German student comes ... like the Asians tend to be shorter ... Anglos [sic] are taller, so they are out of place. So we send them to the [Anglican Church]—more Anglos there. But we see ourselves as doing the same work—you come across people who feel uncomfortable with you, we send them to the Anglican Church.

The following quote is from a young student:

I have my church group, they are all from Hong Kong, that's it ... when I first arrived Melbourne, I look for a church ... I went to Chinatown and find it, but I don't really like ... most of them are elderly old ladies and families as well, and they don't understand my needs. Because they're reaching out to you but they just ask you "how's your family?" but they can't feel my feeling that I'm alone in here and my feeling of here is not my home country and sometimes I feel home-sick and they can't help me ... they don't have similar experience, because they born in here, they migrate in here for maybe 30 years. ... The other church is better because 90 percent of them, they are overseas students. So we have the same feeling. We don't have friends in here, we don't have families in here and we got stressed and when exam are on, we have to cook and we have to study. Like we know each others' need. So we really treat each other as brothers and sisters ... They also have Sunday worship time for the students who're born in here. They also are all Chinese. And for the families who migrated here. For Saturdays it's mainly for overseas students.

It is in arts organisations that there seems to be some exception to this set of separating practices. Both in arts projects within the student-formed organisations on campuses, and in those projects carried out by local government, a good deal of attention has been paid to bringing people from different backgrounds together in artistic practice, observation and discussion. The choral society of one university reports that it counts as its members students from all over the world, meeting regularly to rehearse and perform. Student theatre groups on campuses, supported by student unions for the costs of their productions and therefore subject to the suggestions of those student union organisers, are advised (if they are national or ethno-specific performance groups, as they often are) to go and observe the performance of other groups so as to pick up hints about interesting and different practices. Melbourne City Council's recent multicultural arts project TRANS endeavoured to work with students of Chinese background, from a number of Southeast Asian countries, to assist them to make performances of different kinds in urban public places of the CBD. Here, the intention was to host these performances in places where a broad audience might be exposed to them, thus presenting tertiary students as part of the city's community, and showcasing their interests and artistic talents. Clearly all these arts activities are not themselves expressions of cross-cultural performance; many of

them are facilitating observation by certain groups of the practices of other groups. There will be diversity within these apparently mono-cultural artistic groups in any case, as we know. We think the introduction of new forms of artistic practice to a range of audiences and other performing groups is one way that place-making strategies could begin to develop greater cross-cultural and cross-national awareness. The organisers of these attempts at multicultural artistic learning in public spaces do advise that a good deal of effort is required, however, and that the payoff is small in the short term.

iii) ... through the use of available public space

Public spaces in the areas frequented by students present an opportunity for institutions to recognise those frequenting the area, make them feel welcome and facilitate their interests. Public spaces are certainly where students in the case study area go to socialise and interact. Through the design and arrangements of these spaces, a kind of place-making does already occur, though not evidently in the interests of the transnational and temporary student population.

Student residents of the case study area tell us that they usually spend their recreational time in groups, in a limited number of shopping malls in the CBD, generally those near to the study area. In these facilities they feel welcome, or rather, not especially discriminated against. We have, in our analyses of students' mapping and interview responses to our question about their use of public space, been surprised at how narrow their choices are. But of course it is the case that they will have limited information about the range of other places they might go and in which they might be interested. Some students set out on their own and find interesting parts of the city and inner suburbs to hang out in; most stick to the few nearby shopping malls and the Queen Victoria Market.

I think I'd rather just stick to my places because going to somewhere new feels a bit different and it's hard to get people to go with you ... I'd rather go with friends, right ... I'm familiar with those places (QV and Melbourne Central) and I just basically know where I'm going. I guess I like the security of knowing a familiar place, rather than going to somewhere new ...

I think there's not many places we can go in Melbourne because I think the only place we often go is like Swanston Street, Queen Vic Market or Bridge Street or Smith Street because they're shopping places.

On the campuses themselves, in the public spaces available, there are two trends. One trend is that students from overseas socialise together in certain parts of the campus, and students of Australian background socialise elsewhere. Members of each 'group' will tell about how they feel certain spaces are 'theirs' and certain other spaces are not: the University of Melbourne Union House cafeteria is 'Asian space', the first floor Union House food co-op is 'White space'. Similar divisions are perceived in public space beyond the campuses: Federation Square is White, QV is Asian. Of course, it takes work to maintain these divides between students. Mary E. Thomas, writing in the US on continuing racial segregation in US high schools, points out that normative enforcement of racial boundary-making takes as much effort as breaking those boundaries down. Thomas stresses just how important it is:

to understand how [the students] come to accept and reproduce the authority of race that configures social and spatial meaning. This process involves naturalizing the outcomes of racial difference (for example, segregation), in other words, taking these for granted although [the students] themselves *rearticulate* difference through everyday spatial activities and practices. The seeming 'naturalness' of racial division is actually complexly driven, daily work. (Thomas 2005:1247)

Boundaries are maintained and reproduced in uses of public space on campus. The second trend is that the interfaces between the city streetscapes and the university campuses are not very welcoming of activities, even pedestrian activities, that would bring the non-student public into interaction with students. (This is quite apart from arrangements that might bring students from different backgrounds into connection with each other, though participation in shared activities). RMIT University has developed a city-street strategy in its main campus entrance, normalising the campus as part of the city by use of laneways for pedestrians. The University of Melbourne has yet to develop such a strategy, maintaining the physical barriers between its campus and the streets around it. This is partly because the University of Melbourne campus allows cars to drive through, requiring barriers to be erected to limit the numbers of cars let in: few separating practices are without rationale.

So, a kind of place-making is occurring in the study area already, guided by the actions of the universities, institutions of government and other organisations like social clubs and churches. Into this

spatial and social mix come large numbers of young people each year from overseas countries, to live temporarily and together in dense high-rise housing. They react and act in this environment, forming a place for themselves, and not necessarily one in which they feel themselves to be welcomed and mainstream. Examples of the ways some of them feel marginal to this place are given in the quotes we present below.

I think local is like ... even in school you can see that international is one group, local is one group ... when I enter the class, everybody is already separated because I enter late. I find that even if you want to mix with the locals, they seem to be together ... they're always together ...

I sort of think Federation Square is like Docklands. It's not a place for everyone who can go and visit: certain times it does create psychological barrier for visitors. ... Docklands you know is for rich people only. So if you go there, you have to spend lots of money. ... The main reason I go to Chinatown is not because I like that place, it's just because they do have some Chinese grocery shops there and some nice Chinese restaurants. But the place itself I think is not that nice.

These quotes about how some international students feel in the public spaces around them add to the comments made in various student surveys. The comment is often made by students from overseas that they 'never saw the inside of an Australian home'. A 2005 exit survey by the University of Melbourne Planning Office says "about a third of comments were about social and cultural issues, with the majority of these about homesickness or loneliness, making friends, and socialising with Australian students. ... Many [students] regretted that they had been unable to make friends with students from a different cultural background, and suggested that their respective cultural backgrounds made it 'too difficult', leading them to give up on the effort" (University of Melbourne 2005:22). Students living in the high rise apartments of the study area know their apartments are not the usual 'Australian homes' and express some disappointment in this.

4. Do international examples suggest better, recognition-based place-making strategies?

It is clear that informal place-making strategies in this part of Melbourne are isolating and separating the main group of people that inhabit and frequent this location. These strategies—coping strategies devised both by local institutions and the students themselves—are not enhancing the meaning of place for this group in any significant way. The characteristics and needs of this group suggest real benefit from positive interactions with the diverse range of people and places of Melbourne, but these are not being sufficiently recognised, in our terminology. In this section, we consider what international case studies suggest about recognising students in formal place-making strategies that might be translated into frameworks for improving the Melbourne situation.

There are four parts to international literature and case studies that we find compelling.

j) On housing arrangements

In many other cities around the world, student housing is located at a distance from the universities. Providing a greater range of locations of student housing and preparing students to expect to travel to and from campus can increase affordability and give students the opportunity to spread through and become familiar with a variety of areas in the city. Information for students from the University of Technology Berlin (TUB) Study Abroad / International Programs office is very clear on its website:

It should be noted that most of Berlin halls of residence are not in the immediate vicinity of the TUB campus. The large halls of residence in the east and south of Berlin in particular are located on the outskirts of the city, and you may have to allow for 45 – 60 minutes travel into TUB which is right in the city centre. (Technische Universität Berlin, 2006)

In the Australian case, the success of this arrangement would depend in part on State governments allowing non-Australian students the right to hold concession cards for travel on public transport.

In many European cities, student housing is significantly cheaper than private rental. Germany has a nationwide state-supported non-profit company called *Studentenwerk* which builds or converts and owns all dedicated student housing (and runs university services as well). Student housing in German cities is significantly cheaper than average private rental housing (the price of an average furnished room is 44 Euros or AUD\$70 per week). In Italy, similar kinds of regional companies, also state-

supported and not-for-profit, build and own all student housing. In towns such as the UNESCO-listed Urbino, the regional housing provider uses its economic capacity to restore and re-use historic buildings and make really important contributions to the urban form. Student housing in Italy is also routinely cheaper than private rental.

In England student housing is generally owned and operated by the universities in halls of residence, with competitive rents and high levels of pastoral care. There has recently been a higher level of private housing provision and this too competes well with the broader rental market. Many universities in the USA guarantee housing for freshers in university-owned halls of residence. The rents are about the same as those in the private rental market but the standard of pastoral care—all meals, communal activities, tutorial programs and so on—is much greater than that offered in the purpose built student housing in Melbourne. In addition, both UK and US halls of residence offer extensive scholarships that cover housing expenses. Stanford in California, for example, has a 'needs-blind' assessment process not only for course enrolment but for housing. All students accepted into a first year course who are without the means to pay for housing receive financial aid packages that cover the entirety of their housing expenses.

One of the consequences of student housing overseas being cheaper than or commensurate in price with housing in the broader local rental market is that it becomes a real option for local as well as international students. The demand for dedicated student housing is obviously higher among students from that country who have travelled from another city and are not familiar with the particular local housing market, but this kind of housing would still be less of an option if it were markedly more expensive than other kinds—in general these students still have a sense of what they should pay! This all means in turn that the mix of international and local students is almost always higher than in Melbourne; in fact it is rare to find standard student housing with 'locals' making up less than half the residential population. This has dramatic effects on cross-cultural interactions.

Many of these universities and not-for-profit housing providers use student housing to explore and provide innovative solutions for affordable and well-designed housing—from the 1960s designs of Giancarlo de Carlo on the outskirts of Urbino, to those of Edward Cullinan in the late 1990s at the University of East London docklands campus. Goldhagen (2006) provides a useful discussion of the design of married student housing at Harvard by the architect Josep Luis Sert, who emphasised what he regarded as two critical aspects of urban life: "the *social*—how people interacted in and used spaces; and the *visual-perceptual*—how people related phenomenologically to the spaces of their social lives" (Goldhagen, 2006:2). Here was recognition that students, though necessarily located in a high-rise building to accommodate their numbers, required integration with the surrounding place through the physical features of their building. Rejecting monolithic and purely functional design priorities, efforts were made in the design for this student housing to share facilities with local people and to provide a porous border between the housing and areas around it.

Much could be learned from this approach to the location and design of student housing as a laboratory for new ways of living in the twenty-first century.

ii) On institutional practices

The international literature shows that intersection across racialised social boundaries does not occur without intervention. On some campuses attention is paid to consciously crafting strategies of cross-cultural interaction—in classroom settings and student housing arrangements. Stark and Griffin (2001) recount efforts over the past decade at the University of California, Berkeley, to run a major program for students of differing racial, class and gender identities and have them discuss and confront the ways these identity features influence their interactions with each other. This program is carefully designed, with its members selected and their numbers controlled so that no one group dominates, and gender balance is maintained. Examples abound on other North American campuses of tertiary students undertaking projects with local community organisations, to foster some aspect of the public good. Sometimes this interaction is given academic credit towards students' degrees. In still other university-community efforts, small-scale programs are run by universities to facilitate student interaction with groups off-campus different from them. In efforts such as these the need is recognised for long-term attention to an on-going working multiculturalism. Each of these programs is small-scale, takes a good deal of effort to form, and requires the organisation of interactions between small numbers of individuals over lengthy periods. It seems to be the consensus that slow and small-scale effort is the only way to go, if cross-cultural interaction is to take root.

In the Melbourne setting being examined, such has been the speed of appearance of a large student cohort from overseas and from a range of different countries, that cross-cultural strategies to encourage interactions have not been devised, and this separation of students into social groups of familiars that are relatively mono-cultural is proceeding almost without acknowledgement. It seems clear that university-led strategies to work with students and student clubs to create strategic sets of (inter)activities is required.

iii) On the design of public space

The architectural literature on the need for porous borders between campuses or campus buildings and streetscapes/outside communities, suggests that edges require attention. These are not only the edges between the universities and the city, but also the smaller-scale edges between the purpose-built high-rise student housing and the streetscapes. What can be done at ground level to render these buildings more friendly to their surrounds? Some of the best university campuses are completely permeable: Berkeley, for example, has a zone of university grounds, university-owned housing, and restaurant and bars all integrated into a highly dynamic, interactive environment. Urbino—a university town in the most literal sense—has its faculty buildings sprinkled throughout the built-up area which, as is usual in Italian towns, circles around a central square. These are special examples of course, but their principles can be extended to thinking about the social and public spaces of all universities.

iv) On the use of public and semi-public spaces as sites of creative endeavour

Sites of creative endeavour are usually temporary or interim, with opportunities on and off campus. Temporary uses are usually undefined but short-term: art installations, bars in shipping containers, for examples. Interim uses are the slightly more specific use of a site for some time between its former use (factory, shop, carpark, etc) and its planned, not necessarily yet determined use. Temporary and interim uses are usually not well defined by type of activity or duration, and therefore have ambiguous legal status. But they are becoming increasingly important as sites for interaction, especially as sites for creative production become limited by gentrification and increasing land values. The apparent narrowness of the choices of some of the students we interviewed—confined as they often are to highly-commercial sites for consumption—can be expanded by the availability of designated sites of production.

Cities such as Berlin and Barcelona, for reasons of surplus commercial space and relatively low rates of growth, have a range of spaces of creative endeavour, where the making of artworks, music and performance are as common as shopping. Amsterdam has actively intervened in the land market to make more permanent, in the face of rapid gentrification, a number of temporary sites used for cultural production. Professor Bill Mitchell from MIT (formerly head of architecture at UCLA and design at Harvard) was in Melbourne recently to talk about the interdisciplinary co-operation involved in the redesign of the MIT campus. One of the most important aspects of the redesign was the establishment of a ring of low-rental commercial space around the university. These created opportunities for direct relationships between the university, small start-up companies and students—connecting the university to the surrounding urban environment, providing opportunities for studios, research, collaborative projects, employment and interaction.

Not only does this thinking about possibilities for encounter in urban public spaces build on the points made already about some forms of the arts as a set of activities that draw people together across social boundaries, but the temporariness (and therefore extra creativeness) of what has been documented overseas has the advantage of not requiring permanent shifts in the design of existing public spaces.

5. Conclusion: Contemplating ways forward in Melbourne

For a thorough place-making strategy for our study area of central Melbourne—nothing too heavy-handed but something with a great deal of thought and research underpinning it—recognition of current and past occupants' characteristics will need to occur. Think first about the shaping of urban public spaces in the area. In claiming that a place-making strategy should include conscious connection to the characteristics of occupants of the space, we are of course countering the view of the urban designer for the city quoted at the start of this paper, who felt that good urban design serves every person equally well. While this view of 'good urban design' might be a starting point—emphasizing that there are general principles to which one should adhere in creating the local physical conditions for the city—there are in addition benefits from considering the nature of the majority population of an area. Knowing or recognizing the majority population allows a precise strategy to be

formed for place-making action, by identifying the particular spaces for focus. With the student population of concern in this paper, the first public spaces to be identified might be the edge spaces, where city and campus meet—in activities sited in these spaces, once modified, students might be introduced to other residents of the city, and to a broader range of students. In addition, the point must be made that if the characteristics of the majority group are not identified and used in the forming of place-making strategy, then the interests of some other constituency will come to dominate the design for spaces of the city. One of the reasons for the claim that defining a public interest in cities must accommodate the reality of 'multiple publics' is just this—that if one does not see the multiplicity of interests and engagements in the city, then an unacknowledged, undebated set of interests will come to prevail in ways perhaps unintended. One can imagine a situation in central Melbourne in which the interests of a general sort of middle class tourist might come to dominate in the minds of public space designers—someone wanting transparent vistas and consumption opportunities with the occasional bench for resting—if there were a situation in which the student population group were not recognized to have distinct spatial and social priorities.

Second, ways forward for the city in our case study area, that recognize the important student presence there, require institutional practices to be developed that obfuscate the current boundaries and separations between students from Australia and students from overseas. Habits have formed, and boundaries are now enacted all the time between these 'groups', that need to be disrupted. Both by providing greater diversity of housing choices for all students, and by devising administrative ways of welcoming and 'processing' students that gather them habitually into far more heterogeneous groups than presently occurs, this boundary-disrupting might occur. Interestingly, especially in the case of housing, such efforts would involve pushing students away from this small central part of Melbourne, out to other parts of the metropolitan area where they would encounter a more varied public than is presently the case. Thus, the place-making strategy we envisage, for this one of its facets anyway, would be anything but an inward looking local strategy.

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