Vanity Unfair - Examining the Impact of development authorities on the designation and development of public space:
Barangaroo Case Study

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Abstract: Increasingly prominent on the site of a former shipping terminal and docklands, the $6 billion Barangaroo development on Sydney’s foreshore is claiming the last piece of undeveloped land on the city coast. The contestation that is surrounding the development invokes imagery of Darling Harbour redux. Arguably, the development is typical of the dominant movement of neoliberal cities in the Global North that have seen an increase in the influence and powers of private stakeholders in the public realm. An increasingly interconnected world has accelerated the rate of change however governance has adapted at a slower rate. This disconnection has exacerbated existing issues, one of which is the contestation of what is called public space. This case study of the Barangaroo project will be grounded in theories of globalization and public space, and an accompanying analysis of morphological differences and planning policy through successive changes in the development plan. Through this case study the paper will begin to construct an argument for a more inclusive, adaptive and interdisciplinary planning process that realigns contemporary planning theory with practice and makes clear definitions of what the is public might be. This includes a move towards transparency against what is increasingly becoming a trend towards veiled opaqueness of governance in all aspects of public life while an increasing level of surveillance is thrust upon us in what is a public policy reform agenda that is scarily becoming more bipartisan.

1. Introduction
Cities are organisms in a state of flux continually cycling through processes of development and redevelopment. Spaces of the city also change their definition and meaning through spatial shifts and constructions (Van Kempen & Marcuse, 1997), ideological influences and positions (Friedmann & Wolff, 1982), and political and economic valuations (Harvey, 2006). Mobility is not limited to flows of people, but prescribes meaning through shifts in historical contexts and past states. Viewed through a contemporary normative lens, democratic spaces of the past were only truly open to those who qualified as members (propertied men in the agora). It is now generally recognised that ideally public spaces are open to all, with democracy generally pertaining to egalitarianism (Benhabib, 1992). There are difficulties with these prescribed positions that regard relationships as fixed entities and these will be considered further here.

World cities are global. While fixed in location, imaginary networks allow their influence to spread unevenly around the globe (Sassen, 2001, 2010). As principal nodes of social and economic flows, they are also the sites of large urban scale developments. Examples of which include Canary Wharf in London, Hudson Yards in New York, and HafenCity in Hamburg, an emerging global city (Harris, 2014).

Sydney, Australia’s premiere contribution to the network of Global Cities seems to feel the pressure to maintain its image as the most Cosmopolitan, well connected city in Australia. This facade may well attract tourists and the photogenic image of the city syndicated through media of all sorts may carry, but beyond attracting the flows of tourists and foreign capital, we must consider at first historically the foundations that allowed cities to expand both geographically and by influence, then an argument can be made about the hegemony existing in the cosmopolitan of today (Benhabib et al, 2006).

The last remains of its industrial heritage, the waterfront that was once an active shipping terminal is now in the process of development to the sound of a mixed use precinct named Barangaroo.
This $6 billion project is a development that has been contested since the selection of the masterplan through to the most recent point of controversy in the waterfront hotel and casino (Nicholls, 2015). Even ignoring the design in the context of the urban realm, it can be inferred that the demographic such a building would bring into a dominant position on the harbour would seem to exacerbate the class division that is common to development of prime waterfront spaces in postindustrial port cities. Such divisions have been seen recently in the sale of prime real estate that has been public housing since the 1910s in the immediate area of Millers Point.

The fact that public spaces are public assumes a degree of politicisation. It is perhaps for this reason that bureaucratic processes have made it increasingly difficult for the general public to question the authority of their decisions. And with the growth of private capital on public projects, an additional barrier of ‘sensitive information’ is overlaid on already difficult to procure project details until foundations have already been laid.

This paper will operate with an interdisciplinary approach to large scale developments that often only focus on the political, economic, spatial or participatory. In so doing it provides an introductory study into the potential for further research. The paper will close with a recontextualisation of waterfront urban developments within the neoliberal spaces of today’s global cities.

2. Research Questions & Objectives

With developments like Barangaroo and of increasing scale becoming more and more prevalent, it is important to consider what the implications are, and the accountabilities that follow. This is important not just for the outcome of public spaces, but also making connections between theory and practice that illustrates more clearly the importance of interdisciplinary planning education, and to reinforce that an agonistic mode of participation can guide policy and legislation to a more inclusive public realm.

This paper will attempt to question in an age of perceived democracy, why there is an increased veil of paternalism while we are restricted with accepting public decisions made without recourse for rebuttal or interference (Wolin, 2010). Through morphological inspection of masterplans and site studies, and contextual analysis of planning documents and reports, I will argue against what is defined as public space, and through examining submitted modifications of what can only be called ‘developer creep’ (Nicholls, 2015a), rebut the claim that public space is indeed maximised in lieu of private gain (Brenner et al, 2009).

3. Methodology

The case of Barangaroo was selected for inhabiting all the qualities of conflict that is representative of neoliberal developments, especially in post industrial port front cities, from democracy, participation, urban change both spatially and by demographic, and governance. Although processes of globalisation proliferate around the world, it is understood that local contexts shape decisions and developments according to their individual requirements and specific conditions (Harvey, 2005).

The methodology of the paper is a desktop analysis of existing and current theory in the realm of public space, global cities and planning theory. From a post-Habermasian lens, this paper will consider the relationship between democracy and urban development (Barnett, 2014). This literature review will then be tested against the currently unfolding case study of Barangaroo. Considered in tandem, they recontextualise global trends of increasingly privatised cities to the specific conditions of Sydney and offer a point of departure for future research.
4. Literature Review
The interdisciplinary nature of this paper entails a rather broad ranging accumulation of media. The paper acknowledges that there is a large amount written on both global cities & public space and will attempt to curate a significant, diverse selection of material between theory and practice for inclusion. In reference to Barangaroo there is little scholarly material available and that this paper will attempt to contribute to this gap. It should be noted that this literature review will not exhaust the body of knowledge currently available.

4.1. Global Cities & Pressures
Cities are petri dishes of negotiations and interactions and the analysis of the continuing development of Barangaroo offers directions for future developments taking place in the city. It is generally agreed that the hegemony of cities around the world can be explained through global cities (Sassen, 2001; Harvey, 2005). The Marxist commodification of all things physical and imaginary have also guided the dominating power around the world to follow a neoliberal framework in constructing their cities. These hegemonic forms and multi scalar interconnected networks and agglomerations (Gunder, 2010) makes it supremely difficult to find an answer to the question of how to reform planning and policy, and how to find an approach for planning practice to realign to contemporary planning theory. The public realm introduces additional complications to consider that includes citizenship (Mitchell, 1995), ownership (Mumford, 1961; Harvey, 1989), and democratic participation (Benhabib, 1992; Wolin, 2010).

The commodification of space and privatisation of public spaces has shifted the direction of policy from that of managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Graham & Healey, 1999; Gunder, 2010; Harvey, 1989, 2006; Sager, 2011). These competitive networks that participate in regional and global hierarchies have profound effects at a local level. For example, although only developed in 1988, Darling Harbour is already in the process of redevelopment to capture regional competition from traditionally Melbourne, but also growing at an increasing pace, the cities of Brisbane and Perth. The race to capture international capital and tourism in an effort to project a cosmopolitan image tends to conflict with the terms of a democratic society (Benhabib et al, 2006).

In a post-political society (from Miessen, 2012) the power of conventional governmental institutions seems to hold less and less power to guide the construction of the city. Michele Acuto notes

> The growing salience of global networks, the increasing importance of the advanced producer services industry and the key role of business elites in shaping the form and orientation of the city have all been essential factors in pushing towards the antagonistic element of entrepreneurialism, thus subjugating its other two features (innovation and the outgoing edge) to competitiveness. (pp. 393)

(Acuto 2012 pp. 393)

This shift in dominance from governmental to quasi-governmental institutions (MacDonald, 2015) in the public realm reduces the legitimisation of governments in the face of changing hierarchies of delivery and power in the urban fabric. And with the leading dominance of entrepreneurial practice, competition at the national and regional level overshadows the importance of the local in developing inclusive public spaces.

4.2. Public Spaces
Common conceptions of democratic ideals yields images of equal value, palaver and a mercantile space that is entirely inclusive. Even when looking back to the Greeks and Romans with their conceptions of an inclusive space, the agora and forums constructed were built with a self inclusive model that was open to participation only for the propertied men; women, and men
without citizenship were not privy to the same benefits, instead only to engage in market activities (Mumford, 1961). Considering the context of these misappropriated views we find that traditionally ‘public’ spaces have never been inclusive and in turn cannot hold to that imagined framework. As Benhabib notes,

> Is the “recovery of the public space” under conditions of modernity necessarily an elitist and anti-democratic project which can hardly be reconciled with the demand for universal political emancipation and the universal extension of citizenship rights that have accompanied modernity since the American and French revolutions? (pp. 91)

(Benhabib, 1992 pp. 91)

‘Public spaces’ now hold more importance due to increasing inequality among classes and globally through uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2005). More increasingly also there have been attempts to introduce more inclusive, participatory approaches to planning with Transactive and Advocacy Planning models (Friedmann, 1993). Perhaps it is the tradition of planning or the historical rate of growth and evolution of humanity but theories often lag behind needed practical approaches (Graham & Healey, 1999).

Perhaps the most recent, though seemingly most important interlocutor in these series of arguments is the rapid integration and adoption of information and media culture in the public sphere (Sassen, 2010). We are living in an increasingly mobile and dynamic state of information exchange where it can be easier to post a tweet to millions of subscribers than to talk to your partner in the adjacent room. An epistemological shift must occur in bourgeois culture; where if we are to reconstruct a democratic system of governance and society we must adapt, modify our established ideology and begin to reframe our expectations of participatory politics tending towards more inclusive public spaces. Because if indeed this is the forum where discourse happens, then it must also be a place where all can habit without exclusion.

There are numerous sociological studies referencing use function of space (Jacobs, 1961; Lynch, 1960; Whyte, 1980; Gehl, 2011), but the effects of globalisation have increased the commodification of space to a point where striations in participation of the public sphere are more severe where the neoliberal shift has also affected the ‘publicness’ of spaces. Through the commodification of space there is now a cost threshold of entry where one may not feel welcome, or be required to pay for the cost of entry through exclusionary spatial design or physical barriers like gated communities (Mitchell, 1995).

An argument that has also grown increasingly in scholarship is the imaginary of online space. Paths diverging to this thought are supported by the technological advancement, availability and the increasingly privatised physical public space (Webster, 2014). These advances in technology have also signaled a rise in surveillance and control, where movements of individuals are tracked not only in public spaces, but also in the imaginary of the world wide web.

Not least of all when public spaces are constructed, the physical characteristics both in design and environmental context must be considered in the analysis. Because of this, defining planning constructs purely quantitatively for allocation of public space reinforces the relative autonomy given to the developer to define it as they see fit. Assuming capitalistic tendencies, there is little impetus on the developer for public space to be maximised for the benefit of the public, although the development occurs on public land, there is little opportunity for intervention to take place (Ruming & Davies, 2014).

There is a need to rethink how the definition of the quanta of public space is defined, and if the benchmark should be an amalgamation of both quantitative and qualitative measures. An exploration of this equity in the public realm should lead to more revolutionary adaptive and
relational modes of planning which should alter the dynamics of participation in the construction of the public sphere.

5. Analysis of the Case Study
As a contemporary development there is much to learn from examining the unfolding events in the current climate of citizen dissent (BPN, 2012). Although written about in newspapers and magazine articles, there is little academic literature on the Barangaroo case study (Johnston & Clegg, 2012), with only one peer reviewed article directly responding to this subject. As an analogue for similar developments, this paper should provide scope for future inquiry into an interdisciplinary study on Barangaroo, and further to post-industrial waterfront developments in general.

Barangaroo is a 22 ha mixed use development with land reclaimed from existing stevedoring services. Part of the reclamation process needed remediating of the toxic ground from years of handling sea freight cargo. From the competition to decide on the masterplan, the winning proposal, ‘adjustments’ and the inception of the Barangaroo Development Authority, the amount of commercial-in-confidence privacy (Harris, 2014) afforded to such a public project is certainly surprising given the scale and impact of the development.

We need not look back farther than 1984 to the Darling Harbour development for historical precedence of a project of similar controversy in undertaking (Punter, 2005). The case study will be analysed through publicly available documents from a morphological study through masterplans, changes in modifications and the interrelationship with planning policy with reference to public opinion.

Conclusions will be drawn from this analysis to suggest guidance for future directions for policy adaptation.

5.1. Design & Master Planning Analysis of Public Spaces
Masterplans are documents that guide developments and act as an interface communicating their spatial characteristics to the general public. These documents should indicate the intentions of the project and lead further to outcomes that are projected allowing the public to inflect their opinion towards an agonistic relationship that builds trust and a less opaque vision of the project.

Requirement of an iconic development does not mean an iconic piece of architecture. There are numerous examples of world class public spaces without the need for the spectacle of a disproportionate tower on the waterfront (Oslo, Norway; Copenhagen, Denmark; Barcelona, Spain). The deviation from the winning competition entry and subsequent modifications are all shifting the emphasis away from building public infrastructure and amenities, to maximising capital return on investment.

The following analysis and focus on morphology on selected parts of the development aims to highlight the impact of changes made through successive masterplans and submissions, relationship between quantitative and qualitative aspects of public space, and the influence of capital on the icons and direction of development from the initial winning plan of relatively low density and sensitive design to the current dictum of the necessity of iconic architecture and amenities of consumption through the proposed casino.
One of the original sketches proposing connection to the city grid, the rationale of extending the city block through a ‘radial fan’ typology fails through the specific context of the site and has little meaning where there is a clear physical barrier, a solid sandstone cliff wall at Hickson Road and High Street when viewed in section below in Fig 2, and further illustrated through the image at High Steps in Fig 3.

From the drawing in Fig 2, following the steps down to Darling Harbour, there is a clear change in height of the ground plane. Although there are a series of steps that wind down, there is no accessible route to the shore.
The panoramic image above indicates the expanse of the site. Although the 7 meter drop allows a vista for viewing, the difference in height is problematic for connecting to the existing city grid.

As illustrated in the masterplans below, there is a sharp departure from winning scheme from Hill Thalis Berkemeier Irwin to the most recently submitted MOD 8 plan. The site has been increasingly divided with distinct separations between the headland and more dense commercial areas. Also visible is the encroachment of built form to the waters edge.

Originally winning the open competition in 2006, the Hill Thalis Berkemeier Irwin (HTBI) scheme divides the site in tapered wedges with built form on the east and public open space on the west. These tapered forms allow the buildings to gradually penetrate and connect to the parkland towards Walsh Bay in the north. Public space is also developed into a series of smaller spaces where one can either find spaces for large congregations or intimate gatherings. This low density development makes a more sensitive connection to the fabric of the city, perhaps less exciting than the following scenarios.
The amalgamated scheme, roughly composed of elements from both HTBI & Lend Lease plans follows a similar built form layout but with bites taken off the existing concrete pier, developing the shoreline to introduce a more naturalistic edge. The public spaces are reconfigured but maintain a variety of divisions while also maintaining the smaller floor plates for the built form.

The approved Modification 4 further divides the site into three distinct sections, allowing further cuts into coves to mark clearly, the delineation between Barangaroo South, Central and Point. The most controversial aspect of this plan is to introduce a hotel on a newly built pier both out of line to planning policy of having built form step down to the waters edge and allowing key public space nodes to be essentially privatised. These grand moves are perhaps foreboding of the current state of development.
The most recently published Modification 8 now puts the hotel back on land, that which was allocated as public open space and reallocating the public open space away from the waterfront to an enclosed envelope overshadowing by the hotel to the west. The southern cove has now been partially filled in, a public square removed and a community space on a shortened pier where the hotel was previously placed. Although half of the site can still be considered open public space, spatially there is a feeling of less generosity to public users of the open spaces.

A major point of contention through the project is the density of site and amount of publicly open space as required in the competition. As seen above, Lend Lease’s claim of 50% open space is technically true, but to describe space quantitatively herein lies the flaw when used anthropologically. And considering the position of the new park between blocks 4A & 4B some of the space function as forecourts to the respective buildings (McKenny, 2013). Both these concerns raises the point that development guidelines that define public space to target only a specific quanta finds major shortcomings when space is experienced contextually.
Continuing from these quanta to the claim that the park enclosed by the hotel and residential towers in blocks Y, 4A and 4B only partially overshadow the park can be questioned in the following modeling whereby qualitative aspects of habitation can be raised in the utilization of space with comparison to previous masterplans. The main contributor to overshadowing can be attributed to the hotel dividing the waterfront from the park.

Fig 9. Impact of potential hotel shadowing on the park during summer and winter solstice. Modelling completed assuming best-case scenario of no built form north of the park between blocks Y, 4A & 4B.
Source: Authors own
I have provided a model based on the Barangaroo South public domain model map, mapping out the shadow impact of the potential hotel on the waterfront. Blocks Y, 4A and 4B have been extruded given the data in the previous image. We can see that in the summer, the park will be completely in shadow by 1.00pm, and by 4.00pm during the winter solstice. Although not impacted as much during the winter months when sunset arrives shortly after the park is completely overshadowed by the surrounding buildings, during the summer when all areas west of the hotel tower will be lit for a further 6 – 7 hours, the contained park will be in darkness. Surely the benefit of shielding from south-westerly winds is outweighed by this consideration?

As we see through the successive changes to the masterplan and closer detail, the departure from the winning entry is significant in both shape and spirit. The decision to develop the site in a piecemeal fashion can help to break down the complexity of such a big site, but difficulties occur when dealing with such large masses of land and dominating forms as a hotel on a relatively slender position on the waterfront. But again, much of the criticism could have been averted had the development proceeded in a more transparent mode of delivery.

5.2. Planning policy & Barangaroo
We can perhaps thank the development of Barangaroo, due to its scale, location and hubris to bring to the public, the concern for legitimacy and transparency of the current planning system. The multifaceted management protocols of Public Private Partnerships (Johnstone & Clegg, 2012), reforms limiting citizen participation in development decisions (MacDonald, 2015) and proliferation of special purpose development authorities i.e. the Barangaroo Delivery Authority (Acuto, 2012) all contribute to a well founded public concern towards the development. The publication of the Sussex Penn Review (Sussex, Penn, 2011) and their responses (CoS, 2011; Barangaroo, 2011) and subsequent queries (DPE, 2015) suggest that there is a level of public inquiry into the decisions made in evolutionary submissions. The focused selection of sources identifies key voices interfacing with the changing development plans.

The rate of transnational interconnectivity and rate of change, reactions and interventions that take place puts great pressures on cities to innovate and adapt to these external forces. ‘Planning must increasingly, do more with less’ (MacDonald, 2015) if it is to effectively contribute to the democratic model of the city.

It is not for lack of imagination or inadequate attention or failing thought that no more concrete picture is presented, but because, precisely, the direction for actions in the future should not be preempted, but left to the democratic experience of those in fact implementing the vision.(pp. 194)

(Marcuse, 2009, pp. 194)

We are now in a post political age where traditional bureaucratic structures have less autonomy to construct, or have the ability to control the built form of the city, instead there is a dilution of control whereby they now facilitate the administration and levy the accountability to a third party, in this case study it is the Barangaroo Delivery Authority. These multi-level governance structures makes it increasingly difficult for the general public to discern the roles of each party leading to an environment where the question of legitimacy is raised that grows increasingly difficult to answer. The reform to repeal Part 3A of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act (EPAA), whose aim was to increase accountability and transparency but the result is much of a muchness (BPN, 2013), with little change that allows for community input and still prioritises economic over social developments whilst maintaining a single actor to veto any conflicting decisions through the Director General.
The governance strategies that have emerged in neoliberal democracies over the past 3 decades have emphasised the role of permeable and fluid multi-level institutions incorporating public-private partnerships, citizen participation and civil society institutions in forms for collaboration, in place of hierarchical bureaucratic structures. (pp. 117)

(from MacDonald, 2015, pp. 117)

This institutional fluidity is seen also through the successive changes in the plans of the Barangaroo development (CoS, 2011, 2015).

6. Recommendations & Discussions
Due to the dynamic nature of the conditions that urban planning & policy must cater for, future directions cannot simply be considered a priori. Making amendments to planning theory and policy to allow for a more dynamic proposition of what is currently called public space, will allow for a more relational model of planning that will require that what is put into practice to be captured in written documentation.

The hierarchical model of governance will also need to have an adjustment of process to reassure the public of the legitimacy of governmental practice and of the quasi-governmental institutions that represent them. Perhaps Sydney needs a governmental organisation like the Integrated Design Commission running in South Australia to reintegrate design within state legislative processes such that design is recognised all the while during the planning process.

Although these ideas need to be developed further, there is a clear dissonance between the decisions that current planning processes have allowed, the reactions of citizens and citizen organisations (BPN, 2013), so called revolutionary changes to policy (Ruming & Davies, 2014; MacDonald, 2015), and the current state of affairs. Although these are effects we see at a local scale but is clear that there are many inputs that occur outside the scope of our everyday interactions.

We live in a world city, but we also need to consider incorporating glocalising tendencies (Swyngedouw, 2004) for adaptation to current planning policy. With the proliferation of Public Private Partnership developments, there is also a need to consider planning to be responsible for decisions made on an anthropological scale and adapt these nuances to complement the dominant modernist hand of city construction.

The repeal of Part 3A of the EPAA was supposed to be a positive step forward for a more inclusive model of planning policy but there is significant scope to further the capacity of inclusionary practices. Public spaces in cities are not just facades projecting the imaginary to attract foreign capital, but has the power of proselytising the public to be more active participants in the public realm. Cities should be spaces of discourse and agonistic debate. This can only happen in forums of a variety of scales, considering both the fine grain to the grand parade. The findings of this paper also suggests that public space, through design competitions and continuing policy, be qualified not simply through a quotient that must be reached, but because public space is, we should hope, habited, and in significance, that there be a qualitative measure implemented as a benchmark of design quality.

Through all of these inputs, this paper notes that planning needs to move away from a hierarchical model to contributing to the framework for human habitation. It is only through this dynamic feedback loop that we can capture a localised perspective in a globalised, network city.
7. Conclusion
Due to the network structure of cities to other control centres, suggesting changes in power structures must be extended from a local context to that of the global space. To acknowledge this premise would be to agree to a multi scalar approach to urban planning analysis and reconceptualising the discipline to consider that an interdisciplinary approach may be more powerful in transforming public spaces into truly inclusionary spaces.

From the morphological analysis of the changing plans of Barangaroo, there is still scope to coerce the rest of the site that has not yet been planned or developed to respond more to its context, and the general concerns of public and professional stakeholders. With the current planning framework and publicly available documents regarding development at Barangaroo, there is great uncertainty for the future of the site. Should the government truly want to make revolutionary changes to the planning system, and the developers responsive to these changes, Barangaroo could be a case study that influences all global examples.

In this post-political age it is no longer enough for bureaucratic institutions to parlay responsibility to dilute accountability to quasi-governmental institutions.

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