

Remaking Adelaide's West End

The Contributions of the University of South Australia's City West Campus, Stage One

Associate Professor Christine Garnaut
School of Art, Architecture and Design
University of South Australia
South Australia, Australia
christine.garnaut@unisa.edu.au

This paper is set within the context of late 20th century Australian capital city revitalisation. It focuses on Adelaide, South Australia, and in particular on the remaking of a sector of the city known as the West End. The paper refers to cultural regeneration, one strand in the capital city revitalisation literature, to the revival of attention to urban design from the 1980s and to a concomitant refocusing on the public realm through urban design-led regeneration initiatives. The paper adopts a case study approach centring on the University of South Australia's City West campus that opened in 1997 in Adelaide's West End. The discussion introduces the historical and physical context of the campus site, as well as the City of Adelaide Plan 1991-1996. The influence of these and other factors on the City West plan, by Raffin Maron Architects, is considered along with the contributions of the new campus to the revitalisation of the West End and especially to the North Terrace West and Hindley Street West precincts where it is situated.

Keywords — *urban revitalisation; urban design; public realm; University of South Australia, City West campus; West End, Adelaide; North Terrace, Adelaide.*

INTRODUCTION

The University of South Australia (UniSA) came into being on 1 January 1991. It was a multi-campus institution spread over six sites in the city and suburbs of Adelaide and in regional South Australia. UniSA's inaugural corporate plan released by the University Council in 1993 announced that it would build a new city campus at the western end of North Terrace, about 1 kilometre from its existing location at the Terrace's eastern end. The decision coincided with a period of nascent attention to the revitalisation of the city of Adelaide and in particular of its central business district. To that end an urban design study was underway for North Terrace, a vital contributor to the city's cultural and economic life, and a major east-west thoroughfare along its northern edge. Meanwhile, foreshadowing a late 1990s arts-led strategy to revitalise the western sector of the city, in 1992 an arts-focused complex had opened in a collection of heritage and purpose-built buildings adjacent to the locale selected for the new UniSA campus. One side of the arts complex fronted North Terrace and both it and the campus site were situated in what is known as Adelaide's West End.

The construction of the UniSA City West campus was significant on several fronts. In financial terms it was a substantial commitment and investment for the then very young university, and it was the largest capital works project undertaken in South Australia since the economic crisis precipitated by the collapse of the State Bank in 1991. From the broader perspective of the city and state, the university's move into the West End was looked upon as "a vital component of the City's 'Adelaide Vision' which seeks to facilitate a range of inter-related commercial, professional and educational

developments" (Ninio in Neighbour, 1995, p. 21), and also as an action that "was expected to lead to a regeneration of the West End" (Mackinnon, 2016, p. 107). Furthermore, the year after the City West campus opened, it was acknowledged as one of a number of "significant developments" (Adelaide 21, 1998, p. 3) on or near North Terrace that had been considered in the preparation of the North Terrace Precincts Economic and Urban Design Framework released in April 2000. The Framework underpinned the North Terrace Precincts Redevelopment Project (commenced 2001) conceived as a staged urban design-led revitalisation scheme for the whole of North Terrace (Taylor Cullity Lethlean, 2001). In the upshot only two phases of the Redevelopment Project were completed, both at the eastern end of the Terrace.

Two decades on from the opening of UniSA's City West campus, that part of the West End housing the university has been and is being remade in physical terms by the construction of a collection of buildings that opens onto North Terrace and its near neighbour to the south, Hindley Street. In addition, the western part of North Terrace has been regenerated on both its southern and northern sides. The latter especially has undergone a comprehensive transformation through the construction of an agglomeration of educational and bio-medical research buildings and the new Royal Adelaide Hospital.

This paper focuses on the beginning of the story of UniSA's City West campus and of its contributions to the remaking of Adelaide's West End. The main temporal time frame is the last decade of the 20th century. The narrative unfolds within the wider context of capital city revitalisation in Australia from the 1980s and the rise of urban-design led regeneration initiatives. The discussion begins with a brief introduction to the broad context before moving to the Adelaide and UniSA case study.

CAPITAL CITY REVITALISATION

One strand of the extensive international literature on capital city revitalisation focuses on cultural regeneration. Wansborough and Mageean (2000, p. 181) define cultural regeneration as a process of "restoring and improving the quality of urban life through the enhancement and development of the unique characteristics of a place and its people" and argue that the particular characteristics of a city help to shape a framework for its revitalisation. The contribution of universities to the phenomenon of cultural regeneration is considered by Dempsey (2015) amongst others and forms part of a larger scholarship on "urban renewal and the university" (Ashworth, 1964, p. 493 and, for example, Melhuish, 2015; Mosier, 2015; O'Mara, 2012; Montgomery, 2007).

In Australia, the occurrence of capital city revitalisation can be traced to the early decades of settlement and to public and privately-driven moves to improve the physical condition of cities and the general comfort, convenience and well-being of their inhabitants. These initial approaches were largely piecemeal and variously successful, shaped by a range of influences, imperatives, programs and promoters. The early 20th century heralded the introduction of the idea of town planning, a rising interest in culture and aesthetics and the emergence of design-led initiatives fuelled by the United States-inspired and internationally-informed City Beautiful movement (Freestone, 2007). From the 1920s, functionalist and scientific rationales gradually underpinned city development leaving aesthetic, historic and social dimensions generally overlooked in favour of pragmatic urban schemes (for example, Gregory, 2009).

The 1980s ushered in a reawakening in the popularity of inner city living and a period of change in professional, community and government attitudes to the planning and design of Australia's capital cities as demonstrated in part through a revival in the "importance attached to urban design" (Freestone, 2010, p. 39; Bechervaise, 1998). Various factors contributed to this shift including concern for the loss of design sensibility and human scale in urban environments (RAIA, 1966; Boyd, 1960); decentralisation that contributed to "a relative decline in the commercial importance of central city areas" (Taylor and Newton, 1985, p. 1; Marsden, 2000); pressure for the conservation of the historic built environment exercised notably by community groups and organisations (e.g. Warburton, 1986) and the promotion and marketing of Australia and particular capital cities to the world through their hosting of significant international events.

A key outcome of renewed attention to urban design was a refocusing on the public realm. Gleave (in Rowley, 1994, p. 196) defines the public realm as "... the public face of buildings, the spaces between the frontages, streets, pathways, [squares], parks, gardens and ... the activities taking place within and between these spaces and the[ir] servicing and managing ...". Speaking at an international conference held in Sydney in 1990, founding chairman of the UK Urban Design Group Francis Tibbalds argued that "The public realm is where the greatest amount of community interaction takes place We need to care again about the public realm" (Tibbalds, 1990, p. 41).

By then urgings like Tibbalds' were already being heeded in Australia as illustrated in projects such as the redevelopment of the port of Fremantle in association with the 1987 America's Cup, the remaking of Sydney's Darling Harbour in conjunction with Australia's 1988 Bicentenary celebrations, and Brisbane's South Bank cultural precinct that followed from World Expo 88. Also in the 1980s, in Adelaide, studies began for what eventuated in 2001 as a revitalisation project for the whole length (1.6 kilometres) of North Terrace from east to west (Taylor, 2004). Such "flagship regeneration projects are important symbols of change in the urban landscape and their design ... [plays] a crucial role in the process of urban regeneration" (Wansborough and Mageean, 2000, p. 186).

DESIGN-LED URBAN REGENERATION

Urban regeneration or revitalisation projects help to rekindle and revalue human activity in cities (Taylor and Newton, 1985). The process of developing and implementing a framework for urban revitalisation falls under the mantle of urban design. Urban design is itself a process and one that involves multiple disciplines as well as the product of the process (Dungey in Separovic, 2007). A fundamental aspect of the urban design process is to identify the essential "built form features" (Corporation, 1988, p. 1) that characterise a place and to prepare and apply a design response that draws on and respects those features. Urban design is also intimately connected with the social and with expressing the culture or way of life of a city and its inhabitants and with their sense of place. As Dovey (2005, p. 8) states, "If there is a central task for urban design it is to construct and sustain urban diversity; good urbanism has many forms, but they are all open to difference."

In Australia advocacy from the 1980s for the process, outcomes and value of urban design emerged through various channels including the establishment of professional groups such as the Urban Design Forum (founded 1986), the inauguration of the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force (1994), and the contributions of international consultants and of state-based champions employed by local and state governments in influential planning and design roles. As a consequence of this collective advocacy emphasis on urban design as a tool to assist in establishing the identity and meaning of a place and in making places in the public realm vital, accessible, legible, socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable and economically competitive was a major theme in late 20th century Australian capital city revitalisation projects. In turn, specific projects were influenced by various factors including urban design guidelines, competition briefs and urban design objectives and policies embodied in state and local government development plans. The City of Adelaide is an example of the last point where urban design evolved as planning policy from 1976 in the five-yearly reviewed City of Adelaide Plan (Llewelyn-Smith, 2012; Hutchings, 1989; Corporation, 1988).

ADELAIDE AND THE WEST END

Adelaide's textbook colonial plan (1837) of gridded streets bounding generous town acres, squares and enveloping parklands provided an enduring physical pattern that continues to influence its spatial and built form. The city's two parts, referred to originally as South and North Adelaide, were positioned to take account of the topography and were separated by a river whose reaches formed part of its parklands.

The earliest settlement occurred in the northwest corner bounded respectively on its western and northern sides by West

Terrace and North Terrace. Within this sector Morphett Street running parallel to West Terrace was a principal north-south route, while Hindley Street provided the major east-west connection. Initially the northwest corner, later known as the West End, was the principal place of residence, employment, commerce, industry, food production and leisure for most of the new colony's residents. Its character as a densely built, low-rise, mixed-use environment has survived into the 21st century. So, too, as has its reputation gained largely through the 1960s and 70s when it became part of an entertainment and tourist precinct, as "the seedier side of town" (Adelaide West End Association, 2017). Hindley Street was then (and is) the main location for the variety of entertainment places that characterise the area and is widely recognised as having a day- and a night-time economy.

NORTH TERRACE

North Terrace is the street boundary along the city's northern edge. Additionally, it acts as a border between the walled expanse of commercial buildings on its southern side and the parklands, inset with institutional buildings, on its north. "Accommodating a unique concentration of higher order government, cultural, academic, health institutional and commercial facilities, it is a powerful symbolic and formal element in the city's structure" (Adelaide 21, 1998, p. 5). It is also a major corridor for vehicular and pedestrian movement.

Through the 19th century, as the colonial settlement evolved from its beginnings in the northwest corner, North Terrace developed as predominantly residential on its southern side. During the 20th century, commercial buildings increasingly replaced the houses between Pulteney Street at its east end and Morphett Street to the west. They "formed a more continuous and consistent built edge to the city grid" (Adelaide 21, 1998, p. 10). The northern side of North Terrace had quite a different character. Eastwards from King William Street it was home to the governor's domain and from 1861 to various cultural and educational institutions and health facilities (Samuels, 2016). These buildings were located in spacious grounds and were set back at generous distances from the street. By contrast with its southern side, development on the northern side of North Terrace did not result in a defining built edge to the city grid. The previously mentioned Redevelopment Project of 2001 aimed in part to address that condition.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON NORTH TERRACE AND IN THE WEST END

The University of South Australia (UniSA) was one of several Australian universities formed between 1988 and 1996, a time when higher education in Australia was brought under a Unified National System following reforms introduced by the Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training John Dawkins. Key tenets of the Unified National System included the abolition of the existing binary system that differentiated between universities and colleges of advanced education, and the creation, through amalgamations, of fewer and larger institutions (Harman, 1991). Accordingly, UniSA was founded through the amalgamation of the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) and the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE). It emerged after a protracted period of unsuccessful negotiations to merge the state's two existing universities with its other higher education institutions – the University of Adelaide with the SACAE, and Flinders University with the SAIT (Mackinnon, 2016).

At the time of its establishment UniSA had a headcount of 21 600 students accommodated in campuses in the city, at The Levels and Salisbury in the northern suburbs, Underdale in the western suburbs and Magill to the east of the CBD, and at Whyalla in country South Australia (Mackinnon, 2016). The city campus opened on the former SAIT site on the northern side of North Terrace, immediately adjacent to the University of Adelaide. The SAIT had evolved from the South Australian School of Mines and Industries established in 1889 (Aueckens, 1989). SAIT was based in the purpose-built Brookman building with an expansive frontage to North Terrace, and in several adjacent buildings. Its campus was cheek-by-jowl with the University of Adelaide. UniSA took over the SAIT premises and also leased office accommodation in nearby city buildings.

With no apparent opportunity for future expansion on the North Terrace site the UniSA Council looked at alternative options. It considered centring the new university's activities at its northern suburbs campus, The Levels, about 12 kilometres from the CBD. But the Council was keen for UniSA to "become a city university with a strong central presence, rather than a suburban one" (Mackinnon, 2016, p. 107). In the upshot the Council opted for retaining the campus at the east end of North Terrace and for constructing a new campus to the west of Morphett Street and on the southern side of North Terrace. The two city campuses were named for their geographical location – City East and City West.

The area selected for the City West campus was adjacent to a recently open arts complex that fronted North Terrace and Morphett Street. The complex included the state government-owned Lion Arts Centre that housed various spaces for arts bodies in a repurposed former flour factory; the Mercury and Iris cinemas; the purpose-built Jam Factory with facilities and studios for craft practitioners; and the Experimental Art Foundation offices, gallery and bookshop. The Adelaide Institute of TAFE, a short walk away in Light Square to the southeast and the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) located in the former headquarters of the SA Brewing Company on Hindley Street were established tertiary education facilities in the vicinity of the proposed campus.

The site for the new UniSA campus encompassed an undeveloped half-acre on the western portion of the Lion Arts Centre's land and three neighbouring blocks to the west (Mackinnon, 2016). North Terrace and Hindley Street formed respectively the northern and southern street boundaries. "Assembling the total site proceeded quickly" through 1993 (Mackinnon, 2016, p. 107) as the university negotiated to purchase the undeveloped Lion Arts Centre's half-acre from the government and a number of privately owned properties in various states of repair and used mostly for warehouse, retail, restaurant and entertainment purposes (Kolinac, 1995). Some private holdings were withheld from sale to UniSA. Consequently, its new campus was not built on a completely denuded site (Figure 1) and its planning and design took into account the established buildings, several of which were on the Register of the City of Adelaide Heritage Items.

A national design competition was held for the City West campus. The successful practice was Adelaide-based Raffin Maron Architects. The project to build the campus was launched officially in February 1994 with Guy Maron as architect. The construction company Hansen Yuncken was appointed in May 1995. Despite a range of factors that influenced the budget and other aspects of the new university's development in the period when the City West campus was under construction, the first phase buildings were delivered on time and in readiness for the 1997 academic year (Mackinnon, 2016; Maron, 2015; Neighbour, 1995). Five thousand staff and students moved onto the City West campus. They occupied eight new buildings that were used by the Chancellery and other administrative units, the library, Students' Association, a cafeteria and the faculties of Aboriginal and Islander Studies, Art, Architecture and Design, and Business and Management (University of South Australia, 1997). A childcare centre in another Raffin Maron designed building followed soon after. It was located on the southern side of Hindley Street.

CITY WEST CAMPUS DESIGN

The City West campus and buildings were designed in accordance with the City of Adelaide Plan 1991-1996 and with advice received through a design review process involving the City of Adelaide Urban Design Advisory Panel (established 1992) (Brine 1996; Raffin Maron Architects, 1994; Council, 1993).

The Plan divided the city into districts and precincts and included Statements of Desired Future Character for each precinct. The statements were based on the notion that a prescribed area had its own sense of place or "intrinsic environmental character". Word "descriptions of the 'desired future' of each precinct [were written to] create images of the types of activities, movement pattern and townscape [character] quality sought for each area" (Corporation, 1977, p. 41).

The site for the City West campus was located within the North Terrace West and the Hindley Street West precincts. Key

points regarding their desired future activities, built form, townscape qualities and movement patterns were described in the following ways:

North Terrace West forms part of the prominent built form edge to the City and should relate to and extend the attractive tree-lined boulevard character ... established in the adjacent North Terrace Precinct. Development should aim to substantially upgrade the disparate scale and quality of built form in the Precinct ... Development along the North Terrace frontage should continue the 'City Wall' character of the adjacent North Terrace Precinct. ... Development should contribute to an improved image for the Precinct by the redevelopment of blighted areas and under-developed sites. New buildings should contribute to the extension of the cohesive townscape character of the North Terrace frontage established in the adjacent North Terrace Precinct (Council, 1993, pp. 104-5).

The Hindley Street West Precinct should be revitalised as a culturally diverse and lively ... area supporting the activities of the adjacent Hindley Street Precinct ... New medium scale development should consolidate the disparate built form character ... producing a cohesive urban environment which upgrades the amenity, townscape character and sense of place in Hindley Street. ... The Precinct should offer a high level of pedestrian amenity and safety (Council, 1993, pp.106-7).

The stated desires of the 1991-1996 Plan "for an appropriate urban texture" were given due consideration in the design of the campus and its buildings. So too was the Plan's Built Form Objective:

To create a built environment which realizes the urban design potential of the Colonel Light Plan for the City of Adelaide while having regard to subsequent development and the need to reinforce existing areas of character significance and to promote excellence in design (Council, 1993, p. 17).

The City West campus was planned initially with a north-south orientation but early in the design phase that was changed to east-west to accommodate the sites that the university was able to procure (Maron, 2015). The grid that distinguishes the original Adelaide plan and the physical context of the existing northwest corner of the city were key influences on the campus plan. The affect of the grid is evident in the rigorous pattern of the layout of the buildings, and in their three dimensional form. Rising to four storeys they were built to street boundaries where applicable and most noticeably along North Terrace (Figure 1). As mentioned, the City of Adelaide Plan required new development in the North Terrace West Precinct to extend the "City Wall" and that is what was achieved in the City West design. Indeed, as the campus buildings were rising on North Terrace, a local commentator praised the "uniform four-storey buildings" for their "reuniting" effect on the North Terrace landscape (Thomas, 1996, pp. 8-9).

The pattern of the north-south and east-west internal pedestrian spines and the elevated bridges connecting the various buildings as well as the repetition of the rectangular form of the buildings also draw on the grid, while the density of the development, and the choice of building materials, colours and textures respect the established built context. The configuration of the precast cruciform column facade interspersed with red masonry infill panels reinforced the underlying grid and acknowledged the wider urban context in which red brick was a dominant building material.

"Incorporating a sense of 'Aboriginality' into the campus design" (Neighbour, 1995, p. 23) was a critical consideration of the City West brief. Discussions with local Aboriginal groups and Kaurna elders informed the selection of the red and ochre colours (Neighbour, 1995) which, along with corporate blue, helped to distinguish the campus as a new and distinctive development on North Terrace and within the West End. The university's decision to change the original colour scheme to a more muted palette in 2017 led Guy Maron to speak out about the rationale for the original choice of colours (Maron, 2017).

Maron (2015) explains that the City West design process was guided by the belief that "growth and change" are constant phenomena in university campus planning, and by the maxim that in order to ensure the future flexibility of spaces they

should not be designed to accommodate the specific needs of any one school or department. The resultant space function planning approach proposed “the use of non-dedicated facilities and shared facilities where feasible” (Neighbour, 1995, p. 23). The foresight of this approach is borne out today by the fact that most of the first stage City West buildings have been turned over to different university user groups and uses.

The planning approach generated three space function groupings in which the spaces became increasingly larger as the buildings moved inwards from North Terrace (Neighbour, 1995). The first group adjacent to North Terrace comprised the smallest, primarily staff offices and meeting rooms, while the intermediate offered larger spaces including an “active edge” at ground level with provision for uses including a cafeteria and bookshop, and lecture theatres and spaces for other modes of teaching designated on the levels above (Figure 1). The third group had the largest spaces and these were allocated to lecture theatres and for “specific configurations such as the library and (future) art museum” (Schenk, 1999, p. 14; Raffin Maron, 1994).

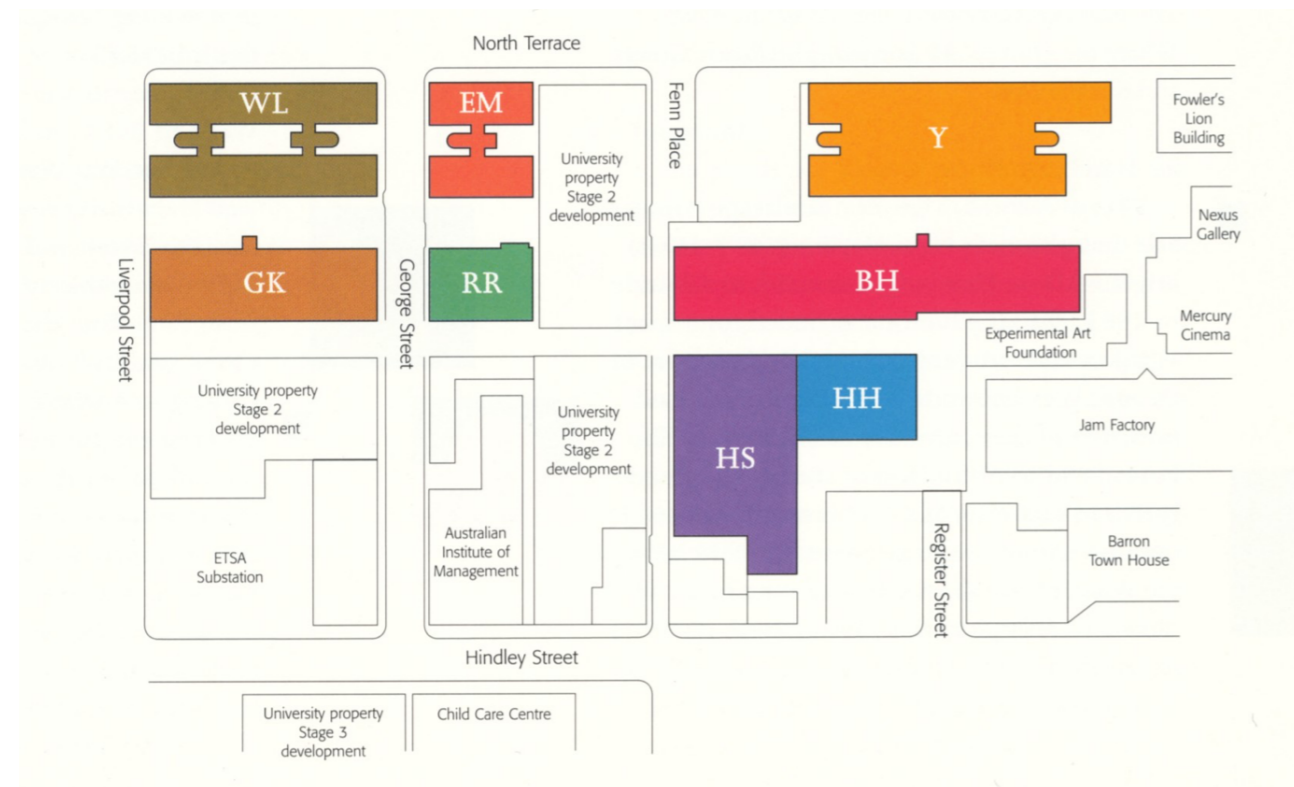


Figure 1 City West campus plan showing location of new buildings and future proposed development.

Buildings designated Y, EM, WL were primarily for offices. BH, RR, GK were used for teaching purposes. HH housed lecture theatres and HS the library. Register and George Street and Fenn Place were incorporated into the campus. The plan also shows the location of the arts complex opened in 1992 and sites retained in private hands.

Source: University of South Australia. 1997. City West Campus. np

Verandahs were incorporated on the northern facades of the first and intermediary layers of buildings. They served several purposes including providing climate control, visual interest, circulation corridors, and a means of access for building maintenance. Additionally they carried out a lighting function as their distinctive “sky reflectors or light pumps direct[ed] natural light deeply into the building fabric” (Raffin Maron, 1994, p. 2).

“Simple direct circulation planning” complementing the city’s street and footpath infrastructure and inviting the public into the campus and encouraging their use of its internal streets as thoroughfares was the “essence” of the campus design (Raffin Maron, 1994, p. 2). Three existing north-south streets were incorporated into the plan to draw out and reinforce the notion of “the city in the campus, and the campus in the city” (Neighbour, 1995, p. 23). However, in the early years of the campus, gates prevented easy out of hours access by the university and wider community, and it was criticised for

“resembling a fortress” (Montgomery, 2007, p. 336). The gates were installed for security reasons. They are now mostly removed improving the pedestrian connectivity and amenity within the campus and with its environs.

The first two functional groupings of campus buildings were separated by an internal landscaped green promenade covered with a naturally ventilating canopy. The promenade was envisaged as the major spine for the campus. The original intent was for it to extend the length of the east-west axis and open at its eastern end into the Lion Arts Centre courtyard. While the latter was achieved, the siting of buildings in Stage 2 of the development precluded the spine from being fully realised (Figure 1). A secondary pedestrian street separated the buildings in the second and third layers. Two north-south streets crossed the green promenade and connected the campus to the major boundaries of North Terrace and Hindley Street while a third provided entry from and exit to Hindley Street.

Buildings were connected by external stairs and with horizontal bridges; these elements were external expressions of the means and modes of circulation and enhanced connectivity between floors at all levels. The bridges also catered for disability access, as did lifts strategically located in each of the buildings. However, as the creation of a low-energy building envelope was a fundamental consideration in the design of the City West buildings, stairs were preferred to lifts as the primary mode of circulation between floors.

CONCLUSION

The move of the University of South Australia to Adelaide’s West End and the opening of Stage 1 of the campus contributed to the process of remaking that part of the city by re-emphasising the value of human activity in the urban landscape and by improving the public realm in the locale where it was built. Informed by the City of Adelaide Plan, the campus plan and architecture took into account the original plan for Adelaide, the existing built form of the city and the local townscape features that contribute to the distinctive identity and sense of place of the West End and of Hindley Street West in particular. The campus buildings fronting North Terrace West extended the already established “City Wall” to the east and contributed to the visual unification of the Terrace on its south side. The design of the buildings helped to consolidate the previous “disparate form” of building stock in the locality. Existing buildings were retained at spasmodic intervals on the campus edges and the layout of the new buildings and circulation spaces inserted between them created a legible footprint. The campus streets and facilities were accessible to the public and invited wider community engagement. When considered collectively, these points arguably suggest that the new City West campus met Wansborough and Mageean’s (2000, p.181) definition of cultural regeneration, in the context of Hindley Street West and North Terrace West, and the wider West End sector, by “improving the quality of urban life through the enhancement and development of the unique characteristics of ... [the] place and its people”.

With the completion of the construction of the City West campus the stage was said to be set for “the west end ... [to] undergo the most concentrated revitalisation and rebuilding the city has seen in decades” (University of South Australia, 1997, np; Campus, 1996). It is outside the scope of this paper to examine the larger outcome of this claim but the evidence of the completion of further phases of the campus, as well as the substantial development in the last decade of the northern side of North Terrace, suggest its prescience.

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