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Design for the old and you include the young

Revitalising urban design in regional Australia

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Title: *Design for the old and you include the young* - revitalising urban design in regional Australia

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Abstract

The eminent Professor of Geriatric Medicine, Bernard Isaacs (cited in Giles-Corti et al 2008) said, *Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young.* This would appear to be a useful design principle for all public spaces, but especially those with the restorative qualities found in even modest, naturalistic settings in urban areas (Kaplan and Kaplan 2011). A restorative network of walkable routes and destinations in regional towns could be influential in creating a sense of well-being and improve their attractiveness to the 65 years plus demographic set to become nearly a quarter of the population in coming decades.

Walking, as a human activity, is linked to the evolution of our senses and should not be regarded as just a *movement mode* (Nicholson 2008). Walking has, in fact, helped to mould our societies and cultures. It has played a significant role in the fields of philosophy, spirituality, sexuality, literature, history, science, politics, the design of cities and many other fields (Gros 2009).

This paper examines the need for regional and local councils to reorient their urban design and planning policies and practices to focus on the many benefits of walking. There is more to walking than active transport and more to active transport than cycling. Or as Jan Gehl observed: *We have a department for roads, why not a department for pedestrians?* (Bennett 2015).

Introduction

Regional and rural Australia has faced many challenges in attracting populations to sustain the level of services that many capital city residents take for granted. With low relative net population growth in regional Australia and a continuing drift to capital cities and coastal regions, maintaining the attractiveness of regional towns is seen as a key initiative for their sustainability. Garnett and Lewis (2007: 41) observe that low population growth in inland and remote regions is associated with falling employment growth rates, lack of amenities and services. They also noted that population changes in coastal regions may be influenced by amenity and lifestyle choices and comment that these non-labour market explanations could also explain a small outward migration from cities to the inland and remote regions of Australia.

The population of Australia is expected to increase to between 36-48 million people by 2061. It is also expected that the percentage of the population aged 65 years and over will increase to 25% by 2061 with particularly rapid growth in the number of people over 85 years of age and life expectancy rising to 92.1 and 93.6 years for males and females respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). This means that there will be around 9-12 million people over 65 years by 2061 representing a significant social, economic, cultural and technical potential for regional towns and regions. This age group is by no measure a homogenous one. It will contain different generations and have diverse expectations and preferences for an over 65 lifestyle that councils need to begin to incorporate into their plans, policies and programs (Humpel et al. 2009).

The attractiveness of coastal, regional and inland towns and communities for a population that will be less likely to be driving, for reasons of lifestyle changes and more likely to be walking or using public transport, has not been a subject of much academic research, although how and when they will retire or move into phased retirement has received some attention (Humpel et al. 2009). Australian population growth is not consistent across capital cities or regional towns: some regional areas are growing and others have a declining population with little research into either the reasons or implications of these population dynamics (Jackson 2004).

The State of Australian Cities 2014-2015 report indicates trends for older people to move out of the city to middle and outer suburbs. Along with this trend, there is evidence that there is an uneven distribution of people over 65 years in regional cities and towns. Growth of this demographic is expected to be greater in non-metropolitan cities and along a belt of towns from the Victoria/New South Wales border to Queensland's Sunshine Coast (Atkins et al. 2015: 24).

This paper will concentrate on the opportunities an increasingly important, over 65 years demographic presents for improving the competitive level of attraction of regional towns for people from metropolitan areas. The authors propose that the potential for increasing the attractiveness of those towns can be led by focusing on walkability in the urban design of the public realm. This would also involve turning the negative narrative of the *burden of ageing* populations (Guest 2009) into a positive narrative of opportunity to support growth, quality of life, wellbeing and sustainability of regional towns for all its residents. This approach would be dependent on the ability of local leadership to adopt land use regulations and planning to favour changes to liveability of those regional towns and communities.

The eminent Professor of Geriatric Medicine, Bernard Isaacs (cited in Giles-Corti et al 2008) said, *Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young.* This would also appear to be a useful design principle for all public spaces, particularly those locations in the public space network that possess social, cultural, recreational and restorational values that allow people to access their benefits through the activities, amenities and facilities found in them.

The reason for this focus on is largely because, as people get older, they will either reduce or stop driving altogether (Fildes *et al.* 1994). Walking as an activity will be essential to maintain well-being for this age group, along with public transport to access the goods and services they will require for an active healthy lifestyle (Robertson *et al.* 2012).

The walking environment of contemporary Australian towns and cities should be reconsidered from the perspective of those who will not be walking as transport but walking as part of a lifestyle to meet their needs and preferences for exercise and mobility (Garrard 2013: 9). In meeting these needs, locations with the restorative qualities found in even modest, naturalistic settings in urban areas (Kaplan and Kaplan 2011) could be influential in creating a sense of well-being and improve their attractiveness to the 65 years plus demographic set to become nearly a quarter of the population in coming decades. By creating a network of destinations such as parks and joining them with tree-lined streets, people will be enticed to walk for enjoyment and reduce stress.

This paper examines the need for regional and local councils to reorient their urban design and planning policies and practices to focus on the many benefits of walking. There is more to walking than active transport and more to active transport than cycling. Or as Jan Gehl observed: *We have a department for roads, why not a department for pedestrians?* (Bennett 2015). A strategy of improving urban design through the prioritisation of walkable routes, environments and destinations is seen as an inexpensive approach to revitalisation and renewal that can distinguish a regional town as a desirable place to live.

Demographic Change, Opportunities and Challenges

Steve Wozniak (b. 11 August 1950), Bill Gates (b. 28 October 1955), Tim Berner-Lee (b. 8 June 1955) and many others of their generation shaped the modern world of computing and technology. This generation is about to retire, or at least change lifestyles in the coming decades that will see the Australian population rise and the percentage of older people in it grow to 9-12 million by 2061 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). To put this in perspective, this is nearly a half of the current population of Australia. It would be a mistake to see the age group who are retired or will retire soon as homogenous (Tight *et al.* 2004). The over 65 age group as a demographic will encompass different generations who have radically different life experiences, world views and expectations.

The use of mobile technology, internet and social media will not be alien territory to the succeeding generations of people who are set to retire in the period up to 2061. In the next 45 years nearly all the people categorised in Figure 1 will be retired. They are likely to look to live in places that match their preferences for changing lifestyles. Although there are different patterns of use amongst the different age groups, the graphic is evidence that all age groups who will retire in the coming decades are using technology to suit their lifestyles, build social networks and guide decision making processes.

Age Distribution At The Top Social Networks
US Data - Users Aged 18 And Over - December 2014

Network	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Snapchat	45%	26%	13%	10%	6%	1%
Vine	28%	23%	17%	15%	10%	7%
Tumblr	28%	25%	18%	13%	11%	6%
Instagram	23%	26%	19%	15%	12%	4%
Twitter	19%	22%	21%	18%	13%	7%
Google+	16%	25%	22%	18%	13%	70%
Facebook	16%	22%	19%	18%	15%	10%
Pinterest	15%	26%	21%	17%	15%	7%
LinkedIn	14%	21%	22%	18%	16%	9%

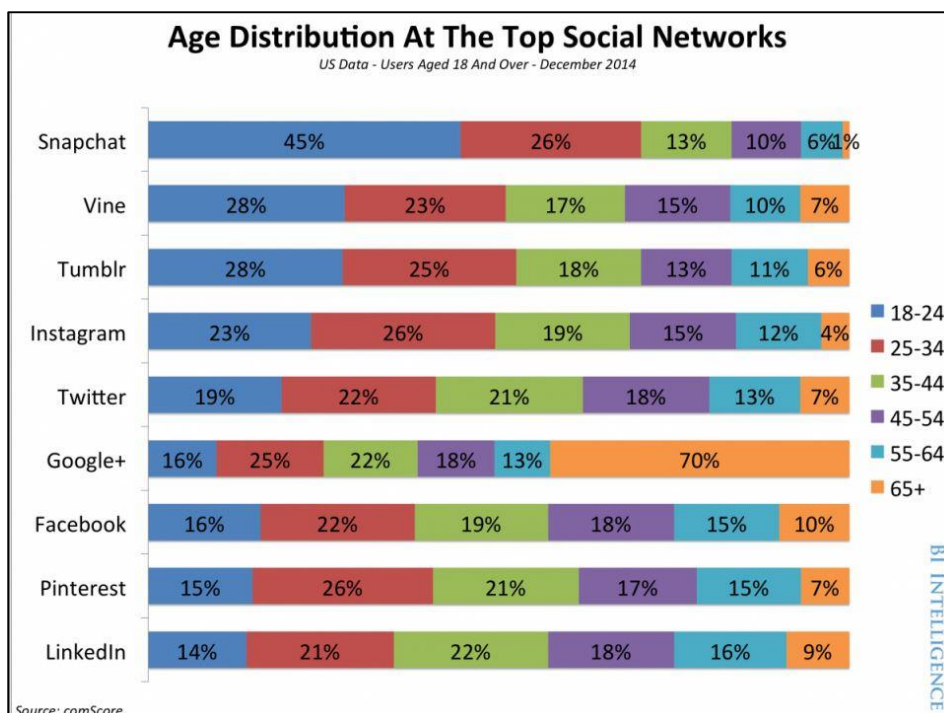*Source: comScore*

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Figure 1: Age Distribution At The Top Social Networks (Hoelzel 2015)

Place branding (Sager 2011) and the concept of people moving to places to suit changing circumstances and lifestyles is not new. Sea-change and Tree-change (Carter, Dyer and Sharma 2007) and the movement of the *creative class* (Florida 2005) to cities that were attractive to live and work in are part of the narrative of contemporary urban planning. What is new is the social environment in which this will take place in. Trip Advisor ™ and other web sites are used by people to search for lifestyle destinations not just for holidays (Cohen 2011) and, as popular television series like *Escape to the Country™* illustrate, trips for holidays are often a precursor for the desire to move to a new less stressful lifestyle from cities.

The attractiveness of different towns and communities in regional Australia is dependent on many factors including the relative cost of living, employment prospects, the quality and availability of education, health services, sporting, recreational and entertainment opportunities (Community Services Victoria 2015). Tonts, Plummer and Argent (2014) also suggest that local leadership, regional development policies, land use regulations and planning are also important factors in the evolution of resilient rural economies.

Badland *et al.* (2014) tentatively identified 11 domains of liveability. These include factors such as crime and safety, the natural environment, public open space, transport and social cohesion. These factors are all associated in the academic literature with health and wellbeing. Badland et al. (2014: 70) also found considerable evidence for the association of walkability with health outcomes. The Australian government is also concerned with the nature of the liveability of the cities and towns in the different states across a range of issues associated with health and wellbeing (Australian Government 2012).

In order for regional towns and communities to adapt to changing demographics, it is proposed that they should adopt an urban design strategy of public spaces for people similar to that that which has

led to the revitalisation of some cities (Adams *et al.* 2004). Melbourne, for example, applied a strategy that included the promotion of urban design outcomes and active transport in the form of cycling and walking. However, evidence shows that improving cycling largely benefited the section of the population that included the young and middle aged planners who were promoting it (Mees and Groenhart 2012) and discouraged the use of the streets by older people (Victoria Walks 2014).

The car dependent cities of Australia (Dodson and Sipe 2005) will face significant age related challenges adapting to the infrastructure and public transport needs of the over 65 years demographic (Atkins *et al.* 2015: 24). However, regional towns with their often pre-car town centres have an opportunity to provide the mix of walkable street networks combined with responsive transport planning that could more closely match the preferences of older Australians to remain independent and live a healthy lifestyle (Olsberg and Winters 2005). Regional towns may also be a better lifestyle match for older Australians. Since the advent of the Garden City, towns with a population of around 30000 have long been seen as the preferred size to support walkable lifestyles with a range of supportive activities, facilities and amenities (Howard 1902).

Shaping Healthy Built Environments through Walking to Support Lifestyles

There is a long established narrative of walking for a healthy lifestyle that has had a significant effect on the form of towns and cities. This originated with the 19th century creation of many of the much loved parks and nature-oriented streets that connect them. These were created largely as a reaction to the crowded and unhealthy conditions of the rapidly growing industrial towns and cities of that period. Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) is associated with both the conception of the parks movement and the origin of the profession of landscape architect. Olmsted (1870) designed New York City's Central Park and related parkways in Brooklyn, with the intent to provide *relief from the stresses of urban life*.

Olmsted (1870: 30) was a keen observer of people and walking, drawing clear connections between the allocation of public space to parks, of varying sizes connected by parkways with the ability *to maintain a temperate, good natured and healthy state of mind* in towns and cities. This concept promoted by Olmsted (1870: 34) is responsible for some of the best loved places in towns and cities around the world. Olmsted (1870) also explicitly valued the allocation of public space for the creation of parks, parkways and green streets over the values that came from developing towns and cities for transport and economic purposes that is the main focus of many planners (Hall 2002).

Walking, as a human activity, is linked to the evolution of our senses and should not be regarded as just a *movement mode* (Nicholson 2008). Walking has, in fact, helped to mould our societies and cultures. It has played a significant role in the fields of philosophy, spirituality, sexuality, literature, history, science, politics, the design of cities and many other fields (Gros 2009).

Seeing the world from the perspective of walking rather than driving or riding is likely to become the dominant outlook of at least a quarter of the nation's population in coming years. This change of view presents an opportunity to shape our towns and cities in a manner which has been part of the relationship between people and place for as long as we have been a species. In so doing, places may be created with enduring value that will attract people who have the choice of where they want to live. In a connected world the reputation of being a walkable, attractive city is likely to be influential in making decisions for selecting appropriate lifestyle destinations to retire or slow down.

Walking has been associated with physical and mental health throughout our history (Ward Thompson 2011). From the development of walks within the castle walls, cloisters and corridors of palaces, the way walking has shaped places has been associated with the preferences of the dominant cultural groups in society. In a Renaissance garden, walking, standing and sitting were the perspectives required to appreciate the ordered statuary, fountains and plantings. A garden was a place that according to Pliny (23-79) was for seclusion, serenity, or relaxation, the opposite of the idea of busy urban life. A garden was a place to think, relax, and escape (cited in Attlee 2006: 13).

The Renaissance garden evolved to the larger Baroque garden where people with time for leisure could enjoy cultivated landscapes. Renaissance and Baroque gardens were the preserve of the nobility and wealthy: they were walled to exclude others, although the owners could walk for a mile without reaching the wall, as at Hampton Park, U.K. (Solnit 200: 87). However, walls also restricted the views to the surrounding countryside; the innovation of ditches hidden in the landscape, known as the *ha-ha,* meant that the owners of the gardens could view beyond into the landscapes surrounding their palatial homes.

Gardens continued to designed and developed to be experienced by walking through them, with walking and viewing becoming linked pleasures (Solnit 2000: 90). Eventually the romantic poets such as Wordsworth (1770-1850) rejected the experience of walking in artificially shaped gardens, and popularised rambling in natural scenic landscapes. In the process, the growing middle class were inspired to experience rambling (Solnit 2000: 102) and created an industry of natural tourism and favoured landscapes, that in turn also led to the creation of national parks, which, not insignificantly, was also a passion of Olmsted's (1865). This powerful cultural relationship between attractive green cities and scenic landscapes continues as a linked narrative that drives not only tourism but lifestyles.

Although the design elements found in the gardens of the nobility and wealthy are not a usual feature of urban landscapes beyond town parks and a few botanic gardens, the concept of creating natural environments within the urban, to relieve the stresses of urban living, remains a very important element of the attractiveness of localities, neighbourhoods, towns and cities. Kaplan (1995: 173), in describing the elements of a restorative environment, asserts that the properties of a natural environment can be reproduced in smaller, more managed environments where miniaturisation of the elements of natural settings can provide a feeling of being in a different world (Kaplan 1995: 174).

From Pliny (Attlee 2006), who identified the pleasure of a private ordered space that connected to nature and culture, to Wordsworth (Solnit 2001) and Olmsted (1870) who created a narrative of a walkable public space that sought to bring nature into the urban environment, there has been a philosophical and social narrative of people's connection to nature as a cultural imperative for living in towns and cities. Since the advent of vehicles, there has also been a linked narrative that has concerned the allocation, arrangement and provision of public space for the economic imperatives of transport to the activities, amenities and facilities of urban life (Fishman 1982).

The decision to prioritise the movement of vehicles over people walking has had an effect on the fabric of contemporary cities that can be traced from the rapid rise of industrial urbanisation up to today. Olmsted (1870) reacted to the precedence of traffic in the new towns and cities by proposing tree-lined streets that favoured walking between valued places such as parks. Sitte (1898) was

dismayed by loss of public life in the streets that he associated with the plain and monotonous character of cities produced by modernist planners. The new urbanists in America sought to address the *geography of nowhere* (Kunstler 1994) of car-oriented development by proposing a return to the urban design and planning of older, traditional walkable neighbourhoods (Congress for the New Urbanism 2000).

Cultural and societal changes have continued to act on the practices of urban design and planning. However, the physical and mental health benefits that can be gained from an environment that supports and encourages walking, remain a constant narrative. The preferences of the generations set to become walkers over the next few decades need to be understood if the expectations of the wealthiest, most educated and informed generations in the history of Australia (Hugo 2003) are to be met by the leaders, designers and planners of regional towns and communities.

Rather than focusing on the design of public space for transport purposes, it is suggested urban designers and planners concentrate on designing the public realm for the use of an increasingly larger demographic who will be using their neighbourhood network of routes and destinations for social, recreational and restorational walking. Locations, precincts and neighbourhoods that allow walkable and egalitarian access to activities, amenities and facilities found in the public realm will then be created. In turn, as suggested by Bernard Isaacs, the needs of the young will also be met (Giles-Corti et al 2008).

We now move on to propose a model that can be used in combination with a typological analysis of the values, uses, activities and amenities of place (Cartlidge 2015: 43) for both the analyses of existing places and a method to create urban design guidelines, policies, plans and programs for the revitalisation of urban design in regional Australia. These guidelines will allow all its residents to access the activities, amenities and facilities of those towns through the creation of a dense network of walkable locations, designed for the local values of place.

An Urban Design Model for Egalitarian and Walkable Places

> *To an energetic child, a flight of stairs is a link between two floors, an invitation to run up and down; to an old man it is a barrier between two floors, a warning to stay put.*
> (Tuan 1977: 52).

It is through the perspective of the experience of place that Tuan (1977) explains that the use of places in the built environment are dependent on the abilities and perceptions of the user. Designing for egalitarian use of the public realm of towns is dependent on the urban designer and planner achieving a network of routes and destinations that extend from the home (Brookfield *et al.* 2015) to every potential activity, amenity and facility in the locality, precinct, neighbourhood and town (Mace, Hardie and Place 1991). These routes and destinations need to meet the needs of all people regardless of age, gender, mobility or perception. Any design, plan, policy or program that favours the active adult male in its design is likely to discriminate against other users (Mace et al. 1991).

If the urban design of place is to be egalitarian, walkable and accessible for all, it is postulated that it should be oriented towards the needs and desires of the walker, in particular, the walkability of the locality and, in valued places, towards the degree of public access to the social, cultural and restorative environments found in those places. However, as Fitzsimons *et al*. (2010) observed, there

is no professional agreement on the different characteristics of the built environment that contribute to the walkability of a place. This in itself is symptomatic of the nature of walking and of the conflict for the control of public space allocation that are the areas of concern for the different fields that create and govern walkable spaces and places for different purposes (Zacharias 2001).

Designing for the earnest purpose of transport to places solely for the purposes of accessing goods and services will remain important. However, creating transport routes linking those purposes unintentionally focuses the designer and planner of the public realm to hurry people along and not allow them to stop, rest or linger. This devitalises the public space and reduces opportunity to socialise. If towns and cities are to design for all their inhabitants, then the urban design and planning of the public realm should take into account changing demographics and lifestyles if they are to be healthy, lively, safe and sustainable (Gehl 2010).

Adopting a value-relational urban design model for the networks and destinations of regional towns can incorporate the values of a changing demographic and meet the preferences and expectations of people for a sustainable and active healthy lifestyle. It can also provide the constraint boundaries by identifying the inherent values of localities and precincts for purposive use of places related to those values (Carr *et al.* 1992). This would mean that places would be designed according to the nature of their values to society as a whole, and not just for the sake of well-worn, professional practices and narrow sectional interests.

A Value-Relational Urban Design Model for Egalitarian and Walkable Places

In proposing a value-relational urban design approach to the creation of urban design guidelines for places that prioritise walkability, the authors specifically prioritise walkability as the peak value, with the objective of making public access to the activities, amenities and facilities of public places walkable and egalitarian. The prioritisation of these values will necessarily make the other values of place subordinate to this objective. In doing so, this will allow the urban design practitioner to adopt a responsible (Haas and Olsson 2014) and responsive (Bentley *et al.* 1985) ethical position to the design of public space.

This paper argues for the creation of a value-relational role for urban designers as representatives of those groups in society who are less likely to be involved in the political process of the production of the policies, programs and practices of urban design and planning. However, it is recognised that without the support of government in mandating this role and its paradigms (McGlynn 1993), the current design and planning processes are likely to continue to prioritise active transport as the priority use of public space.

The process of the production of spatial plans that progress from general or diagrammatic plans of regions and towns to detailed blueprints for precincts or buildings is a top down process embedded in planning practices is known as the *survey-analysis-plan* method (Hall 2002). The authors would argue for the survey and analysis stages to include an examination of the values of the locations within the network of the public realm of towns, thus reversing the direction of planning from detailed plans to spatial plan general summaries. The proposed process for designing the network of routes and destinations of the public realm is to identify the place values of locations that are being used, or have the potential to access activities, amenities and facilities in the precincts and the routes that join these places within the locality to the wider precinct and beyond.

A model of urban design, intended for the production of urban design guidelines from the value-relational analysis of locations, has been developed (Figure 2) from an analysis of international and Australian urban design guidelines (Cartlidge 2015: 137) and the requirements for a restorational place (Kaplan: 174; Cartlidge 2015:162). The best practices of urban design and the values of restorative environments are thereby combined in a synthesis that addresses the attractiveness of the network of routes and destinations. This will encourage walking in a contemporary replication of Olmsted's (1870) approach to the design of cities and towns where an active urban connection with nature is created for the purposes of promoting healthy lifestyles for all (Maller et al. 2008).

The structure of the model rests on a base of the urban design principles of inviting, comfortable and secure and their associated attributes. These principles support the peak urban design principles of governance and accessibility and their associated attributes. Walkability is the most important attribute and is the focus for the peak urban design principle of governance and accessibility. The peak political values of the model create a simple political mission statement applicable to any locality or precinct for a walkable and egalitarian public access to the activities, amenities and facilities found in valued places. This mission statement can be modified to suit local political and cultural values.
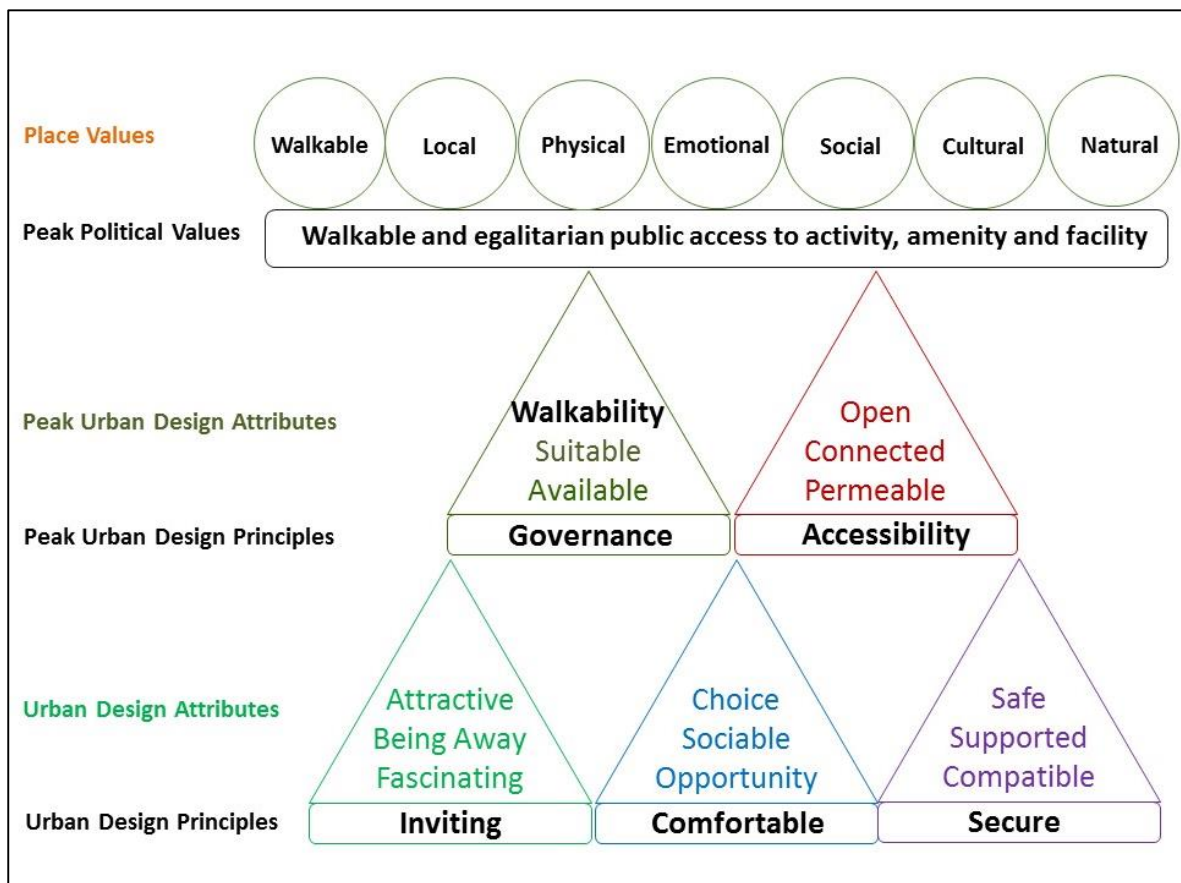

Figure 2: An urban design model for egalitarian and walkable places (Cartlidge 2015)

The research also indicated that the walkability of a place is an attribute of urban design that is both a characteristic of walkable places and a political and place value of those places (Cartlidge 2015). Without understanding how people value, use and relate to different places it is not thought possible to design, plan and develop them so that they may functionally reflect the role they play in people's lives (Carr *et al.* 1992).

Balanced along the political platform are the values most associated with each location that include their local topophilic (Tuan 1974) and natural biophilic (Wilson 1984) attributes. They include the value of a walkable precinct for all; the local values created by topography or history; the physical values of climate and the opportunity for physical activity associated with the place; the emotional values associated with the formation of a sense of well-being; the social value associated with places and their activities, amenities and facilities, such as social clubs; the cultural values associated with places, such as the historical artefacts or, in Australia, their customary use by aboriginal traditions; and the natural values of a place, such as the parks and gardens or street trees, their environmental values and the presence of restorative landscape elements.

In applying the model to the creation of urban design guidelines for localities and precincts, it is recognised that urban design is a political-cultural process (Hayden 1995) and that politics is the way that society organises the production of the built environment to suit the cultural intent of society's dominant groups (Cuthbert 2007). If urban design is to meet the needs of all the social and demographic group of public space, then the role of good design is to understand and incorporate the most important values held by those users (Carmona *et al.* 2001). The design process must identify the winners and losers in the production of public spaces and places for access to public goods, especially when the public goods are as valuable to society as a whole, as they are in the public realm (McGlynn and Murrain 1994).

Conclusions

An active and aging population will alter the demographic landscape in the next few years. They are likely to want to live in walkable localities and neighbourhoods, and they could resurrect walking for social and pleasurable recreation, as they will not be rushing off to work. To help make that happen, urban designers and planners need to start to provide inviting, comfortable and secure streets specifically to meet the needs of the walker.

With changes to population demographics and the opportunity to work from anywhere with good internet connections, regional towns could position themselves as destinations for people who have a choice of where to live. Walkability will play a significant role in creating the desirable characteristics of towns as lifestyle destinations with a high quality of life. There have always been centrifugal and centripetal forces acting on towns and cities in terms of enticing or deterring population movements. This is driven by many factors including the attractiveness of places that meet the lifestyle preferences and expectations of different groups of people.

However, there is not a substantial body of research into the preferences and expectations of the different generations poised to alter the demographic nature of Australian cities, towns and communities in coming decades. This paucity of research may be due to lack of funding, a lack of political will to address the issues of an ageing population, or the time it takes for academic research to be initiated, funded and published. However, it is reasonable to propose that the different degrees of attractiveness of coastal, inland and remote regions to an ageing, largely metropolitan, population over the next decades, will determine the decisions of that population to either stay put or move to places that they perceive as meeting their lifestyle preferences.

Regional towns and communities that fail to respond to these preferences for amenities, services and the quality of lifestyle expected by the succeeding waves of retirees are likely to lose out to

those that actively respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by a changing demographic (Beer and Keane 2000). This paper suggests not only a model for the urban design of regional towns to respond to the challenges that lay ahead, but a value-relational approach to urban design and planning. This approach will respond in a timely fashion to the needs and desires of different demographic groups in society, meeting the requirements of all by designing walkable places using the values of the locations for accessing activities, amenities and facilities.

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