Urban Design and the Better Cities Program: The Influence of Urban Design on the Outcomes of the Program.

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by
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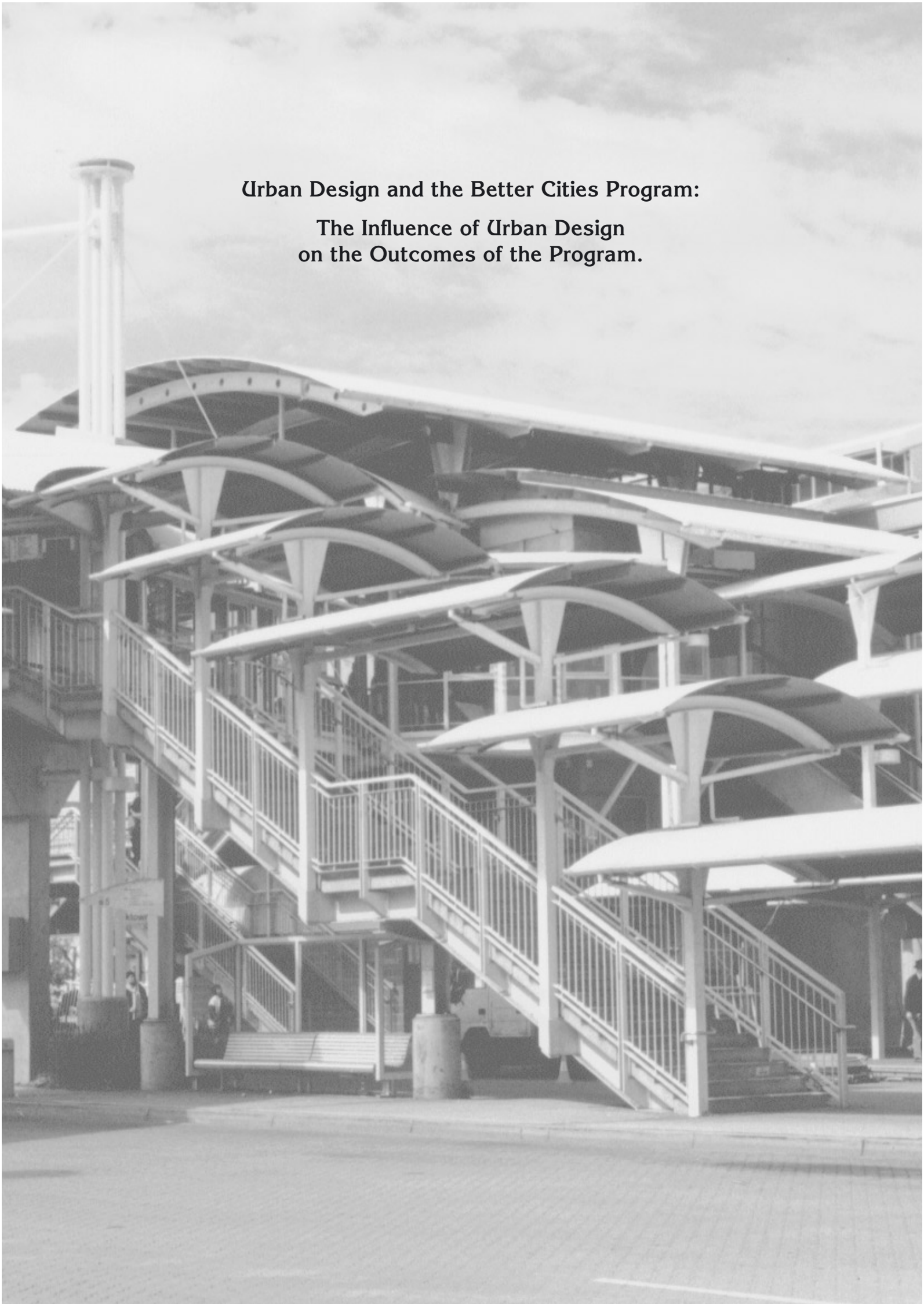

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Abstract

The aims of the research were to assess the influence of urban design on the Better Cities Program (BCP) and to explore and document the achievements of the Program in terms of urban design. This in turn led to the exploration of some 34 case studies of the BCP initiatives known as Area Strategies throughout Australia. The research outcomes provided an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Program's objectives and processes in relation to urban design and prompted suggested options or modifications, which could enhance outcomes in future initiatives. The thesis is an overview of the Program's genesis and procedures, including comment on economic, political and social concerns, and draws from this broad analysis the specific issues and outcomes related to urban design practice. It was perceived that whilst not centrally an urban design program the BCP fell short of known urban design principles that could reasonably be expected to be present, given that the achievement of better cities is dependent in large part on better urban design.

To maintain a comprehensive overview and sense of continuity the research included urban design evaluations of two projects from the earlier Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) period. This was done in order to review the state of urban design at that time and to discover whether fresh insights and approaches may have occurred over the intervening 25 years. To structure the research, a number of interlinking methods were implemented. These included literature reviews, interviews, questionnaires and case studies of the Program's projects - called Area Strategies - and their ranking through a matrix. Methods extended to a comparative analysis of the Program's objectives with those of DURD. The Area Strategies were interrogated from three positions, namely: by evaluation of these initiatives based on an Empirical approach; by critical literature where available, but mostly from a more abundant source of descriptive literature and by expert opinion through many interviews, discussions and the Questionnaire responses. The methods were essential in order to collate, analyse and categorise the gathered information for the purpose of evaluation, summarising and framing of conclusions.

Central to the thesis was the reliance on the 'enduring strands', being those essential and time-honoured fundamental elements of the urban fabric. These enduring strands became the evaluation tools of the case studies, and comprised the following: buildings and their groupings, the public domain, issues of safety and security, activities, conservation and heritage, the role of landscape, architectural responses to the environment, ecological responses, circulation, public art, social responses and management processes.

The discipline of urban design as distinct from city planning and architecture, developed significantly during the second half of the twentieth century and it received Commonwealth recognition during the life of the Program through the publication of the findings of Prime Minister Keating's Urban Design Task Force. The thesis compares the recommendations of the Task Force and those of the research and finds sufficient parallels to affirm that both endeavours share a common basis.

It is not the role of the thesis to recommend an urban design policy for potential future programs, but it does point to the way urban design might be better integrated in such programs.

This research provides support for the argument that if urban design concerns had occupied a more central position in the range of objectives of the Better Cities Program, then the outcomes would have been more satisfactory in many of the projects. With greater recognition of the critical contribution of urban design skills, outcomes of future programs of this nature could potentially be significantly enhanced.

Appreciation

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Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIPs	Area Improvement Programs
AMCORD URBAN	The Australian Model Code for Residential Development Guidelines of Urban Housing (URBAN)
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ATP	Australian Technology Park
BBCP	Building Better Cities Program - initial name of the Program
BCP	Better Cities Program
CBD	Central Business District
CPTED	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
DCP	Development Control Plan
DUAP	Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
DURD	Department of Urban and Regional Development
EPRA	East Perth Redevelopment Authority
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
LEP	Local Environment Plan
MFP	Multi-Function Polis
NCA	National Capital Authority
NCDC	National Capital Development Commission
NCPA	National Capital Planning Authority
NIEIR	National Institute of Economic and Industry Research
NURDA	National and Urban Redevelopment Authority
PALM	Planning and Land Management
REP	Regional Environmental Plan
ROW	Residents of Woolloomooloo
SAHT	South Australian Housing Trust
SEPP	State Environmental Planning Policy
TOD	Transport Oriented Development
WRAG	Woolloomooloo Residential Action Group

Conventions

Area Strategy	Area Strategy, with capitals as generally adopted in BCP references.
Government	Government (capitalised) in preference to government.
PM's Task Force	*Urban Design in Australia*. Report by the Prime Minister's Urban Design Task Force.
Program	The Better Cities Program.
The Report	A Report on the Commonwealth Better Cities Program 1991-97 (2 Vols.).
Philosophical bases	The schools of Empiricism, Rationalism and Pragmatism are capitalised.

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