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Conversations: Cultural Tourism

Slattery Forum Paper: 01



Yagan Square, Perth
Designed by Lyons Architecture in collaboration with
Iredale Pedersen Hook Architects and ASPECT Studios with
MRA and whadjuk working party, cost managed by Slattery,
photo courtesy of ASPECT Studios

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Cultural Tourism – A new economic driver for Perth?

“There is no doubt that Perth is more vibrant, more visually appealing and we are getting the much desired compliments and accolades from elsewhere...

Yet in my mind, Perth has not yet reached its full potential.’

Marion Fulker, CEO, Committee for Perth

Slattery recently gathered a panel of leading thinkers and designers to explore the idea of cultural tourism as an important economic driver for Perth. The closed room discussion included state and local government representatives, global and local architecture firms and senior property executives.

Facilitated by Belinda Coates, Director Clients & Strategy, Slattery, the dynamic forum included a keynote by Marion Fulker, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at The University of Western Australia and CEO of the Committee for Perth. Marion was later joined on the panel by prominent West Australian architect, Peter Lee, International Director of HASSELL and Adjunct Professor at Curtin University, and Sharyn May, the Principal Consultant of The Maytrix Group. This report outlines the key commentary and insights from this robust discussion amongst these Perth leaders, who are actively involved in projects that are enhancing this city and ambassadors for its future.

Perth ambition – Beyond blue skies and golden beaches

Surrounded by waterways, heritage buildings, modern architecture and access to some of Australia’s best beaches and wineries, Perth is already a tourist destination in its own right—but has it reached its full potential?

In a rousing opener at Slattery’s forum, Marion Fulker, relayed her comments made to The West Australian newspaper, ‘There is no doubt that Perth is more vibrant, more visually appealing and we are getting the much desired compliments and accolades from elsewhere.’

‘Yet in my mind, Perth has not yet reached its full potential.’

Fulker highlighted the great gains of Perth in recent years as new cultural infrastructure has been completed, including Yagan Square, Elizabeth Quay, Optus Stadium alongside the many changes to the city skyline, which show a more sophisticated and grown up city. The city that was described by Lonely Planet in 2000 as ‘Dullsville’ is evident no more. For Marion, she described that moment in time as ‘the slap in the face we needed’.

With deliberate investment in Perth in the past decade, Perth’s revitalisation has been breath-taking and its value is backed up by substantial returns in a changed perception and experience of Perth globally. This is impacting visitor numbers as well as the Perth community’s perception of itself.

In 2014, a journalist from the New York Times dubbed Perth a ‘Hipster Heaven’, and his colleagues in 2017 wrote of a city ‘transformed’.



Perth is clearly a city in transition and will continue to evolve with a forecast future population of 3.5 million by 2050 (up from 2 million currently). Turning to this future, Fulker drew on two scenarios for the forum to consider. The worst case or 'Business as Usual' scenario offers more of same on an incremental basis: more people, more single dwelling housing in the burbs with more cars being driven further. In the Best Case or Bright Future scenario, more people equals a diversity of housing across a range of locations, many connected via public transport and cycle ways. In the first scenario, Perth fails to invest in cultural infrastructure to end up with 'a cultural infrastructure deficit', as described in a Committee for Perth 2013 report, which highlighted that at the least, Perth's cultural infrastructure needs to double to meet future demand. In the second 'Bright Future' scenario, investment is made to enable a continuum of cultural offerings that include permanent facilities as well as pop-up events and festivals, filling the desert between sport and entertainment at one end, and high arts and fine art at the other.

‘Sustaining belief in a cultural project requires political bravery.’

Marion Fulker

The right ambition?

The Bell Tower is a major tourist attraction built on Perth's foreshore in 2000. During planning and construction, it earned public scorn and attracted considerable controversy, from the classic waste of money 'that would be better spent on hospitals, policing or schools' to public abuse of workers from cars. However once open, the project was quickly adopted by local and visitors. Fulker noted that debate quickly shifted from its 'why?' to 'why not bigger?', 'more iconic?', or 'louder?'—a perspective that has lingered. Its modesty has only become more apparent with the development of Elizabeth Quay which will dwarf the Bell Tower.

This example, among others, forms the backbone of Committee for Perth's review of similar projects under the provocative title 'What We Thought Would Kill Us', that explored the community's response to something they don't like by long, loud campaigns to government. This can result in watered down projects, such as the Bell Tower, or save governments from making bad decisions on the run. Fulker's key point was that 'sustaining belief in a cultural project requires political bravery.'

Activating Perth: Which markets are more important for Perth's economy?

Perth is now attracting close to 1 million international visitors every year, approximately 11% of all those who come to Australia who spend around \$2.2 billion. WA's economy is bouncing back, with recovery boosted by accommodation, tourism, health services, the arts and recreation sectors. WA's overnight visitation is comprised of 16% international, 23% interstate and 61% intrastate with an additional 22 million day trips each year. (TRA; Tourism WA, 2019)

Unpacked further, the 16% international are contributing nearly 43% of the income so clearly growing the international market is important. Interestingly Chinese tourists spend the most per visit (\$5,286) compared to other international visitors, who spend an average of \$2,300 per visitor (Volger et al, 2018). However Singapore and Malaysia are the largest source countries for WA tourists, with Perth attracting 27% of all Singaporean tourists to Australia. Selfie tourism is also feeding interest across younger travellers (under 35 years) who revel in both the built and natural environment readily available to them in WA.

Elizabeth Quay on the Perth waterfront





Optus Stadium
Photo courtesy of HASSELL COX HKS

And let's not forget the local—it's equally vital to capture the spend from interstate and WA residents. Domestic tourists are easily the largest market for WA. As the architect for the new Optus Stadium which opened in early 2018, Peter Lee was uniquely placed to comment on this. The stadium has shown its worth since opening in early 2018, attracting more than 2 million through its doors including over 122,000 regional, interstate and international visitors at 43 major events. The 2018 AFL season alone attracted 66,000 people, with over 31,000 coming from interstate, yet almost 35,000 came from regional WA, jointly spending \$66 million (Prestipino, 2018). Costing \$1.8 billion to build, Lee noted it is now estimated its costs will be recouped within 10 years, far faster than original predictions. In fact, any infrastructure completed so far has far exceeded expectations of return in terms of visitor numbers, economic return and Gross Value Added, which assesses the direct and indirect benefit of public investment including jobs and liveability. There is nothing to lose from good investment in cultural infrastructure.

“International tourists need to experience a city as the locals do, and interact together.”

Sharyn May

Sharyn May touched on the MONA effect, citing Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art, which attracts over 330,000 interstate and international visitors annually, contributing over \$760 million to the local economy. She highlighted that international tourism can only be successful if a local culture exists. 'International tourists need to experience a city as the locals do, and interact together.'

Fulker highlighted Perth's proximity to Asia. By 2030, 1 billion people from Asia will have disposable income to travel, with Perth the closest Australian city for many (BCG, 2017). Perth is seen as

an attractive education proposition for many students from our close neighbours, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, as Perth is approximately five hours' flight time away.

Clearly all visitor segments are important. Getting people to stay longer and spend more is key to growing tourism's economic contribution. Fulker noted, 'Perth needs to grow its attractions to enable a two-week itinerary.'

How does arts and culture contribute to the city's vibrancy?

Australia's cultural industries contribute more than \$50 billion per year in economic activity. Culture not only differentiates cities and communities but it also benefits a community's health and well-being, its feeling of connectedness and of being part of something. Cultural infrastructure and cultural activities are particularly important for locals and visitors within any city. Tourism Australia research tells us that cultural visitors stay 25% longer and spend 20% more in a city. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimates that more than 50% of tourists worldwide are motivated by the desire to experience a country's culture and heritage and that cultural tourism will grow by 15% year to year. (Fairly, 2018)

When we travel, we go to experience the food, the architecture, the culture, an event, a show, something that is unique to that place. In 2017, 43% of international visitors to Australia engaged with the arts. Arts tourism grew by 47% between 2013 and 2017. (Australia Council, 2018)

Fulker commented, 'People want to come to a city that is rich in offering. Does it have the best food? Places to visit? A city needs a rich tapestry. Perth communities love and are reliant on nature but many Asian communities cluster and seek "vibrant nodes". Developing an investment, engagement and attraction strategy is key to leveraging our natural beauty and all the new infrastructure on offer as well as guide decisions in what comes next.'

“Every city should have a great museum.”

Marion Fulker

May concurred, 'Credited with fuelling the creative economy in other cities, a rich and diverse dining culture is at the heart of a vibrant city. Connecting people and place, dining is part of cultural identity of a city.'

In the cultural plan May produced for City of Perth, culture and creativity are noted as the engine of the new economy. 'Culture is at the core of a distinctive identity for all the greatest cities, which acts as a magnet drawing and retaining talent. Tourism centred around authentic cultural identity is big business, encompassing experiences such as music and arts festivals, museum exhibitions, art galleries, and natural and built heritage. Tourists are drawn to vibrant cities looking for unique experiences, with both cultural and ecological tourism growing in many cities and regional communities, such as Melbourne, Hobart and Broome in particular.' (City of Perth, 2018).

May noted, 'Density in a city creates vibrancy and to capture a 24-hour vibe, the right hospitality mix and therefore planning and licensing needs to be in place; something Melbourne has done well.'

Precinct planning is important, particularly to attract the aspirational and younger people returning to have families for the way of life. The built environment and activating the public space is vital. Investment in both soft (programs, artists) and hard infrastructure is needed with

community consultation at the heart, with government, artists and communities to establish clear meaning and purpose, integral to ensuring existing communities and

new audiences engage and connect with a place.'

Fulker commented, 'Every city should have a great museum. Yagan Square, Elizabeth Quay – these are the physical spaces creating a sense of place in Perth right now, and what's needed to create Perth as a unique destination is a unique offering. Perth needs the leading attractors, the shows and stadium events that will drive people to book to see over a weekend and travel via a five-hour flight – from Asia or the East coast of Australia.'

The panel agreed the new WA museum will make a difference within the city, elevating Perth's cultural centre as a focal point. First and foremost the new museum responds to the needs of the community for a bigger, diversified museum. It is expected to attract huge numbers of visitors from Perth and WA residents.

The New Museum for Western Australia

The project combines the restoration of existing 19th century buildings with a new five-storey exhibition space. The base of the structure is an area called 'the City Room', an outdoor area framed by the refurbished historical buildings. Overall, the museum will contain more than 6,000 square metres of exhibition space including a 1,000 square metre touring exhibition gallery and will open in 2020.

HASSELL Principal and Board Director Mark Loughnan, stated: 'Our vision for the design was to create spaces that promote engagement and collaboration, responding to the needs of the Museum and the community. We want it to create a civic place for everyone, an interesting mix of heritage and contemporary architecture that helps revitalise the Perth Cultural Centre while celebrating the culture of Western Australia on the world stage.'

HASSELL + OMA (2019)





An integrated approach from across the city to program and develop an annual events calendar would help capitalise Perth's ability to generate and promote city vibrancy. The dynamic program from Perth Festival, Perth Fringe Festival, local artists and events such as FORM's street art festival (2014-2016 before moving to the regions) have cultivated a contemporary awareness of Perth as a creative city. Tourism marketing now needs to capitalise on this and the unique built environment such as Optus Stadium's landscape design incorporating the six seasons of the Aboriginal calendar. Lee highlighted that the WA Museum was included in a global list of the top nine anticipated new museums in the world. Perth's brand needs to be emphasised and promoted to generate awareness in the same way the former Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, put Melbourne on the map. A far, stronger approach to positioning and cultivating Perth's identity is needed.

Many of Perth's heritage assets, primarily ex-state buildings have been successfully developed by private investors such as COMO Treasury, which adds to Perth's unique appeal.

Is Perth set up as a destination?

Some of the biggest shifts in recent years has been in Perth's hotel sector, now offering some of the best mix of hotels in Australia. Everything is catered for, from COMO (high end, premium market), part of the Treasury building's redevelopment, the Westin, QT Hotel, to the Alex Hotel, a very cool modern boutique offer. Since 2012, over 2,900 hotel rooms have been added, making prices more competitive overall, and helping break down Perth's reputation of limited and high cost rooms only (Shield et al, 2018). In addition, signature restaurants have lifted the game on fine dining.

Food and wine offers were noted as improving all the time with many international tourists attracted to sustainable, fresh food options on offer, especially seafood, a drawcard for many Asian tourists who represent nearly 50% of Perth's visitors. Perth's reputation as a clean, safe and friendly destination encourages tourism. (Volger et al, 2018)

May discussed the capability to host. It's important to get the right mix of hospitality (catering and service), and density coupled with public space activation for locals and visitors balanced between scale and sustainable programming. Funding for programming is usually insufficient. Often this can be the last aspect to be thought of when planning new cultural infrastructure, but it's often the most important, colouring the actual visitor experience, shaping the perception of both institution and place.

Service levels are an area noted by Fulker as requiring attention, with COMO and Crown investing in training up their hospitality staff to meet expectations of guests. Government and education providers need to also get on board, linking the city's aspirations with training to improve capacity and capability of Perth's staff cohort.

Transport options for getting around Perth need to be addressed. METRONET will provide major public transport access to the city via new rail links.

However this doesn't create the options to move across the city, between universities, leisure options and where people live. Investment in a comprehensive bus system as well as rail will address these limitations and reduce reliance on cars as the primary mode of transport. This was seen as a priority to enable Perth to grow its student population and liveability for current and potential residents.

Communication to tourists about WA's distances was also noted, and the ability to move around Perth and regions within 2-3 hours of Perth (i.e. Fremantle, Mandurah and the South West region (the second most visited region after Perth). Should the car be the only option available?

Brand Perth – the home of Indigenous art and cultural experience

As recognition of the unique value of Australia's Indigenous communities grows and reconciliation within contemporary Australian life unfolds, Perth has the opportunity to embrace and place Noongar culture, heritage and Whadjuk region stories front and centre within Perth's offer, reinforcing the ground swell of commitment to a positive future for First Nation Australians.

Fulker highlighted the need for a unique, 'one of a kind world centre for indigenous culture that is a place for reconciliation, cultural learning and exchange, home to collections and artefacts, language and stories but most importantly the place where the oldest living culture can be experienced in many forms.' To be a living centre like no other—artefacts and art are not the primary basis—rather it adopts the basis of Aboriginal and First Nation culture sharing in practice, to hand down culture and language through lived experience and exchange.

It could start with the Perth region (Whadjuk) Noongar Traditional Owners and grow to accommodate the multiplicity of Aboriginal and First Nations cultures across Australia and the world.

HASSELL is also the Australian architecture studio with OMA (The Netherlands) behind the forthcoming WA Museum which will open in 2020. Both Optus Stadium and the New Museum for Western Australia incorporate Noongar and other Aboriginal culture into their design and offer. Like Fulker, Lee places the embrace and celebration of Noongar and Indigenous Australia as paramount to successful development, and tourists want this. Visitor surveys have identified that 78% of people were seeking an Aboriginal cultural experience during their visit to WA yet only 24% reported experiencing Aboriginal Culture (Davis, 2017).

Lee believes the most important thing about an indigenous cultural centre is that it must be authentic and driven by the Noongar people wanting to tell their stories in their own way.



'First Contact'
By Noongar artist, Laurel Nannup
Image courtesy of Max Pixel

Lee commented 'Great places, places we love and enjoy only really occur when we are respectful of the stories of the past as part of the contemporary, and represent them in an authentic and thoughtful way.'

He noted, 'Historically, Perth has not been good at leveraging partnerships to create synergistic outcomes. How it can work is shown through the landscape of the Stadium and at Crown. Both reflect the six seasons of the Aboriginal calendar along with artworks by numerous Aboriginal artists in both developments, all put together by FORM.'

He also noted that this is yet to be celebrated at the site, having been disappointed by the quality of the tour guides on a recent visit.

FORM is a leading creative organisation that develops and advocates for excellence in creativity and artistic practice in Western Australia, with multiple facilities in Perth and the Pilbara.

FORM's activities span high-level artist development and exhibitions, Aboriginal creative development, place-making and strategy, social and multicultural engagement, cultural infrastructure development, Aboriginal cultural maintenance, research, and advocacy.

www.form.net.au

Commenting on HASSELL's bold vision for the East Perth Power Station, a new riverside site which is ripe for revitalisation but hasn't harnessed government ambition and public support to action, Lee said, 'Despite all international tourists eagerly searching for Australian indigenous experiences, we haven't yet put that all together in Perth. Imagine if we could get the East Perth Power Station site redeveloped and also incorporate an indigenous cultural centre somewhere on this peninsula. That would indeed be a powerful indigenous learning precinct where elders could explain their culture and tourists could be immersed in the Australian Indigenous story. So much of the hard work has already been done to ready the site.'

'This isn't about telling a curated story, it's about telling their stories "warts and all". We should not try to imagine or dictate the types of stories told, but should ensure that challenging stories can be shared in a safe, engaging and appropriate environment' Lee said.

“Great places, places we love and enjoy only really occur when we are respectful of the stories of the past as part of the contemporary, and represent them in an authentic and thoughtful way.”

Peter Lee

Concept for East Perth Power Station by HASSELL (2015)
Artist Impression courtesy of HASSELL



Lessons from afar

From researching close to 40 global cities to learn lessons for Perth, Fulker's four top recommendations are:

1. A long overdue reform to its governance structure which is fragmented and outdated.

Most cities have undergone substantial reform including London and Auckland to have a mechanism to serve residents but also be outward looking and maintain a balance sheet where they drive infrastructure projects rather than lobby for them.

2. An integrated public transport network that is reliable, safe and importantly expedient.

This is the only way we will get out of our cocoons of convenience – the car.

3. We must stop treating the river with a 'look but don't touch' reverence.

Perth has a new node of density emerging at Elizabeth Quay, let's not stop there. Revitalisation needs to continue in ways that are best in breed but reflect the distinctiveness of Perth too.

4. The opportunity is there for the taking for Perth to be the city in Australia that acknowledges, respects and celebrates Aboriginal people, their heritage and cultures by starting with the Noongars and reaching out across the country and the world to embrace all First Nation people.

A unique opportunity that another city will steal if we don't back our own idea!

Both a call to action and scene-setter, this established the tone for the full panel discussion.

In Conclusion

This was a highly stimulating conversation centred on economic value derived from cultural tourism in Perth and the impact it can bring to commercial, tertiary, hotel and retail sectors. The new London to Perth direct route is boosting UK visitor numbers and other direct flights to come as negotiated (Tokyo-Perth direct flights will start later in 2019) will similarly assist Perth's tourism-driven economy, and Perth's positioning as a Gateway to Australia, especially for Asian markets, for education and holiday markets. Direct access is key, supported by great destination marketing.

Summing up the significant investment in culture and the value of developing infrastructure, Coates noted, 'The built environment can drive better outcomes for the community, through great planning and design, place-making, jobs and liveability coupled with smart investment.'

'Perth is a vibrant, engaging and adapting city that combines urban energy with extraordinary nature. It's time for Perth to take its place as the new gateway between Asia and Australia, with government and industry partnering to ensure the built form expresses and meets local and tourist expectations.'

There was a unanimous call for an ongoing, transparent pipeline of projects shaped by vision and ambition that can tell Perth's story including rightfully, that of its Noongar (Indigenous) and natural heritage, and investment in soft infrastructure, programming and artists. Government plays an important role by ensuring the right policy framework as well as driving investment, skills and training.

Collaboration, leveraging government and private interests and creating synergistic outcomes was seen as critical to getting the right planning and investment in place to grow Perth's share of international and domestic tourism. This will position Perth as a leading destination, and one that places Noongar culture front and centre, embracing Perth's Indigenous heritage.

Substantial opportunity awaits.



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Qantas Business Lounge Perth Airport, a Woods Bagot design using the colours of WA, cost managed by Slattery. This upgrade coincided with Qantas' reintroduction of direct flights from Singapore to Perth. Image courtesy of Qantas and Australian Business Traveller





View of the City of Perth from Kings Park

About Slattery

Slattery is a property and construction advisory firm specialising in quantity surveying, cost management and early phase project advisory, with an outstanding history now spanning over 40 years.

We work hand-in-hand with governments, institutions and organisations as well as planners, developers, architects and design teams on a broad range of property and construction projects.

A commitment to excellence and innovation, and an ability to become an integral part of the project team has earned Slattery the trust and respect of clients and project teams alike. Slattery will add value to the project by taking control and ownership of the cost management process from the outset.



Arts, Culture, Leisure & Tourism

Slattery understands the value and benefit of great cultural and civic spaces to communities, to defining identity and place-making alongside stimulating and sustainable environments to learn, live and work in.

Through our work on projects across Australia including new builds, heritage refurbishment, master-planning of new precincts, diverse arts, culture, education and leisure projects, Slattery brings unique understanding of the importance of balancing the needs of state and local governments, key institutions with the cultural and functional requirements of the creative industries and local community.

Using our knowledge of design, procurement and construction challenges and opportunities, we are passionate about assisting our clients to achieve successful outcomes.

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