

STREETS – PART OF THE RACE TO THE TOP

Steven Burgess
MR Cagney

Cities are changing. Well, good cities are changing. They are changing in a few ways, and these changes are having a range impacts. One of these impacts has been that inner urban living has become so desirable, that it nearly is or maybe is out the price range of the majority of the population. This in itself though, will provide opportunities elsewhere. There will be opportunities to attract a different market to suburban living and also to regional living.

The problem is – we aren't geared like that. Suburbs and regional villages, towns and cities are geared up, not to compete with the larger cities, but to compete for their rejects. Harsh, I know, and I really do feel like a horrible person for saying it if it is any consolation, but there, I've said it. It simply isn't OK for our smaller towns and cities or outer suburbs to say "come to our place to invest, everything is cheaper and there are no traffic jams so you can drive everywhere". Forgive me for stating the obvious, but that puts you in the race to the bottom, and some places are good at it. That is they are good at making cheap car dominated places. Releasing land on the outer urban edges and then providing road space and parking space to compensate for the fact that you have to drive everywhere. Being able to drive everywhere has its flexibilities and can be misinterpreted as 'freedom'. **Having** to drive everywhere however is the cruellest of prisons. This is happening too often and its happening on our watch.

The weird thing is we know this is not really what people want. We have large data sets on what people want from their town centres and neighbourhoods (PlaceScore© <http://www.placescore.org/>). Let me give you a hint it isn't, hot, depressing, disconnected and polluted. Its clean, green and safe!

Thanks goodness clean, green and safe is easier and cheaper to do than the other stuff!

Quality dense, diverse, walkable and connected centres are the trick, and luckily we know exactly how to build them. For the last 50 or so years we have mostly chosen not to, but we haven't forgotten how...have we?



The question is: do we like spending time here;

Or here;



Its not about what house you want to live in, its about what community you want to live in. A clean green and safe one. Clean, green and safe means less cars, better designed streets, cooler streets, smaller house setbacks, green front yards that invite people to walk along your street. Generous footpaths where your can walk next to your child, mate, friend, lover, wife or husband, not in front or behind. And of course it means significant, beautiful, remarkable, memorable, plentiful, oxygen producing, carbon eating **street trees**. And no, I really don't care if it means you have to sweep up the leaves, or some other petty maintenance issue. This is the future of healthy happy and healthy cities we are talking about. Your children and their children need us to do much better here. And we aren't.

A fun thing to do would be to sit back and blame institutional suburban developers for being greedy, or not understanding the future of cities or being obsessed with development and not planning etc. Fun as it might be however, it is mean, and it is completely unjustified. Our planning systems Australia wide make it easier for the market to plan, develop and sell urban sprawl (which gets us hot, depressing, disconnected and polluted). What our planning system makes it difficult to do is quality diverse, walkable and connected neighbourhoods (clean, green and safe). So if you have a responsibility to your investors, and we all do, whether it is tax payers, ratepayers or shareholders, it makes sense to develop sprawl doesn't it? Of course, it does. But here is the rub; we don't like it any more.

The millennials want to live in exciting, vibrant and walkable neighbourhoods. Unit now however, in Australia, that meant inner urban Sydney and Melbourne. But because they are the only real options they are becoming too much in demand and therefore too expensive. More people want dense, diverse, sustainable a resilient living that the market is not supplying, so it. There is plenty of sprawl development which makes it cheap, and it is easy to get approved and developed, but it is not delivering on the clean green and safe.

So suburbs and regional cities, towns and villages around Australia...get your s*#t together and get on the race to the top. Overspill from Sydney and Melbourne will be binary. They won't spread themselves around. They will ALL go to the coolest City. The one that will take the risks. The one that will go outside the boundaries. What does that mean? Well it means creating great streets and diverse housing. Create a "yes and" rather than a "no" or "yes but" culture in government. Giant street trees, generous footpaths, free outdoor dining, separated bike lanes, genuine mixed land uses. A place where you just want to walk and sit, and walk and shop, and walk and eat, and walk and say g'day. A place where you want to be...

We are not talking about a big shift in what is actually achievable here. All the community wants is for us to relearn the art of making places they like. Who's in?