

***Gender Assumptions in the Redevelopment of
Melbourne's City Centre***

**Adam Birch (student no. 307552)
Masters of Urban Planning
Faculty of Architecture, Building & Planning
University of Melbourne**

Introduction

The redevelopment of the central city of Melbourne has been applauded for improving the liveability of the city by increasing the residential population and the demand for retail services (Adams 2005). Post-Fordist approaches to city redevelopment have focused on profitability and have not explicitly considered the impact of redevelopment on the needs of different groups of women (Turner 1995, p271-273). Many low income women particularly single mothers benefit from good access to public transport, shopping and services that the city offers, but are disadvantaged in terms of affordable housing, access to childcare and issues of safety (Turner 1995, p271-273). Gender analysis is used in this paper to examine the gender assumptions made in planning, demographic projections and developers' narratives.

Theories of difference have challenged dominant conceptions of urban environments through an understanding of identity, power and place (Jacobs & Fincher 1998, p.1-2). Different identities have been socially constructed (both within and between different groups) in the design and use of the city (Gibson 1998, p.304). Beall (1997, p.3) explains "the structure of urban space presents both constraints and opportunities which impact in different ways on the lives of different inhabitants of the city." Feminist literature on planning has challenged the assumptions made in rational planning and has brought greater awareness of the social construction of gender reflected in the built form together with the differences within and between groups of men and women differentiated by class, race, age, ability and sexuality (Greed 1994, p.34). Despite this, planning theory and practice in recent times has assumed gender into a broader conception of diversity and difference (Rahder & Atilia 2004, 109).

City building is complex and enacted by multiple players that make assumptions that impact different social groups, as explained:

The physical structure of the city is the product of conscious decision-making and social relations and therefore can never be neutral. What gets built, where, how and for who reflects the relations of power and the often-stereotypical assumptions of planners, architects and other urban decision-makers. Cities are literally concrete manifestations of ideas of how society was, is and should be. (Beall 1997, p.3)

In addition, the actors that contribute to urban development and the gendered nature of cities include "private-sector developers and their professional advisors, politicians... urban theorists, other urban economic and social policy makers... and cultural and entrepreneurial trend setters" (Greed 1994, p18). Planners (whether men or women) work within a limited framework restricted by policy priorities, managerial structures and political support that inform the assumptions that address gender issues through planning. Planners have limited scope in re-shaping cities with development occurring gradually over many years, and a legacy of past generations' impact on the built environment (Greed 1994, p18).

Reeves (2005, p.55) argued that housing projections and planning have failed to account for the different needs of men and women and that housing projections should consider the needs of different households. These different needs can be culturally varied as Greed (1994, p.46-47) explained that the urban setting preferred by many Anglo-American women was suburban homes with gardens, but in contrast, many Continental-European women preferred living in apartments in traditional central districts.

The urban environments desired by women have both the amenity of suburbia and the services of the central city (Shlay 1985). Greed (2008) argued that the 'non-sexist city' would contain a mix of uses including "localised facilities, shops, schools, child-care facilities and amenities" that reduce the need for unpaid domestic duties and reduce travel demand. This approach would "create sustainable, accessible and equitable cities, whilst fulfilling many of the criteria of new urbanism." (Greed 2008). The central city of Melbourne has many of the attributes of the 'non-sexist city', however the assumptions made in planning policies, demographic projections and developer's narratives have shaped the central city as a place that has not directly catered to the needs of families and the different needs of men and women.

Central city redevelopment in Melbourne: Gender assumptions in planning and developers' narratives

Three elements have influenced the redevelopment of the central city of Melbourne since the 1980s. These have included the interdependent production of advanced business services: including information and communication technology (ICT) and higher education services; changing attitudes in residential preferences: gentrification; and policy levers to encourage residential development: the *Postcode 3000 Program* (Tsutsumi & O'Connor 2005, p.1-2)

The *Postcode 3000 Program* was established in 1992 by the City of Melbourne with the aim of facilitating and supporting residential development in and around the central area of Melbourne (CoM 1993). The program was successful at increasing the number of residential units in the Central Business District (CBD) from 736 in 1992 to 9,895 in 2002 (Adams 2005, p.50). Initiatives to support residential development included financial incentives, technical support, street-level support and promotion. Financial incentives included removal of open space contributions for residential development; permit application fee refunds and waiver of council rates during the construction phase. Technical support included building and planning advice, streamlined approvals, and guidelines. Street level support included some limited street-level capital works and reduced parking requirements. Promotion involved ongoing marketing and advertising campaigns by the City of Melbourne both directed toward developers and the wider population.

The types of apartments to be developed within the city were not explicitly stated within the *Postcode 3000 Program*, and were essentially left up to the developers to determine their key markets. The qualitative research by Fincher (2004) and Costello (2005) demonstrated that developers of high rise apartments in Melbourne considered the main residents of city apartments would either be Asian students or wealthy residents such as empty nesters, young professionals, singles, double income with no kids, and perhaps gays, all with 'European' lifestyle aspirations. Women were seen as the 'market hurdle' in overcoming detachment from their suburban homes, and required dwellings excessive levels of security (Fincher 2004).

The *Postcode 3000 Program* promoted the use of existing community services to be consolidated by inducing greater demand. During the implementation of the program, childcare, primary and secondary schools in the City of Melbourne were not located in the CBD, Docklands and Southbank. Greed (1994, p.174) argued "a local authority cannot seriously state that it is promoting equal opportunities within its boundaries, if it does not make childcare an integral part of its economic strategy". Fincher and Iverson (2008, p.62-72) argued that provision of childcare is essential for providing greater gender equity of women with children by increasing their participation and opportunities in the workforce. However, the complexity in the different types of childcare facilities, funding models and different tiers of governance that support and monitor childcare services places a burden on planners understanding the needs of the community and determining the best model of childcare that should be provided.

One example of a mixed-use development that achieved some element of gender equity in the design was the development of the Queen Victoria site occupying an entire city block initiated through a private public partnership. This development involved the purchase of the land by council, developed privately and designed by six architecture firms. The project consisted of retail development of various scales, residential apartments and office space. Included in the development was the inclusion of a childcare facility with places for 70 children (Adams 2005, p.63). The former Queen Victoria Women's Hospital was converted into a women's centre providing offices for not-for-profit community groups catering to the needs of women.

The most recent strategic plan for the City of Melbourne: *Future Melbourne* (CoM 2009) was developed through the use of a 'wiki' in 2008 and is to be initiated in 2010. A 'wiki' is an online tool whereby any user can generate content and edit other users' contributions (Godwin-Jones 2003, p15). The plan is aspirational in aiming the city becoming a more diverse, tolerant and accepting city. Under the goal of 'A great place to live' the plan acknowledges that different users of the city experience the urban environment in different ways, as explained:

Our municipality is 'open' around the clock, accessed by different people for different reasons throughout the day and night. To some, Melbourne is all about bright lights and fine dining or big business and office blocks, while to others Melbourne is about taking the kids to the park or the convenience of living close to work. Students, workers, tourists and residents all use the central city in different ways and we must cater to their various needs - whether it be to study or work, to shop, for public transport, a quiet spot outdoors for lunch, vibrancy and night-life or access to great parks. (CoM 2009).

Future Melbourne is integrated with other planning and policy documents by the *City of Melbourne* and research papers that profile various aspects of the city. The plan outlines specific indicators that will be used to measure the various goals together with the outlining positive externalities. However specific actions, strategies, programs or policies to achieve these goals are not expressed within the plan. Because of the lack of strategies outlined, the implementation of the plan is to be achieved through the *Council Plan* reviewed every four years together with the City's annual budget and various branch businesses plans.

Future Melbourne outlines that residential growth for the central area (CBD, Docklands, Southbank) is expected to increase to 58,100 people in 2020; an increase of 15,500 households. The population projections are based on demographic profiling that reinforce gender stereotypes and does not consider the changing role that women and men may play in the future.

Gender assumptions in the demographic projections for the central city of Melbourne

Quantitative approaches to analysing linkages between demographic change and changing gender systems are problematic because of three reasons (Mason 1997 p.160-169) First: *Changes in fertility and mortality*: reduction in fertility rates since the 1970s in developed countries should not be assumed to be because of increased participation rates of women in the workforce, and can be because of complex cultural, social and economic reasons. Second: *Changing gender roles*: the role men and women play in the workforce, caring for children and domestic duties are complex and continually evolving. And; third: The affects that *demographic change* has on the way men and women live their lives: for example the affect of an ageing population that will have on the higher proportions of women who care for the elderly.

Two assumptions were made by the City of Melbourne in their population projections for the Central Business District (CBD) that reinforce gender differences. These assumptions included “a loss of adults in their twenties and early thirties forming families with children, as overseas students return home and young people seek more affordable housing, notably rental” and “relatively low fertility rate of 0.8 children per woman of childbearing age” (Casey 2008a p10). These assumptions conflict with an expected 140% net increase in 2021 of households with children occurring in the CBD, followed by the Dockland and Southbank (id 2009, p.12).

Melbourne CBD has the largest residential population for a CBD in Australia. Seventy percent of housing in the CBD are apartments, 91% in the Docklands and 94% in Southbank. Residential population in the Melbourne CBD grew at a rate of 18% per annum between 2001 and 2006 (Casey 2008a p3).

A small number of households in the central city of Melbourne are headed by single parents, with 313 households headed by a woman in the CBD, Southbank and Docklands combined in 2006 compared with 117 households headed by a man (ABS 2006). Although these households only represent a small percentage of the total population of the central city, they are expected to increase by more than 100% by 2021 (id 2007).

In contrast, the population growth assumptions for the Docklands acknowledged relatively small populations of children (120 people between the ages of 0 to 12 or 3% of the total population on census night 2006). However, growth in the population of people aged between 25-39 some with children was projected. This growth was assumed to be because of ‘lifestyle opportunities’ and was considered because of “implications for service delivery” (Casey 2008, p3-9). The majority of housing planned to be developed in the central city of Melbourne will continue to be apartments. The assumed markets for city apartments by the demographers are 1-bedroom apartments for students and 2 to 3-bedroom apartments for ‘young urban professionals’ and ‘empty nesters’ (id 2007, p.7).

For people living in inner city apartments in Melbourne, proximity to the CBD was given as the most important reason for choosing where they lived (Metropolis 2005, p.92). This was not just because of proximity to work, which rated much lower, despite the fact that many city residents work in the CBD or surrounding suburbs. Lifestyle options, good access to public transport and proximity to shops were rated as very important (Metropolis 2005, p.93). Good access to childcare rated as the lowest reason for living in inner city apartments.

The most common reason for residents potentially moving out of the inner city was to obtain a larger property. (Metropolis 2005, p.79). However, 25% of the respondents in the CBD said they would relocate to another high-rise apartment. The services and facilities wanted by inner city apartment residents were exceptionally diverse. (Metropolis 2005, p.105).

The complexity of gender issues and demographic projections are problematic for planning for growth and change in cities. Demographic projections are limited in their ability to foresee the changing roles that men and women may play in the future. This unfortunately results in projections based on assumptions that reinforce gender roles and stereotypes. Some of these assumptions are evident in the expected household arrangements of the central city of Melbourne that inform planning policies taking the ‘predict and provide’ approach that does little to address gender inequalities or the different needs of men and women.

Conclusion

Planning policies in the State of Victoria do not explicitly consider gender issues nor directly work towards achieving greater gender equity. Gender mainstreaming could be used as an approach to monitoring the impacts that policies and programs have on different groups of men and women (Reeves 2005, p.77).

Planning policies in the City of Melbourne have been successful in increasing the number of residential dwellings within the CBD, Southbank and Docklands. The residential use of the city has improved the economic diversity and resilience of the city through increased demand for retail services and increased rates base for the council. Planning policies have encouraged good urban design, diverse economic development, and public participation. The redeveloped central city has many attributes of a 'non-sexist city' including mix of use; close links between work, home and shops; access to (some) childcare and essential services; good public transport and pedestrian mobility. However, the delivery of diverse and affordable housing options for families and essential social services has been limited. These aspects of the city show how power, identity and place have been influenced by the assumptions of the players in city building. If planning for diversity is to be taken seriously, then the needs of different groups of men and women should be considered to achieve greater gender equity.

References

- ABS, Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) *Census of Population and Housing*. ABS, Canberra.
- Adams, R. (2005). "Melbourne: Back from the edge." Charlesworth, E. ed. *Cityedge*, Architectural Press, Oxford. 50-64.
- Beall, J. (1997) *A city for all: valuing difference and working with diversity*. Zed Books, London.
- Casey, N. (2008) *Docklands Small Area Economic and Demographic Profile*. CoM, Melbourne.
- Casey, N. (2008a) *Melbourne (Central Business District and St. Kilda Road) Small Area Economic and Demographic Profile*. CoM, Melbourne.
- CoM: City of Melbourne. (1993) *Postcode 3000 Program: Action Plan for City Living 1992-1995*. CoM, Melbourne.
- CoM. (2009) *Future Melbourne*. CoM, Melbourne. <http://www.futuremelbourne.com.au>
- Costello, L. (2005). "From Prisons to Penthouses: The Changing Images of High-Rise Living in Melbourne." *Housing Studies*, 20(1), 49-62.
- Fincher, R. (2004). "Gender and Life Course in the Narratives of Melbourne's High-rise Housing Developers." *Australian Geographical Studies*, 42(3), 325-338.
- Gibson, K. (1998) "Social Polarization and the Politics of Difference: Discourses in Collision or Collusion?" Fincher, R. & Jacobs, J. eds. *Cities of Difference*. The Guildford Press, New York. 301-316.
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2003) "Emerging Technologies: Blogs and Wikis: Environments for On-Line Collaboration" *Language, Learning & Technology*. 7(2). 12-16.
- Greed, C. (1994) *Women & Planning: creating gendered realities*. Routledge, London.
- Greed, C. (2008) "Planning the non-sexist city: the Eurofem Initiative and Beyond" *Gender and the Built Environment Database*. Women's Design Service, London.
http://www.gendersite.org/pages/planning_the_non-sexist_city_the_eurofem_initiative_and_beyond.html
- id Consultancy (2009) *Melbourne City Council, Population and Household Forecasts: Melbourne CBD*. id Consultancy, Collingwood.
- Jacobs, J. & Fincher, R. (1998) "Introduction" *Cities of Difference*. Fincher, R. & Jacobs, J. eds. The Guildford Press, New York. 1-25.
- Mason, K. (1997) "Gender and Demographic Change: What do we know?" Jones, D. ed. *The Continuing Demographic Transition*. New York, Oxford University Press. 158-182.
- Metropolis (2005) *Inner City Apartment Residents' Survey April 2005*. Metropolis Research, Carlton.
- Radher, B. and Altilla, C. (2004) "Where is Feminism in planning going? Appropriate or Transformation?" *Planning Theory*, 3(2), 107-116.
- Reeves, D. (2005) *Planning for Diversity: Policy and Planning in a World of Difference*. Routledge, New York.
- Saegert, S. (1980) "Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities." *Signs*. 5(3). s96-s111.
- Shlay, A. (1985) 'Same city, different worlds' *Urban Affairs Review*. 21(1) 66-86.
- Tsutsumi, J. and O'Connor, K. (2005) "International Students and the Changing Character of the Inner Area of a City: A Case Study of Melbourne." *State of Australian Cities: National Conference 2005*, Brisbane.
- Turner, R. (1995) "Concern for Gender in the Central-City." Garber, J. and Turner, R. eds. *Gender in Urban Research*. Sage, Thousand Oaks. 271-289.

This page has been left intentionally blank.