

LIVING WITH HERITAGE: CANBERRA, CITY IN THE LANDSCAPE. CAN IT REMAIN A CITY NOT LIKE ANY OTHER?

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Background

A hundred years ago the beginning of the twentieth century saw an international zeal for the new art and science of town planning. Building better cities would build better, healthier citizens imbued with civic pride. Parallel with this there emerged an interest in the building of national capitals linked to the sense of national identity and sentiments that had emerged in many countries in the nineteenth century. Australia, India, Brazil, Canada envisaged the inauguration of national capital cities. So energetically and intellectually bubbling away were these utopian ideals of new cities and it is in this international heritage context we have to view the setting of Canberra, Australia's National Capital, in terms of the past, present, and future. In line with this world trend Australia's first planning conference, the 'Congress of Engineers, Architects, Surveyors, and Others Interested in the Building of the Federal Capital of Australia', took place in 1901 in Melbourne coinciding with the first meeting of Australia's new federal parliament.

From its inception in the nineteenth century and before the Walter Burley Griffin entry won the 1911 international competition for the city's design, the concept and ideal of an Australian federal capital envisaged a city in the landscape and of the landscape. This set in train the foundation for Canberra as a remarkable city. In the true sense of the word it is a unique city, for there is no other city like it in the world. Walter Burley Griffin declared in 1912 that he had planned a city not like any other city. These were prophetic words for the development of the city over the years has maintained its status of being unlike any other. Why is this? There are roads, houses, offices, schools, shops, parks – all the components we associate with urban development – as in any other city.

The underlying reason lies in the way landscape defines and articulates the city plan starting with the Griffin plan. Changes over the years to the form of the city and hence to the Griffin ideal have taken place. Nevertheless the

landscape basis which binds form and content remains vividly coherent in the city plan. The form of the physical landscape – natural and created – is a palpable, tangible presence defining the city; but equally so is its content or intangible, symbolic meaning. Places like Zurich or Kyoto are similar in the way landscape open space surrounds and penetrates the city, but not to the comprehensively planned extent or with the same founding visions as Canberra.

Underlying the city's spatial structure is the fundamental premise of Canberra as a city in the landscape. Its spatial structure has been progressively and incrementally planned from the beginning to maintain continuity with existing design elements, in particular the hills, ridges, and valleys.¹ The extraordinary expansion period of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) 1958 to 1988 kept these elements as the structure of the city plan. These were the very landscape elements that impressed Scrivener, the New South Wales Surveyor given the task of finding a site in late 1908. The instructions given to Scrivener by the Minister for Home Affairs, H. McMahon, to recommend a specific site were explicit and also noteworthy in their implications. They reflected the manifest destiny of nationalism and emerging sense of identity based on images of landscape in Australia:

the Federal Capital should be a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position, with extensive views and embracing distinctive features which will lend themselves to a design worthy of the object, not only for the present but for all time.²

The instructions to Scrivener further stipulated that the site should be chosen 'with a view to securing picturesqueness, and also with the object of beautification

¹ National Capital Development Commission, (1970), *Tomorrow's Canberra. Planning for Growth and Change*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.

² Dept of Home Affairs, *Information, Conditions, and Particulars for Guidance in the Preparation of Competitive Designs for the Federal Capital City of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Melbourne, 30.4.1911, p26.

and expansion'. On 25 February, 1909, Charles Scrivener reported that he regarded 'the Canberra site as the best that can be obtained in the Yass-Canberra district, being prominently situated and yet sheltered, while facilities are afforded for storing water for ornamental purposes at a reasonable cost'. He thought that 'the capital would probably lie in an amphitheatre of hills with an outlook towards the north and northwest, well sheltered from westerly winds'.³

Scrivener's reference to an ornamental water body met the recommendations of the 1901 Congress that site selection for a new Australian federal capital city should take into account the need for 'abundant Water Supply ... For creation of artificial lakes, maintenance of public gardens, fountains etc'. A paper by Bogue Luffman, Principal of the Burnley Horticultural in Melbourne, suggested that the hills that would surround a site should be maintained as native forest or planted and that there should be opportunity for the creation of lakes. Looking out over the magnificent setting of modern Canberra, the far-sightedness and wisdom of these ideas are apparent and it is the splendour of the landscape elements that has proved to be an enduring and distinguishing characteristic of the city's setting. Landscape articulates city form. The magnificent panorama over the city from Mount Ainslie is testimony to this aspect of Canberra (Figure 1).

From the symbolic heart of the city and the nation in the National Triangle with its serene symmetrical beauty, out through the tree-lined streets, neighbourhood and district parks and open spaces to the hills, ridges, and valleys – the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS) that articulates the city plan – it is the landscape nature of the city that predominates physically. In turn this tangible physical presence has inextricable, intangible meanings and values, confirming that landscape is not just what we see, but as Cosgrove suggests, it is a way of seeing that has its own history, but a history that can be understood only as part of a wider history of economy and society; that has its own assumptions and consequences, but assumptions and consequences whose origins and implications extend well beyond the use and perception of land; that has its own techniques of expression, but techniques shared with other areas of cultural practice.⁴

When you look out over the magnificent prospect from Mount Ainslie or from Parliament House (Figures 1 and 2)

across the city to the surrounding hills that form the embracing backdrop for the city, or enjoy the tree-lined streets, gardens, and parks of the suburbs (Figure 3) the landscape itself is more than physical elements. It has a meaning and significance that inform what Canberra is.

Consideration of these special aspects of the city are critical for Canberra as national capital and as home for 320,000 people. How will the city expand in the future and house a growing population whilst respecting its landscape image? What is the future for the national areas, for the parkland around Lake Burley Griffin, for the NCOSS without which Canberra would be like any other city and which gives it a special sense of place? Even before the site was chosen, landscape imagery and associated sense of Australianness drove the enthusiasm and resolution for the country to have a federal capital. On the understanding that 'You can't have a future without a past'⁵ it is important that we have a firm perspective of where we have come from and what visions and decisions have brought us to where we are today.

Healthy cities for healthy citizens

The art and science of planning had social as well as physical underpinnings; in particular the encouragement of a healthy citizenry educated in the role of civics. This would be manifested through a utopian approach to the layout of towns where residential areas, parks and democratic open space, shopping municipal/government buildings et al would be carefully zoned and sited. Controlled physical planning with monumental public buildings in a discontinuous pattern, open space and greenery, distinct residential zones according to economic status would have desirable social outcomes in contrast to the overcrowded industrial cities throughout the world. Two styles of city layout were advocated: the **City Beautiful** and **Garden City** with overlapping philosophies.

Proponents of the City Beautiful (with its reordered Renaissance urban planning and design incorporating axes and vistas connecting circles, squares, ellipses eloquent classical architecture and gardens) preached that it would create better citizens. Hausmann's Paris, Pope Sixtus V's re-planning of Rome, L'Enfant's and the Burnham Commission's Washington were role models. The City Beautiful movement would 'in every citizen, even the slum dweller, [create] a feeling of aesthetic appreciation and

³ Quoted in Frederick Watson, (1927), *A Brief History of Canberra, the capital city of Australia*, Federal Capital Press, Canberra, p.129.

⁴ Denis Cosgrove, (1984), *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Croom Helm, London & Sydney, p.1.

⁵ Aboriginal teenager, ABC TV, July 1993 quoted in David Carter, (1994), 'Future Pasts' in David Headon, Joy Hooton, Donald Horne, eds, *The Abundant Culture. Meaning and Significance in Everyday Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, p.3.

thereby civic pride, which would motivate him to recognise and fulfil his role as a useful member of society'.⁶

The English social-reformer, Ebenezer Howard, advocated the idea of social integration with society's physical well-being through his concept for the Garden City. In 1898 he advocated the building of new towns where the advantages of town and country would coalesce and engender a 'better and nobler' society.⁷ He envisaged a new economic and social order, a reformed society where 'Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilisation.' It was a period of enthusiastic anticipation and high ideals for what town planning might achieve. The first garden city, Letchworth, was started in England in 1903; Barry Unwin (one of Letchworth's designers) published *Town Planning in Practice* in 1909; professional congresses in Europe centred on town planning; 1911 saw the British Town Planning Institute formed. Patrick Geddes in 1915 published his classic *Cities in Evolution* in which his idea of the new science of Civics concerned itself with study of physical elements as a basis for planning. 'Survey before plan' and taking a 'synoptic view' were crucial to Geddes' approach to city planning. His concept was the city as process. Equally he was outspoken about unhealthy slum conditions.

Landscape visions of nation and federal capital conflated

An enduring theme in forging an Australian national identity from early colonial days has been, and continues to be, the Australian landscape and its representation in writing and painting.⁸ Identity, like landscape itself, is a cultural construct. Both are composed of various signs and symbols - what Roland Barthes calls 'signifiers' - which can be read within a cultural context.⁹ They signify place and identity with place. In the Australian context Anne-Marie Willis

links landscape and identity with the proposition that 'landscape as a foundation for national identity promises an essence grounded in place, a revealed truth'. Picturing the landscape in both words and paintings has been central to forming a sense of 'Australianness' as a revealed truth.¹⁰ Canberra in its landscape setting is both a tangible physical and value-laden intangible manifestation of this.

Driving into Canberra from Sydney, Melbourne or Cooma, or flying in over the paddocks and forested hills, is a strikingly different experience than the approach to any other Australian city. The boundary between the city and the bush is abrupt. Paddocks give way to houses, tree-lined roads, and open space with sweeping panoramas of forested hills forming an immense and magnificent landscape backdrop. In the centre around Lake Burley Griffin are the city's monumental national buildings majestically poised in a sylvan setting, again with the defining backdrop of hills. Alternatively Lake Burley Griffin offers contact with nature in the heart of the city (**Figure 4**).

The reasons for these differences lie historically in the visions behind the idea of an Australian capital city. They explain why Canberra is unique internationally, different from any other city, and why in 1910 the Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, proclaimed 'This must be the finest Capital City in the World – the Pride of Time'.¹¹ Underlying its inception at the beginning of this century lay two basic visions. The first was that a vigorous Australian national identity existed, that this was related to the ideal of the Australian landscape itself and that it could be symbolised in the layout of a capital city. The second was that city planning could create a better and healthier society.¹²

So the utopian ideal of new cities and redevelopment of selected parts of existing cities as a way to social reform and realizing landscape idealism was palpable in Australia. In entering the winning design in the Federal Capital Competition in 1911 Walter Burley Griffin declared:

⁶ Fischer, K F, (1984), *Canberra: Myths and Models*, p.10, Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg.

⁷ Howard, E., (1898), *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Reform*, London.

⁸ (i) Smith, B, (1985), *Preface to Second Edition*, p.ix, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Oxford Univ. Press, Melbourne; (ii) Taylor, K, (1994) 'Defining an Australian Sense of Place: Cultural Identity in Landscape and Painting' pp270-28, CELA94 (Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture USA) History and Culture Conference Proceedings, Mississippi State University, Long Beach, Miss., Sept 7-10, 1994.

⁹ Barthes R, (1977), *Image-Music-Text*, essays selected and trans. Stephen Hall (Glasgow).

¹⁰ Willis, Anne-Marie, (1993), *Illusions of Identity: The Art of Nation*, p64, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney.

¹¹ See Peter Harrison, (1995), *Walter Burley Griffin: Landscape Architect*, Robert Freestone, ed, National Library of Australia, Canberra, p.6

¹² Ken Taylor, (1999), 'Picturesque Visions of a Nation. Capital City in the Garden', *The New Federalist* Number 3: June 1999, pp.74-80. See also Mark Henry Haefele, (1995), *Ideal Visions of Canberra. An exploration of the aspirations and assumptions behind the planning of Canberra during its two greatest periods of growth*, thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts of the Australian National University, June 1995.

I have planned a city not like any other city in the world. I have planned it not in a way that I expected any government authorities in the world would accept. I have planned the ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the future.¹³

That Griffin's city met the ideals current in Australia was no accident. The competition and the Griffin scheme were the culminating pinnacle of the utopian visions for a new Australian city that would lead the world. In short the Griffin plan - so exquisitely illustrated by Marion Mahoney Griffin's water colour prospects - was beautiful in design conception and physical presentation. It was the City Beautiful with Garden City overtones par excellence and matched Australian visions of the ideal city. Here was inspiration for the creation of a grand capital that grasped the idea of landscape as the structure for a city where social reform through healthy living was integral to the structure and life of the city.

The Griffin design admirably suited the natural amphitheatre qualities of the site where 'the setting [was used] as a theatrical whole' to give a design that 'was rich in symbolism'¹⁴ by its use of radiating avenues with the hills as focal points and the use of dramatic views out of the city to the magnificent hill-landscape surrounds. Its geometrical major and minor axes created impressive vistas (**Figure 1 and 2**). Of equal significance was Charles Weston who, from 1913 to 1926, laid down the innovative and visionary landscape planning framework for the city with his tree planting schemes. He set up experimental nurseries to raise the necessary tree stock; some indication of Weston's achievement can be seen from the fact that between 1921 to 1924 1,162,942 trees were planted in what is now the inner city suburbs (**Figure 5**).

Notwithstanding John Sulman's support for the Griffin plan it was he as Chairman of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee 1921-24 (FCAC) who instituted changes to it when Griffin left as director of design in 1921. The FCAC reflected Sulman's influential ideas as a leading town planner and educator, in particular his advocacy of the garden city and garden suburb. The FCAC therefore declared that in the first stage Canberra was to be 'a garden town, with simple, pleasing, but unpretentious buildings'; it saw houses as single storey cottages standing in their own

garden. Sulman in 1910 had suggested that Australians preferred the single story house; evidence from various developments in Australian cities pointed to this phenomenon.¹⁵ In 1909 before the competition for the Federal Capital design was announced Sulman wrote a series of articles in the Daily Telegraph.¹⁶ In one article he stressed the need for parkways, playgrounds, vistas, and a hierarchy of streets going from wide to narrow. He advised incorporating into the plan a central area with Parliament at the hub surrounded by public buildings, shops, and hotels set within a diagrammatic radial-concentric plan with radiating avenues which he likened to a spiderweb pattern.¹⁷

Sulman as FCAC Director also conceived of major public buildings and national institutions as separate buildings standing in a park-like setting: an urban picturesque personified. This is the current pattern for Canberra's national buildings and institutions in the central National Triangle. The Federal Capital Commission (FCC) under John Butters continued the garden city concept in residential areas, domestic FCC style of architecture (unique to Canberra) with its Arts and Crafts Movement genre and public buildings like Old Parliament House.

An enduring legacy

The 1920s and 1930s saw the central symbolic heart of the city and nation from the Griffin plan with its national triangle and exquisite axes and vistas established in outline. But buildings spaced in a park-like setting, not Griffin's more symmetrical urban spaces with paving, water and trees between buildings. Surrounding this were the early garden city residential suburbs of detached cottages in large gardens. Street planting had taken place and public parks initiated. The basis for the landscape city par excellence was in position. Even so the city grew slowly; by 1958 its population was a mere 36,000. It was at this stage that the decision was taken by the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, that Canberra should expand and that Government Departments and workers would relocate from Melbourne and Sydney. Parliament House was in Canberra (built in 1927) but not the machinery of government.

¹³ Walter Burley Griffin, (1912), *New York Times*, 2 June 1912. See also Donald Leslie Johnson, (1977), *The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin*, p.20, Macmillan, Melbourne.

¹⁴ Freestone, R. (1986), Canberra as a Garden City 1901-1930, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 19; 3-20.

¹⁵ Sulman, J., (1921), *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*, New South Wales Government Printer, Sydney.

¹⁶ These were published later together as one monograph: John Sulman (1909), *The Federal Capital*, J Sands, Sydney. See also John Sulman, (1909), 'The Federal Capital', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 28 August 1909.

¹⁷ Sulman, (1909), p.682.

Following a Senate Inquiry on the Development of Canberra and a report by the renowned British planner, Sir William Holford, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was set up by Menzies in 1958 to plan, develop and construct Canberra. The underlying landscape foci briefly reviewed above were grasped by the NCDC. They continued to suffuse planning ideas during the crucial years 1958 to 1988 (when the NCDC was disbanded) where land-use planning policy and implementation integrated civil engineering and landscape concerns in an holistic approach to planning. The garden city ideal flourished to create a city known affectionately as The Bush Capital.¹⁸ Not least was the adoption of the Y Plan in the late 1960s as a linear model for city growth, with a series of new towns rather than the concentric pattern of other Australian cities. The Y Plan, formalised in the 1984 NCDC Metropolitan Policy Plan, articulated the form of urban growth on the basis of a series of new towns separated by landscape corridors (Figure 6). So landscape maintained its primal position as articulator of urban form. With over 14 million trees in the city and its immediate surrounds with associated public and private open space and wildlife, Canberra became and remains the epitome of nature in the city.

Essential to the Y Plan is the integrated open space system of hills, ridges and buffers: the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). The 1992 report *Our Bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital's Open Spaces* refers to the NCOSS covering 72% of the Territory as 'a valuable legacy of visionary design and planning.' In *Tomorrow's Canberra* the forerunner of NCOSS is referred to as 'the emerging metropolitan park system [which] encompasses a wide range of parks, recreation areas, reserves, and other open space.' By 1977 in a report by George Seddon the term NCOSS - reflecting NCDC nomenclature - was used. It embraced the comprehensive network of inner and outer hills, ridges and buffers, Lake Burley Griffin, river corridors and mountains with associated bushlands. The primary significance to Canberra's post-1945 planning of the open space system may be gauged from the view expressed in the 1970 NCDC publication *Tomorrow's Canberra*:

The fourth major component of land use, open space, will probably be the most enduring element of the urban structure.

It is this comprehensive network which articulates the city plan. It was pivotal in guiding the physical layout and

planning structure of the new towns inherent in the Y Plan concept.

Future development: maintaining the landscape setting ethos

Canberra's population is now around 330,000 people; not big by world city standards and predictions are for 500,000. Nevertheless the issue facing the city is how to expand without destroying the rich landscape heritage and open space system that defines the city's special character. The ACT - Australian Capital Territory - in which Canberra sits is around 2000sq kms entirely surrounded by the state of New South Wales as determined at the time of Federation in 1901. About 75% of the land is in the form of forests and river valleys. These are unsuitable for building and also comprise valuable water gathering grounds and wildlife habitats.

Various options for expansion have been considered under the aegis of a Spatial Planning exercise by the ACT Planning and Land Authority over the past twelve months. Central to the options has been the goal of conserving the Bush Capital image and the National Capital Open Space System whilst acknowledging decreases in household sizes and an ageing population. The change and consequent effects on housing needs have increased the attraction of town houses and apartments and the challenge is where these can be sited so as not to destroy the leafy character of traditional suburban housing areas which many people still value. Herein lies the dilemma of occupying a living, heritage city. How may it change without destroying its sense of place?

Ebenezer Howard asked this question over one hundred years ago: 'Where will the people go?' This is critical now to Canberra's future and the protection of its heritage context with both tangible physical values and intangible values that Canberrans place on the very nurturing idea of nature in the city and living with it. John Ruskin the nineteenth century architectural critic referred to the way people see things and attach meaning to them as 'seeing with the soul of the eye.' At the heart of attachment to the Bush Capital image is this very way of seeing so that it is not just what is seen that is important to the Canberra community, but the way it is seen and the meanings and values attached to it.

In a current document *The Canberra Spatial Plan* the ACT Government through its planning agency (ACTPLA) proposes increased densities along transport corridors (roads) and around shopping centres which are strategically placed

¹⁸ Bush meaning in Australian open eucalypt woodland and grassy glades. It is also applied to grazing land and originates from early colonial days and when it referred to land outside the city.

in the new towns. Whilst these zones have been delineated for increased density in contrast to the detached house and garden typical of Canberra's residential neighbourhoods, planning and design guidelines to safeguard the landscape character of the city, particularly the space for tree planting outside public land, and guidelines on materials and built form to try to encourage harmony and balance with existing adjacent buildings, particularly detached housing, have not been promulgated. The result is a move by many developers to flat roofed, grey rendered buildings creating a boxy, sterile contrast to the traditional brick house with concrete tile roof; garden space is all too often replaced by hard surfaces which increases run-off. Holes in the urban tree canopy are appearing.

The Spatial Plan also proposes 19,000 houses and units in a former pine forest area destroyed by the January 2003 bushfires and adjacent rural area and continuing development at Gungahlin new town with an additional 28,500 dwellings. This approach proposes plans whereby the external landscape framework of the city in the surrounding bush and forests connects with the open space system within the city penetrating through the suburbs down to street-trees, neighbourhood parks, and private gardens. The vision of the landscape city is maintained, but it is usually at the detail planning and design level that it starts to fail. Nevertheless the proposed city form reflects community values ascertained through a long process of consultation over the last two years and a commitment by the government to conserve the city's landscape heritage context. What it does not reflect is the community's preference for design guidelines covering architectural form, materials and tree planting space in private development.

Contemporary city and World Heritage candidacy

Canberra also serves the significant and symbolic function of national capital managed through the National Capital Authority which recently published the Griffin Legacy plan suggesting how some of Griffin's ideas for a cosmopolitan city might be revisited, including higher density living in the central part of Canberra. Some of Griffin's early planning and design ideas were altered or not achieved, but the framework of his plan has stayed in place. His National Triangle (Figure 1) as the symbolic centre of the heart of the nation remains mainly as a vast, serene landscape space housing fewer buildings than Griffin envisaged. Parliament House is on the site preferred by Griffin for his people's Capitol (sic) building, but its design allows people to walk up to it and over it (Figure 2), thereby symbolising an ideal relationship between citizens and politicians. The panoramic

prospect of surrounding landscape visually and physically interpenetrating the city envisaged in the Griffin plan survives. The legacy of Charles Weston's innovative landscape planning endures.

National spaces and buildings are there to remind residents and visitors of Canberra's evocation of a national vision and *raison d'être*. 1.6 million visitors each year come to look. Landscape as the city's determining element flows through residential areas creating a linked system of open space symbolising nature in the city par excellence. Internationally the achievement of the city offers a role model to various Asian countries – including Malaysia, Japan, and South Korea – for proposed administrative centres. Landscape, because it is not simply a physical component but is a function of the imagination, 'defined by our vision but interpreted by our minds'¹⁹ remains an enduring, fundamental theme with its ability to appeal across cultures.

Within the planned setting of Canberra the central part of the city is significant as a record of the formative years of planning following the Griffin initial plan and its subsequent amendments. The central part of the city is a series of layers over time and is critical to an understanding of the symbolism and meaning of the National Capital as the symbolic heart of the nation. It reflects the essence of the Griffin plan, subsequent changes introduced by John Sulman and the FCAC (1921-24) followed by FCC planning (1925-29) and Thomas Weston's innovative contribution, and post-Second World war planning that has seen the development of Lake Burley Griffin and foreshores at the centre of the city as a serenely elegant setting for national buildings.

The central precinct is the hub of historic Canberra and the focus for the city's international recognition as a planned community with city beautiful and garden city planning ideals. It contains and emphasises the major natural landscape elements of Black Mountain, Mt Ainslie, Mt Pleasant, and City Hill, all of which were central to the Griffins' landscape setting for the city.

The historic heart of Canberra meets the following criteria of outstanding universal value for the inclusion of cultural properties in the World Heritage List:

- i. represents a masterpiece of human creative genius;

¹⁹ Meinig D W, (1979), Introduction in Meinig D W, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, p.2, Oxford University Press, USA.

- ii. exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time, on developments in town-planning and landscape design;
- iii. is an outstanding example of a type of architectural ensemble and landscape which illustrates (a) a significant stage in human history and (b) meets the test of authenticity in design and setting.

Additionally the precinct meets the description of the following category of cultural landscapes adopted by the World heritage Committee:

Clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man.

Currently Canberra is being reviewed in the light of the 2003 Regulations of the 1999 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act for nomination to the new national heritage list. It is my contention that this should be a precursor to serious consideration for world heritage status for Canberra as a major twentieth century town planning achievement with its associated meanings and statement of values as an Australian icon. This sentiment was aptly summarised seventy years ago by the historian W K Hancock (1930) in his book Australia:

Canberra is interesting, both as a document of Australian life, and in itself; its story is worth telling at length.

Abstract

Canberra, Australia's national capital, had its genesis in ideals of the Australian landscape. Site choice in 1909, the Griffin winning design in the 1911 international competition, and subsequent development have focussed on the concept of the city in the landscape. Symbolically fundamental to the city's image is its overall landscape setting and how the surrounding landscape flows into the city to create a green skeleton which articulates the city's form. It is the city's landscape setting from the surrounding hills through the open space system of the city right down to individual street-tree plantings that form a tangible physical framework. But it is a framework that has distinctive intangible values where culture and nature meet.

As the city grows and demographics change how can the setting of the city in landscape image and its associated symbolic values be maintained whilst accommodating urban consolidation and increasing densities in contrast to the traditional suburban mode. Is it possible to maintain the leafy city character and its social values? The city continues to fulfill a national role and local community role. But tensions are apparent as the city examines ways in which sustainable growth can be achieved and have the potential to question the very landscape basis of the city where culture and nature meet.

The paper will look at the values of the setting of this unique city, critically review their formation, and discuss options for the future.

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Fig.1 Panorama of landscape setting of Canberra



Fig.2 View from Parliament House



Fig.3 Setting of Curtin a 1960s Canberra suburb



Fig.4 Nature in the city: lake Burley Griffin



Fig. 5 King Edward Terrace street planting: *Platanus acerifolia* and *Quercus palustris*

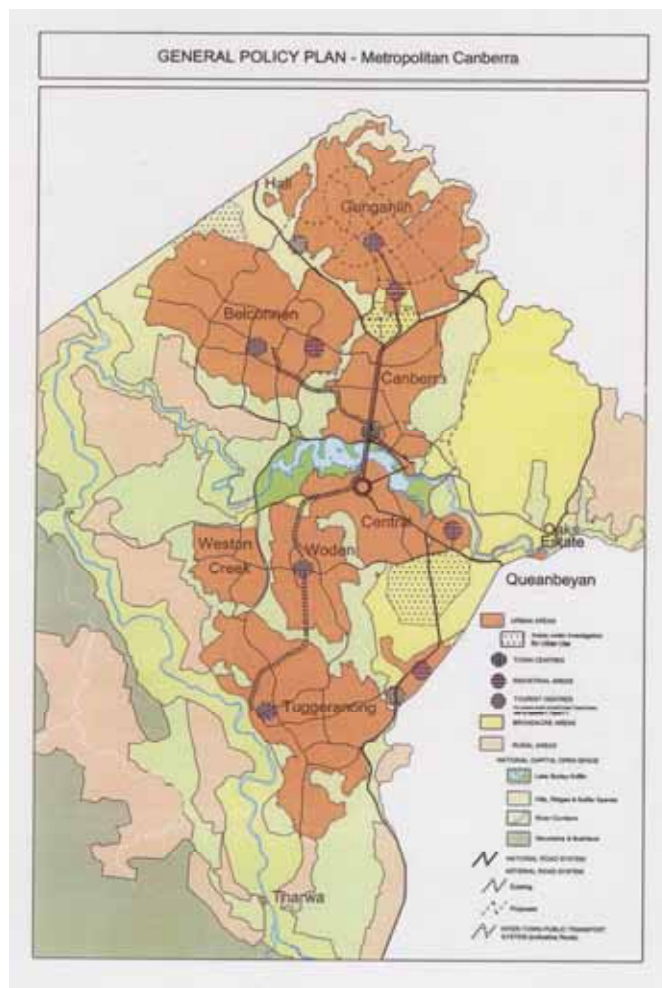


Fig.6 Metropolitan Canberra showing Y Plan configuration