

Leading Canberra Forum

Sponsored by Australian Institute of Management and MAW Action, supported by Canberra Business Council

On 27 October a group of ACT Leaders assembled in the Legislative of Assembly Reception Room to talk about how a leadership alliance might be established in Canberra. This workshop was in response to a survey Charles Landry's conducted a year ago with 150 leaders who self-rated our city. Canberra passed with a respectable 5.4 out of 10, but scored poorly on leadership, with just 3.4 out of 10. This meeting was conducted after a number of barnstormers met late last year after Landry's last visit to discuss the problem. The barnstormer's at that time were head of CMD, head of MBA, head of CBC, a representative from the Airport and head of ACTPLA and head of MAW Action.

The workshop (on 27 October) of leaders assembled to look at how this might be turned around. A group of 55 young people had assembled in the same room earlier that day and self-rated the city and the information was reported to this embryonic Leadership Alliance working group. The outcome of the youth survey was more positive than the middle-aged sector conducted the survey a year earlier. Importantly, though they highlighted similar points to those raised by the older group last year and showed a similar frustration with the lack of a vision for the future of Canberra. The following table shows the results.

Canberra's Creativity Scorecard	150 established leaders in 2010	55 young leaders in 2011
Political & public framework	4.1	4.9
Distinctiveness, diversity, vitality & expression	5.2	6.1
Openness, trust, tolerance & accessibility	5.6	6.2
Entrepreneurship, exploration & innovation	5.5	6
Strategic agility, leadership & vision	3.4	5.7
Talent & learning landscape	7.4	8.2
Communication, connectivity & networking	5.4	5.9
Place & place-making	4.9	6.2
Liveability & wellbeing	7.5	8.1
Professionalism & effectiveness	5.3	5.8
Average	5.43	6.31

It was agreed that the embryonic Leadership Alliance working group would look at ways to lift the leadership of the ACT. Mary-Anne Waldren and Charles Landry met after this workshop and have written up notes on what this Embryonic Leadership Alliance might tackle first. Mary-Anne agreed to meet with members of the group and others to progress some of these ideas.

Embryonic Leadership Alliance

1. Harness the collective wisdom of Canberra to turn ideas into reality:

- A. Engage an experienced researcher who with the help of a reference group as well as planning and legal expertise, should conduct a series of targeted rules and incentives audits in as many areas as possible. The audit should cover all the aspects and dimensions that can make Canberra a better globally recognized city with a high reputation. Such an overarching audit will acknowledge recent work such as the Hawke Review.

The audit will provide a tangible and important foundation for Canberra to move forward with a real difference. The central question guiding the audit would be, “What does a knowledge-intensive city look and feel like in contrast to one more focused on being a government city”? This difference in focus is crucial since in a government city the workforce and politicians have to be there as the political institutions are there. By contrast the knowledge intensive city needs to attract and retain a mobile workforce, which has choices about where it wants to be. Crucially such a city needs an entrepreneurial and forward looking environment.

Within this framework the questions might be:

- What would the rules be for fostering a vibrant city? (refer to people who are doing this the broader cultural community and members of the youth leadership grouping)
- What would the rules be for being a green city? (consult Green politicians, business people etc)
 - What does a physically exciting city look like and what would its rules be? (consult interesting architects and urban planners etc)
 - What does a city with seamless connectivity look like and what rules and incentives need to be put in place? (consult widely on this)
 - What would the rules be for a vibrant business environment including fostering successful business incubators? (Consult in this area)

If vibrancy is important to a more knowledge intensive city there are many organizational issues to be addressed and the way institutions operate might need to be rethought, including planning or cultural ones.

The collective wisdom of Canberra will tell the city the necessary rules.

The audit will sharply reveal the difference in Canberra’s intent and vision and the capacity of its regulations and incentives system to help the city to achieve its aims. It will highlight

the extent to which the system in the city is a hindrance or a help to achieving its future vision and what gaps need to be bridged and what changes need to be made. Armed with this rules and incentives audit, key ideas can be presented to the city's leadership, such as: "You say you want these things. You can't unless you change this..."

B. An integral part of the audit is to highlight examples of where else in the world a more imaginative rules and incentives system or creative bureaucracy has been harnessed.

2. Reinforce and broaden the Canberra story. An important task for the Leadership Alliance which connects to the audit noted above is to strengthen and broaden the story or vision of Canberra as a clever, entrepreneurial city and not only one concerned with government and the butt of jokes. Crucially this needs to be projected to the outside world not in a simplistic way based on slogans and tag lines, but rather more a concerted long term strategy to change Canberra's image. Amsterdam's marketing approach, is one useful example, to assess and learn from.

3. Foster horizontal networks. A second focus and aim of the leadership alliance is to foster cross-sector links within the city in order to achieve joint buy-in about the city's future and strategic ambitions. Canberra has excellent vertical networks in a variety of fields, such as government, community, science, business and youth.

4. Involve youth in committees. Canberra has such a depth and breadth of talent in its young people that is ripe for tapping into. The fact that this excellent resource has been grossly under-utilised was obvious during the youth forum. Many individuals commented at how surprised they were to find themselves in a room full of the sort of skilled young people they were sitting next to and discussing issues with. This had not happened to them before. These are our future leaders and should be invited to participate on government, business and not-for-profit boards and community meetings. They have energy, drive, enthusiasm, skills and creative talent to burn. Mentoring of young people by the wise who have time to share and knowledge to impart is also important. Mary-Anne Waldren and others have great networks in this area.

Potential alliance members A group of people will be asked to assist to take this journey.

People throughout the world could be consulted on this, as Canberra's critical friends, including Charles Landry, former Mayor Jeremy Harris etc... Larry Beasley, former head of Vancouver urban planning and now advisor of many cities.

BACK GROUND INFORMATION

Maximising Canberra's potential

Canberra is a complex place, much loved and much maligned at the same time: "I love it' and 'I think it's dull and boring'. Some say: 'Stop hugging yourself Canberra' and others say: 'you don't know what you've got'. Some say Canberra: 'is too comfortable with itself

and self-satisfied' and that it can become 'a tender trap', others say 'I can see things are happening and its beginning to move'.

It is a place reflecting high aspirations of its founders and a sense of itself as very special and distinctive. Yet is it a typical city in our common sense understanding? There is Civic with the vast parliamentary triangle attached and cultural institutions. To walk from one end to the other seems inconceivable. And then far away in the distance, but a short drive by car, are the suburbs. Canberra is 'monumentalism combined with suburbia' as one commentator noted. An unusual mix.

The core of Civic itself has the familiar pattern of most cities of its relatively small size: shops, cafes, offices and places to recreate. Then there is a vast appendage that belongs to the nation, a set of museums, a parliament, monuments. Would we build such a city again today? Would we build it differently? Perhaps smaller scale, perhaps with greater intimacy, perhaps a focus on putting the physical fabric together so we interact, perhaps more geared to peoples' sensory experience of place? But we have what we have. How can we make the most of it?

Canberra has, in some important quarters, an old fashioned view of how you put a city together. Very hardware and infrastructure focused. Very much seen from the air, very spatially planned images, very prescriptive, still often separating functions. Instead Canberra needs recalibrating and rebalancing. Canberra's leading planners know this, but they are often forced into their departmental boxes. A greater emphasis on the software of the city is required and how the city works as a living organism. This is the cultural perspective that looks at the city from the ground. It focuses on how a city feels and is experienced emotionally and psychologically. It taps into and works with the local imagination and goes with its grain and then overlays a global and cosmopolitan flavour on top. This usually creates vibrancy and soul. When these aspects work well they tend to have spin-offs. The city becomes an attractor, thus supporting its economic and social life too.

To make Canberra become the best it can requires a new alignment between the insights of experts in the physical domain, in design, in economic life, in animation, in how human relations work as well as those who are culturally attuned and understand shallow and profound trends.

This is an organisational challenge. It requires cross-sector interdisciplinary thinking and working, the breaking down of silos knowledge and experience where open-mindedly Canberra gives itself the opportunity to look at itself in a 360% way. This approach asks: 'What could make Canberra great' and 'how can what I know help'. This is truly blended or integrated thinking, where a group develops together and you might change your views and seek new solutions as you understand different perspectives. This is contrasted to multidisciplinary working where the expert gives their views that remain largely fixed.

Canberra has a dilemma, as a young city has seen less reuse and refashioning, which helps build up the patina of cities we admire. This constant renewal and experimentation is what allows the incidental and the unplanned to come to the fore. The challenge is to plan for non-planning ... that is to allow things to evolve.

Overcoming the gridlock

Strong differences in opinion on practically every measure were a central conclusion drawn from measuring Canberra's pulse last year. This was echoed last month. For example, on the question of how professional and effective the city is two people in the same meeting said: 'Canberra is highly professional' and another noted: 'Canberra is a notorious non-finisher.' The city still functions, it is moving on, new developments are hitting the ground and the gridlock might not be noticed for most Canberrans day to day. The differences are expressed largely in a genteel way. Yet the danger of falling into a gridlock is very real. It concerns entrenched views about where the city is and what it could become. It is here that the bigger issues involved about the long term future of the city 10, 20, 35, 50 years ahead are played out. Public sector, private sector and community views differ sharply, yet they need to align at least at the level of core principles and strategic direction.

Importantly too there is another consideration that the broader public is less aware of namely the interface of administrators with the political sphere. This overlay within which the public sector operates ultimately has a significant influence on how decisions are made, so public officials can be blamed for things which are often out of their control. There is a tendency to say its 'them', when in fact it could be political processes.

Yet standing back beyond the fray there is little or at least less disagreement about what people, not all of them, want from Canberra. They want it to be a multilayered experience where urbanity, verve and some style in Civic mixes well with strong sub-centres that have character, heart and a vibrancy of their own, such as possibly in the future places like Woden and Belconnen if their sense of urban design and quality lifts up dramatically. Many people also want a Canberra where it is possible to enjoy a level of relaxed calmness away from any hubbub with the opportunity for vitality that is accessible.

Canberra needs a new alliance to bring the different parties, public and private, together. The creative city index revealed sharp differences of opinion and entrenched perceptions between the different sectors. The city can only move forcefully forward to the next evolution of Canberra if this gridlock is broken and this involves in part rethinking some of Burly Griffin's precepts. Otherwise energy, resources and intellectual effort will be wasted.

Canberra has immense opportunities. It is big enough to be taken seriously and small enough to make it happen. In principle at least. It is ideally placed to be a poly centric city with a strong heart and central core and various hubs of vitality and economic viability. Each hub can be more self-contained with boundaries so they have a beginning and an end without an endless sprawl that over time merges all the settlements into one. This allows Canberra to be both big and small at the same time.

Canberra owns the land, it can decide what to do. It is in a unique, privileged position to do things other cities cannot even imagine.

Big decisions lie ahead for Canberra, many of which have been discussed for a very long time, such as: 'What is the shape and form of the future city?', 'Will it densify and if so where?' or 'How will we manage to get light rail?' or 'How will Canberra's perception be changed?' and 'How will Canberra get on the global radar screen?' as well as 'How do we diversify and enliven the experience of Canberra?' and 'How will Canberra show it is green?' For Canberra it is not the question of intellectual capacity, knowledge or talent in

moving forward. Canberra's knows how to discuss things, the issue is more how to get joint agreement to get things done and a pathway to get there. Six years ago I focused on the idea of green urbanism as Canberra's distinctive attribute, six years on this is even more urgent.

At this juncture it is more important to have an organisational format within which these ideas and options can be discussed. For Canberra having the ideas is easy, getting agreement to make them happen is a different matter. This is why Canberra forces should align to overcome the gridlock and to create the next evolution of Canberra, that is sustaining in every sense, that provides a rich and varied experience, that pleases the senses and emotions and that combines 'ordinary' with interesting surprises that make its urban experience extra-ordinary.

By Charles Landry and Mary-Anne Waldren
1.11.11