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Geographical Research, 2021; 59(3):394-406

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which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12466>

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30 August 2023

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/130910>

Waterfront regeneration in Australia: Local responses to global trends in reimagining disused city docklands

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Abstract

This article applies ideas about critical urban assemblages to understand the planning processes, politics, and delivery of waterfront regeneration from an Australian perspective, drawing on the Port Adelaide waterfront in South Australia as a case study. Waterfront regeneration is associated with global economic deregulation, market-led development, changes to planning regulatory requirements, and “streamlined” governance arrangements. The global spread of waterfront regeneration is an outcome of such processes, with individual waterfronts being “remade” and reimagined to reflect priorities emphasised by those forging urban policies linked to inter-urban competitiveness and neoliberal urbanism. Waterfront developments may be categorised as “models” of success or failure that limit deeper analysis that can advance theory and practice. How such projects reflect interactions across local and global scales rather than just being expressions of global forces is a question often ignored; so, too, are those considering how policy and politics mediate those relationships. Ideas, strategies, capital, people, policy, and politics are dynamic, provisional, and contested, and are produced and assembled in particular ways to suit specific spatiotemporal contexts. On that understanding, the aim of this article is to highlight how the Port Adelaide waterfront is undergoing assembly and reassembly to reflect socioeconomic priorities and metropolitan planning agendas.

KEYWORDS

Australia, community participation, critical urban assemblage, sustainable environments, urban planning, waterfront regeneration

1 | INTRODUCTION

Waterfront regeneration is now prevalent in cities worldwide, extending beyond post-industrial cities and urban centres in the West to include economies in Latin America, the Gulf States, and South East Asia. Generally, waterfront regeneration has been linked to economic deregulation, market-led development, the relaxation of planning, and “streamlined” governance arrangements. The spread of waterfront regeneration is one

manifestation of these structural and global processes, with individual waterfronts being “remade” to reflect the priorities of urban policies linked to competitiveness and neoliberal urbanism (Boland et al., 2017).

Accounts arguing for the success of urban waterfront regeneration have tended to draw their evidence from select perspectives such as those offered from architecture (Breen & Rigby, 1996) and urban design (Bruttomesso, 2001), or from the perspective of wider city/regional strategies (Schubert, 2011). Alternatively,

the redevelopment of waterfront land has received attention because of a failure of planning (Dovey, 2005; Searle & Byrne, 2002), community engagement (Bounds & Morris, 2001; Oakley, 2007), tourism (Craig-Smith & Fagence, 1995; Harvey, 1992), and real estate (Dovey, 2005; Oakley, 2014). Authorities worldwide face the challenge of balancing these diverse stakeholder interests—in particular of activating high-profile redundant spaces that are often at the heart of cities—increasing economic investment and accommodating current and future generations in well-designed sustainable environments.

Similar goals continue to be pursued, if on a smaller scale, elsewhere in Australia. One current project at the Port Adelaide waterfront is typical of waterfront renewal activity worldwide (Figure 1). The regeneration of this waterfront site is widely regarded as a pragmatic solution to offsetting social and economic decline and environmental degradation through bolstering economic development, investment and competition. Situated 15 km from the city's central business district, the inner harbour is considered an ideal location to support the current orthodoxy of high-density transit oriented urbanism.

Within a planning context this redevelopment has relied on a leverage style of urban planning (see

Key insights

By focusing on key dimensions of critical urban assemblages, it becomes apparent that the Port Adelaide waterfront has been assembled and reassembled to reflect particular temporal and spatial contexts and interests. The article offers key examples of these trends as evidence of shifting socio-economic priorities and metropolitan planning agendas.

Galland & Hansen, 2012, p. 208) and involved the State government incurring the costs of remediation of contaminated land in and around the inner harbour. While the focus has been on recapitalising the inner harbour land by means of high-rise residential development and new economic activity, the State government has been keen to promote how the redevelopment would generate much needed local employment. Expectations of more than 6,000 jobs in full-time construction and 2,000 spin off jobs in service, hospitality, recreation, and tourism were offered as additional benefits for the overall region

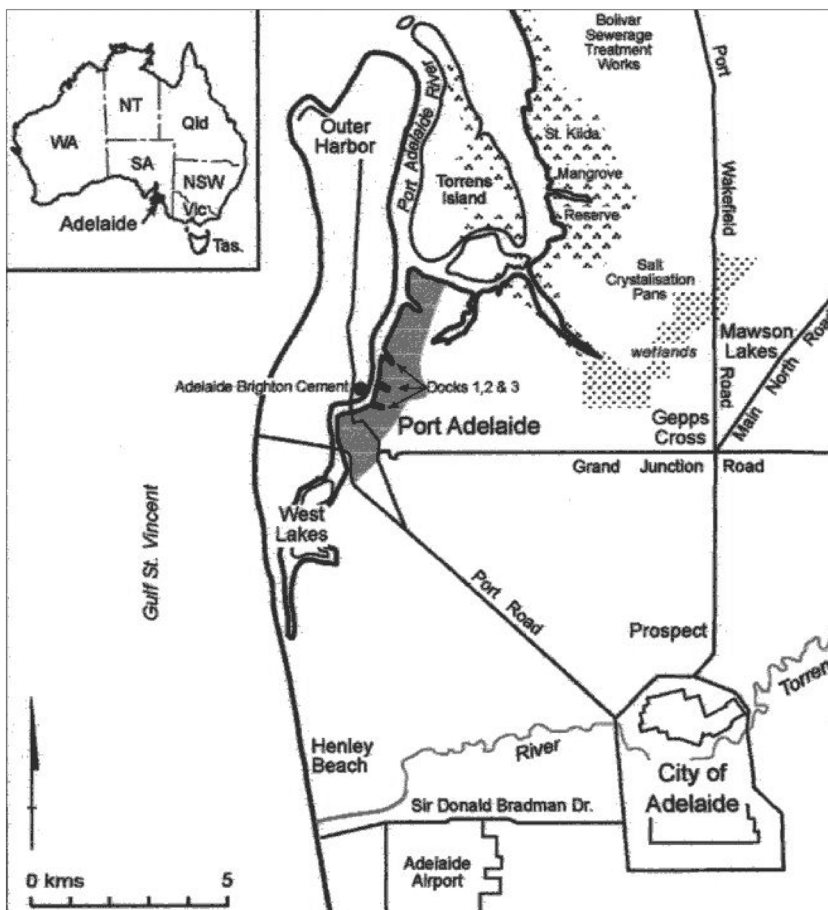


FIGURE 1 Map of Port Adelaide inner harbour: Study site map

(Wheatley & Craig, 2003, p. 3). The Port Adelaide area had come to be characterised by rising unemployment as an outcome of the closure and relocation of traditional industries and shipping which rendered the inner harbour as an abandoned and lifeless space. Hence new employment opportunities were considered vital in an area experiencing long-term socio-economic difficulties.

This article provides a critical analysis of and reflection on the progress of this redevelopment (see Oakley, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that waterfront regeneration programs span several years. The Port Adelaide waterfront was publicised as a development that would take between 10 and 15 years to complete (Wheatley & Craig, 2003, p. 3). Work on remediating the site started in late 2004 after the appointment of a developer consortium entrusted to plan and deliver a revitalised inner harbour. The original concept plan for the waterfront outlined the building of eight distinct precincts of mixed new economic land-uses: residences, retail, tourism, and commercial. By late 2007, two precincts of the redevelopment had been completed and consisted of high-rise apartments and two and three-storey townhouse dwellings. The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was used to explain the general downturn in urban development and new construction initiatives across Australia, and the postponement of more development of the Port Adelaide waterfront land. However not every country was affected by the crisis and not all nations experienced the same degree of economic decline. Yet the prevalence of the global doctrine of neoliberalism remained with its imperative of the private sector and markets (Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 2002). While it is important to consider the place-specific practices of neoliberal capitalism as part of an explanation, the regeneration of the Port Adelaide waterfront was and continues to be a source of possibility, challenge, and contradiction. The degree and type of neoliberalism in any particular environment is, however, an empirical question (see McGuirk, 2012) that can be more fully explained by what is known as a critical urban assemblage approach. That is, redevelopments of this nature are not solely the result of a neoliberalised urban regeneration paradigm but one element in the constellation of factors, approaches, tensions, and contradictions.

This article thus extends waterfront regeneration studies by adopting a critical urban assemblage framework to examine the aspirations for, the failings of, and how the Port Adelaide waterfront is being reimagined. Textual analyses of policy, media, government reports, and marketing are offered as empirical data. In the next section a concept of critical urban assemblage is outlined. The merit of this lens is that it enables an examination of the contextual importance

of relations between stakeholders, the place of community, economic context, and material factors such as land values and housing demand, and cultural matters such as history and preferred leisure activities in urban development. A failure by the developer consortium to gain approval to increase the scale and density of the development, as outlined in the master plan and followed by the GFC, resulted in it being temporarily suspended. This matter is examined in sections three to five, which cover key components of the redevelopment over three decades, and which highlight in different ways how techniques of governing, politics, and participation were reassembled to accommodate a different spatial-temporal setting (McCann & Ward, 2011) for a reimagined waterfront landscape. The work to reimagine that landscape was reflected in what was the second decade of the redevelopment. I show how critical urban assemblage offers insights into the differences between the first and second decades of the regeneration of the inner harbour: the *politics* of governing; the *reimagining* of the inner harbour that would include the Port Adelaide centre; and the *reintegration* of public participation into the planning system. This revitalisation is still in progress and 2021 heralds a new decade, and for the Port inner harbour, a third decade of development. The focus of the discussion is confined to the period between 2002 and early 2020.

2 | CONCEPTUALISING CRITICAL URBAN ASSEMBLAGE

In Deleuzian philosophy, the term *assemblage* describes a framework used and applied in different ways to analyse social complexity by accentuating fluidity, exchangeability, and multiple functionalities (see Marcus & Saka, 2006; McFarlane, 2011). For example, assemblage emphasises the composition of a range of elements: ideas, policies, strategies, capital, people, and cultures into “some form of socio-spatial formation” (Anderson & Macfarlane, 2011, p. 124). The term assemblage can be “analytic, a descriptive lens or an orientation” (Marcus & Saka, 2006, p. 102). It emphasises processes, relationships, and the provisional nature of sociospatial formations. That is, it is a useful lens by which to explore how elements come together. These elements are dynamic and provisional and may contain tensions and contradictions.

The phrase *critical urban assemblage* suggests that there are key features of *urban assemblage* and *critical urbanism* by which to highlight the capacity to realise what Lefebvre (1996, p. 158) called the “right to the city;”

that is, a “right to urban life” in both present and future tenses.

Thinking first about *urban assemblages* provides a way forward to secure a right to the city. Rather than focusing on cities as “resultant formations,” those working with urban assemblage approaches understand the city as “an object which is relentlessly being assembled at concrete sites of urban practice” through the actions of multiple actors (Farias, 2010, p. 2). McFarlane (2011, p. 208) suggests that the idea of an urban assemblage offers to critical urbanism a *descriptive orientation* to urban inequalities that emphasises how urban inequality is historically produced by changes in capitalist endeavour and how the urban form and urban living might be more “justly reconfigured” in relations across political, economic, community, and activist domains (McFarlane, 2011, p. 210).

Finally, urban assemblage approaches offer to critical urbanism ideas about *the imaginary of assemblage* as “collage, gathering and composition” in ways that reveal different forms of “elite-driven and regressive urbanism” (McFarlane, 2011, p. 219). This kind of regressive cosmopolitan urbanism is at the expense of more progressive variants that enable active participation in and access to the city for a range of groups. Progressive cosmopolitanism of the kind revealed by urban assemblage approaches is “concerned with a right to the city through a politics of recognition which has the potential to generate new urban knowledges, collectives and ontologies” because it highlights many issues and concerns across a range of identity formations—among them class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (McFarlane, 2011, p. 221). Urban assemblage therefore draws attention to processes of assembly and reassembly of the built environment.

While urban assemblage can be a useful lens to explore how elements originate and hold together, in and of itself it does not suggest a *critical* understanding of these or alternatives to the status quo. In addressing such matters, Li (2007) argues for an analytic of assemblage that includes reference to the political economy. Useful to this discussion is scale. Howitt (2003) notes that in human geography the concept of scale is not confined to physical size; rather, it can refer to social processes, social conflicts, and contestations in place as these pertain to changes in production, consumption, and social relations. Scale can therefore highlight the fact that sites-as-space are not benign but are contested and political and can offer alternative socio-political practices of land-use and of everyday living.

The ways in which agency is conceived and critiqued offers another dimension to *critical urbanism* (McFarlane, 2011, p. 215) especially when the focus is on

agency and action and on how materials are used to forward advance particular agendas. What is important is how materials function not simply as objects but as processes that are put to work to achieve for particular aims. For example, policy documents or promotional materials are produced to communicate and direct particular specific actions. These materials also become part of the processes that bring actors together in their “dissolution, contestation and reformulation” (McFarlane, 2011, p. 218).

To explore possible alternatives to such socio-political practices, I make use of Marcuse’s *critical urbanism*. Critical urbanism refers to “critically exposing the positive and possibilities of change, implying positions on what is wrong and needing change, but also on what is desirable and needs to be built on and fostered” (Marcuse, 2009, p. 185). First, those using critical urbanism seek first to *expose* by understanding the basis of the urban problem and communicating clearly and broadly the analysis. Understanding the urban problem rather than problematising the landscape and local communities is therefore emphasised. Second, critical urbanists seek to *propose*—working with those affected to come up with proposals, programs, and strategies to achieve better forms of urban life. Theirs is a participatory approach that necessitates eliciting wide-ranging community views in the planning and land use decision-making process. Finally, they seek to *politicise*, “clarifying the political action implications of what is exposed, proposed and has informed action.” This work involves raising issues with and through social movements, community groups, and policy-makers in both the day-to-day politics and in organisational strategy. Critical urbanism therefore is premised on a participatory and socially just approach to urban development.

3 | DECADE I: REZONING AND REVITALISING THE INNER HARBOUR OF PORT ADELAIDE

Despite the inherent social mix of the population, Port Adelaide’s inner harbour has long been characterised as requiring an urban solution to deep-rooted problems. A recurrently promoted theme was the geography of socio-economic decline, underpinned by external and negative perceptions of the inner harbour and surrounding port. Indeed, Port Adelaide has been harshly referred to as “Port Misery.” The origins of this name are entrenched in political feuding that emerged after early European colonisation and reveal a complex interplay of political dynamics and social perceptions that were projected onto the region.

Since the 1970s, the inner harbour has been subject to various master plans. Political will to invest in and revitalise the site waned until the early 2000s (Rofe & Oakley, 2006). Redeveloping the waterfront from mid-2005 reflected a shift in planning and practice. The Land Management Corporation (LMC), a corporate body of the State government, was given responsibility to coordinate, plan, and manage the redevelopment. Like many quasi-government authorities across the country, it was mandated to promote a “competitive environment” in land-use management and land sales across the state (LMC, 2006).

The redevelopment tender methodology and the financial arrangements organised between the State government—via the LMC—and the successful developer would see a shift in the balance between public interests and commercial imperatives. In a closed tendering process, a consortium was appointed that comprised local, national, and international property-related businesses working under the name of Newport Quays. Any details relating to the expected costs of staged payments on completion of each of the eight planned precincts or agreed timeframes with fines for non-compliance were protected by confidential agreements between the consortium and the LMC. The planning rationale was visibly oriented towards the real estate market (Galland & Hansen, 2012, p. 208). Under the Development Agreement, the State government would financially benefit from any upward speculation in the real estate prices (Public Works Committee, 2003, p. 17).

While the decision to regenerate the inner harbour was largely welcomed by local residents and various local organisations, concerns were raised about aspects of the redevelopment. Those concerns related to a lack of meaningful participation in how the waterfront land would be revitalised and an inability to publicly scrutinise tax-payer costs and private sector profits associated with the redevelopment. All that was known was that the State Labor government would bear the cost of remediating the site before handing the land to the developer consortium. There was more concern that the same concept plan developed by the consortium mirrored the legislative changes to the State Development Act 1993 which enabled the rezoning of waterfront land from industrial to residential and commercial use (Figure 2). These concerns informed written submissions and participation at various forums organised by the LMC where local residents and community groups opposed the proposed scale and density of residential construction on the grounds that the development was considered out-of-scale with the surrounding area and would undermine the

cultural and maritime heritage of the waterfront land. Lack of affordable or social housing, urban infrastructure, and community services were additional sources of contestation during the consultation stage. There was concern that the redevelopment would be “re-imagined” into a space of “spectacle, symbolic economy and cosmopolitan living” (Lehrer & Laidley, 2009, p. 799); a speculative endeavour that is favoured by a select population who purchase into these newly built forms. It was publicly acknowledged that, despite community disquiet, the LMC was unwavering in having the redevelopment as outlined in the concept plan proceed. This obduracy would lead to ongoing distrust between local community groups, residents, and the LMC and highlight a lack of confidence within the community of public participation in planning (Oakley, 2009).

The pace with which the first two stages progressed through the planning application process in both local and State governments, and the momentum with which residences were purchased, gave reasons for the developer to propose that the density of apartment complexes could be increased beyond the heights earmarked in the master plan (Government of South Australia, 2003). However, the proposal to increase building heights to accommodate more apartments in stage three would yield unintended consequences for the developer. The local council joined residents to contest the proposed plan. The ensuing dispute received sustained media attention as concept plans were lodged, withdrawn, reworked, and resubmitted by the developer consortium. In each of the submissions presented, changes revealed an increase in the number of apartments, deviating from what originally had been planned (Todd, 2008a, p. 1). Delays in getting planning approval would dovetail with a weakening economy and falling housing and construction activity across the city and nation.

In mid-2008, reporters were noting that strong property sales within these precincts were over-estimated (Todd, 2008b, p. 5). Their commentaries were substantiated in 2009 by several well-publicised marketing campaigns launched by the developer. A range of inducements as part of the property purchase price were offered and included luxury imported cars, sports boats, a two-year period of 0% interest finance or a guarantee of three years of rental returns (Urban Construct, 2009, p. 17). Persistent market jitters, continued falling house prices, and the GFC resulted in a continued sell-off of properties within the developed precincts. In the spring of 2011, real estate agents were publicly offering apartment price reductions of over 50% off the original prices (Brock Harcourts, 2011).

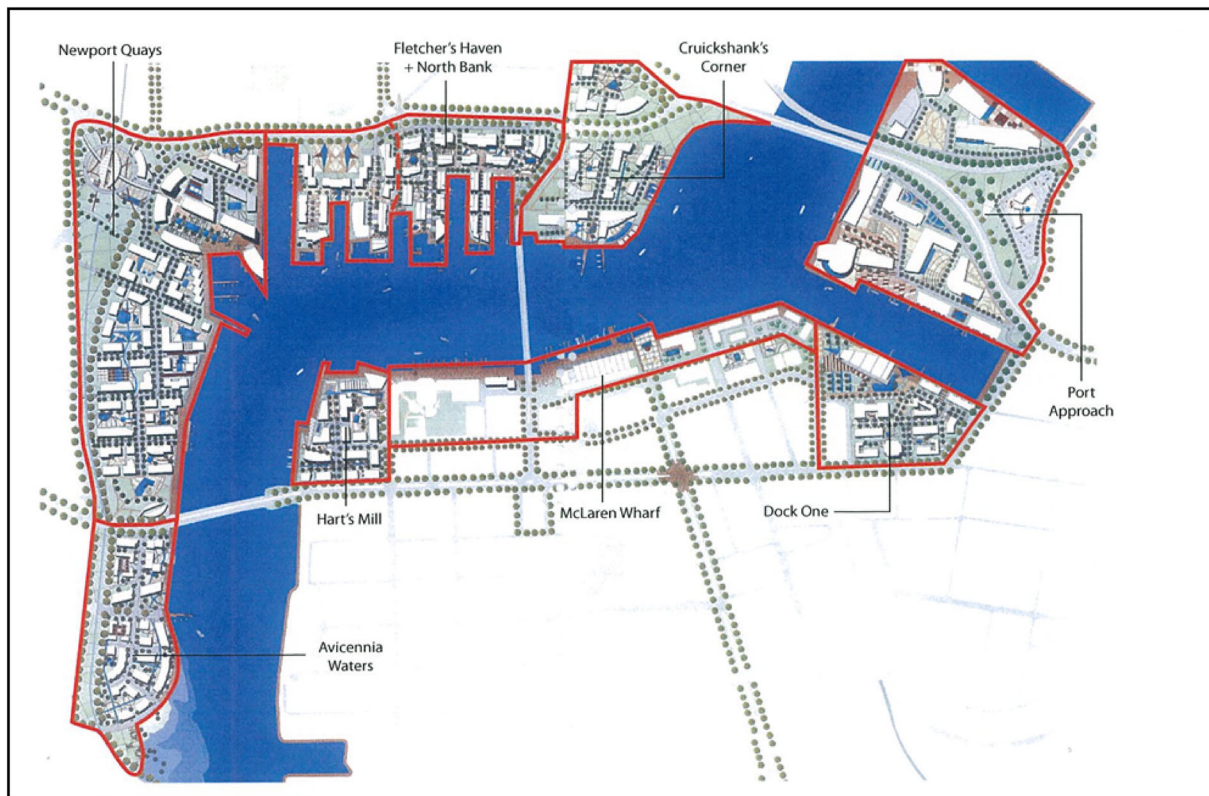


FIGURE 2 Newport quays waterfront master plan of the Port Adelaide inner harbour. *Source:* Renewal SA (2012)

4 | DECADE II: REVITALISING THE PORT ADELAIDE CENTRE AND THE INNER HARBOUR

Delays in the progress of the Port Adelaide redevelopment, falling real estate prices, and global economic uncertainty prompted changes to the planning and delivery of a redeveloped waterfront site. In the spring of 2011, the State government announced that it had terminated its contract with Newport Quays. Soon after the principal developer of the consortium, Urban Construct, began legal proceedings seeking AU\$100 million in damages. The initial contract between the State government and Newport Quays involved the construction of 1,500 apartments, of which only 415 apartments were built. After protracted negotiations a settlement of AU\$8.4 million was paid by the State government to Urban Construct (Boisvert, 2014, p. 15). With no developer, the State government instigated an alternative precinct-wide master plan broadened to include the integration of the Port Adelaide centre as part of the revitalisation of the inner harbour (Government of South Australia, 2011, Figure 3). The draft plan would involve a more thorough engagement with local government and local communities. This shift to an apparently more consultative and participatory approach was interpreted as a significant concession and

admission that private sector interests had been privileged at the expense of good planning, sound urban design, and attention to the local context (Tauriello, 2011, p. 4).

This period also signified changes to urban governance and practice. In November 2011, the LMC was replaced by a new State government body, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA). It was to have sole responsibility for all urban renewal projects across Adelaide metropolitan areas, including the Port Adelaide waterfront redevelopment. In a media release, the State government emphasised that the URA would ensure that urban renewal projects across the city met the “highest standards of planning and design” (Government of South Australia, 2011).

Within a year the State government would announce that the URA would trade under the new name of Renewal SA, which identified the importance of fostering and integrating people, partnership, and progress into planning, practice, and development:

The creation of Renewal SA represents a renewed commitment to community engagement and encouraging community involvement in the planning and design of our neighbourhoods ... Renewal SA will

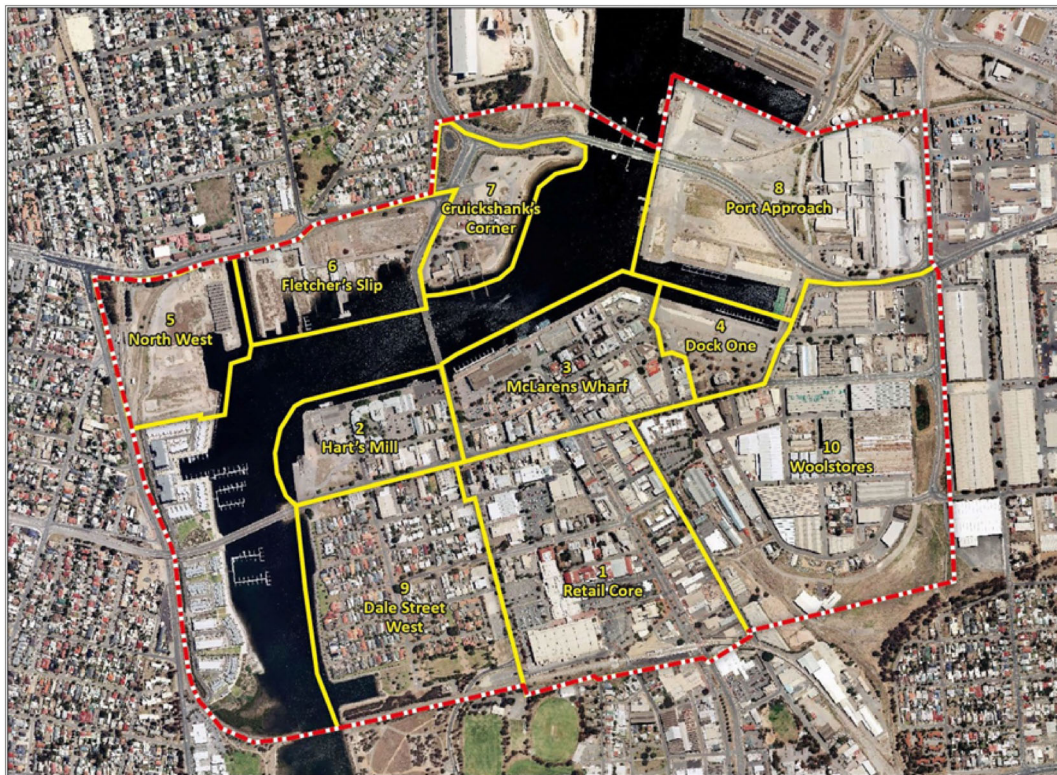


FIGURE 3 Study areas for precinct plan. *Source:* Port Adelaide Centre renewal development plan amendment (2014)

encourage participation and feedback at key stages of the redevelopment process to understand the unique attributes of a location and its community and foster a sense of place and custodianship. (Renewal SA, 2014)

This quote suggests that different collaborations, approaches, and expectations for urban development would be pursued.

In a further bid to restore community confidence, a public meeting with the Premier and senior public servants in attendance addressed more than 400 people in January 2012 (Bachmayer, 2012, p. 1). The focus of the meeting was to announce the drafting of the new master plan to reflect community aspirations for the inner harbour and Port Adelaide centre. Attendees were encouraged to offer written suggestions about how the revitalisation should proceed. The meeting was also used to announce the establishment of a steering committee consisting of business experts and community representatives from council, and tourism and maritime heritage sector organisations to help write the master plan (Bachmayer, 2012, p. 6).

In April 2012, the membership of the Port Adelaide Steering Committee (PASC) was announced, and it

included seven local residents. The decision to include locals on the PASC indicated that local participation in planning did have a role in urban regeneration. Shortly after that announcement, a series of community events were held to publicise and receive feedback on planned upgrades that had been lobbied for in the January public meeting. In October 2012, the PASC worked in conjunction with the State government to host a community open day that over 4,500 people attended. Written feedback totalling 1,500 responses was received during this event and reportedly it was used to inform the master plan (Government of South Australia, 2013) and several enhancements to the Port Adelaide centre and inner harbour. Improvements included suggestions for activating under-utilised streets and laneways; restoring certain key buildings; creating new public spaces; constructing walkways with interpretive signage and seating along the inner harbour; landscaping around the heritage-listed Harts Mill (Figure 4); repairing the boat ramp; and incorporating a recreational beach at a site known as Cruickshank's Corner (Brombai, 2013, p. 3).

The decision to adopt a more collaborative approach to, and engaged processes of, community consultation reflected a shift in planning practice for Port Adelaide. It echoes what Lefebvre (1996, p. 52) has referred to as a space of reflection to allow voices and actions of multiple



FIGURE 4 An artist's impression of the regeneration of Hart's Mill precinct. Source: Renewal SA cited in Boisvert (2014)

actors, capital, state, and communities to come together to contest and negotiate an alternate aspiration—in this case, Port Adelaide's inner harbour. And it echoes Marcuse's (2009, p. 194) call for participatory planning that actively elicits the aspirations of those who are being planned for and who may be affected by changes to land-use in planning decisions.

Diversifying the local economy by drawing on global trends has also been a notable focus in plans to reactivate Port Adelaide's centre and inner harbour. Local residents and community groups have long called for greater investment in the maritime heritage of the waterfront. One successful initiative has been the return of the *City of Adelaide* clipper ship from Scotland. Built in 1864 to carry passengers and cargo to Adelaide, the clipper will be moored within a historic "seaport village" of existing nineteenth century buildings along the waterfront frontage. To reflect the maritime trade of the inner harbour the seaport village will include other tall ships, shops that highlight the period, and a ship's chandler (Boisvert, 2013, p. 3). Attention has also been paid to promoting the contemporary relevance of the area through the hosting of various festivals. Of note has been the staging of the international indie Laneway Festival in early 2014 which attracted up to 6,500 ticket sales (Boisvert, 2014, p. 3). This highly successful event continues to be held at the Port.

While these suggestions for upgrades and activities were welcomed by local residents and business owners, they provide only a partial solution to the challenge of instilling confidence in new economic investment. Many of the shops and commercial buildings in and around the Port Adelaide centre continue to experience long-term vacancy rates exacerbated by the postponement of the redevelopment of the inner harbour. The two main thoroughfares, Commercial and St Vincent streets,

accommodated more abandoned or for-lease buildings, almost doubling those occupied by shops and government offices (McGregor, 2011, p. 37). At the same time, the local government envisaged that an additional 600-person workforce was required for the Port. Reactivating the Port Adelaide centre and inner harbour relies on establishing a more vibrant local economy to support diverse activities and multiple publics. A failure to reinvigorate the area rested in some part with the continued external perception that the Port Adelaide area was socially and economically stagnant. Relocating a government department and/or university faculty would signal a long-term commitment to, and investment in, the Port Adelaide area (Oakley, 2010, p. 7). It would also act as a much needed catalyst in attracting new business investment.

Then, in March 2013, the State government announced its intention to move some of its departments to the Port Adelaide area.

5 | DECADE III: A NEW VISION FOR THE PORT'S REVIVAL: POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

Relocating a State public servant workforce to Port Adelaide would be a protracted process spanning across both Australian Labor and Liberal Party governments. The 2014 election resulted in a new era for State politics with the Marshall Liberal Party coming to power. Work on a six-storey AU\$40 million office to accommodate 500 public servants had started under the previous Labor government. The newly elected Liberal government was left no choice but to continue the build despite arguing that it was a waste of tax-payer money (Henson, 2018, p. 25). Initially, the plan was to have staff from departments of

Premier and Cabinet, Transport, Agriculture, Environment, Renewal SA, and Services SA move into the new premises. By the spring of 2018, the Liberal Government announced 330 staff from Shared Services would relocate to Port Adelaide (Novak, 2018, p. 4). With a reduced number of government staff relocating, the State government would lease the two vacant floors to private sector companies (Novak, 2018, p. 4).

The relocation of a government workforce to the area was both material and symbolic. It reflects how public sector resources can positively be diverted into financial strategies that facilitate development opportunities and potentially different levels of production, consumption, and investment. Referring to Marcuse (2009, p. 185), it also offers an example of constructive image-building by government to “expose the positive and possibilities of change” and what can be “built on and fostered.” Ultimately, the State government failed to relocate the expected 500 staff to Port Adelaide. The 15 kilometre move out of the central business district produced strong objection by staff for reasons of aesthetics of working in an industrial area, increased travel time, and disruptions to their work-life balance. Media headlines such as “Too far, not aesthetic” (Wills, 2017, p. 1) were reminders of a sustained and externally imposed stigmatising narrative defining Port Adelaide and inner harbour (see Rofe & Oakley, 2006). In short, the assemblage and reassemblage of the built form is relational, provisional, and contestable. The relocation of government workers, albeit a smaller number than anticipated, signalled that the land-use for the Port could be reimaged.

In January 2014, a revised vision for the area, was released for public comment. The document known as

the Port Adelaide Precinct Plan outlined the reduction of building heights to three and five storeys rather than up to 12 storeys as proposed in the previous Development Plan. It also set out guidelines for future development of the town centre and the old wool store precinct. A government media release entitled “A 20-year vision for the Port’s revival” announced the Development Plan Amendment for Port Adelaide and presented a range of long term benefits for the area. It included the construction of 2,000 new residences to accommodate an increase in population of up to 8,000 people; the creation of 2,000 permanent new jobs; and the generation of between AU \$1–2 billion in investment (Government of South Australia, 2014). A notable shift in government thinking was the decision to procure, through tender, multiple developers to complete the construction of remaining precincts along the inner harbour. Written public submissions on the Port Adelaide Precinct Plan (PAR) closed on 18 March 2014, four days after the State election was held.

Of the three precincts identified for development, the North-West and Fletcher’s Slip was met with community contestation. An interstate company, Cedar Woods, successfully tendered to develop the 12.6 hectare site. Two-thirds of the proposed 1,300 homes would be two-to-four storey townhouses, and, in line with current legislation, 15% affordable housing would be included. The precinct would also include a promenade, plaza, and the refurbishment of heritage buildings (Holderhead & Eichler, 2016, pp. 14–15). The artist impression of the plan included the retention of Shed 26 (Figure 5). Built in 1956, Shed 26 was the last remaining sawtooth shed in the inner harbour (Figure 6).



FIGURE 5 An artist’s impression of Fletcher’s slip precinct. *Source:* Siebert (2019)



FIGURE 6 Shed 26. Source: Siebert (2019)

By December 2018, Cedar Woods revealed that the remediation work required to repurpose Shed 26 was substantial. Without the State government being prepared to meet the AU\$10 m remediation cost the shed would be demolished (Thomas-Wilson, 2018, 26). In a bid to appease public anger, Cedar Woods agreed to meet with the National Trust SA and SA Heritage Council to investigate how Shed 26 could be preserved (Bond, 2019a, 29). According to the SA Heritage Council, the shed met four of the seven criteria for heritage listing in South Australia. By April 2019, the State government announced that it would intervene and override any proposal to have Shed 26 heritage listed. The shed was demolished in July that year. The Environment Minister David Spiers justified this decision with the following qualification, “Our state needs investment ... Investors need certainty, or they will direct their funds elsewhere” (Bond, 2019b, p. 4).

The cost to remove Shed 26 should not have been considered in financial terms but rather should have accounted for its value materially, culturally, and historically to Port Adelaide and to South Australians. It was one of the last significant maritime artefacts that connected the Port centre and the inner harbour. Much of the Port’s shipping, manufacturing, and commercial architectural heritage remains in the Port centre. Numerous old factories, warehouses, shops, and banks exist in the centre of Port Adelaide, which is in close walking distance to the waterfront. The historic value of these buildings has prompted their renovation and reuse for different economic and cultural functions. Similarly, Shed 26 could have undergone adaptive reuse. Moreover, the shed offered a critical connectivity to these buildings and the inner harbour. Left remaining along the inner harbour is Harts Mill and the first slip way. The two remaining structures and Shed 26 have connections to the State and to other parts of the world. If Shed 26 had

remained with Harts Mills and the slip way it would have made the inner harbour unique, and the ongoing redevelopment of the waterfront a point of difference with other national and international examples of renovation and revitalisation.

The decision to demolish Shed 26 echoes back to a politics of scale. Urban actors are increasingly relying on strategies that can explain, justify, and “impose a link between a particular scale or scalar configuration” (Gonzalez, 2006, p. 838). As noted by Howitt (2003), this process is both discursive and material. More commonly, geopolitical and geoeconomic discourses can be used by urban actors to identify and characterise a site such as Shed 26 as a problem requiring a solution; the rationalities and strategies for transforming this site and the nature and scale of a proposed development to replace the problem. With the Fletcher’s Slip precinct proposal, the discursive-scalar dimensions arguably elevated the capacity of the market and economic factors to determine the scalar transformation of the site. It also revealed that public participation can be both selective and conditional, and in effect reduced to a consultative process that enables the public to voice their views to little or no influence.

Paradoxically, it is the maritime heritage and history of the waterfront that continues to be used in marketing. For example, on the website for Cedar Woods, Fletchers Slip redevelopment is being described in the following terms:

A port is a curious place. It offers safety and security yet can be a launching pad of dreams and adventure; the beginning of a new journey or a true sense of home. Fletchers Slip, with a rich history of ship building and restoration, was all of these things ... (Cedar Woods, 2020)

Like other cities around the world, Adelaide is currently in the grips of COVID-19. While the number of cases in Australia is well under 30,000 (at January 2021), the work on Fletchers Slip is slow. Visits to the display centre are by appointment only, and understandably, sales are sluggish. This is not the first time the redevelopment of the inner harbour has been affected by externally sourced challenges. Unlike the GFC, COVID-19 is having both economic and health impacts on communities and businesses. The inner harbour is now in the third decade of redevelopment. Is it possible in this next decade that the Port waterfront can emerge reimagined and revitalised as a world class, well-designed liveable environment for multiple publics and economic uses?

6 | CONCLUSION

Currently, two stages of the Port Adelaide waterfront have been completed. The GFC had a significant impact on the housing and construction industry in Australia, but it was not the primary contributor to ongoing construction being postponed. Nor can the redevelopment be categorised simply as a failure in planning. The remediation of environmentally degraded waterfront land and new residents living in the area were positive outcomes of this project. Similarly, the redevelopment cannot be labelled as the product of a neo-liberalised urban regeneration paradigm. The imperative of the market in driving this development was unsustainable because of the different agendas, aspirations, and tensions that would be played out between government, developer consortiums, and the public.

Critical urban assemblage is a means to examine how waterfronts can be reassembled to provide a new balance across the local and the global that can reflect local circumstances and needs. It is wrongly assumed that market-driven forces can or should be the primary arbitrator given the timeframes involved in the planning and delivery of projects of this nature and scale. Like many waterfront developments more, not less, state intervention is required as one means of mediating the uneven dynamic of economic growth and decline, stakeholder interests, and the public good. While other “models” of development can inform planning and practice, attention to local socio-economic needs that reflect local democratic processes and participation is important for ongoing momentum and broader meaningful engagement. Including community sentiment and aspirations into land-use decision-making processes is important in the reassemblage of a dynamic, relevant, and thriving Port Adelaide centre and waterfront. There is an opportunity to deliver a sustainable and liveable urban environment

inclusive of multiple communities. It is evident that pursuing residential densification continues to be a key policy direction; projects of this nature should also deliver socially sustainable outcomes in terms of dwelling, urban amenity, infrastructure, and services.

By focusing on elements of critical urban assemblage as outlined in this article, it is evident that the Port Adelaide waterfront has been assembled and reassembled to reflect particular temporal and spatial contexts and interests that implicate a range of geopolitically resonant scales. This observation is evident in two master plans that involved different levels of public engagement, aspirations, land-use function, and agendas. The disbanding of the LMC and the establishment of Renewal SA underscore how governance arrangements are provisional. Those leading the new government authority would publicly distance themselves from the predecessor organisation by announcing that they would undertake a very different approach to participation and consultation in urban planning. Attention to preserving the maritime heritage of the inner harbour as a trading port, streetscaping, and increasing open space were the outcomes of the level of community commitment to, and participation in, public forums. A reduction in building heights outlined in the latest master plan further underlies that public sentiment and involvement has a place in planning. Contrary to patterns that became evident in the first decade, multiple developers will be involved in the reassembling of the inner harbour. The challenge for the State government is going to be to determine how it continues to engage the private sector in this urban project given the dynamic interplay of history, politics, local communities, and current and future economic circumstances. As the Port enters into a third decade of redevelopment, the outcome is less clear given COVID-19 and, with it, economic recovery and business confidence.

Ultimately, to argue that this waterfront project is an example of a participatory and socially just approach to urban development remains premature. Creating opportunities for social and cultural diversity by including affordable housing should be an important part of this reimagined landscape. Reinstating and embedding *as practice* a more inclusive and meaningful consultation process involving multiple actors and stakeholders in decision-making is critical in the assembly and reassembly of the Port and inner harbour. Yet, for example, the destruction of Shed 26 went ahead despite public and community opposition. Considered to have material and symbolic significance as a maritime artefact, Shed 26 was also a reference to an external narrative of the Port—one of decay and stagnation. Privileging of the market to the detriment of meaningful and engaged wider community and public participation in the

planning of the Fletcher's Slip precinct reveals that the process of assemblage and r-assemblage is complex, contested, and provisional.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the anonymous referees for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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How to cite this article: Oakley S. Waterfront regeneration in Australia: Local responses to global trends in reimagining disused city docklands. *Geographical Research*. 2021;1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12466>