Civic Square Challenge
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Introduction

The Play, Creativity and Culture Symposium: Play for a Vital and Sustainable City was held over two days – 22 to 23 November – at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre and the Canberra Museum and Gallery in Civic Square, Canberra.

The event was organised by the Play, Creativity and Culture Project, Centre for Creative and Cultural Research in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, and co-sponsored by the City Renewal Authority and Canberra Museum and Gallery.
Participants

The Symposium was well-attended and vibrant, with the audience and speakers engaging with the many and varied ideas, and with each other throughout.

122 participants from over 40 organisations attended. They covered many sectors, including health and wellbeing, arts, urban design and planning, transport, landscape architecture, environment, policy, culture, scholarship and education (primary, secondary and tertiary).
Speakers

Challenged our assumptions

Cast light in dark and unseen places

Reconfigured our approach to our own practice

Iterated and modelled the importance of engagement, care, awareness, responsivity and compassion

Taught us things we didn't know

Shook up our perspective

Made us feel delighted, angry, shocked, bewildered, sad, heartened, liberated and inspired

Gave us many and varied tools to act

Were generous with us and with each other

Created connective tissue between ideas, and between people

Made us braver

Inspired us to do and be better

Played
Aim

Make the most of this rare opportunity.

Draw on the rich collective expertise, creativity and lived experience of the Symposium participants.

Generate ideas to improve life in cities for people – with a focus on life in Canberra – by making cities more playful: by enlivening spaces and creating places, and by enhancing the relationship between people and place.
Brief 1: Civic Square

Make Civic Square a more playful, people-centred and inclusive public space
Process

Each table is assigned a public segment

Each segment represents a group that tends to feel excluded and/or is not designed for in the public realm

Your job: to make Civic Square a more engaging and inclusive public space for your segment
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- Access to facilities - toilets, baby-change, waste disposal
- No food
- Safety - London Circuit
- Lack of shade - glare/heat
- Forbidding laneway approaches
- Mixed messages about water feature/water play
- Too much concrete
- Barriers to green space over road
- Boring/lacks variety
- Not convivial enough
- May be children's only experience of city - coming to theatre. Is imposing and unwelcoming. Says 'I don't belong here'.
- Not convivial enough
- Forbidding atmosphere - domineering excellence
- Outdated ethos
- Environment speaks to behaviour - quiet, sober, government
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- Outdoor waiting room
- Facilitates access to city
- Safe in terms of visibility
- Big
- Flat
- Near bus station and transport
- Space to run around
- Grass
- Water feature - giving options to play that are different
- Near cultural hubs - library, museum, theatre
- Sculpture
- Natural gathering place
What is safe and welcoming in Civic Square now?

- Cleanliness - sense of pride
- Proximity to water
- Good sight lines
- Good lighting
- Steps - multipurpose
- Colour

Families
What can you do to make it more safe and welcoming?

- Tunnel or bridge across road
  OR close London Circuit OR
  make 30km/h
- Canberra themed B16 shaded art piece
- Canopy
- Toilets and shower facilities
- Trees
- Food garden
- Pot plants
- Food stand - healthy treats
- Outdoor working artist studio
  that families can work with
- Bubbler
- Opportunity for active play
- Multiple use
- Self-activation capability
- Water jets
- Music
- Light
- Space for play bus
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Child-friendly water play
- Paddle pools
- Make it a beach
- Have changing tents
- Civic Beach - cocktails
- Ice cream stall
- 'Eels in jelly'
- Sand castle competitions
- Sand sculptures
- Surf lifesavers + nippers: teach water safety
- Wave machine
- Rock pools full of wildlife
- Movie nights + art projections (virtual/environmental)
- 'Whale watching'
- Ambient sounds
- BBQs - live prawns in pools you can catch and eat
- Tunnel with snakes and fishes on display
- Yoga classes
- Meditation
- Tai Chi
How can you encourage your segment to encounter unknown people in Civic Square?
How can you encourage your segment to encounter unknown people in Civic Square?

- Child-friendly water play
- Paddle pools
- Come to a beach party
- Learn to surf
- Handball
- Volleyball
- All pop-up and renewal
- Day and night
- Rock pool stays
- Deck chairs
- Beach umbrellas weighted down
- Big screen
- VR spaces/experiences
- Projection screens that come down at night on the buildings for projections
- Dress up ethos
- Bar
- Palm tree in boxes on wheels
Workshopping
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- We realise that we don't know the group well enough to know how to start
- Our group includes kids, which raises a whole other set of issues
- Racism
- Planners don't know the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues
- Activities around the Square not relevant
- Nothing to bring them here
- Lack of representation in collaboration - we don't know how to engage with them
- Invisibility in public space
- Not much designed to make them feel safer and secure
- Need a longer period of collaboration to get their view
- Name doesn't resonate and isn't identified well with space
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- Place to gather
- Potential for sense of belonging and connection

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Make Civic Square THE Welcome to Country place
- Give custodianship/ownership
- Increase cultural safety through welcome into space = Aboriginal flag/TSI flag
- Acknowledgement signage
- Yarning circles in natural place
- Seating and shelters
- CMAG + library special exhibitions and events + internships
- Characterised by self-determination and culturally mediated direction
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elected body
- Artwork - shared
- Artwork owned by Assembly made more public
- Music and food opportunities
- Cross generational interaction opportunities
- Acknowledge nature of indigenous families

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Tent Embassy - space for governance
- Interpretive signage or artwork that connects place to broader indigenous view of landscape e.g sign showing distance to other cultural sites
- Celebration and acknowledgement of sovereignty
- Identified jobs in arts, legislature and library
- Cultural celebration in public space - flexibility around fire/smoke ceremony
- Street art
- Signage in language
- Space for protest and demonstration/occupation /activism
- Assurance of not being moved on - especially by police
- Nans - focus on including grandmothers
- Decolonising space - place-based motifs as a minimum

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
Workshopping
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- Need more shelter to encourage lingering
- Opportunities for temporary works - including performance
- Big space hard to work with - laneways more interesting
- Funding for experimental projects - guerilla opportunities
- Materials - space able to be changed
- Formality hard to work with - very serious
- CMAG not very visible
- Legislative Assembly very sterile facade

Artists
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- CMAG is a big bonus for space
- CMAG has interesting small gallery space
- CMAG can shift from indoor to outdoor spaces
- There can be interaction between theatre and public space + complementary businesses
- People can see the artwork for free
- People come to Civic Square for culture - artists can reinforce this
- Already has identity as arts precinct, which is good, but doesn't feel like an artist's space
- Need to be considered more as an arts space - with different artists working on different spaces in different ways
- Space can form a canvas
- Increased activity can make space safer
What can your segment do in this space?

- Social interaction as engagement
- Laneways: lighting elements; kinetic works
- Interactive and humorous interventions in the space
- More welcoming
- Performances with food and drink
- Artist group pop-ups
- Curated programs through the space
- Choral performance - curated program (Hip Hop to Opera)
- Changing programs of public dance
- Readings - slam poetry, theatrical performances
- Embedded glow in the dark pavement inserts
- Kinetic art works in sensory garden areas
- Temporary events/pop-ups - art installations - Festival?
- Update water feature
- Masquerade Ball - mask making and costume making public workshop
- Legislative Assembly - temporary window installations
Workshopping
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- Design unappealing
- Dead space
- Unsafe
- Unwelcoming
- Thoroughfare
- Tickets too expensive
- Lacks cultural offer
- Activities are locked off - need to come out (e.g. Multicultural Centre well utilised for events and meetings but this is not visible)
- International students lack visibility in this space
- Location is pointless - what's here for us?
- Lack of shade
- Lack of amenities
- Space does not encourage social interaction
- Space not legible
- No invitations to contribute
- Too much open space
- Fear of stepping out of uni comfort zone
- Lack cultural knowledge to "read" most offerings of the cultural institutions
- Lack understanding of cultural norms for appropriate behaviour
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre has a cultural focus and supports multiple international community groups
- Somewhere central to meet
- Visibility if they are out in the community
- Opportunity to learn about local culture through lived experience
- Opportunity to make social contacts in an informal context
- A place of potential belonging
- A place for shared culture
- A place to develop new cultural competencies
- Can access the Gallery and the Theatre
- Good in winter
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Place where international students can leave their name
- Multilingual signage
- Intuitive design
- Busking
- Cultural shared food - international food markets
- Free Open Day shortly after start of term or maybe once a term on Thursday nights
- Small space 'rooms' for informal meeting
- Recharge centres
- Live stream another part of the world into Civic Square e.g. Nara Japan
- Flexible seating to allow for watching tutors/performances
- Musical stairs
- Events targeted at international students and Embassies
- Involve universities
- Green spaces/trees
- Activate the edges with spill out activities from Theo Notaras, CMAG, Theatre, Legislative Assembly
- Diverse seating - lounging etc
- Fire pit
- Sculpture park
How can you encourage your segment to encounter others in Civic Square?

- Speed meet
- Outdoor food markets with shared tables
- 'Eat Street' style - shipping containers
- Outdoor BBQ - e.g. Australia's longest 'international BBQ
- Cooking classes
- Artificial beach
- Badminton courts
- International games e.g. mahjong
- Parklets - using spaces for pop up picnics
- Outdoor karaoke
- Outdoor library (bookshelves, chairs)
- Outdoor 'language lab' - students can teach others
- Seating designed to encourage random conversations
- 'Help Desk' for students - linked to library
- Meet and Greet night
- Anti-stress activities
- Adult play - e.g. musical swing/steps
- Elected international student
  'Canberra' ambassadors
- partner with uni and other cultural groups for co-creation of place/ideas
Workshopping
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- Access to spaces e.g. stairs, traffic
- Transportation
- Lighting
- Visibility
- Speed
- Mobility
- Health: physical and mental
- Conflict between user groups (e.g. scary teenagers)
- Isolation - no one to live with (widowed)
- Homelessness
- Confidence vs fear e.g. fear of falling
- "New" or redefined roles of the 65+ e.g. new profiles - working/caring
- Perceived redundancy in the public realm - stereotype of uselessness
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- Possible social interaction
- Connection and belonging
- Access to entertainment - library, CMAG, theatre
- Free services
- Health - mental and physical (being outdoors, among others, movement)
- Diversity and inclusion
- Sharing knowledge - potential for intergenerational learning and exchange
What does your segment have to offer the public realm?

- Watchful eye - permission to help regulate the space
- Wisdom
- Cultural input
- Resilience
- Time
- Volunteering capability
- Experience
- Learning
- Ol Skool skills e.g. Men's Shed
- Keeper of historical narrative of place
- Responsive
- Problem-solving e.g. making do
- New relationships - intergenerational connections
What would make it safe and welcoming?

- Seating areas to meet and talk
- Shade/trees
- An interactive water feature
- Colourful lighting in laneways
- Safer access road - close or slow down London Circuit entrance
- Place on London Circuit to park small bus for small-medium groups
- Transport access
- Pop up workshops - attractions/build comfort
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Regular exercise classes - tai chi, pilates
- Relational seating - seating that generates conversation, people watching and sense of sociality
- 'Elder of the week' - elected and made available to engage with at certain times in Civic Square for advice
- Develop grandparent/grandkid activations
- CTC offer special sessions discounts for grandparent/grandkid program
- CMAG offer grandparent/grandkid art classes
- Shade to sit with strangers
- Intergenerational street art
- Storytelling - written/mural (artists and older people co-creating works)
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Close London Circuit - older people bring old cars to 'taxi' people around the block for fun and to engage
- Pop-up ('prop-up'?) workshops teaching traditional skills - showcase/train
- Old people with skills build the space e.g. develop prototype of a great urban seat/urban furniture
- Elder Assembly - bringing elders from different communities together to share stories
- Library - two-way storytelling: elders as human books sharing single narrative
- Adopt a grandparent
- Pet cafe
Workshopping
What are the issues with this public space for your segment?

- Lack of shade - hot/cold, exposed
- Big open and obvious
- No small spaces to congregate
- Cultural institutions inadvertently marginalise this group
- No cheap affordable food
- Hard - uncomfortable
- Serious/formal tone to space
- No toilets or supporting facilities
- Poor lighting in square and laneways
- Lack of colour and activity
What are the benefits of this public space for your segment?

- Meeting place to hang out and socialise
- Opportunity to adapt to civic life and citizenship
- Visibility - make their voices heard and presence felt
- Tangible and visible contributions to public space
- Ability to mentor others/younger kids
- Accessibility
- Playful affordances for physical and cognitive challenges and experimentation
What does your segment have to offer the public realm?

- Capacity to see playful affordances and to 'mess' with space and objects
- Innovation - without the thought of constraints, budget
- Native tech capacity
- Energy for engagement
- Skills, opinions, talents and ideas

Youth 13 - 18
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Play instruments/entertain for free on stage
- Work with schools and performance/art schools to engage and co-create a 'place' for youth
- Parkour
- Seek 'n' find mission to get to know the city
- Geocaching
- Experiment with shade
- Moveable chairs
- Levels
- Photography competition - display on outside of buildings
- Big screen - project/stream skateboard park in Belconnen into Civic Square
- Hammocks
- Colourful/brighter lighting - especially in laneways
- More bike racks
What can you do to attract your segment here?

- Bikes you can peddle on to control water height
- Ping pong on traffic walkways
- Rotating adaptation of sculptures/more playful sculptures
- Interactive walls - whiteboard quality; thermal walls
- Lights - glow in the dark if you lose phone
- More trees (like across the road)
- Science-based interactive sculptures
- Mural on the CTC ramp if possible
- More food options (mix of Braddon and pop-up ANU)
- Music (link place with music from Canberra region like Patrick (?) playing violin
Speakers

Malcolm Snow

Paul Tranter
Speakers

Quentin Stevens

Mike Horne
Speakers

Jaz Choi

Chad Toprak
Speakers

Jordan Lacey

Ruth McDermott and Ben Baxter
Speakers

Jo Norster and Millie Caitlin

Sayraphim Lothian
Participant Inspirations, insights and visions

Respect your audiences - be generous to them, They will give back

We don't have to overcomplicate things for them to be successful e.g. 200 Dolphin torches

Sound: bring the sounds of people to Civic Square - crowds. Maybe crowds connected with different Canberra events (cricket, parliament) and crowds of different cultures of origin for residents

Civic Square - more trees and shade. Integration with waterplay. No seating edge. Rolling lawn. Timber stage behind library

Easels (permanent) in Civic Square. Roundtable citizen's Upper House of Review. Shade, seats, sound, light - add them
Participant Inspirations, insights and visions

Playful interactions focused on government issues etc - to represent Canberra spirit!

What I took away - don't do it all at once. Get to know the space and observe how people are using it and build upon it. Leave spaces with the space for pop-ups.

New light rail goes out as well as in. Interventions that encourage people to go out to new neighbourhoods

Interactive lighting through alleys to Civic

Be brave and implement ideas without waiting for permission
Participant inspirations, insights and visions

Noise pollution can be made into music

Family game days (and food) in Canberra's grassy parks in spring or autumn

Artist commissions to create interventions in public spaces.
Sustain artist practices

Being able to slow down the process to respond to public need, especially when working for Govt. Sound difficult but I think it is important - and the balance between doing things too quickly vs slow is a fine art

Fascinated by play and the forbidden, illegal, unsanctioned, non-government behaviours
Participant Inspirations, insights and visions

The importance of sharing design with users throughout the process

Sound - hearing people's stories - quietly in public "sound poles" - so stories of international students and senior citizens. Tales of first arriving in Canberra

To activate public space we need to be BRAVE, be willing to get things wrong and be open to exceeding expectations

Night-time cycle for family events with lit up bikes and noise

More interactive playgrounds with children allowed to build or make things
I love the idea of a Night Mayor - to build a safe, vibrant and inclusive NTE for all. Challenge of activation on winter nights

"Deep Engagement Not Entertainment"
Fiona Robbe

Sound in the city!

Take over the many spaces in our national cultural institutions - transform them into play spaces for all!

I found it confusing that the word 'city' often meant the built environment then at times meant the people. It's both to me. And the unique culture of each city could be ranked on a playfulness index'.
I love the idea of being able to play games with complete strangers in unsuspecting places. I wonder if there is something intrinsic about the places that those kind of games can happen. Do they need a soul?

Sound - made local connections - looking at making construction noise pretty!

Imagine if cities were designed by poets, artists and photographers.

Risky play. Small booths for lying and seating.

Sweet moment: challenge to create innovation and change through small beginnings and installations.
Participant Inspirations, insights and visions

Play Your Street project - engagement of adolescents for random pop-up action

From Jaz: bloody talk to people!

It's all about the "video" games. Will definitely use these ideas!

Put all senses on the table when we're designing spaces for people who tend to think more traditionally

Place can be linked to history and ownership, whether through sound, light or interaction
Participant
Inspirations, insights and visions

Digital: an app that connects Civic Square to other places in CBR that people visit. A game in Civic Square where winning requires a large number of participants

Support local artists and provide venues for experimentation

Creative interventions for light rail HUGE possibility

Retro Games Fest for all the nerds and geeks!

More craftivism in Canberra involving the community. Hand more spaces over to people
Design the city centre as if it is a theatre set

It is all about -kindness; going back to nature; listen to the people; accuracy; keep it simple (and beautiful, magical, creative)

Civic Square - big spheres that light up at random times. No obvious pattern, just on...off. Kids will make their own fun with it...figure out which light is on and race to it etc. If not big spheres, how about coloured light panels on the ground?

A structure at the entry to Petrie Plaza, London Circuit side, that acts as a windbreak. This could allow for a very sight and sound experience.

The Canberra community needs to take more ownership of their public places, leading their own placemaking and guerilla activations. There is a culture of entitlement where govt is expected to do everything but local communities have so much potential
Participant Inspirations, insights and visions

Generosity pays off

Allow disorder/mess. Pets are interesting/important players in public spheres. Make weird stuff. Roam around the site. Live in the space. Design to allow the space to open up to possibility

Implicate yourself in the decisions you make, get your hands dirty

Lighting in the city should be warm and create interest and wonder. Make areas of light and dark.

A wind harp art installation on Petrie Plaza next to the Little Big Man statue. This can also be used by kids and Kidsland in Canberra City Walk Markets. It would be sensitive enough for bubbles to strike the strings and make music.
Participant
Inspirations, insights and visions

Let's make spaces in Canberra that create wonder and joy

Rather than creating and planning everything, create platforms for the public to fill. Grants, stages, sheds and frameworks for self-expression.

The importance of slowness, 'unstructuredness', messiness and ethics in instigating play

Great ideas about slowing down and giving ourselves permission to indulge in play. Clearly the evidence supports this. Would be great to see more recognition of play in health, education and office environments

Let's give adults more opportunities to play!