ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS AND THE EVOLVING IMAGE OF PERTH CITY

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Abstract. This paper draws upon the theory of Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) to explore how landmark architecture can affect how a city is represented as it evolves over time. Using Perth, Western Australia, as a case study, diagrammatic plans and elevations are drawn to identify how the identity of the city changes during the city's evolution. The research revealed that Perth's architecture revolves around the discoveries of mineral deposits in Western Australia and the ensuing economic impacts. This led to the identification of five stages within the history of Perth, which include settlement, gold rush, depression, minerals boom, and mining boom. The most iconic architectural landmarks during each of the five stages are then used to analyse the image of the city. The image of the city is discussed by Kevin Lynch (1960) as a fixed point in time, however this paper explores the notion that as the city evolves so too does its image.

Keywords. Landmarks; Image of the city; Mapping; Perth; History.

1. Introduction

The image of the city is described by Kevin Lynch as the “mental image of that city which is held by its citizens” (Lynch 1960, pp.2). Architectural landmarks are "expressions of a collective identity" (Kaika 2010, pp. 457) which are therefore the main element that affects the image of the city. However, as landmarks shift and change over time, the identity of the city alters. Thus, this research focuses on landmarks and how their imageability affects image of the city. Using Perth, Western Australia as a case study this paper discusses the evolving identity of the city throughout the stages of city evolution. The aim is to use a series of original drawings to explore architectural landmarks in Perth city to analyse the effects on the changing image of the city. Although Perth has a relatively short history, its architectural style and landmarks have evolved considerably over its development (Seddon and
Perth was chosen as an initial case study for this research due to the ease of local research and its short history which allows its landmarks to be researched in greater depth from English settlement to the near future. It was also chosen due to Seddon and Ravine’s (1986, pp. 17) discussion that Perth has an unparalleled visual record compared to other Australian cities. This is due to Kings Park being a fixed vantage point which has been used by photographers and artists for many years.

Although, as Lynch (1960, pp. 7) describes, everyone remembers the city differently, the analysis of distant and pedestrian landmarks allows the identity of Perth city to be revealed. As Perth city evolved from settlement through to a modern skyscraper city, the identity has also evolved and is analysed in this research. Although the research has revealed that architectural landmarks exist as both distant and pedestrian, this paper will primarily focus on distant landmarks.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this thesis builds on the methodology of Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) and his theory of the way people remember cities. During the first stage of Lynch’s research, he studied the central area of three cities to analyse the paths, edges, nodes, districts and landmarks to determine their strength in relation to imageability. Lynch (1960, pp. 46) discusses that these five elements do not exist in isolation within the city but instead are constantly interacting with each other. “Districts are structured with nodes, defined by edges, penetrated by paths, and sprinkled with landmarks” (Lynch 1960, pp. 46). The first map (Figure 1) represents the initial subjective observations of the city, while the second (Figure 2) represents the way the city is remembered by its residents. During this research I used the first stage of Lynch’s methodology as outlined above but primarily focused on the element of architectural landmarks to determine how they influenced the identity of the city.

Possible landmarks of Perth city throughout its history were outlined and the most easily identifiable landmarks were chosen to be used within the drawings. The level of contrast was the main factor which influenced whether a landmark was more or less identifiable within Perth city. For example, the tallest buildings were chosen for their contrast with the primarily shorter buildings within the skyline and historical buildings were often selected based on their contrasting materials and form within the more modern context.
3. Image of the City Theory

Lynch (1960, pp. 7) discusses that each element within the city has a high or low likelihood of being remembered based on many factors including form, colour, and materials. This is referred to as “imageability”: “that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer” (Lynch 1960, pp. 9). Although each person views and remembers the city differently, the elements with imageability allow larger numbers of people to hold a similar mental image of the city. Lynch (1960, pp. 7) refers to these as “public images”. The elements which Lynch (1960) describes as the base of the mental image are paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. However this research focuses on landmarks because architectural landmarks are often discussed as a major factor in the creation of national identities (Delanty and Jones 2002, pp. 454).

Landmarks are described by Lynch (1960, pp. 46) as “a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain”. Using this general definition of landmarks I have defined architectural landmarks as a prominent building within an area or city, as seen from the view at a given vantage point. In the case of Perth city, the most common vantage point is Kings Park (Seddon and Ravine 1986, pp. 17). Although distant landmarks create
icons for cities and skylines, they do not affect the people who live and work there on a daily basis at street level (Lynch 1960, pp. 81). Lynch identifies that “other landmarks are primarily local, being visible only in restricted localities and from certain approaches” (Lynch 1960, pp. 48). I call these local landmarks ‘pedestrian landmarks’ and define them as a prominent building within a street, area or city, as seen from the view of a pedestrian at street level. These pedestrian landmarks affect the daily journey of people within the city and often appear on dominant corner blocks, such as St Georges Terrace and Barrack Street in Perth. The prominence of a landmark is determined by its contrasting nature with the city. In *The Concise Townscape*, Gordon Cullen discusses that “the human mind reacts to contrast, to the difference between things” (1971, pp. 9). The contrast may include materials, form, light, position or density. This criteria of contrast was utilised within this research to determine if a building may be classified as a landmark.

4. Perth, Australia

4.1. HISTORY

For over 45,000 years the Noongar people have lived in Western Australia (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council 2014). In 1829 it was colonised by the British under the command of Captain James Stirling (Seddon and Ravine 1986, pp. 16). Perth was the main settlement of the Swan River colony and was located just past the narrows on the north bank of the Swan River because it was considered by Stirling to be a “site of great beauty” (Seddon and Ravine 1986, pp. 72). Throughout the history of Perth city, the style of architecture has adapted with changing trends. Through the research, I have identified that West Australian architecture revolves around the discoveries of mineral deposits, and the ensuing economic impacts. I have used this conclusion to identify five stages within the history of Perth:

- **Stage one.** 1829 - 1879 settlement;
- **Stage two.** 1880 - 1928 gold rush;
- **Stage three.** 1929 - 1960 depression;
- **Stage four.** 1961 - 1999 minerals boom;
- **Stage five.** 2000 - 2015 mining boom.

Lynch (1960, pp. 2) discusses that while cities are constantly changing in small aspects, the overall image of the city remains stable. However Perth city has shown that the overall image of the city can continually change during its development, not just in minor details. This is revealed through the five stages outlined above where the image of the city varies greatly.
4.2. LANDMARKS

The major landmarks from each of the five identified stages were drawn and analysed within the selected sites. Their relationship and affect on the identity of the city is then analysed and revealed.

“Landmarks become more easily identifiable, more likely to be chosen as significant, if they have a clear form; if they contrast with their background; and if there is some prominence of spatial location” (Lynch 1960, pp. 78).

Distant landmarks are strongly affected by the evolving skyline of Perth city. Although it is shown as a simplified line on the drawings, it is complex in real life. The skyline blocks and reveals landmarks as larger buildings are constructed. As distant landmarks are blocked and can no longer be seen from the main vantage point in Perth: Kings Park, they either become pedestrian landmarks or just another building that blends into the fabric of the city. This is dependent on the buildings connection with the street, either through contrasting form, materiality or colour. In The Concise Townscape Cullen (1971, pp. 9) discusses his research about how the human mind responds to contrast in urban environments. The contrast creates a stimulating city through the juxtaposition of materials, form, light, position or density. This contrast gives landmarks, and therefore the city, a stronger imageability.

5. Stages of Evolution in Perth

5.1 STAGE ONE: SETTLEMENT

During stage one from 1829 to 1879, the identity of the city which is revealed through distant landmarks is that of a village settlement acting as an English outpost. The identity then evolves into a small town later in stage one. Throughout this stage the majority of the buildings were still strongly influenced by English building styles and techniques. There was very little sense of Australia within the architecture. This could be because of the mindset of the settlers as they would have still considered themselves as English people merely living in Australia.

10,000 convicts arrived in Perth between 1850 and 1868 (Nevill 2007, pp. 15). Their work within the city on the construction of public buildings allowed the image of Perth city to shift from a settlement to a small town. The two main distant landmarks which were built by the convicts were Town Hall and Wesley Church. They initiated the change in the image of Perth city from a village settlement to a small town. Other buildings such as Government House and the Pensioner Barracks also create this change. Dur-
ing this stage, all distant landmark buildings were either publicly built or open to the public which is due to the limited number of wealthy people within the colony. During stage one no landmarks were blocked from the main vantage point view from Kings Park. Due to the limited number of large buildings, all of the landmark buildings could be seen (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Stage one drawings (by author).]

5.2. STAGE TWO: GOLD RUSH

Stage two encompasses from 1880 to 1928 in which the image of the city evolved from a small town to a gold rich town. Gold was found in various locations across Western Australia between 1855 and 1895. This led to Perth’s population rapidly increasing to 27,000 in 1901 ("The 1901 Census" 1901). The large influx of people was just one factor which affected the overall image of the city evolving into a gold rich town. A large amount of wealth was brought to Perth with the new population which in turn produced a sense of opulence within the city through its landmark architecture. The main form of architecture used with the distant landmarks was an opulent federation style. This is exemplified by buildings such as the Palace Hotel and Moir Chambers. These buildings affected the overall image of Perth city by demonstrating a sense of wealth which was previously missing from private buildings within Perth. Although the opulent style was best appreciated in detail from the pedestrian view on the street, the new buildings began to tower over the primarily single storey buildings throughout the rest of the city. Town Hall and Wesley Church continued to act as distant landmarks during this stage because of their tall spires, however they did not dominate the skyline as they did during the previous stage.
5.3. STAGE THREE: DEPRESSION

Stage three occurred between 1929 and 1960. It was significantly affected by the great depression which lasted from 1929 to 1932 ("The Great Depression" 2009). The overall image of Perth city is that of a town trying to grow after hard times. The CML building was Perth’s first skyscraper. It was built in 1936 reaching 10 storeys and providing a very large and contrasting landmark within the Perth city skyline. The Gledden Building was also a distant landmark which was built in 1938. However, there were very few new distant landmarks during this stage as there was no skyscrapers built between 1939 and 1954. This was caused by steel shortages resulting from World War II. There was quite a lot of new construction after the depression in the 1930s but then it slowed again during the 1940s and well into the 1950s. Due to the very limited number of landmarks constructed, the overall image is that of a town trying to grow after hardship.
5.4. STAGE FOUR: MINERALS BOOM

During stage four, from 1961 to 1999, the overall image of the city is that of a modern city with an abundance of new construction due to the wealth from the nickel and iron ore mining in the north west of Western Australia. Perth City Council was aiming to create a sense that Perth was a modern city with facilities able to host worldwide events. This was achieved through the construction of the modernist building Council House which was opened by the Queen. Perth city then hosted the Commonwealth Games in 1962 and the America’s Cup in 1987. Both of these events affected the landmarks and therefore the identity of the city by boosting construction after the depression and war years. The distant landmarks that allow the overall image of a modern city to emerge also include Allendale Square, former Bankwest Tower, QV1 and Central Park Tower. All of these buildings are tall with a strong impact on the skyline and strong modernist forms. The modern architectural styles also give rise to the overall image of a growing and modern city. As these tall modernist buildings were constructed, they blocked many of the smaller landmarks from view and therefore many of the landmarks in previous stages were no longer considered as distant landmarks during stage four.

Figure 6. Stage four drawings (by author).

5.5. STAGE FIVE: MINING BOOM

Stage five includes the years from 2000 onwards where the image of Perth is that of a city aspiring to be a skyscraper metropolis and keep up with worldwide standards. The centenary was marked by the completion of the Swan
Bells (Perth Bell Tower) and since then many landmark buildings have followed such as Woodside Plaza, 140 William Street and Brookfield Place. Construction has also begun on Elizabeth Quay which will allow for possible landmarks to be built at the Swan River’s edge, strengthening the connection with the city and the Swan River. All of the above projects also have pedestrian activity at their bases which strengthens their connection with the street. This is allowing the distant landmarks to also act as pedestrian landmarks which did not occur in stage four. Stage five is continuing into the future where new landmarks will be constructed and the overall image of the city will continue to evolve.

6. Conclusion

Cities are generally referred to in the context of a single point in time and their evolution is not always taken into account when describing the image of the city. However, the identity of the city is affected by its landmarks, and evolves as they too evolve. If the major distant landmarks of each stage of a city’s evolution are uncovered and analysed then the image of that city at each stage can be revealed. This research has analysed the most identifiable landmarks throughout Perth’s history to more accurately represent the constantly evolving image of the city. Perth was used as an initial case study for testing the theories and methodologies of research. The findings should be tested in other contexts to analyse the evolution of the image of other cities.
References


