



Towards The Public Interest

the role of architects and
citizens in making the city
for the common good

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Journal Series
2017

Ben Peake

NSW
Architects
Registration
Board





The Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarships Journal Series is a select library of research compiled by more than 160 architects, students and graduates since 1951, and made possible by the generous gift of Sydney Architect and educator, Byera Hadley.

Byera Hadley, born in 1872, was a distinguished architect responsible for the design and execution of a number of fine buildings in New South Wales.

He was dedicated to architectural education, both as a part-time teacher in architectural drawing at the Sydney Technical College, and culminating in his appointment in 1914 as Lecturer-in-Charge at the College's Department of Architecture. Under his guidance, the College became acknowledged as one of the finest schools of architecture in the British Empire.

Byera Hadley made provision in his will for a bequest to enable graduates of architecture from a university in NSW to travel in order to broaden their experience in architecture, with a view to advancing architecture upon their return to Australia.

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Ben Peake was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2014
Cover image: High Line aerial with New York.
Photo: www.thehighline.org

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Towards The Public Interest: the role and obligations of architects and citizens in making the city for the common good.

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My ambition for this project is to leverage my knowledge from talking with leaders in Sydney and New York on our roles in city making and our obligation of working towards the common good.

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Introduction

What is the role of the architect? What is the role of the citizen in making the city? These simple questions were the catalyst for my Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship.

The purpose of my Byera Hadley scholarship was to meet and interview leaders of the built environment in both Sydney and New York. The interviews were an opportunity to leverage the knowledge of others to understand the role of architects and citizens in making the city.

I started the research thinking increasing community participation in the built environment would be the clear outcome. However, the Sydney interviews provided tremendous insight into the different ways people are engaged in the profession of architecture. The more time I spent with people the more I came to realise that architects have an additional obligation beyond acting as citizens. Architects have an obligation to act as experts, and to act as a profession towards the public interest.

The following report is divided into two parts;

1. Sydney

The Sydney interviews are presented as an essay that attempts to answer the questions: How do architects work towards the public interest, what is the role of the citizen, and what is the larger role of the architect?

Three common themes came up in my discussions;

- Personal and professional experience and judgment were key in understanding how one may act for the common good, and backed up by legislation and the codification of public benefit.
- A common thread between interviewees was the element of sharing, and that it is not one interest that pervades everybody else's, rather a balancing of various interest. In this regard, the involvement of the community in participation, discussion, and compromise was key in achieving more balanced outcomes.
- Architects have an obligation to speak out and help inform others about our area of expertise... In other words, architects as advocate.

2. Learning from New York

The High-Line in New York had seemed like the exemplar grass-roots, bottom-up project that transformed a city for the better, and I wanted to speak with people in New York to understand if the professional/citizen/city-maker dynamic was different than in Sydney.

Part 2, introduces four interviews from New York, and presents some approaches that could be used to inform practice in Australia.

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Sydney Interviewees

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Ken Maher
Hassell Fellow
National President Elected*,
Australian Institute of
Architects

“I always say that I think if we had to be good architects and responsible architects and good citizens, in effect, we need to think about that issue of the public interest consequences.”



Rob Stokes
Minister for Planning
NSW Government*

“the future is made by those who turn up.”



Philip Thalys
Principal
Hill Thalys

“We’ve got a dual-role; we are citizens, we should always act as citizens and never against our rights as citizens. But also, we are professionals; we should be more experts than the citizens, so it’s also our obligation to give expert advice”



Laura Harding
Hill Thalys

“We have an obligation to de-mystify because the planning systems become very complex and in some regards we think it’s a bit conspiratorial”



Alex Greenwich
Member NSW
Parliament for Sydney

“I think a community based independent is the best representative for elected office.”



Sacha Coles
Director
ASPECT Studios

“We’re going through a period of, I think, lethargy because we’re so wealthy”



Adam Haddow
Director
SJB

“It’s an ongoing struggle to encourage people step back from the ‘I’ and step into the ‘we’ more”



Tim Blythe
Regional Director
Urbis Planning

“Development processes allow development to occur that has broader interest. It’s not one interest that pervades everybody else’s.”

*Positions held at the time of interview.



Michael Zanardo

Principal
Studio Zanardo

“SEP65 It is a rare example of the public interest being codified to some level of detail.”



David Tickle

Principal, Urban Design
Hassell

“Architects always think about the human experience. More than others, architects are concerned with the way people live”



Philip Graus

Director
COX Architecture

“When you ask what’s the role of the architect (in city making) I’d call it an architecture of alterations and additions”

New York Interviewees



Ethan Kent
Vice President
Project for Public Spaces

“The biggest crisis in the world is a crisis of community capacity. It’s a crisis of our capacity to create change”



Mike Lydon
Principal
Street Plans Collaborative

“Instead of asking people to come to planning, you need to take planning to people!”



Michelle Young
Author
Untapped Cities

“We believe in preservation, but measured preservation, so we’re not like, “We have to save everything”, but I think there are certain things that are important”



Dominic Leong
Partner
Leong Leong

“I think as a citizen, there is a responsibility, an obligation, and also necessity to participate in the public realm. How do you contribute to something larger than yourself just as a human being?”

*Positions held at the time of interview.

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Part 1

Sydney Questions & Interviews

Architects, perhaps more than others, share an optimistic belief that society can make the world a better place. The responsibility for the built environment, vested in the profession by the public, results in architects feeling an ethical obligation towards the public interest. An obligation expressed in principals of the professions codes of conduct. Thomas Fisher, defines this obligation as “our responsibility as architects need to go beyond our direct obligations to clients, communities, collages, and coworkers. The sustainability movement has revealed how much of what we do affects the public at large and those only indirectly affected by our decisions, as well as future generations and other species” (Fisher 2010).

Through personal interviews conducted in Sydney, the following brings together a collection of views into the public role of architects, and how different people in their career work towards the public interest. In other words, how are they meeting their professional obligations beyond their clients.

The responsibility of architects involves working towards the public interest, engaging with citizens in making the city, and advocating for change where required. Architects responsibility is codified in both the Australian Institute of Architects Code of Conduct for members, and the NSW Architects Registration Board Code of Conduct. However, the purpose of the interviews is to hear directly from individuals how they apply these principals into their career and practices.

“A city has to take the long view. A view for the common good”

Amanda Burden
Director of the New York City
Department of City Planning

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Background to Interviews

Entering my masters of Architecture degree felt as though I was advancing towards soon becoming an architect. At the same time, the white paper on reforming the NSW Planning System was on exhibition. The White Paper envisioned as an opportunity to re imagine the New South Wales planning and assessment of developments within our environment.

This conjunction resulted in my questioning who makes the city? What right do citizens have to make their city, and what will my role and obligation be as a future architect? How do we know we are working towards the public interest?

Now, with almost three years experience in the profession, at the end of my masters degree I'm reaching out to various leaders to share their views on the questions I've had, and see how they have dealt with these issues in their careers.

Questions I've taken to architects, politicians, citizens, and built environment enthusiasts having included;

- What is the public interest, and how do we know we are acting towards the public interest?
- Should citizens be more involved in the making of our city?
- What is the role of the architect?

By speaking with a broad range of experienced leaders within the profession, I hope to understand the ways people have dealt with these questions in their own careers, and perhaps identify trends or shared approaches across the profession.

Three main themes have emerged; personal and professional experience and judgment were key, and backed up by legislation and the codification of public benefit. A common thread between interviewees was the element of sharing, and that it is not one interest that pervades everybody else's, rather a balancing of various interest. In this regard, the involvement of the community in participation, discussion, and compromise was key. And finally, that architects have an obligation to speak out and help inform the population about our area of expertise... In other words, architects as advocate.



Towards The Public Interest

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Architects interviewed in this project agree the ambition of the profession is to act towards the public interest. This belief is recorded in the NSW Architects Code of Professional Conduct which states architects not only have a duty to their clients, but a concurrent duty to the public by asking architects to “recognise that the fundamental and overriding obligation of a profession is to serve and promote the public interest” (NSW Architects Registration Board 2012). Furthermore, The Australian Institute of Architects Code of Conduct expects members to “serve and advance the public interest through appropriate involvement in civic activities, as citizens and professionals” (Australian Institute of Architects 2006). However, what the public interest is, and identifying ways to work towards it are not defined. This allows a level of flexibility for professionals to introduce their own experience, judgement, and personal areas of focus to their work in meeting, in their view, the spirit of the codes.

Ken Maher, Former National President of Australian Institute of Architects, believes his benefit of free education instilled a reciprocal obligation to the public, has felt the professions obligation to society throughout his career, explaining “we’re dealing with the places that people occupy and places that people live in, the places that people experience and that’s an obligation as we do things that hopefully, last quite a long time for generations” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.). Upon the receipt of the Australian Institute of Architects highest accolade, The Gold Medal winner, Maher titled his lecture “‘An architecture of Engagement’ and said “we need to adopt a more intelligent and informed way of thinking and designing with the public interest or the true common-

wealth in mind” (Maher 2009). Maher believes the public interest “the theme that needs to drive us if we’re going to be responsible and responsive architects” and continues “I always say that I think if we had to be good architects and responsible architects and good citizens, in effect, we need to think about that issue of the public interest consequences” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.).

Philip Thalís, Principal Hill Thalís, sees architects as citizens first, and our obligation is to prove our role as experts to become a profession. “We’ve got a dual-role; we are citizens, we should always act as citizens and never against our rights as citizens. I think that’s an extrapolation of the Board of Architect’s code. But also, we are professionals; we should be more experts than the citizens, so it’s also our obligation to give expert advice. And so first of all we’ve got to prove that we are experts, and then we’ve got to persuade people and persuasion is our stock-in-trade” (P. Thalís 2016, pers. comm. 11 February).

Architects relationship with the public interest is inherently linked to the scale, and scope of projects. David Tickle, Principal Hassell, speaking of his career “made the shift into urban design as my profession rather than simply just architecture. It’s very much about public benefit” (D. Tickle 2016, pers. comm.). Larger urban projects provide more scope to engage with public matters that a single dwelling may. Philip Graus, Director COX, sees architects working in the public interest by developing and deploying their skills as spatial thinkers through a design process. “You work in the public interest by looking at, I think, the broader physical context” (P. Graus 2016, pers.

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“I think that there is a lot to do with our responsibility to society which is not about architecture, but about how we conduct ourselves, about the businesses we develop, about the opportunities we create for staff...we believe strongly in a fair, equitable culture”

Adam Haddow
Director, SJB

comm.). He believes the best way for architects to work on the city is through “an architecture of alterations and additions” (P. Graus 2016, pers. comm.) each responding to environmental, and social contexts. The method described by Graus of leveraging a project to work at a larger social scale beyond the boundary of a site is as Fisher suggest “architects can help channel the wealth of a few to benefit the needs of many” (Fisher 2010).

Meanwhile, Adam Haddow, Director SJB, looks to his practice as a vehicle to fulfil his obligation towards the public interest. “I think that there is a lot to do with our responsibility to society which is not about architecture, but about how we conduct ourselves, about the businesses we develop, about the opportunities we create for staff...we believe strongly in a fair, equitable culture” (A. Haddow 2016, pers. comm.). His practice, SJB, are inaugural members of the Australian Institute of Architects Gender Equity Taskforce program ‘Champions of Change’ joining leading practices in a commitment to making change within their organisations in relation to gender equity. The practice is also a member of Career Trackers, an indigenous employment program, and Career Seekers a program for asylum seekers and refugees. Haddow reflects on advice he was given “Nick Murcutt used to say to me ‘that to achieve excellence, you’ve got to have the environment for excellence to bloom”. It seems via the programs SJB are involved with Haddow wants the practice to “make sure there’s opportunities for people that aren’t born into opportunity” (A. Haddow 2016, pers. comm.).

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Each of these approaches to working towards the public interest are valid, and supported by the individuals personal experiences. There also exists a shared understanding of what is in the public interest through various legislation. The Environmental Planning & Assessment Act (EPA&A) is the framework to which development processes are structured in NSW, and it provides the framework for various instruments and principals. Tim Blythe, Regional Director at Urbis Planning, explains legislation provides the framework for the codification of public interest. Blythe explains “ultimately planners have rules and guidelines because they are meant to represent generally what is the balancing of interests” (T. Blythe 2016, pers. comm.). Blythe continues “when it comes to things like principles around view sharing, you don’t have a right to an absolute view, but you might have a right to at least have some shared view. This process still allows the development to occur that has broader interest. It’s not one interest that pervades everybody else’s.” (T. Blythe 2016, pers. comm.).

An example of the codification of public interest that directly affects Architects is NSW State Environmental Planning Polity 65 (SEPP65) and the related Apartment Design Guide. Michael Zandardo, Principal Studio Zandardo, is an architect involved in the review SEPP 65 Apartment Design Guide for NSW Government Architects Office. Zandardo explains “SEPP 65 has been made within the legislative process. It has been made with consultation, which is often called ‘stakeholder engagement’ now. So theoretically it reflects the views of its stakeholders. The ADG (Apartment Design Guide) which is called up under the legislation responds to this consultation and is actually quite a detailed design

guideline which has been developed with the input of many expert architects, landscape architects and urban designers. It is a rare example of the ‘public interest,’ such as sunlight and natural cross ventilation, being codified to some level of detail” (M. Zandardo 2016, pers. comm.).

However, rules often based on the minimum standard may not always be enough to satisfy our obligation. Blythe explains “you use a combination of the rules, the perspectives that area reached by or given to you thought that consultations process, and your own judgement, your own professional judgement. Which I think overtime you develop. I think that’s where your experience becomes important. Because having had enough experience with conflicting development situations you tend then to have a bit of perspective on what is reasonable and what isn’t. And where is something going to far.” (T. Blythe 2016, pers. comm.)

Given the nature of city making, and the involvement of competing interests, we can not solely rely on legislation and law to identify and communicate our shared commitment towards societal benefit. We must use our own experiences, judgement, and ability to persuade in order to work towards the public interest. In dealing with instances where client brief may not align with an architects view of what is the right thing to do, Graus explains “It’s your job to talk. The new client might not agree with you. We’re only paid to provide advice, but you have a responsibility to explain the public interest to your clients. Good clients work with you because the public is using their building, buying their things” (Graus

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*“sometimes you
actually should say no.”*

**Laura Harding
Hill Talis**

2016). Philip Talis has a stronger view “We shout at our clients” (P. Talis 2016, pers. comm.). Laura Harding, Hill Talis, continues “There’s this great seduction and the idea of design being really flexible-- design can fix anything-- but sometimes what you’re being asked to do is really inappropriate for not necessarily for architectural reasons, but the way the city works for accessibility, for equity, for all of those things, and sometimes you actually should say no. And you’ll lose work, we have” (L. Harding 2016, pers. comm.).

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Identifying, and working towards the public interest is a complicated process that cannot be fully articulated through static legislation and law. Consultation, negotiation, and sometimes conflict are all inherent parts of the process.



Citizen Participation

Beyond architects professional and ethical obligation to the public interest, citizens have a right to shape their own environment. Bryan Bell, a Loeb Fellow of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, who researches and educates others on public interest design, believes “people should be able to participate in decisions that shape their lives. And the design of the built environment is one of these decisions” (Bell 2003). However, with low general citizen participation in the current planning of our cities the right to our city is left to a relatively small group. NSW Minister of Planning, Rob Stokes, understands “the future is made by those who turn up” (R. Stokes, 2016, pers. comm.). “Those who participate actually have enormous power and I suppose it’s the same in anything, but to say that participation doesn’t impact outcomes, I don’t think is born out by reality. I think what it does show, though, is those who choose to participate or can participate have power, and those that don’t, therefore, don’t have power” (R. Stokes, 2016, pers. comm.).

According to Stokes the real value of citizen participation is to improve the outcomes for the population. “There’s two basic principles for participation and why governments provide it. One is to provide legitimacy to decision making, but the second, and I think is far more important, is to improve the decision, and that’s ultimately why we want to ask people what they think. So from the benefit of their knowledge, we can make the outcome better than it would otherwise be, that’s the whole point. And if we’re not doing it for that reason, then it won’t actually be legitimate anyway. So if we don’t actually care what people have to say, then we shouldn’t ask them” (R. Stokes, 2016, pers. comm.).

However, for participation to be successful, it must be accessible and relevant to citizens. At the time of the Draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, and in an effort to understand why participation was so low, I asked friends ‘Why are you not more interested in what’s happening with the built environment?’ a close friend once told me that their impression was “someone else was taking care of it” (S. Darmo 2013, pers. comm.). Politicians? Council? Planners? Architects? Who had my friend handed responsibility of their city to, and why didn’t they want to be more engaged with the process? After all, David Harvey describes our ability to “change and reinvent the city more after our hearts desire” as “the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights” (Harvey 2008).

My paper, ‘Authorship of the Metropolis’, dealt with a citizen’s right to shape the city, and identified the ‘Social Contract’ as a theoretical lens through which to view our current governance arrangement in relation to the built environment. The principle of the ‘Social Contract’ is that “in order to extend ourselves beyond the state of nature society must collectively agree to relinquish some liberties in order to have all others protected, and that the state is the most suited to hold the authority over individuals” (Rousseau 2002). Jean-Jacques Rousseau describes the social contract as being when “each of us puts in common his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the general will; and in turn each member becomes an indivisible part of the whole” (Rousseau 2002).

In my research I found there is a lack of engagement from the general public with the planning of our built

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights”

David Harvey
Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City
to the Urban Revolution

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“There’s two basic principles for participation and why governments provide it. One is to provide legitimacy to decision making, but the second, and I think is far more important, is to improve the decision, and that’s ultimately why we want to ask people what they think. So from the benefit of their knowledge, we can make the outcome better than it would otherwise be, that’s the whole point. And if we’re not doing it for that reason, then it won’t actually be legitimate anyway. So if we don’t actually care what people have to say, then we shouldn’t ask them”

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Rob Stokes
Former NSW Minister for Panning



Pirrama Park, ASPECT Studios, Hill Thalix 15

environment, with only 0.009% of NSW residents having made a submission or attended a workshop for the Draft Metropolitan Strategy. The 'Social Contract' is responsible for part of this effect. However, I concluded that there are three contributing factors that inhibit participation in the process of shaping our built environment. Firstly, that the population has, in their mind, handed over their involvement in shaping the built environment to governments as part of entrusting them through a process like the 'Social Contract'. Secondly, when invited to participate few citizens currently comment on the formal planning methods used by government. Finally, that authorities often do not engage with the population for comment in an exciting or inspirational way.

Interviewees all had experiences of community participation and they believed, if done correctly, it can help generate better outcomes. However, they also spoke of the difficulty in getting participation right.

Sacha Coles, Director of ASPECT Studios, has been involved in numerous public projects and agrees the level of community participation is generally pretty low "I'm always blown away by the lack of protest and the lack of attendance of social issues which I think are pretty important but just don't seem to resonate with people. We're going through a period of, I think, lethargy because we're so wealthy and, in a way, I don't even know if it's happiness, but certainly it's about wealth. I think people are pretty dismissive and they just assume that someone is taking care of it, which is pretty dangerous." (S. Coles 2016, pers. comm., 11 February). Direct community action

is seen as a way to have the public voice hear explains Michael Zanardo, "protesting is a way to make the public voice heard by government. They see it in the street" (M. Zanardo 2016, pers. comm., 26 January).

Coles comes from a position of understanding the value citizen participation can introduce to a project. Pirrama Park (pictured adjacent), a collaboration between ASPECT Studios and Hill Thalix, is an award winning example that exists due to direct community action. Coles explains ASPECT received the project as a result of the community protesting proposals for the site to be developed into residential apartments. Local resident Marcelle Hoff protested, lead Friends of Pyrmont Point group, became a City of Sydney councillor, and the city subsequently purchased the land and developed into the public park we have today. The result wouldn't have existed without the actions by a group of local residents enforcing their right to shape the city. Coles sees Pirrama Park as a "fantastic story of a local community just going ballistic about what they saw as the wrong decision by the state government and exerting their rights and it working. We had a huge responsibility in that case to that community. They gave birth to the project and they were very interested the whole way" (S. Coles 2016, pers. comm., 11 February).

Generally interviewees shared the view that community participation can lead to better outcomes, however it's an inherently complicated process that must be done well to be successful. Ken Maher believes "the challenge with community engagement is bringing people to

a knowledge level where they can make an informed choice” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.). Therefore, the aim of community participation should be sharing knowledge so people can in fact make an informed decision, and that these decisions have a measurable impact on the process. Having an informed public is fundamental to workings towards the public interest as simple participation in the process is no guarantee that the public interest will be promoted. Often people are coming from a position of their own self concern, and without the broader knowledge are unaware. Philip Thalys comments that sometimes participation is for a ‘collective self interest’, and expands “when these people are objecting about their DA, I don’t actually see that as a statement of the public interest; I see that as collective-self-interest because most of them are actually going to be about their view loss and affect on real estate values. I don’t think that’s actually the public interest at all” (P. Thalys 2016, pers. comm.). Blythe has a similar view “when it comes to things like principles around view sharing, you don’t have a right to an absolute view, but you might have a right to at least have some shared view. This process still allows the development to occur that has broader interest. It’s not one interest that pervades everybody else’s” (T. Blythe 2016, pers. comm.). In other words, we must look beyond the needs of individuals to understand what the broader context and impact is. This will be a continuing struggle for community participation according to Haddow “I think that will be an ongoing struggle to encourage people to step back from the ‘I’ and step into the ‘we’ more.” (A. Haddow 2016, pers. comm.)

Michael Zanardo was a member of Super-Sydney, an experiment in “citywide conversation about the future the metropolis” (Super Sydney 2012) of Sydney. From his experience as part of Super Sydney, Zanardo believes often with current community engagement “there is no big, open question being asked” (M. Zanardo 2016, pers. comm.). This suggests that structured and organised participation events potentially are strategically excluding questions that might change the preferred direction.

If some of the issues of community participation are the effects of the social contract, distrust in government, and the focus on individual impacts, then the response should be explaining the value of good participation, improving trust between government and citizens, and advocating for a broader understanding of collective benefits. Architects are increasingly involved in community participation and can have an impact on its success.

Role of the Architect

All interviewees spoke about the role of the architect being beyond designing buildings. “Architects are more than just someone who designs buildings, absolutely. I think most architects would say that, weather they are actually applying it each and every day for each and every project, who’s to say. I’ve had some conversations with people - why are you an architect - I’d say almost always they say because I am interested in people. No one says I’m interested in making beautiful objects. I’m actually interested in people and designing spaces that people want to be in. I think that probably drives most of us in what we do” (D. Tickle 2016, pers. comm.).

A common thread is the belief that architects have a public role to comment, and generate conversation about the built environment. This role of architect as advocate is an opportunity to engage the public on broader issues of public interest. Ken Maher comments “conversations precede actions, which is why advocacy is so important” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.). The theme of architect as advocate came up repeatedly during the interviews, often attached with a warning that it’s not the architects job to tell people what to think. Haddow noted “the role of the advocate should not be telling people what to do or think, rather sharing information to help individuals make their own decision. “Don’t tell people, “You need to live in an apartment,” help them understand that actually, from their point of view, it’s so much better or them” (A. Haddow 2016, pers. comm.). According to Graus architects have to be mindful of their role. “As architects, we only explain. We don’t tell anyone what to do. If you haven’t really thought through what makes a good city, how could you tell anybody?” (P. Graus 2016, pers. comm.).

Furthermore, engaging the public in the built environment is easier than it seems when “there’s more interest in a rugby league player’s groin injury than there is in the future of the city, on any given day, in any given media” (P. Thalys 2016, pers. comm.). Providing a challenge to expand the conversation beyond real estate. However, advocacy isn’t necessarily limited to conversations, Tickle sees built examples as a tool to demonstrate what is possible. “In a way our most powerful tool is producing a vision, and being able to deliver some really great examples. Apartment living in Sydney up until recently wasn’t a desirable thing. However, there has been so many great examples of great living environments now people actually see that they could make that shift from a standard house into an apartment. I think people can see the benefit.” (D. Tickle 2016, pers. comm.)

This ability to demonstrate what is possible, links to architects ability to de-mystify the development process, communicate change in ways people can understand to increase effective citizen participation. Harding believes this is key “We have an obligation to de-mystify because the planning systems become very complex and in some regards we think it’s a bit conspiratorial. So when there’s a state-significant development or something out on the website, there’ll be sixty documents of an average of a hundred-page length. We can decode that and we can understand it and so we have an ability to try to be able to make that more transparent to allow people to actually understand what’s occurring and what they should be angry about or supportive of” (L. Harding 2016, pers. comm.). Ken Maher also believes we have an ability to improve peoples understandings “you can’t really have

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“Conversations precede actions, which is why advocacy is so important.”

Ken Maher
Former National President
Australian Institute of Architects

a participatory democracy in the area of design and planning without advocating and engaging to draw people into the strongest understanding you can of the issues. That’s hard because they’re often very complex issues” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.).

Broader issues of sustainability came up in almost all the conversations as a fundamental public issue we collectively need to address. Ken Maher, who through his career has looked more broadly from architecture, to landscape, to ecology believes it should be the focus of our next era. “The issue of the fragility of our planet and the need for things that we do to be restorative in that regard, rather than destructive. I see that as our next era; I think we’ll be much more focused on that, much more. Because, as the sand runs out, in terms of the impact of what we do on the health of our only one planet that we deal with, is significant” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.).

Sustainability measures in multi residential housing such as solar panels, low voltage lights, was an area where the interest of developers (clients) don’t match the interest of the people who are going to occupy the building, suggesting this is an area architects need to speak for the future population of a building.

There is mixed views on the ability to address the challenges of the future. Adam Haddow comments on architects solving the worlds problems - “we do see ourselves, I think, as socialists where we have to solve the world’s problems. Architects will not solve the world’s problems, we will not. And architects might be

in the process of not doing architecture, Paul Pholeros for example, solving world’s problems. He wasn’t doing architecture; he was just looking at systems and structures to enable better ways of living (A. Haddow 2016, pers. comm.). Regardless, it seems the profession will continue to do all it can to work towards the public interest. Ken Maher believes we have an ability to go beyond just not doing any harm by explaining “the legacy of what we do is really very significant and it’s not all about not bringing any harm; it’s also about inspiration, it’s about delight, it’s about people enjoying life to the full. What we do, what we occupy, what we experience is a really key part of that is one part. It’s an opportunity to actually inspire people, make life a little more joyful for them, without trying to get too megalomaniac about it” (K. Maher 2016, pers. comm.).



Sydney Summary



The opportunity to meet and talk with a variety of architects, and others engaged in making the Sydney, has been an insightful, inspiring, and partly daunting experience.

As a profession we are optimistic about the role citizen participation can play, provided it's done well in an open, transparent, and honest way. As a profession we are acutely aware of the potential, and limitations of the field to help address the worlds problems.

As a profession we agree there is an obligation to the public interest, and there exists a flexibility and individualism that allows each person to bring their own area of focus. One coloured by the diverse experiences of their life and career. A significant aspect of the work being done is outside of designing buildings, and focused on creating a culture that creates an equitable profession focused on promoting and working towards the public interest.

Part 2

Learning From New York

It's a common mantra that the future is shaped by those who 'turn up'. If we take this to be true, what responsibility does the architect have to serve those who don't 'turn up'? What obligation does the profession have to promote the public interest? These were some of the questions I had in my mind when I travelled to New York for my Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship, in part to experience The High Line.

The High Line

The High Line has become an exemplar community founded urban project. Its story began with chance meeting of two citizens: Joshua David and Robert Hammond who 'turned up' to shape the future of their city. The design collaboration between James Corner Field Operations, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Piet Oudolf, has become a widely celebrated part of New York. We have projects like this in Sydney too. Friends of Pyrmont Point, a community organisation founded by Marcelle Hoff, was the catalyst for Pirrama Park - an award winning project by ASPECT Studios and Hill Thalys.

Speaking with people New York, we discussed the opportunities and challenges with community participation. I have always been a strong believer that broad community participation would go beyond legitimising projects and result in more equitable outcomes. The High Line, I believed, is a project that support this perspective. However, often the challenge with community participation is bringing people to a level of knowledge where they can make an informed choice for the common good, rather the promotion of collective-self-interest.

Although the High Line was championed from within the community, it was not initially universally loved. At the first community hearing "person after person stood up and cited all the reasons they thought the High Line should be torn down" (David & Hammond 2011). Residents spoke of their experiences and memories of the elevated railway being loud, dirty, and the place to avoid Pigeon excrement. The people didn't see the same romantic vision that David and Hammond saw. They needed to bring the people, and the city with them, which they were able to achieve through a feasibility study by The Design Trust for Public Space, and a subsequent ideas competition. The role of design was fundamental to inspire and articulate the potentiality of the project.

Therefore, is this the space architects need to occupy? Is this where their role of the architect is most valuable? Given the profession has an ability to de-mystify (Harding 2016) the process of development in our cities. The architect's ability to distil, reformat, and communicate complex spatial issues is a fundamental value of the profession.

The following pages are excerpts of interviews in New York with Ethan Kent, Mike Lydon, Dominic Leong, and Michelle Young. Where I put these questions and others to them to learn from New York.



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Interview:

Ethan Kent

Senior Vice President
Project for Public Spaces
14th March 2016



In my conversations with Ethan Kent, we focused on community capacity and citizen engagement. In other words, how can communities and professionals work together to make the city better?

Kent believes “the biggest crisis in the world is a crisis of community capacity. It’s a crisis of our capacity to create change” (Kent 2016). Through the work of Project for Public Spaces they attempt to address this crisis by identifying ways of achieving cultural change and building capacity within communities themselves. Key to this is ensuring the right questions are asked, which enables people to contribute.

Kent’s concepts of the Power of 10, he argues, can lead to better cities by asking the right questions. By considering what people do in places before considering how they are designed, or how they look. This shift in thinking is translated into a simple question: What are ten things people can do in this destination?

Ben Peake: From your experience, how do you see the relationship between community's and built environment professionals, and the role of citizens and designers in community participation in projects?

Ethan Kent: I think the relationship between communities and say leaders and a profession is not a very constructive one anywhere. I think New York is one of the most dysfunctional. People fear each other, they hate, they don't trust each other and so because of that dynamic, they're both right in saying it's [community participation] not possible.

But we've worked all over the world and have actually developed and been part of many constructive dynamics between communities. So, I obviously believe it's possible but it requires culture change. It's not something you can just flip overnight if the culture in the city is just not there, and the trust isn't there.

The biggest crisis in the world, we think, is a crisis of community capacity. It's a crisis of our capacity to create change.

It sound simple but most of ideas is around a very top down solution. Green architecture, smart cites, these kind of solution led ideas where the focus is on the solution or the profession as a creative individual, rather than on building real capacity of communities to change, to innovate, and to come up with ideas and adopt ideas.

We find communities are very creative themselves if they're asked right questions. A lot of the ideas that

are credited for changing New York actually came from communities that had been asking for these things and for a long time.

BP: This project started for me from conversations friends and family about what they thought about making the city. And some people had an interest in it, but one of my mates said that he thought, "somebody else was taking care of it". That's just one person but I imagine he is representative of people who are too busy, not interested, or not realising that their views and their input has the potential to benefit the process as well.

EK: I think that perception is wide spread and I find myself falling into that very frequently. Assuming that this design is the best design that could have been come up with. Until I ask some larger questions that frame it differently.

I think our professions that are to blame for perpetuating that myth. Citizens want us to seek our responsibility for problems in the public realm and designers are scared of the messiness and the conflict of engaging the community. They're both right given the existing paradigm, but we know that there are approaches, systems that can make it much more fun and creative and fast by having a more collaborative process as well.

BP: In your experience, how do you find people make the switch to be more involved? In some of the projects you've worked on, is there an established group of people who have some interest, or is there an advocacy role that you play to get people involved?

EK: Our initial contacts are with people that are very passionate, kind of out of the box, aren't defined by discipline or department. Often they're people that facilitate other people to come into a vision as well and allow them to jump across boundaries. We think a lot of the best public spaces can be tracked back to people like that. We call them zealous nuts. They're crazy in a good way.

Ironically a lot of those people are the same people that the very professionalised controlled system are very afraid of. Because they don't do things in the neat predictable way either. A lot of the best public spaces from the High Line to, which we have mixed feelings about, but all the stories in New York of transformation really started from communities actually being against something. And that is a challenge for communities, to shift from being against something to for it. They say the best way to prevent something from happening, to prevent your neighbourhood from changing for the worse is to have a vision for which you want it to be like. That visioning process is key.

BP: And what about the process? What is the best way to get people involved?

EK: We think the focus on place and on the human scale. The goal of creating place is a powerful means to change the way we think about, participate in, collaborate around our environment. So, again it's the fact that it's very local, it's immediately connected to us, the fact that it's not just defined by one problem or one solution. You're actually taking a step back and asking, "What do I love about this place? How can I make this street corner?" ... That scale, "How can I make this better?" And the conversations that occur where people start to listen to each other all of a sudden, they're not just opposing the new project or solution, where they start...

BP: It brings it out of the abstract to, as you're talking about something physical?

EK: Yeah, it brings it out of the abstract and it brings it out of the profession.

The conversation is how are we creating a place? Not, do I like that building or not? Or, do I want traffic to flow more freely, or not through here? Bikes, do I like bikes or do I not like bikes? It's how can we make this place better? And then you can start to listen to people that don't like bikes or do like bikes, or architects that like modernism or don't like modernism. You start to think about, it gives a framework for the discussion.

BP: I laugh at the bikes because it's a big issue in San Diego, people who do and don't like bikes.

EK: Right. It's just an indicator that people care, which is great. You want people debating these things but you want the debate to then lead to something constructive. I know the first bike lane added in Sydney, drove the property rates way up on the street in Surry Hills, which is good and bad too.

We've all become so passive to participating in our cities. You know, place attachment is sort of one of the biggest factors that is being found to lead to economic growth and innovation and entrepreneurship. And place attachment is found to correlate highly with how much we're participating in our communities, how culturally open they are, the opportunities for social engagement, and those sorts of things. So the place qualities are key for that. The emotional connections to communities, not just the liveability, the aesthetics and such.

BP: Do you think that in a sense that's going back to the way things may have been in the past? Where it wasn't such a global world and people maybe didn't travel that much and there was a stronger connection to the place of our upbringing?

EK: Yeah, I think it's interesting. I think there's definitely, we've gone through sort of an era where I think every city is trying to be the same in a way, they're all trying to compete to have the same facilities, or the same type of iconic building.

BP: To attract global capital?

EK: Yeah, to attract global investment and so there's this predictability of it all. But at the same time, I think that's changing fast too. I think now what's needed for cities to compete is, uniqueness and it suddenly becomes a place. People can move where they like and they can invest where they like. Places that match peoples personalities, that create attachment, that help create culture and identity. Those are the places that are going to succeed most in the future so it's quite antithetical to that global era.

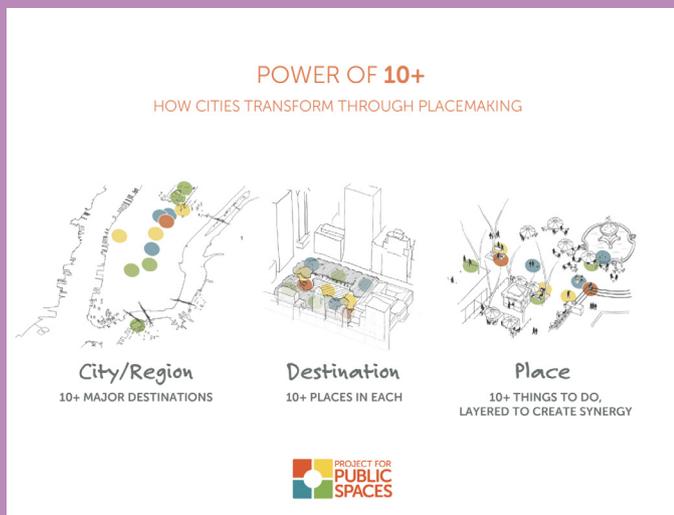
BP: Are you able to talk about your concept of the Power of Ten?

EK: The Power of Ten is a framework to scale up a conversation around place making. I think its at the human scale again that cities fail and succeed. Great places are often really great mainly because there are reasons to be in them. We say a good place has at least ten reasons to be in it, and there are things to do. It's a way to get the conversation going before you talk about aesthetics or infrastructure, engineering, which could start to alienate some people.

The questions what do you like to do in this place? What do you do in this place? What else could you do in this place? You start to get a layering of different ideas to serve a range of different user groups and then.

BP: And these become generators for design?

EK: Yeah. And it's additive. Usually these are necessarily competitive, and you don't want any use or user group to dominate, that's part of the idea too. If it's dominated by any one group, homeless people or elderly people, whatever, any group they're limiting it for themselves in a sense. So, how does it become comfortable and open to whatever group you're trying to attract? In some of our early work we found the best way to deal with the problem, of undesirables or any group that need be perceived as undesirable isn't to push them out, it's to attract other user groups to prevent them from dominating.



So, a good place ... It's the triangulation between these different uses that really makes the magic and creates this place attachment and experience where people want to come back.

We think a great destination has at least ten places in it. If you look at places like Bryant Park or Union Square, those destinations are made up of smaller places that you circulate through. It's in those places where people are most expressive, they're most connected with the person they're with, or the person that they've never met before. Then, we think New York has essentially transformed itself through the transformation of ten or more destinations.

These destinations were not things that the city planned for earlier or supported, and often were against their transformation. It was community groups, it was business proven districts, or activists that organised and facilitated the visioning. Often a very informal way and not through any formal processes necessarily. But it's how they transitioned it to a somewhat more formal process and fund raised and then most importantly we think actually is how they built the capacity for that community continually to work together to manage and improve and engage people in these public places on an ongoing basis.

BP: Two of the examples I knew a little bit about before coming to New York are the High Line, and the pedestrianisation of Times Square. Do you mind sharing your perspective of the High Line? As a good example of a bad example?

EK: Yeah, I guess a little bit of both. I think it was, in many ways it was a model process where the two founders of the Friends of the High Line met at a community board meeting and had this idea and really organised people, inspired people to think about this. They really allowed people to come in to the project and project their ideas and other people's idea. They worked really hard and organised and fund raised and the time was right in the ... Much like you were saying with Surry Hills, the time was right back in Chelsea. It was sort of ready to gentrify and the population was there.

We were actually asked somewhat early on, the Ford Foundation asked us to come to a meeting with them to talk about how they could better engage the community. Especially in particular the people in the public housing projects nearby so that they could know the project representative them. We were a little critical in the meeting because we actually asked the Friends of the High Line, who are you building this for? Are you building this for your friends? Or are you building this for the community? And effectively, they were very good at organising but they were but they were basically organising amongst their friends.

It was sort of the wealthy people in that community that were new and excited about the community. They were giving them money and shaping it and had all the momentum and that's good, but it was also not really a fully open policy making process that's about serving the existing population and attracting new residents on the terms of that population.

BP: Just on the point of existing and new communities needs coming together. In Sydney, we have a number of industrial sites that are being transformed, or will be transformed into residential areas: Green Square, Barrangaroo for example. How do you work on the existing communities needs, and projecting what the future community needs might be?

EK: Are you talking about some of the communities in Sydney where there are existing populations or there are no existing populations?

BP: There are existing populations that may be around an old factory site or a significant industrial area, which is not being demolished and designed for the future population to move in.

EK: The degree that it affects the area, the community right around it obviously those communities should be allowed to help define those public spaces to support their needs and interests and attract new people investment on their terms to an extent.

But again, I think whether it's the new or existing populations that we think the best way to engage them is ... Is not in this sort of aesthetics and form or the massing or the height, it's in, you know, what are the experiences in the small places around it. What the power ten, essentially. What's going to get people to really use it? So it's not just privately used by the people right there, and so new people invest in it knowing this isn't just for them, this is for a larger reflection of the community.

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And also make sure no one's dominating those spaces, so it's arranged for different user groups moving through these spaces, and to make sure they're safe and they're not just dead spaces or something like that too.

So that power ten approach is a way to really lead with the programme.

BP: One of the things I'm interested in is the concept of the common good, and the public interest. A couple of people I've spoken to have suggested that sometimes individuals' involvement is more like a collective self-interest. In your experience, you've been able to help people talk about what's good for everyone, beyond what's good for their own benefit?

EK: Public spaces in and of itself are often a focus that is fallen through the cracks. Public space in and of itself isn't necessarily a good thing. We see place as the goal.

So and again, it is subjective we think what makes a good place but it's the. There are parts of it that are not. In the process, and the focus on place is something that should be more central and enables a more constructive conversation. Most importantly, it enables the sort of culture change of people from a fear based approach where the way they behave in the space, the way the design development is often taking value from the place, to one where everyone is competing to contribute to the place.

And the best places in the world, the culture, whether you're shopper, whether you're designing the building or whether you're in retail, you're competing to add value. You're sort of giving love to the space but in an extreme.

However, if you're in like a strip development parking dominated area everyone's taking value, everyone ... It's just purely consumption. It's degrading the common good, it's extractive in every single way.

Therefore, its how do we create places that thrive, that are going to be able to create the new types of jobs and ideas and the inspiration that enables us to address other solutions.

BP: I know you think public spaces are a really important part of the city to work on. I guess this isn't a proper sort of question, but why do you think working on cities is an important thing to do?

EK: I do think the reason to work in cities is that it's the biggest thing that's holding us back, and the thing we need to most focus on, is actually cultural change. To create cultures that are more open, innovative...

BP: Supportive?

EK: Creative, emergent, you know, cultures. That's what's going to enable us to address challenges, lift people up.

I think it's important and we need to make these places work and do that or the potential where there are diverse groups of people coming together, we need to figure out how to get them to participate and benefit each other. Not just work in isolation.

Our focus is not really designing new spaces or working on them project by project but building new models that go against the grain. It's a network of people around the world that are doing things differently and a lot of our work is training people on every scale to work together to create place.

So the September conference is called Place Making Week. We're trying to make place making and place led development central to the newer agenda. So it's sort of coming together people around the world and one of our conference, the future of places, as we've run it in a few different cities, we've had people from over a hundred countries participate in these conferences. Trying to make public spaces and place making more central to the newer agenda.

This September event is sort of ideas, which is ... It's not just what national governments can do, it's what everyone can do.

BP: I think that's a really interesting aspect of it for me, is that as a profession we have an obligation to serve the public interest. But, what role does citizens have in serving the public interest? And, you know, being part of society, part of the community? And I think from my experience personally, there's a level of distrust in the government, so I think the opportunity is there for people to be involved and participate in a process where their views are actually heard and contributed to. I think that's where the shift, from our experience, we need to move to.

EK: Yeah, that's the goal. As an organisation we need to figure out how to move from just working in fifty communities a year. You know, we've gotten to work really in every context around the world, and to have learned from other great models for applying this, but it's still That's not going to have a big enough so it's going to these meetings, and trainings, and communications that will try to scale up this movement as a culture shift and how we all participated in shifting it and shaping cities.

BP: Well thank you for your time.

EK: I appreciate your interest in this. I mean, obviously it's not a series of questions that anyone in this country is really asking. I've really enjoyed my time in Australia because I feel like people are less defined by the disciplines and conventional questions in a way. I do think that people that travel more, they learn and are more open, and I do think a lot of the best models are going to come from Australia because of the spirit of inquiry.



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Interview:

Mike Lydon

Principal
Street Plans Collaborative
Author: Tactical Urbanism
16th March 2016

Mike Lydon literally wrote the book on tactical urbanism. Describing methods for implementing short-term changes for long term benefit to the built environment, and communities.

I wanted to speak with Mike Lydon to understand how 'bottom-up' community lead activism increased participation in the built environment. Lydon advocates for diverse public realm outreach methods beyond regular town hall meetings, describing "your methodology for getting people to participate can't just be a town hall meeting at 7pm on a Tuesday. Only certain kinds of people can show up to that" (Lydon 2016).

Lydon's catchphrase for this type of engagement is "instead of asking people to come to planning, you need to take planning to people" (Lydon 2016). However, he also warns "I'm a firm believer you can have too much participation, and you can have the wrong type of participation" (Lydon 2016).

Lydon beives the "really big frontier here is, how do we make cities affordable in the long term, and how do we protect them against massive disruptions due to climate change?" (Lydon 2016).

I left my conversation with Mike Lydon inspired by the passion he had for making our cities better.

Ben Peake: Mike, you've worked on tactical urbanism projects obviously in the USA, but also in Australia. Can you talk about the different relationships citizens have in participating in, or making direct change to their built environment?

Mike Lydon: I've found that working in Australia, New Zealand, and places in Europe, that it's pretty common that the opinion is such that a normal citizen would expect that the government is supposed to deliver all the changes and they'll take care of it and that's why we pay taxes, right? And I think there's some validity to that, but we also find that there is a huge value in citizens being engaged and pushing and developing their own projects and approaches to neighbourhood development.

In the U.S. we've had a longer history of people expecting government not to deliver their own changes, and I think there's a strong streak of libertarianism in the United States, where you get government out of your life, I'm going to self-determine what happens in my own lot, my own building, my own neighbourhood, and whether that's good or bad it can be debated. It is more common here that we expect, as citizens, to have to advocate and demand better, or self-determine what happens in the neighbourhood. The contextual differences are definitely real between the two places, in my opinion.

Once you're educated to the fact that you can engage in those ways, it becomes kind of expected that you have to bring improvements to your neighbourhood. Again, we have our own participation problems and challenges in the United States. I'm not going to say it's utopia or

that we're doing any better than you are. But again, it's a different context.

BP: How did you come to be involved in tactical urbanism?

ML: It was working in Miami at the time, where I was involved with a lot of really big, urban design projects, as well as a massive project in the city of Miami to change the zoning code. And to make it a code that's much more friendlier to creating walk-able neighbourhoods that are transit, et cetera. More density.

It was almost like if you were going to build a new building in Miami you had to build a lot of parking. It didn't guarantee that the building would meet the street. It didn't have any real strong regulations around transparency, glazing at the ground level, block size. All those sorts of things were not controlled for. It was all about the use.

We were trying to change that zoning code wholesale. As a very young planner at the time, working for a consulting firm that was leading that project. A lot of my role was not on the project, or out there leading it or speaking a lot. I was just helping with the workshops and the outreach, and the grunt work. I was observing a lot. It was my first job out of graduate school. My first real planning job. That was an amazing project to be working on. And eventually it got adopted, five years later. But I was kind of frustrated with the way the public engagement was happening. It was always the same kind of people showing up to meetings. You'd go to one meeting where people were

whiter, wealthier, well-educated, had spare time, and could afford to spend the time on these meetings. And there'd be a room of 60, 80 people at the meeting. You go to a neighbourhood where people lived that had less resources, less education, less time, more likely to be minority, and you'd get four or five people who showed up.

BP: So, there's this huge disconnect in representation?

ML: Yes, who engaged and why. And seeing that challenge was an education for me. Just, you know, watching this unfold.

I was also frustrated with the rate of change. Seeing that we're proposing things that will impact the city 10 years from now, 20 years from now. Like, that's what planning is for, ultimately. But at the same time, people who are 60 don't want to wait until they're 80 to see something positive happen, right? Or if you're 20, you don't want to wait until your 40's.

30 What can be done now, and how, by doing something now, can we engage people to speed things up?

I was involved with a lot of bike advocacy in Miami. And we held an event called Bike Miami Days, which was patterned after something in Bogota, Columbia, called Ciclo Dia. Ciclo Dia closes down 70 kilometres of streets every single Sunday in a network of car-free streets so citizens can bike, walk, take exercise classes.

So, if Bogota is doing it, Miami needs to do something like this to encourage cycling and physical activity. To be able to explain to people physically that the city could become more friendly to people.

We had a very supportive mayor, and we closed down about two miles of streets in the core of the city. And it was a big success. A few thousand people, at least, came out. And you could just see people's faces, that they were smiling, happy, engaging with the city in a physical way, having a great experience. And to me that was better than any public meeting. You're doing more convincing in that moment that cycling should be supported and networks should be developed in that moment.

BP: Because it's a tangible thing?

ML: It's a tangible experience, yeah. I was sold at that, and realised that we need to be doing more things like this if we're going to move the political needle forward to support the policies and the investments that bring transformation in the medium and long term.

So that, and then what was happening in the streets of New York at the time were, they had initiated all of these transformations using very low-cost, temporary materials. Bring those two things together. Okay, cities can actually lead this work and citizens can actually not only be engaged, But also, create these kinds of projects, either with cities or on their own.

So, that was really the back story to me. Just trying

to find ways that people were doing this kind of work around North America. And that's when we wrote the first Tactical Urbanism guide in 2011.

BP: In Sydney at the moment, George St has been closed down in preparation for the construction of the light rail. I was in the city recently shopping, and it was a great experience to be about to walk straight out across the street, and people did have smiles on your faces as you describe. It was pretty amazing. However, that was a result of construction, not people saying "lets see if we can make the street a better place for the weekend". They have put up some temporary seating, and DJ on the weekend, and people realise the potential of the space.

ML: Yeah. It's funny, construction is such a wonderful opportunity to test things out and engage people, because there's a planned disruption in the street.

BP: There is some negative media commentary around gridlock, traffic chaos. But I think the outcome will be fantastic. It allows people to really can see the city, as you said, in a different way, for that interim period. And they'll appreciate that it's going to make things better.

ML: Yes. Exactly. I think there are things you can do on the front end, and then during disruption, when you have construction. Then people of the community can see it as a benefit or an opportunity, as opposed to this negative, horrible thing.

There's a great example up in Montreal. They're doing a whole street reconstruction project. It's full of traders and all these businesses. And they're all concerned about losing customers. But what they're trying to do instead is use public art, and expand the sidewalk with wooden platforms. Really make an engaging, fun installation as opposed to a construction project. So they're masking it that way. That's just one of many examples where I think a city has looked at it as an opportunity. There are just so many things to do in those situations.

BP: One of the things I've come across in my research is the role of the architect. I want to ask if there's a similar sort of obligation in your profession. Our code of conduct states we have an overarching obligation to public interest. A lot of the people I've spoken to are dealing with it in very different ways. Some say it's about making the best-built environment we can, or the best buildings. Another said it's about making the best culture in his practise for staff.

In your experience, is that something you have in mind? Do you feel like you have an obligation to the public? And, if so, what sort of ways and tools do you be comfortable you're meeting this obligation?

ML: That's a great question, and the answer is absolutely yes. We call ourselves a planning, design and research advocacy firm. My partner, Tony, and I, both come at this work as advocates for better cities, first. And cities that

are oriented towards public interest for people. That are equitable. That give people many options and choices for getting around, and they can afford to live there, all those sorts of things.

Sometimes we get ourselves in a little bit of a challenging situation because, when you're hired as a consulting firm, you're supposed to basically be neutral. That's kind of the theory, or accepted practise or norm, is that you will be impartial and will look at things objectively. And we don't. Straight up, we don't.

BP: And you're open and honest about that early though?

ML: Yeah, we're open and honest about that. We are going to be coming at projects where we don't think adding more pollution, and car traffic and congestion and danger in our streets is a good thing. We're the wrong firm to hire if you want to go in that direction.

With this work, we develop a lot of our research practice, our communication style and the way that we use Twitter, and Facebook, and messaging. It's all about projects that we think advance the public interest in a positive direction. Moving things forward.

People know that about our firm, and sometimes they think that we're a non-profit, and that we're just a NGO or an advocacy group. We're not, technically, but we adopt some of those practices because we think it's really important.

It's our responsibility as professionals to look at best practises and be advocates for it.

BP: In a way your research is defining your view of what the public interest is, or best practice. You find things along the way, pick them up and make them part of your culture, and your practice?

ML: Right. And we learn from people around the globe on what those things are, what they can be. As much as we might contribute, or put information out there, we also take back. We see it being really reciprocal. If we put out four different guides on tactical urbanism for free around the world, well that's been hugely valuable in terms of people getting access to the idea. Then us getting access to people, clients, collaborators, critics, supporters. You get back what you put into it, sort of thing. So it's been really enriching for us.

BP: Since starting your practice in 2009, have you seen a shift in the focus on what needs to be done? Or do you think it still rests on some fundamental ideas about environment and people?

ML: There's been a shift in our practise. It's almost like each new project you take on you learn more things. And you kind of broaden the depth of your skills and expertise. And then it brings out new opportunities and new ideas on how to keep evolving the work that we're doing.

A good example of that is we've been really practicing as consultants in this tactical place-making space for about four years now, and it's shifted from being, "Hey, look at all these great examples. Isn't that inspiring?" To, "Okay, here's how you actually do it. Here's how you'll integrate it into a planning project." To right now we're working on a design and materials guide that's focused explicitly on what is the paint? What is the tape? What is the wood pallet? Where do you get it? How much does it cost?

The really nitty-gritty details of how you deliver these projects. And we're developing this guidance around this so that both cities and citizens can work apart, and more proactively, together, to deliver change in the streets and in the neighbourhoods.

We our practice maturing and evolving in the direction where we're now attracting foundations, and cities are coming to us for that information. It is really enriching, because three or four years ago, nobody even knew what tactical urbanism was.

The field is shifting, I think, in a number of directions where some of the cutting edge practises of advocates and consulting firms and cities five or six years ago are really much more main stream now. That has happened very quickly. And that's really exciting.

One of the things with the resurgence of cities, at least in North America, and I know it's partially the case where you come from as well, is that it's bringing tremendous opportunity and economic and social gains for educated people, for wealthier people, upper middle class people. It's really developing a much larger chasm between lower class and upper class as well. We're seeing new problems emerge in the North American city that were on nobody's radar screen seven, eight, 10 years ago. How we deal with that is now this kind of new frontier of equity. The issue of equity, connected to this issue of resilience and the need for dealing with climate change for a lot of cities in the US, is also increasingly emergent.

It's still a battle everywhere you go. But streets should be designed in a complete way, so that you should be able to cycle, you should be able to take the bus. Transit is good. We need more density. Cities are shifting that direction. I really feel like it's on its path, even though there's individual battles to be won. But the really big frontier here is, how do we make cities affordable in the long term, and how do we protect them against massive disruptions due to climate change?

BP: On the equity aspect. I interviewed Philip Thalís, an architect in Sydney in regards to community participation in the planning process from a development review process. He talked about people promoting their own collective self-interest. And in parallel to that a report read that people being involved in the planning and development process to keep out certain developments from their area, so they make rich enclaves. Weather on purpose or not, they are all promoting their own interest.

What do you see as the problems, benefits and opportunities of participation?

ML: That's a really awesome question. I am a really firm believer that you can actually have too much participation, and you can have the wrong kind of participation.

The phenomenon you just described is extremely common in the US. Again, people with spare time tend to be older. Who are wealthier well-educated, don't want change, because they view change as being bad.

People can hijack the public process, or control it in a way that prevents evolution in neighbourhoods and cities from happening. And that's really dangerous. That's really dangerous. Because that drives up the expensive housing. It keeps places more homogeneous. And it's a really selfish attitude that once you've got yours, no one else should be able to also have that same opportunity.

We see that in small towns in the United States. We see it in the big cities. So, your methodology for getting people to participate can't just be about the public meeting that happens at even o'clock on a Tuesday, right? That's the problem. Only certain kinds of people will show up to that.

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You need to have those meetings, but you also need to be at the bus stop, where you find a bigger cross-section of people. You need to be on the street doing demonstration projects that say, "Actually, this transformation won't be so scary. You can experience it yourself today."

BP: It's a method of engagement to catch the right type of participation?

ML: Yeah, you gotta catch the right kinds of people and make that much more accessible. I mean, my tag-line for this is you need to, instead of ask people to come to planning, bring planning to people.

Because then if you're in the meeting with the grey haired people who are saying, "No, no, no, no, no," You say, "Okay, we hear your opinion and it's 100% valid. But we've also heard from 300 people who said they are really excited about this project. This opportunity."

So we have to balance this out. As opposed to just the same people hearing each other say, "No," expect that they represent the community.

BP: You mentioned advocacy before, can you talk about why you think this is an important role?

ML: Yeah, I mean that's a big part of what we do, but in terms of advocacy in general, we often times work for and with non-profit groups here in the US. And I've really been impressed recently on how advocates have started to work a lot more intelligently around communication, around how they work with politicians, and how it seems advocates groups go from being on the fringe of an issue, and then persevering to the point where people are being cherry-picked from the advocacy organisation to then go work for government.

We're seeing a lot of actual city agencies and governments intentionally go to advocacy organisations and say, "Hey, look. We're the city, we do a couple things well. You're an advocacy group, you do a couple things well. If we partner together, we do a lot more things better together."

And that's exciting, as well. Building those bridges and trust that connect advocacy issues and citizen groups with city leadership, both pursuing each other in partnership, is a much more powerful power for change than being.

BP: Working in the same direction, not just adversarial?

ML: Exactly. And when we see that happening. When you see the grass roots organisations pushing, and then the city responds positively, that's where, in the United States, we're getting the most change happening the most quickly. And that's exciting.

It's a really important lesson, I think, for advocates. If they can figure out that path to success, then their job becomes a lot easier moving forward.

BP: You mentioned social media before as a tool. But how has technology changed the conversation, and what opportunities have you had in there as well?

ML: Yeah, I think it's changed cities in a really positive way and governance in a positive way.

Elected officials and different departments and agencies are held more accountable now, when there's a constant conversation happening digitally, that they can track and follow and be brought into whether they want to or not.

You have to orient yourself to be more transparent as a government to deal with that. And that's a good thing.

I don't think that digital communication, Twitter, et cetera, replaces participation. I think it's an aspect of participation. It's a really important aspect that was missing, that again, has positive ramifications. There needs to be understanding of the limitations of technology. And how that plays a certain role within a larger ecosystem of communication and change-making and advocacy and things like that.

There is technology now that's being developed that is happening so quickly in so many different arenas for cities that it's hard to really grasp how you as the consultant, or you as the practitioner, you as the architect, will ultimately leverage it. We're talking about things being connected digitally. Cars starting to talk to each other. People getting warnings and things on their phones. Sensors in buildings and streets. And all these things are all being linked together in a really powerful way. It's just, the system's not up and running yet.

It is hard to understand exactly how that's going to impact what we would do from all sorts of physical planning decisions. The kinds of streets we're designing today may be completely irrelevant in 10 years. So, it's hard to say.

BP: It's just a lot of data at the moment, I guess, and it hasn't been translated into information.

ML: Yeah, there's a lot of data. And you need to know what to do and how to collect good data. And you need to know how to then evaluate it and you need to know how to actually communicate it. And those are three really challenging things.

And you see a lot of people, organisations, or governments doing one or two of those things. But all three is a challenge.

There is a constant wave of information. I could sit on my Twitter feed all day and literally just be drowning in information and numbers and tasks and not do anything. I'd just be paralysed by it. There has to be a way to navigate through that in a very proactive, intentional way. Or else you will drown.

BP: Thank you Mike. It's nice to meet someone who's so passionate and speaking about the positive nature of what is possible.

ML: Oh no, thank you for your interest in it.



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Interview:

Dominic Leong

Principal
Leong Leong
22nd March 2016

Dominic believes architects have a crucial role in bringing projects together, and negotiating the space between bottom up and top down approaches, stating “that’s why our profession exists because we’re experts in trying to translate diversities and desires and constraints into a synthesised thing” (Leong 2016).

Leong is obsessed with fuzzy things... the blurry messy space of the in-between. Although he hasn’t figured out how to do it yet, he is interested in expanding the role of the architect beyond what the public may consider our disciplinary boundaries.

Leong believes that “being able to navigate back and forth between the two [methods of operating] can expand the realm of possibilities for what we do as architects” (Leong 2016).

“Leong Leong is an award-winning architecture and design firm based in New York that focuses on projects that envision new relationships between culture and commerce, public and private, and the domestic and monumental. The studio’s interests are not defined by a particular project type, but by the potential to create environments and objects with cultural resonance” (Leong Leong, 2017).

Opposite: Los Angeles LGBT Centre by
Leong Leong, in association with Killefer
Flammang Architects.
Souce: leong-leong.com



Ben Peake: Dominic, I've been asking architects how they see the role of citizens and architects in making the city, and particularly the role of architects acting in the public interest, for the common good. Is this something you're mindful of in the practice of Leong Leong?

Dominic Leong: I think it's an interesting question. We started off with doing projects that weren't necessarily public oriented. It's more private sector work. Regardless of what type of project you're doing or what type of client you have, there is definitely responsibility to respond to issues that exceed one particular client. And I'd say the greater good or what could be called the greater good of the city or how architecture relates to the city. Those are concerns that often times we bring to the table more than a client. I think that things that often times get explored either explicitly or implicitly depending on what they clients bring to the table.

Our practise has evolved from trying to address issues in the city in a more implicit way given the types of projects we were working on to larger projects now. More public projects, Institutional projects, more urban projects. Which by their very nature and location and context, demand more explicit positions on how architecture relates to the city. Which is exciting because all of a sudden, a lot of these conversations or desires to understand the public in a larger context are on the table and part of the conversation.

I think what you prioritise in these situations always evolves out of a lot of different discussions. But for us, just the idea of collectivity is something that's interesting to explore and try to understand because it's a constantly

evolving thing. And I think collectivity is used as another way around talking about what is public versus what is private. Collectivity is slightly broader in the sense that it doesn't create a clear definition between public and private. That there are notions of collectivity that can be both public or private. Increasingly, the clear distinction of what is public what is private is super blurry right now. And it goes back to, like in New York, the reference of like the pop space, the privately owned public space. Which essentially give FAR bonuses for leaving open space for large buildings. That open space is maintained by the owner but given to the city.

That's why I think collectivity is a maybe more inclusive way to try to understand the social aspects of architecture that connecting individuals to other people.

BP: And then that becomes the place where you can act? You can transfer things from the private into the public domain?

DL: Yeah. And just the way we form community today we relate to people is so much more complex given the internet. These primary sites of collectivity don't always reside within architecture or whatever. So the value of space, the value of architecture, the value of the city has evolved and is changing. And it's actually a continuing effort to understand how we interact, whatever medium it is. Whether it's the medium of the city, or whatever.

And we've kind of explored that in certain projects like the PS One project, basically trying to find intersections between these different mediums of exchange or interaction, like digital versus physical. And I think it's

always a challenging situation too. In some ways you want to find these one to one connections. But there never really is that clear ... I think network diagrams of social interactions don't apply to physical space, but there's often times these sort of desires to converge these different organisational systems into architecture. Which I think often times is problematic and it becomes more gestural than actually performative.

So the way I think it actually puts the onus back on architecture to really understand what tools we have to understand what's effective.

I actually believe the limitations of architecture accepting those is actually more productive than saying, architecture can do everything and create all these new realms ... Just kind of leaving everything totally open ended. But there are ... We're working with real space materiality dimensions. All these things. These are kind of the constraints we work with. Because at the end of the day, we're physical beings and stuff. Which is interesting because sometimes in these conversations about the relevance of architecture becoming less and less. But somehow that creates an anxiety within the profession-

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BP: The crisis?

DL: The crisis. The kind of continual mid life crisis that architects constantly have. But I think certain aspects of architecture can't, won't change.

BP: Can you talk about a project where you're exploring the ideas of collectivity?

DL: We're doing this project in Los Angeles. It's an LGBT Centre. Which in a way is a new typology. I would say it's a new typology both for the LGBT community. Essentially if you look at these kind of social movements or the evolution of LGBT movement essentially ... It has arrived to a point where architecture can play a role within the identity of that organisation or that community. Previously, it's just about rehabilitating existing buildings. So all of a sudden, there's this interesting moment where it makes sense to make architecture. Which I think is a really interesting moment.

A, because they financially have the resources to do it. But also because I think the community is less marginalised. And there's been so much progress in terms of integrating into, or achieving a lot of social equality. So you put architecture in the role of celebrating that, representing that, becoming an interface between I would say the public, the city, and what was previously a more marginalised community. So it becomes an interesting question of what role should architecture play within the situation?

And it's essentially ... The programme itself is super complex. So it's a utopian idea like senior housing, youth housing, cultural component, administrative component. Basically a huge shelter. In some ways, you want to have a unified as a kind of collective coexistence of these different

clients and user groups. But in reality, they actually don't want to mix that much. So the role that architecture plays in this case is to create a sense of consistency or unity between these diverse groups. While at the same time, create multiplicity within that. The combination of multiplicity and singularity, I think, pushed us in this direction of not doing a project that had like this singular identity in terms of what it represented within the city, but actually in a way had different identities or different presence from different...

BP: I think in a sense, that speaks to the diversity of the community itself as well.

DL: Yeah. Exactly.

BP: It comes from this programmatic understanding that is quite reflective LGBT.

DL: I think the nuances are more and more apparent within the community. It's like the kind of complexity of that, I think, is important to express. So it's not just like "The Gay Centre." It's a whole range of nuances within.

BP: A key part of my questions has been about citizen participation, and the citizens right to the city. One person I asked why are they not more involved in the city, and they responded "Well, isn't somebody else taking care of that." He handed over professional responsibility to the city, to politicians, to architects. I believe there is value for people to be involved... have you come across this in your experience?

DL: Yeah. I think it's an interesting question. I think as a citizen, there is a responsibility, an obligation, and also necessity to participate in the public realm and the formation of that and the evolution of that. How do you contribute to something larger than yourself just as a human being?

In relationship to planning architecture in the space of the city, participatory design makes sense in certain circumstances. But if it's placed in contradiction to bottom up versus top down. Planning architecture historically is this top down process which is basically aligned with the power structure. It follows the flows of capital, which essentially set certain priorities for what it needs to accomplish. Versus the bottom up kind of collective desires. In a way it's overcome those same forces that are actually driving the evolution of the city. That I would say the intensity of both hopefully produce some kind of negotiated public sphere. I think whenever one side starts to shift the balance, then things could get interesting.

The Favela... The whole romanticization of like Favela as a bottom up phenomenon. That dynamic is basically filling a void, which the state can't actually accommodate. I would not say it's ideal. It's sort of an extreme example of participatory design like having to actually provide things that I would say the state or the city should normally provide.

BP: Perhaps its either end of the spectrum is undesirable, but it's about finding the negotiated space in the centre?

DL: And I think in the role of the architect, in a way, is to negotiate these things above and beyond responding just to the client's needs. Like there's a responsibility to address the city as a whole.

BP: Have you had bottom up feedback from the LA project, for instance as you're working with a really diverse group of people? How does it work?

DL: Definitely. Within the organisation itself, there's so many different voices. But there's community groups and they have their own interests. I would say typically, not to sound cynical, but this is where there is expertise to be an architect. I think that is super important to acknowledge or respect that we're trained and we spent years and years and years trying to understand these issues, which I would say exceed the normal citizen. That's why our profession exists because we're experts in trying to translate diversities and desires and constraints into a synthesised thing. To disregard that by over prioritising on expert opinions on the way things can be, compromises the integrity or even the possibilities and potential of what architecture can be. Which is not to say they shouldn't be taken into account, but I think there needs to be the dialogue and that it needs to be filtered or translated back through the discipline area of knowledge, expertise that is why architects exist.

BP: I had someone put it to me that sometimes when you involve people in the process, it's more about a collective self interest than it is about the common good or the public interest. And that it's often people's nature to understand the things that influence their lives. By no fault of their own, but they just don't have the visibility for what's good for the collective. As you said, the expert skill of the architect to synthesise these things or bring all these different things through.

DL: Yeah. Totally. At the end of the day, people just want to be heard. They just want to have their experience acknowledged. So part of it is just about opening up a dialogue so these kinds of exchanges can happen.

BP: What do you see as the role of the architect beyond design, and facilitating these conversations. I believe you were involved in teaching also?

DL: I think the role of the architect is complex. There's an expectation of the profession that the general public has, which I think is actually really narrow according to what we do or what kind of knowledge the profession, or the discipline contains. I'm interested in trying to embrace the super multi faceted strings of knowledge that guide us, but also evolve out of trying to accomplish things in super complex context environment from political, economic, and strategic situations.

Architects are only really expected to act on a small percentage of what our actual knowledge base is. But for us at the same time it's never really clear what we know. So how can we expect people to respect that if it's even hard for us to define sometimes?

There's kind of like this fuzzy knowledge but also a need to be relevant, but also actually being really relevant. I'm just trying to continually interrogate what the potentials of the profession are or the discipline is and trying to translate that into what's expected from us from the public at large. And then, in turn, what opportunities or possibilities that opens up to act in more effective ways as an architect?

BP: Quite similar to the way you spoke earlier about spacing between public and private as well. What the public expects, what we think we might know, and then where do we sort of-

DL: I'm obsessed with fuzzy things.

BP: Yeah. I think so.

DL: Fuzzy logic. There's no absolutes. And it's really that messy, in between space.

BP: And that's the exciting part as well. You spoke earlier also that the potential of the project is what's interesting. Rather than the typology. It's that exciting realm of work could be anything, really.

DL: I think, in a way, you have to kind of embrace that. Otherwise, it's super frustrating. It's already frustrating.

I think teaching is really important. I think that's one aspect of what we do. We're also interested in expanding the role of the architect. In a way, historically you could say the architect designs and then provides deliverables in order to execute the design. So that's like one axis of operation. And there's like all this invisible knowledge that I think can be captured in another axis, which is like strategy and content. Which is architectural thinking applied in a different medium than design and deliverables. This axis, in a lot of ways, sets the top level conversations, which determines the relevance of architecture. Which I think we think about this axis like ... That's kind of how we understand the world. But often times, architects are only tasked or expected to work along this axis. Different people have done it different ways. But being able to navigate back and forth between the two, then it expands the realm of possibilities for what we do as architects. And somehow, you're able to, in a way, create a narrative that actually describes the relevance of architecture rather than trying to fit architecture into a pre-existing narrative.

I haven't figured out how to do it yet. But I think that's kind of an interesting ambition to try to kind of shift the role, or expand the role of the architect. I think it's increasingly important in order to encompass the broadest concept of collectivity.



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Interview: Michelle Young

Author
Untapped Cities
13th March 2016

I was interested in talking to Michelle as someone who shares her interest in cities and what they can offer with a wider audience. Michelle is the author behind Untapped Cities, whose ambition to help people rediscover their city.

One of Michelle's initiatives to show people more interesting places of New York through tours operated by different collaborators of Untapped Cities.

Michelle believes "in preservation, but measured preservation, so we're not like, 'We have to save everything', but I think there are certain things that are important" (Young 2016).

Ben Peake: Michelle, I would like to start by asking what started your interest in cities?

Michelle Young: I could trace it back to the fact that my parents took me travelling starting when I was really young, all over the world. My family's from Taiwan so obviously we went there, but then a lot of places in Europe as well, so I think that's the very basic root of it.

In college I didn't really study anything, well I studied architecture, history and theory, and a little bit of urban planning. Then after that I worked in fashion for four or five years as a merchandiser, so wasn't really doing anything.

Through that I got to travel again and go to cities in South America, and that I think is what re-piqued my interest in cities because I had always kind of known the Western, fairly developed city, with a certain type of architecture or certain type of history, and then I had to work in La Paz, Bolivia, and that a whole experience of a kind of urban typology that I had never seen before. I started thinking a lot about developing cities, what makes a city developing, or the different stages of development. And so from there, that's where I started diving back into cities.

I travelled through Southeast Asia and started comparing, and then looking at cities recovering from disasters and then how do they rebuild and what's the typology of architecture in places that are either limited in terms of resources or limited because of some natural disaster.

That's the point where I was when I entered grad school for urban planning. While I was there I started Untapped Cities. It was a place for me to write about things I was seeing in New York, and also it was a place for people to

contribute from some larger nebulous network of people would just contact us and say, "I want to contribute as well."

BP: They would say "I've found this cool part of the city"?

MY: Exactly, exactly. So, it became a beast in its own, and then I redirected my grad school studies to better understand how I could build the site, so I took classes in photography, also video. I started thinking about my projects in terms of would it make it interesting, exploration on my website, and then I had a lot of professors that were really supportive of this idea.

I think now we exist in this interesting place where we are public facing but we have a background in the academia of architecture and cities and thinking about cities. In our content we always try to balance that, so if we're talking about something popular, we'll try to bring it back to what was the origin of this site, or this place and reminding people about the history and the many layers that have happened to get us to this stage.

BP: **You're obviously engaged in and thinking about the city all the time. As part of my research I've been speaking with friends and family, and one person put their lack of interest in the built environment down to the believe that someone else is looking after it. Do you find this phenomenon in your dealings with the public?**

MY: I think that definitely applies to what's happening in the US right now, politically, not just from city perspective, but the fact that people feel a bit helpless about the

decisions that are made, but also that they have given up responsibility and assume that the people they elect—it's sort of like a catch 22, because they don't really know the people they're electing. They barely go to vote. Our municipal election is like, eight percent of people in New York actually voted for the mayor, like voted at all. So of course he wins with such a small percentage of votes, so we're partially responsible for these people because we don't go to vote, and then we assume that because they were elected that they're going to know what they're doing, and that they're qualified. And then we're upset about the decisions that are made, and it comes back to, but wait, we didn't even vote. So I think that's across the board, that's happening. In the US we think about it as the fact that our whole electoral system is we vote for people who vote for us, and there's a lot of debate about this.

BP: They're representative?

MY: Yeah, exactly. I think that applies to many other countries as well. I think there's a general situation happening with the level of community involvement in the voting process, but I would say that in New York, the community activism side is very active. So community groups coming together to create things like the high-line or to protest things or participating in workshops run by the city, so there's a lot of affordable housing stuff going on right now.

BP: Yeah we were watching New York 1, because it's been on, and there was a guy there talking about affordable housing. A lot of the issues that are going on at home are also here in the US. Similar affordable housing,

pedestrianisation, bicycle paths and safety.

MY: Similar topics, right.

BP: Different scales, of course.

MY: Are you familiar with the process of when people want to build a bike lane or something, how that works? There's a community board system. The community board system is part of this whole process called ULURP, Uniform Land Use Review, Policy, I don't know what the P stands for, but it's called ULURP, and let's say that you want to build a bike lane. There's a specific timeline for when you can submit, once you submit, this body has 30 days to review, and this body has 60 days to review, and part of that process is the community board has to come together and vote whether they approve it or not approve it. Then that vote goes to the borough president, which then he puts in a vote. Usually he sides with whatever the community wanted. There's something that one of the roads is non-binding, so basically it doesn't have to be followed. Anyway, but there's this process that I think was created in the 1970's.

40 **F** For example, you are not building out of the zoning, so let's say you want to build and that falls in the zoning, you don't have to go through this process. That's called building as a right here. So only things that either fall outside of zoning or need licences, so if you were going to create a bar, you need a liquor licence, that goes through the community board. Or you want to put a new sign, but it's in a historic area, so that's sort of outside the zoning, then you have to go through that.

A lot of times people ask, "How come that thing got built?" And it's because they built within what was allowed and they didn't even have to go even through approval of city planning or anything.

There are certain areas like that, for example midtown, there aren't any height restrictions in midtown, and that's why you're seeing these really tall residential buildings all the way up to 7th Street. There's no rule that exists right now that prevents height. There are certain rules about shade, but if they fall within the rules then it's totally fine.

BP: Part of the research that I'm doing is that there's more of that community engagement. For a few different reasons, there is mistrust of the government. As I mentioned before, a lot of people believe somebody else is taking care of it on their behalf. What do you think are some of the limiting factors in participation?

MY: Yeah, it's the same thing. There's a long history of distrust as well that comes from the heir of Robert Moses, when he just bulldozed and railroaded things down, and I think that kind of still remains. The idea that the government is going to come in, the city is going to come in, change this neighbourhood, and we won't be able to live there anymore. There's a lot of debate right now about what they call gentrification, particularly in Brooklyn. There's some areas that are being rezoned under the mayor's initiative for more affordable housing, and so there is this assumption that's happening and you're hearing it in

neighbourhoods like East New York, even here, in Crown Heights.

I think similarly, maybe from a different source, there is distrust. Part of the role of city planning is to figure out how to address these neighbourhoods. They often have more community meetings, more informational, and then they have workshops. From what I know about city planning, it's not like they come in with this evil plan. I know a lot of people that work there. But I think that's the impression, and so I think there could be more done in terms of the marketing of what they do, and trying to reformulate that narrative that has been around for a really long time.

BP: Tell me a little bit more about Untapped cities. You have about 200 collaborators?

MY: At this point, our roster probably has more than 500 people. At any given time, we're probably at 20 to 40 people who are active, but then people will reappear, so regularly I get emails like, "Hey I haven't been contributing for a while, but I had this idea." So we keep that kind of dialogue always open from a practical standpoint. Usually it's just a couple of us that are editing, compiling, writing at a given time here in New York.

The tours are something we expanded to in the last couple years, developing it slowly, trying to figure out what our readers wanted because they're very particular. Most of them do live in the New York area and know a lot about history, so they're not going to go on something that's considered more futuristic. So tours like the Remnants of Penn Station have been very, very popular, so we've been developing that and we're growing that a lot more this year. It's one of our initiatives to keep bringing people into more interesting places and have more events a month.

And then next would be the shop. It's almost for fun. That way we can support some local producers. I've written a few books, so the books will go in there. That's another way for us to distribute.

BP: One key thing I saw on your website was the idea of "Rediscover your city". Can you expand this statement a little bit, in the light of making cities, knowing about cities, and wanting to be involved in cities.

MY: that's a good point. "Rediscover Your City" is what we feel like is the core of what we try to do, is to get people that live in New York, or in whatever city they are, to see our cities in a new way, so maybe it will encourage them to go to a specific place, whether on a tour or on their own. Or to look a little deeper at the places they're walking past, or to take a different path from what they normally take. In that sense, all our content is targeted for New Yorkers.

And then, I do think from a city building perspective, it's good to know the ins and outs of whatever site. People are always thinking about how it affects them personally, every single decision is about, "Oh, it's my view", or it's my street and little block that I live on, and I think if they understand the context of everything, the history, in New York, it's the fact that things get demolished and rebuilt

Towards The Public Interest: the role of architects and citizens in making the city
there is this public that we're trying to serve or address, but I think in general the idea is very important.

constantly. When I see empty lots in mid-town, I'm like, "Really?", and yet, you see it all the time, right? Whereas, in other cities like Paris you would never see something like an empty lot because they can't demolish it. I think it would be helpful to understand what everyone's role in that specific period of time is, in the larger context.

BP: Thinking a little more broadly about New York, I read you've travelled to 40 or more places. What do you think is the greatest thing happening here at the moment and maybe the biggest challenge or biggest opportunity?

MY: I think what's great about New York is that people come here from all different countries and all different places in the US, and they come here because they want to make a future for themselves, and so I think it's a city that's extremely welcoming to both people but also their endeavours. When I'm out or I meet people, everyone is excited and they want to know what you're doing, and that energy itself drives a lot of entrepreneurs, and I think that's why the entrepreneurial scene is equally powerful here now as it is in Silicon Valley.

Everyone has a project, even from a city building project, there's always perspective, there's always something new that's coming and I think that's really exciting. The idea that anything is possible. I think New York, as a city, has always projected this and it's still around.

I think the challenge is that it is also a city built on commerce, and so for me, from an architectural perspective, I've been rather disappointed with what has been built over the last 10 years, and a lot of that is because there's always a vision when they talk about anything is possible, and then inevitably it gets scaled back, and we don't have the leaders right now to insist that design is important. So you're seeing a lot of blue, glass, square buildings.

Hudson Yards looks pretty much like the World Trade Centre, which will look pretty much like some other new developments that are coming up. So, my hopes for the future are that one day ...

I think is that it's short-sighted because New York City, all its famous landmarks are because someone had a crazy vision. Woolworth Building, it was a five and dime store guy who was like, "I'm gonna build the tallest building in the world", Grand Central Terminal from Vanderbilt said, "This is going to be my station." And all the other world's tallest buildings that were here until the 1970's. So I think what has made New York famous are these buildings that had something unique about their design and the engineering, so what is New York gonna be in 50 years, 100 years, when we haven't built anything new and interesting?

BP: Do you feel you have an obligation to the public to make the city better? To work towards the public interest or the common good?

MY: Yeah, I think so. I think it's not something that I actively think about, but I think the nature of what I do is I want to educate, shed a different light, so maybe that does come from my training in architecture and urban planning, that

BP: And how do you think you're doing that?

MY: You know there are a lot of initiatives, whether it's a preservation initiative or something, that we try to partner with different organisations, so that's the active way of contributing.

To highlight, one example early on was the TWA Flight Centre at JFK, that's the Saarinen terminal. It had been sitting empty for a long time. It had already been landmarked, which was a campaign from the National Trust to try to landmark it, but then it was costing a few million dollars a year just to have it empty and not too much AC or cooling. So the National Trust came to me and said, "We want to push this idea of reusing it as a hotel, can you do a story on it?". So we went there, we photographed it. I said, "I'm not doing a story unless you let me go inside." And so that's an example of the active things that we do to push awareness of a particular site.

BP: Like an advocacy role as well?

MY: Exactly. We work with the Municipal Arts Society if they're pushing something and we feel it's aligned with what we're doing and what our readers are interested in.

And then on the more daily non-advocacy side, it's just more about making sure that our content is well-researched, that we've considered all the different opinions. The other thing we do is try not to write with too much obvious opinion. It's not like an op-ed, they're not editorials. We try to present most of the sides but then have our opinion embedded in that. We also never use the first-person in our writing, so it's not about me or a specific person, but it's about what we stand for and what we learned. So even if it was just me that went somewhere, I'll write "we", like we the collective we as a site. I think that helps convey this idea that there's a group or a bunch of people behind what we're trying to achieve.

BP: In the years since you've been reporting, do you think what you're trying to achieve has changed? In response to what's happening outside, or do you think it's just ... there's always a fundamental set of principles.

MY: There's definitely fundamental principles in the sense that we believe in preservation, but measured preservation, so we're not like, "We have to save everything", but I think there are certain things that are important. I think the big change now is now my fight against very banal architecture. I don't think that was around when I was first starting to write about it. Now, I feel like it comes up a lot.

BP: Protect what's good and prevent mediocre.

MY: Yeah, and I think it's coming up to the extent that people that are not involved in architecture are noticing this, and so hopefully we can find a role for it.



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Reflecting on New York

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Although there were a number of people I wasn't able to meet with on this trip to New York (Amanda Burden was unable to talk due to engagements with Bloomberg, and Jeffrey Schumacher was unwell when we were to meet) the people I spoke with all added different ideas to my understanding of New York.

Key ideas from my time in New York which I hope to adopt in developing my own practice.

Power of Ten

Ethan Kent's Power of Ten, approach to designing public spaces considers why people want to be in public spaces before the way they may be designed. In fact, Kent is quite critical of design-lead approaches to public spaces only.

The Project for Public Spaces concept of The Power of Ten, is a compelling idea to me as it quickly directs thinking towards the reasons for making quality public space, not simply the look of quality public space. In this approach, conversations of place making should precede design or engineering concepts which will allow all people, professionals and citizens, to contribute to making the city in some way.

Diverse Public Outreach Methods

Mike Lydon has a desire to change planning from asking people to come to the discussion, but taking planning to people.

Community engagement in the built environment is a topic I discussed with all interviewees. Mike Lydon was quick to warn that not all community participation is equal that you can have too much or the wrong type of participation which goes against the ambitions of participation in the first instance.

Lydon believes that a broad range of diverse public outreach methods are needed to help ensure that the different voices of the community are heard. No longer can we ask people to come to planning - we must take planning to people.

This idea has been adopted recently in Sydney, with a pop-up community feedback station for the City of Sydney appearing in East Village Shopping Centre, near the site of the new Gunyamma Park and Pool at Green Square.

New York Community Boards

The New York system of Districts within each borough of New York

However, there is concern that the groups are simply protest groups concerned with preventing something rather than progressing the city.

In Sydney, we have a number of community started groups, Resident Action Groups (RAGs) for example. However, these groups are started by the community, and don't have a direct structural relationship with local governance.

Expanding The Role of the Architect

Dominic Leong's obsession with fuzzy things and the blurry and messy space of the in-between reminds me of something Tim Blythe, Director of Urbis, said in our interview. Blythe who believes the development process "allows the development to occur that has broader interest. It's not one interest that pervades everybody else's" which in some way refers to the messy, blurry, space in between that Leong refers to. A space that Architects can occupy to bridge the gap between professionals and citizens.

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#Byera



#Flatiron at #dusk #nyc2016 #byera. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship.#BHTS

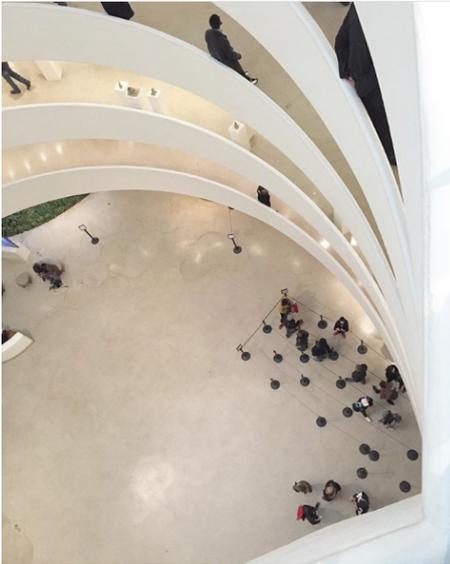
A collection of Instagram posts from my time in New York. @benpeake



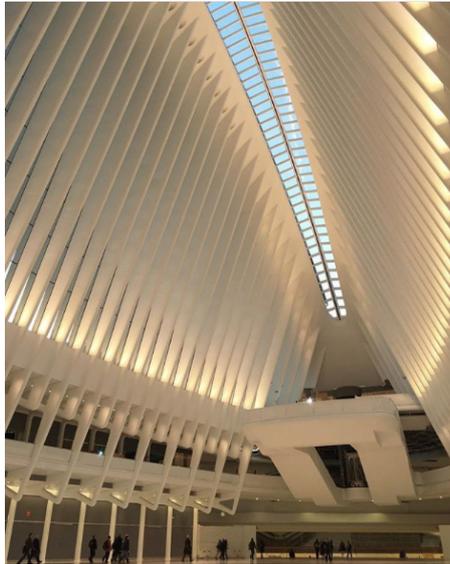
I was in DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass) this morning for a great meeting with Mike Lydon. #dumbo #nyc2016 #brooklyn #architecture. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



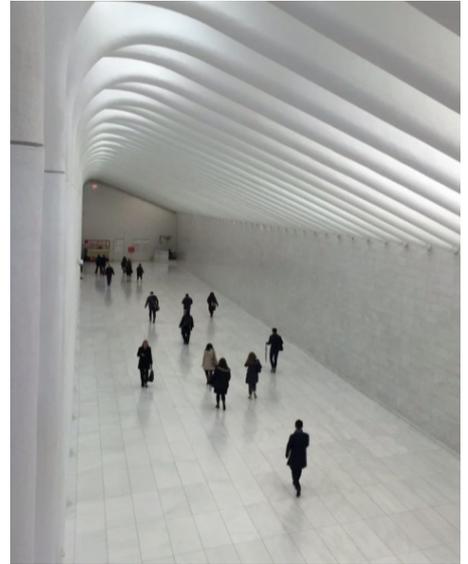
That window! #TheMet #Breuer #marcelbreuer. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



Great to finally see it in person! #gugenheim #nyc #franklloydwright #byera I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



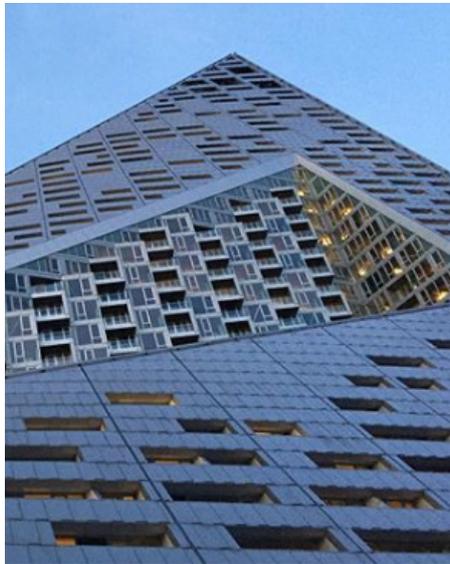
#oculus #calatrava #awesome. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship.#BHTS



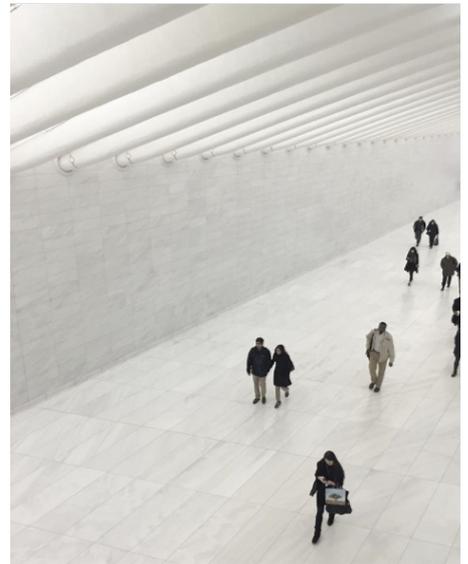
What a fantastic way to commute! #calatrava #PATH. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



5:30 closing time at #TheMet #Breuer. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship.#BHTS



It's #BIG In #NewYork. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



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Definite highlight from today! #calatrava #PATH #nyc2016 #manhattan #architecture. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



A few minutes after this photo I was asked to leave the #HighLine because it was closing... A criticism I've heard from a few people while I've been in NYC. Such a beautiful sunset time.... It's open until 10pm after April 1st. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



Round the corner and... #newmuseum #SANAA. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



In two weeks I walked over 220,000 steps! Including #BrooklynBridge for sunset. It was pretty cool to see so many people walking the bridge and seeing the city from this perspective. I'm in #NewYork thanks to #Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship. #BHTS



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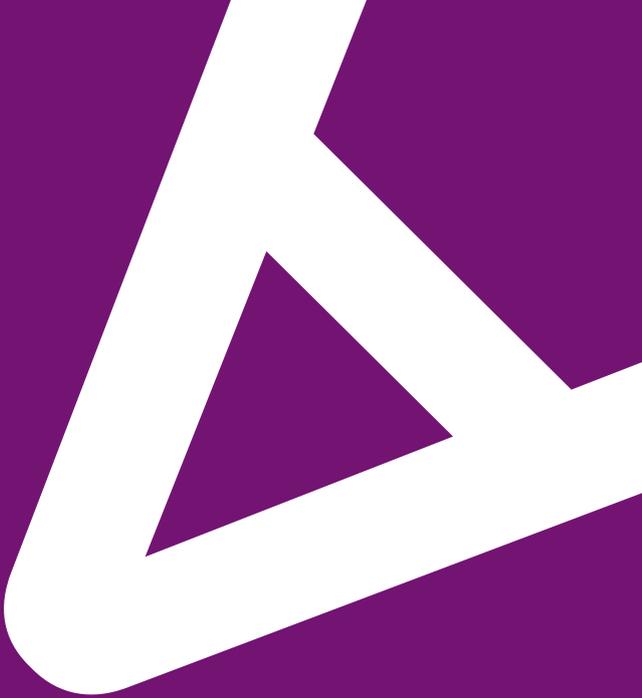
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