Good Places and Governance – Evaluation Criteria

Introduction

Everyone wants to live in a 'good place' but, similar to many aspirational concepts such as love, justice, democracy and freedom; the concept is easy, but the operational reality is difficult. Many of the issues being grappled relating to 'good places' and urban development pivot around appropriate governance structures.

In this paper we present a simple conceptual framework in which to think about the creation 'good places' and identify fifteen criteria that can be used in the evaluation of potential governance structures.

In this context "good", when connected to "place", is a highly value laden and contextually driven compound noun. Three examples illustrate this. The Pitjantjatjara[i] have a concept of '*ngapartji ngapartji*' - the need to respond to those around us in a mutual dependence upon those involved in the exchange, a formal give-and-take that forces us to acknowledge our participation in and dependence upon each other. Similarly, the ancient Greek idea of "the good life" was a life lived with virtue, realised in the context of the polis or the civil society of the city state. Aristotle thought "place should take precedence of all things … because place gives order to the world"[ii]. A further example is the southern African idea of Ubuntu, a kind of African humanism, loosely defined as "I am because we are" or "Humanity towards others"[iii] .

While it is important to look for alternatives to the current, dominant, neo-liberal formulation of 'good places' as equates to economic benefit, when looking at the above examples it has to be acknowledge that these were essentially agrarian based cultures and generally accessed local resources. In contrast, we live in a global technological and information economy and cities are the predominant form of human habitation. For us, the creation of 'good places' is far more complex. We need to reconnect with each other, develop unique place-identities and, at the same time take, responsibility for what we do in a globalised and resource constrained world[iv].   Three concepts are used to frame this investigation.

Firstly, *Defining a Good Place* requires a broader investigation than the physical construction and activation themes commonly found in urban renewal discussions. This opens up the less easily defined questions of place identification and the role and capacity of citizens and civil society[v] in the creation and curation of their own places[vi].

Secondly, strengthening each 'place' will require a unique mixture of *Interventions* that combine built form, technology; building social and cultural identity, economic development, social activation and infrastructure.

Thirdly, delivering these interventions requires *Resources*. While the default position is that resourcing is about finance and investment; ideas, leadership and people are equally important.

These three concepts can be considered as three points of a triangle, see Figure 1, and governance structures, with their varying their capacity to support delivery of better places, mapped into this triangle.

The three concepts are elaborated on below, and evaluation criteria developed from the discussion.

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Defining a Good Place

What constitutes a Good Place

The conceptualisation of a "good place" can be thought of as spectrum stretching between personal identification and attachment as in - "this is my place"; a geographic location, or place assigned by an economic valuation. The societal dimension, where a group of people bring their collective identity to a location, as in – "this is my town" increases complexity. These concepts are expanded upon below.

'Good Places' informed by universal values: As alluded to above the definition of a "good place" needs an alternative to neo-liberal economic prescriptions. At a meta level, good places need to be informed by universal virtues including connection to a global world and biosphere; and its citizens need to be actively involved in an ongoing process of converting these large, universal ethical values into day to day activities.

Place as defined by the Person: From the perspective of the person or individual, Scannell and Gifford[vii] identify three dimensions of attachment to place. Firstly, attachment is assigned by individual or collective meanings. Secondly, from a psychological perspective how a person perceives or behaves in a place. To this, others such as Giuliani[viii] and Baum and Palmer [ix] add a stronger emphasis on the personal experience and values as the driver of place attachment.

Place as a Structure in a Geography: Scannel's third dimension of attachment is by spatial organisation and specific social or physical elements of a location. As Tuan[x] and Healey[xi] discuss this conception of "place" underpins much of town planning theory and architecture.

Place as a Process: To this discussion Lewicka[xii] shifts the focus to the processes that contribute to the creation of places including theories of social capital, environmental aesthetics, phenomenological laws of order, attachment, and meaning-making processes that stem from movements and time-space routines

Place as a Societal Construct: Returning to the idea of commonly held values and places, Tubeck[xiii] and MacCann[xiv] note that places are defined by a set of shared values, a mutually recognised collective identity and investment in, and benefit from, a group of people who live in a particular location.   The attraction of this concept can be seen in the wide number of video programs celebrating quirky places inhabited by quirky people[xv].

Place defined by planning and econometrics: At the opposite to the above are scientific or econometric approaches that have currency in the planning and business community. Planners have developed standardised ratios of social and infrastructure services required to support differing numbers of population[xvi] and requirements for developers to contribute land and/or funds for infrastructure[xvii]. Similarly, investors often define 'good places' purely by their return on investment.

However only using econometric requirements to define good places has been criticised for being too spatially and cultural coarse grained; and ignoring accessibility to services, culturally determined appropriateness[xviii], bio-geophysical contexts, and conducive to social engineering by elites[xix].

'Good Places' and who decides

Two key questions can be considered - "What factors need to be considered when considering governance structures to create 'good places'?", and "Who decides what needs to be added / changed to create a 'good place'?" Factors that inform these questions are discussed below.

Multiple Dimensions: The greater number of dimensions being considered when determining what constitutes a good place, the more likely a better outcome. For example, evaluating a place against the seventeen UN SDG's, the ten One Planet Principles, Liveability Indexes or similar provides broader perspective on what is important rather, for example using developers' metrics of yield and return on investment.

Scale: Over the past fifty years there has been an extensive body of work [xx] [xxi] [xxii] exploring the definition of place and, as a generalisation, it can be said that place is defined by an arcane mix of geography, population numbers, economic activity, accessibility and movement, types of infrastructure, ecological processes, access to resources and culture.

Places are not discrete but nest within and overlap with other places. Consequently, the more the investigation is able to understand the multi-dimensional bounds of a place, and how this nests and links with other places, the more likely a better outcome will be achieved.

There is still, however, the question of whether there are geographic cut-off points to the scale of consideration of place. That is, is an area above which consideration of the personal, cultural and stylistic dimensions of place disappears because the area has become too big and contains too much diversity? Correspondingly, is there a geographic size that is too small and consideration of a place becomes dominated by an expression of personal preference? As a very broad generalisation, for the intent of this investigation, places could be considered as something bigger than a site-based development but smaller than a local government area.

Uniqueness and Narrative: Good places are invariably based in a strong and pervasive narrative that articulates what a place is about, creates the vision of what is being created and drives the direction of development. The cultures described in the introduction spend generations developing and integrating their narratives into nature and their community. Our neo-liberal society assumes that the same can be achieved with one line mission statements and strategic plans, but these are up to the task of supporting the complexity of creating places.

A strong narrative helps build a high degree of local variety and specificity. Change that recognises such a narrative is more likely to be welcomed and accommodated. There is also a temporal dimension. Places will always change over time, when the pace of change is too quick (or sometimes too slowly) for the people involved, then a feeling of dislocation to place can occur.

Who decides what needs to be added / changed to create a good place? It is important who owns and drives the narrative. In existing urban contexts, urban renewal or brownfield developments where there is an existing local culture, established infrastructure, local environment and built form

with which the intervention has to interact. Here the narrative needs to be alive, articulated by the community in their context, and inform the existing democratic processes such as local government which provides statutory driven, long term, custodianship for places. If local government does not understand the narrative it may establish an unwarranted rigidity and alienate its citizens.

For greenfield developments creating 'good places' starts from the developers' financial and market interests, the statutory planning requirements, and the ingenuity and capacity of the designers to anticipate the structural and services needs of the future residents.   Addressing these challenges can be facilitated in the design process by different degrees and styles of consultation, use of spatial tools[xxiii] [xxiv] [xxv], and recognition of bio-geophysical and cultural contexts [xxvi].   Similarly, the willingness of developers or local government to continue and support ongoing relationships between people as they build a community and society can also improve the creation of places in a Greenfield location.

Connected People and Leadership Groups: Place can also be considered as a construct of the ease by which people can communicate with each other. And particularly if people feel they have a degree of control or influence over of type activities that occur.

The role of leaders therefore needs to be considered - specifically that they are informed by virtue. If virtue is not considered then leadership can promote self-interest, bigotry, hatred and elitism because it enables like-minded people to congregate around a similar ideology and feel that their place is "good" but the ultimate benefit to humanity and the world is far less than optimal[xxvii].

Alternatives to Consultation: There is a cliché in the development industry that good consultation will produce good urban development outcomes. However when considering "who decides what creates a good place" a more appropriate response is that the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of place creation requires that there is a highly engaged, self-determining, and well educated civil society[xxviii] that is willing to work through the issues for their place independent of whether or not a specific project or opportunity for change exists. In fact, an empowered civil society will actively seek the projects and investment needed to deliver what it requires to build its place.

If, however, the community is only a collection of disconnected individuals, then consultation is likely only to support impositions, by government or developers, with their definitions of what creates a good place. It also has to be acknowledged that it is not in the interests of efficient delivery of development projects or easy government process to have an empowered community. It is far easier to keep communities as an isolated collection of individuals whose needs are met by a steady, but modest, flow of goods and services and have consultation processes that are limited to time specific and spatially limited projects.

In these circumstances the most usual outcomes from consultation processes is that citizens can give carefully constrained and achievable inputs to a well-defined development process and identify tweaks to the project that may make the outcome a bit better.   In this context these well intentioned, and extensively consulted, "best guesses" are better than nothing, but are often less than optimal and both the investment industry and civil society are likely to remain locked into the "inform" end of the IAP2[xxix] spectrum.

In response to this it appears that the resources currently spent on consultation could be better deployed on building a self-determining community that knows what it wants and is actively seeking to create it and, in addition, are seeking out the projects and governance structures that support the creation of their places.

Interventions to create 'Good Places'

Interventions to create 'good places' can be considered in two arena - the types of interventions and the processes that are used to develop and deliver these.

Types - Activation, Social Infrastructure, Built Form

Interventions spans a wide spectrum from ephemeral activities through to the physical and built form aspects of place.   An analogy can be drawn from computing, specifically:

Software - things that are ephemeral and easily changeable on short term basis – such as the how citizens go about their use of the space and places; specific organised actions such as street parties facilitated by civil society; and ongoing events such as work places, street life, and cafe society that bring life and vibrancy to a place.

Firmware - the design and operation of commonly shared spaces and buildings. This can be referred to as the public realm and can contain social infrastructure or neighbourhood assets. While these places often contain some built form components, they also have enough modifiable spaces to allow a flexibility of use when required. Often these places are in local government ownership, but they can also be in private or civil society ownership. Examples include parks, laneways, sidewalks, libraries, gyms.

Hardware - things that are built in, difficult to change and are either corporate, public or private ownership.   Examples include buildings, roads and other infrastructure. Collectively these are the physical structures provide the shape and form of the place in question. These hardware aspects change less regularly – but when they do, they have big impact.

In reality there is an overlap between these types of interventions and all of these need to come together to produce 'good places'.

Processes

A key element of the urban regeneration focus on the urban planning and design frameworks embodied in some form of 'centre plan'[xxx] developed under specific statutory planning law. These plans guide the built form and design language of new public and private investments through urban design controls. Updating of the public realm 'firmware' is often linked to these processes.

These plans are often supported by studies and including:

- Movement and access such as traffic management, pedestrians, cycling and parking

- Public realm guidelines that aim to establish a coherent framework of soft and hard street treatments that are aimed at building the urban amenity.

- Neighbourhood asset / social infrastructure reviews including both the soft and hard assets needed and/ or desired by the community to enhance the quality of place.

- Assessments of economic development trends to inform demand for workplaces

Regular revisions of these centre plans are intended to adapt to changing circumstances and produce beneficial interventions and better outcomes. Unfortunately, the reality is often different. Revision is resource intensive requiring extensive interaction with the community, deep thought and good design. Consequently, centre plans are often left for many years under resourced or incomplete, relying on the default position of site-by-site assessment within outmoded planning

frameworks. The challenge therefore when considering governance structures to is whether they are capable of carrying the aspirations for creating 'good places' when this is not supported by the available planning regime.

In addition to planning processes there is also the designs that occur within the planning framework. Once again challenge in a design process is the translation and operationalising of the narrative. Some features of this translation include, firstly, opening up the dialogue about design and focusing on outcomes rather than primarily relying on enforcement of regulations. Secondly, ensuring that all the professionals involved understand the overall narrative and work from the premise "how does my action contribute to the ongoing creation of the narrative?".

Thirdly as places change over time it is important to build in flexibility to the design and the capacity for easy removal or retrofitting[xxxi]. While built form is difficult to change and can cement, literally, a structure into a place for fifty years there are many opportunities for places to change particularly through the activations and social infrastructure. Whether a governance structure supports flexibility and change or entrenches outmoded behaviour is an important factor to be considered.

Resourcing the creation of 'Good Places'

The common view is that there is a fairly direct link to availability of finance and creation of 'good places'. However, there are many examples of 'good places' being created with minimal resources. The most pertinent example are the historic towns and villages that are considered to be full of character, soulful and exemplars of 'good places' were inevitably highly constrained in their build by location, activities of their citizens and availability of materials[xxxii xxxiii].

Three resource related factors can be added to the above issues to be considered when creating 'good places' and are:

- Brokerage - being able to work cross-sector to organise deals and access resources

- Financing - where needed accessing finance and particularly money that understands achieving multiple objectives and not just ROI

- Tracking - having a monitoring system that operates at a meta-level to determine how well progress is being made across the whole of the place

Brokerage

Creating 'good places' requires a delicate and sophisticated linking of civil society, business and government to achieve common outcomes. Each of these parties can bring resources to the creation of 'good places' and the capacity to work out deals to support equitable contribution from and benefits to each of these groups is essential. The role of the Leadership discussed above in brokering these contributions is essential.

Financing

As a generalisation, both the private sector and local government look to the finance industry for large capital investments. In such cases the place creation benefits from this investment depends on the quality of the design and whether the investors accept a broader can deliver For ongoing operations and enhancement of places the private sector usually uses some form a margin from rent

or profit or finds a way to monetise the place enhancement.   For Local Government ongoing investment in places can be resourced from an allocation from existing funding, developer contribution schemes, quarantining a portion of the rates from a discrete area for a program of works, or additional rate levies such as improvement districts. Each of these has their area of application and effectiveness however the way they are structured often limits their effectiveness. For example, Percentage for Art[xxxiv] schemes often devolve into the delivery of plonk/plop[xxxv] art rather than incorporation of artistic input into the fabric of buildings as intended by the scheme's policy.

Financially driven silo behaviour is also challenging for creation of 'good places'. The private sector is looking to a return on investment and local governments often slice up their programs so they can be easily delivered through works budgets. Neither of these single-focus approaches are likely to deliver 'good places'.

Three possible financing mechanism that go beyond these traditional systems are potentially available. Firstly, if there is a clear understanding of how a project fits into the bigger story of the creation of the good place a developer may be willing to contribute more (in terms of resources or elements of the place creation process identified through a process like a neighbourhood assets assessment) through their development or off-site because they recognise the benefits to their project from being in a particular location.   This may be a rarity however it does occur.

Secondly, there is a need to bridge the gap between large institution investors and projects within a particular area. As a generalisation, large institutional investors which are more likely to be patient and willing to invest in 'good places', look for big investments. These are generally limited to large projects covering significant geographic areas. Many place creation projects occur at a local level with developments that are too small to attract the large institutional investors and revert to the BAU finance industry and the usual developer approach of get-in/get-out quickly to maximise ROI.

There is a very real need for local governments and civil society to work with institutional investors and developers to develop investment packages that can supply patient capital across multiple projects in a specific place. In this context the combination of a strong local leadership group, and a well-defined narrative that is being translated into specific development projects would provide good guidance for these investment packages.

Thirdly, impact investment[xxxvi] [xxxvii] is a rapidly maturing industry that is committed to mobilising investment capital to produce environmental and societal benefits which capture some of the points discussed above. The strength of impact investment, over the above two approaches, is that the structures to operate these packages are already in place and there are well thought-out agile and responsive performance criteria implicitly structured into the funding arrangements.   However, impact investment projects need the guidance and project definition of leadership group and a strong narrative to define the details of the task to realise and maximise its benefits.

Tracking

While the creation of 'good places' needs to be embedded in a narrative and consider multiple dimensions this process needs a degree of rigour and attention on real, as opposed to aspirational, outcomes. A considerable amount of work has been done, and tools developed, to apply indicators and measure performance against multiple criteria. The main challenge is that they are adopted at the front of a project to guide the design and delivery, rather than being applied at the end to demonstrate compliance and gain certification.

Summary and Criteria

Based on the above discussion fifteen criteria were developed to guide the interrogation of governance frameworks. These criteria are shown in Table 1 and follow the sequence of the discussion above.

This assessment is followed by another paper that reviews and evaluates a range of governance criteria against the criteria developed here.

Table 1 Governance Framework Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Description
DEFINITIONS OF A GOOD PLACE	
Informed by Values	Does the governance structure have the opportunity for building-in virtuous values?
Multiple dimensions	Does the governance structure easily accommodate consideration of multiple dimensions of what is needed create 'good places'?
Scale / Geographic Area	At what geographic scale does this governance structure operate most effectively? Does the framework match the scale to which it is applied?
Uniqueness and Place Narrative	Is the governance structure able to leverage off, and assist, creating a strong and pervasive local narrative?
Leadership Group	Does the governance structure identify a leadership group to deliver the vision for the place, and does this framework support engagement and co-creation of its place with other actors?
Greenfields and Exiting Communities	In a Greenfields development does the governance structure support progressing the developer's vision and policy framework that frames the development? Where there is an existing community, does the governance structure match the level of sophistication that the community needs to support the creation of 'good places'?
Ownership by civil society	Does the governance structure support the development of a well-articulated vision from civil society, or does it seek to entrench consultation to inform predetermined development directions?
INTERVENTIONS TO CREATE GOOD PLACES	
Types of Interventions	Is this governance structure able to support the delivery of activations, social infrastructure and built form?
Collaboration	Do the governance structures being considered easily interface with other governance structures being used by other agents in the place?
Flexibility and Adaptation	Does the governance structure allow for flexibility of use over the life of the place?
RESOURCE TO CREATE GOOD PLACES	
Translation	Does the governance structure guide the translation of a bigger narrative that defines a good place into specific actions in their projects?
Statutory Powers	To what extent does the governance structure contain statutorily enforceable powers?

Brokerage	Does the governance structure allow brokerage within the leadership group to identify and organise the deals necessary to produce 'good places'?
Broadening Financial Activity	Does the governance structure have sufficient flexibility, accountability and transparency to support investment from multiple sources across multiple projects in a specific area?
Monitoring and Measuring Progress	Does the governance structure have the capacity to factor in multiple and measurable outcomes particularly into the financing arrangements?

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i Palmer. D., Ngapartji Ngapartji: the consequences of kindness, Murdoch University Copyright 2010 © Big hART

ii Bonnett. A. (2014) Unruly Places: Lost spaces, secret cities and other inscrutable geographies. Houghton Mifflin Hardcourt, New York. (Pg xii)

iii Mkabela, Q; Nyaumwe, L J. (2007) Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Sabinet Volume 6, Number 2, pp. 152-163(12)

iv McIntosh, A & Carmicheal, M. (2016) Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service. Green Books, Cambridge. Pg8.

v Civil society covers a very complex domain, see Howell, J., & Pearce, J. V. (2001). Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration. In this context civil society can be considered as a combination of citizens, landowners, businesses that have an interest in the wellbeing and future of a location particularly a town or city centre

vi Ruming, K (2018) Urban Regeneration in Australia: Policies, Processes and Projects of Contemporary Urban Change. Routledge ISBN 9781472471635

vii Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of environmental psychology*, *30*(1), 1-10.

viii Giuliani, M. V. (2003). Theory of attachment and place attachment. Chapter 5, in book Bonnes, T. Lee, and . Bonaiuto, M (Eds.), *Psychological theories for environmental issues*, Aldershot

ix Baum, F., & Palmer, C. (2002). 'Opportunity structures': urban landscape, social capital and health promotion in Australia. *Health promotion international*, *17*(4), 351-361

x Tuan YF. (1979) Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective. In: Gale S., Olsson G. (eds) Philosophy in Geography. Theory and Decision Library (An International Series in the Philosophy and Methodology of the Social and Behavioral Sciences), vol 20. Springer, Dordrecht

xi Healey, P. (2006). Urban complexity and spatial strategies: Towards a relational planning for our times. Routledge.

xii Lewicka, M. (2011). Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years?. *Journal of environmental psychology*, *31*(3), 207-230

xiii Trubek, A. B. (2008). The taste of place: A cultural journey into terroir (Vol. 20). Univ of California Press.

xiv McCann, E. J. (2002). The cultural politics of local economic development: meaning-making, place-making, and the urban policy process. *Geoforum*, *33*(3), 385-398.

xv For example Letterkenny, Twin Peaks, Houseoes, Ballykissangle

xvi Casey, S. (2005). *Establishing standards for social infrastructure*. Ipswich, Australia: UQ Boilerhouse, Community Engagement Centre.

xvii Western Australian Planning Commission. (2016) Draft STATE PLANNING POLICY 3.6 Development Contributions for Infrastructure

xviii Baum and Palmer op cit

xix Brand, R. (2005). Urban infrastructures and sustainable social practices. *Journal of Urban Technology*, *12*(2), 1-25

xx Cresswell, T. (2014). Place: an introduction. John Wiley & Sons.

xxi Gieryn, T. F. (2000). A space for place in sociology. Annual review of sociology, 26(1), 463-496

xxii Stedman, R. C. (2003). Is it really just a social construction?: The contribution of the physical environment to sense of place. Society &Natural Resources, 16(8), 671-685.

xxiii Bigotte, J. F., & Antunes, A. P. (2007). Social infrastructure planning: A location model and solution methods. Computer-Aided Civil and Infrastructure Engineering, 22(8), 570-583.

xxiv Brown, J., & Barber, A. (2012, March). Social infrastructure and sustainable urban communities. In Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers-Engineering Sustainability (Vol. 165, No. 1, pp. 99-110). Thomas Telford Ltd.

xxv Davern, M., Gunn, L., Whitzman, C., Higgs, C., Giles-Corti, B., Simons, K., & Badland, H. (2017). Using spatial measures to test a conceptual model of social infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing. Cities & Health, 1(2), 194-209.

xxvi Benedict, M. A., & McMahon, E. T. (2002). Green infrastructure: smart conservation for the 21st century. Renewable resources journal, 20(3), 12-17.

xxvii https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkt8UrUm_iM

xxviii In this case this resonates with the Greek idea of people who are seeking to live lives of virtue in the context of the polis

xxix The International Association of Public Participation - IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/

xxx The term 'centre plan' is used here to cover all the myriad of planning terms used in different jurisdictions.

xxxi Gabriel Luiz Fritz Benachio, Maria do Carmo Duarte Freitas, Sergio Fernando Tavares, Circular economy in the construction industry: A systematic literature review, Journal of Cleaner Production, Volume 260, 2020, 121046, ISSN 0959-6526, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121046.(http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652620310933)

xxxii King, A. D. (Ed.). (2003). Buildings and society: Essays on the social development of the built environment. Routledge

xxxiii Browne, R. B. (2006). Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes. *The Journal of American Culture*, *29*(3), 380.

xxxiv https://www.artquest.org.uk/artlaw-article/percentage-for-art-2/

xxxv https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plop_art

xxxvi O'Donohoe, N., Leijonhufvud, C., Saltuk, Y., Bugg-Levine, A., & Brandenburg, M. (2010). Impact Investments. *An emerging asset class*, *96*.

xxxvii Charlton, K., Donald, S., Ormiston, J., & Seymour, R. (2013). Impact investments: perspectives for Australian superannuation funds.