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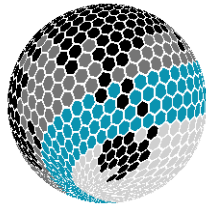
## Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism

**On 29 November 2016, the Senate resolved that the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism be established on 27 March 2017.**

1. I would like to make a brief submission to the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism.
2. I am currently employed as a Senior Lecturer at the School of Architecture and Built Environment, Deakin University, where I chair the History/theory discipline group. I am a research member of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation with a focus on the Diversity and Identity Stream.
3. My comments in this submission will focus on parts (a) (g) and (f) of the Inquiry - the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities, (g) how to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life and (f) how to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief.
4. Given my academic training and research background in migration and architecture, the perspective will draw from my research on the mediating role of the built environment in multiculturalism, cultural diversity, identity, access and agency.

### **Multiculturalism – History and Present**

- Multiculturalism is a highlight in Australia's history. It has often been interpreted as a two pronged agenda – i) management agenda for managing various ethnic groups in Australia; and ii) promoting cultural diversity and pluralism as contributing to Australian culture
- Initial programmes were both transformative and progressive – teaching languages of Australia's migrant communities in schools, developing committees and commissions to promote multiculturalism, collecting data and initiating research on migrant issues.
- This had enormous impact including i) the aspiration, capacity and achievement of higher education of many individuals who came from immigrant families; and ii) this was a great way to improve the expected standards of public discourse on multicultural matters. Like others of my generation, I was one of those individuals. This was a significant initiative and platform for multiculturalism.
- However, this proactive environment did not last, and several political changes have had a disintegrating effect such that the term 'multiculturalism' is often avoided, negated, or overused and many think it is meaningless. How can multiculturalism be reclaimed as a productive field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Studies and questions demonstrate that there is a 'glass ceiling' for educated NESB professionals including academics, and this is conflated with the current global economy whereby trans-national professionals gain access, but NESB who have grown up in Australia are under-represented. In addition, studies on artists have shown that NESB artists are under-represented in exhibitions, grants, and funding success; not dissimilar to studies that have shown that cultural background is a big factor in access to employment.



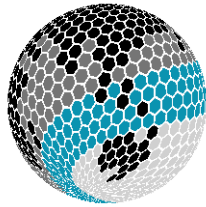
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- The result is that at present the rhetoric around multiculturalism is either about all the problems that it has caused (ethnicity not managed well); or numerous celebratory events of dance, food music festivals.
- This does not mean that huge effort and programmes do not exist but these are not perceived as innovative and other potential objectives and programmes have been missed or have lapsed.

### **Contribution of multicultural societies to the built environment is unacknowledged**

- In this section I will focus on the shortcomings from an architectural and urban perspective highlighting how this field has been largely overlooked. The reason that the architectural and urban environment is a significant field is i) it defines the cultural order, imagery and aesthetic field of our society and ii) it focuses attention on the very concrete conditions and implications of the negotiations of diverse cultures that co-exist within the same neighbourhoods, districts, and cities.
- The contribution of a multicultural society to the built environment has been largely unacknowledged in the outline, rhetoric or discourse on multiculturalism or on Australian culture. Included in this lack of acknowledgement is the enormous contribution of immigrants in nation building (post-war), the contribution of pioneering immigrants during the gold rush and after, and the contribution of various waves of immigrant communities, and its impact on the built environment. A whole history of 'migrant architecture' and how it has shaped the Australian economy, society, and culture has been overlooked.
- This has included the complete transformation of urban streets and the urban cultures these have generated in concentrated immigrant cities, including the specialty food stores, cafes and restaurants initially in the 1960s, and beyond; the introduction and implementation of agricultural systems in rural regions; the development of collective gathering places including culturally specific worship centres, ethnic clubs, as well as parks and annual picnics; industrial sites and migrant industrial communities; housing, hostels, camps and houses.
- The enormity of the contribution of the many different immigrant individual and communities to the architectural and urban environment is dramatically mismatched by the scarcity of information and data.
- Data Collection and research on the multicultural conditions of the built environment are limited. Academic studies have been exceptional, and exceptions to the gap in the government initiative and agenda to collect data. The studies (scholars listed below) are also fragmentary, and spread across several disciplines, with limited scope for collaboration and collective approaches.
- There is not comprehensive data or adequate government studies on migrant housing, including the processes of settlement, hostels, access to housing, and access to ownership/construction of houses. In 1993 a report on immigrants and housing was developed by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs: P.N. Junankar, D. Pope, C. Kapuschinski, G. Ma, W. Mudd, Recent Immigrants and Housing, A.G.P.S., Canberra. And in 1994 a comprehensive bibliography on migrant housing was commissioned by the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (BIPR), Immigrant Housing in Australia: An Annotated Bibliography, Library Bibliography Series, Central Library of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Australian



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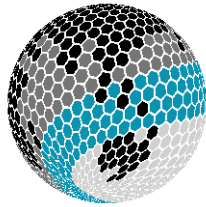


Government Publishing Service, Canberra [ISBN 0 644 35077 6], 1994. I am not aware of such undertakings since – that is 23 years ago.

- A lack of acknowledging the contribution of a multicultural society causes negative effects. Amongst these negative effects includes on the one hand unspoken environment of hostility and exclusion, and on the other much more direct and continuous attacks. Recently the latter is evident in the attacks on Mosques in the public media, and the negative names given to environments including ‘monster houses’, ‘wog houses.’ While the former includes the incremental erasure of the diverse aesthetic and cultural references made in the aim to assimilate.
- The focus has been on negative points of ‘cultural interface’

### **Need to recognise the impact diverse communities have had on Australian architecture and culture**

- Foods, music, festivities of migrants are celebrated as multicultural contributions to Australian society, invariably with the qualitative term ‘ethnic,’ but the contribution of migrant houses, or the urban culture of multicultural streets, the use of parks have not been acknowledged, and in many cases have been perceived negatively.
- There are confronting programmes such as ‘go back where you came from’ but we have not addressed the positive contributions of what the diverse communities have brought to Australian society and how this has enriched its architectural and urban landscape and culture.
- **The first** recommendation for constructive progress - ‘better recognition and value of the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life’ - with a focus on architecture and urbanism, would be to **develop a comprehensive annotated bibliography** of the existing studies, research, reports, and data. There have been well known scholars and studies. The work of Celestina Segazio has noted the built heritage of Italian immigrants in Carlton; and the architect Allen Willingham has coined the term ‘Mediterranean Architecture’ for the houses of Southern European immigrants; Dr. David Beynon has studied the worship buildings of non-Christian religions; Helen Armstrong, Denis Byrne have studied the use of parks and natural environments by immigrants; Ruth Fincher, and Kim Dovey and Ian Woodcock have researched the impact of cultural diversity on urban environments. I have studied and documented the houses of southern European immigrants for 25 years, and I will elaborate on this below. It is evident that waves of immigrants have transformed many aspects of our built environment – streets with cafes and restaurants, and new type of food stores, houses, market gardens, and parks. The significance of this physical transformation is threefold. Firstly, it effects and defines our social and cultural environment, what we value, our everyday multiculturalism and our aesthetic references and traditions enable a more cohesive and expansive sense of what Australian society is; secondly it manifests ‘the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse’ communities, and thirdly, it orients new and emerging communities.’ Including the work of international authors, my edited book *Ethno-Architecture And The Politics Of Migration*, recently published by Routledge (2016), has outlined the international and current scene of migration and architecture.
- Here I would like to add the need to extend research to the aged individuals and communities. In addition to new and emerging communities, much more intensive



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understanding, research, and plans are required for aged care for NESB citizens and communities.

- In my research on migrant houses, participants have outlined how much the house means to them. The house has provided a sense of belonging and identity, and a way of transitioning from immigrant to active citizen. Participants have narrated their vulnerability and their experience of severe discrimination on arrival when they rented rooms 'enter and exit houses like a quiet cat'. A whole history of living in shared houses, and 'half way houses' whereby settled immigrants provided a transition space for arriving immigrants has been inadequately narrated. In adapting or constructing their houses, immigrants' later experience engendered social and supportive neighbourhoods and networks through collective house building. There have been many reports on the hostility and exclusion of the neighbourhoods in which they worked and lived. This reinforces non-multicultural enclaves and sentiments in our society. By building their houses, immigrants have created 'friendly multicultural rather than mono-cultural neighbourhoods.' Most notable from an architectural perspective was the contribution of southern European migrants who built their houses in the 1960s. These houses are distinctive as they illustrate how diverse cultural values were crafted into the architecture, and form an important gap in the history of post-war houses in Australia. Many have now been reconstructed and demolished, as these inventive houses were confused with McMansions (built much later).
- **The second recommendation** is to identify the gaps and to develop a multifaceted agenda **to collect data and support research on the impact of diverse cultures on the architecture and urban environments of Australian cities**, regional towns, rural areas, and natural environments. These can be updates on the kinds of annotated bibliography carried out in 1993/94. In other words, it is important to build a platform of knowledge that will generate both a broader and a deeper understanding of the contribution of multiculturalism to the architectural/urban shape and order of our society and the kind of cultural values it engenders. A more recent generation of scholars doing new work – Iris Levin has worked on migrant houses, Dijana Alic on 'ethnic clubs, Anoma Pieris and Alexandra Dellios have/are working on refugee camps, Shilpi Tewari has worked on new housing estates and diversity, Sally Winkler and Victoria Gantala have worked on migrant houses, and Sally Winkler on heritage and cultural diversity, Nasim Yazdani on urban parks - will expand the field.
- **The third recommendation** is to develop a **plan for the dissemination, engagement and interaction** with this knowledge and understanding. Many years ago I was contacted by someone from SBS that was interested in doing a television programme on 'migrant houses'. Unfortunately, this fell through. A plan that forms productive teams to work towards dissemination in print and digital media, interactive interfaces and access to data, education material for schools, television and film. Developing a network of organisations and scholars would be a supportive platform for dissemination. One aim of the Alfred Deakin Institute Symposium I am organising, *Aesthetic Anxiety or Performative Subjectivity: National narratives encountering migrant architecture in Australia*, scheduled on 16-17th November 2017 is to identify the national key scholars working in this area.



I am happy to provide further assistance if required.

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