

This month's *ESD Matters* takes the notion of Environmentally Sustainable Design a little broader, to explore ideas around social design, and specifically how design which facilitates interaction and integration can make our cities more 'liveable'.

Liveability is perhaps most aptly described by the Urban Foresight report that suggests, 'Quality of living = a strong urban identity supported by a quality urban environment', as one of five inter-linked goals in a living cities programme.<sup>1</sup>

With a commonly reported 86% of New Zealanders living in urban environments<sup>2</sup>, we think it's important to take to the street and look at the premise that a thriving, dynamic and healthy city is one which embraces its urban nature and recognises the importance of locally relevant architecture and design. And as many other cities around the globe have found, we see the return on this investment to be a vibrant community with engaged people.

Embracing 'pavement life' with street art, theatre and sculpture, architecture, alfresco dining and dedicated pedestrian areas is not unique to New Plymouth's urban fabric. Melbourne has proved with their efforts over the past decade that celebrating the City's identity and encouraging inner-city development (predominantly for residential and hospitality sectors) can inject new life into the urban fold. An episode of the Design e2 series titled Melbourne Reborn (which aired on TVNZ7 just this week)<sup>3</sup>, featured architects, urban designers and Rob Turner, Melbourne's Director of Design and Urban Environment, discussing the turnaround experienced within the city in recent years. A web like network of small service lanes overshadowed by high rises were traditionally 'dead' from 6pm when commuters exited the central city. Now days, Melbourne thrives (from both commercial and wellbeing standpoints) with these very lanes being a hip, sort after shopping, dining and entertainment precinct.

The incremental change has been brought about with well designed development, celebration of street culture and art, commercial investment and sound urban design. Closer to home we see similarities in urban renewal projects such as Wellington's waterfront and Waitangi Park upgrades and Auckland's Viaduct Basin restaurant, bar and apartment scene, to name a few.

As designers we have the opportunity to inspire our communities and to ultimately make places 'liveable'. An idea supported by local government, businesses and individuals throughout the world. This year's World Cities Summit kicks off in a few days time (28th June - 1st July) in Singapore. This four day event consisting of plenary sessions, networking forums and workshops will this year focus on Liveable and Sustainable Cities for the Future. Specifically it will look at leadership and governance for building liveable and sustainable communities.<sup>4</sup>

It appears there is much activity in this vein happening around us, and the NZ Urban Design Protocol sets out essential design qualities as Context, Character, Choice, Connections, Creativity, Custodianship and Collaboration<sup>5</sup>. Our collective efforts to find and nurture our City's identity is vital to our wellbeing and the City's liveability. If we are inevitably going to leave our mark on this world, lets give thought to what that mark will be.

- 1 [www.greens.org.nz/policy/urban-policy-living-cities](http://www.greens.org.nz/policy/urban-policy-living-cities)
- 2 Future Makers, Thoughts Starter card - *The importance of being urban*, available for download from <http://futuremakers.ning.com>
- 3 View a webcast of Melbourne Reborn online at: <http://www.e2-series.com>
- 4 [www.worldcities.com.sg](http://www.worldcities.com.sg)
- 5 Definitions for each of these design qualities can be found at [www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/urban/design-protocol/](http://www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/urban/design-protocol/)



[1] Huatoki Plaza, New Plymouth Photographer - Chris Hill [2] Puke Ariki facade, New Plymouth Photographer - Simon Devit [3] Ohakune Visitor Centre Photographer - Matt Grace [4+5] Bus Depot, New Plymouth Photographer - Rebecca Scott [6] Real TART gallery Sarah Stevens, Taranakiart.co.nz