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## **Navigating the Sea of Diversity** Multicultural Place-making in Sydney

**Susan Stewart, Bronwyn Hanna, Susan Thompson, Maryam Gusheh,  
Helen Armstrong and Deborah van der Plaats**

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# Navigating the Sea of Diversity

## Multicultural Place-making in Sydney

**Susan Stewart, Bronwyn Hanna, Susan Thompson, Maryam Gusheh,  
Helen Armstrong and Deborah van der Plaats**

### Abstract

*Historically, most multicultural exchanges have taken place across recognised geographic borders. However postmodern multiculturalism, largely resulting from ethnically diverse migration to advanced (post)industrialised countries, has led to new modes of multicultural contact. For many people, multicultural exchanges must now be negotiated in their everyday lives, often in their neighbourhoods and home, as well as in the public domain. Undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of built environment design and planning academics, this paper explores ways of documenting and theorising the activities of 'everyday' built environment professionals in Australia. It focuses on those who are attempting to sensitively and effectively design for such encounters in the context of contemporary multicultural urbanism.*

*Earlier studies of Australian multiculturalism in the built environment have typically followed international trends in focusing on ghetto-like places; that is, ethnically distinct, relatively segregated areas such as Melbourne's Chinatown or the Vietnamese precinct in Sydney's Cabramatta. This paper avoids this focus on overt ethnic stereotyping by focusing on places that may be visually unremarkable but are culturally heterogeneous in their production and habitation. It documents innovative strategies for multicultural negotiation developed by landscape design and planning professionals working for local government in the low-income, ethnically diverse suburbs of south west Sydney. The success of these strategies suggests that the everyday negotiations of design professionals offer a valuable site for study of the impact of cultural diversity on the evolution of the built environment.*

### Introduction

Australia, like other advanced industrialised countries is profoundly diverse in its ethnic composition. Yet, apart from an enduring fascination with Japanese culture, the Australian built environment is predominantly influenced by Anglo-American and European models of design. Design journals feature the latest trends from these places; university courses privilege western precedents in the teaching of design; and prizes are typically awarded to designs that emulate overseas examples, or are produced by internationally acclaimed 'masters'. This focus on western design offers little assistance for the everyday practice of built environment professionals working in multicultural Australia.

By contrast, the research project reported here focuses on Australian built environment design and planning practice that seeks to respect and foster cultural diversity. We argue that such work needs to be encouraged if built environments are to be amenable and appropriate to the diverse population that they house. It is also

productive of a richness of understanding and flexibility of work practices that can escape the form-driven dogma of much western design.

Our research documents and evaluates culturally responsive projects currently being undertaken by Australian built environment professionals. In order to do this, we examine cross-cultural design and planning practices, focusing on the ways in which they foster and accommodate multiculturalism in contemporary Australian society. The research is less interested in place-making that has resulted in overt ethnic stereotypes, such as 'Chinatowns'. Rather, our attention is on places that are culturally heterogeneous in their production and habitation, although they may be visually unremarkable.

In this paper we describe the research methodology and some initial findings from our survey and interviews. We present a case study that describes how innovative strategies for cross-cultural community consultation are currently being developed by landscape architecture professionals working in south-western Sydney.

## **Understanding Current Practice**

Our research seeks to identify professionals who have appropriately and effectively addressed cultural complexity in their work, typically with little recognition from professional establishments or academia. For this reason we have avoided focusing on already-established role-models in the design and planning professions. We have also refrained from choosing spaces and places that necessarily look interesting *to us*. Instead, our research methodology privileges the opinions of everyday practitioners. We asked them to describe situations they have experienced and to nominate sites involving cross-cultural issues which they have worked on or heard about.

In the initial phase of the project, funded by a University of NSW (UNSW) Faculty of the Built Environment (FBE) grant, we studied perceptions and practices of Australian resident landscape architects and planners who graduated from UNSW between 1985 and 1995. A mail survey was sent in August 2002 comprising a three page questionnaire asking about respondents' ethnic background and their experiences working with, or for the benefit of multicultural communities. We also requested respondents to identify both well and poorly-working multicultural spaces.

Of the 322 questionnaires sent (165 to landscape architects and 157 to planners), 47 responses were received. Twenty-eight of the 47 (or 60%) were from planning graduates, and 19 (or 40%) were from landscape architecture graduates. The 47 responses represented a fairly even distribution of graduates from both disciplines over the 11-year period surveyed. Of the 47 responses received, 35 (or 74%) were from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, mostly born in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to estimate the ethnic backgrounds of a student cohort (and this information is not collected by UNSW). However, a general perception shared by our research group was that a large proportion of FBE graduates during those years was indeed from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. A quick perusal of the names in the cohort suggested that between 21% and 31% were non-Anglo. Thus these results may suggest a greater tendency to respond to the questionnaire by Anglo-Celts than by other graduates. This tendency was also borne out by the numbers of respondents prepared to attend a focus group to further discuss the topic – all were native English speakers, and only one was a first generation migrant. This suggested that the professionals either most interested in, or prepared to publicly discuss the topic of multicultural professional practices, were from Australian-born English-speaking backgrounds, rather than from NES or migrant backgrounds. This is an important observation,



We were interested to discover whether the ethnicity of the built environment professionals surveyed had influenced the kind of work they attracted, speculating that non Anglo-Celtic communities might prefer to employ professionals from their own culture. Australian educated, non Anglo-Celtic professionals, acting on behalf of a cultural group with which they identified, might be in a particularly interesting position as negotiators of Anglo-Celtic institutional structures within a multicultural context. However, of the 47 respondents, 39 (or 83%) said that they were not aware of their cultural background having affected the kind of work that they had been given, and only two respondents gave positive examples of their cultural background attracting work associated with that background.

In response to the question about experiences of working with or for multicultural communities, 18 of the 47 respondents (38%) said they had never been involved in a situation where cross-cultural negotiation was central to the design or planning process. The remainder of the respondents (62%) offered an interesting diversity of examples where such negotiation had been important. These examples included initiatives involving negotiation and communication with a diverse user group. They also encompassed experiences assessing development proposals submitted to local councils where recognition of different cultural needs and sensitivity about appropriate processes for addressing them, played an important role in everyday transactions. The range of values held by people from different cultural backgrounds in relation to the Australian 'bush' (generally referring to natural landscapes, forest or woodlands) was commented upon, as was the difficulty of enforcing the planting of Australian native plants in new subdivisions where migrant residents wished to plant species from their home country. A number of respondents mentioned issues concerning the recognition of prior Aboriginal occupation or addressing ongoing indigenous associations with landscapes. Difficulties associated with gender, when dealing with certain cultural groups, were also mentioned.

The survey inquired as to difficulties associated with cultural difference that the respondents had experienced in the course of their practice. The most frequently cited problems were those arising from differing assumptions about the role of government regulations, language difficulties, and cross-cultural differences of opinion about the acceptability of certain design features. Of these, language difference is perhaps the one best institutionally recognised, and eight of the respondents (17%) had recourse to interpreters. The other main response to these difficulties was the employment of various modes of research and consultation. Some large-scale employers of built environment professionals, such as local government bodies, have instituted programs for training staff to address cultural diversity. However, a significant proportion of the respondents (43%) indicated that there were no resources available to help them.

Unexpectedly, the survey question requesting respondents to name both well and poorly-working multicultural spaces, delivered a far less interesting list of sites than the earlier question asking about projects in which the respondents had been involved. Sixteen of the 47 respondents (34%) left the question blank. About 30 positive responses were given, most naming specific religious or commercial places associated

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because the rhetoric of multiculturalism is meant to empower non-Anglo cultural groups, and to increase their ability to participate in the public culture. The survey results beg the question: Do Anglo-Australians feel more empowered and entitled than non-Anglo Australians to speak about multiculturalism? This possibility is supported by Hage's (1998) proposition that multiculturalism serves primarily to enrich and empower the majority 'white' culture.

with a particular migrant group. This recourse to stereotyped sites of cultural difference was surprising, in view of the diverse array of projects in which the respondents had been involved. It suggested a separation, in the minds of the respondents, between the activity of negotiating across cultures with regard to the production of a place, and recognition of the place itself as multicultural. Although unexpected, this important finding supports our research premise that the investigation of multicultural place-making is hindered by the emphasis that the built environment professions have traditionally placed upon formal outcomes.

Thirteen of the respondents expressed interest in attending a focus group interview, which was subsequently held at the FBE at UNSW on 5 September 2002. Although attended by only four respondents, this focus group was energetic and rich in its pronouncements. The main topics covered concerned:

- Strategies for public consultation with culturally diverse communities
- The complexity of professional planning and design practice in a multicultural setting
- A critique of the formalism and overarching control often attempted by the design professions
- Problems with the education of built environment professionals
- Analysis of specific places where multiculturalism comes into play.

Selected results from the focus group are considered below in the case study on landscape consultation techniques.

## **Case Study: Innovations in Planning and Design Practice in Fairfield**

### **Background to the Locality**

The local government area (LGA) of Fairfield City is situated 32 kilometres south west of Sydney's central business district. Covering an area of 100 square kilometres and housing nearly 200,000 residents, it ranges from sparsely populated rural areas to established and sometimes densely populated suburban and commercial districts. Fairfield is the most ethnically diverse local government area in Australia with residents coming from more than 130 countries. Less than half those living in the LGA are Australian-born. More than 70 different languages are spoken at home and only a third of residents speak English at home (Berryman and Finch, 2000, 14). Perhaps because of this diversity, as well as its affordability, Fairfield is a popular place for both recent and established migrants to settle, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Although there has been a long-term decrease in the proportion of Fairfield residents who are Australian-born or migrants from English speaking countries, nonetheless, native speakers of English still constitute by far the single largest language group in the locality, followed (in descending order) by those speaking Vietnamese, Cantonese, Italian, Spanish, Assyrian and Arabic (Berryman and Finch, 2000, 68).

Many of those who settle in the Fairfield LGA have arrived in Australia as refugees, or have been admitted as migrants under the family reunion program. Their backgrounds are sometimes traumatic, their education fragmentary or disrupted, and their skills frequently unmarketable in their new country. People with this background often find it difficult to become competent in English with insufficient

training or support, and this is then associated with high levels of unemployment (Berryman and Finch, 2000, 76-7).

Fairfield City Council strives to foster a sense of community among this diverse and sometimes struggling population. The success of this enterprise depends in part upon the Council's capacity for successful cross-cultural negotiation. It must manage differences not only between the diverse cultural groups within its constituency, but also between its own institutional agendas and the often-divergent priorities of the populace. Indeed, it is this latter cultural divide that has, in many cases, proved most sensitive. Yet with its slogan, 'Celebrating Diversity', and its local politicians and council officers representing many of the community cultural groups, Fairfield Council has developed a reputation for good practice in local government multicultural policy development and implementation (Thompson et al, 1998).

### **Planning and Design for Public Open Space in Fairfield**

Geoff King and Louise McKenzie, two built environment professionals employed by Fairfield City Council, attended our focus group. McKenzie is a landscape architect involved in the construction of specific projects, while King, as Place Manager for Open Space, is concerned with strategic planning for Fairfield's public open space.

King works closely with Council's Social Planner and Cultural Planner, and this relationship is physically reinforced by their adjacent workspaces. This deliberate fostering of interdisciplinary exchange by Fairfield Council met with general approval by participants in the focus group. The group was critical of the 'silo mentality' that often operates to isolate professional groups from one another. Several people related stories about fruitful working relationships that had arisen through serendipitous placement of built environment professionals in close physical proximity to community workers. The ability to negotiate cultural difference within a community, it seems, may benefit through collaboration across disciplinary boundaries in the workplace.

McKenzie and King's work has been informed by the experience of Fairfield Council's drainage engineers, headed by Steve Frost. McKenzie has collaborated with Frost and his colleagues on a number of innovative projects aimed at restoring natural drainage channels and wetlands. These works, including 'Restoring the Waters' (1994-2000), 'the de Freitas Wetlands' (1997-8) and 'the Flood Icon' (1998), pioneered Fairfield Council's employment of community artists as a means of involving local people in the re-shaping and rehabilitation of their open spaces.

The first of these projects, 'Restoring the Waters,' attracted considerable attention within the Australian engineering, community arts and landscape communities. The project involved the restoration of a portion of Clear Paddock Creek, formerly contained within a concrete drainage channel, to a more natural, sustainable stream system. Realised over a six-year period, from initial conceptualisation in 1994 to design development in 1996, and implementation in 2000, the project was innovative in its employment of a 'targeted and tailored cross cultural awareness program.' (Frost, personal communication, 2003) At the design-development stage, two artists, Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford, were employed to work with school children in the hope that their enthusiasm for the project would influence the wider community. Over 800 young people were involved in various activities including making hundreds of masks of water creatures that would come back to live in the wetlands. Older children made water art installations or wrote poems on the theme of

water, many revealing tacit knowledge about water management in other cultures such as Vietnam and the Middle East.

The 'Restoring the Waters' project was successful not only in environmental terms but also, and crucially, in terms of the attitudinal change evident within the community. The initial reluctance of many Fairfield residents to relinquish the 'tidiness' of a concrete drainage channel in favour of a more natural, meandering stream system, gave way to pride in, and a sense of ownership of, the recreated waterway. A potential division within the community, between those who favoured retention of the concrete channel and those who supported a more natural system, was largely resolved through the involvement of their children in the project. The awakening of memories, not only among older residents who could still recall the original Clear Paddock Creek, but also among migrants from rural Vietnam, China and the Middle East, established a link between these diverse cultural groups. It is this twofold success, supporting both environmental and social sustainability, which King and McKenzie have built upon in their development of on-site community consultation days for the on-going design of Fairfield's public open space.



**Fig 1: Vietnamese mother and child looking at water creatures. Launch of Restoring the Waters project 1995.** Photographer: Helen Armstrong

Successful community consultation depends upon active engagement of the various parties involved. In Fairfield, however, many residents experience themselves as divided from the government and its institutions. This separation is an effect not only of language and cultural difference, but also, especially for refugees, of personal histories of disenfranchisement and disempowerment. Such disengagement is of particular concern in a district populated by diverse cultural communities, especially when a high proportion of residents are relatively recent arrivals, and have yet to establish a sense of belonging within, or shared ownership of, their local public space. McKenzie asks:

In this sea of diversity, how do you get people to get to know their neighbours? How do you create a sense of community? (Focus group, 2002)

Traditionally, the most preferred method of community consultation employed by local government in Australia has been the formal public meeting. These have not worked well in overcoming the disengagement of the majority from the process of local decision-making. As King remarked, such meetings are likely to draw 'two

elderly Anglo-Saxons and a dog . . . and that's just not very efficient.' (Focus group, 2002)

In her work on the 'de Freitas Wetlands' project, McKenzie realised the potential for resolving conflicting cultural priorities through an informal, on-site consultation with representatives of both viewpoints. In this case the conflict revolved around the remnants of rose gardens and 50 year old fruit trees planted when the de Freitas family owned a nursery on the land running down to a small lagoon on Prospect Creek. In those early days a lot of Germans and other migrant families had settled along the Creek, and the de Freitas gardens were among the few remaining traces of this occupation. McKenzie recognised the cultural associations of these venerable remains but, in proposing to retain them, faced opposition from the de Freitas Wetlands Working Party, a 'very angry group' of Fairfield residents who wanted the wetlands completely revegetated as a natural habitat area. McKenzie recalls:

. . . to disperse the anger and [meet] the particular needs of this group, we had a consultation on site. And I invited the Garden Club to come along, because there were people in the Garden Club that recognised that these roses were 50 years old; they were really quite special roses, and they [the Garden Club] said they'd be really happy to maintain them and look after them . . . And so it was the de Freitas Working Committee, aggressive, and the Garden Club members, and they just worked it out themselves. . . . We [the Council workers] just stood back, and the Working Party people really just stopped and the Garden Club people told them about the significance of the place and the roses, and they worked it out together. (Focus group, 2002)

Drawing upon their experiences in the Restoring the Waters, de Freitas Wetlands and other creek rehabilitation projects, McKenzie, King and their colleagues are in the process of developing an innovative and culturally sensitive community consultation process. Developed and tested over the past two or three years, this new approach to community consultation has now informed the planning and design of several new parks in the Fairfield area. The approach is driven by a deep philosophical commitment to both the local community and broader environmental goals. In the words of King and McKenzie (personal communication 2003):

At the heart of our design approach is building upon peoples' common ground, and creating valued public places which offer a different kind of richness to local peoples' everyday lives. Cultural differences are celebrated through the consultative methods employed. . .

In regard to environmental sustainability, [the consultative processes] are about achieving a balance between natural and built environments. . . such as ensuring that green corridor links are achieved across the LGA as part of the regional Sydney network; that people newly arrived in Western Sydney gain an understanding of the value of native bushland and fauna, and the need to look after local creek systems. . .

The key event in this innovative consultation strategy is a festive 'Open Day', oriented towards families with children (one of the major intended user-groups of parklands in the district), held on the site of each proposed development. At a reasonable cost of around \$AUD 3,000, and generally drawing 300 or more locals, these events have proven significantly more successful mechanisms for engaging the community than the traditional formal meeting.

Prior to the day, a banner announcing the event is placed on the site. Flyers are sent out, including a short survey asking residents what they want from the park and what memories or stories they associate with the existing space. These recollections can significantly influence the public value accorded to the space, and can be incorporated into community artwork for the proposed park. On the Open Day itself,

the atmosphere is designed to be colourful and lively. McKenzie recalled one such day:

You just couldn't help but go to this space because of the music. And the local Arabic women all came down with their chairs, the elderly women out of the flats, and they all sat there. They fell asleep in their chairs. It was amazing! . . . And some of them got up and did belly dancing, or their traditional dance. (Focus group, 2002)

King added:

The cultural highlight for me was the elderly Vietnamese gentleman who played first 'Oh Vietnam' on the harmonica, and followed it with 'Waltzing Matilda.'

. . . We had an Islander dancing troupe at one [Open Day] . . . We had face painters at all of them. We had [community] artists at all of them. We had music, in some form, at all of them; sometimes an old Italian guy with a squeeze-box, whatever; just something to get people thinking positively. . . We had [local government] people from all the relevant language groups with clipboards with survey forms. . .

. . . The food, the music, the indirect stuff, pulled people out of their houses into the place; made them comfortable in the place. (Focus group, 2002)

Just getting people out of their houses and into the park is an achievement, and makes an important contribution to the ultimate success of the proposed space. As McKenzie commented: 'these were often spaces that the people had never been into' (Focus group, 2002). The Open Day festivities introduce life and colour into spaces that may have been considered lonely and unsafe by the community. The music, the dancing, the shouts of excited children, banish loneliness and reclaim the place for its people.



**Fig 2: Open Day at Springfield Park, Fairfield LGA, November 2002.** Photographer: Bronwyn Hanna



**Fig 3: Open Day at Springfield Park, Fairfield LGA, November 2002.** Photographer: Geoff King

Importantly, the Open Days also allow diverse groups within the community to encounter one another in an atmosphere charged with festive goodwill. McKenzie says:

...[We] have been trying to, just in these little events on our parks, get people out, let them see who lives here. That we're all family, we've all got kids, all got this common interest. (Focus group, 2002)

In strong contrast to the traditional formal meetings held at the Council Chambers, the Open Day community consultations tend to defuse antagonisms between different groups. King commented that:

...the Open Days have been fascinating because we've had some really angry people turn up, always in ones and twos, and they haven't been able to actually disrupt what's happening. Because they can't grab hold of the public meeting, they can't grab the forum. (Focus group, 2002)

The potential for a small, but vocal, group of lobbyists to dominate a public consultation, to the detriment of other, less confident or single-minded groups, is eliminated by the diffuse nature of the Open Days. Because there are dozens of discussions, multiple points of engagement, no one group can silence another.

The presence of community artists at the Open Days and the incorporation of artworks into the new park, have proved central to the success of these events and the designs that follow. King stated:

... these artists are very different artists. They're very much focused on the community and telling people's stories and getting involved . . . So for us it's actually a very effective tool and a way of getting to those communities and getting some feedback from them. (Focus group, 2002)



**Fig 4: Child's drawing, from Open Day at Springfield Park, Fairfield LGA, November 2002. The drawing shows fruit trees, swings and a slide. The child has written: "This park need [sic] more peolep [sic] to portect[sic] this park."**

Photographer: Bronwyn Hanna.

While children are entertained by clowns, taught how to make kites or paper hats, and encouraged to make drawings of 'a marvellous park', their parents are shown sketch plans of the council's proposals by council-workers fluent in the major community languages. All are invited to comment or make suggestions. Formal, computer-derived plans have been found to be alienating, because they look too complete; too untouchable. Instead, McKenzie says: 'We do sketches on butter paper on the boots of cars, and I'm literally out there with a spray can; and that's how it happens, on site' (Focus group, 2002).

Being there, on site, allows McKenzie and King to respond directly to specific community perceptions of the place. They can ask individuals: 'the corner of this park, what don't you like about it?' (McKenzie, Focus Group, 2002) As King says, '[we] get down and dirty with them [the community] and discuss these things.' King emphasises the importance of getting out of the office, away from the drawing board or the computer, and into other people's spaces. '[It's] amazing how much easier it is to sort problems out on the ground!' he maintains (Focus Group, 2002).

## **The Parks**

What are the parks that emerge from the Open Day process like? We visited two that had recently been completed; Bolivia Park in Cabramatta and Bareena Park in Canley Vale.

These two parks are certainly not recognisable as icons of a particular migrant culture. They do not look stereotypically 'Lebanese', 'Vietnamese', or 'Serbian'. Rather, they appear as elegant, but in no way extraordinary, examples of everyday Australian park design; sporting standardised play equipment, concrete paths and Australian native planting. The only overt sign that there might be a special relationship between each of these parks and its users is given in the inclusion of community artwork: often a mosaic, mural or sculpture. This artwork plays a key role in establishing a relationship between park and community. Developed from residents' memories and anecdotes, and from the drawings done by local children at



the Open Day, the artwork both nurtures and manifests a bond between community and place.

However, the sensitivity of the parks' designs to the needs and desires of their communities extends beyond the inclusion of the artwork. The Open Days at Bareena and Bolivia Parks, by filling these once-abandoned spaces with people, allowed King and McKenzie to see how each park might work. McKenzie commented that the Open Days allowed them to see:

. . . where people were comfortable sitting and how they rearranged themselves in their spaces. And how it worked with a big group . . . It actually was a good trial for us, to just see what was good about this and what wasn't. (Focus group, 2002)

Both observation of the community in the park and suggestions made by the community during the Open Day consultations, can impact upon the final park design.

In both Bareena and Bolivia Parks, strong community concerns about safety and the need for visibility have been recognised in the Council's policy of removing lower limbs of trees, so that there is minimal foliage between ground cover and canopy. This cropping of the trees is difficult to accept for landscapers who have been trained to appreciate both the aesthetic and the environmental value of the full foliage range. Yet, with the exception of a relatively small group of environmental lobbyists who are concerned about the loss of a bushy habitat for small native birds, the community desire for clear sight lines through the park is so strong that the popular use of the area may well depend upon it.<sup>2</sup>

A related design decision is the encircling of the parks by a ring of sturdy timber bollards. The aggressive car culture, adopted by some sections of the Fairfield community, is a constant threat to unprotected parks. The bollards prevent the driving, and occasional dumping and torching of vehicles within the park. The desire to reinforce park boundaries (without screening the interior) is also evident in the planting and paving design at both Bareena and Bolivia Parks.

Working within a limited budget, King and McKenzie have been concerned to establish the long-term landscape infrastructure of appropriate canopy and pathways as a priority. In this respect McKenzie emphasises the need 'to achieve a balance in this urban environment, between the environment and what the community wants' (Focus group, 2002). By the time the trees are mature the community that uses each park may have changed in composition and character. Thus the planting layout tends to be guided more by the long-term goals of the designer than by the immediate desires of a particular community. The placement and choice of benches and play equipment can more easily respond to changing community desires than can the planting of trees and shrubs. Nevertheless, even with respect to planting, the requests of the community are noted and accommodated where possible. Thus each of the entries to Bolivia Park is symbolically marked by a pair of golden rain trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) symmetrically flanking the path. These exotics, oddly contrasting with the informal clusters of eucalypts that dominate the park, bring a personal touch to the design. They mark, quite clearly, the accommodation of conflicting cultural desires.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this is common practice across local government in Sydney as part of the 'Safer by Design' policy recently enacted in the state planning legislation.



**Fig 5: Bolivia Park, Cabramatta, Fairfield LGA, December 2002.** Photographer: Susan Stewart

In King and McKenzie's work cultural difference is celebrated through the methods employed on the Open Days, the music, the dancing and the festivity, that bring the community together in the various parks. In their design work McKenzie and King strive to build upon the experiences and desires that residents with different cultural allegiances share; to celebrate their diversity and to achieve broader environmental and social sustainability goals. In this way they hope to create valued public places that offer a different kind of richness to the everyday lives of Fairfield's population.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented preliminary findings from our research into multicultural place-making in Sydney. The research discussed here confirms the engagement of built environment professionals in cross-cultural negotiation in the course of their everyday practice. This practical engagement is a rich source of community understanding that is often overlooked, given the form-focused orientation of the built environment professions in Australia. The research also reinforces the importance of everyday professional practice informing the theoretical discourse of planning, architecture and landscape architecture.

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<http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/Files/Information/multi.pdf>

## **Bionote**

**Dr Susan Stewart** teaches history, theory and design in the interior design program at the University of Technology Sydney. Her doctoral dissertation, from which a number of papers have been published, examined Sir Henry Wotton's *The Elements of Architecture* in the light of classical theories of practical reasoning, with a focus on the cultivation of judgment. Her current research interests include interior design theory and cross-cultural place-making.

**Dr Bronwyn Hanna** has taught in departments of Fine Arts, Communications, Planning, Geography, Architecture and Interior Design at various universities in Sydney. She has co-authored a book on Women Architects in Australia 1900 – 1950, and has participated in several research projects concerning multiculturalism and the local effects of global restructuring. She is currently writing a literature review about landscape and gender for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

**Dr Susan Thompson** teaches urban planning in the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of NSW, Sydney. Susan has several major research themes including cultural diversity and the city, meanings of home, planning processes and community renewal. She has pioneered the use of qualitative methods of inquiry in urban planning scholarship.

**Maryam Gusheh's** research draws upon the field of cultural study in the analysis of cross-cultural architectural practices and the role of urban forms in the definition of cultural identities. Her doctoral dissertation undertakes a critique of the Parliament Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, designed by the American architect Louis Kahn. Maryam teaches architectural history, theory and design. She is the director of architectural practice *Gamble Gusheh Design Pty Ltd* and contributes to the design and documentation of residential projects.

**Helen Armstrong** is the Director, Cultural Landscape Research Unit, School of Design and Built Environment, Queensland University of Technology. She has undertaken a number of research projects related to the cultural landscape. Most of the research has explored Australian perceptions of place. Recent research has involved the study of migrant place-making and the contribution of cultural pluralism to Australian cultural heritage.

**Dr Deborah van der Plaats** has taught architectural history and theory at the School of Architecture and Graduate School of the Built Environment at the University of New South Wales. Her present research interests include multiculturalism in the built environment, the architectural writings of William Lethaby and John Ruskin, nineteenth century readings of the *Hypnerotomachia*

*Poliphili*, and the role of the Imagination in eighteenth and nineteenth century theories of architectural invention.