

COMBINING COMMERCE AND LEISURE: CREATING THE URBAN MAGNET

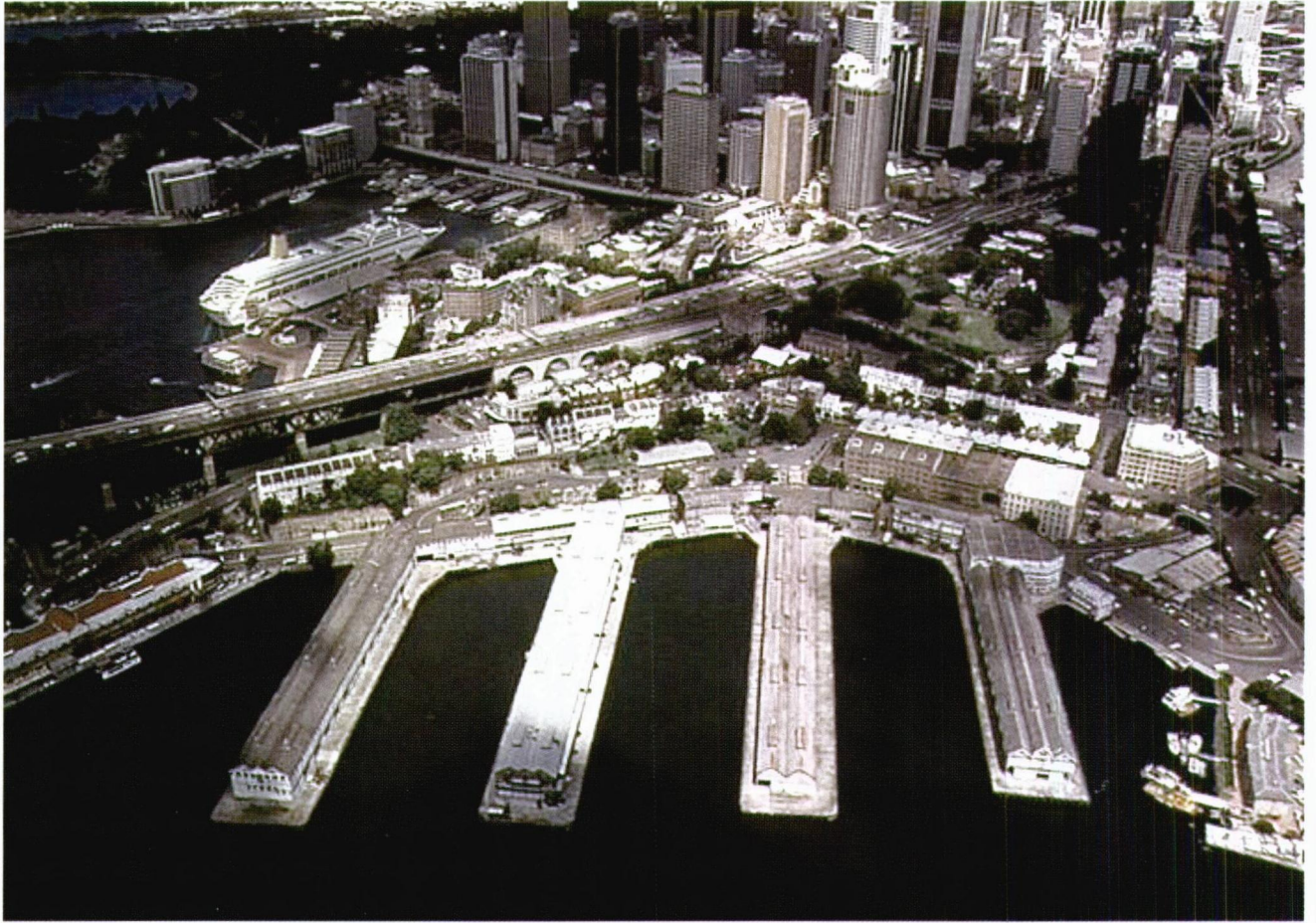


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Cities change and evolve with improvements to their infrastructure. Some of the major changes to cities in the past century have resulted from the advent of the motor car, the elevator, easier and more affordable air travel, climate control, containerized shipping, information technology, communication and advanced electrical distribution and applications. Better health care and the resulting increase in population have added to the complexity of our habitats. These changes have not always improved our cities, in some cases keeping up with change has often contributed to haphazard or spontaneous growth, congestion, uncontrolled expansion and untidiness.



Darling Harbour Sydney



Aerial view RECYCLED WHARVES Walsh Bay & Finger Wharf Apartments

Accommodating such rapid changes has caused some forms of infrastructure to become obsolete. In the city of Colombo, the commercial 'life' may have been taken out of the central business area - the Fort. Developing future strategies for improving the urban infrastructure of Colombo, should include measures to revitalize the commercial business center and re-develop the opportunities present in the Beira Lake precinct. Solutions to enable easier access, improved parking facilities and or people movers to these areas would assuredly render these areas viable for redevelopment as thriving 'urban magnets'.

'Urban magnets' are typically centers of mixed commerce and leisure usage. The catalyst has always been the present day generation's obsession with leisure which, exploited by interactively juxtaposing business offices, shopping centers, food outlets, theatres, cinemas and outdoor recreational facilities, create attractive hubs that generate commercial revenue and satisfy consumer needs.

Some examples of revitalized obsolete infrastructure in Sydney, NSW and Doha Qatar are outlined below.



Walsh Bay apartments Finger Wharf

Sydney New South Wales

Leading up to the 2000 Olympics, several disused ports in Sydney, previously industrial harbour precincts rendered ineffective with the advent of containerized shipping, have been transformed into exciting commercial and leisure centers.

All four areas described below are located on the water's edge, a distinct asset in any development context particularly for reasons of ambiance of the surroundings and associated visual aesthetics. The use of under utilised warehouses and industrial buildings, adapted to hotels, apartments, entertainment venues, cafes, museums, galleries & other exhibition spaces has been the recurrent theme with each of these precincts.

Several new buildings, an exhibition center, hotels, retail market, marine museum and aquarium and redeveloped disused buildings, linked to a casino, have transformed the previous working port area into a major tourist attraction.

The presence of this urban magnet has contributed to ancillary commercial development on the fringe of the harbour. The city has benefited enormously through this regenerated precinct, it is the hub of lunch-time activity for city workers and the leisure time venue for a host of visitors both local and tourist.

Walsh Bay and Finger Wharf apartments are excellent examples of adaptive re-use, transforming wharves rendered obsolete by modern containerised transportation. Re-development has offset the cost of retaining and re-using the buildings.

Walsh Bay apartments - an interesting commercial conclusion – to demolish one of the historic wharves and replace it with a new purpose built residential building of high commercial value. The apartments were sold off the plan in a single weekend.

Similar constraints were overcome with the Finger Wharf apartments - innovative solutions were adopted to overcome the constraints of fire safety of existing timber framed construction, condition of rotted timber piers and lack of parking.

Radisson Plaza Hotel

Sydney's Radisson Plaza hotel is also a good example of this type of development. To promote commercial viability, three extra floors were added to the building, raising and reinstating an existing cupola once the extensions were complete. Previously a commercial bank building, it is now a five star hotel complex replete with all modern amenities – an excellent piece of adaptive reuse.



Radisson Plaza Hotel





Doha Qatar: City Centre



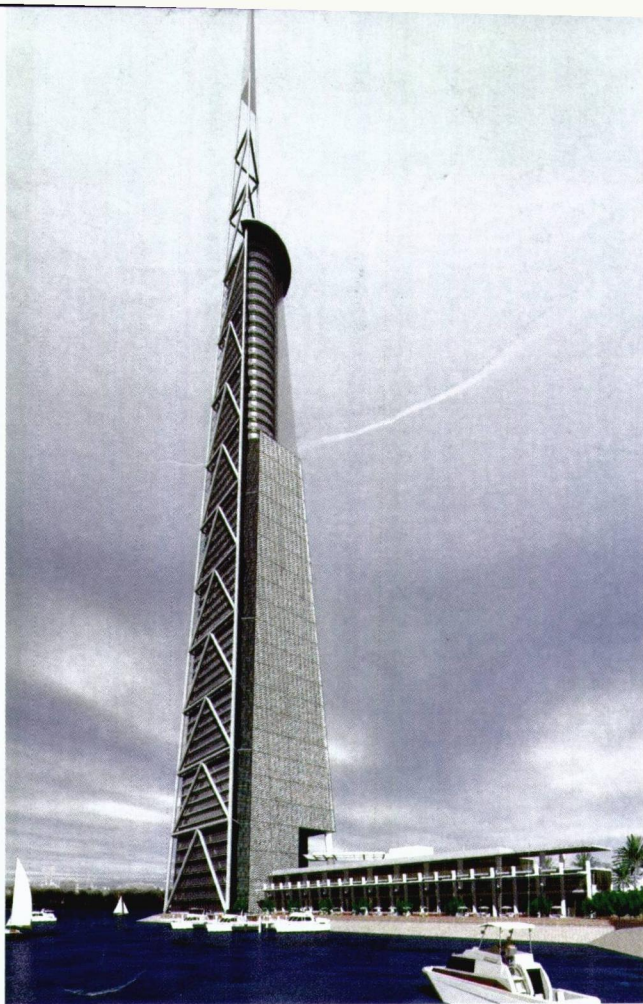
All these are examples of prominent buildings, rendered disused through the advent of modern technologies, that have been effectively converted to more appropriate uses, whilst at the same time retaining their inherent architectural character.

City Centre Doha

Doha City has seen rapid growth from its sleepy fishing village status in 1956 into a modern metropolis today. Planned urban development along the foreshore or 'Corniche' has resulted in a new commercial and leisure zone at one end, the 'air conditioned city' or City Centre complex.

This new center has been planned to generate growth in a predetermined pattern, reclaiming areas of the natural Doha bay to form the Corniche.

City Centre is predominantly a shopping mall, with ancillary leisure facilities, a nucleus of growth resulting from the change of direction in urban planning. In its extreme summer heat of 50 °C leisure seekers flock to the building, which offers a controlled environment.



Doha Towers



2 proposals

The 60 storey tower & Lagoon Plaza

2 Proposals - The 60 Storey Tower & Lagoon Plaza

GHD Global Qatar's proposal for a 60 storey tower, mid way between the old and new city centers, is intended to reinforce the prominence of the Corniche in the city plan.

The complex comprises hotel, marina and shopping outlets. Doha bay becomes a part of the development, which is designed to exploit the proposed waterfront location.

Also proposed by GHD Global Qatar, Lagoon Plaza – the 'leisure anchor' is designed to effectively combine commerce with leisure – both projects take advantage of adjacent water to create leisure oriented micro environments as urban magnets.

Concluding Comment

The process of planning for redevelopment should include a philosophy of creating a 'centre' or 'heart' to concentrate leisure and commercial activity. The overarching designs must address functionality, life style amenity, circulation, environmental amenity, servicing and infrastructure and roads.

The assets of Colombo Fort's historic city buildings and the Beira Lake precinct should not be over looked in the continuing redevelopment of the city of Colombo's infrastructure. As these examples and projects demonstrate the imaginative development of these assets would be what transforms Colombo into a 21st century city. ▲