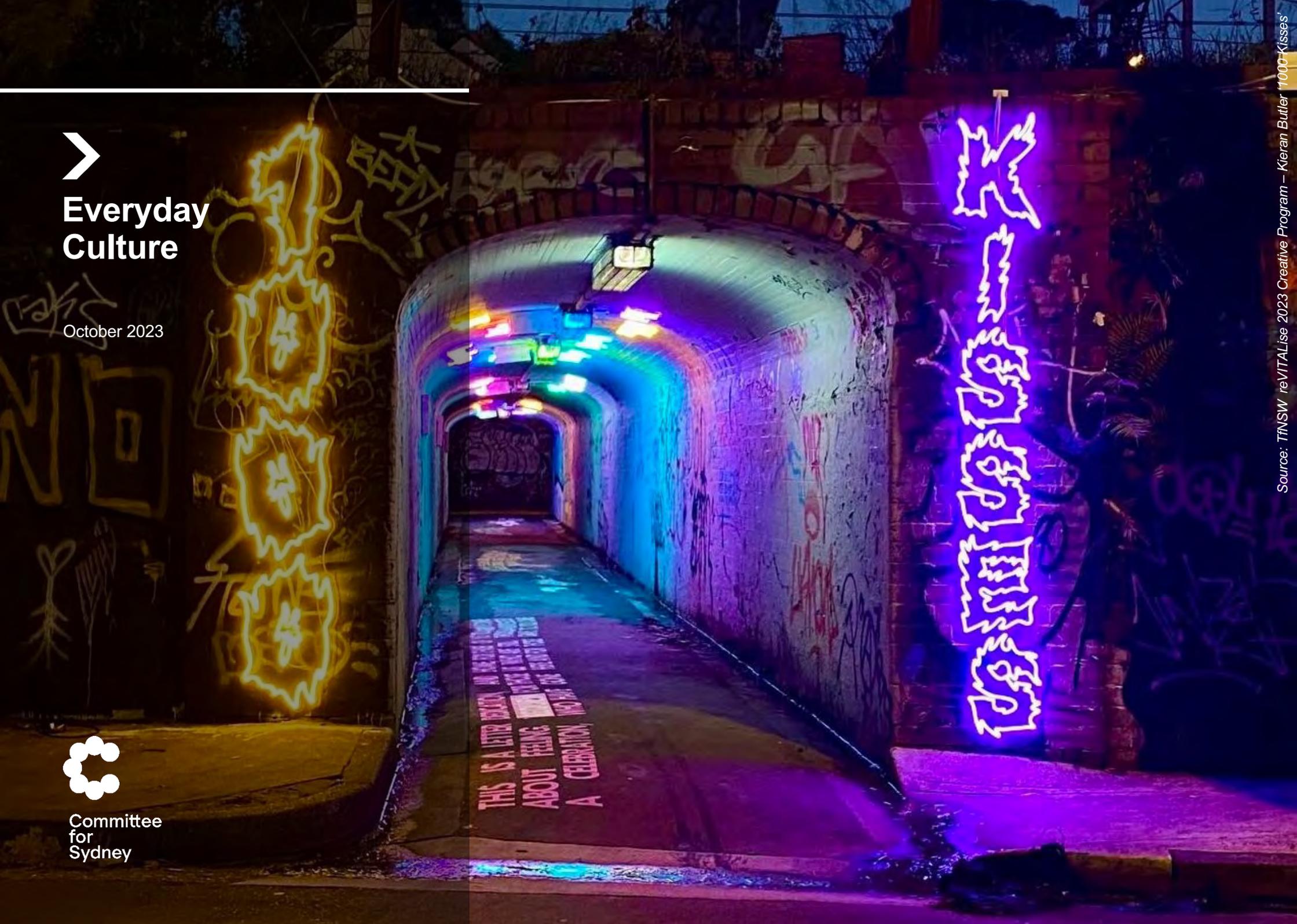# Everyday Culture

October 2023

Committee for Sydney

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of our land – Australia. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.

We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. This was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Contributors

Lead authors

Kerri Glasscock   Sydney Fringe Festival
Harri Bancroft   Committee for Sydney

Champions

Kerri Glasscock   Plug and play city, Town hall revival
Alison Lee and Amelia Thorpe   Parklets
Chris Tooher   Open streets

Renders

Hatch RobertsDay   Plug and play city
Hassell   Town hall revival, Open streets
Urbis   Parklets

Note: *This report is being released as a series. New chapters, championed and co-authored by different creatives, will be released monthly.*

Table of Contents

Note: *This report is being released as a series. New chapters with new ideas will be released monthly.*

Foreword

Sydney is the best city in the world – I firmly believe this.

The reason I can make this claim so confidently is because I have the privilege to work with, and for, our local creative community every day of the year.

The crying shame for the rest of the city is that the gifts so lovingly crafted by our local community are often hard to find. This is due to a number of reasons: a lack of affordable, appropriate infrastructure that excludes many; a heavily curated program of events that rely on big, flashy, often out-of-town one-offs; and a historic reliance on our geographical beauty – our sites rather than the content that exists within and around those attractions.

Imagine if all the incredible content that brews behind closed doors could flow freely throughout our city – a place where cultural interactions were not limited to destination events, ticketed auditoriums or prescribed activity. A city where everyone has the right to present, participate and experience cultural activity every day.

Add a sprinkle of that to our natural beauty and we really will be the best city in the world.

This report looks at how other countries nurture their cultural identity by creating democratic everyday experiences for their citizens. It throws a few ideas down on the table for how we might do the same here in Sydney. These ideas are innately achievable and inarguably impactful.

Sydney is the best place to call home and Sydneysiders should be able to access the incredible cultural offerings that our artists create daily. Everyday Culture provides a platform for just that, while also ensuring that visitors who come for our beauty can also experience the true voice of our city. Culture is being made daily, so let's make it available to everyone every day.

Kerri Glasscock, CEO,
Sydney Fringe Festival

Introduction

Sydney should have great cultural experiences – every day

All people participate in culture, from celebrations of tradition to exploring the new and unexpected. Culture is a matrix of creating and consuming; it brings cities to life as we express ourselves, connect and find places where we belong.

Most importantly, culture is fun! This is why we believe people in Sydney should have access to great cultural experiences, every day.

Sydney is well known for its big events and distinguished cultural institutions. We care a lot about both, and value each as vital pillars of our city's annual offering.

However, we believe art and culture should be more accessible within the day to day. This report looks at how we can enhance Sydney's 'everyday culture' – creativity and connection for everyone, every day.

The vision is of a city where cultural production and exhibition are possible in a myriad of public spaces. This requires a democratic provision of culture via assets that will enable and encourage everyone to participate in cultural activity.

Boosting cultural participation builds a critical mass of people – an audience – seeking new experiences. Critical mass makes it fun to be out doing things because it builds the vibe and energy of a city. But just as importantly, it makes putting on events or shows financially viable for artists, producers and small businesses.
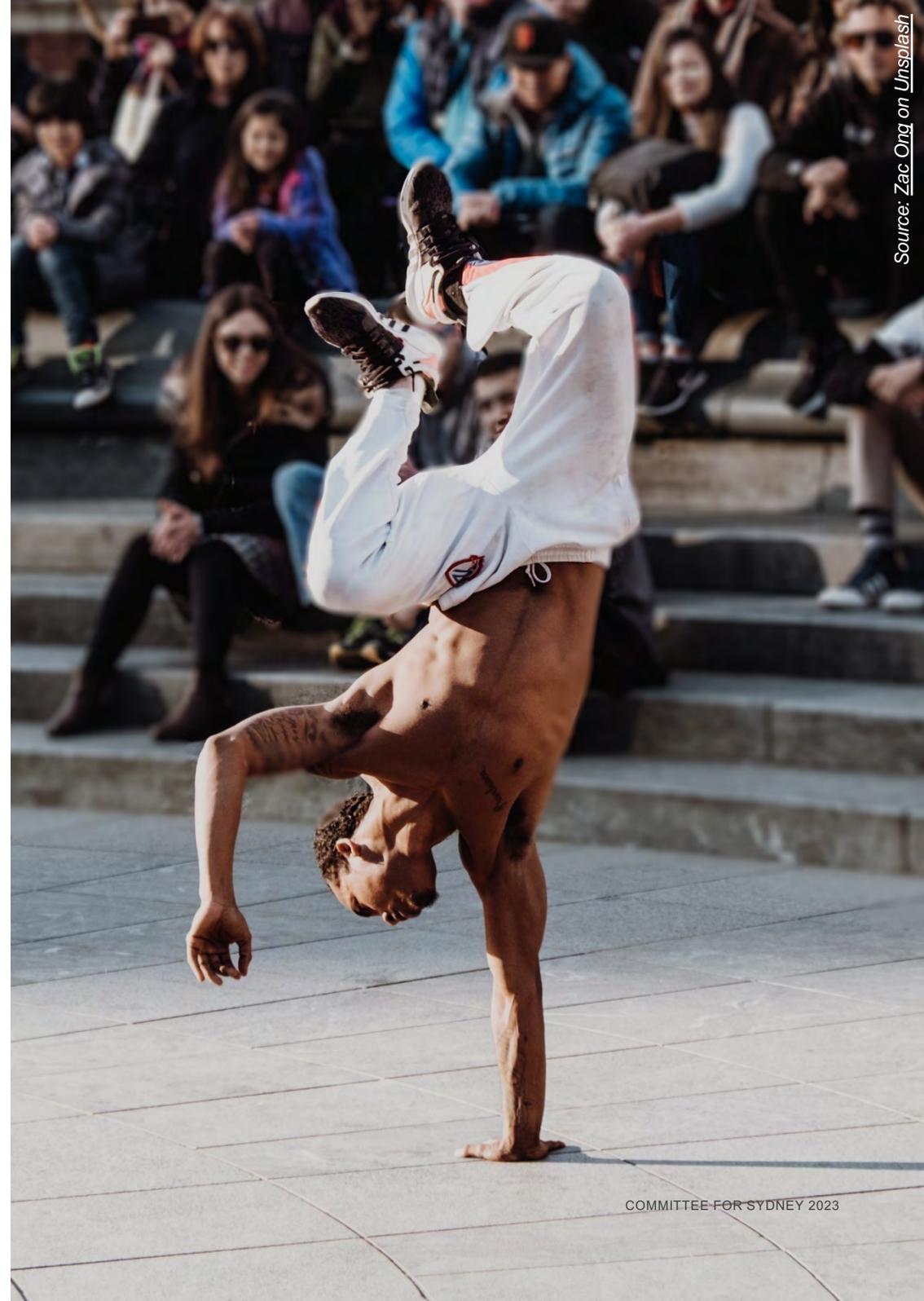
Source: Zac Ong on Unsplash

When there is a baseline of cultural activity every day, new and seasonal events have something to build on in terms of audience, as people have a greater appetite for activity.

We define 'everyday culture' as creative experiences that are:

- Free or have free-to-public elements

- Open to the public

- Take place at least once a week for at least one season a year.

Next we briefly outline the regulatory and funding environment for culture and the arts in Sydney and Australia, before presenting a photo essay of inspirations and examples of everyday culture in cities around the world.

We shared these inspirations with some of Sydney's best creators who helped us develop and author a set of everyday culture ideas which form the body of this report.

This report is also a little different – with each idea released sequentially and building the body of the report over time. Each idea has associated recommendations to government on what needs to change for the idea to be realised.

The regulatory environment is almost ready to enable everyday culture

For a long time, restrictive regulations and lockdowns have stifled creativity and cultural expression in Sydney.

But that's changing. In recent years, the NSW Government has made regulatory changes to undo mistakes of the past and better support Sydney's nightlife and entertainment.

Positive legislative changes include (but are not limited to):

- Ending the lockout laws

- Temporary outdoor dining rules

- Temporary fast-track pathways for liquor licence boundary changes

- Special Entertainment Precincts

- Exempting development for change of use from a shop to entertainment venue

- The removal of live entertainment conditions on liquor licences (such as what type of music can be played and what type of decorations can be hung)

- Extended trading for dedicated live music and performance venues.

Source: Nadim Merrikh on Unsplash

COMMITTEE FOR SYDNEY 2023
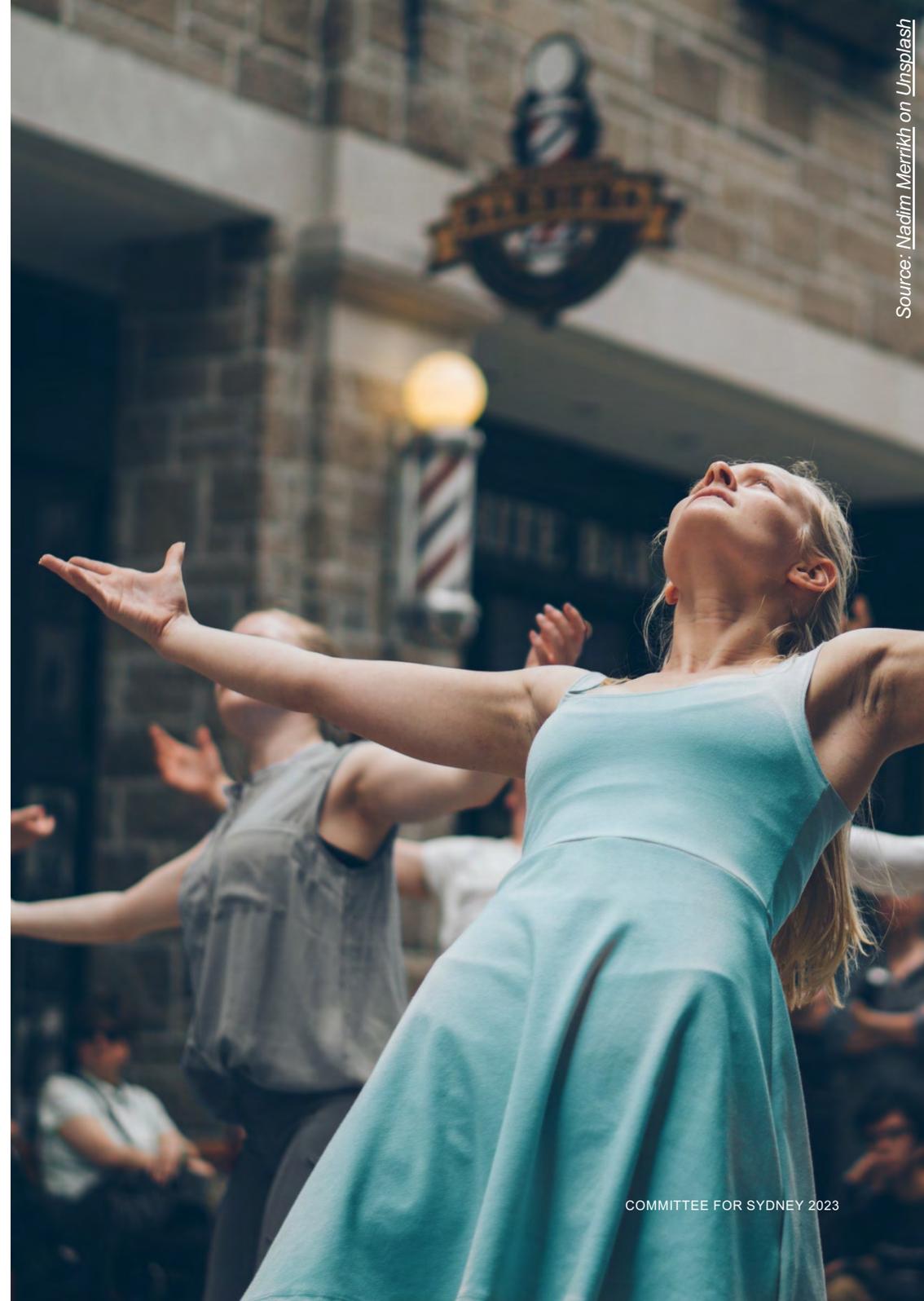
These changes have all addressed issues for internal premises and venues. However, there is still more that can be done and our report highlights the next steps to ensure our public domain spaces are also activated and well-utilised.

For Sydney to be full of everyday cultural experiences we need to create spaces around the city that encourage people to plan, or spontaneously create, cultural moments. Placemaking efforts should focus on achieving this outcome.

Creating special places means that people can experience life in public in an infinite variety of ways that make city life special and meaningful.

These places work on their own when nothing specific is programmed to be happening in them. But these spaces can also work as stages or settings for cultural and artistic events.

The focus is on making daily life better for locals, but bringing more culture into daily life will also support the visitor economy. It transcends that dichotomy. We make the city for locals, but then we invite visitors in to join us.

We need to invest more in culture and the arts

Strong cultural economies attract tourists, boost local businesses and create jobs. They create places where people want to live, work and play. When a city has a depth and breadth of year-round cultural activities, people spend more time and money going out.

Investment in culture and the arts doesn't only produce direct economic benefits – there are also social and individual benefits to be gained.

Cultural activities facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, boost social inclusion and improve people's wellbeing. As well as this, creative activity fosters innovation – an essential element of social and economic progress.

With so much to gain from a robust cultural sector, greater investment in culture and the arts should be a priority for all levels of government. We should aim to increase government spending on recreation, culture and religion as a percentage of GDP to match or exceed the OECD average.

The federal government's announcement of a new national cultural policy, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*,[1] which includes $300 million in funding commitments, is a step in the right direction. However, all levels of government need to commit to more funding to turn the dial on historic underinvestment in arts and culture.

1. Australian Government Office of the Arts

Australia spends less on culture than the OECD average
Total government (federal, state and local) expenditure on 'recreation, culture and religion' as a percentage of GDP in OECD countries, 2020
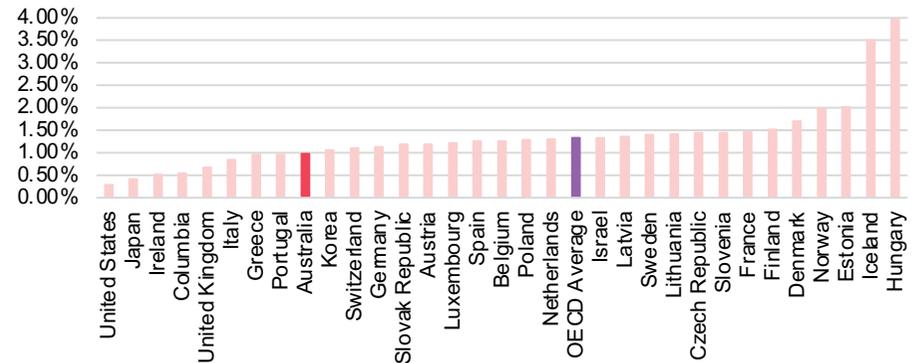
Source: OECD

Australia's spending on culture has remained low for decades
Total government (federal, state and local) expenditure on 'recreation, culture and religion' as a percentage of GDP

Source: OECD

Sydney is a global city and the gateway to Australia. The NSW Government could elevate this status by making Sydney Australia's cultural capital.

But compared to other states and territories, NSW Government expenditure on recreation, culture and religion is quite low. The good news is that this means there is a big opportunity to increase funding, boost the economy and enhance Sydney's reputation.
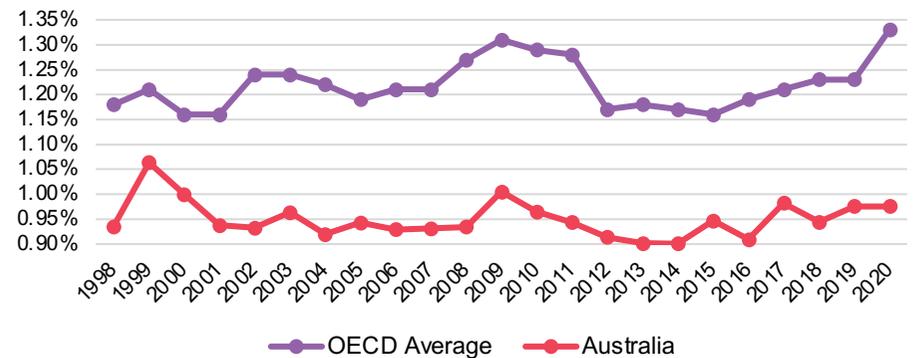
While local government spending on culture in NSW is comparable to other states and territories, it could be higher. We recognise budget constraints can be more difficult at a local government level but suggest that in-kind support, such as accommodation grants or pre-approved event sites, could be made available.

The NSW Government should also consider offering in-kind support, such as waiving user-pays police fees for more events – not just those considered as state significant.

NSW Government per capita spending on culture is low
Total state government funding for 'recreation, culture, and religion' per capita, from FY1998/99 to FY2020/21, in FY2020/21 dollars
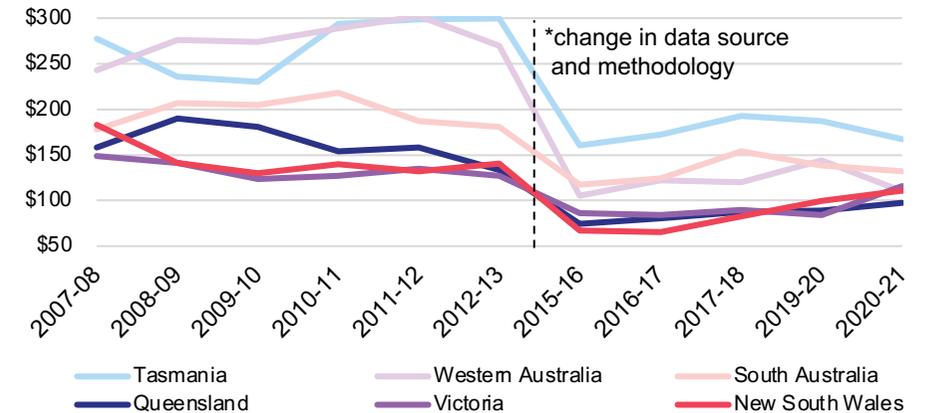
Sources: ABS, Australian Government

Local government per capita spending on culture could be higher
Total local government funding for 'recreation, culture and religion' per capita, from FY1998/99 to FY2020/21 in FY2020/21 dollars
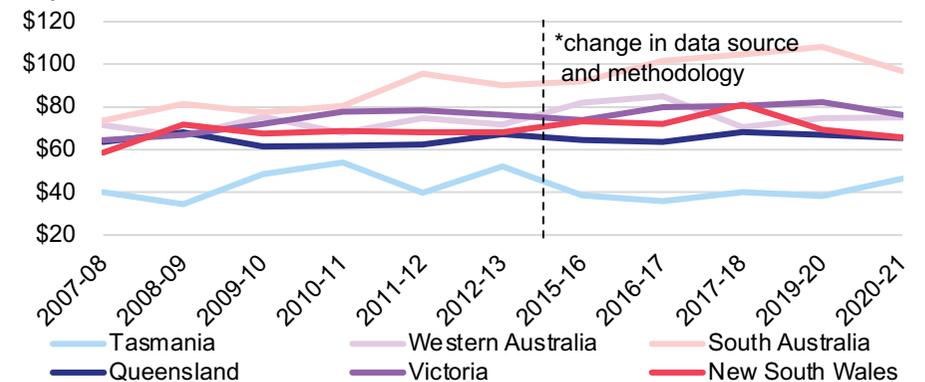
Sources: ABS, Australian Government

Photo essay: everyday culture inspiration from cities around the world

Daily and weekly rituals

Passeggiata, Rome

Source: Pixabay

Call to prayer, Istanbul

Source: Adli Wahid on Unsplash

Puja, Rishikesh

Source: Sachin Singh on Unsplash

Aarti, Varanasi

Source: Prado on Unsplash

Music

Busking, London

Source: Maaria Lohiya on Unsplash

Bloco Afro, Salvador

Source: Mídia NINJA on Flickr

Frenchmen Street, New Orleans

Source: Robson Hatsukami Morgan on Unsplash

Callejoneada, Guanajuato

Source: Russ Bowling on Flickr

Public theatre

Gigantería, Havana

Source: Mikhael Simmonds on NBC News

Ana Desetnica, Ljubljana

Source: Siolnet

Nukkad natak, Delhi

Source: Vibhana Kanwar on Anukriti Facebook

Bate-bolas, Rio de Janeiro

Source: Folha de S.Paulo

Immersive transport station design

T-Centralen Metro station, Stockholm

Source: Robert Bye on Unsplash

Alisher Navoi Metro Station, Tashkent
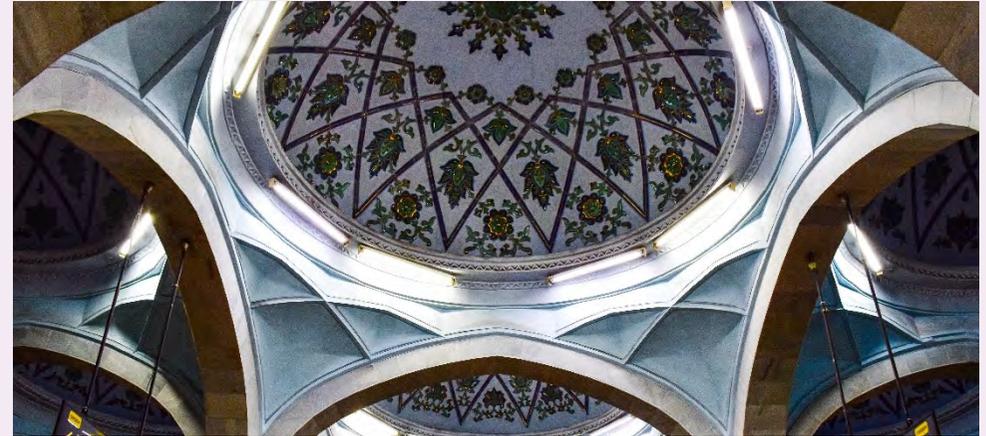
Source: AXP Photography on Unsplash

Toledo Metro Station, Naples

Source: Maritè Toledo on Flickr

Bus stop, Moldova

Source: Photobank MD on Flickr

Parklets

Parklet, San Francisco

Source: San Francisco Planning Department on Flickr

Parklet, Sao Paulo

Source: EMBARQ Brasil on Flickr

Parklet, Vancouver

Source: Paul Krueger on Flickr

Parklet, Berlin

Source: Fridolin freudenfett on Wikimedia

Open streets

Ciclovia, Bogota

Source: Lombana on Wikimedia

Car-free Sunday, Jakarta

Source: Raditya Fadilla on NOW Jakarta

Raahgiri Day, New Delhi

Source: Nidhi Gulati on Project for Public Spaces

CicLAvia, Los Angeles

Source: Metro – Los Angeles on Flickr

Public art

King Art Centre, New York State

Source: Ron Cogswell on Flickr

The Parthenon of Books, Kassel

Source: Heinz Bunse on Flickr

Little Island, New York City

Source: Coco Tan on Unsplash

The Bean, Chicago

Source: Richard Tao on Unsplash

Street art

Favela Mosaic, Rio de Janeiro

Source: AXP Photography on Unsplash

Wynwood Walls, Miami

Source: Sieuwert Otterloo on Unsplash

Shop shutters, Barcelona

Source: Ulli Hansmann from Pixabay

M50 Art District, Shanghai

Source: jo.sau on Flickr

Lighting

Lanterns, Hoi An

Source: Steven Wilcox on Unsplash

Neon lights, Tokyo

Source: Kevin Poh on Flickr

Super-Trees, Singapore

Source: Timo Wagner on Unsplash

Building lights, Shanghai

Source: Edward He on Unsplash

Ideas for Sydney

Plug and play city

Foreword

Sydney loves a street festival, an outdoor party or a performance. Our weather encourages us to live outdoors as much as we can, yet the bulk of our cultural presentations are held indoors.

This is mostly due to the fact that our city is simply not set up to host regular outdoor activity. Without permanent base-line infrastructure, the added expense and regulatory frameworks that are overlaid on activations are prohibitive for many producers, artists or event organisers. This results in street activity being reduced to those who can afford to access the process of putting on a show.

Of course, we still want and need the massive concerts in the Domain, or Opera on the Harbour, but wouldn't it be wonderful to have locations across the city that could easily, affordably and quickly be activated by everyone to present culture?

Small community festivals, solo artists, independent companies, youth groups. Places where citizens could gather, share stories and everyone could affordably use public-owned assets for culture every day.

Kerri Glasscock
CEO, Sydney Fringe Festival

Bio

Kerri Glasscock is the co-author and champion of plug and play city.

Kerri is a well-known and influential arts leader in Sydney, having built a strong reputation as an independent theatre maker, award-winning venue owner, artistic director, CEO and advocate for the cultural sector.

She is a respected voice of the Sydney night-time economy and has led the way in regulatory reform for the sector over the past six years, ensuring policy positions are based on sector-led data.

Kerri is currently CEO and Festival Director of the Sydney Fringe Festival – the largest independent arts festival in NSW – which presents the work of more than 2000 artists annually across Greater Sydney.

The vision

An exciting and culturally abundant city with layers of activity embedded throughout its landscape and calendar. The streets of Sydney should be alive with activations, events, pop-up performances, community conversations and gatherings all year-round.

Why we should do it

Every single festival and event that takes place in Sydney needs to be assembled or built from the ground up, every time. This includes infrastructure and ambience. An immense amount of budget is spent on administering regulatory requirements, along with bringing in infrastructural requirements, such as water, toilets, three-phase power and lighting. This reduces return on investment and creates budget restrictions that limit the amount of art and culture that producers can deliver.

If a base level of variable infrastructure was permanently established in Sydney, places could literally come alive any day of the week without extensive timelines, regulatory prohibitors or increased costs for cultural organisations, groups and individual artists. These places could also have overarching approvals to be used as event spaces – meaning organisations wouldn't have to apply for a DA (development application) and may be able to use generic traffic management plans or risk management plans. This would allow producers to be more responsive to demand, and not have long drawn-out timelines.

With this plug and play infrastructure, events could deliver greater impact and redistribute budget line items to support more artists or further amplify their offering. Small, diverse community groups and individual artists – who historically are priced or regulated out from presenting activations – would be able to transform their local streets.

A plug and play city provides a creative opportunity to people who would otherwise lack the required resources or funding. This encourages diverse and spontaneous community gatherings, activations and events which can take place at almost any time, on any day.

How it would work

A plug and play city would require a diverse mix of infrastructure, from simple base line items to higher-end infrastructure builds. These might include:

- Public domain alterations in plazas and public owned spaces to include three-phase power outlets, ambient and changeable lighting, raised or tiered areas that could be utilised as seating or a low-fi stage and public toilets (for example, Hurstville Plaza)

- Ambient lighting and public art in laneways and streets appropriate for events. This enables event organisers to have a baseline to build from[insert comma] without having to create atmosphere from the ground up (for example, Kensington Street and Angel Place)

- More pedestrianised streets that are suitable for events so organisers do not have to go through street closure approval processes

- Permanent outdoor stages in appropriate parks for large scale concerts – just like the old park bandstands

- Blanket or global DAs.

Where it would work

For Sydney to become a true Plug and Play city, we need the above-described infrastructure in some of our town centres, plazas, parks, slow-streets and laneways across the city.

> ## Before plug and play infrastructure

Centenary Square, Parramatta

After plug and play infrastructure
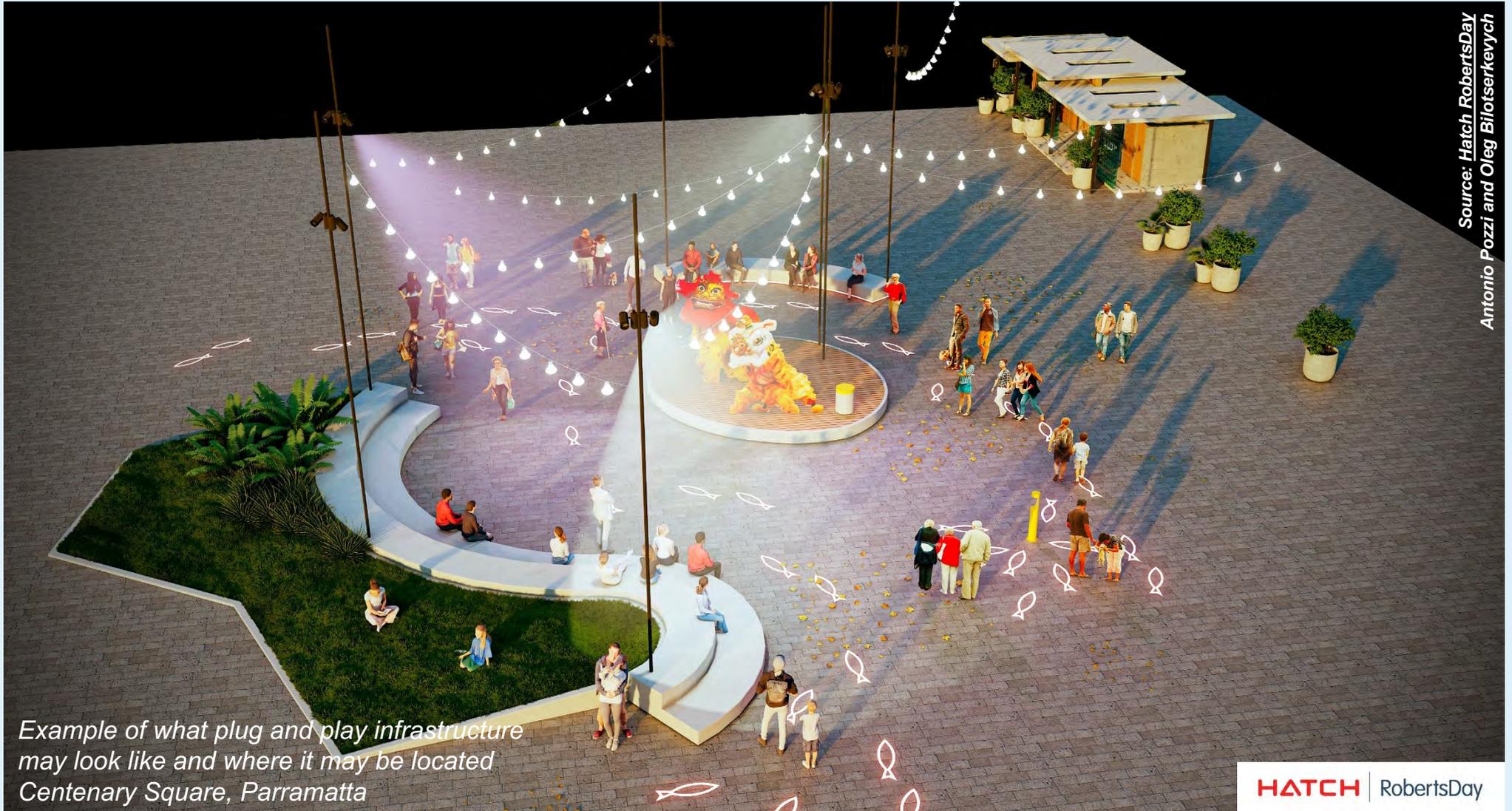
LIGHTING INSTALLATION

STAGE AREA

PUBLIC TOILETS

THREE-PHASE POWER

FIXED SEATINGS

WATER REFILL STATION

Source: Hatch RobertsDay Antonio Pozzi and Oleg Bilotserkevych

Example of what plug and play infrastructure may look like and where it may be located Centenary Square, Parramatta

HATCH | RobertsDay

After plug and play infrastructure

Source: Hatch RobertsDay
Antonio Pozzi and Oleg Bilotserkevych

Example of what plug and play infrastructure may look like and where it may be located Centenary Square, Parramatta

HATCH | RobertsDay

Case study: Pre-approved event sites, Wollongong City Council

Summary

- Wollongong City Council has eight pre-approved event sites
- Council established 'blanket DAs' for these sites, so that event organisers do not have to apply for a DA (development application) as well as applying to host the event
- Council has created an Events Toolkit which details the capacity, hours and types of events that can be hosted at each site
- The toolkit also details the other documents required with the event application, some of which are pre-prepared by council, such as Traffic Management Plans.

Background

- In *Creative Wollongong 2019-2024*, the council set policy and planning actions to expand the blanket DAs to include pre-approved event sites, and to provide an accompanying Events Toolkit
- Council's intention was to enable more nightlife and events, making Wollongong a more attractive city for people to live in, work in, visit and experience.

Why it matters

- Applying for a DA is uncertain, time consuming and expensive
- Council's blanket DAs help streamline event organising, making the process easier, more certain and less expensive
- Blanket DAs also allow for the pre-preparation of other blanket documents required for event applications, such as Traffic Management Plans, that can be expensive and time consuming for event organisers to complete.

Case study: Tench Reserve, Penrith City Council

Summary

- Tench Reserve is undergoing a $13 million upgrade, expected to be finished in 2023
- Located on the bank of the Nepean River, Tench Reserve upgrade includes a natural amphitheatre, riverfront board walk, playground, public art installations, new pathways, trees and a boat ramp.

Background

- Tench Reserve upgrade is being funded in partnership with Penrith City Council and the NSW Government
- NSW Government funding has been made available through the Parks for People Program, which is part of the $150 million Strategic Open Space Program initiated in 2019
- Tench Reserve reopened to the public in February 2023, with final work on the amphitheatre and boardwalk expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Why it matters

- The natural amphitheatre at Tench Reserve offers a new space for festivals, such as the local Real Festival in Western Sydney
- When not being used for performance, the landscaped space is open for people to sit or play in the shade with views of the river
- This type of infrastructure has multiple uses and benefits for the community.

Source: Scharp

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Create amphitheatres in appropriate parks or plazas**

We need more ready-to-go performance spaces throughout Sydney. One way to achieve this is by building amphitheatres in appropriate parks or plazas – either using existing sloped areas, or through landscaping. These spaces will provide the perfect spot to gather and enjoy the outdoors, with or without an accompanying performance.

Good landscaping can ensure trees and plants keep the amphitheatre well shaded while also preventing soil erosion. The flat stage area should be decked and sitting off the ground for ease of maintenance. Planting around the perimeter of the stage can be designed to prevent flooding.

Amphitheatres don't have to be large. Small and large-scale stages would offer a diversity of performance space that can be used by amateur and professional artists and performing arts groups.

Lead agencies: Local councils, NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Placemaking NSW, Greater Sydney Parklands

- **Build or upgrade public toilets and water fountains in parks, plazas and on high streets**

Upgrading or building new public toilets and water fountains in parks and on or near high streets makes it possible to host events and performances without needing to bring in portaloos and water. This makes it cheaper and easier for arts organisations or other groups to host events, meaning Sydney could have more cultural experiences on offer more often.

Better public amenities also enable people to spend a day at the park, the same way they do at the beach. A day spent outdoors with friends and family is arguably at the core of Sydney's cultural identity.

Lead agencies: Local councils, NSW Department of Planning and Environment

- **Install three-phase power boxes in parks, plazas, laneways and high streets**

For Sydney to become a Plug and Play City, we need three-phase power boxes in public spaces throughout the city. We already have spaces that could be used for cultural activities, but there is a financial and physical barrier in bringing in three-phase power.

If amphitheatres in parks, laneways in the city and high streets across Greater Sydney all had built-in three phase power boxes, we could more easily and affordably host events and cultural activities.

Making it possible to literally plug-in and play will dramatically increase Sydney's capacity for live performance – which in turn will increase people's sense of discovery, excitement and cultural connection to place.

Lead agencies: Local councils, NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Plug and play city

- **Have fun lighting in parks, plazas, laneways and high streets**

Once three-phase power is installed, we can liven up public spaces in Sydney with fun lighting to make the everyday experience more exciting, and to make live performances 'pop.'

While this intervention is largely about enabling more public performance throughout Sydney by reducing costs and operational hassle, the added benefit is that Sydneysiders get a well-lit city that is safer and more fun to explore.

We're not suggesting Vivid all-year-round – although wouldn't that be fun? But we are suggesting more interesting and coloured lighting that can be manipulated by performers or event organisers and enjoyed by the public everyday.

Lead agencies: Local councils, NSW Department of Planning and Environment

- **Create pre-approved event sites**

We suggest local councils across Greater Sydney create pre-approved event sites, removing the need for event organisers to lodge a development application to host their event.

Wollongong City Council's pre-approved event sites and associated events toolkit offer a great example of how this can work (see case study on page 28). Event organisers still submit an event application, but do not have to also go through the process of a separate development application. Council can set capacity limits and any required restrictions for each pre-approved site, such as accepted days or times of use.

Lead agencies: Local councils
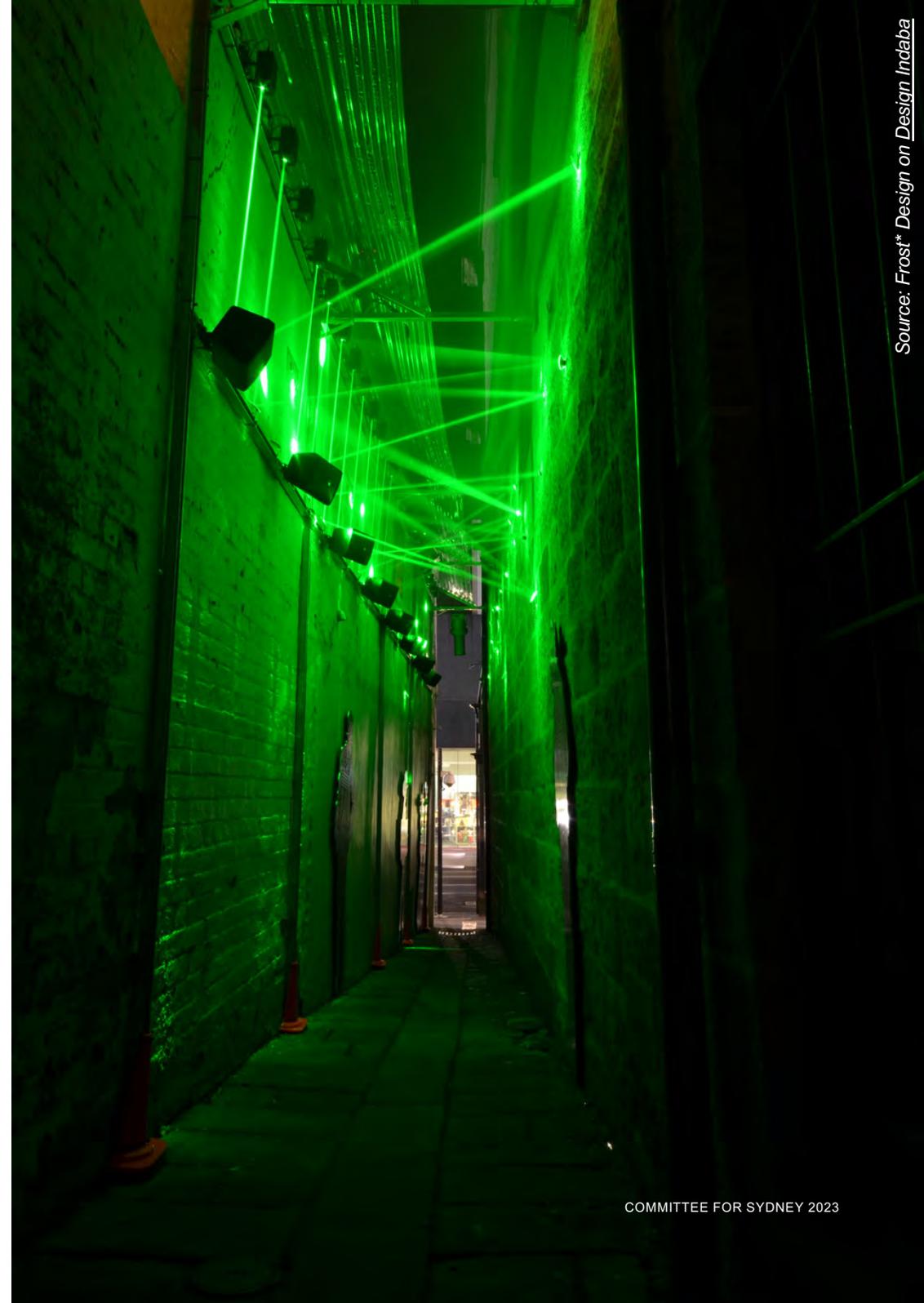
- **Make generic site plans, event notification plans and traffic management plans**

Once pre-approved event sites have been created, council can make accompanying generic site plans, event notification plans and traffic management plans available to event organisers – to further streamline the event application process. There may still be some extra detail required in each document, but having a large part of the required details completed will save arts and cultural organisations time and money.

Lead agencies: Local councils

- **Include the provision of Plug and Play infrastructure in placemaking strategies and plans**

Placemaking strategies and plans should identify appropriate sites, of varying scales, for plug and play infrastructure across the city. Government should consult with the arts and cultural industry to help identify these sites and inform strategies and plans. The ultimate goal is for all public domain works to include plug and play infrastructure.

Local councils may also update development control plans to include general provisions that require developments of a certain size, or in certain locations, to include plug and play infrastructure to improve the public domain.

Lead agencies: NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Transport for NSW, local councils

For more information

Case study: preapproved event sites, Wollongong City Council
- <u>Creative Wollongong 2019-2024</u>, Wollongong City Council
- <u>Events Toolkit</u>, Wollongong City Council
- <u>Organise an Event</u>, Wollongong City Council

Case study: Tench Reserve, Penrith City Council
- <u>Tench Reserve</u>, Penrith City Council
- <u>Parks for People - Tench Reserve</u>, NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Town hall revival

Foreword

Community and cultural spaces are scarce in Sydney. Therefore, we must look to public-owned assets to secure the future of everyday culture happening in our own back yard.

Town halls were created as places of public assembly, as spaces for community to gather, and for their voices to be heard and ideas exchanged. The importance of this is acknowledged by the number of these great buildings.

As local government areas and structures have changed over time, many of these buildings sit underutilised or have been demolished. The town halls that remain are often no longer used for their original purpose.

Let's open up these buildings again and ensure affordable and democratically distributed access to vital performance space for our local creatives.

This would remove financial risk associated with presenting work in local communities, increase the diversity of stories presented and establish local performance spaces in suburban areas.

Kerri Glasscock
CEO, Sydney Fringe Festival

Bio

Kerri Glasscock is the co-author and champion of town hall revival.

Kerri is a well-known and influential arts leader in Sydney, having built a strong reputation as an independent theatre maker, award-winning venue owner, artistic director, CEO and advocate for the cultural sector.

She is a respected voice of the Sydney night-time economy and has led the way in regulatory reform for the sector over the past six years, ensuring that policy positions are based on sector-led data.

Kerri is currently CEO and Festival Director of the Sydney Fringe Festiva – the largest independent arts festival in NSW – which presents the work of more than 2000 artists annually across Greater Sydney.

Town hall revival

The vision

Convert former town halls across Sydney into performance and rehearsal spaces, creating a local space for cultural activities.

Why we should do it

As the pressure for appropriate and affordable space increases post-pandemic, the need to examine the uses of public-owned assets, and how that use is distributed equitably to the community, is paramount.

Town halls were created as places of public assembly and are therefore appropriate facilities for the presentation of arts and cultural activity, most importantly public performances. In Sydney, a city that has a dire lack of places to house public performance, these buildings should be safeguarded and revived for that sole purpose.

The provision of community-based cultural activity – amateur, independent or professional – needs subsidised, non-curated space. This is nearly impossible to achieve via private sector investment due to the existing commercial business environment, and the deficit business model of performance-focused venues operating in that environment.

Imagine a city where suburbs across Greater Sydney have established community cultural hubs, operated by community for community, on their high street. A place for residents and visitors alike to come and see local artists and performances all year round.

Town hall performance venues could become vital community infrastructure like libraries, pools, parks and community centres. This would ensure local voices have a place to perform in their originating landscape, and that emerging and diverse practitioners are authentically supported by their community.

Source: Sydney Fringe
Photographer: Seiya Taguchi

How it would work

Sydney is filled with beautiful historic buildings that were once town halls, but no longer are. We estimate there are more than 25 town halls still standing that are no longer used for their original purpose. These town halls are well placed, generally within town centres and major shopping streets, making them accessible to communities across Sydney.

A number of operational models could be used to revive town halls. But to maintain authentic community engagement, ensure the cultural infrastructure is open for community use, and ensure that artists from all demographics are supported, we recommend local councils select a local independent arts organisation to run a cultural program in their town hall building. As the primary tenant, they would be responsible for:

- general management

- managing bookings

- facilitating shows/programs

- maintaining the building

- community engagement

- strategic development.

The organisation would need to be offered the premises on an accommodation grant or lease model and be paid a small fee to manage responsibilities. This could be funded by council rates, or it could be funded by private events held at the town hall, such as weddings, birthdays, gala dinners and so on.

Source: Sydney Fringe
Photographer: Seiya Taguchi

Town hall revival

Too often, local councils try to make money by charging venue hire fees to arts organisations. The reality is that most arts organisations run on a deficit business model, although this isn't always apparent to the paying audience.

There is an assumption that ticket revenue goes towards paying artists a living wage. In fact, it usually only covers the high cost of venue hire. Almost all artists support themselves through other income streams because artistic work doesn't typically pay a living wage.

The provision of affordable, appropriate cultural space is key to ensuring the sector grows to become viable in Sydney. Reviving town halls could radically transform the sector, bringing online an immense amount of low-cost cultural space without the need for local councils to invest in building new cultural infrastructure.

Making the venue hire free, or close to it, will make many more performances and cultural experiences possible. It would acknowledge the delicate ecosystem within which the sector operates, the value that local artists bring to the community, and the importance cultural activity plays in contributing to community wellbeing and our city's economic success.
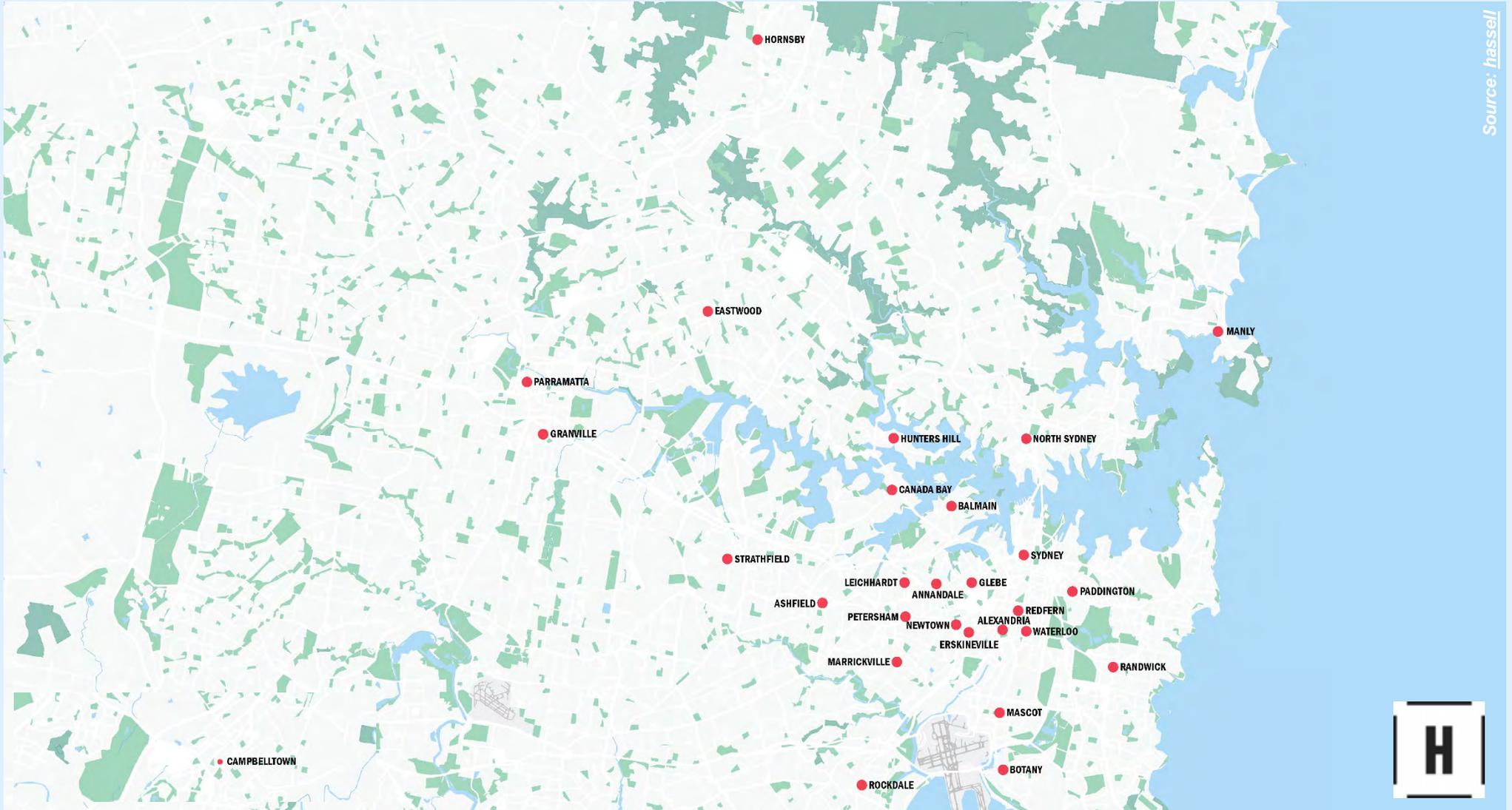
Where it would work

Any town hall that is no longer used for civic duties. While this idea is intended primarily for old town halls in Sydney, there may be under-utilised community halls that would also be suitable for these purposes.

Map of town halls in Sydney

Source: *hassell*

Case study: Sydney Fringe, Marrickville Town Hall

Summary

- Sydney Fringe headquarters relocated to Marrickville Town Hall in partnership with Inner West Council in 2022
- Sydney Fringe is working with the local community and council to develop a strategic plan to activate the town hall as a live music and multicultural arts facility
- Inner West Council is now looking to convert all eight town halls within its jurisdiction into arts and cultural venues
- A Cultural Concierge Office has been established by council to match creative practitioners looking for space with the spaces available in their eight town halls.

Background

- Sydney Fringe currently uses former council offices within Marrickville Town Hall as office space
- Marrickville Town Hall was opened up for short-term artist residencies in 2023, and Sydney Fringe will use the building for a proof-of-concept pilot as part of the 2023 festival
- There are plans to use the basement level as a performance venue, but rezoning is required before the space can be used for entertainment
- A steering committee was established with representatives from the local community, council and Sydney Fringe to develop a pathway to enable the building to be used by local creatives.

Why it matters

- Aside from Sydney Fringe's annual festival in September, Sydney has almost no non-curated or open-access performance venues available to local artists
- This limits the creation of new work, new voices and new audiences, negatively impacting emerging artists and the sector
- The small amount of existing independent performance space only has capacity for 90-110 performances annually. These opportunities are heavily curated and only available to a small group of producers and presenters
- In Sydney, the few year-round performance venues are disproportionally located in the CBD. The provision of cultural activity should be available in local settings, without the need for people to travel into the CBD or neighbouring suburbs to experience performances
- Local venues allow local artists to access their own audience base, reducing the financial risk of live performance
- Opening new, fit-for-purpose performance space is incredibly expensive. Under-utilised public buildings should be safeguarded and used for their original intent.

Case study: Fringe Common Rooms, Victorian Trades Hall

Summary

- Fringe Common Rooms in Trades Hall Melbourne has been the permanent home for Melbourne Fringe since 2020
- The venue has a licensed performance space and bar, which were installed and are maintained by Melbourne Fringe – supported by a Creative Victoria grant
- Melbourne Fringe uses profits from bar sales at commercial events to support local artists.

Background

- Melbourne Fringe has a 5x5x5 years lease at a discounted rate
- As well as the performance space and bar, Melbourne Fringe has offices in the building and as part of its lease it can use the entire building during the annual festival
- Melbourne Fringe is the liquor license holder, so if Victoria Trades Hall Council hires out other rooms, Melbourne Fringe runs catering and keeps the income from this service
- Music and literary events helped raise funds to construct the Trades Hall in 1873
- From 1997, different arts organisations have operated the performance space and bar in Trades Hall.

Why it matters

- The lead tenant lease model exemplified by Melbourne Fringe at Victorian Trades Hall is a possible operational model for Town Hall revival in Sydney
- Melbourne Fringe and Trades Hall have a collaborative relationship and both organisations view their relationship and activation as an essential service to the community.

Source: Melbourne Fringe

Case study: The Concourse, Chatswood

Summary

- Sitting on the old Willoughby Town Hall site, The Concourse opened in 2011
- The Concourse houses a concert hall, theatre, rehearsal centre, art space, function space, outdoor cinema screen and Chatswood Library
- The site is owned by Willoughby City Council, with Century Venues contracted for its management and operation
- Willoughby Symphony Orchestra is resident at The Concourse, just as they were at Willoughby Town Hall in the early 1900s.

Background

- The site of The Concourse was home to Willoughby Town Hall between 1903 and 1969, and then Bailey Hall and Civic Centre between 1972 and 2008
- In the 1990s, Willoughby City Council planned to redevelop the site to upgrade the decaying and insufficient facilities and create a 'centrepiece – a heart and soul for the CBD'
- The Concourse residents include Willoughby Symphony Orchestra, Willoughby Choir and Willoughby Theatre Company.

Why it matters

- The Concourse builds upon and continues a century-old tradition of civic participation, the performing arts and community celebration originally forged at the old town hall
- While not all town hall revivals require full-scale redevelopment, The Concourse exemplifies the scale that can be imagined and achieved in reviving Sydney's town halls.

Source: Limelight

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Audit open-access and non-curated infrastructure**

Across Sydney there is a lack of space for creative uses, particularly for smaller or amateur arts organisations or groups. This impacts the industry – up and coming artists have few places in which to practice, perform and organise. To foster emerging artists, we need more diverse spaces for them to mature. Local councils should audit the number and types of open-access and non-curated spaces, like town halls, in their jurisdiction, determine how many spaces are available, and establish a target for how many spaces should be available.

Lead agency: local councils

- **Assess the utilisation capacity of town halls and community spaces**

Once an audit has taken place, local councils should assess the utilisation capacity of their open-access and non-curated cultural spaces. As discussed, most town halls in Sydney are no longer used for their original purposes – and are often under-utilised with a few bookings by community groups throughout the week. There still needs to be space for community groups, but often councils have a number of such spaces that can be booked throughout the week and could be optimised.

Town halls, and sometimes community halls, offer the perfect space for arts organisations and groups to practice, perform and organise. The utilisation of these spaces will help councils confidently determine what buildings might be repurposed or revived to foster cultural production.

Lead agency: local councils

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Work with cultural organisations to understand the needs of local artists**

It might seem like a simple task to offer under-utilised public space to artists, however it is important that this process is nuanced and well thought out. Local councils should engage with small and amateur arts organisations or groups, and individual artists, to understand what they need. This can help determine what kind of spaces can, or should, be offered. Sometimes office space may be required, sometimes people may need performance or rehearsal space. Understanding demand will help council determine what types of spaces could be better utilised if offered to local artists.

Lead agency: local councils

- **Establish a steering committee to create a pathway for building use**

Reviving under-utilised public buildings, like town halls, requires input from the broader community. Once local councils have audited and assessed their open-access spaces, and understood the needs of local artists, they should establish a steering committee with representatives from all parties to decide how these spaces might be used by artists.

This committee will build trust and a sense of ownership for locals. The committee can discuss and research options for how spaces might be used, and how the spaces will be offered – e.g. a long-term lease model or accommodation grant – and who will curate the cultural activities and offerings that the space allows for.

Lead agency: local councils

Source: Sydney Fringe
Photographer: Seiya Taguchi

COMMITTEE FOR SYDNEY 2023

- **Establish a cultural concierge office**

Inner West Council, which is currently reviving eight town halls for cultural use, has set up a Cultural Concierge Office to help match creative practitioners with available spaces.

We suggest other councils adopt a similar model to make it easy for artists to access spaces, while ensuring a considered approach from council. This will also build trust with the local community that spaces are being offered and used fairly.

Lead agency: local councils

- **Rezone town halls to allow for more uses**

The last step to revive Sydney's town halls or under-utilised community halls is to rezone them. Because of their prior use, many town halls are not zoned to allow for performance or commercial activity. For example, Marrickville Town Hall in Inner West Council is currently zoned for residential use, so council is working to rezone the land so it can be used for entertainment.

If councils follows the above recommendations, they can confidently rezone the space – knowing this will benefit local artists and the community, be supported by the community, and will restore the original civic duty of the building.

Lead agency: local councils

For more information

Case study: Sydney Fringe, Marrickville Town Hall
- <u>Fringe HQ</u>, Sydney Fringe Festival
- <u>Inner West Sydney Town Halls to Become Music Spaces</u>, The Music Network
- <u>Sydney Fringe Festival in the Inner West</u>, Inner West Council
- <u>Sydney's suburban town halls to get second life as arts hubs</u>, Sydney Morning Herald

Case study: Fringe Common Rooms, Victorian Trades Hall
- <u>Fringe Common Rooms</u>, Melbourne Fringe
- <u>Trades Hall History</u>, We Are Union

Case study: The Concourse, Chatswood
- <u>About</u>, The Concourse
- <u>Concourse Managers Decided</u>, Aussie Theatre
- <u>The Concourse celebrates 10 years of arts and culture</u>, Willoughby City Council
- <u>The Concourse History</u>, Willoughby City Council Archiv
- <u>The Concourse Project Funding and Costs</u>, Willoughby City Council Archive

Parklets

Foreword

The kerb of our streets is the often-forgotten public space resource with the potential to transform streets into places of enhanced economic, social and cultural activity.

In many cases the default use for our kerbs is parking. This is underpinned by an assumption that this is the main thing that helps to attract people to a place. But with high streets now having to compete with big-box shopping centres and online shopping, we need to provide more than parking convenience and we must think more creatively about how to attract people to high streets and have them stay longer.

During Covid-19 we saw the potential of kerbsides to enliven shopping streets, with the introduction and wide-spread use of dining parklets across Australia. The enduring appeal and use of dining parklets is a testament to local governments, but there is more to kerbside potential than dining-only parklets. International examples show us that parklets are simply parking-space sized opportunities to rethink how we use kerbsides to reflect the aspirations and values of the communities in which they are located. Kerbs should have a variety of uses – public space, play-space, cultural out-reach, music and more.

Alison Lee

Co-author and champion of parklets.

Alison Lee is a transport planner and Director at Urbis. Her work centres around the concept of streets being a public asset that should be used for the benefit of community - whether for movement, culture, economy, landscape or more.

Amelia Thorpe

Co-author and champion of parklets.

Amelia Thorpe is Associate Professor in Law at UNSW Sydney. Amelia teaches and researches planning, property and environmental law, focusing on mobility and urban governance.

Amelia has a particular interest in the regulation of streets: as well as kerbside space, her current projects include work on food delivery cycling and infrastructure for electric vehicles.

Alison Lee
Director, Urbis

Amelia Thorpe
Associate Professor, UNSW

Parklets

The vision

The kerbs of Sydney's high streets are alive with people eating, playing music, pondering, gardening, playing and, yes, even parking.

Vibrant streets are more loved by the community and generate more economic activity through local expenditure, as people are attracted by the everyday urban theatre of visiting their local shops.

Why we should do it

Rethinking our kerbs is good for business and communities. Creating great high streets is all about attracting a greater density of people.

Unfortunately, [in the second half of the 20th century,] our high streets evolved to serve the car, not the community. Cars are the most inefficient way of delivering people to businesses because they take up so much space.

For example, using a car parking space for a bike parking corral or a dining parklet can generate about 80% more expenditure for businesses in a street than the 1.2 people using it as a car parking space.[1]

Furthermore, in surveys across inner Melbourne, 86-94% of businesses felt positively about the impact of parklets and other outdoor dining types on the 'vibe' of the street.[2] The vibe of a street is critically important in attracting people and having them stay longer.

1. Urbis, 2021, Economic Benefits of dining parklets, bike parking and car parking.
2. Urbis, 2021, Measuring and Evaluating Extended Outdoor Dining, for Cities of Melbourne, Yarra and Stonnington

Parklets

Increasing the density of people on high streets through more visits and longer stays can be achieved by improving street amenity.

The heatmaps to the right show an example of McKeon Plaza in Maroubra, before and after street amenity improvements were undertaken as part of Transport for NSW's successful Streets as Shared Spaces program.

According to Urbis research on the program, amenity improvements to streets – such as planting, outdoor dining, wider footpaths and slower speeds – can generate an estimated 22% more revenue for businesses across the street.[3] This is the true meaning of an attractive space.

There was also an overall positive response to the changes from businesses in the street, with 70% agreeing that the changes created a positive atmosphere in the neighbourhood.[4]

Many local governments introduced outdoor dining parklet programs as a response to Covid-19 lockdowns and indoor capacity limits. Post-pandemic, some of these have been wound back and some have been just temporarily extended.

A handful of councils in Melbourne have introduced permanent dining parklet programs as part of the permits allowed in their broader outdoor dining programs.

3. Urbis, 2023, Benefits Realisation: The Value of Kerbside Activation, study undertaken for Transport for NSW
4. Urbis, 2023, Benefits Realisation: The Value of Kerbside Activation, study undertaken for Transport for NSW

Note 1: Based on results from 4 case study locations that took place in the Streets as Shared Spaces Program (Round 2).
Note 2: Benefits Realisation: The Value of Kerbside Activation was undertaken as exploratory research on potential community benefits only and not government policy.

BEFORE

DURING

Source: Urbis, 2023, Benefits Realisation: The Value of Kerbside Activation, study undertaken for Transport for NSW

Parklets

But a parklet isn't just limited to dining areas, which is the most common use in Sydney currently. The possibilities are endless, particularly when viewing overseas precedents – like pop-up markets, acoustic performances, pocket parks, micro libraries, and art galleries.

These types of parklets are about putting the 'public' back in public space and are more reflective of the less rigid ways in which streets were used before the car became dominant.

How it would work

Three types of parklets would add significant value to the everyday culture of streets in Sydney:

Dining parklet	Essentially a business space (e.g. table service) but outside of business hours they are available to the public.
Semi-public parklets	Shared seating near businesses areas (e.g. space to consume takeaway food), but not exclusive use for customers.
Community parklets	Other organisations such as libraries, museums or community groups.

Private ↑

Public ↓

Dining parklets can be administered through local governments' usual outdoor dining programs.

Semi-public or community parklets should be administered through a parklet permit from local councils, much like applying for a parking permit.

Source: GGN Online: Building Parklet & Streatery

Parklets

Simple rules that give applicants clear answers are key to getting more parklets permitted 'as of right' within the following parameters

- Rules on where parklets are permitted (e.g. not in bus stops, on streets with low-speeds, etc)

- Design standards for safety and accessibility

- Hours of operation

- Maintenance standards and expectations (which can be reason for a permit being voided if not upheld)

- Signatures of support from surrounding residents (if in a residential area).

Parklets need a 'sponsor'. The sponsor is responsible for installation and maintenance (and removal if required). Permits should be valid for up to three years but should be extended if maintained and well-used.

Parklets can offer value for business by extending their seating at a low price. It is only right that the use of public space for parklets be via paid permits. The price of those permits should reflect the level of 'publicness,' with higher fees for those that are more private (and more profitable). There's an opportunity to hypothecate funds received by councils from dining parklet permits to be channeled into community organisations to provide non-commercially oriented parklets.

For dining parklets sponsored by businesses – such as cafes and pubs – the space should be reserved for customers during business hours, and accessible to the public at other times.

Community organisations could have no permit fee and be able to apply for parklet grants that have been established through dining parklet permit fees. In this way, there can be a rebalancing of kerbside spaces for both commercial and community good.

Parklets

Where it would work

- Dining parklets would work anywhere in front of businesses, but are ideal on high streets as they add extra amenity in highly visited areas

- Semi-public parklets would work similarly in high streets, in locations where multiple cafes/restaurants doing takeaway could benefit or in locations where there is a dearth of public places to sit

- Community organisations can operate community parklets in front of buildings, such as libraries, galleries and museums, or even local businesses wanting to contribute to the community

- Community parklets could also be public space parklets, which could include pocket parks, seating and gardens, and these could work in residential areas – particularly high-density residential settings, where people may not have much access to outdoor space. These become spaces in which people can meet their neighbours and access local green space.

How to make it happen

Local governments should create a program to administer parklets throughout their jurisdiction. This is really about councils creating the policy environment and promoting it to businesses and community. In locations that are both high streets and state roads, reinventing the kerb with parklets will remain limited where there are clearways. For some high streets the need for clearways should be reviewed.

To make it quick and easy to apply for, and install, a parklet on any local road, we recommend council comes up with simple safety and accessibility standards that parklets must meet. Parklet applications should not have to go through traffic committees – the NSW Government should make this allowance.

Source: Transport for NSW

Case study: Parklet program, San Francisco

Summary

- San Francisco has more than 1,500 parklets — small, highly designed open spaces that fit into a parking space
- San Francisco's parklet program has been hugely influential, inspiring similar programs across North America and many other places
- Parklets are typically provided by businesses but are open to the public: a win-win in which businesses get more customers and communities get better public spaces.

Background

- The San Francisco parklet program was inspired by PARK(ing) Day – a global, grassroots event in which participants use parking meters to 'rent' public space, temporarily transforming the kerb into a vast array of other uses: health clinics, art installations, bike repair workshops, massage parlours, play and performance spaces.
- The founders of PARK(ing) Day, Rebar, worked with the City of San Francisco to develop a program to enable longer-lasting reclamations of the kerb
- Today, the San Francisco city government has well established processes for permitting, and monitoring, parklets to ensure they are well maintained and tracked
- The annual permit fee ranges from $100 for a public parklet, to $2,000 for a commercial parklet. Set up costs – design, documentation, insurance and construction – are often $20,000 or more

- These costs mean that most parklets are provided by businesses. There are some notable exceptions – the dinosaur park provided by a philanthropic individual, the educational park provided by a school thanks to a grant from the National Science Foundation
- Even when businesses cover the cost, they do not control the space. An important feature of San Francisco's program, and many others modelled on it, is a requirement that parklets are available to the public, with no obligation to spend money at associated businesses.

Why it matters

- Parklets are a way to inject fun and vitality into the streetscape, re-purposing public space for a far wider range of uses than simply storing cars
- They create more space for people to stop and rest, eat lunch, meet with friends, and engage with their community. They are also effective contributors to traffic calming – making the street more relaxing and enjoyable for everyone
- Parklets also support local businesses with 90% of people who use parklets in San Francisco saying they spent money on the street.

Case study: Citizen gardens, world-wide

Summary

- Known by a wide variety of names (including parklets), these tiny green spaces are generally more informal in their designs and legal status
- Plants are the focus and they are less likely to include seating space or business elements.

Background

- Citizens and communities have been creating gardens in public spaces for a very long time.They range from planter boxes (which can be moved easily), to digging up the road surface to create more permanent deep soil gardens
- While other parklets can look like extensions of commercial dining spaces, these are much greener
- Citizen gardens tend to be installed and maintained by communities rather than businesses, but there are some exceptions e.g. the parklet created by Sam Crawford Architects in Foster Street, Surry Hills
- Perhaps inspired by PARK(ing) Day, some grassroots groups have developed events to promote the installation of citizen gardens. In Belgium, Citizen Spring encourages people to create citizen gardens. In Austria, Cabriobeet promotes the conversion of cars (not just car spaces) to green the kerb
- In London, citizen gardens are often installed as part of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods
- Permitting processes are varied. Some are completely informal ("guerrilla gardens"), some seek permission after the event (e.g. the Chippendale verge gardens created by Michael Mobbs and his neighbours). The Foster Street Parklet was formally approved and part-funded by the City of Sydney prior to construction.

Why it matters

- Citizen gardens increase green space in the city, providing important cooling and biodiversity benefits in addition to the amenity, traffic calming and community building benefits of other parklets
- With the right permitting processes, citizen gardens could be cheaper and more accessible for communities to lead, without the need for business involvement.

Source: Citizen Gardens Twitter

Before parklets

Smith Street, Summer Hill

After parklets

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Create parklet programs**

Councils could trial a parklet program before fully implementing it. The NSW Government's temporary outdoor dining rules which have been extended until December 2023 – and ideally become permanent – provide the perfect opportunity to develop a parklet program. Council should ensure their program allows for dining parklets, as well as non-dining parklets.

Businesses, local organisations or members of the community should be able to apply for, fund, install, and maintain a parklet. Because parklets require a relatively substantial investment (it can cost up to $30k to build one, plus ongoing cleaning and maintenance costs), parklet permits should ideally be valid for at least three years to make this a viable investment.

Lead agency: local councils

- **Streamline Traffic Committee approval process**

To save on paperwork and time, parklets should not need to go through the Traffic Committee process. Applying for a parklet should be as straightforward as applying for a parking permit.

As a red tape reduction measure, the NSW Government should allow councils to bypass Traffic Committee when approving changes that increase the amenity of a street, including parklets, pedestrian crossings, cycleways, bike corrals, designated car-share spaces and verge gardens.

Temporary delegations issued by Transport for NSW, which make it possible for council to approve a pedestrian crossing without going to Traffic Committee, were a positive first step that should be expanded, and made permanent.

Lead agencies: Transport for NSW, local councils

- **Make fast-track pathways for liquor licence boundary changes permanent**

In line with the temporary outdoor dining rules, Liquor and Gaming NSW created fast-track pathways for businesses to temporarily extend their liquor license boundary for free. Businesses that have operated with the temporary change for more than 12 months (excluding any lockdown periods) are then able to fast-track making the boundary change permanent – with the $102 fee temporarily waived.

Due to the success of outdoor dining in Sydney, we recommend these fast-track pathways become permanent, succeeding the standard process of applying for a permanent outdoor dining liquor licence. Permanent fast-track pathways will support businesses located in council areas that continue, or develop, an outdoor dining or parklet program after temporary outdoor dining rules end.

Lead agency: Liquor and Gaming NSW

- **Remove clearways on high streets**

Transport for NSW should adopt a program of ending clearways on high streets as a top programmatic priority, adjusting key bus routes at the same time. See our paper *Better parking for better places* for possible solutions for buses currently running on high streets with clearways).

When you remove clearways, you can get creative about what you do with the kerb lane and make that space work harder for everyone. High streets without clearways can support parklets, more street trees and bike corrals. By removing clearways, we create a safer and more pleasant environment for people to walk, and we free the kerb lane for more purposes, not just the 'new' uses we are promoting here, but parking that supports local shops.

Lead agencies: Transport for NSW, local councils

For more information

Case study: Parklet program, San Francisco

- <u>About</u>, PARK(ing) Day
- <u>Shared spaces manual</u>, City & County of San Francisco
- <u>Making the shared spaces program permanent</u>, City & County of San Francisco
- <u>Total shared spaces applications</u>, City & County of San Francisco
- <u>Citywide assessment of parklets and plazas</u>, San Francisco Planning Department
- <u>People love parklets, and businesses can help make them happen</u>
- <u>Owning the Street</u>, The Everyday Life of Property by Amelia Thorpe
- <u>From one parking spot to 100 public parks</u>, Fast Company

Case study: Citizen gardens, world-wide

- <u>More flowers, fewer cars: the rewilders turning parking spaces into parks</u>, The Guardian
- <u>Low Traffic Neighbourhoods: An Introduction for Policy Makers</u>, Living Streets

Open streets

Foreword

I stumbled upon the concept of open streets more than a decade ago in New York City, where I witnessed the magic of entire avenues shutting down for blocks on a Sunday morning. These streets were transformed into vibrant spaces for people and pets, fully supported by local businesses.

Later, in my current role at Sydney Festival, I was tasked with discontinuing Sydney's beloved Festival First Night event. First Night involved closing CBD streets for a one-day street party, showcasing artists performing in the festival, and drawing a massive crowd of up to 200,000 attendees. It was immensely successful but eventually succumbed to its own success due to escalating costs.

As a long-time resident of Newtown, I've witnessed our own high street, King Street, turn into a miniature First Night every weekend, where the community gathers to eat, shop, and simply enjoy each other's company. The footpaths are bustling and traffic crawls at such a slow place it's quicker to walk.

It's clear temporarily closing King Street to cars and giving it back to the community for a day or evening would be a tremendous success, much like what I witnessed in New York and other cities.

Then came the NSW Government's Open Streets program after Covid-19, supporting local governments in closing high streets for community gatherings. These events were efficient, low on infrastructure, and embraced community ownership.

Now, I propose we continue this positive trend by identifying high streets where regular open street events can occur, whether monthly or weekly, as long as it serves the local community, businesses, and residents.

We should keep it simple and affordable, allowing these events to grow organically in response to community demand and aspirations.

See you on the street!

Chris Tooher
Executive Director, Sydney Festival

Open streets

Bio

Christopher Tooher is Executive Director/CEO of the Sydney Festival, an annual event held in January that features a mix of free and ticketed performances in Sydney, Australia.

Before his role at Sydney Festival, Tooher served as General Manager at the Bell Shakespeare. He has had a broad career in the performing arts sector, including stints as a producer at the Sydney Opera House and Director/CEO of Illawarra Performing Arts Centre in Wollongong.

Tooher is respected in the arts industry and has been involved with various boards and organisations. These include TAFE NSW, Hothouse Theatre, Australian Dance Theatre, Riverside Theatre, Legs On The Wall, Critical Path, Arts On Tour NSW, Performing Arts Touring Alliance and Australian Theatre Forum. He has also been part of panels and committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and Create NSW. Currently, he serves on the NSW Festivals Artform Advisory Board.

Open streets

The vision

Car-free high streets one weekend morning every week for people to enjoy however they choose. These events would be low-touch, meaning they don't have supporting entertainment or food – local businesses can provide these amenities. Instead, people can enjoy the free space on foot, bike, skates or a skateboard.

Why we should do it

Open streets take place in cities around the world every weekend. While they were initially organised to give people more space to walk or bike, they've ended up as a boon to the local economy. Despite car traffic being closed, foot traffic ends up being far greater than on regular weekend days.

Better yet, people love to be out enjoying the weekend with other people. Open streets around the world have become so popular that some are attended by up to 100,000 or even 1,000,000 people every weekend.

Open streets offer immense public health benefits, as people can be more active in a safe environment. They also provide a great space for people and kids to learn to ride, increasing their confidence and meaning they may be more likely to switch to cycling or skating for some trips during their week.

COMMITTEE FOR SYDNEY 2023

Open streets

How it would work

The idea is to make high streets and some local streets car-free for a portion of one day a week – creating a safe place to meet-up, relax, play, bike, skate or create.

Opening a street can be very expensive, due to safety and policing requirements. Traffic management plans and Local Traffic Committee approval are also required, which can be costly in terms of time and money. To keep costs down, we suggest a range of options detailed in our recommendations.

To help get some events up and running, the NSW Government may consider extending or making permanent Open Streets, a previously once-off program that offered event grants to the local governments most affected by Covid-19 lockdowns. The activations that followed were heralded a success. We should keep the good times rolling.

Importantly, these events should be low-touch to keep costs down, meaning they don't need supporting entertainment or food – local businesses can provide these amenities. The aim is to create as much free space as possible for people to enjoy on foot, bike, skates or a skateboard.

Ideally Open Streets events have minimal police presence and use volunteers to help out. The magic of the event relies on local shops and community members coming out to participate, not on excessive programming.

City of Sydney has continued to run a Sydney Streets program, which is very similar to the idea put forward in this chapter. We hope these events will continue to grow in size and route length, so more people have the opportunity to get out and bike, skate, or walk on the weekend.

Source: Street Lab

COMMITTEE FOR SYDNEY 2023

Open streets

Where it would work

Open Streets would work anywhere in Sydney, but some places are easier than others. The success of Open Streets events around the world show that once implemented, community support and demand tend to rise, and the length of streets open often grows over time.

A good place to start could be King Street or Enmore Road in Newtown, building off the council's recently endorsed Special Entertainment Precinct.

This route could extend up Australia Street, which intersects with two parks that families and people can spill onto. There are also multiple businesses that would benefit from increased foot traffic.

Across Sydney, high streets in places like Lakemba, Parramatta and Auburn would also work well. Really, Open Streets would work in any neighbourhood, on any street.

Imagine if one day all the centres in Sydney had Open Streets on a weekend morning. These centres could then connect their routes, creating a long and exciting journey – much like the Open Street event Ciclovia in Bogota – for people discover different parts of Sydney each weekend by bike.

Source: Fibonaci Blue – Flickr

Source: AI generated, prompted by hassell

Case study: Ciclovia, Bogota

Summary

- Ciclovía is a weekly event where more than 127km of road space is opened up between 7am and 2pm on Sundays, and public holidays, for recreation, biking, skating and walking
- The network of open road space is designed to be accessible to all people living in Bogota
- Ciclovía has been running every Sunday since 1974, with more than 1.5 million people attending weekly.

Background

- The first Ciclovía in 1974 was organised as a rally in favour of bicycles over cars, run by a not-for-profit organisation, Pro-cicla, and the Administrative Department of Traffic and Transportation
- In 1995 the Transit Department put forward the vision of creating the largest temporary linear park in the world, contributing to improving people's quality of life
- Between 1995 and 2000, Ciclovía went from a 20km route to a 121km route
- Logistics and operations of the weekly event are managed by the Ciclovía Guardian School, a group of volunteers hired and trained by government
- The open street network is on Bogota's major roads and highways
- Along with the open street network, Ciclovía hosts bike riding lessons, healthcare checks, and recreational classes, such as aerobics and zumba.

Source: Mobile Lives Forum

COMMITTEE FOR SYDNEY 2023

Case study: Open streets around the world

City	Event name	When	Route length	Established	Organisers	Attendance
Bogota, Columbia	Ciclovía	Every Sunday 7am-2pm	~120km	1974	Bogotá City Council	~1,000,000
Jakarta, Indonesia	Car Free Day	Every Sunday 6am-11am	~5km	2007	Jakarta Special Capital Region Administration	~100,000
Mexico City, Mexico	Muévete en bici	Every Sunday 8am-2pm	~48km	2007	Non-Motorized Mobility Strategy Office	~50,000
Portland, USA	Sunday Parkways	May-September, one Sunday per month 11am-4pm	~10-15km	2008	Portland Bureau of Transportation	~100,000
New Delhi*, India	Raahgiri Day	Last Sunday of every month 6am-9am	~1-5km	2014	Raahgiri Foundation, The New Delhi Municipal Council and the New Delhi Police Department	~10,000
San Francisco, USA	Sunday Streets SF	Annual seasonal events	~1.5-6km	2008	Livable City in partnership with San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency	~100,000
Atlanta, USA	Streets Alive	Four times per year	~14km	2010	Atlanta Bicycle Coalition	~145,000

Case study: Open streets around the world - continued

City	Event name	When	Route length	Established	Organisers	Attendence
Los Angeles, USA	CicLAvia	Bimonthly 9am-3pm	~1.5-6km	2010	CicLAvia in partnership with Los Angeles Department of Transportation	~50,000
London, UK	Summer Streets by Regent Street	Four Sundays per year	~1km	2012	JLL - The Crown Estate's central London holding of Regent Street	~200,000
Manila, Philippines	Carless Sunday	Every Sunday 6am-12pm	~600m	2012	The Pasig City Government	Not reported
Singapore, Republic of Singapore	Car Free Sunday SG	Last Sunday of every month 8am-12pm	~5.5km	2016	The Urban Development Authority, within the Ministry of National Development of the Singapore Government	Not reported

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Install automatic rising bollards on high streets and in some laneways**

The installation of automatic rising bollards would allow us to close streets and laneways, or parts of a street – either sections, or parking lanes – whenever we want.

Despite a high initial upfront cost, automatic rising bollards would significantly reduce the cost of road closures for activations, events, and cultural activities, as they reduce the need for hostile vehicle mitigation.

The high cost and set-up time associated with hostile vehicle mitigation – which often requires concrete barricades, or large vehicles such as a bus to block street access – prohibits many local councils or organisations from being able to afford to host street events.

Because automatic rising bollards are permanent, standardised Traffic Management Plans and guidance documents could also be created for different days of the week at different times. This would make it easier and cheaper for councils or organisations to apply to Traffic Committee for road closures that use the bollards.

Lead agencies: Local councils, Transport for NSW

- **Consult with local businesses and get them on board**

Open streets have proven to be a boon for local businesses around the world. Consulting with local businesses is important as they have a stake in what happens on the day. Consulting will help to foster their support for the events – they may be able to help out by opening up their amenities, such as bathrooms, on the day.

Lead agency: Local councils

- **Simplify Traffic Committee approval processes**

NSW is the only state in Australia to use Local and Regional Traffic Committees. These committees are designed to delegate certain aspects of the control of traffic on regional and local roads to local government, but often have the unintended effect of blocking progressive and diverse uses of the street.

If an open streets event is initiated in a certain location, designed to be recurring every weekend, it should not need to be approved for every single weekend. Organisers should be able to apply for a year-long approval of weekly events.

Lead agencies: Transport for NSW, local councils

Committee for Sydney recommendations

- **Make generic event notification plans and traffic management plans**

Councils can make generic event notification plans, and traffic management plans available to event organisers – to streamline the approval process. There may still be some extra detail required in each document, but having a large part of the required details completed will save organisers time and money.

Lead agencies: Local councils

- **Avoid the temptation to include a stage or event program**

As already explained, the beauty of an open streets event is creating space for people to enjoy however they like. Adding in a stage for performance, or organising an event program adds a layer of complexity and cost that doesn't need to be there.

Lead agencies: Local council or community organisations

For more information

Case study: Ciclovia, Bogota

- <u>Ciclovía Program</u>, City of Bogota
- <u>History of the Bogota bike path</u>, Government of Colombia
- <u>Guardians of the bike path</u>, Government of Colombia
- <u>How Bogotá's Cycling Superhighway Shaped a Generation</u>, Bloomberg

Innovation Fund Partners

We would like to thank our Innovation Fund Partners for their support of the Committee for Sydney's research.

These organisations are future focused and driven by outcomes. They are leaders of change.

Their combined investment underpins our annual research program and together with our members, enables us to grow our impact and output – striving to create a better Sydney that offers unparalleled opportunity and quality of life for everyone.