

REDEVELOPING SYDNEY'S DARLING HARBOUR

ABSTRACT

This exploratory research discusses the redevelopment of Darling Harbour with the intention to create a new place for people in terms of tourism, education, recreation, entertainment, and cultural and commercial activities. It states the significance of Darling Harbour in the industrial development of Australia and aims to create an impact on future planning decisions of similar places. From a critical tourism perspective, it argues that the case study area has been regenerated as a consumption space while it used to be a place for production in Australian industrial history. The research employs a qualitative case study approach based on extensive archival document analysis, site observation and semi-structured interviews. It explores the process and implications of the transformation of Darling Harbour on its industrial values. The findings argue that the development decision announced by the State Government of NSW in early 1984 resulted in the loss of industrial identity for the place.

Keywords: identity, industrial heritage, redevelopment, Australia

Introduction

Through transformation places of production shifted to places of consumption; the change of the industrial economy and landscape resulted in loss of industrial heritage; and redevelopment and urban renewal allowed the loss of connection of the tangible artefacts and the memory of the industrial past (Kaya, 2020). Inspired by the first approaches to waterfront developments that occurred in Boston, Baltimore, Seattle, San Francisco and London (Florio and Brownill, 2000; Bruttomesso, 2004; Gospodini, 2006; Jones, 2007; Fainstein, 2008; Smith and Ferrari, 2012); Darling Harbour has been transformed into a highly attractive tourism precinct. This paper provides an analysis of the transformation of Darling Harbour waterfront, and it attempts to answer the following questions and illustrate the reasons inherent in the change process:

- What were the governments' intentions in developing the industrial landscape located on the urban waterfront of Darling Harbour?
- How was industrial heritage regarded within the transformation decisions?
- What role has tourism played in the redevelopment of the industrial landscapes?

This paper argues that as a significant commercial and industrial port the synergy between socio-economic development, conservation strategies, new roles of the urban spaces and the industrial history has not been created.

Literature review

The industrial landscape has changed immensely as a result of the transformations of the inner-city waterfronts since 1960s. The problem of how to utilise the abandoned spaces occupying such vast areas in the centres of port cities with higher material values presented some new opportunities and affected the decisions of governments to transform these areas. Old industrial lands have been transformed into luxury housing, offices, tourist attractions, cultural amenities and shopping centres. Industrial waterfronts in particular located in city centres have come under the pressure of change (Baxter, 2000).

Sydney is a city that had experienced transformation and economic restructuring with a unique property boom between 1968 and 1974 that reshaped the central business district (CBD). This transformation also expanded the city fringe (Daly, 1982). Industry and manufacturing relocated to outer Sydney and the resultant vacated sites were targeted for profitable redevelopment with the construction of high-rise housing and office space. The transformation movement continued in the 1980s and Darling Harbour has been redeveloped for entertainment, commercial and recreational

purposes: as the port facilities of Sydney have been relocated, labour on the wharves has been displaced following the requirements of economic change (Proudfoot, 1996). After the 1980s, a new process occurred in cities and urban life came into being. The orientation of economic developments made cities attractive and mega-cities were constituted after the 1990s. With the process of transition from the modern city to the postmodern city, industrial areas have been decentralised and cities have become centres for technology, services and tourism (Thorns, 2002). Redundant industrial waterfronts were creating socio-economic and spatial problems, while also creating unique opportunities for cities in their adaptation to the post-industrial economy. Henri Lefebvre's 1991 book *Production of Space* suggests that the restructuring of capitalist relations of production affects urban space through changing the pre-existing and creating the new. The pressure of capitalist development since the 1960s has been reflecting on urban development (Gospodini, 2006), and the industrial places of production have been transforming to places of consumption. Many of the (re)development/renewal initiatives have been signified by mobilisation of the "cultures of the cities", urban lifestyles for the imagined "urban" future along entrepreneurial lines (Zukin, 1995, 1998; Hall & Hubbard, 1998, p. 199), which has helped to turn cities from "landscapes of production" into "landscapes of consumption" (Zukin, 1998, p. 825). This period witnessed an astonishingly rapid phase of deindustrialisation as discussed by Urry (1995) in *Consuming Places*. He argues that this deindustrialisation has resulted in a deep loss of technology, factories, steam engines and the social life patterns that developed around these technologies (Urry, 1995). It was inevitable that economic recession, the search for new markets, environmental pollution and new developments in transportation would bring about the decentralisation of industrial places that had traditionally been a fundamental component of the cityscape (Harvey, 1989). according to Lefebvre, one of the most important urban issues is the high-level passivity of the relevant parties, by which he meant the communities that use the place, and he questioned the reasons for their quietness (Lefebvre, 1970). A socially constructed place needs the voice of its residents, visitors and workers, which are associated with the involvement of community within the transformation decisions. The transformation of daily life should be carried out together with the well-rooted transformation of space, because the one is strictly dependent on the other (Lefebvre, 1970). In light of these arguments, the case-study area, Darling Harbour, is politically and economically reproduced, and social construction is engaged through the restructuring of places as centre for consumption (Urry, 1995).

Methodology

The design of this research is based on the case-study approach with a constructivist epistemology that claims that meaning-making and understanding depend on one's perspective. Here, in this research, the researcher's perspective creates the subjective notion of seeking the meaning. The case study conducted on Darling Harbour (Figure 1) focused on the historical and economical changes of the industrial landscape based on political decisions to transform the space to a tourism precinct by erasing the industrial history. Hence, the case study determined heritage as an inherently political process and as a tool to reflect cultural power (Harvey, 2001).

Documents used as a resource in this qualitative research concentrate on content in the text via a form of thematic analysis. Various documents were collected from the libraries of the Australian Institute of Architects, the City of Sydney Council Archives, the Parramatta Heritage Office of NSW, the Historic Houses Trust, the National Trust, the NSW State Archive, the NSW State Library, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Archives and the University of Sydney. Public documents, primarily newspaper articles and design plans, were analysed to identify possible motives and to determine the process of implementation of the waterfront redevelopment. It was also important to obtain historical photographs and descriptions, to understand how the waterfront had been altered. The newspaper articles were reviewed to investigate the government's intentions, the economic expectations and public opinion about the redevelopment. Site maps covering different time periods were identified to provide a richer understanding of the changes occurring in the urban landscape and how the developments had affected Darling Harbour. The newspaper articles and editorials provided an insight into many aspects of the project, reflecting the history and heritage of the site.

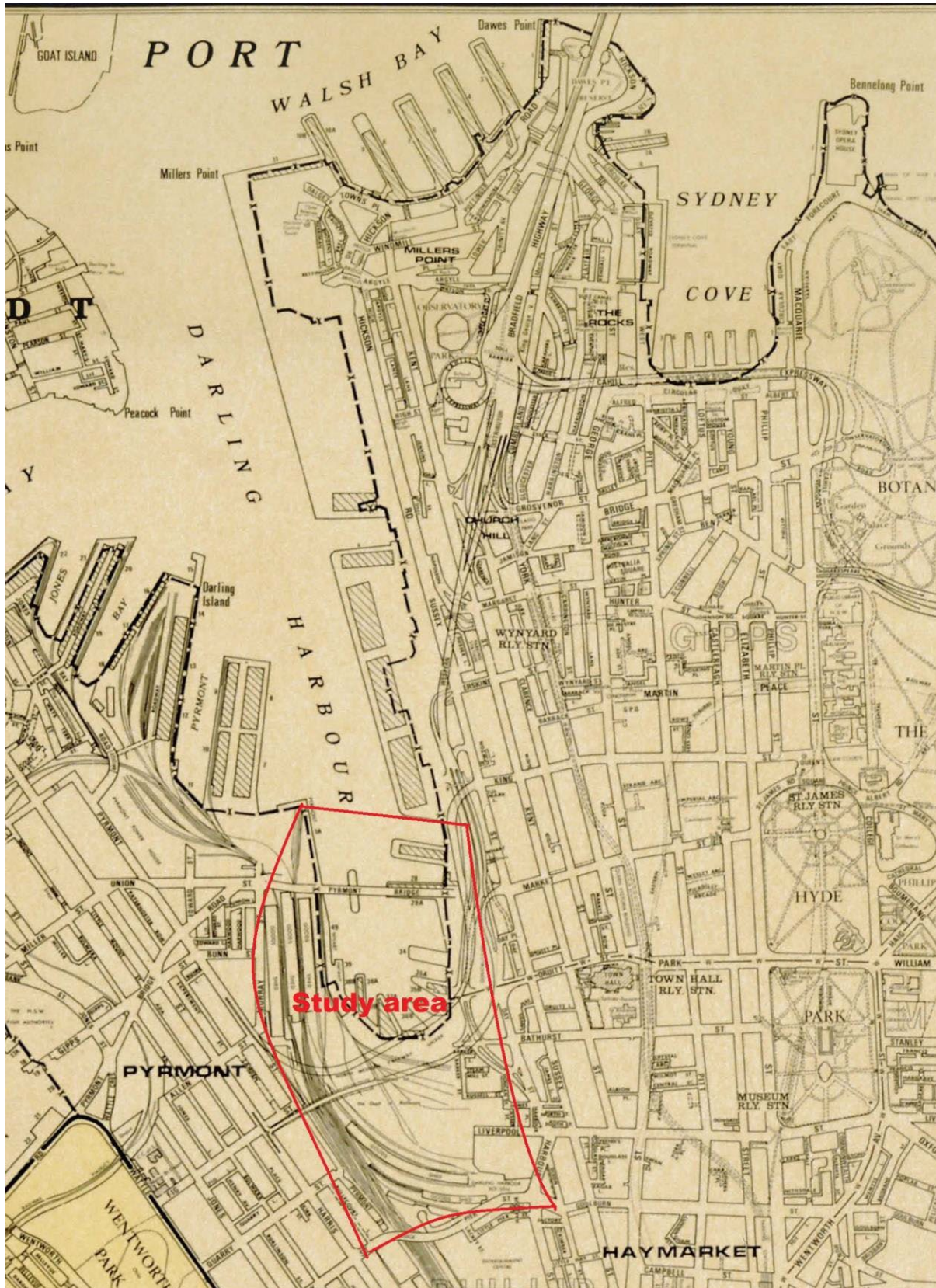


Figure 1: A location map of the study area prepared by using the partial map of City Boundaries and Wards, 1842–2004 – 1949 (1 Jan)

Interviews were conducted with people who had been involved in the redevelopment process to investigate the decisions made at that time and the policies regarding the transformation of the industrial waterfronts. Urban planners, architects and designers involved in the planning process

helped understand the planning policies and heritage preservation at the time of the redevelopment. People from heritage and preservation disciplines provided guidance on heritage items and the legislation applicable to industrial heritage areas. Analysing the semi-structured interviews and transcribing them also converted the audio data into a written text format. At this point, thematic analysis became a foundational method for the qualitative analysis. The thematic analysis allowed the identification, analysis and reporting of themes within the data, by organising and describing the dataset in detail. It also helped to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As this is compatible with constructionist epistemology, it provides theoretical flexibility and a research tool that assists in extracting rich detail from complex data. Based on this, thematic coding was adopted as the process of examining the qualitative data in the form of words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs, and this allows the researcher to identify one or more passages that exemplify the same ideas (Gibbs, 2007). Lists of codes were used and developed into a hierarchy to establish a relationship between the codes and sub-codes – which means that the major codes became the themes, and the sub-codes became the codes and labels (see Table 1).

Table 1: The themes and codes deduced from the data

THEME	CODES	SUB-CODES
↓	↓	↓
Transformation		
	- Changing landscape in time	
	- Reasons for transformation	
		• Economic restructuring
		• Urban restructuring
		• Industrial redundancy of the waterfronts
	- Rushed urban redevelopment	
		• Copied transformation projects and creation of similar landscapes
	- Political forces behind the development	
		• Government's intention in development decisions
		• Political ambitions
		• Decision-making process
		• Bypassing the Acts and the creation of new authorities
		• Involvement of private partnerships
Heritage/industrial heritage		
	- Industrial history	
	- Recognition of heritage	
	- Representation of heritage items	
	- Adaptive reuse of heritage structures	
	- Demolition of heritage assets	
	- Significance	
		• Industrial significance
		• Heritage significance
		• Cultural significance
		• Historical significance
Tourism		
	- New place identity	
	- Economic benefits	
	- Creation of public spaces	
	- Role of tourism	

Conclusion

The political and economic construction of urban transformation projects and the intentions of governments in developing industrial waterfronts have been explored drawing on the theoretical perspectives formulated by Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Manuel Castells, John Urry and Sharon Zukin. Consequently, it has been acknowledged that the widely accepted capitalist system shaped by Fordist production changed in the mid-1970s due to the global (OPEC) economic crisis, which had origins in the 1960s. This research has traced the Sydney experience of this new level of capitalism and some of the impacts on the government's urban planning decisions. The transition to a flexible accumulation regime based on processes and markets, with more flexible effects, greater mobility and rapid changes in consumption patterns (Harvey, 1996), led the government of the day to consider the Sydney CBD and its waterfront as congested, and hence to create decentralisation and the development of new industrial districts. The CBD was planned to be rearranged within the scope of the new global financial system, based on the tourism, the service sector and the promotion of consumption. The rapid pace of this commercial, technological and organizational innovation and the deindustrialisation of Sydney's urban waterfronts precipitated the redevelopment of Darling Harbour. Such large-scale urban redevelopment projects are conceptualized as representations of space by Lefebvre (1991), and representations of space illustrate the organization and planning of urban space through the state-bound interventions of urban policy, planning and dominant knowledge. For instance, the political construction of the Darling Harbour Redevelopment Project reflects hegemonic power in the decision-making process and shows that the state government plays a role in a coercive-legislative mechanism (new laws, changes to the existing laws and decrees). The huge port and railway facilities that lay abandoned in and around the major urban area of Sydney presented a grand opportunity for the entrepreneurial Labor government (of the day) to compete with cities around the world to achieve impressive physical development aimed at triggering economic growth. After a number of attempts, the state government decided to develop a vision for the area, enabled redevelopment by means of a private partnership, and led the legislative arrangements by changing the planning authority, bypassing the heritage laws and creating a new body (the Darling Harbour Authority) and new legislation (the Darling Harbour Authority Act). These decisions were and still are controversial as the redevelopment created an 'abstract space' (Lefebvre, 1991), produced through knowledge and power, political leadership, urban planning and the economic-corporate interests of hegemonic class fractions. In this sense, Darling Harbour reflects and embodies an exchange value-oriented appropriation of space by capitalists and state actors who are interested in the abstract qualities of space, including size, width, location and profit, but not heritage.

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