

RECENT IPSWICH CBD REVITALISATION –BACKDROP AND REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate the first stages of one of the largest regional regeneration projects in Australia. Although small by Asian standards, the Icon Project is an office and retail project, leased to the state government which is slated to catalyse revitalisation of Ipswich's CBD. Ipswich Queensland is rapidly-growing city about 40 kilometres from Brisbane on the Bremer River. Once, due to its navigable access and surface coal, it was a candidate for Queensland's state capital. But, as traditional industries folded in the 1970s, Ipswich declined economically and socially. The burning of Reids Department Store in 1985, the ill-considered Kern development, suburban retail leakage and a recession accelerated CBD decline. Recently, despite the GFC and floods, the rapid expansion of hydrocarbon prospecting in its western hinterland has lifted confidence in Ipswich's future. Here, we sketch the backdrop to Ipswich's growth and reflect on conflicts in planning between short-term economic goals and broader sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable urban regeneration, smart strategy, sprawl, innovation, financial viability, place-making, community engagement.

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1. Introduction: the regeneration problem

Over coming decades much urban growth will be regional. In past couple of decades from 1990, for example, the population of Puning (China) multiplied by twelve (UN-HABITAT 2012). In Australia, Karratha City Centre is a noteworthy regional urban development in response to the mining boom. On the Eastern seaboard, hydrocarbon reserves also underpin much rapid regional urbanisation. Gladstone is an obvious case but mineral growth spillovers extend to other cities. In fact, in Australia, property markets analysis should consider geological bounty or the vagaries of commodity markets. Here, we investigate urban regeneration in Ipswich, Queensland. Ipswich presents the classic symptoms of resurgent second-tier, struggling to sensibly manage its growth and overcome legacy blight of previous misconceived development.

To provide a structured framework for reflection, we select four criteria to evaluate sustainable regeneration (planning governance, economic, social and place-making). For practical reasons, we were unable to conduct detailed social evaluations but enrich a general consideration of CBD place making with scrutiny of the ICON project. Our sources were official planning documents at the local and regional scales, site observation, 'expert' documented verbal opinions³ and unstructured discussions in the local community or with councillors, researchers and business owners, conducted over a ten year time period. Our dissection of the Ipswich regeneration experience and, in particular, the ICON project, provide insights which resonate with the wider urban regeneration community in Australia and internationally.

2. Research question and methodology

Ipswich is undergoing significant change through rapid urban development and population growth. Jansen et al. (2012) states that Ipswich's social and economic background revolved around coal mining, railway and agricultural industries; Ipswich was in the middle of the 20th Queensland's largest coal producer but during the 1970s traditional industries declined with major social and economic impacts until the 1990s (Jansen et al., 2012). Given its significant decline, Ipswich presents a useful case study to investigate urban regeneration. We investigated it looking for the key urban regeneration success factors. The research question was:

'Is regeneration in Ipswich sustainable?'

While a complete answer is perhaps unrealistic, we nevertheless can draw out some potentially useful urban development lessons. The first step is to develop a sustainable regeneration model which broadly reflects the main themes drawn out by a review of its literature. The model tells us what to look for in sustainable regeneration projects. We then look at the evidence from a variety of sources to see if we can find these critical success factors in Ipswich. The evidence for the answer to the research question comes from a variety of primary and secondary sources we concede it is not statistically robust for our preliminary investigation. Notwithstanding this limitation, it extends to:

- Observation on site of conditions, regeneration and interactions
- Planning and media documents on Ipswich or regional economics
- Opinions of key informants in regeneration lectures¹.
- Identification of specific challenges faced by ICON project developers.

3. Urban regeneration: planning overview

The aim of this section is to define the concept of 'sustainable urban regeneration' from both a planning and real estate perspectives. The model generates criteria to evaluate regional urban regeneration projects systematically.

Urban regeneration has undergone a recent redefinition. Based on the evolution of urban regeneration policy, Roberts (2000) identifies 5 different models. As stated by Colantonio and Dixon (2010, 55): "urban regeneration conjures up different meanings to different people and can range from large-scale activities promoting economic growth through to neighbourhood intervention to improve the quality of life."

³ These were transcribed during 'PLAN3000/REDE3203 (PLAN-MAKING or INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PROJECT course 2012 at the University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, Australia).

Roberts (2000, p. 17) defines urban regeneration as: “a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.” Roberts (2000, p. 14) differentiates the renewal, redevelopment and regeneration models according to: 1. Key actors and stakeholders; 2. Spatial level of activity; 3. Economic focus; 4. Social content; 5. Physical emphasis; and 6. Environmental approach.

Table 1. The evolution of urban regeneration

Period/policy type	1950s Reconstruction	1960s Revitalisation	1970s Renewal	1980s Redevelopment	1990s Regeneration
Strategy	Reconstruction of older areas based on a master plan	Continuation of the 1950s. Attempts at rehabilitation.	In-situ renewal and neighbourhood schemes.	Flagship projects	Comprehensive practice and integrated treatments
Key actors	National and local government. Developers and contractors	Greater balance between public and private sector.	Private sector. Decentralisation in local government.	Private sector special agencies. Growth of partnerships	Partnership.
Scale	Local and site levels.	Regional level is emerging	Regional and local levels	Site	Reintroduction of strategic perspective: regional level
Economic focus	Public sector	Growing influence of private investment	Resource constraints. Growth of private investment.	Private sector dominant.	Greater balance between public, private funding.
Social	Improvement of living standards	Social and welfare improvement	Community based action. Greater empowerment.	Community self-help with selective state support.	Emphasis on the role of the community.
Physical emphasis	Replacement of inner area and peripheral development	Continuation of the 1950s with rehabilitation of existing areas	Extensive renewal of older urban areas	New development 'flagship schemes'	Heritage and retention
Environment	Landscaping and greening.	Selective improvements	Environmental improvement	Concern for a wider approach to environment	Development of a wider idea of environmental sustainability

Source: Roberts, 2000, p. 14.

In addition to those models identified by Roberts (2000), Colantonio and Dixon (2011, p. 8) states that the literature on urban regeneration is organised around different narratives, 6 in total:

- Property-led physical approach (Dixon & Marston, 2003). For example a major retail-led scheme is expected to have multiplier effects in the local economy.
- Business-driven approach, which highlights the importance of business investment as a driver for urban regeneration (Porter, 1995).
- Urban form and design perspective. This approach emphasises the relationship between Sustainable Development (SD) and urban form (Burton et al., 1997).
- Culture-led regeneration or cultural industries approach. Creative industries are seen as catalysts for regeneration (Florida, 2004).

- Health and well-being perspective this approach highlights the role of urban design on neighbourhood health and liveability (Barton et al., 2003).
- Community-based and social economy. This approach is based on the involvement of the community in decision-making.

Lately (2000s), culture-led regeneration inspired by the ‘creative city’ concept has emerged on the regeneration scene (Edensor et al., 2009, Evans, 2005). Another ingredient to for successful urban regeneration is due consideration of social dynamics (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011; Colantonio, 2010). Preserving the area identity must be a central concern in urban regeneration practice. As stated by Colantonio and Dixon (2011, p. 4) in the European context, since the 1990s regeneration is characterised by more integrated urban development which connects the stimulation of economic activities and environmental concern to social and cultural elements. These authors emphasise the shift from ‘urban renaissance’ to ‘city competitiveness’ which includes the following key drivers (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011, p. 4):

- Innovation in processes and products;
- Economic diversity;
- Skilled people;
- Connectivity and communications;
- Place quality;
- Strategic capacity.

Barcelona demonstrates the benefits of mixed regeneration treatments. The dominance of infrastructure and the physical regeneration mindsets was replaced integrated approach (Roberts 2000) with a more nuanced mix of interventions, geared around neighbourhoods, innovation and job creation (Franke *et al* 2007). Generally, in Europe sustainable regeneration involves balanced consideration on three sustainability domains or the ‘triple bottom line’ (Elkington 1997; Hediger, 2000). For Colantonio and Dixon (2011), the social re-balancing of the sustainability agenda occurred after 1990s but, despite lip-service, it is still neglected in mainstream sustainability debates; drowned out by economic and environmental planning concerns (Woodcraft *et al.*, 2011). According to Hemphill *et al* (2009), it relates to the notions of ‘social capital’ and ‘social cohesion’ to meet the needs of local people today without compromising its future. Specifically, it has the following components:

- Interaction with other residents or social networks;
- Participation in collective community activities;
- Pride or sense of place;
- Residential stability (versus turnover);
- Security (lack of crime and disorder).

For Polese and Stern (2000) social sustainability is ‘development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population.’. Locally, in Ipswich the Murri court system and other ‘on-track’ initiatives offer some hope for aboriginal people to re-connect with their culture. Community capacity building is about meaningful connections (Bush, and Connors 2010). Today, the evaluation of social sustainability is routine for major infrastructure projects. For example, World Bank (2010) Operating Principle 4.12 mandates careful consideration of community impact caused by involuntary resettlement (Colantonio and Dixon 2011, p. 241), urban regeneration projects can influence social sustainability in various areas, including demographic balance, education, place identity and social cohesion.

4. Evaluating urban regeneration: key planning and real estate considerations

In practice, the modelling of sustainable regeneration is difficult (Hemphill et al. 2004, p. 726). System boundaries for evaluation are fluid and timeframes uncertain. The various impacts of urban regeneration projects extend far beyond its designated construction site area. Environmental and social systems are complex and incommensurate with commercial

ones. Even if appropriate indicators were readily available, what weight would be attached to criteria? Fundamentally, robust project evaluation turns outcomes, cost, timing and ethics.

For example to inform evaluation, Pacione (1982) advocates the use of expert opinion to decide of a list of relevant criteria in a given context. Hemphill et al. (2002, p.712) suggest ranking as follows:

1. Transport and mobility
2. Economy and work
3. Community benefits
4. Buildings and land use
5. Resource use.

Sustainable evaluation blends 'top-down' (experts) with bottom-up (community involvement) and balances different interests. Notwithstanding acceptance of the need for a balance between expertise and local consultation or subsidiarity, indicators for social sustainability remain somewhat contested but there is widespread agreement to consider both physical and non-physical factors as presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Social sustainability: contributory factors identified in literature review

Non-physical factors	Physical factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training • Social justice:inter-and intra-generational • Reasonable distribution of income for social • Residential stability (vs. turnover) to foster social capital via interactions • Sense of community and belonging cohesion • Participation and local democracy • Health, quality of life • Safety • Mixed-tenure • Employment • Cultural traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urbanity • Attractice public realm • Decent housing • Local environmental quality and amenity • Accessibility (e.g., to local services/employment/green space) • Sustainable urban design • Walkable neighborhood

Source: Dempsey et al., 2011

On the real estate side, urban regeneration requires sustainable investment flows underpinned by demand linked to jobs and income. Notwithstanding, market imperfections (information asymmetry, illiquidity and site monopoly), private investors want capital security and stable income streams. If prospects are less certain, then growth should compensate for taking on extra risk. In practice, this means regeneration proposals, must convince potential investors that the project is:

- Institutionally secure
- Attractive and competitively-priced in its market
- De-risked or with strong growth prospects

In short, for developers and their financiers to buy into a sustainable regeneration project they must be convinced that the project is well governed and can compete with existing or forthcoming investment alternatives. In making evaluations, players will consider the risk-mitigation afforded by likely future infrastructure or service upgrades

5. Results: Ipswich evaluation

Urban planning governance

Ipswich City Council purports to use six strategic documents, including the Ipswich Regional Centre Strategy 2007 (joint between ICC and QLD Government to revitalise the Ipswich City Centre), the Integrated Strategy and Action Plan 2008 and the Ipswich Master Plan 2010. However, Ipswich City Heart appears to be the most significant project driving change. For Keenan (2012), '*ICON is the first part of a very big vision for Ipswich*'. City Heart is slated as an environmentally and socially acceptable project which will attract new tenants to the Ipswich CBD.

Property economics/investment

Ipswich must compete against, for example, the Gold Coast, Springfield or other alternative commercial, retail and residential offerings in the South East Queensland Region. Under competitive pressures, Mayor Paul Pisasale recently announced plans to build a giant wave pool (Pierce 2012), presumably to compensate for Ipswich's lack of leisure appeal compared to coastal locations. The city does though have some competitive advantages for businesses and residents:

- Plentiful land and flexible planning

- Affordability housing for jobs
- Good road transport links to Brisbane, Toowoomba and the Gold Coast underpinned by the Ipswich Motorway upgrade
- High population growth projections

Unfortunately, Ipswich's affordability and industrial advantages coral it in the down-market sector for cheap housing. Ipswich requires significant political will and financial support to escape its second-fiddle role as provider of subsistence accommodation for Brisbane. Barriers preventing regeneration 'break-out' for Ipswich are a low-quality urban form legacy and working-class or dependent social-economic profile. The first can only be transformed with large up-front costs while the second curtails incomes and hence expected investment income streams. Ipswich found a partial remedy in the massive expansion of Springfield and other sundry new estates to its East. Unfortunately, these estates with their new shopping centre, Orion Springfield, further dilute the appeal of and sap purchasing power from retail activity in Ipswich CBD. Hence, notwithstanding peripatetic festivals, Ipswich Mall is deserted on a Saturday afternoon. The other nail in the sustainable regeneration coffin for Ipswich CBD was the fairly recent opening of Riverlink Shopping Centre across the River Bremer, in North Ipswich. Locals are attracted by the no-frills and cheap shops available in Riverlink's. In fact, it is now branded 'the regions newest shopping destination' and 'Ipswich's favourite place to shop' (Riverlink 2012). However, even the local youth have noted its consumptive limits and remarks such as 'it's boring' or there is nothing to do' are not infrequently overheard (Huston 2012). In short, Riverview was perhaps understandable short-term palliative to stem the retail haemorrhaging but, in the longer-term, it has accentuated the challenge of Ipswich CBD regeneration.

Challenges notwithstanding, currently, Ipswich CBD regeneration strategy involves:

- Maintaining a relatively high-profile public relations posture
- Developing an opportunistic planning framework with catalyst projects and flexible planning codes without usage restrictions
- The, aptly named Icon, demonstration project

Each of the strategic prongs carries some dangers for investors. First, the public relations posture, as illustrated by the 'wave pool', appears indiscriminate. Industrial expansion of waste processing facilities is at odds with the wave pool lifestyle message and certainly has raised some understandable health concerns for local residential investors. The indiscriminate growth message is supported by a flexible planning framework. However, lax planning can signal strategic drift, if not desperation. Second, flexible planning codes undermine spatial monopolies which, essentially, drive commercial value. What prevents competitors setting up shop next door and poaching market share? Finally, the emphasis on high profile projects, such as Icon, carries two risks. First, it may fail commercially much like the residential Aspire building. Second, artificially protected by a government lease, Icon could disrupt established trade although, presumably, not on the scale seen when Meyer Centre opened in Brisbane's Queen Street.

Place-making (*CBD urban form*)

The CBD in Ipswich has undergone significant change since the mid 1980's. Ipswich CBD has a history of key developments which have either prevented development within the CBD or drawn opportunities and business away from the CBD and into surrounding centres. The example of Riverlink has been provided above, along with Springfield as another example. In particular, Springfield is still experiencing growth and the provisions of additional services through the Area Development Plan (ADP) as part of the master-planning process through Ipswich City Council. "*The ADP supports Council's vision for the region and key features comprises an additional major supermarket of 5,500 square metres, around 600 additional car parks, new mini major, new tavern and approximately 40 new specialty stores*". (<http://www.orionspringfield.com.au/development>)

These key drivers impacting on the Ipswich CBD are detailed in Table 3 below and derive from "PLAN 3000" Lecture, including guest Danny Keenan of Ipswich City Council.

Table 3: Key drivers, timing and associated impacts on Ipswich CBD

Key driver	Timing	Impact
Fire in the centre of Ipswich	1985	This provided a catalyst to re-build Ipswich CBD Properties were bought and demolished
Open air and partly enclosed shopping centre under ownership	Late 1980's	The owners bought company in "fire sale" – centre owned by off-shore company, and the CBD died.
<p>Indooroopilly Shopping Town</p> <p>This western suburbs regional shopping centre has provided a drawcard and another 'pull' mechanism away from Ipswich CBD. Indooroopilly is a multi-storey shopping centre, which is currently undergoing a \$450 million expansion and redevelopment in 2012. It currently integrates cinemas and a Brisbane City Council library. <i>"Eureka Funds Management worked with Brisbane City Council and State Government agencies over a number of years to finalise the approved plans"</i>. http://www.indooroopillyshopping.com.au/redevelopment/index.php?id=35</p> <p>The current expansion will mean that Indooroopilly will become even more appealing, offering a new and attractive shopping experience, so less reason to visit Ipswich.</p>	Up until the late 20 th Century	Both shopping centre developments (Indooroopilly and Riverlink) drew people away from the Ipswich city centre.
<p>Redbank Plaza.</p> <p><i>"Redbank Plaza is a multi level, fully enclosed shopping centre, situated 28 kilometres south of Brisbane and 10kms east of the Ipswich CBD"</i>. Source: http://www.redbankplaza.com.au/default.asp?PageID=83</p>	Up until the late 20 th Century	Both shopping centre developments (Indooroopilly and Riverlink) drew people away from the Ipswich city centre.

Table 4: Ipswich CBD SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheap and plentiful land <u>Mainly</u> flat topography CBD heritage presence within the Ipswich Motorway Flexible planning scheme? Working age demographic Projected rapid population growth Tertiary education and Industrial employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logistics - decades of underinvestment in passenger rail services Ipswich – Brisbane train line Half of CBD floods Negative crime, shopping and status stigma Blighted or poorly designed building stock Lack of high paid employment Social disadvantage (education under-achievement, poverty and endemic chronic disease) Main roads bisect pedestrian pathways Very poor streetscape design (lack of shade, trees and active frontages) No central green spaces Limited nightlife Poor CPTED casual surveillance Extensive graffiti 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition and limited response to rail issue Growth in service and logistic sectors Educational <u>enrichment and</u> expansion Population growth Heritage Cheap land <u>Diversification</u> Links to surrounding centres (Springfield, Ebenezer and Ripley Valley) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excessive population growth <u>Visual blight from poorly designed buildings</u> Over-burdensome heritage restrictions Competition from out-of-town malls Community resistance Economic downturn Negative reputation sticks Oil vulnerability,

Source: Site observation, planning documents, media, student, and expert opinions expressed as external guest lecturers (UQ PLAN3000/REDE32020 2012).

Place-making (ICON project)

ICON Ipswich has been identified as “...the development that will revitalise and redefine Ipswich’s CBD, (as it represents everything that makes this city great - community, industry, history and pride...” (Source: <http://iconipswich.com.au/vision-plans/>).

Furthermore, Icon offers a breath of fresh air and aims to:

- Trigger gentrification and improvement of businesses, services and clientele within the Ipswich CBD
- Showcase development which aims to enhance the image and amenity of Ipswich and
- Provide opportunities for future continued development.

(Source: <http://iconipswich.com.au/vision-plans/>)

ICON has been developed and wholly owned by Leighton Properties and Ipswich City Properties and offers mixed-use residential, commercial and business complex located in two towers within the Ipswich CBD. Tower 1 construction

commenced in December 2011 and is due for completion in Q4 of 2013. Tower 2 construction will commence late 2012 and is due for completion in Q2 of 2014. (<http://iconipswich.com.au/vision-plans/>).

As outlined in media release “*A Project that’s already making headlines*”, the proposed ICON Tower 2 will be an integral part of the greater ICON Ipswich master plan – delivering an eight-storey, A-Grade commercial tower with 10,400sqm in office space and 2,000sqm in ground-floor retail, including an internal retail mall. It will also include three levels of basement car parking comprising 177 new car park spaces.

<http://iconipswich.com.au/updates/media-releases/>

In a snapshot, ICON:

- Supports redevelopment of commercial area, healthcare, affordable real estate
- Offers a reasonable expectation for profit
- Signals to the market the potential of Ipswich as a ‘demonstration project’ or ‘catalytic’ project
- Upgrades visual amenity (ICON Tower 2 will integrate with Ipswich mall and will have a “green roof”
Demonstrates the benefits of staged development
- Provides high quality architecture and activation of urban spaces within the Ipswich CBD.

ICON is an example of a development strategy which incorporates the vision for Ipswich and responds to the needs of the community and the business environment within the Ipswich CBD. The Ipswich CBD has a history of key drivers and milestones, which have prevented the CBD from blossoming to its full potential.

Based on our research, The ICON project is only a partial solution to Ipswich’s current struggle to become an urban environment likely to attract investment and residents. More needs to be done and the statement that a vision might emerge later in the process is risky and likely to leave the regeneration process be driven by short-term commercial interests, disconnected from the concerns of ordinary people in Ipswich. Therefore, it is crucial to ask the question: *Does the ICON project represent the vision of the Ipswich community?*

The fact that the Ipswich community is willing to change should be used as a key driver for regeneration, this would enable to define regeneration strategies that incorporate attributes that are specific to Ipswich (e.g., strong heritage; affordability of land; population growth; service and logistics growth; etc.). The ICON project appears distant from these strengths. In fact it could belong anywhere in the SEQ region within a medium density area. To this extent, it does not demonstrate a clear differentiating vision for Ipswich, linked to local aspirations. Responding to our research question, key criteria, blending planning and real estate consideration, need to be considered when evaluating a regeneration process in the context of Ipswich (regional city):

- To what extent the regeneration process is giving Ipswich a competitive advantage towards other regional centres (e.g., Ripley Valley, Springfield);
- To what extent the regeneration process is initiating a significant shift in the perception of Ipswich for both the residents and investors;
- To what extent the regeneration process is allowing for flexibility to incorporate changing planning policies and fluctuation (real estate market) at the regional scale (e.g., provision of large transport infrastructure; etc.).

6. Conclusion

Our investigation into the ICON development in Ipswich's CBD considered the urban backdrop and reflected on sustainable regeneration issues with a wider resonance. First, Ipswich confronts challenging and sometimes conflicting growth pressures. A blighted retail legacy and continued suburban retail sprawl accentuates the challenge but there is no simplistic regeneration resolution. While Icon is certainly a visible boost for the city and battered Ipswich investors, badly burnt by the collapse of Aspire, ICON alone cannot catalyse further quality development. Ultimately, the fate of its property market is more closely linked to the vicissitudes of Chinese economy or Reserve Bank monetary policy. In addition, for substantive sustainable development, government must continue to address wider and more intractable social problems, including indigenous substance abuse, chronic health issues, rail underinvestment and lagging state school performance. Integrated development must address community capacity building for health. In short, the ICON tale is an enchanting one of well-designed spaces attracting talent but it is unrealistic to expect a dormitory city to transmute overnight into a wonderland for aggressive IT entrepreneurs. Boosted by defence, infrastructure upgrades and the upsurge in hydrocarbon prospecting in its hinterland, Ipswich will continue to evolve from a gritty industrial town into a balanced retail and administrative centre.

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