MARVELLOUS MELBOURNE – MORE THAN A CITY

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

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Melbourne, Australia's fastest growing city is a 'metropolis' that has a 'carnival atmosphere'. It has the 'enthusiasm of celebration' and 'a feeling of ambition' as the city offers events and cultural activities on a 'larger scale than any previously witnessed in Australia'. It sparkles with 'special illuminations on buildings', and 'necklaces of lights reflected in the [Yarra} river' with fairy lights that 'shine through the leaves and trees' in the ever elegant 'Paris-end' of Collins Street.

Walking around Melbourne, a visitor might marvel at this very cosmopolitan city and agree enthusiastically with these comments. Yet, these observations featured in newspaper articles across Australia described Melbourne's' Centenary Celebrations close to 80 years ago. It would appear that not much has changed in Melbourne.

As in the 1900s, the Melbourne of now is acclaimed for its arts, its creativity, its cultural events, and its soul – pulsing with life as displayed through digital illuminations onto public buildings, fairy lights in the fashion precinct of Collins Street, music performed by buskers at special vantage points across the city, public festivals for every creative industry imaginable, street art celebrated in the labyrinth of laneways, and the city's endless pavement cafes offering culinary creations from what seems to be the most diverse range of international cuisine possible. It may be no surprise then that Melbourne has been named as the most liveable city in the world by the Economist Intelligence Unit not once but three times in 2011, 2012 and 2013, and been ranked in the top three since 2009.

The energy and appeal of Australia's second largest city is reminiscent of its early foundation years in the mid-1800s when the city experienced a boom due to its Gold Rush and at this time was the number one travel destination for the British. Within two decades of its founding in 1835, as it was the cultural, education and culinary capital of Australia, and as such was the unofficial capital of Australia until the modern capital Canberra was created in 1927. Due to the gold discovered in the nearby regional areas of Melbourne, the city quickly became the grand dame of Australia. This natural wealth paid and paved the way for major development and large scale, monumental civic buildings. It also funded the arts and cultural

attractions. The goal at the time was to herald the arrival of a new city in the British Empire. Hugh Stretton wrote in *Ideas for Australian Cities* in 1989, a publication acknowledged for its analysis and critique on the shaping of Australian cities, that through gold Melbourne capitalised on developing links with the city centre and the surrounding country areas and this in turn enabled the development of its own industrial and manufacturing base, further expanding the development and wealth in the city. The boom that Melbourne experienced enabled it to become a sophisticated city as was captured in the silent film Marvellous Melbourne 1910 – Scenes of the City of Melbourne.

Then the city lost its sparkle. As a result of the post-war depression in the late 1940s, the critical manufacturing industries of food processing, coach building, textiles and engineering – industries that had been pivotal to Melbourne's prosperity – departed the city centre due to closures or in search of more economical rents on offer in the outer suburbs. Even the artists moved out for financial reasons and in search of life which was now considered devoid within the city. Melbourne was labelled 'dull' as Stretton confirms. It became known as the '9-5 city', because the city was deserted once the office workers went home. It limped and stagnated in a neglectful state until the 1980s when both the Victorian State Government and the City of Melbourne, the city council, actively worked to return Melbourne to its glory days, and establish it as the dynamic city it has become.

In *Melbourne, Biography of a City* the conscious, strategic rejuvenation was illustrated as:

> '…the frantic development of the city in its earliest days has a reference to Melbourne's recent years with it proliferation of high rise buildings, updating of important institutions such as the State Library and Museums, introduction of the City Square and the splendid Victorian Arts Centre and Concert Hall, the completion of the underground City (Rail) Loop, the refurbishing of the city's railway stations, the landscaping of the Yarra River, the cleaning up of the attractive lakes in the Royal Botanic Gardens, the 'recovery' of Victoria's first Government House and the development of Melbourne's China Town – to name but a few.'

Melbourne was reborn celebrating its earlier grandeur while managing to bring to life areas of the city that had languished even during the boom times. Melbourne is designed around a grid and interlinking its main, wide streets with its criss-crossing trams there is an abundance of lanes and arcades. Not a handful, but a few hundred and nearly all previously

derelict, many once used as public urinals, garbage dumps, and as a result a magnate for vice and crime. With the support of the city council through changes to local by-law regulations in the late 1980s permitting retail and hospitality use of the lanes, these previous ugly areas now showcase all that is Melbourne – its art, fashion, music, food and culture. Whatever you may be looking for it will be found in one of Melbourne's many lanes or arcades.

These once neglected and much avoided lanes are now among the stars of the city, many of which are designated public art spaces putting Melbourne on the international street art map. The charm and appeal of Melbourne's laneways became a feature of the Tourism Victoria 2007 campaign: 'It's easy to lose yourself in Melbourne' which according to Tourism Research Australia helped boost Melbourne's international tourists to close to two million a year. The popularity and public interest in the lanes means any disruption to the street art makes leading news as when the artist Adrian Doyle converted a well-decorated lane back into a blank canvas for it to be quickly covered again with fresh street art.

Figure 1. Hosier Lane, Graffiti Street art.

The quirky uniqueness of Melbourne's lanes, their diversity in profiling art and Melbourne's ever dynamic culture from its migrant roots of Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Macedonian, Croatian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Korean, Ethiopian, Eritrean and beyond, capture what is the essence of Melbourne. It is as Sophie Cunningham, Melbourne icon and author, explains in her book *Melbourne:*

'Liveable cities don't happen by accident, and their vitality is the result of small things writ large.'

Figure 2. Melbourne Centre way Laneway, City of Melbourne

As it was almost a hundred years ago when as Hugh Stretton explained in *Ideas for Australian Cities* that there was much public interest in the shaping of Melbourne, there is again a renewed interest in how the city is presented and how it is to be shaped with forums hosted regularly seeking ideas on what is a liveable city and open discussion on how a creative city can be achieved through the arts. Melbourne has experienced its boom and its bust all of which has shaped the cultural heart of the city for today. It now flourishes with a creative energy that is so entrenched it seems this has always been this way. Sophie Cunningham best describes it in her book *Melbourne.*

'Melbourne is a city you get to know from the inside out…It's a city of inside places and conversation…of intimacy. It's a city that lives…you have to love it.'

Hyperlinks (in order as appear in text)

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