



Design-Intensive Industries and Urban Transformation: The Case Study of Auckland

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In this creativity age, abundant with relentless branding campaigns, bombastic slogans, breathtaking landmarks, inspiring cultural icons and heart-touching identity crises, the global competition for recognition is taken to new heights. Auckland has a magnificent natural setting between two large harbors - the Waitemata Harbor and the Manukau Harbor, a setting that can be rivaled only by few cities in the world. Some of the distinct characteristics that Auckland has are: remote geographical location in the South Pacific, unique identity reflecting the diverse nature of the New Zealand's society, strong presence of landscape features, such as the city's harbor, genuine Kiwi love of the outdoors and rich cultural heritage and tradition. Considering this diverse range of factors, the ultimate challenge would be to create prosperous and memorable urban places as a vital component of the city's vision and growth.

The aim of this paper is to examine the intersection between the concept of creative industries and urban design and planning focusing, in particular, on the relationship between the design sector of the creative industries and their impact on urban life in Auckland. The actual physical space of the city will be discussed as providing the context, in which the creative industries flourish and in turn, their impact on the urban environment will be analyzed as key in constructing people's experiences of the city space.

The creative sector in Auckland has approximately 13 100 employees working in Auckland City. This equates to 4.3% of the city's total employment. In comparison, the creative sector accounts for 1.9% of total national employment according to the Auckland's Creative Industries Research Report (ACC, 2007). The creative sector employment is concentrated in three sub-sectors that make up over 90% of total creative sector employment in Auckland City. The Design sub-sector made up of advertising, architecture and graphic design with 5250 employees is the largest one, followed by the Screen Production and Radio sub-sector (film, television, video and radio) with 3580 employees and the Publishing sub-sector comprising newspaper, book and periodical publishing with 3154 employees.

This paper focuses on Auckland-based creative professionals employed in small, medium and large-sized architecture, graphic design and advertising firms, representing the largest creative sub-sector. Mapping techniques are employed to plot the exact locations of these design sub-sector firms in Auckland's CBD (Central Business District) and CBD fringe areas in order to identify possible patterns and trends. The resulting 2009 snapshot maps illustrate well defined areas of creative clusters in the fabric of the city. Further to the mapping techniques, a case study of New Zealand's biggest architectural practice, located in a hip mixed-use precinct on the north-west edge of Parnell (a trendy suburb adjacent to the Central Business District of Auckland) is presented to support the points raised in this paper. The firm's recent move from a traditional office building in the CBD to a warehouse building from the 1960s in the CBD fringe exemplifies a trend of urban renewal in Parnell.

The paper concludes that whilst considering the specifics of Auckland's urban planning policies, the potential impact on the urban environment is on a micro level - transforming live-work-leisure spaces and on a macro level - transforming the urban environment and ultimately changing the city's image.

KEY WORDS: Urban transformation, creative industries, urban mapping.