Urban Dynamism, a Contrasting Experience:
Street Life in Unplanned Bangkok and Planned Melbourne

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the notion of 'urban dynamism' through the conceived and lived street life of Bangkok, Thailand and Melbourne, Australia. Each city provides a contrasting experience, namely Bangkok's organic dynamism and the city's administrators varied attempts to control and organize it, and Melbourne's conscious planning and design to rejuvenate urban spaces, through the formal strategies of the Victorian State Government and the City of Melbourne.

1. INTRODUCTION

As major urban public spaces, streets play a significant part in revealing various facets of urban political, economic, social and cultural conditions. Observable urban dynamism on the ground and the overall dynamics of the urban system and its 'becoming' process as a whole are reflected in everyday street life. Everyday life perspectives can be obtained by looking at the dynamics of street life, with its spontaneity, difference and disorder, which "makes reality visible" (Madanipour, 1996, p.73). This paper investigates the notion of urban dynamism through the conceived and lived street life of Bangkok and Melbourne. Each case provides a contrasting experience, namely Bangkok's organic dynamism and the city's administrators varied attempts to control and organize it, and Melbourne's conscious planning and design to rejuvenate urban spaces, through the formal strategies of the state and local governments[1].

[1] We also discuss 'informal' tactics of Urban Village Inc., a cross-disciplinary alliance of designers, planners, artists and academics etc. in Melbourne's CBD.

What are the important ingredients and characteristics that support a vibrant street life? From the planner's point of view, it may be function and efficiency, while from the designer's viewpoint; it may be driven by form and aesthetics. While both are important to attract users, the most critical ingredient is arguably the critical mass of people who use the streets in varying capacities. More often than not, it is defined by commercial and transit functions – as places to shop, window-shop, eat, drink and loiter – to see and be seen. Even better is when street vibrancy is underpinned and/or layered by non-commercial aspects such as the intangible sense of community. While these generic attributes characterize successful streets worldwide, they manifest in different forms and practices in different urban cultures, socio-economic settings, and location factors.

The paper attempts to compare the contrasting street life cultures of Bangkok and Melbourne and is composed of four sections. In the first section, we define 'urban dynamism' from the ground through the observation of everyday street life in the city, asking what are the fundamental ingredients constituting life on streets and other public spaces. We then investigate how these ingredients broadly apply to the two cities. We conclude with a discussion of the contrasting experiences of the two cities.

2. URBAN DYNAMISM THROUGH EVERYDAY STREET LIFE

Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander, the two prominent urban theorists that inform our study, criticized the way in which modernists viewed the city as "organized simplicity" that rigidly reregulated where to do what. They both argued that cities in real life are, in fact, characterized by diversity emerging from "organized complexity".

For Jacobs (1961), this diversity is manifest in and sustains an urban ecology, the integration of the economic, aesthetic and social life of cities with many forms of wealth, place and encounter. This ecology of urban diversity contributes to creating vitality of urban places through the continuity of life on the streets and other public spaces. Alexander (1965) argued "both the tree and the semi-lattice are ways of thinking about how a large collection of many small systems goes to make up a large complex system", how small sets of parts collectively become a complex organic whole (Alexander, 1996, p.120). Tree-like structures correspond with the modernist concept of urban structure, involving control, simplicity, singularity, neatness and order. In contrast, a semi-lattice structures choice, chaos, disorder, overlapping, ambiguity, and a multiplicity of other aspects. This does not mean that the semi-lattice structure is less ordered than the rigid tree-like structure; rather it is a more complex order like the structure of fabric, living things, paintings or symphonies (Alexander, 1996). Complementing Jacobs' viewpoint, he argues that there are always many systems of human activity working together and overlapping one another in a pattern of everyday city life, pointing out that urban structure can be conceived of as a semi-lattice, rather than tree-like.

We argue that underpinning this 'organized complexity' are four significant ingredients of urban conditions, which constitute and determine life on streets: density, urban morphology, functionality, and operation. All four ingredients in combination are essential; none by itself is sufficient for a vibrant street life.

The first ingredient is the need for sufficient people in an area, the concentration of large numbers of dwelling units per land area, or high density. According to Jacobs (1961), if there are sufficient people in an area, both from residences and primary uses, urban diversity will be generated and maintained. High density plays a significant role to stimulate and generate a local economy that serves the everyday needs of the inhabitants as well as visitors. She also argues that a high density of people is necessary for an integrated social mix of age groups, genders, ethnicities and classes.

The second ingredient is urban morphology: the character of urban form contributing to the creation of street life. Urban morphology is the study of a concrete condition of urban structure: urban form and space. Rossi (1982, p.95) suggests that urban morphology has to be seen as a representation of phenomena in the urban dynamic - a snapshot of the form of urban settlements at a particular moment in time in the process of transformation. The present particular form of a city is the result of a unique, cumulative, historical process through a series of individual events, subject to a multitude of accidents of history, and to the broad influences of climatic and geographical location, culture, and economic and political structure (Lynch, 1984, p. 327). Physically, the building footprints are seen as static, while the network of shared open space and paths is seen as a dynamic system of circulation and movement (Trancik, 1986, p. 98; Hillier and Hanson, 1984, p.89).

The spatial layout of settlements and built forms can also be investigated as a dialectic between openness and enclosure in response to their connectivity with the immediate surroundings, which shapes the ways in which social networks are produced and reproduced (Hillier et al., 1987). The degree of openness/enclosure of those settlements and built forms links to their degree of spatial permeability; for example, housing enclaves, cul-de-sacs and buildings can be seen as closed systems. We discuss urban openness/enclosure and spatial permeability through the two sub-layers of urban physical structure: spatial and formal.

The spatial structure can be comprehended from the patterns of hierarchical street networks, the street connectivity within an area and how that area relates to the whole city system in terms of its degree of spatial permeability and walk-ability. The quality of the urban environment for walk-ability tends to link strongly to the presence of street life. Based on Jacobs (1961), permeability is a quality of the spatial network where locations are interconnected and there are always various alternative ways to go to a specific location or to a place where primary functions are situated. Permeability provides social and economic opportunities through spatial integration, where separated paths meet and come together in one stream as well as along the paths leading to a specific destination, such as primary functions within and across the district. This encourages many social encounters, and stimulates local economic life through many street frontages.

To elaborate in more detail, in everyday experience, the spatial structure of urban settlements provides the material preconditions for the patterns of the use of space, flow of movement, encounter and avoidance (Hillier and Hanson, 1984, p. ix; Hillier, 2001a). The physical fabric of built environments, as well as the way they are organized and managed, in part, sets constraints on what people can and cannot do (Bentley, 1985, p. 9). As people cannot move through walls, closed doors or fences, the spatial structure of built form plays a significant part in shaping their spatial practices (Dovey, 1999, p. 10). As such, the spatial layout of public space and paths in cities influences patterns of movement and encounter (Hillier, 2001b) - the ways people move and how they meet. Thus a point of spatial confluence becomes a point of potential encounter, and, in many cases between various kinds of movement, creates a high potential for social integration (Hillier and Hanson, 1984). Chance encounter is an unplanned social contact, involving face-to-face interaction. Consistent with Jacobs (1965), Hillier suggests further that permeability and spatial convergence provide high potential not only for social encounters but also for economic transactions (Hillier, 1996).

The urban built form can be seen as consisting of fixed/semi-fixed/non-fixed, static/mobile elements, which project onto space in the temporal dimension: permanent/ ephemeral patterns (Hall, 1969; Rapoport, 1982, 1993). Based on Hall (1969) and Rapoport (1982, 1993), the fixed feature elements include the permanent built structures, which are not easily dismantled such as highways, streets, buildings, etc. The semi-fixed feature elements incorporate the elements, which are easier to be removed such as street furniture, signage, trees, etc. The non-fixed elements involve people's activity patterns projected onto both spatial and temporal dimensions (Donley-Reid, 1993, p.115; Giddens, 1984, p.64; Lynch, 1972, p.72), reflecting the dynamic process of the rhythms and flow of everyday life.

To investigate urban built form, Hillier (1996) suggests looking at how the street of a city is open for exchange and transaction. Buildings and their openings relate to open space and create two interfaces: the relationship between people in the buildings and those outside, and the relationship between people doing things outside the buildings and the passers-by. What we can see is a relationship of co-presence between groups doing different things in street space, and such co-presence is unforced, even relaxed (Hillier, 1996, p.158). We shall call this 'street life'. This also suggests that the openings of buildings, their interface with the streets or public spaces, and the functions accommodated in them are key factors in the generation of 'street life'.

The third ingredient is functionality, uses and activities. The function accommodated in the area includes mixed primary uses, multiplicity of uses of the public space, and small grained size activities and businesses. The mixed primary uses or functional mix in a district "…are those which, in themselves, bring people to a specific place because they are anchorages"; for example, offices, factories, education, recreation and dwellings (Jacobs, 1961, p.173). These primary uses also generate a mixture of small businesses, with related activities such as eating-places and other commercial support activities, catering for daily life in the area. These mixtures of uses draw different groups of people into the areas for different purposes at different times of the day. This ensures the presence of people in the outdoor areas across time and space.

The fourth ingredient concerns the operational process of public spaces: how the uses of street space are managed and controlled, for whom and by whom. It involves the following questions: "who does what, where, when, with whom, including and excluding whom, and why" (Rapoport, 1993), which is usually played out both explicitly and implicitly. This operational process can be observed from two different approaches: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down process usually refers to the official view of the city management that rigidly regulate where, when, and how the public spaces are utilized and by whom. Different cities have different strategies concerning the activities of people in the city and the design concepts for their public spaces. For example, North American cities tend to operate the uses of public space based on commercial and rational approach and the majority of city streets have been entirely devoted to car traffic, while European cities are focused more on people-oriented activities and the uses of public transportation (Gehl, 1998). On the other hand, the bottom-up process depends largely on communities and stakeholders voluntarily involved in operating the uses of public space including generating local economy, organizing cultural events, and, in many cases, maintaining such spaces. It can be perceived as a democratic way, inclusive, adaptable, and flexible. However, this bottom-up approach is not always smooth and is often ambiguous, as it depends on local politics and unwritten rules.

These four ingredients frame the rhythms of everyday urban life. One of the most renowned definitions of city life is 'Urbanism as a way of life', declared by Louis Wirth; the individual inhabitant's way of living in the city collectively becomes its rhythms[2]. As Mumford stated in 1937, 'a city is a theatre of social action' (Mumford, 2000) and its public spaces are where 'urban drama' is portrayed through its people's social activities, comings and goings, days or nights, week in week out, season after season. In this sense the meaning of public space can be seen as a process in which meaning is constructed and reconstructed every day by the people themselves through their recurrent use and participation in public space in the course of the flows of their lives. These meanings can be perceived as a trace of the memory or collective memories of individuals or groups (Boyer, 1994); as a space of displacement for their present use (Sennett, 1990, p.194); and as a space of future potential and change (Lynch, 1972).

Consistent with Mumford, Jacobs (1961, p. 61) notes that the street is a stage set of everyday life. Streets and other kinds of public space are the setting in which social identities and social practices shaped by people's experiences are played out (Fyfe, 1998, p.1). Street life articulates characters and identities of places through the pattern of events, encompassing social activities and spatial settings (Alexander, 1979, p.55). At the street level the aesthetic of ordinary street life is played out through street choreography voluntarily performed by actors, both inhabitants and visitors. The street choreography is created by the movement of people's bodies in space in the rhythms of their routines of life, the regularity and repetition of activities in time and space (Seamon, 1979, p.143). Jacobs's 'street ballet' and Seamon's 'place ballet' portray urban street scenes and narrate stories of communal life through the gathering of people moving and doing different things, thus creating the plurality of rhythms from their spontaneous participation, social encounters and co-presence in public space. As pointed out by Jacobs (1961, p. 67) and Seamon (1980, p.162), this is a process in which the trust of a shared public space in a city is formed over time.

In the next two sections, based on the discussed ingredients of urban dynamism, we elaborate our contrasting experiences of street life in two global cities: Bangkok and Melbourne. Street life in the first originates from natural and human ecological foundations; while the latter is constructed from planning/design ideas and intentions based largely upon land subdivisions for the market economy.
Bangkok's urban morphology descended from its pre-modern canals that functioned as both the main transportation routes and irrigation system. In that sense, in Alexander's (1965) terms, Bangkok, a relatively young city, is a "natural city" whose urban structure while resembling the structure of a "tree", functions as a "semi-lattice" with intensely utilized streetscapes. In essence, its fluid origins transformed materially into concrete through the integrative logic

[2] 'Urbanism as a way of life' is Wirth's famous essay written in 1938 on the sociological definition of the city concerning the relationship between size of population, density of settlements, and heterogeneity of its inhabitants (Wirth, 2000, p.97–105).

3. BANGKOK

Figure 1:
Street life in the old commercial district of Sampeng, Bangkok's Chinatown is possibly an early area where the water-based culture metamorphose on land. We hypothesize that Bangkok's contemporary street life has formal origins/roots in both its khlongs and the Chinese migrants commercial urban practices (Sintusingha 22/12/08).

of contemporary street life predominately generated by the commercial activities of lower economic and cultural classes (sub-culture) which is replicated city-wide. While this may yield an undifferentiated experience citywide for the locals, it is a highly legible urban characteristic for foreign visitors.

The present day urban environment of Bangkok is diverse, yet somewhat chaotic due to the co-existence and co-functioning of many urban dynamic systems. Some are contradicting, and some complementary: water/land-based settlements; formal/informal economy; modern/traditional lifestyle; industrial/agrarian modes of production; and permanent/ ephemeral built forms (Polakit, 2004; Polakit & Boontham, 2008). This multi-layered system is an important characteristic of "natural cities" in contrast to "artificial cities" which tends not to have multiple urban systems. Bangkok has, since its inception, experienced the layering of new urban developments upon the previous layers without completely displacing them.

The nature of Bangkok urbanism is thus grounded in the co-existence of these complementary and contradictory layering concepts in urban development processes, involving multiple agents whether imposed by the state and/or generated by people themselves whereby "everyone has the power to effect change – albeit at a variety of scales" (Sintusingha, 2002, p.139). Thus the urban ecology of the city is composed of two systems, formal and informal, in both the economy and built form. The municipal bureaucracy views the informal or marginalized activities as less important than the formal, and ascribes to them values of being disordered, chaotic, dirty, poor, eyesores, unwanted or even illegal. Although they are visible activities that exist in the everyday space of Bangkok, they are hardly counted as part of the formal system of the economy or even of society. On the other hand, they are integral in the function of the city providing critical services fundamental to the formal economy from domestic help, child and elderly care to transportation. Marginalized activities, prevalent in Bangkok, come in various forms, ranging from street stalls, hawkers, boathouses, squatters and the homeless, to illegal activities such as informal financial businesses and unofficial lotteries, gambling and prostitutes (Polakit, 2004).

Bangkok's density varies from over 30,000 people per sq. km. in the inner city districts to ~4,000 people per sq.km. in suburban districts. However, this

number is irrelevant in terms of street life, as it is the combined effect of density and specific morphology, characterized by high density built up areas clustered along streets throughout the city (regardless of distance from the center) that underpin the city's dynamic street life. The dominant building typology, or "collective form" to borrow Maki's (1964) term, is the shop house, which contributes fine-grained active street frontages that accommodate highly flexible mixed-uses, combining various commercial, manufacturing functions with dwellings. Due to the haphazard urban expansion, decades of rural-urban migration, lax land use control, and poor provision of public housing in the past, the city is also characterized by a highly mixed socio-economic urban fabric with informal settlements established near sources of employment - often located by or close to the main roads - and are thus often found juxtaposed with middle to high-end subdivisions in the suburbs or high-rises in the inner city. With relatively limited employment opportunities in the urban formal sectors, the lower socio-economic groups are prevalent in the informal to semi-formal commercial activities on the streets utilizing non-fixed forms of mobile vending activities. This looseness of formal control allows a high degree of bottom up, fine-scale localization in terms of the appropriation of public spaces in both space and time.

While the municipal bureaucracy shares a disdain of the informal activities with the middle classes and above, it is argued that they are generally powerless to impose control[3] – and one could also argue they are, depending on varying contexts across the city, tolerant of these activities. This is also reflected the ineffectual larger scale master-planning exercises[4] with development often occurring independent of those plans and are largely driven by the construction of large scale transportation infrastructure of roads since the 1950s. Since the mid-1990s, mass transit and private sector agents at multiple scales and social classes have led development in Bangkok through the decades of modernization and globalization. As a result, Bangkok's present day commercial forms ranges from "transnational hyper-markets, huge shopping complexes, shopping malls, and department stores, supermarkets, transnational and local convenience stores, to local marketplaces,

Figure 2:
Street life in the old commercial district of Pahurat (Bangkok's 'Indian Town') adjacent to Sampeng witnesses the 'place ballet' between fixed/semi-fixed/non-fixed forms as well as the sacred and the profane (Sintusingha 22/12/08).

[3] Such as problems with enforcing Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's introduction of zones and to register vendors in 2005 (Bangkok Post, 2005) or to ban trading on Mondays in 2008 (Wancharoen, 2008).

[4] Of which the first official masterplan was as recent as 1992.

shop-houses, tiny movable stalls, and floating shop-boats" (Polakit & Boontham, 2008, p.185). Despite the resultant rapid morphological transformations, informal street practices have consistently been able to adapt, characterized by what Polakit (2004) considers indigenous Thai 'operation' of "spontaneity", "fluidity" and "adaptability". Here we add 'ambiguity' due to the ambiguous unwritten rules that organize socio-spatial practice and demarcation. A condition that result, ironically, from having clear, modernist-inspired written rules - and all informal activities are, of course, technically illegal - that is generally ignored and hence open for multiple interpretations by the local agents and stakeholders. In a sense, there is a disconnection between the formal and informal that result in this ambiguity. They are two parallel systems that in some contexts have established synergies e.g. 24 hour convenience stores and mobile vendors, while in others are quite independent of each other e.g. hyper-markets and local marketplaces – the latter providing potential for encounters and integration across social classes, the former social segregation.

Functionally, this ambiguity manifests in the fluidity and adaptability of use of the streets (see Figure 1 and 2). The functional differentiation between the sidewalk and the road surface often does not apply and, bikes, motorbikes, mobile vendors can be seen using both the road and sidewalk to move, sometimes irrespective of traffic direction. Apart from various appropriation of the sidewalk and road surface by mobile vendors, both spontaneously and in fixed temporal patterns, commercial activities also often flow out from the fixed forms of the shop houses into the sidewalks. While the main streets, areas of spatial convergences, are dominated by commercial activities, within the less busy side-streets (*sois*), the road surface is often also appropriated by recreational activities such as mini-football, *takraw* (local foot volleyball) and badminton where games can easily be interrupted and the mini-goalposts and dividing nets are moved to make way for oncoming vehicular traffic. Food and drink vendors also often, whether spontaneously or not, take advantage of the congregation of people.

4. MELBOURNE

Melbourne began as a colonial speculation, planned on the model of an efficient gridiron. In Alexander's term, it can be considered an "artificial city" with a structure resembling a semi-lattice but, on the whole – except for its early modern history of mixed uses and especially since the post-war suburbanization of the city – functions as a tree. However, the far-sighted physical plan of wide streets interspersed with laneways and the concentration of public transportation facilities provided a spatial structure and infrastructure that over the past two decades

Figure 3:
Melbourne's Centre Place laneway, an example of successful planned (although gentrified) street life, once mainly famous for its graffiti associated with youth subculture, now also a popular attraction – an example of formalization of the informal. Note the congregation of youths to the left not participating in the introduced café/restaurant culture (Sintusingha 14/09/09).

from the mid 1980s to the present, has been retrofitted to attract activities back to the CBD (such as at Centre Place laneway in Figure 3) in an attempt to transform Melbourne into a twenty-four hour city. An investigation of the period 1971 to 2009 reveals the mainly top-down operational processes which have shaped street life in Melbourne's CBD, and also describes fundamental changes through time in built form, spatial structures and practices, density and demography, and functional composition.

By many accounts, Melbourne CBD in the 1970s was not a city with streets and shopping malls made active by shoppers and window shoppers, and instead was labeled by prominent architectural critic Norman Day to be "an empty, useless city centre" (Adams, 2007, p. 3). The shift of Melbourne towards an eco-urbane, post-industrial, global, and 24-hour active city has been consciously managed through strong leadership in urban planning and design since the mid 1980's by the City of Melbourne, in cooperation with the State Government of Victoria (Adams, 2007, p. 4). This long-term strategy has included coordinated support for the development of inner-city residential accommodation, growth of mixed-use commercial activities on sidewalks and adjoining frontages, and renovations of streetscapes geared towards pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users (Adams, 2007, pp. 12-14). While there is certainly evidence that in relation to urban regeneration and dynamism, the operation of regeneration has been defined by a top-down approach rather than bottom up, we argue that when considered against significant global and regional macroeconomic effects that have been coupled with Federal and State government policy shifts, it is difficult to prove causation by the City of Melbourne's urban designers and administrators alone. Global, national, and regional scale macro-economic and policy factors are significant correlating factors and Dingle and O'Hanlon (2005, p. 3) describe the period 1971 to 2001 as one of de-industrialization and restructuring of the Victorian, Australian, and inner-Melbourne economies, and attribute causation to the coupling of long-term underinvestment in technology, plant, and equipment, with forceful macro-economic factors such as economic stagnation, the rise of competitive East Asian economies, and national recessions during the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The reinvention of Melbourne briefly lagged or coincided with "globalization, tariff reductions, and recession" (Dingle & O'Hanlon, 2005, p. 3), de-industrialization of the Australian economy (O'Hanlon and Hamnett, 2009, p. 215), state government led diversification of Melbourne's urban economy towards "services, spectacle, and consumption" (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 31), growth of the Australian tertiary education export industry and the associated influx of international students to Victoria[5] (Fincher et al, 2009a, p. 6), and the extension of operating times for night venues and relaxation of liquor licensing laws across Victoria (Moodie, 2009).

From 1992, a City of Melbourne policy known as Postcode 3000 removed barriers to and created incentives for the redevelopment of disused CBD building stock towards residential accommodation. The reclaimed buildings were typically empty shells left abandoned by large retail stores and offices through successive national recessions and restructuring of Melbourne's urban and suburban economies (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 34). Rob Adams (2007, p. 10) suggests that Postcode 3000 was "designed to reintroduce a residential population into the central city", and that it "was spectacularly successful". However, considered against influences such as the diminished demand for large CBD retail properties driven by decentralization through suburbanization (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 34), and the federal government led expansion of the Australian tertiary education export market (Fincher et al, 2009a, p. 8), it is difficult to isolate the sole significance of Postcode 3000 in driving increased uptake of CBD living. From 1993 to 2004, a 16,000 person (or 500 percent) increase in the population of international students attending city campuses was accompanied by a swelling of the CBD residential population from 1008 to 9375 (Gehl, 2004, p. 12). By 2008 the CBD population had risen to 17,290, with 56.5 percent born overseas, 51 percent aged between 21 and 25 years, 27 percent studying at tertiary level (22 percent international tertiary students), and 29.5 percent living in single person households (Casey, 2008a, p 26 and b, p. 5).

Moreover, the shifting functional mix in Melbourne's CBD since 1971 is evidenced by a reconfiguration of employment opportunities away from manufacturing. In the City of Melbourne during this period, employment in the manufacturing sector collapsed

[5] Fincher et al (2009b, p.6) noted that transnational students are socially and spatially separated from local students through a variety of institutional, architectural, and urban design mechanisms argue that "many transnational students were having a very narrow set of experiences, and that they weren't actively choosing this" (2009a, p 86).

by 70 percent from 62,004 to 18,504 (O'Hanlon and Hamnett, 2009, p 215). Today higher-income professional services industries are the largest employers in the City of Melbourne (Dingle and O'Hanlon, 2005, p. 4), and this is most pronounced in the CBD where 40 percent of the 197,052 workers are employed in finance, insurance, property and business services. Despite an increase in the total number of retail and hospitality businesses operating in the CBD, the period 1971 to 2008 also saw the collapse by one-third of inner-city retail and hospitality employment through the closure of many "large enterprises housed in multi-storey retail emporiums in the Central Business District and major urban thoroughfares" which were "unable to compete with the emerging car-based shopping malls of the suburbs" (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 34). Dingle and O'Hanlon (2005, p. 4) infer that "while shops, restaurants, cafes and new hotels in revitalized inner city shopping strips and new or refurbished leisure precincts create many new small businesses, they have not created many jobs".

This shortfall was more than compensated with the emergence of a "local economy heavily dependent on demand for, and provision of, consumption, services and 'lifestyle' facilities" (O'Hanlon and Hamnett, 2009, p. 215) which can be ascribed to the "deliberate economic and tourism strategy" initiated by the Victorian Labor government of John Cain since 1982 to "sell Melbourne as an events city" (O'Hanlon, 2009, p. 30). The Cain government legislated for and funded the advancement of a vibrant cultural agenda for Melbourne, and the development of sporting and cultural infrastructure of national significance within "… a five-kilometer arc of the Central Business District, and most have been funded from public or public-private sources, and overseen by a state government instrumentality, Major Projects Victoria, founded in 1987… All of these events—except the Commonwealth Games and the puppet festival—are annual fixtures, and almost all are staged primarily in the new or refurbished inner urban cultural and sporting facilities …" (O'Hanlon, 2009, pp. 31-32).

Figure 4:
Through the 2008 action research project "Couch Sit"; Urban Village Melbourne Inc questioned whether formal physical appropriation of public space was the only mechanism by which private interests excluded public uses of city space. Seated on a red household couch from 11am on a weekday, the researchers occupied a section of a sidewalk on Collins Street near to the intersection with Elizabeth Street. While the neighboring bank had no physical or legal claims to the sidewalk, after two hours the bank manager confronted the research team (pictured), and after four hours the team was asked to move on by the Victoria Police at the request of the bank manager. The Urban Village Melbourne Inc. research team argues that this exposes a behavioral mechanism, by which private interests seek to control public uses of city space adjoining their own active frontages.

Led by the 'events city' policies of the successive Victorian Governments, retail and events strategies and urban design and planning policies of the City of Melbourne have explicitly accommodated an increasing representation of small retail and hospitality business in the CBD to cater for the suburban, interstate and overseas visitors. Since the early 1980s the City of Melbourne has relaxed street side trading regulations, regulated for a higher percentage of active building frontages to sidewalks, and across the city has widened sidewalks, increased numbers of street trees, street lighting and street furniture, and improved paving finishes (Adams, 2007, pp. 13-14). In the CBD between 1993 to 2004, Gel (2004, p. 32) observed an increase in the number of curbside cafes and outdoor seats from 95 cafes with 356 seats to 1940 cafes with 5380 seats, an additional 3.1 kilometers of revitalized lanes (Figure 3) and arcades, the development of more and higher quality active edges across the CBD, and a corresponding and significant increase in street life measured in pedestrian activity and stationary activity (of which sitting, standing, and sitting at a cafe are the most common activities).

In assessing this increased street life, which has been accompanied at the boundary of the public and private realms by a proliferation of commercially activated edges and curbside cafe seating, Gehl (2004, p. 56) cautions against the continuation of urban design policies which privilege "private use at the expense of public rights" (vividly demonstrated by Urban Village's "Couch Sit" project – see Figure 4). Adams (2006, p. 6) goes further and suggesting that while curbside "…make a valuable contribution to the social and cultural identity of the city and contribute significantly to its economic prosperity and sustainability, this 'appropriation' of public space for private uses may need to be reviewed and balanced by more opportunities for public seating. Informal meeting places are equally important to support the increasing density of housing, business, and retail occupation within the city centre, and there is corresponding pressure for more universally accessible, sheltered, well-conceived and varied public spaces. All people must feel welcome in the city and benefit from various forms and durations of respite without having to spend".

5. CONCLUSIONS

Overlaid on the ingredients of street life above, are three interplaying operational factors: the top-down formal rules and regulations; the bottom-up informal real uses; and the flows and shifts in the globalized economy that directly and indirectly impact on the city's morphology and functionality. In Melbourne, a predominantly middle-class society where the formal rules hold sway, this phenomenon is felt most strongly in the increased commercial activities that activate the frontages of streets and laneways in the CBD, indirectly leading to the commercialization of the public urban spaces. On the other hand, Bangkok's

Table 1: Ingredients of street life

Ingredients of street life	Bangkok	Melbourne CBD
1.Density (residential population)	From ~30,000+ persons/sq. km. at Pom Prap Sattru Phai, an old inner city district, to ~4,000+ persons/ sq.km at Don Muang, an outer district ~20km from Bangkok's central business areas. The long-term trend has been decrease in population in inner Bangkok and increase in the suburbs (Burapattana and Ross, 2007). Note that this number is based on registered residences and actual numbers would be higher.	From ~15.000+ persons/sq. km. in Melbourne's CBD part of Melbourne City Council with ~2,400 persons/sq.km. (as of 2007) (Casey, 2008b) to ~306 persons/sq.km. at Hume City Council 15-45km from the CBD (2006 numbers) (Hume City Council, 2009). The long-term trend is projected increases throughout the city.

Table 1: Ingredients of street life (cont.)

2. Urban morphology
 	
2.1 Spatial structure (openness vs enclosure)
- street connectivity (permeability and walk-ability)
- Hierarchical street network
  - internal structure
  - internal-external connectivity
 	
2.2 Physical settings
- fixed/semi-fixed/non-fixed feature elements
- public/private interface at the ground level
	2.1 Planned/unplanned open and enclosed spatial system
	- Poor street connectivity (permeability and walk-ability)
	- Hierarchical street network: streets, side-streets (*soi*) and pedestrian lanes (*trok*) high convergence at streets and intersections of streets and side streets.
	
	2.2 Formal/informal built forms
	- permanent and ephemeral fixed/semi-fixed/ non-fixed feature elements
	- good public/private interface at the ground level for shop-houses; very poor for car-oriented hypermarkets and shopping malls
		2.1 Planned open and enclosed spatial system
		- Very good street connectivity (permeability and walk-ability)
		- Hierarchical street network: active edges along streets, arcades, and revitalized former service laneways.
		
		2.2 Formal built forms
		- highly planned/designed and regulated fixed/semi-fixed/ non-fixed feature elements
		- good planned/designed public/private interface at the ground level

3. Functionality, uses, activities - Mixed primary uses - multiplicity of uses - small scale local economy	Mixed formal/informal commercial functions - Mixed primary uses: commercial, cultural and manufacturing. (work, live, learn and play) - High degree of mixed uses both vertically and horizontally such as in the shop-house typology, the ground floor is utilized for commercial and the upper levels are for residential. In many cases the front is for commercial and the back is for residential. - Multiplicity of uses, for example, public spaces are utilized for a variety of uses, by different groups of people at different times of the day - small scale local economy including very fine scale mobile vendors	Formal commercial and cultural functions - Mixed primary uses: commercial and cultural - (to some degree) multiplicity of uses - small scale local economy
4. Operation (spatial and temporal dimension) - Control: top-down vs. bottom-up written/ unwritten rules - Inclusion/exclusion - Adaptability - Flexibility	- Bottom-up - Unwritten rules - Inclusion/exclusion based on unwritten rules and tacit sphere - High adaptability - High flexibility	- Top-down - Unwritten rules - Inclusion/exclusion based on rules and regulations - Low adaptability - Low flexibility

streets are dominated by informal commercial activities that persisted through time adapting and evolving with the various waves of global inflows (Polakit and Boontharm, 2008). Unwritten rules govern the public spaces arguably allowing for more individual finer scale appropriation – however, this is under threat from the worldviews and aspirations of the expanding middleclass, numerically and spatially (Sintusingha, 2009), which displaces and hinders informal activities of the urban poor[6] (Polakit and Boontharm, 2008, p.198). The question posed here for planners and urban designers in Bangkok: Is urban spatial conciliation between the two groups possible? Can the middle classes be drawn back from the privatized, temperature-controlled commercial spaces of hypermarkets and shopping malls to the streets? Or is intervention futile and the city should just let economic development run its laissez-faire course manifesting in new mall typologies that cater to various scales, locations and socio-economic classes mushrooming throughout Bangkok's conurbation.

While the residential density of Melbourne's CBD corresponds with the denser districts of Bangkok, this may not be a relevant factor as the CBD attracts a huge number of daytime users and visitors to sports and cultural events many times its residential population. The vibrancy of the CBD predominantly hinges on its daily and weekly commercial cyclic ebbs and flows, its temporal population of international students, and its many choreographed annual sports and cultural events. On this note, Urban Village Melbourne, a group of designers and researchers are investigating through research-design alternative, bottom-up, 'open source', participative and non-commercial strategies at the finest scales consciously challenging/ testing Melbourne's top-down rigid operational rules at the commercial fringes of Grade 2 and 3 service laneways of the CBD using Bullens Lane in Chinatown as the pilot project. And here Bangkok's operation through spontaneity, fluidity, adaptability and ambiguity - where rules are often negotiated in the lived spaces - may provide a fine scale model for planning/design practice. Viewed from Bangkok's looseness and its organic co-existence between fixed/semi-fixed/non-fixed forms, another possible challenge for Melbourne's street life is the strict demarcation and separation between pedestrian, bike and road traffic. On the other hand, Melbourne provides lessons for Bangkok that planning and design can be effective advocacy tools that enable spatial revitalization and social convergence that may address the broader-scaled questions posed above – arguing further that this should be done with a robust balance between top-down and localized bottom-up processes. The question also remains for both cities - and planning practice in general - how the local residential population can be effectively engaged and participate in the process. In Bangkok this can be translated into the acknowledgement of the informal street economy as integral, rather than fringe urban activities and planning/designing for such activities rather than to limit and/or eradicate; in Melbourne, a decentralization of planning that engages the local inhabitants in the planning and design decisions at very fine scales as is attempted by Urban Village Melbourne.

Modernist notions about city planning have been profoundly embedded in the urban structure of cities, such as street systems, infrastructure systems, urban forms, zoning regulations, and segregation in terms of ethnic groups and socio-economic classes. This concrete and rigid urban structure, further enhanced by economic liberalism, is very hard to change and, to some degree, this is a reason why despite attempts to engineer street life, there has been little success. We argue that street life is democratic and unplanned, full of spontaneity, flexibility, adaptability and inclusion. This also leads to an interesting contrast between Bangkok's developing democratic system generally characterized by a weak rule of law which, ironically, is manifest in socio-spatial flexibility and freedom compared to Melbourne's mature democratic system with a robust rule of law and relative transparency that, however, seem to restrict everyday street life flexibility. Whether these two cases can be generalized as urban conditions in 'developed' and 'developing' societies, and will Bangkok inevitably shed much of its informal characteristics with increased affluence, are questions for broader study. From this study we observe that much can be learnt in the art/science of planning/design for 'urban dynamism' in the investigation of both contrasting conditions.

[6] In light of the political conflicts in the country before and after the 2006 military coup, many commentators reclassified this group as the "lower middle class" who has also benefitted from participation in the urban, mainly informal economy, albeit less than the middle to upper classes.

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