



### ANIMATING THE HERITAGE OF GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY

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Two years ago, WSROC began managing the Regional Cultural Planning coordination project that spanned the 14 LGA's in Greater Western Sydney.

#### Common barriers faced by cultural staff

During the consultation and research to develop a Regional Cultural Strategy, a number of common issues kept emerging, and they were:

- That cultural and heritage officers are isolated within the local government structure
- That information that was useful to cultural planners was often inaccessible
- That rich cultural information gathered through cultural projects such as CCD, festivals or cultural mapping, or recorded in heritage collections – were not valued by planners or decision makers, and even if they were, the mechanisms to include it in the planning processes were poor
- That culture and heritage is seen as too messy, too difficult, or sufficiently addressed through demographic data.

#### Digital Cultural Atlas for GWS

The DCA is a response to the needs of cultural planners – but is essentially about animating any cultural story and presenting it within a spatial context that activates the physical environment.

- It is a conduit between the hard data and tools (GIS) currently used for landuse planning in local government, and the intangible, value-based stories about how the community lives.
- Through the research, it has become clear that DCAGWS can address the unique bundle of challenges faced by heritage planners in GWS Councils.

#### The digital cultural atlas concept

The traditional atlas concept suggests:

- Lots of maps
- Additional information about economics, politics, lifestyles
- Indexing which makes it easy to find places

Electronic/digital cultural atlases extend on this through the use of new information and communications technologies :

- Geographical Information Systems (GIS)
- Networked information and the World Wide Web
- Powerful linking and indexing techniques

#### Beyond the bird's eye view

Cultural mapping/planning requires both

- the 'bird's eye' (planner's) point of view and
- the 'on the ground' (community) point of view

Adding perspective by 'zooming in':

- Images
- Video, audio
- Documents, stories
- Links to related information wherever it is
- Online Exhibitions and access to digital collections
- Linking information together to provide 'trails'

#### A bundle of GWS heritage challenges

Heritage issues in GWS:

1. Heritage awareness is low in the community, and heritage fears are perpetuated by the real estate, finance and insurance industries (eg: depreciation of property, property modification straitjacketing).



2. Within local government, heritage planners report that heritage is often met with ignorance or outright hostility by elected representatives, and there is generally a high turn over of planners assessing DA's. The value of heritage places to the community takes a back seat when it is believed that individual rights (to alter the property etc) are being compromised. People cannot contextualise the value of heritage places, within the regional history, let alone the state or national stories.

GWS is facing significant development pressures to accommodate the rapidly expanding metropolitan population, with an additional 260,000 dwellings planned in the period 2001-2019. It is expected that most of this will be accommodated in existing areas, with 60,000 on the fringe. Development applications in town centres for new 20+ story residential developments are being approved, in part because local government planning instruments have not kept pace with these new ventures. Some councils have been unable to conceptualise the impact of these major developments on heritage properties, aesthetics (including shadowed areas) and the overall functioning of the city.

3. The range of heritage is poorly understood— recent studies reveal that our colonial heritage is well documented, but records fail to reflect the full range of the regions cultural heritage. There are notable gaps in our understanding of Aboriginal heritage, migrant (esp post WWII), industrial and moveable heritage and the importance of cultural landscapes (including productive agricultural heritage). There is a cultural cringe towards late 20th century heritage, which diminishes the social and cultural heritage value of places. This includes significant migration heritage places, as the greatest influx of migrants to Western Sydney occurred after WWII as Australia sought labour to rebuild the nation after years of depression and war.

### Benefits of DCA to heritage and local government

1. Promotes heritage awareness

- In the community
- In local government

2. Bridges the communication divide – an unthreatening passage between culture-talk and planning-talk

3. Tells a story which situates heritage items in community context

- Activates the meaning and value of 'problem points on a map' (NSW Heritage Office plotting SHR & LEPs to DIPNRs GIS)
- How heritage items contribute to historical themes
- How local heritage finds its place in regional development
- The relationship between places and moveable heritage and collections
- A spatial context for peoples stories/ oral histories
- The relationship between sense of place and cultural identity

4. A framework that connects diverse information sources

- It networks heritage and cultural places, organisations, communities and people
- Enhances knowledge about communities for museum planning or CBHS

### How could it be used?

- Western Sydney heritage review, and implementation of recommendations
- Thematic history online, weaving the regional story that connects local items
- LEPs - reviews
- GWS Agricultural heritage project – looking at agricultural landscapes, and resonant objects

### Grantham Poultry Research Station, Seven Hills, State Heritage Register

DCAGWS has the potential to connect and visually represent the Grantham story with:

- the Estonian Poultry farms in Thirlmere, (a story that is being researched by Wollondilly Shire Council, Wollondilly Heritage centre and the Powerhouse Museum), as well as contextualising it with
- the history of farming sub divisions that saw poultry farming boom across western Sydney from 1900-1960s, and
- farmers market days, through to
- modern day Ingham Brothers factory production methods.

It can also explore the reuse and adaption of Grantham as a Heritage Park,

- with council currently exploring a childrens science museum,
- including activities that make use of the historical chemistry labs,
- passive recreation in the Cumberland parklands, as well as
- family day care centre.



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