

## Cairns: City for Global Creatives?

**A multi-part conversation on 'Creative Cairns', by editor and urbanist Dr. Ben Guy, who recently gave a talk on this topic for an Arts nexus 'Fourth Friday at 4 Forum'. Submissions welcome.**

A discussion on the power of creative people to drive economies and wealth generation has been inspired, in part, by the success of Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*. In the text, Florida, an economist, argues that 'talent' is the new natural resource - the power behind the engine of the first world economies. These economies do not compete in manufacturing and production any longer. They are, or need to be, leaders in relation to creativity as measured largely by Intellectual Property production - especially, for Florida, in info-tech.

The argument continues that these creative people are footloose, highly talented, and motivated not purely by money - but by lifestyle too. This includes fun and rewarding workplaces, flexibility with stability and, particularly, great places to live. Culture, nature, great people, diversity and intellectual challenge - the good things of life.

However, with increased global mobility and the unilateralist psyche of modern America, including visa restrictions since 9/11 - which tend to reduce cultural diversity - and the promotion of 'family values' sponsored from the religious right, Florida argues that the USA is facing a *Flight of The Creative Class* (his second book) - to better places. Herein lies the opportunity for quality places to attract such people - for their economic and cultural benefit to the society in which they enter. Can Cairns be such a place? Does it have enough of the good stuff to draw the best of the best? ...

The Creative Class reportedly produces a disproportionate share of wealth, accounting for nearly half of all wages and salaries earned - as much as the manufacturing and service sectors combined. They are people worth attracting from a rational economic standpoint.

Now, Cairns is no New York nor London, it cannot compete on scale - but it does offer some foundational elements that can attract 'creatives' to

drive the economy. An international airport 10 minutes from the CBD; a fantastic natural environment; great weather (mostly) and a cosy and very safe atmosphere. These can be attractors to a global company or a footloose creative seeking sanctity, a wired lifestyle and to escape the 'rat-run'. The majesty of the reef, the backdrop of the forest and the ability to move from real natural experience to urban convenience are real highlights of this town. With clever marketing, Cairns could be sold to the right people to get the right outcomes for the community and the Place.

The Place that is Cairns (isolating the splendour of the natural environment), it is argued, does not have the necessary chutzpah that would attract people who could similarly choose London, Florence or Sydney. The streets, buildings and the 'sense of place' that is the man-made Cairns is seriously lacking. While some of the older timber streetscapes have a charm, they are disappearing and are not sufficient. Where is the urbanity, the density and vitality in the streets, especially of the CBD?

The Creative Class tend to like quality amenities throughout the streets and spaces - not sports stadiums and isolated monuments. Cairns is competing, in this race, with some of the prettiest European historical villages, or the dense high-rise Asian towns, such as in South Korea, or Singapore, that leave their surrounding nature-scapes intact.

The convenient, safe, bike and roller-blade network on all those 35m wide flat streets, from Earlville to Stratford, are missing - instead we have 7 'lanes' of traffic and carparking! The enmeshing of the forest with the urban, such as linking the Red Arrow deep into the heart of the CBD is completely missed - Cairns could be, if it desired, a very

green city with each street enclosed by rich greens ruffling in the slight breeze - instead, streets and footpaths are typically exposed and baking - street trees are dispersed and barely relevant; the piazzas, the secondary spaces, groovy alleyways for artisans and up-and-comings, the urban nooks and crannies are absent.

The inherited street-block grid is a reasonable tropical framework, with caveats. We might say 'we are working on it' (such as a great initiative to link the Esplanade through to the Red Arrow, or a rumour of 10,00 trees to be planted, or the Lagoon development) - but a comprehensive intention of

creating a Great Place that is Cairns, just is not there: from the micro- to the macro-. Where is the vision?

Even if the desire is present, the capacity and knowledge seems to be absent. The new CairnsPlan places 'land use' above 'place context' - implying that as long as the 'use' rules are satisfied - it matters little how it contributes to its context. The Repco building as the 'Gateway to Cairns', near the Airport Drive, is a typical outcome of such urban planning. And blank fences! Queensland is becoming one long blank 1.8m front fence: streets become unsafe, ugly, and a downward

social spiral commences. These mistakes were made 30 years ago in the UK and Europe - with many many millions being spent on social and physical reparations. Yet here we are.... building at the edges of town, stretching infrastructure costs, which prevents attention to quality infill. There are no urban design guidelines or education - despite that the local university (for some mad, probably 'logical', reason isolated at Smithfield) teaches urban design - and has done for years!

The remedy? ... Watch this space... There is a Way!



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## Soul to Soul Ken Miida

Fri 20th May - Sun 5th Jun

Soul to Soul is the first solo exhibition of stunning new photographic work by Cairns based Japanese photographer, Ken Miida.



Opening:  
Friday 20th May 6.00pm  
Daily from 10.00am - 5.00pm

## Nomadic

Fri 20th May - Sun 5th Jun

A dynamic exhibition of fibre works exploring the artistic properties of the emerging and environmentally friendly eco-fibre hemp, presented by Flying Arts.



Opening:  
Friday 20th May 6.00pm  
Daily from 10.00am - 5.00pm

## Slap Dance Sing

Sat 21st May 2.00-4.00pm, Tank 5  
\$12 and \$10 concession.

Body & Voice Percussion Workshop with Matt Hill, 0425-233-559

## Darren Hanlon

Fri 3rd June

Darren Hanlon has played with many international acts including Billy Bragg, Magnetic Fields, Evan Dando and the Violent Femmes. 'Punks Not Dead' made No. 45 on JJJ's Hottest 100.



Tickets: \$18 and \$15 concession, from Ticketlink 07-4031-9555, www.ticketlink.com.au  
Doors: 7.00pm, Show: 8.00pm  
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## Tanks Dance/Arts Markets

Sun 5th June 9.00am - 1.00pm, Free

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