



Conference Paper

Building a case for an International Design Centre in Geelong

Dr Meghan Kelly*, and Dr Russell Kennedy

School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University

Abstract

Geelong has a long history of design innovation and there exists an opportunity to applaud the achievements of a city and its people whom have been punching well above their weight. The significance of these hidden achievements is currently lost in a city where deindustrialization has changed the landscape forever. This article proposes it is time to affirm Geelong's role in innovative design, albeit through broad association, and offers ways to celebrate these achievements. It concludes there is an opportunity for a recognized International Design Centre based in Geelong where the past can be showcased but, more importantly, we can open the discussion for future innovation connecting industry and manufacturing with design, creating new opportunities for Geelong.

Keywords: Design innovation, Geelong, history, International Design Centre

Corresponding Author: Dr
Meghan Kelly; email:
destech@deakin.edu.au

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1 Introduction

Geelong, the second largest city in the state of Victoria, Australia, is located on Corio Bay and the Barwon River to the west of Melbourne (Travel Victoria, 2016). It is a beautiful historic centre, serving as the gateway to the Great Ocean Road and the Bellarine Peninsula. It is described as a pleasant, well-planned city with generous areas reserved for parks and open space (Sensis, 2015) however, not commonly known, Geelong is a city with a long history of design innovation.

These hidden design achievements are currently lost due to deindustrialization and the constantly changing economic landscape challenging the focus on design achievements. The Age Newspaper (Lucas 2014) reported Geelong was facing an industry exodus through factory closure to an extent not seen before in Victoria's second largest city. Ford, Qantas and Alcoa, large corporate and manufacturing companies that had situated aspects of their organizations in Geelong, were withdrawing from the region. The sense of demise throughout the community was acknowledged as hundreds of retrenchments were proposed. Yet, reported in the same article, was reference to the sustainable success of small to medium businesses in the Geelong region. It was noted there were new, technological advancements to stem from the district, touching on the possibilities emerging from design innovation and giving renewed hope for the future.

It was noted by Haughton (2015) that innovation is part of the thinking of the local community. Citing a few of the achievements, such as the work of “Geelong Advertiser and editor and inventor, James Harrison, (who) devised the world’s first successful ice making and refrigeration machinery in Geelong in 1856 and thereby laid the foundation of our modern way of life” and the “technical innovations by talented locals, like W. Thomas who undertook Geelong’s first telephone experiment in 1877”, Geelong’s history is filled with examples of local individuals and municipalities who regard themselves as progressive and revolutionary. “Because of its size and character, Geelong has been a suitable testing area for the application of new devices and products” and this was certainly evident in past examples where Geelong was the location for the installation and commissioning of the first automatic telephone exchange in Australia and was an early implementer of advancements of urban services such as electricity, sewerage and street tramways. The sense of Geelong as a location for continued optimism, despite setbacks, lingers, enticing new industries to invest in the region.

Yet the intention of this article is not to reflect on the well documented, historical past economic dynamics of Geelong, but to demonstrate the potential of a strongly established, progressive community who continues to take advantage of opportunities. More significantly, an underlying optimism can be seen to stem from the ingrained sensibility to recognize design as pivotal to advancement. This article argues that its history of innovation and manufacturing combined with a strategy of design policy and advocacy would provide a firm foundation for sustainable growth and place Geelong in a strong economic position for future generations. The development of an International Design Centre, based in Geelong, where the past can be showcased but more importantly, where the discussion for future innovation can evolve, will strengthen the connections between industry, manufacturing and design. In effect, this proposal identifies a plan to create the impetus to design a better future for Geelong and the surrounding districts. This paper also argues for Geelong to become part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as a City of Design. The UCCN was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development (UNESCO, 2015).

2 Geelong’s International Design Centre

Australian regional city regeneration in Australia is increasingly becoming an important topic “as they attempt to position themselves mid-way between larger discourses about capital cities and peri-urban landscapes” (Jones and Meikle, 2013). Geelong faces a legacy of heavy investment in industrialism, specifically from the automotive and wool industries, and now must “re-image itself, (and) regenerate key sections of its urban fabric”, to create an economic renewal. Past Mayor of Geelong, Keith Fagg, said: “the city had presented itself as an appropriate location for one of the Government’s

Industry Innovation Precincts, which would allow it to draw on federal funding to seize new opportunities and more aggressively access export markets” (Shane, 2013). As Bowen (2016) reports: “Like many heavy industry-based regional economies, Geelong found its economy collapsing in the face of globalisation. However, the city is now set to be the centre of an advanced manufacturing industry”.

Currently ranked 328 in the 2015 Innovation Cities Index (Global Innovation Agency, 2016), 20 points below its 2014 ranking, Geelong has some work to do to be recognized as an innovative, design city. This ranking prompted the comment from Rebecca Casson, Chief executive of the Committee for Geelong, to attest “innovation was not an idea, it was a necessity” but “we don’t actually know what that means or that that looks like” (Squires, 2016).

According to the Geelong Manufacturing Council (2016) in 2010/11 the region saw 24 new investments announced as part of the Geelong Innovation and Investment Fund, delivering over 1000 new jobs and \$100 million in investment. The Council argues Geelong’s reputation as a leading manufacturing centre is based on multiple strengths and extensive manufacturing diversity. They point out that the Geelong region has approximately 500 manufacturers across industries such as transport equipment, metals, extractive industries, chemicals and petroleum, cement, engineering, textiles, timber and food, all of whom would benefit from strategic design intervention.

The authors of this article argue that the process of re-imagination is already underway with many Geelong manufacturing companies whose principles are based on design thinking. The authors propose that this can be enhanced with further development taking a two-phase approach:

- 1 Create Geelong International Design Centre
- 2 Apply for Geelong Creative City of Design: UNESCO Creative Cities Network

To begin with, establishing Geelong as an International Design Centre would both reaffirm its history of innovation but more importantly act as a fillip for a city needing to maximise its manufacturing industry. Successful application to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) would result in Geelong’s immediate recognition as a City of Design aligning Geelong with other locations around the world that champion design as the key facilitator of innovation and change. By asserting such an approach, this article aims to open discussion for Geelong to develop a design and innovation strategy that connects industry with design thinking methodologies.

Such a strategy is not new. Cities and countries around the world use design centres to stimulate business by promoting the value of design and facilitating connections between designers and manufacturers. Founded in 1978, the Danish Design Centre (DDC) based in Copenhagen is regarded as a benchmark model for design centres. Denmark is a leading design nation with a strong design history that is admired around the world. The important point to take note in regard to Geelong is that the DDC has evolved its focus from increasing the awareness of Danish design in a broad sense, to increasing

awareness of design as a competitive parameter. Its clear message is to promote the use of design as a driver of innovation and for development in companies and society at large (Mikkelgaard-Jensen & Bason 2016). The Danish case study demonstrates how a united collection of stakeholders can benefit each individually, but also as a whole. Evans and Freeman define stakeholders as those groups who have a stake in or claim on the firm, specifically including suppliers, customers, employees, stockholders and the local community, as well as management in its role as agent for these groups (Evan and Freeman, 1988).

We need to understand the complex interconnections between economic and social forces. Isolating 'social issues' as separate from the economic impact, which they have, and conversely isolating economic issues as if they had no social effect, misses the mark both managerially and intellectually. Actions aimed at one side will not address the concerns of the other. Processes, techniques and theories that do not consider all of these forces will fail to describe and predict the business world as it really is (Freeman, 1984, p. 32).

Design Centres are located in many capital cities around the world however many are also located in regional centres of similar size to Geelong. The South Korean case study is an interesting example given it has design centres (government and corporate) in the city of Seoul but also in regional cities such as Daegu and Gwangju (DGDC 2014). Their agenda is to promote the value of design and assist small and medium business, with a specific focus on local design and innovation. The Daegu Gyeongbuk Design Centre and Gwangju Design Centre demonstrate how governments in South Korea clearly understand the need to build links between design and business (You-Bok Park 2013). Originally the South Korean government established the Korean regional design centres, yet these now run as independent not-for-profit organisations.

The international design centre concept is a proven model of Constituent Market Orientation, defined by Tellefsen and Love as "an organisational learning circle where members of the organisation identify the current and future needs of its constituents and the factors that affect the satisfaction of their needs, spread this external information internally in the organisation, and co-operate in order to prepare and implement innovations based on the external information with the aim to improve the need satisfaction offered members of the constituencies" (2016). Tellefsen and Love argue that Constituent Market Orientation theory focuses on the underlying aspects of the orientations of constituents. That is, it considers processes that underpin the amount and direction (orientation) of market-oriented attention undertaken by individuals, groups, business units and organisations that form a business market arrangement of customers, suppliers, and businesses. This definition aligns with the strategies of industry and government supported design centres around the world in countries including Denmark, Honk Kong, Singapore and South Korea.

The Geelong Manufacturing Council (2016) states their vision "is to position Geelong as a leading, technologically advanced, internationally competitive manufacturing

centre". This article supports the Council statement but argues that for this to be realised Geelong needs to develop a dedicated design led, innovation strategy with clear constituent market orientation. It asserts that with a combination of government and industry support Geelong could develop a highly effective International Design Centre that is networked with other design centres around the world. To do so would create natural alliances with national and international design associations, including Australia's local peak body, the Design Institute of Australia (DIA) and its global affiliate who already has an established network of design centres and design promotion agencies around the world, the International Council of Design (Ico-D).

In a globalized market, cities and their governments are rapidly developing methods of design advocacy and promotion that include opportunities for exchange and knowledge sharing. Within the frame of constituent market orientation, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) provides another opportunity for design-focused cities to advance their creative profile including in the area of design. UNESCO (2015) claim that joining the Network will enhance a city's creative potential for sustainable urban development, exchange know-how and cooperate on an international level. Established in 2004, the UCCN aims to promote cooperation with cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development. Member cities of the network work together towards a common objective that places creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans both locally and internationally.

The 116 cities which currently make up this collective work together towards a common objective: "placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level" (UNESCO, 2015). The UCCN is currently formed by 116 Members from 54 countries covering seven creative fields: Crafts & Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Music and Media Arts. Cities are only able to be bestowed UCCN status in one field (UNESCO, 2015). Currently Australia has three cities in the UCCN (Adelaide for Music; Melbourne for Literature; Sydney for Film) but none have been acknowledged as a City of Design. UCCN for design currently include; Bandung, Beijing, Berlin, Bilbao, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Curitiba, Detroit, Dundee, Graz, Helsinki, Kaunas, Kobe, Montreal, Nagoya, Puebla, Saint-Etienne, Seoul, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Singapore, Torino (UNESCO, 2015).

This article suggests that Geelong is well placed to apply for UNESCO Creative Cities status in design. Geelong is already one of Australia's foremost manufacturing centres, with a long and rich history. The region is home to a range of leading national and international companies and boasts many diverse and innovative success stories. It is a region ideally situated to grow manufacturing, whether involving new ventures or by taking advantage of the existing industrial, research and educational infrastructure.

Geelong is also identified as home to important education and research facilities with significant infrastructure already in place in the region, including organizations such as CSIRO Materials Science and Engineering; Deakin University; Geelong Technology Precinct; CSIRO Division of Animal Health; CSIRO Marine Sciences; Australian Fu-

ture Fibres Research and Innovation Centre; Centre for Advanced Design in Engineering Training; Centre for Intelligent Systems Research; Institute for Frontier Materials; Carbon Nexus; Gordon Institute of TAFE and Geelong Technical Education Centre (Geelong Manufacturing Council, 2016).

3 Summary and Conclusion

This article concludes that with a combination of government and industry support Geelong could develop a highly effective International Design Centre in Geelong, to network with other design centres around the world. Step one in the proposal would be to develop strategic plan to establish the Geelong International Design Centre. The next step but included in that plan would be to apply to UNESCO for Geelong to join its Creative Cities Network as a City of Design. Both strategies are integral and need to work together; one provides the action, the other presents Geelong with prestige, profile and global networking. Geelong could apply to join UNESCO's Creative Cities Network now however its case for UNESCO City of Design status would be strengthened greatly if it could demonstrate plans to establish an International Design Centre.

This article also suggests that a strategy of Constituent Market Orientation including a visible, design centre hub aligned with an international advocacy network will provide substantial benefits to a region that is already achieving great things. Geelong's local industry increasingly needs to compete on a global basis against countries and cities that already have well-established design and innovation policies. Such policies are delivered by government promotional agencies and supported by active and dynamic design centers. With unified stakeholder support from both government and industry, Geelong has the potential to establish itself as a high profile, international design city in a relatively short time period.

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