

The People and Place Podcast: Indigenous Design (Part 2) Transcript

Hannah (00:28): This is part two on our discussion around the importance of indigenous connection to place. Joining me once again is artists, Ailsa Walsh, a proud indigenous woman of the Yuggera, Lardil, and Cululeah Countries. We also have Michael Hromek Technical Executive in WSP's, Indigenous Specialist Services team and also Ben Gibbs, an Associate in our Sustainability team. I'm Hannah Bleyerveen and today we discuss meeting sustainable design objectives, using indigenous design to enrich online places and the positive impact of indigenous design for future generations. Ben, could you please tell us how do you think indigenous design and incorporating it into places can help us meet our sustainable design objectives?

Ben (01:12): Traditionally we think about sustainable buildings as environmentally sustainable. Social sustainability is a key element of what you would consider now if someone says this is a really sustainable building or place. Projects like 900 Anne are setting the high benchmark for how that can be done really well and people can have come to the office a lot to look through and see how it's been done effectively and we have had great feedback. This kind of incorporation is being recognised by third party rating agencies and things as being innovative and WSP are working closely with the Green Building Council of Australia on their new rating tool and how we incorporate that and what we're seeing at the moment. The conversations we're having now, these design elements that were currently or previously considered to be innovative, moving into being part of what is considered to be a sustainable building. That's a great thing.

Ben (02:01): I think to see that move through the industry and we've seen things that rating tools and the Green Building Council, have in their ratings transformed the industry in terms of use of sustainable materials or better performing concrete from an emissions point of view or use of solar panels and renewable energy. So, that's driving those kind of uptake of these kinds of aspects of building design and to have something as important as incorporation of Aboriginal culture in built into the writing tool I think is really exciting. And I think once that kinda comes out, the industry will move to it and we'll see a lot more.

Hannah (02:31): What do you hope future generations can connect to when they see indigenous culture in public spaces?

Hannah (02:38): Michael,

Michael (02:39): One thing I'd hope that they connect to is the distinction of what that culture is. There's so much distinction and variation between Aboriginal countries, tribes and cultures. If we do have places that can reflect back onto people who they are in a sense, I think that's quite powerful and what we should be aiming for. The trick in the Aboriginal knowledge space is to unlock what is the appropriate thing we should be representing here? What does the community want? And often that completely shuts down any Aboriginal engagement in the projects that like it gets turned into the too hard basket and that's quite disappointing.

Ben (03:14): Can I just add as someone of a nonindigenous background, I think this conversation about impacting future generations, might be benefited by just improving the

education of the wider community. You know I feel very grateful to be involved in this project because I've learned a lot about indigenous culture through Ailsa's work and working with Michael quite closely and I know the wider team have improved their knowledge as well. For future generations, the more we can integrate these indigenous designs and stories throughout the community and wider places, but also offices, that it just creates an easier way for people to communicate and feel like they have a shared place.

Hannah (03:51): What do you think about that Ailsa?

Ailsa (03:53): That's what we want. Now you'll tell your kids about our rich culture and that we're not all drunks or smokers or abusers, like that people see on TV. I think that's again, another generation thing. Even with non-indigenous people,

Hannah (04:07): I want to explore how we might be able to use indigenous designed to enrich online spaces. What do you think about that, Ailsa?

Ailsa (04:16): In regards to community, its response is really good. You'll see artists who will put up colouring book pages online for free. There's companies that will do weaving classes digitally. There is negatives with everything and it's like a yin and yang, but going digitally is a good thing

Michael (04:32): For me, I've joined an Aboriginal men's Facebook group and that's been revolutionary. I can tell you what I've learned so much from this group, so it's interesting to see how future technologies are actually going to help propel this knowledge that is often been gate kept. I've heard terrible stories in Yuin country where uncles have wanted to pass on this information, but none of the nephews wanted to hear it and a lot of that is generational trauma and terrible stuff that broken culture is a result of, but there are still ways that we're getting around that.

Hannah (05:06): Thanks for joining us as we discuss the importance of indigenous connection to place and how we can give life to this through our planning and design of places and infrastructure. Thanks especially to our guest speakers and the incredible Ailsa for having a yarn with us. I encourage all our listeners to check out Ailsa's incredible artwork by the link in our show-notes. We also invite you to share your thoughts on some of the ways our industry can move forward, to embed indigenous voices authentically into infrastructure in place, design and planning. You can email us your thoughts to FutureReady.Australia@wsp.com