Nature's home or growth engine: Whereto the city?

Engaging with nature in the city

Looking at life in cities, 'community development' advocates might ask, how can people fashion a healthy relationship with nature and its life support systems. Alternatively, do we have to settle for a dominant Mainstream ethos that reads, 'cities, the growth engines of global society'?

For its sensitivity to nature in suburbia, it's hard to go past the response of a neighbor who had bought a house with a dozen, already established large trees. After her house had been damaged by a falling, large eucalyptus branch during a wild storm, she commented: 'I've thought for a while of taking out the big trees, but where will the birds go?'

Generally, though, do many care?

Often, even architecturally landscaped gardens surrounding planned developments have been laid out with varieties of plants that are well behaved and easily manageable. But if you love the sound of nearby birds, forget it! Or if you think that you'll be able to get involved in personally shaping a plot or a community garden near you, sorry, 'there's no room here for that!'

Contrast this neighbor's attitude with that described for a developing Canberra suburb: ''….. the new town of Gungahlin has been developed in a manner that responds to current demands including the need for compactness. Street tree planting has become an option and narrow verges and high plot ratios preclude the growth of large trees. The result after 10 years is rather barren…… In the latest survey, more than 50 per cent of the residents did not want a tree planted in front of their place although they would like one next door.' (Firth, 2005.) And we haven't mentioned the (barren) situation for most apartment dwellers!

Being positive, there is an approach that could bear more fruit than the broadly advocated densification urban policy: Start by taking existing housing built areas as given and acknowledge that the thousands of in situ residents' chosen lifestyle is to be respected. Then work with these established (inner, middle and outer suburbs) residents with the aim of coaxing them to make the transition to a fuller involvement with their natural surrounds, with other living species, and a wider range of people.

Home gardens, in fact all the surrounding green space in the neighborhood, might then be given a recognition they deserve. That is, celebrated for their potential for food production, the place they have in our emotions through memories of home, friends and wanderings, the part they play in community-building for immigrants, the physical benefits they provide for healthy activity, climate modification benefits, the opportunity they present for personal creativity. (Gaynor, 2006; Bartlett ed.,

2005; Holmes et al, 2008; Fisher, 2007; Gleeson, 2008;Thomson ed., 1996; Timms, 1999; Buchanan, 1996.)

Nature and Growth – Attitudes and questions

For nature: Michael Hough, following the pioneering voice of Ian McHarg, (1992), and others, has incisively examined and advocated new perspectives on nature in cities. Comparing the modern city with older city building, he describes four different patterns of space-making: 'a lack of visual connections to the countryside, the use of urban parks solely for leisure, the mutually exclusive nature of the relationship between town and countryside, and the abundant use of energy.' (Hough, 1995.) And for some Australian historical and wide-ranging consideration of the place of nature in the city, Goode, 1997, Low et al, 2005.

E.O.Wilson: 'If biophilia (an innate tendency to focus upon life and lifelike forms) is truly part of human nature, if it is truly an instinct, we should be able to find evidence of a positive effect of the natural world and other organisms on health. In fact, the annals of physiology and medicine contain abundant and diverse studies affirming just such a connection, at least when health is broadly defined.' (Wilson, 2002; Webster, 2009, Stoneham, 1997, O'Donoghue, 2003.)

For Australia in particular*: 'Australia is a deep-time creation.* Successive waves of immigrants to its shores stumbled upon an extraordinary entity, with stunning regional variations, unmatched in natural diversity, certainly in relation to the Europe from which most of the second contingent came…… Its remnant existence (Mary E. White, 1994) posits a question mark against the wisdom of chasing a global-style urbanism/minimalist built form in architecture and landscaping. Australia's indigenous nature can be understood as a metaphor for the local against the global view of the world.' (Fisher, Puglisi, 2003.)

Alternatively, there's the Mainstream growth ethos. The broader attractions of Mainstream, from which the idea of 'the city as growth engine' derives, should not be denied. We start by saying 'economic growth works'. Then:

There's the beauty of well-designed homes and gardens, the satisfactions of interior designing. We celebrate the exquisite clothing, the luscious meals and fabulous wines, the breathtaking travel destinations, the trips to catch up with widely dispersed family and friends, our international professional connections. A lot of us are not too happy with building 'outwards', but whatever we do we accept that we shouldn't stop building, and maybe go 'upwards', and multiply our roads, ports, airports. We have musical brilliance at our fingertips, or through the importing of talent; cars honed to eye-catching and ever-upgraded technical perfection, aircraft and ships that can take us, literally, to the ends of the earth. The availability of premium goods produced from all corners of the globe can be on our shelves, thanks to increasingly unfettered trade regimes. And there's the magical capacity allowed us by communication and information technologies, and life spans for many not

dreamt of a few years ago. Shopping, of course, has a special place, and retail downturns are lamented as top news. And we expect all these goodies to be supplied at cheaper and cheaper prices. (Puglisi, 2008.)

Can it be doubted that society is in the (now slightly perplexed) thrall of this Mainstream growth agenda? Characterized, in summary, by the dominance of <u>economic</u> solutions ('production and consumption expansion need not be bounded'). Incorporated in these 'solutions' are attitudes to <u>population</u> growth ('global numbers and immigration levels are not a concern'); and <u>techno-scientific</u> pulses ('techno-advances are an unquestioned blessing and can be the answer to any problems').

Are this agenda and its outcomes overstepping Earth's limits? Many now think so. (New Scientist, 2006,2008,2009; Harman, 2008; Pacific Ecologist, 2008; McCamish/Deere 2008; Earth Policy Institute, 2008; CSIRO, 2009; Huesemann, 2008; Rachel's, 2009; EurActiv, 2008; Ends, 2008; McEwan, 2008.)

For the purposes of this paper, chaotic economic manifestations aside, the environmental concern can be posed thus: Whatever the joys and achievements of the prevailing wealth, population, technological and urban growth ethos, is there an urgent need to scale down to the limitations of the Earth? *Perhaps, sadly, is it just altogether too much?* And can an alternative wisdom derived from the world's religions, cultural humanism and environmental science – take your pick, or learn from them all - so small in influence against the Mainstream dominance, coalesce to emerge as a new 'big thing'? (Wilson, 2006; Bell, 1976, Puglisi, 2006.)

City growth and display in residential settings

Looking firstly at its *residential* aspirations, what is behind the 'growth engine' view of cities?

Start with 'the gated communities/villages'. American, yes, but with copies in other countries, e.g. Cairo, (ABC RN, 2009), Dubai…., where wealth accumulation and its protection dominates. These are privately operated housing settlements, hidden behind severe security systems, uninviting to strangers, manicured to a fault, enforcing their own internal rules of conduct and usage.

As an emblem of what is seen by many as the height of residential achievement, it's hard to go past this contemporary manifestation of wealth and power. Nature, cultivated, has its place there, but at the cost of an immodest use of land for the few and a consumption extravagance that bears a heavy footprint well outside its immediate area, of materials, water and energy - not to dwell on its social exclusiveness. (Yardley, 2008.)

Does this attitude have an expression in Australia? It has certainly taken on similar characteristics. While exclusive areas and gated communities have legs here too,

(Nixon, 2006), most residential offerings are places of typically more modest ambition but nevertheless still extravagant. Dovey's 1970's and 1980's analysis of local home styles and aspirations is still relevant today – in fact more so given homes into the new century have tended to grow in opulence and size (about 30 per cent in the last 20 years). 'Each model home is marketed as a rung on the social ladder….The house as a symbolic package both establishes status and communicates it to others through the 'impact it will make on all future visitors'. 'The house is at once a stepping stone 'for the family that's going places' and a reward for all the sacrifices: 'we designed it because you've made it'. (Dovey, 1994.)

Mainstream takes shape in cities

For the purposes of this paper, city growth – its full spectrum of activities, not just its residential expressions - refers to the ever-intensifying urban expansion of property and infrastructure development. Together with social and cultural change, and driven by population increase, new business initiatives and workplace arrangements, greater demographic complexity and strong pro-consumption lifestyles, and increasing technological sophistication. All hopefully - it is thought - contributing to large numbers of extra, affluence-seeking households in the advertisement's 'you've made it' luxury.

Why does Mainstream come out the way it does on the ground? Where do cities fit into the Mainstream agenda?

Stated as a few salient considerations:
- *Cities have now become home to the majority of the earth's population, commonly dated from 2007, and growing.* **I***n wealthier developed nations it could be as much as 90%.*

These may be very significant pivotal events in the history of the human race. (World Watch, 2007, The Economist, 2007.) There are now more people than not for whom a relationship with the land - *as a matter of daily contact and concern* - is potentially no longer its health, productivity, beauty, diversity.

- *Cities are widely depicted by Mainstream as the economic engines of societies, meaning its main locus of economic growth.*

Government adviser Rod Eddington expresses a typical position: 'There's no doubt that Melbourne's success is critical to Victoria's future. Around the world, cities are becoming the great drivers of the services economy and Melbourne is no exception. As our economy becomes more oriented around knowledge and services, Melbourne's liveability, creativity and competitiveness are increasingly important to attracting the people, investors, ideas and jobs that Victoria needs to maintain a high standard of living….' (Eddington, 2008, Cox, 2009; and see economic geographers for their perspectives, Bloom, Khanna, 2007, O'Connor, K., 2008.)

- *Cities as knowledge work centers*

'Most definitions of the city are based on the idea of human communication, and conceptions of the city as an enormous communication network are now commonplace……. The infrastructure for a society based on knowledge work is coming into place rapidly, if unevenly, and major changes to the nature of work and leisure, the structure of industry and employment, the nature of organisations and the character and purpose of social movements are resulting.' (Wilmoth, 2003.)

- *These lines of analysis are important for their descriptiveness and necessary to a proper understanding of the complex interactions within urban Mainstream.*

Any hoped-for variations to their underlying value systems and social implications must start with these analyses, especially if a *peaceful transition* to something else is desired (Newton ed., 1997). And if some new realities for cities and suburbs – inward immigration, aging, rise of non-traditional households, economies based on innovation and 'creative city' qualities – are to be confronted and evaluated. (Katz, 2007, Florida, 2002, Cityscape, 2009.)

But it is posited in this paper that our questioning of Mainstream will need to look behind descriptions of 'urban growth engines' if our sense that the planet is in distress has any justification. (Other distress signs, actual and potential, not covered here include slum conditions and overpriced housing, now a feature in Australian cities as well as overseas. Davis, 2006; Mackenzie, 2008.)

Looking inside the changing city functions and workplaces of global capitalism

'Urbanity', understood as contact with a multiplicity of strangers, and a richness of artistic and 'cultural' events, has long been a basis for extolling the virtues of city life. And has given the idea of cities its traditional form, a major contribution to their environment.

Prominent sociologist Saskia Sassen examines changes internal to the urban scene: the 'new tendencies to polarization' in the impacts of globalization on the industries of cities and regions. She concludes, succinctly, 'We are becoming a planet of urban glamour zones and urban slums.' (Quoted in Sutherland, 2006; Sassen 2001.)

The world of the new urban capitalist *work-mode* is still under the sociological microscope. One level of analysis with disturbing results has been conducted by Richard Sennett (2008, 2006.):

How have the claimed benefits for 'urbanity' fared under the *emerging* organization of the capitalist, globalised workplace? Sennett has made a detailed examination of how workplaces are arranged, how teams form and un-form, move on, compete, and so on. He concludes: '…I want to argue that the dialectic of flexibility and

indifference pose three dilemmas for cities: a dilemma of citizenship; of arousal in the public realm, since the impermanence/standardization connect leaves people indifferent to public places; and finally the dilemma of sheer, durable attachment to the city.'

Given '*American Mania, When more is not enough*' (Whybrow, 2006), or more popularly, '*Confessions of a Shopaholic*'. (Kinsella, 2000), and others, there are indications that Sennett's 'dilemmas' won't find a happy response. Will the recession change these attitudes? Will life continue as before, and if so, even in the absence of 'reckless' spending, will it still be altogether too much for the planet's life support systems?

Environmental stresses that stand to question this 'growth engine' future for cities

If these are some of the social and cultural questions for 'cities as growth engines', what do we perceive about the planet's life support systems? Examples from other countries, as well as Australia, sharpen our perspectives:

G*lobal warming, energy and water supply limits.* "Climate changes being created by mega-cities which depend entirely on a constant, carnivorous, planetary energy burn are moving the earth's atmosphere towards a different hydrogen/oxygen configuration with different consequences for the planet's surface, a configuration that is simultaneously creating a dryer, hotter planet and global dimming…' (Doucet, 2007.)

And on the effect of global warming and water supply on cities from the US Secretary of Energy: Steven Chu warns that climate change could wipe out Californian farms by the end of the century by destroying snow pack that supplies vital water to the nation's top agriculture state. He comments, "I don't actually see how they can keep their cities going." (Chu, 2009; Yardley, 2007 – for a China reference.)

Pollution. Starkly, for China: 'This miracle will end soon because the environment will no longer keep pace. Acid rain is falling on one third of the Chinese territory, half of the water in our seven largest rivers is completely useless, while one-forth of our citizens does not have access to clean drinking water. One third of the urban population is breathing polluted air, and less than 20 percent of the trash in cities is treated and processed in an environmentally sustainable manner.' (Pan Yue, 2005, 2007, 2009.)

Or for America, where 'Six in 10 U.S. residents…live in areas with dangerous levels of air pollution', according to the American Lung Association. (Zabarenko, 2009; Cappiello, 2009.)

E*cological sustainability and footprint.* Kaye, reporting work by Research Professor, Peter Newton: "On the demand side of the sustainability equation, his research on

consumption for the report *Australia State of the Environment 2006* showed that Australia's use of resources is unsustainable by any measure. Ecological footprints of 7.5 hectares per person have been calculated for Australia – more than three times the global average……" (Kaye, 2008.)

Looking beyond city boundaries. 'As the world urbanized, energy use climbed. Early cities relied on food and water from the surrounding countryside, but today cities often depend on distant sources for such basic amenities.' (Brown, 2006.) Victoria's so-called North-South pipeline, passing water from a water-stressed rural region to supplement Melbourne's supplies, is a blatant example of the political power wielded by a major city to the detriment of a less populated area.

So, in answer, can we turn for solutions to *innovation and technology? No doubt, these will need to play a part.* But a cautionary shot: "In his 1997 book, Why Things Bite Back: Technology and Revenge of Unforeseen Consequences, Edward Tenner describes 'revenge effects' which, because of behavioural responses, accompany every advance in technology…. The conclusion from this brief review of innovations in management or technology is that no matter how brilliant they might be, they can only advance society so far towards sustainability". (Fisher, 2000; Huesemann, 2008; and see Trainer who calculates that 'consumer-capitalist society…. simply cannot be made sustainable', 2008.)

Some more specific issues confronting urban planning and management

How are we doing with some of the most basic measures about our links with natural systems? It seems we're managing poorly, that's if we are actually aware of the problems in the first place. 'Good management' and 'good design' are not proving to be easy.

As statements of policy, we know about using public transport, cycling and walking as preferable – when practical – ways of getting about. (Fisher, F., 1997). Wild estimates of increases in road freight for the future bring serious retorts that we have to get these massive vehicles off the roads and on to rail. We know that we need to green our houses – water tanks, solar heating, and so on.

But there remain some inadequately-treated, day-to day concerns about how we build, manage and use our cities, (not dealing here with stressed resource restraints such as for water and power). Often, it is just that our scientific knowledge is not adequate to the situation at hand.

- Many cities still remain pretty-well unaware of the health problems from particulate emissions for residents and road users living, playing, sitting, travelling along major roads. Satisfaction with ambient levels of these pollutants should not reduce surveillance and protection from point source concentrations.

- Cities function inefficiently without a good balance between public and private transport. But despite the fuel-costs-and-recession-caused spike in the use of public transport, we still haven't made adequate changes to our infrastructure plans for transport. (Anderson et al., 1996; Buckley, B., 2009, Cox, 2009, Legge, 2009.)

- The lauding of housing accommodation in coastal areas continues to thrive, despite some legal disputation, along with major infrastructure services, only slowly awakening to projections of sea-level rise in association with storm surge and wild weather. Knowledge about building in bushfire-prone areas also remains an area of considerable disputation.

- The prospect of a probable two to three-degree increase in average summer temperatures has done little to curb our 'look-at-me' house styles on small, un-shaded land blocks. Generally, planning for global warming remains an endeavor of mixed achievement. (Low, 2003.)

- Noise-prone residential environments, light pollution interfering with bird life and traditionally times for night-time wondering and with human health implications, are not on the radar.

- Housing and roads without shading, buildings and pavements that suffer a heat island effect, absorbing heat during the hot days and taking much of the evening to cool off. (Edahiro, 2008; Doyle, 2008.) Saddest of all, perhaps, is that canopy of large trees and vegetative under-storey, planted, nurtured and maintained over previous decades, is threatened. By the dry and by government regulatory water regimes, exacerbated by climate change.

- Failure to prepare areas for flooding episodes during periods of heavy rain by increasingly covering soils with hard surfaces. Drains built in previous eras of lower flows are not being upgraded with concerted urgency to match predictions of wild storm potential. (Auditor-General, Victoria, 2005.)

Those are some of the interventions we don't do well. And of another order:
- the loss of 'old and cherished' places that don't strike it for historic preservation, but which are nevertheless part of a community's memory. Nothing is too precious when it comes to development 'creep', when we are told that the land is '*needed'* for development. (Buckley V., Wallace-Crabb, 2009.)

Avoiding population growth as the major determinant of city futures?

Amongst our State Premiers, only former NSW Premier, Bob Carr, has posed the issue, 'Australia must begin to think of itself as a country with a population problem.'

So how, currently, do we handle population at a governmental level?

We start off by *measuring* growth. For example, 'the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released on 18/3/09 showed the population grew by 1.84 per cent in the year to September 2008, reaching an estimated 21, 542,500. The gain of 389,000 people was largely a result of net migration (61 per cent), with the remainder due to natural increase (the excess of births over deaths).' (Midalla, 2009.)

Then, it is constantly made abundantly clear, *you can't argue with increasing numbers.* It's the starting point for all urban planning and infrastructure requirements. (e.g. Madden, 2009.) 'Predict and provide' rules as the dominant organizational mode.

If ever there was 'an elephant in the room', this is it. It is not yet 'acceptable' to discuss water, land and power shortages, the need for major infrastructure works, the type of transport provision, except in the context of the supposed trump card, namely, that population growth is the determining factor. But should it be so?

No one would deny that there are real difficulties in making a transition to a stabilizing population program, in a fraught world growing 70 million people every year, (Bonnett, 2009.) In some countries, compounding issues might include an aging population, or little scope for immigration gains (The Economist, 2009). It's important though, in starting to look carefully at the population issue, that global and local considerations be untangled.

For a start, there can be little dispute with the notion that projections of global population growth into the 7-8-9 billions suggest resource outcomes with serious consequences. For example: 'Consider that with the global population past six billion and on its way to eight billion or more by mid-century, per-capita fresh water and arable land are descending to levels resource experts agree are risky.' (Wilson, 2002; Dayton, 2009; Barlow, 2009).

If that's the global scene - and many more similar expressions could be laid out – should the considerations applying to Australia be any different? In brief summary, there are three conceptual levels that we might propose to look at issues of urban population growth:

Firstly, *the environmental-resource level* – will there always be another and another solution to pressures on capacity and conservation: resource availability, ecosystem and landscape values? For instance, it's said: 'Australia doesn't have a water problem, only a water management problem. Good management and technology will fix it!' But if so, one wonders why it hasn't happened already – on time, at reasonable cost, balancing all priorities of governments, using technologies that don't bring their own burdens such as heavy energy demands and hidden contamination risks, and not interfering with large segments of the population or natural eco-systems? (Davidson, 2009.)

Secondly, *the social-multicultural level* – bringing people from many countries has undoubtedly enriched our society: does that mean that *this way* of gaining the benefits of other cultures is potentially unlimited as to numbers?

Thirdly, *the humanitarian level*, as international strife - whether of the war variety, or poverty, or the environmental refugee blow-out - continues and most likely becomes more pressing. For example, an early International Organization for Migration estimate is for '200 million environmentally induced migrants by 2050'. (Renner, 2008; Warner et al, 2009.) People concerned for the growing refugee problem rightly see it as cruel if we take a restrictive attitude to immigration. A cold indifference to their plight is anathema. On a country and personal basis, if we feel the need for a response in social justice, should, for example, other categories of immigrants be curtailed? Do we respond by offering to share too-expansive housing?

For Australia, an overriding consideration for population growth agendas must be that all States face serious environmental constraints – natural resource limits (e.g. water and power), local pollution (e.g. air and chemical), spreading ecological degradation (e.g. river depletion, loss of grasslands) – not to dwell on housing crisis concerns. Further, and very significantly, the extent of the drain that cities make on outside resources is simply not understood, or worse, ignored or overridden in the short-term interests of the more politically powerful entity. It's a plight that shouldn't be taken lightly in setting immigration levels, any more than for current residents' family-size expectations. (O'Connor et al, 2008.) There may be some' buying time' solutions, such as more decentralized growth, (Buckley B., 2009) but in the end, and maybe already, each location faces those same constraints.

A comment on recent broad-scale efforts at metro planning (See Summary Box)

It's common for energy efficiency and climate change advocates to urge objectives of a 'move to higher-density living with parks and parklands, efficient transport, and a return to the shopping strip, to which people would walk…' (Karoly, 2009.) If this can be achieved in the design of any area, it could be valuable for addressing these objectives. Walking in parks is very pleasant, but it does not constitute the totality of 'green space', 'nature's home', 'urban forest' experiences in the sense being urged in this paper.

City-wise, broader experiences can be looked for in private as well as public gardens, roadside vegetation, carefully nurtured institutional, industrial and commercial surrounds, and where possible, a restoration of a city's underlying green corridors such as creeks. For someone fortunate enough to have long views into open spaces and over water, there are clear benefits. But use of a balcony and a constrained view of the sky is unlikely to go far towards instilling a deep sense of nature's moods and complexity.

Simple to state policies, such as 'build upwards rather than outwards', have long been highly contested professional solutions (e.g., Troy 1996, Newman, 1988).

Certainly, it's not my intention to defend every aspect of some real and often dysfunctional manifestations of life in the suburbs. Isolation, snobbery, complaints about fences, filling the houses with 'stuff'. (Sinclair, 2009.) Home gardeners do many silly things in looking after their plot: over-use of insecticides, and so on. (Puglisi, 2005; McKay, 2009).

But the usual signs of community and personal dysfunction can be as evident, if not more so, for lives in apartments as in detached housing neighborhoods.
So as a general comment, I would caution against a too-glib dismissal of the suburban house and garden lot. A pleasant if austere reminder of how generations past used their time in the Great Depression comes from Wright. 'Their recipe is a garden, a few chooks down the back, little or no exposure to the gyrations of the sharemarket, a small and comfortable home, a little bit of hard-won and carefully tended savings, a willingness to make do and a cherished circle of friends, neighbors and family.' (Wright, 2009.) And perhaps participating in a scheme of community gardens, (Lebihan, 2009.), or one of the interesting social gardening activities with legs around town. (E.g., SGA, 2009; McQuire, 2009, Hopkins, 2008.)

To many, this will understandably sound quaint, out of date. But Denise Gadd, reporting on a school project at Bentleigh West Primary, explains how a small-scale gardening exercise 'snowballed into a full-scale environmental campaign involving the entire school.' Something here has struck a cord with young people. (Gadd, 2009.)

More generally, the search for 'sustainable living' needs to be carefully evaluated for different segments of metropolises: for instance, built-up areas versus newly developing ones.

For newly developing areas, there are, in fact, examples of real achievements, and we can look forward with interest to their testing in practice. 'One small subdivision proposal on the NSW North Coast… is showing a way to the future. The roads will be narrower and cooler; food will be grown in an orchard on the site; etc.' (AFR, 2008.) '…….there is a growing understanding of the importance of sustaining good biodiversity…' (Costello, 2009). And development with less dependence on private cars for households has proven successful, for example in Freiburg, Germany, (Rosenthal, 2009), and is well-advanced with planning, for example, at Hayward, California. (Davis, 2009.)

Built-up areas, in particular, can produce questionable outcomes when compacted. Green roofs and planted fascias are compensating in some small ways for loss of green space in high density work and residential areas. But generally, the pitfalls of broad-sweeping policies are amply illustrated in a recent Melbourne study, (Birrell et al, 2005). Experience suggests that redevelopment of sites resulting in poor in-fill

solutions is commonplace, especially through the reduction of green space and the substitution of hard surfaces for gardens leading to heat generation.

Suburbs dismissed as 'sprawl, but…

Against the too-evident international problems, in overpriced housing, congestion, rootlessness, and homelessness, we could be too hasty in throwing away our urban achievements. The use of suburbs as a valuable asset can be thought through more carefully. As an alternative, and as our experience with much higher density development shows, housing consolidation, especially when used in conjunction with greater city economic growth, can have very mixed results.

Modest low-density settlement is a starting point that we allow Mainstream - or short-term planning solutions - to dispense with at our peril in a world needing some more localized life choices. If 'adaptation' to severe climate conditions is to be our lot, then the value of what has already been built in a dispersed localism is a strategy to be carefully assessed. This is not meant as a knock-down argument in favour of suburbia, merely a precautionary note against hasty re-development.

Household composition continues to change, and housing space needs will change also. And smaller household sizes: '…nearly one in four (households) has just one person under the roof……In fact, we are still learning to live alone, caught as we are between old notions of aloneness and newer notions of autonomy.' The buzz for these people comes, it is said, in areas 'rich with cafes, where tiny tables, communal tables and wi-fi provide connections real and virtual…hot spots for restaurants and bars; light on backyards but big on parks…'(Macken, 2009.) Is it passe' to offer these alone households the opportunity to commit to nature, 'restoring the land', in their personal lives?

By design or good luck, Australians have created elements of a green world where nature enters our lives as a matter of course. Dating back well before the first world war, and based on practices of egalitarianism, co-operation, wealth distribution, (admittedly too, many copy-cat practices such as repetitive garden lay-outs), a *modest* abode with access to a nearby patch of nature inviting personal use has been considered a fair thing. (Stretton, 1989, Troy, 1996, Gleeson, 2006.)

Within cities, nature waits to play its part as a source of climate cooling (e.g. NGIV, 2008), health and enchantment, including for children, and as a community activity. And if you are of a religious disposition, to help people sense, it is said, 'the wholeness of being'. (Bakker, 2009.) Lived in as nature's home, cities can be society's confident path, even on a daily basis, for interaction with some of the Earth's wider life-support systems. It stands as a sharp contrast to the alternative: cities as places that single-mindedly drive Mainstream's economic engine faster, with all the now-familiar attendant threats posed to civilisation.

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