

The Regulation of Excellence: Design Competitions in Sydney

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Abstract: The pursuit of design excellence in new commercial developments is driven by a mix of public and private interest. The public sector seeks sustainable outcomes which address and enhance the public realm. The private sector similarly recognizes the 'design dividend' primarily in relation to maximizing return on investment. The complexity of securing rapprochement between these aspirations is elevated in global cities where competitiveness, productivity, and livability make for high stakes. Development assessment procedures for large-scale projects are of course often contested but the critical scrutiny of alternative designs for the one project represents a distinctive take on design as public policy. Little studied although much touted, competitive design processes to achieve design excellence have been part of planning decision-making in the Sydney CBD since 2000 and in the wider city since 2012 under the City's Competitive Design Policy. This paper takes a first step in unpacking the nature and significance of the phenomenon in central Sydney where there has been around 40 competitions resulting in over 20 completed projects since introduction of the policy. Drawing on a City of Sydney database, and set against the wider institutional context, the paper identifies the major characteristics of the developments concerned and key aspects of the competitive process involved in terms of timelines, participants and outcomes. Ascertaining the scale and nature of the process provides a foundation toward a more critical assessment of the effectiveness of competitions in mediating between public and private interest.

Introduction

The Central Business Districts (CBDs) of global cities are development battlegrounds where the interests of private capital in maximising financial returns come up against government policies and regulations aimed at delivering outcomes in the public interest. Urban planning and increasingly urban design are the key processes operating at the negotiation interface (Barnett 1974; Punter 2007). Yet there has been little scholarly study anywhere of their effectiveness and how they might better mediate private and public interests. More has been written about the status of Sydney as Australia's 'global city' (Sassen 1994; Baum 1997; Connell 2000; McGuirk & O'Neill 2002; McGuirk 2003; McNeill et al 2005; Bryan et al 2005; Goodman 2010; Acuto 2012; Hu et al 2013; Hu 2014) and the various ways in which the city's role as a global economic command point has shaped both public policy directions (Hu 2012; McNeill 2011) and the built form of the Central Business District (Dean 2005).

This paper addresses the larger gap while contributing to the ongoing discourse on global Sydney by examining the statutory provisions in place to secure 'design excellence' in the City of Sydney. Past approaches to city shaping have been described as 'accidental' in nature (Ashton 1993; Punter 2005). But increasingly good design attentive to the public realm is being accepted as an important dimension in planning and development processes. Of particular interest here is the City of Sydney's much touted but little studied Competitive Design Policy (CDP), through which design competitions have been mandated for over 40 major public and private developments in the CBD since 2000.

Our aim in this paper is to explore how, why, and with what effect the City of Sydney's CDP is being used in planning assessment processes. After briefly reviewing the literature on design as public policy, the paper identifies key drivers for the introduction of the policy, and its current status and form with respect to CBD developments within our study period 2000-2014. We then describe our research method in refining and completing a dataset to permit an overview of the major characteristics of the developments captured by competitive processes. The penultimate section of the paper summarizes key aspects of the competitive process in Sydney in terms of timelines, participants and outcomes. The final section raises some critical questions deserving of more research beyond the preliminary quantitative overview offered here. The paper provides an update on Punter's (2005) work on Sydney's urban design history and contributes to the overseas literature on competitive design processes. Through a preliminary assessment of the scale and nature of the process, the paper provides a foundation for more critical analysis of the effectiveness of competitions in mediating between public and private interests.

Urban Design as Public Policy

Design review has emerged as a key concern in the planning of global cities since the 1960s (Barnett 1974; Lai 1988; Abbott 1991; Loukaitiyou-Sideris & Banerjee 1998; Punter 2002; Punter 2007, Punter 2011). According to Punter (2007), this has been driven by a series of related agendas including an increased concern for place distinctiveness in a globalized world; new sustainability imperatives; a desire to revitalize cities suffering industrial and population decline; efforts to improve the attractiveness of cities as places to live and work; and a growing recognition that urban design initiatives can be important means of attracting economic investment. The critical scrutiny of alternative designs for planned development projects represents a distinctive take on design as public policy and a considerable body of contemporary literature has emerged on the use of design competitions in North America, Scandinavia and Mainland Europe (recent examples include Garde 2014, Menon and Vanderburgh 2014, Ostman 2014, and White 2014), as well as isolated cases from other locations (see, for instance, Liang and Mäntysalo 2013 and Picken 2013).

While this existing work on design competitions is rich and geographically wide-ranging, it provides a knowledge-base that is 'heavy' on individual case studies and qualitative perspectives on design competition *processes*, but somewhat light on quantitative data and competition *outcomes*. Our paper offers quantitative data on both the process *and* outcomes of a large number of design competitions over the course of nearly 15 years, focusing on a single planning jurisdiction, the City of Sydney. Our dataset also includes competitions for private developments whereas existing practices and studies globally deal almost exclusively with the use of design competitions for public developments.

The Pursuit of Design Excellence in the City of Sydney

From the mid-1990s urban design in the Sydney CBD experienced a profound shift from what Punter (2005) describes as 'design agnosticism' to the pursuit of design excellence, and he gives the greatest credit for spearheading this shift to then-Lord Mayor Frank Sartor. According to Punter (2005), Sartor had several motivations for the introduction of the competitive design process. As well as increasing the overall quality of development in the CBD, he hoped the new provisions would break the monopoly of a small number of large architectural firms that were designing many of the major projects in the city and were perceived to be no longer innovating; compensate for a lack of design expertise among the City of Sydney's staff; increase certainty for developers; and reduce the number of successful court appeals against the City of Sydney's planning decisions. Other key drivers for the introduction of the competitive design process by the City of Sydney were the Olympic Games and the success of several independent design competitions that had recently been run for high-profile buildings in the CBD.

A key early sign of the shift in public policy was the introduction of provisions for 'Design excellence and competitive processes' as part of a major amendment to the City's Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP) in 2000.¹ The provisions required major developments to be subject to a competitive design process. These "Design Excellence" provisions still survive today, albeit in amended form and with greater statutory force. The City of Sydney's statutory land-use plan, the *City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012*, codifies the present provisions addressing design excellence with their stated objective of "deliver[ing] the highest standard of architectural, urban and landscape design" (clause 6.21.1). The provisions apply "to development involving the erection of a new building or external alterations to an existing building" (6.21.2), with consent contingent upon whether "the proposed development exhibits design excellence" (6.21.3). Matters for consideration in determining design excellence are as follows:

- the suitability of the land for development,
- the existing and proposed uses and use mix,
- any heritage issues and streetscape constraints,
- the location of any tower proposed, having regard to the need to achieve an acceptable relationship with other towers (existing or proposed) on the same site or on neighbouring sites in terms of separation, setbacks, amenity and urban form,
- the bulk, massing and modulation of buildings,

¹ In the NSW context, Development Control Plans (DCPs) are non-statutory documents which provide greater detail and planning controls in support of the main statutory planning documents, Local Environmental Plans (LEPs). Both DCPs and LEPs are made and administered on a local level.

- street frontage heights,
- environmental impacts, such as sustainable design, overshadowing and solar access, visual and acoustic privacy, noise, wind and reflectivity,
- the achievement of the principles of ecologically sustainable development,
- pedestrian, cycle, vehicular and service access and circulation requirements, including the permeability of any pedestrian network,
- the impact on, and any proposed improvements to, the public domain,
- the impact on any special character area,
- achieving appropriate interfaces at ground level between the building and the public domain,
- excellence and integration of landscape design (6.21.4)

The provisions also address those circumstances in which a competitive design process is required. There are three such types of “trigger”: height, site area and total capital value of works. The trigger points for height and site area depend on the site’s location – either inside or outside of “Central Sydney”, which is a statutorily-defined area encompassing the CBD. The triggers in Central Sydney, the focus of this study, are a height of 55m; a site area of 1,500m²; or a capital value of \$100,000,000. A competitive design process is required for any proposed development where one or more of these criteria are either met or exceeded (though a developer may also elect to follow a competitive process, even if no triggers are met). These triggers relate to both public and private projects.

Where the site area of a proposed development is 1,500m² or greater, clause 7.20 of the City of Sydney LEP also requires the preparation of a site-based DCP, which is a plan establishing basic public realm and building envelope controls for a given site. However, the requirement to prepare the site-based DCP may be waived if a developer instead completes a “staged” development application (DA) process. In this process, a “Stage 1” DA sets out the basic controls for the development, essentially gaining in-principle support from the consent authority for the building envelope and general approach for the site. The Stage 1 approval helps establish a framework for the competitive brief, and subsequently a competitive process takes place. After the competitive process is completed, a more developed “Stage 2” DA follows, with final approval for the project gained at this stage. This staged approach has been utilised in most competitive design projects in the CBD.

There are three other noteworthy aspects of the statutory provisions. First is the interface of the provisions with the deliberations of the Central Sydney Planning Committee (CSPC), the joint local-state committee which approves all major projects in Central Sydney valued over \$50 million. The scale of the triggers (particularly the \$100m capital value trigger) means that the CSPC is almost always the consent authority for projects subject to a competitive design process. Second, the competitive design process itself may be waived by the consent authority if it is deemed “unreasonable or unnecessary”, or if the project involves only alterations and additions, does not significantly increase the height or floor space (GFA), does not have significant adverse impacts on adjoining buildings and public domain, and/or does not significantly alter any aspect of the building when viewed from public places. Third, development incentives or “bonuses” are available for projects designed through a competitive process. If it is determined by the consent authority that a building demonstrates design excellence (i.e. has gone through an appropriate competitive process), a bonus of up to 10% increase in either height or Floor Space Ratio (FSR) may be granted. This bonus is intended to compensate developers for the costs of staging a design competition process. A further bonus is available to developers where a project has gone through an “architectural design competition” (one type of competitive design process); such projects may be eligible for a 50% or 1,000m² (whichever is lesser) reduction in required Heritage Floor Space.² All bonuses are granted at the discretion of the consent authority.

While the statutory provisions address when a competitive process must occur, and the bonuses that may be gained therein, they do not address the nature of the competitions themselves. Instead the

² City of Sydney’s Heritage Floor Space scheme is essentially a Transferable Development Rights (TDR) program for the CBD. In the scheme, developments are only allowed to reach their maximum height potential through “purchasing” floor space from a central pool of transferred development rights from heritage buildings (or from other “owners” of such floor space). The bonus for competitive projects discussed above allows for a reduction in the floor space that would be required to be purchased, while the incentivized height potential remains.

LEP refers to “competitive design processes”, and defines these as processes which conform to the City of Sydney Competitive Design Policy (CDP). Under the CDP there are three types of “competitive design processes”: “open” competitions, “invited” competitions, and “the preparation of design alternatives on a competitive basis” (“design alternatives”). The similarities and differences between competition types are summarized in Table 1. “Open” and “Invited” competitions are considered “architectural design competitions” under the City of Sydney’s DCP and LEP, and, as such, are made eligible for the Heritage Floor Space and FSR/Height bonuses. Meanwhile, the design alternatives process only makes available the FSR/Height bonus. Another key difference between the “competitions” and “design alternatives” types is the jury composition; while there can be some blurring, competition juries are split between nominations from the consent authority and developer, while the design alternatives panels are entirely appointed by the developer.

Table 1: Characteristics of competitive design process types under the Competitive Design Policy

	Open Competition	Invited Competition	Design Alternatives
Invitation process	Public notification of an EOI; all respondents given the competition brief	Developer invites competitors, with advice from <u>CoS</u>	
# of participants	All respondents can participate; usually ends with a shortlist of around 5 firms	Minimum 5 firms	Minimum 3 firms
Jury name	Jury		Selection Panel
# of Jurors	Minimum 4; maximum 6		Not stipulated
Jury composition	Half of jurors nominated by consent authority, half by developer Only persons with expertise in design or construction Majority of jurors to be registered architects		All selection panel members appointed by developer, with <u>CoS</u> observer present
Shortlisting	Jury may suggest refinements to 1 or more schemes		Selection panel may request refinements from 1-2 schemes
Bonuses available	10% FSR or 10% Height (6.21.7) 50% reduction in Heritage Floor Space requirement (6.11.2a)		10% FSR or 10% Height (6.21.7)
Design timeframe	28 days		

Research Approach

In late 2014, the City of Sydney shared with the research team an internal spreadsheet which had been used to record information about design competition projects. This spreadsheet, only developed some years after the CDP was introduced in 2000, provided (incomplete) descriptive data on a total of 107 projects. Evaluation of the spreadsheet revealed that projects from the first half of the study period (2000-2006) tended to have more detailed quantitative and qualitative information, while for projects from the second half of the study period (2007-2014) progressively less information had been captured. In later years, the spreadsheet began to refer to Council’s internal document databases where more extensive project documentation is held. The research team did not initially have access to these internal databases so various other sources (discussed below) were used to verify the existing information and fill in missing information where possible. All development projects in the spreadsheet were assigned a distinct identification number. Additional columns were added on both spreadsheets in order to track stages of development applications and make other relevant notes.

Due to the volume of cases, missing information and uncertainty as to many specific case histories, a decision was made to focus on the 66 CBD cases in the spreadsheet. Preliminary searching revealed that Development Application (DA) approval documents usually contained most of the relevant information to complete the spreadsheet. Therefore, the first key step in data gathering was confirming (or locating if missing) the DA numbers for each project. Sources for this information included a number of publicly available Council sources, including Council and CSPC meeting minutes, the online Development Application tracker, and periodical commercial and residential floor monitors. Once DA numbers were confirmed, DA documents were located and saved for each project. Sources for this were the same as above, with the addition of Google search by DA number, which frequently facilitated direct access to the desired document.

Data population and manipulation consisted of the following:

- Projects were categorized (e.g. some competitions had not resulted in a built outcome, while others ultimately did not proceed to a formal competitive process) with most attention focused on those projects where competitive processes had resulted in built outcomes.
- If data gathering revealed more than one competition at a site, the project was “split” into two entries to account for both processes independently.
- Additional metrics were added once it became clear what information would reliably be available in documentation.
- Some additional competitions not contained in the original spreadsheet were revealed through the DA document review.
- Some projects had been varied through formal DA processes after receiving final approval. Where substantial variations (i.e. those affecting quantitative or qualitative data on the spreadsheet) were located, these were prioritized over the original approval. Unfortunately variation documents were more difficult to locate (as these may be delegated from formal Council meetings to lower level planning officials) and inconsistent in detail.
- The spreadsheet listed projects up to mid-2014, however, some newly “live” projects postdating this cut-off period emerged during the research period up to early 2015.
- It was also decided in early 2015 to use a definition of “Central Sydney” employed in the LEP, this resulted in a slight reshuffle of the dataset.

It should be noted that the above steps were performed iteratively for several reasons. First, upon discovering multiple competitive processes at one site, data gathering began anew for the “discovered” project. Second, documents were often difficult to locate, so a project might be filled in to the best knowledge available at the time, and then returned to later if better information was located. Third, project DA documents would often mention or discuss another project in passing, adding new information to other entries on the list. And finally, decisions like splitting the projects into different status categories or adding a new metric would require returning to previously completed projects to reflect this change.

The result of these data refining processes was to reduce the original 66 spreadsheet entries in the CBD to 37 competitions which had definitely resulted in a built outcome or, as of early 2015, appeared very likely to proceed to construction in the near future. Other entries were excluded either because no competition was ultimately required by the consent authority for the project, the project did not proceed to competition stage, a competition was run but the project did not proceed to construction, or because no competition had been completed as of early 2015. If a project had more than one competition for the same building, only the competition that ultimately resulted in the final built product was included.³

In mid-2015, one member of the research team was granted limited access to the City of Sydney’s internal database to further verify the quantitative data assembled through the processes described above. Following this, the final analysis examined seven project elements (site area, floor space, FSR, height, heritage floor space, capital value, time lag between stage 1 and 2 approvals) and four competitive process elements (type, participants, winners, jury members). While the final revised data set understates the amount of design competition activity in the CBD and does not fold in the impact of CDP provisions outside the CBD, it does provide a rigorous foundation suitable for gaining an appreciation of the extent and nature of the CBD experience.

Processes and outcomes in the Sydney CBD

Of the thirty-seven competitions in the final dataset, thirty-five were private developments and two were for electrical substations managed by the NSW Government. As of mid-2015, twenty-five of the projects were complete, six were under construction and five had been granted planning approval, with construction pending. The remaining one was a project where a competition had been completed but where planning approval had not yet been granted. The thirty-seven projects in the dataset had a fairly even spatial distribution throughout Central Sydney, although a little sparse on the central-west side of the CBD. There was a fairly consistent stream of Stage 2 approvals from 2001-2008 with

³ The World Square development in the southern CBD was excluded from the dataset, as it is a uniquely complex site that had multiple competitions and where quantitative elements for each individual competition could not be easily reconstructed.

between one and five projects approved each year. This was followed by a three-year period from 2009-2011, closely mirroring the Global Financial Crisis, in which only one project was approved. In 2012 the stream of approved projects picked up and it has since been steady.

Project characteristics

The quantitative characteristics of the thirty-seven projects in our dataset are summarised in Table 2. As evident in the second column, there remained some issues with data completeness and consistency across the complete set of variables. For the first four variables (site area, floor space, FSR and height), all cases were successfully recorded barring three which have not yet received Stage 2 planning approval (final project details are not confirmed). The Heritage Floor Space purchasing scheme was not applicable to all cases and was also not consistently documented – a problem shared by the capital value variable. Time between approvals was also not applicable in all cases, as some projects had the requirement for a staged DA waived.

Table 2: Quantitative results from dataset analysis

	No. of cases included	RANGE		Mean	Median	Total
		Minimum	Maximum			
Site area (m ²)	35	305	11,378	3,019	2,040	105,659
Floor space (m ²)	35	4,215	142,222	35,079	23,024	1,227,768
Floor-space ratio (FSR)	35	4.1	16.91	12.03	12.5	n/a
Height (m)	34	25.11	235	105	110	n/a
Heritage Floor Space (m ²)	27	313	20,881	4,962	3,588	133,980
Capital value (\$ AUD)	37	\$11,132,000	\$604,100,000	\$147,772,366	\$101,992,000	\$5,467,577,526
Time between approvals (months)	28	6	60	19	17	n/a

There was a large degree of variability of the projects in terms of scale, as noted by the large ranges for each of the variables in Table 2. The distributions for some variables were skewed high by a few large projects - note that site area and floor space have much higher means than medians. FSR did not have the same skew, due to a large (and therefore quantitatively “weighty”) cluster of projects with FSRs in the 12.5:1 to 13.75:1 range. This result is due to the “maximum” floor space allowed in the CBD generally being 12.5:1, with 13.75:1 representing the 10% competitive bonus on this figure. Thirteen of thirty-four cases fell in this FSR range. The height distribution was split into two groups, with 15 projects between 25 and 85 metres and 18 projects between 108 and 235 metres; interestingly, no projects fell into the sizable gap between these two height ranges.

The land use mix of all projects was examined. Use mix was not dominated by one particular category: all projects except one had a mix of uses (the outlier being a plain substation), eighteen projects had a large residential component, seventeen projects had a large commercial component, seven projects had a large serviced apartment or hotel component, three projects had a large retail component and three had a substation component. At least 11 projects featured direct involvement with items of heritage significance, though the density of heritage items within the City Centre meant that most projects had some bearing on various CBD heritage items through less direct means as well.

A key conclusion from these results was the high impact that these projects have had in aggregate. These projects account for around \$5.4 billion worth of development in Sydney’s CBD since 2001 (before CPI adjustment). Well over one million square metres of floor space have been delivered in the CBD under the provisions of the CDP, with more than 130,000m² of heritage floor space purchased in aggregate. The relatively even spatial distribution also means that all areas of the CBD

have at least partially been shaped by the outcomes of competitive design processes over the last decade and a half.

Competition participants

In terms of architectural firms participating in the competitive processes, complete information for all competitions except one was located and a great deal of diversity in terms of firms participating in and winning competitions is evident. Overall, there were 80 different participating firms, including numerous collaborative entries. Of these, 49 firms competed once, 15 firms competed two or three times, 11 firms competed four to six times, and five firms competed seven to nine times. There were twenty-seven one-time winners, six two-time winners and one three-time winner. There were also three collaborative winning schemes, and one project where two winners were each awarded one portion of the project (hence producing more “winners” than actual competitions in this subset).

Information regarding the participating jurors was more difficult to obtain, as it was rarely discussed in the DA documents and juror reports are not easily available through the public record. We were nevertheless able to assemble details for jury and panel members for a subset of 23 competitions. In this subset, there were 107 juror/panel positions filled by 87 different jurors. Seven individuals were panel members on two or three projects, while three individuals had served on four, five and six projects respectively. Fifteen percent of jury/panel positions and 16% of individual jurors were women. While the least complete variable subset, these results indicate a diversity of participants on the judging side of the competitive design process.

Planning procedures

Our exploratory data analysis illuminated numerous divergences and anomalies in competitive processes that indirectly shed light on the complexities of planning approval processes in the CBD. Notwithstanding the general ideology of planning system reform targeted at injecting more simplicity and integration in central city planning (CIE 2013), a multiplicity of pathways to approval is evident. These are partly explained by the City of Sydney’s discretionary decision-making in responding to the circumstances and challenges of different development projects.

Along with wide variations discovered for each of the quantitative project elements, the research identified how variable the approval processes could be in qualitative terms. Across all projects examined from the original spreadsheet provided by the City of Sydney, several variations were identified. For instance, anomalies with the design competitions included some projects where the design competition requirement was waived by a consent authority. This is why some noteworthy Sydney CBD projects from the last decade or so - like the Deutsche Bank tower - were not included in the quantitative dataset. There were also some two-stage design competitions involving a “short-list”. However, the design competitions themselves were not discussed consistently in the DA documentation, and no publicly available competition jury reports were identified for the projects in our 37-case subset.

There were multiple ways in which development application processes could vary. Retrospective or amended Stage 1 DAs were sometimes lodged concurrently with Stage 2 DAs in order to accommodate changes which emerged from the competitive process. In other cases, a consent authority would exercise its discretion to waive the Stage 1 DA in favour of a single-stage DA. There could also be multiple DA processes at the same site, sometimes based on the same competition design and sometimes based on multiple competitions; causes for this included matters like substantial detailed design changes or a change of ownership of the site. In one case, a Stage 1 DA was refused, but the developer proceeded with a design competition and the refined Stage 2 was approved. There were also two recent projects which substituted a planning proposal (the statutory process for changing LEP controls) in place of a Stage 1 DA. Finally, frequent variations to approved Stage 2 DAs were located, though usually by chance due to inconsistencies in the public record. Some of these variations were substantial (for instance, removing a heritage façade which was initially meant to be preserved), while in other cases the amendments were incremental but numerous.

There were other procedural anomalies. For instance, there were some competition projects located at master planned sites, which could complicate approval processes and application of the CDP. The NSW Government was involved in some projects as the consent authority in some areas of the city; this involvement ranged from managing the Stage 1 through to full oversight and consent on the

project. The Land and Environment Court was also involved in some cases, sometimes reversing the original consent authority determination. In one case, approval for an entire project was given, but only a part of the building eventuated in the medium-term; the rest of the project was built through a second design competition process.

Timelines

Another signifier of procedural complexity was the wide range of project timelines. As noted in Table 2, the gap between Stage 1 and 2 DA approvals ranged from six months to five years, with a median of about 17 months. The longest gap of five years was on a project which experienced financial difficulties, a change in ownership and an alternative development process that did not proceed, before returning to the original competition-winning design as the basis for a Stage 2. At the other end of the spectrum, there were two projects with relatively small gaps (six and seven months) that had both had previous Stage 1s that did not proceed; perhaps the initial failed DAs set the stage for a quicker final process. In any case, the dataset did not establish a “typical” timeline for competitive projects in the CBD.

Conclusions

Design review has emerged as an increasingly central concern for planning policy and internationally there is now widespread recognition that the design of the built environment can help give global cities a point of difference and increase their competitive edge (Punter 2007; Turok 2009). It is clear from the City of Sydney’s current policy discourse that design excellence is being pursued in Sydney’s CBD at least partly in an effort to make the city more globally competitive. Other Australian central cities have comparably identified variations of design excellence to promote their own corporate objectives but Sydney appears to be unique in mandating competition provisions for major private development. Indeed, while design competitions, globalization and competitiveness go hand in hand, no other global city has obviously pursued a statutory approach in the same way as Sydney.

The main aim of this paper was to provide an initial analysis directed specifically at the City of Sydney’s “design excellence” policy and provisions in helping facilitate that objective. It drew on and developed an existing database for design competitions that took place under the City’s Competitive Design Policy between 2001 and 2015. The major characteristics of these projects were identified, both in terms of their competitive processes and their built outcomes (as approved). Our analysis indicates that the City of Sydney’s mandating of competitive design processes for major projects has had a significant impact on the built form of the Sydney CBD. Well over 1,000,000m² of floor space has been delivered under its provisions over the last decade and a half across all precincts of the central city. According to Punter (2005), monopolistic design was a key issue that the competitive design provisions and policy were formulated to address. Our quantitative analysis suggests a great deal of variation amongst participants on both sides of the jury table; certainly the number of different winning firms goes a long way to fulfilling this original goal. Another key finding was the high degree of variability in both the procedures and outcomes of competitive design processes.

Some questions arise from our analysis deserving of more detailed examination. Our quantitative data do not enable us to assess directly the extent to which the City of Sydney’s design competitions have helped achieve various key policy goals (Punter 2005) such as increase the overall quality of development in the CBD, compensate for any lack of design expertise among the City of Sydney’s staff, increase certainty for developers and reduce the number of successful court appeals against the City of Sydney’s planning decisions.

Further investigation on just what design outcomes have been delivered is needed. Attention here should be on the extent to which the outcomes of design competitions are superior to those that would otherwise have been delivered, on what aspects of the *process* are most likely to deliver successful and unsuccessful *outcomes*, and on the differences in outcomes delivered by the varying processes available through the CDP. We have begun documenting how competition-winning designs have also subsequently won professional awards as an external validation of their quality, but whether such kudos have come in greater quantum than might otherwise have been the case is impossible to say.

Many other questions are raised regarding specific aspects and implications of the Sydney model of design competitions. Five stand out. First, are design competitions only effective in delivering design

excellence in large projects that meet or exceed the City of Sydney's current trigger points for competitive design? Second, given the huge variation between the smallest and largest projects in our database, is it appropriate that a standard 10% FSR/height bonus should be available for all projects? The 10% bonus was explicitly meant to defray the costs of staging a design competition but the financial return on that 10% bonus for the largest developments will clearly be much greater than for the smallest. Is the increase in the costs of staging a design competition for larger projects commensurate with this increase in the financial return available to developers? Third, are architectural firms being adequately compensated for their participation in competitive design processes commensurate with the uplifts in value and return which developers stand to earn? Fourth, should information on competitions from selection of participants and jurors through to publication of alternative designs be made more transparent and publicly available? And fifth, and more broadly, how is public benefit ultimately leveraged through competitive processes?

The Director of City Planning Development and Transport for the City of Sydney has referred to the formalization of design competitive processes as one vehicle for "closing the gap" between the interests of capital and the state.⁴ That is, they help mediate different and potentially conflicting values by rebalancing the private and the public interest in the development process. Economy recovery after the GFC has accelerated the scale of these processes in Sydney with the City Council having instituted a full time competition coordinator position from early 2014. Overall, there is a *prima facie* evidence that the processes are uplifting design quality. They are certainly diversifying the designer pool and educating the development community to the value of the design dividend; the economic returns for achieving design excellence are considerable. There are nonetheless many questions encompassing matters such as process, participation, approval pathways, and the consistent application of CDP guidelines which have been raised. To unpack these issues our own research will take a qualitative turn into interviews with key players in Sydney's design, planning and development arenas.

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