



Creative Destruction

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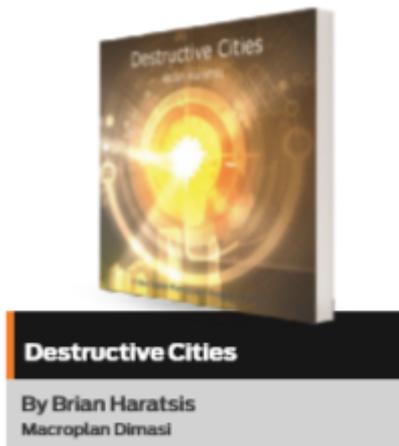
For years, we have heard about the incredible population growth that Australia will experience over the next 50 years, rising from about 24 million at present to more than 41 million in 2061.

The changes and challenges arising from this population explosion extend across every area of society; employment, housing, recreation, transportation and development.

In *Destructive Cities*, Macroplan executive chairman and founder Brian Haratsis argues that a new approach is needed for our cities to get the best out of this growth and the increasingly globalised economy.

Haratsis believes that there needs to be a change in the way people think about urban development that will allow cities, buildings and areas to change their usage and purpose as the

city evolves; not just a change to the current city layout. Haratsis promotes the theory of 'continuous regeneration'.



Indeed, there are plenty of current situations which show the need for exactly this approach, such as empty CBD office towers that cannot easily be converted to hotels, or purpose-built industrial areas that are now vacant as companies move further out of the city.

While a lot of this thinking is not new, Haratsis rightly points out that these days red and green tape can see projects needing between five and ten years for approval.

Haratsis argues for a change in approach to allow for cities to evolve to their next iteration as the situation demands.

Yet our cities have always evolved. From the time of settlement, in what would predictably become our major cities, to the waves of new residents as a result of economic conditions, immigration or uncertainty overseas.

We have also seen influxes of people from regional and rural Australia as successive primary industries have faced challenging economic climates in farming, minerals or the search for precious metals.

Generations of people moved from the inner cities to the suburbs following the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright and his designs for the American suburbs of the 1930s and later the rise of the motor car which made travel between home and work easy.

In Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, everybody wanted to own their own piece of the country and the Australian suburbs grew. In recent decades we have seen the revival of our CBDs as the population chooses to return to the centre of our cities. Even in regional and rural Australia, the major population centres are growing at the expense of smaller communities.

These cycles influence today's urban environments, whether it be the high use of the private car, the hub and spoke approach to single city states or major CBDs, or housing affordability.



Changes in living patterns also flow through our infrastructure and other programs. They influence where we build roads, railways, hospitals, police stations and airports.

But all of these decisions have historically been reactive rather than proactive.

The challenge for the future is to get ahead of issues rather than to be playing catch up, whether we are investing in infrastructure projects or are we making the decisions to protect corridors for major infrastructure in the future.

In recognition of that fact, Haratsis argues that policymakers need to allow cities to grow organically rather than impose a Nanny State 'place-making' framework.

This view neatly fits between the rigid approach where people are directed where to live regardless of the infrastructure and services, and the *Field of Dreams* philosophy—'build it and they will come'—neither of which are the best approach to any development.

The approach that Haratsis argues for is not to restrict the choices of the individual but to create the circumstances to make life easier for the individual no matter what they choose.

This philosophy should guide the approach of governments as they examine how we can make more effective use of the instruments and levers available to us; whether it is getting better value from existing infrastructure investments or whether it is our investments in different modes of travel that allow people to make their own choices.

Haratsis also covers a number of other issues, such as the emergence of driverless vehicles, the high cost of infrastructure and the need for the private sector to have a role in the provision of infrastructure, changes to taxation and planning policy to allow for more affordable housing, amongst others.

Many of these issues are of interest to city planners and residents, however, the truth is that our cities succeed because of the choices individuals make. And it will be the reaction of the public to new entries, like driverless vehicles, that cannot be predicted. Remember the internet was going to allow people to work from home and see the end of office buildings as we know them, yet in reality our CBDs are growing faster than ever.

It is precisely this density that allows our cities to succeed. Even a city park and garden requires a sustainable population base.

And while the future of our cities relies on millions of people making their own choices, government can assist in that success if they create the environment for people to make their own choices in response to their own circumstances at a time of their choosing.