CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 8       Conclusion

RICCARDO      The art of the Third Place
8.1 [CONCLUSIONS]

This thesis has addressed the questions of; **What is the ideal form for the Third Places of Riccarton?** Is the design as simple as a pre-prescribed list of design factors or does it involve more than this? Can these concepts that work well in other cities be applied successfully to the local context of Riccarton? When applied what would they look like? And finally **would they work as successful Third Places?**

*So what does this all mean?*
[THE FUTURE OF RICCARTON?]

What this thesis was seeking to achieve was significantly driven by the earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011. The destruction in the eastern suburbs, the impact on the city centre, and the limited damage in the west resulted in the significant population movement to western suburbs such as Riccarton. In effect the earthquakes acted as a catalyst for change for the suburb. The exact levels of population increase on the western suburbs are still not known. However the rate of increase is evident from the number of people in the suburbs, the new businesses, traffic congestion, the impacts on community infrastructure, the increase in mall revenue and the housing shortage.

Plans are still to be started for the eastern suburbs, with the 100 day blueprint and draft plan only addressing the central city. What does remain certain is that it will be rebuilt.

Therefore it still needs to be addressed:- when the rebuild begins how will the central city and eastern suburbs be rebuilt and what will become of the western suburbs, such as Riccarton. They benefitted from the sudden population influx, however will they become deserted ‘boom and bust neighbourhoods’ once the new city starts to be constructed?

[AN INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE?]

There was significant diversity and different scenarios provided in the case study section of this thesis, offering a range of possibilities for the ‘ideal’, ‘successful’ Third Places in the landscape. It is important to note that all the case studies that were analysed were based in the New Zealand context. On one hand this is useful for investigating more ‘relevant’ design solutions and therefore things that would fit in with the New Zealand way of life and the people, planning policy and corporate identity. On the other hand, in order to push the boundaries of urban design and landscape interventions, examples from the international context would have added further richness to the material. If time and funding for this thesis would allowed, the scope would have expanded, offered a range of ways of looking at the mall and in turn perhaps new ‘international’ ways of designing these Third Places.

[APPLICABILITY AND THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF THE THIRD PLACE]

As well as the way international examples can influence the design of Third Places it also needs to be acknowledged how this research can be replicated in other countries and how this research will address different cultures and climates. This research looked at how the design of the Third Place can be applied to Riccarton, a western suburb of Christchurch.

The theory developed in Chapter 4 looks at how we design successful Third Place. It is here that the individual cultural elements are acknowledged. Many of the design elements are broad and can be directly applied to other countries. As they simply look at the ‘human elements’ that are the same worldwide such as perception and scale. These elements would not change due to the country they are in. They include strong: Architectural Relationship, Permeability, Legibility, Linkages and Sequencing and Safety Factors.

However of these design factors certain elements would change depending on who the target audience was. For example the design may need to take into account what different activities would be taking part on site.
and therefore how adaptable the site is and what level of personalisation it provides. This therefore identified the need to ensure that the design is linked well to the local area and that it acknowledges all cultural elements, this will differ depending on the country.

The design scenarios adopted in Chapter 7, were specifically designed and applied to the Riccarton context. Riccarton is a first suburb, in Christchurch, New Zealand. It has its own individual character, challenges and opportunities. To translate the design scenarios to other suburbs in Christchurch and to other cities in New Zealand, individual cultural elements and local place need to be acknowledged. This will result in design scenarios that would work in other New Zealand suburbs of a similar context.

However when applying the design scenarios to other suburbs in other cities around the world it would not be as straightforward as simply transplanting the design scenarios. Even if the cultural concepts were acknowledged and the local community consulted, some of the physical design interventions would have to be altered to recognise climatic responses. This may result in completely different design scenarios and even instances where certain redesign elements would not work at all.

For example this can be explained with a scenario of designing the Third Place, and taking into account the mall as a Third Place in the United Arab Emirates (UEA). There are first the cultural differences in how spaces are used and for what purpose; furthermore the climate is so different to New Zealand that many of the design elements such as the glass pedestrian walkway would be inappropriate. The Malls in the UEA would hold a different status in the environment as extremities in climate perhaps result in the interior air conditioned climate appearing as significantly more appealing. There is no way as designers they would wish to ‘lure people out into the environment’ in temperatures that range anywhere above 30 degrees. In these instances different design concepts would need to be developed to acknowledge not only cultural factors, how the space is used and what the community needs, but also climatic factors that can influence the ‘Third Place’.

[IS IT TRULY A PLACE FOR EVERYONE?]

The ethnic diversity of Riccarton highlights the complexity of designing for communities. My design thesis has established that in order to make the Third Places successful they have to meet the ‘needs’ of the local community. Riccarton has a significant diversity in the population, with large numbers of elderly, students, transient and Asian (of which itself there are distinct groups, Malaysian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, to name a few). If each group has different needs and desires for the Third Places, then is it possible to determine what these needs are. A design scenario would need to be applied to place to subsequently provide a Third Place so multifunctional it meets everyone’s needs.
[WHO IS INTERESTED IN THIS RESEARCH?]

This question raises the issue of who would be interested in this research, and is it a feasible design process to undertake. In an ideal world, there would be considerable interest in the ways in which the urban environment can be enhanced for all users. However, with privatized spaces like malls, their focus is almost exclusively on the interior and it is not in their best interest to address the streetscape. From the malls’ perspective, the key focus is the internal landscape of shopping. People arrive, from a large catchment and frequent the mall, they appear happy whilst there, they have no desire to go into the Riccarton environment and therefore spend their money in the mall. They can achieve all they need to under one roof - shop, food, basic amenities and as this evidence suggests a social requirement is met. All of this is under the watchful eye of the corporation and they have the ability to control the way people interact with their environment.

On the other hand, addressing the street is a significant interest to the key policy holders and for those in charge of the ‘active place making’ agenda of the cities. Councils and in this particular case Christchurch City Council has a unique opportunity if they where to treat Riccarton mall as an asset and not a negative element in the landscape. There is the opportunity for the council to utilise the facilities the mall offers, such as provision of anchor stores to attract large numbers of people and the large availability of parking. If the council where to enhance the relationship with the outdoor space, to make it more people-friendly and accessible then perhaps they can harness the people from the mall and ‘lure’ them into the Riccarton environment, thus activating the space.

[BUT WHAT IS REALLY THE PROBLEM WITH THE MALL?]

As a landscape architect I was quite happy to list the problems I see with the mall from an urban design point of view. I have preconceived perceptions and view the place as; impermeable space, no personalization, lack of activity, no interaction with the external streetscape, car dominated, corporate and consumerist driven landscapes, to name a few. This view is also evident when you see the work conducted by my fellow students and peers in the profession. The reason for this could be argued that we hold preconceived perceptions about the mall environment; we expect it to be everything against what we argue for as landscape architects. However one question that kept arising in this research, and what people kept asking me when I introduced the topic to my friends and family (those out of the landscape / urban design circle) was – “well what’s the problem?” “I like the mall – it’s fun to be there, why would I want to go anywhere else, if this place works for me then why would I want to go into the ‘greater’ Riccarton area?”

This Mall popularity is also evident from the numbers of people frequenting the mall, teenagers see it as their ‘social haven’ and the annual financial turnover for Riccarton mall...
is significant. The places are obviously not that much of a problem if so many people use them. Or in fact is it that they don’t know any different? Are the reasons such as the convenience, the climatic comfort, the safety why they are so popular? Or is it the fact that the space is designed to be watched, and thus goes back to the ‘Flaneurs’ of Paris and the act of socialising in a mall and being watched is simply something that people like to do?

This raises an opportunity for more research into the Mall environment to determine what this significant factor that is offered in the mall that is not offered on the streets.

The reason I chose to address the mall environment is that, according to case studies and theory developed it does not work successfully as a Third Place of landscape. However this is not to say it is not a social environment and necessarily a negative aspect for Riccarton. With some of the mall’s successful features used as the drivers behind the design of the Third Place of Riccarton, such as car parking and its ‘magnet’ ability to draw people into Riccarton.

[RICCARTON - TOWARDS THE ‘ART OF THE THIRD PLACE’]

The different design scenarios in chapter 7 saw concepts applied to the local context of Riccarton. In doing so I accept that this in fact is a design experiment and that measuring the success of these designs in a real world situation is difficult. However the design of the Third Places in Riccarton, addressed the local context, and provided places for the people of the city. Whilst at the same time addressing a significant design challenge of Riccarton Mall. It provided opportunities for new design innovations and techniques from external case study sites. Overall, the design scenarios offer positive new design programmes for a current space.

[THE DESIGN SCENARIO]

Riccarton is a cohesive environment of Third Places for people. An identity that is adopted in the suburb from the mall, through the development of the street systems, the enhancement of the architecture and artefacts that exist within Riccarton at present. Riccarton no longer is known just for the mall; it takes this anchor and utilizes it, making it a place of so much more.

Riccarton a place with vibrant third spaces, connected systems, permeable space, active frontages, bustling streets, all at a human scale. Riccarton still is a place to shop, but is also a place to live, work, play, dance, laugh, love, learn and belong.... It is the ‘art of the Third Place’.