From ‘Hell’ to Hull: urban planning and the arts
Planning Congress 2015 from May 13 to 15, 2015

Andrew Dixon, a cultural advisor from the north of England who re-invigorates towns in industrial decline, will be guest at Australia’s leading gathering for the planning industry in Melbourne in May.

Dixon led a successful ten-year regeneration program for the Newcastle Gateshead area, but more recently won accolades for improving the ‘hellish’ image of Hull, a city known for shipbuilding and coal mining, successfully bidding for Hull’s 2017 UK City of Culture, and in December helped win York a UNESCO City of Media Arts.

Dixon states Hull’s winning bid triggered a wave of transformation through a multitude of planning projects for the town: “We have kick-started everything from improved roads and rail to a transformation of public realm. Above all we have helped tell the story of the Hull’s contribution to the world.”

Dixon states his work focuses on cities that need a change of fortune or image: “Developing a city known for its coal and shipbuilding into a cultural tourism destination is inspirational. Artists and musicians joined planners and politicians to broker the town’s ambition. Planners are some of the most creative people in any community. I am looking forward to hearing about their innovative work in Australia and sharing my UK experience.”

Kirsty Kelly, CEO of Planning Institute Australia says that Dixon’s ability to deliver real change amongst communities is valuable knowledge to share: “Andrew’s wisdom on how to make change happen is valuable. His projects are about good design and how to garner support: working with the governance framework and linking planning outcomes to economic outcomes for communities. Andrew’s focus on culture is really important to us, we don’t want an Australia full of “off the shelf” urban design solutions that look the same – working with local culture helps enable each community to maintain and celebrate its uniqueness and local flavour in its urban places.”

James Larmour-Reid, Victorian President of Planning Institute Australia says the event and its speakers, focus valuable knowledge to share globally: “Planning Congress 2015 provides members with an extraordinary opportunity to engage with planners and designers from around the country and the world. It's a chance to reinvigorate, refocus and look ahead to challenges of the future.

"Melbourne's transformation from provincial 'rustbelt' outpost to the 'world's most liveable city' is well-known and something to be extremely proud of. What is less well-known is the parallel evolution of our regional cities, like Bendigo and Geelong. This event will enable to us to share these success stories.

"Andrew Dixon promises to be a Congress highlight. Victoria has recently experienced a second wave of structural reform with the closure of a number of significant manufacturers. It will be fascinating to hear how the UK deals with these issues and to learn about the transformative power of arts and culture,” concludes Larmour-Reid.

Dixon, a specialist in repositioning places through culture, has led projects in Hull, Newcastle and York in the UK. He led the 2006 World Summit on Arts and Culture, and the Newcastle Gateshead cultural regeneration and repositioning included developing iconic structures such as The Baltic Contemporary Arts Gallery, Angel of the North, and Sage Gateshead. He continues to work with Hull for its City of Culture in 2017. Dixon’s advised York City Council on its future cultural vision, and in December 2014 York became a UNESCO creative city.

Planning Congress is this country’s premier gathering for town and regional planners. The first event was held in 1951, and next year marks its return to Melbourne after a decade being held in other states. Keynote speakers from around the globe, who have all driven change in a variety of places, will be amongst Australia’s top planners to discuss the topic of Great Places.


Planning Congress 2015 runs from May 13 to 15, 2015 at South Wharf. For more information see: piacongress.com.au or call Planning Institute Australia on 02 9262 5933

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