

**ADDRESS TO THE WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT, URBAN
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA LUNCHEON, FRIDAY, 20
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**Women in Planning and Development:
Do you make a difference?**

It was great to hear last November from my old colleague, Brian Stewart. Perhaps I should say "long standing" rather than "old", Brian! We were baby barristers together in the Public Defender's Office in the late 1970s and early 80s and since he left his position as Director-General of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General we have only caught up periodically. Brian was not ringing just for a chat, but to persuade me to speak today. For old times sake, I thought it would be mean-spirited to reject Brian's offer, but my head reminded me that I had not studied planning and development in my law degree; nor had I worked in that field as a barrister; nor had I held a commission as a Planning and Environment Court judge in my seven and a half years on the District Court. True, I do get to sit on some appeals from the Planning and Environment Court, but these turn on cute and tricky arguments of law and that's hardly the stuff of luncheon speeches! Well, last November the 20th of February seemed a long way off and, trusting that some sort of inspiration would come my way on Peregian Beach in January, I decided to ignore my mother's advice to always say "no". And so, here I am with you as captive audience for the next 20 minutes of so.

Women in Planning and Development – do you make a difference?

I have enjoyed reading up on women in planning and development in preparation for this address. I quickly noticed the many parallels between women in development and the experiences of women in the law generally and with my own personal career experiences.

About 30 years ago when I started in the law there were no women prosecutors and I was the first woman to commence work as a paralegal in the Public Defender's Office. It was then a very "blokey" place with girly posters decorating the walls and a culture that centred around the pub at lunchtime and after work. There were no women judges and but a handful of women barristers. Women could sit on juries but the mere fact that they were women entitled them to be automatically exempted. Cases concerning criminal sexual misconduct, almost invariably involving women or children, did not proceed if there was no supporting evidence. Complainants whose cases did proceed were cross-examined in open

court, often aggressively and for days on end, about their prior sexual history and their character, making them feel like they were the accused. It was often difficult to persuade juries to convict unless the complainant had extensive physical injuries.

Now, those complainants give their evidence in closed court, usually screened from the view of the accused and in the presence of a support person. They may not be questioned about their prior sexual history without meeting strict criteria and only with leave of the judge. Child complainants give evidence by way of the video recorded statement they first give police and are cross-examined whilst they are in a special room separate to the court by way of closed circuit television. Juries may convict without supporting evidence of complainants and judges are no longer required to warn juries of the danger of convicting on the complainant's evidence alone. There is now no distinction made on gender grounds between the duties, rights and obligations of jurors. And there are lots of women judges in Queensland (although still a minority): 20 women magistrates out of 81; five women District Court judges out of 36 and six women Supreme Court judges out of 24.

I am confident the appointment of women judges has made a difference on all sorts of levels. It is not that the results in individual cases are different but women judges bring their own life experiences to their role, an experience invariably different to that of their male colleagues. Very often they will run their court in a way that's different to male judges. As enough women are appointed, they affect the culture of the judiciary. Sometimes this is achieved merely by women judges putting forward their own views and opinions, talking about current affairs and telling anecdotes in collegial discussions outside the court room with their male colleagues. In carrying out their powerful judicial role, they also create a positive role model for all members of the community, especially the young aspiring women lawyers. On the micro level and perhaps of interest to you planners and developers, the appointment of women judges has meant that the Supreme and District Court buildings now at last have waiting rooms equipped with books and toys, decorated appropriately for child court users, and female public toilets with nappy changing facilities, something not dreamed of by the males who designed the buildings.

As the number of women has increased in the legal profession, particularly in the ranks of senior solicitors, barristers and judges, and as female court users and their supporters have become more confident to

advocate for change, things have happened at all levels of the justice system, with benefits to women, children, and the community generally.

Such multi-level change has a snow-balling effect; it also changes the attitudes of men; it encourages more women to use their voice for change; and before long the community looks back with bemusement and mild amusement at the bad old days.

Unlike the law which only admitted women to its ranks in the early 20th century, women do have a tradition in urban development. Even before women had the vote, women advocates impacted upon city planning by demanding adequate sanitation, improved city hygiene and the provision of parks and playgrounds. But whilst women often provided ideas and input into municipal affairs, men were largely the administrators and implementers of urban policy. There were, however, notable exceptions. Jean Hillier¹ refers to great women planners in the United States such as Jane Addams, Melusina Fay Pierce, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Catherine Bower, Edith Elmer Wood and Mary Simkhovich. To this list I would add Elisabeth Herlihy, who had a 37 year career in the first half of the 20th century as a Massachusetts planning official and was known as a great communicator with her constituency, whether talking to real estate agents or members of women's clubs. I could not address this group without also mentioning its amazing patron, Sallyanne Atkinson, whose vision for the planning and development of homely but boring Brisbane was revolutionary.

Despite these great role models, the professions involved in urban development have been dominated by men in both universities and in practice, so that, at least until very recently, men have financed, planned, designed, developed and constructed the suburban and urban environment as they saw it without sufficient thought for women's needs.

The lack of interest in the needs of women and children when the court buildings were constructed 25 to 30 years ago has a parallel with Hillier's observations about the disastrous planning of some Australian suburban developments where land and houses were sold to young families with the promise of immediate kindergartens, pre-schools, childcare centres, primary schools, high schools, shopping centres with doctor's surgery, dentist, library, church or recreation centre, but with the facilities not arriving for at least eight years, and sometimes never.

¹ Hillier, Jean, 2001, "Relationships between planning policies and women in Australian Suburbia", Yiftachel et al (eds), *The Power of Planning: Spaces of Control and Transformation*, Kluwer: Dordrecht.

Hillier argues that, in the past, the zoning of suburban residential areas for low-density nuclear family occupation on quarter-acre blocks followed what she calls the "phallogocentric" (what an evocative word!) assumption epitomized by a 1915 planner who waxed lyrical about gardens which give "the wife an opportunity of enjoying pure air and direct sunshine whilst still within the area of her home. In the days of maternity, a quiet restful garden must often seem like a perfect oasis of rest and quiet to many a workman's wife." Those words were definitely written by a man who hadn't experienced the "joy" of looking after babies, toddlers and a house, (and probably the garden too), single-handedly, week-in, week-out in the suburbs.

Hillier contends that mono-zoning and the pace of new development in suburban Australia have tended to lead to an absence of formal childcare, inconvenient shopping facilities, lack of community centres, inadequate access to public transport and an absence of convenient waged employment opportunities. A recent UK project into planning for the needs of women notes that the inclusion of building ramps helps not only the disabled, but also women with children in prams and that many shopping malls now provide crèche facilities; on the other hand, other facilities such as public toilets and public transport which benefit women and children are in many areas in decline.²

Hillier questions whether planners and developers in attempting to avoid monotonous streetscapes and to create an interesting environment have put women's safety and the willingness of women to use spaces in urban areas in jeopardy. More recently planners, architects and designers have, she argues, "worshipped at the altar of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design", often implementing "physical solutions with little thought for their underlying assumptions and implications."³ She reminds us that focussing on the physical environment alone, whilst ignoring the socio-economic aspects of crime is unrealistic, a theme to which I will return shortly.

Britain's professional institute, the RTPI, has developed a practice advice note on planning for women and all British planning schools include equality issues in their syllabus; women students now account for over 35

² Women and accessibility in town centres: Open Sesame Project (United Kingdom), p 5, a joint project specifically aimed to address the needs of women through the town planning system. It seeks active community involvement in bringing about positive change to the built environment.

³ At 64.

per cent of British planning students and in Queensland there are about 40 per cent or more. British local government strategic plans specifically refer to women's issues - usually alongside the needs of ethnic minorities and the disabled! So much for 51 per of the population! Not so very different from the days before 1848 and the *Married Women's Property Act* which first allowed women to own property in their own right and removed them from being classed with lunatics and children! Hillier fears that such strategies may categorise women as a special needs group, ghettoising and further disempowering them, without challenging or changing the essential masculine assumptions or philosophical ideology of planning and the planning system.

In her call to make women visible in planning and development, Hillier reminds us that women are no longer all Anglo-Celtic, middle class and heterosexual and that it is important to recognise the differences between women and their differing needs when designing the urban environment. Hillier rightly laments the lack of consultation with Aboriginal women in the design and planning of their communities. I would love to see UDIAQ and Women in Development work with Noel Pearson, his team and indigenous women, men and children in creating culturally appropriate housing and truly safe spaces for women in redeveloping the Cape York indigenous communities.

These days only about 33 per cent of households constitute the traditional family, a couple with dependent children; 25 per cent are couples without dependent children; 23 per cent are lone person households; 10 per cent are single parent families and 4 per cent are group households. Women dominate the single parent and lone person categories. Hillier warns of the need for us as a community to also plan for our poor and that poverty is becoming increasingly feminised: 58 per cent of single parent families have a female head and 20 per cent of single women live, or merely exist, below the poverty line. There is a chronic shortage of decent housing which is affordable to the income-poor who are increasingly placed in outer suburban areas 40 or 50 kilometres from the city centre with the resulting problems of lack of facilities and isolation; these locations are especially difficult places to live for women.⁴

Let me refer back for a moment to the women's safety issue. The truth of the adage "prevention is better than cure" is beyond doubt. Studies consistently show that each community dollar wisely spent on disadvantaged families during pregnancy, after birth and in the pre-school

⁴ At 70-71.

and early primary years, supporting mothers, establishing play groups, addressing early behaviour and learning problems, and so on, is infinitely more cost effective than that community dollar spent later trying to rehabilitate damaged young offenders who have become a risk to women's safety. By analogy, a dollar spent on thoughtful planning and development of integrated housing and facilities for the income poor must also be money well spent for all of society.

Another valid point made by Hillier is that bringing women into planning and development policies opens up questions of values; society needs to move towards a more inclusive form of planning in which the different voices of women are heard and listened to with respect and our knowledge and experience understood and acted on; this, she says, will require a change in the internal, phallogocentric (that word again!), culture of planners who believe that only they, as experts, can identify an optimal solution. When women become an integral part of development, from planning and financing to designing, constructing and promoting development, they are more than just a box to be ticked near the end of the project. Hillier concludes optimistically that not only women will benefit from the provision of decent planned suburbs with useful public transport services, street lighting, accessible waged employment opportunities and the services and facilities to make daily life more comfortable because, by planning developments for and with women, you are planning for everybody.⁵

In preparing this address I came across an article on women's needs in housing and urban planning in Zambia. I was about to discard it as irrelevant but as I flicked through it, I was struck by unexpected similarities between Australia and Zambia, although there were, of course, the predictable differences between a developing and a developed country. As here, 51 per cent of the population are women who head about 20 per cent of households and over 80 per cent of all household chores in Zambia are carried out by women; Australian, like Zambian, women do the cooking and child-rearing but at least we don't have to fetch water and firewood! Many of us can empathise with the overburdened Zambian women who combine economic activities with household chores and, like them, we commonly work 16 hour days. I was also interested to read of the feistiness of Zambian women who, despite the patriarchal Zambian society, believe they are *insubordinate* to men! Regrettably, I'm sure that "*insubordinate*" was a translating error!⁶

⁵ At 71.

⁶ Meeting Women's Needs in Housing and Urban Planning, Towera Kazunga, Planner, Ministry of Local Government and Housing, Zambia.

Let me return to the Australian context. The first wave of women successfully breaking into any male dominated profession, whether law, medicine, financing, planning, architecture, development, construction or advertising have had to, at least to some extent, do things like men. As enough women take their role in these professions, women change the culture; they develop the confidence and leadership to dare to do things their way with resulting benefits for all. What, for example, is wrong with job-sharing and part-time work? Yes, it does benefit women with family commitments just as it benefits men with family commitments. My physio and his anaesthetist wife have pre-school children; they both want to practice their careers and be intimately involved in rearing their children; their solution was to each work three days a week. Family commitments are not limited to dependent children, but include elderly parents. Aging professional men and women have much to contribute in terms of knowledge and experience but often find the demands of fulltime work too onerous; they can be enticed to stay longer in the work force by part-time work. A little flexibility means happy workers whose employer benefits by keeping the skills of the experienced employee.

Before Brian's November phone call, I knew nothing of the UDIAQ. As a judge, citizen and parent, I am delighted that one of its activities is to promote a code of ethics for all members and that members are committed to striving to achieve environmentally sustainable development. The UDIAQ is to be congratulated for its initiative in setting up the Women in Development subgroup, which encourages and supports the participation of women in the development industry and in UDIA activities. Women in Development is akin to the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland, with which I have been involved since its inception in 1978. Both groups play an important transitional role in supporting and assisting women in traditionally male-dominated professions. In the long term, such groups should become redundant. Your group is in its fifth year; the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland is in its 24th year; both organisations are still needed and, I fear, will be for some time to come.

In answer to the question posed in the title to my address "Women in Planning and Development: do you make a difference?": "Yes, you do." You have enormous potential to have a positive influence on our fast-expanding Queensland community. There will be times when you may wonder if that is true; sometimes you will find it's two steps forward, one step back, but do what you can to change things for the better. Dare to do things your way, even if its not necessarily the way a man would do them.

Having the courage to develop your own style may help change the, dare I say, "phallogentric" culture of planning and development for the benefit of the industry and the community; by being there and by being brave enough to use your experiences as women in decision-making, you will encourage other women to do the same. It is a good thing to strive for worldly success and financial reward: we need more rich and powerful good-minded women who can effect positive change! But always do it within your professional code of ethics. And remember your obligation to the community to give back. By helping the disempowered you are helping society be happier and safer – and it makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside, too! It's good for those you help, good for the community and good for you. As trail blazers you also have a duty to support and mentor the young women in your profession; and in terms of mentoring, don't forget the young men; it is equally important for them to have senior women mentors in powerful decision-making roles as it is for their young female counterparts.

That snowball I mentioned earlier is getting bigger all the time. Keep it rolling and growing, even in a Brisbane February heatwave!