

## **Diagramming Urban Fragments: Collage City and the ‘Vest-pocket’ in the Case Study of Canberra**

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*Written as part of the reaction to Modernist planning in the late 1970s, Collage City by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter proposes an urban design theory which applies collage as a method from art, shifting the focus from the scale of the totality down to the ‘fragments’ of the city. As design theory, Collage City focuses on the relationships between different elements in space through space and time, and it is through this multi-dimensional approach to the understanding of the city and its fragments that Collage City theory has the potential to generate a different approach. This paper starts by outlining the aspects of Collage City theory to generate the framework for the analysis of the ‘vest-pocket’ fragments and proposes the use of diagram as the main tool to examine the relationships between various scales, alongside a diachronic study of change and persistence of the urban fragment. Canberra’s early civic precinct will be utilised as a case study, mapping its context over time and the relationships of urban fragments to the city. The paper concludes that the diagram complements the reading of the city through its multidimensional relationships and the level of abstraction which contributes to the spatio-temporal collage.*

### **Introduction**

Most of the urban theories that were developed in the second half of the 20th century discarded utopian planning as one of the major reasons for neglecting the human scale and urbanity of the city. Written as part of the reaction to Modernist planning, the text *Collage City* emerged as a design theory that advocated for the adoption of utopia as part of an urban design approach, albeit through the small-scale intervention of the “vest-pocket utopia.”<sup>1</sup> This vest-pocket idea is developed through a series of five arguments, beginning with a criticism of Modernism and the classical utopia, and ending with the introduction of the collage technique from art as tool that can be applied in the urban context to overcome the problems associated with total design. The vest-pocket fragment is essentially a miniature utopia, sitting between the scale of the city and the fine-grain, human scale. The traditional Utopia was dismissed due to its totalising nature, however, recent discussions around the fragmented nature of the urban fabric, as well as the complex nature of cities, have brought back into focus questions around the need

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1. D. G. Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism: Conceptual Modeling in Architecture, Urban Design and City Theory* (Chichester, England: Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2005), 129.

for holistic framework for understanding and planning cities.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in this paper we build on the potential that *Collage City* theory offers, instead of completely dismissing the utopian approach to the city, it reinterprets Utopia through the fragmentary vest-pocket scale as a design approach for the application of utopian theory to the city. Although not fully explored after the initial publication by Rowe and Koetter, in this research we argue that the vest pocket aspect of the city would provide a new light for the analysis of utopian cities.

*Collage City* applies collage as method from art to develop a design theory which focuses on the relationships between different urban elements through space and time. The vest-pocket approach of this design theory creates an in-between scale that connects the large-scale vision for the city and the fine-grain of the streets and human dimension, and it is through this multi-dimensional aspect that a methodology based in collage theory has the potential to generate a new approach. Thus, this paper's overarching question is how can we apply *Collage City* theory as a framework to analyse utopian planned cities to capture both the ideals of the plan and human scale fragmentation? This broad question is approached through experimentation with the figure ground mapping and diagramming process that focuses on two types of relationships: between the scales of the plan and the human dimension (exploring relationships synchronously) and over time (diachronic diagramming). Canberra as a twentieth century planned city striving towards a utopian ideal has been chosen as a case study to test the application of the vest-pocket approach to the analysis of the city.

The paper starts by introducing *Collage City* theory and the vest-pocket fragment, followed by an overview of the diagram and abstraction in architectural theory. The case study of the Civic Centre in Canberra is outlined, and results from the case study and mapping and diagramming process discussed.

### ***Collage City Theory***

Published in the late 1970s by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* was part of the Postmodern response to Modernist planning and its perceived disavowal of history and tradition.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other nostalgic approaches during this period, the focus of the book is the proposal of an urban design theory which applies collage as a method from art, moving away from the totalitarian approach down to the 'fragments' of the city. While planning theory after the 1950s did not consider cities as a holistic design, *Collage City* challenges dominant approaches of 1970s urban design with its treatment of urban fragments.<sup>4</sup> This collage-based

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2. N. Coleman, "Recovering Utopia," *Journal of Architectural Education* 67, no. 1 (2013): 24; O. Romice, A. Feliciotti, and S. Porta, "The Road to Masterplanning for Change and the Design of Resilient Places," *Architectural Research in Finland* 1, no. 1 (2017).

3. S. Hurr, "Conjectures on Urban Form: The Cornell Urban Design Studio 1963-1982," *The Cornell Journal of Architecture* 2 (1983): 71-78; C. Rowe and F. Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 11-31.

4. Coleman, "The Problematic of Architecture and Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2014): 6-10; N. Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 280-281.

design process allows the existing city to be layered into, rather than completely redesigned, as the existing vest-pocket fragments are identified and utilised within the new urban composition.<sup>5</sup> The text synthesises several arguments, suggesting that a collage technique may be the only way to overcome the problems created by the determinism of Modernist planning and its utopian impulses, as a way of extracting objects from their context, to superimpose them in different spaces to create new references and meanings.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, Rowe and Koetter suggest the use of utopia as metaphor rather than as prescription, that is, they argue for utopian poetics rather than utopian politics. This distinction is achieved through the fragmentary approach they propose, as the ‘means of permitting us the enjoyment of utopian poetics without our being obliged to suffer the embarrassment of utopian politics.’<sup>7</sup> Through the collage technique, the *Collage City* can utilise fragments of different utopias and ideals (the poetics), without having to apply the one totalitarian model (the politics). The word utopia is used in the same way in this paper and thus, utopia is considered in terms of utopian poetics.

*Collage City* theory is developed using three techniques of (I) City as Museum metaphor, the role of the (II) bricoleur and the (III) vest-pocket scale, which all approach the city and its history from varying perspectives and scales. The focus of this paper is the technique of the vest-pocket scale which allows utopia and the city to be treated in “fragments” rather than “in toto.”<sup>8</sup>

### The ‘Vest-pocket’ Fragment

While the utopian fragments exhibit this totalitarian design on the individual scale, the contextual relationships created through their juxtaposition and placement within the collage demands a “geometrically multiplying double reading of each element”, thus negating the static nature of the composition as a whole.<sup>9</sup> *Collage City* theory was written as a design theory, therefore when applied in this way, these fragment utopias will create friction in their relationships as they collage and collide within the urban composition. The essence of collage is in a process of abstraction, enacted through the distancing the fragment from its context, and through the relationships created within, and between, fragments in the new collaged composition. The strength of this technique lies in this agglomeration of relationships and reference created through the collaging of the vest-pocket fragments. Through this collaging of meaning, it creates dynamism, revealing its potential as a tool for those planning in the rapidly changing and developing cities

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5. J. Barnett, *The Fractured Metropolis: Improving the New City, Restoring the Old City, Reshaping the Region* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 185.

6. A. McIntyre, *Contemporary Australian Collage and its Origins* (Roseville, NSW: Craftsman House, 1990); Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 1978, 138-139.

7. Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 1978, 149.

8. Ibid, 149.

9. K. Vaughan, “Pieced Together: Collage as an Artist’s Method for Interdisciplinary Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 4, no. 1 (2005): 32.

of the contemporary era.<sup>10</sup> As the “fragmentation of urban space” becomes a more dominant characteristic within the city, it offers opportunities for these fragments to be identified and the vest-pocket scale to be applied, while leaving the city as an open-ended work that can further change and develop.<sup>11</sup>

In this research we interpret the vest-pocket fragments as intermediary scale between that of the city and the fine grain of the streets and human scale. The vest-pocket fragment is the *Collage City* equivalent to the urban “field” described by Shane, fragments that are perceived through the patterns that emerge within city plans through different stages of development.<sup>12</sup> In this research the vest-pocket is interpreted as a legible spatial fragment that maintains its coherence through time and creates a historical reference through its formal characteristics. The two vest-pockets identified within the case study both exhibit these two features; these are the elements that have persisted through the developments of the Civic Centre of Canberra. The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings and the Civic hexagon have retained their identity through changes to the plan and to the context of the city, revealing an ability to withstand a degree of change. In addition to this, they hold the notion of the history of the city, through the associations they bring by transposing a historical reference into the new urban context. In the case of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings it is achieved through the formal precedent, the detailing of the colonnade creates references to Brunelleschi’s Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence which inspired its design.<sup>13</sup> For the Civic hexagon it is the geometry itself which creates the reference, by applying the radiating geometric framework to the city centre a reference is created to urban planning ideals and movements, namely the Garden City. While the vest-pocket fragment is defined by these two characteristics, it is spatially flexible in that it can be either building, street, or public space of varying scales. It is bounded by the morphology of the area as well as the character, but not limited to the singular block or district, creating the perceptual level between the city and the street. The collaging of all the elements within the composition creates relationships across the various scales of the urban fabric. Thus, the vest-pocket fragment technique creates a multi-scalar approach to the analysis of the city, looking at the relationships between the scales, rather than at the elements, to help understand the complexity of the city. To explore this method to read the city, we propose to focus on ‘unrefined’ tensions in the existing relationships. This paper suggests that those relationships can be found in between the scales, especially between the utopian vision for the whole city and realised vision(s) for the individual fragments. By examining the relationships

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10. J. Farah, and J. Teller, “Bricolage Planning: Understanding Planning in a Fragmented City,” in *Urban Development* (ed.) S. Polyzos (Croatia: In-Tech, 2012); T. Hatuka, and A. D’Hooghe, “After Postmodernism: Readdressing the Role of Utopia in Urban Design and Planning,” *Places* 19, no. 2 (2007): 20-21; Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, 2005.

11. M. Balbo, and F. Naves-Bouchanine, “Urban Fragmentation as a Research Hypothesis,” *Habitat International* 19, no. 4 (1995): 573; J. Ockman, “Form Without Utopian: Contextualizing Colin Rowe,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 57, no. 4 (1998).

12. Shane, *Recombinant Urbanism*, 2005, 129.

13. D. Marshall, G. Butler, J. McCann, and B. O’Keefe, *Sydney and Melbourne Buildings Conservation Management Plan* (Canberra, ACT Economic Development Directorate, 2011), 27-35.

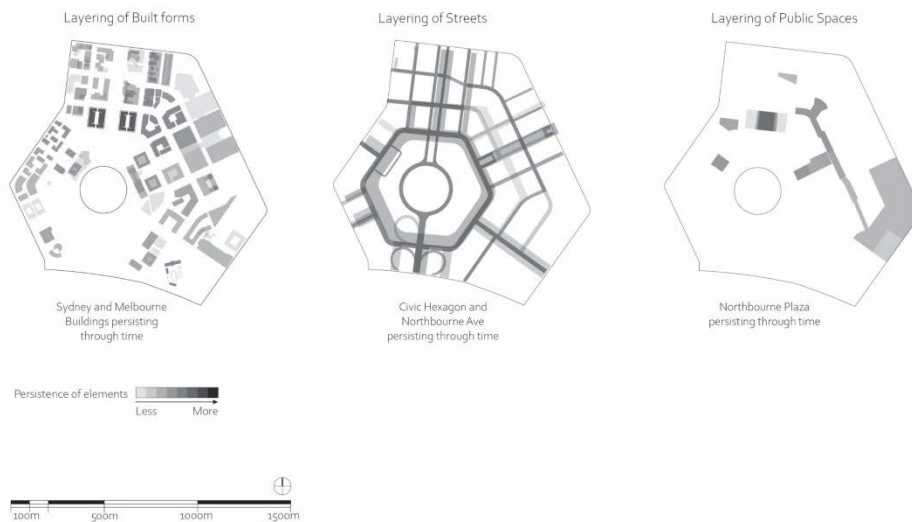
within and between these vest-pockets, the tensions can be uncovered. In addition, the paper argues that we can find those relationships by analysing the places and their development over time, as the layering of time and history of the city.

## Methodology and Methods

### Methods: Testing

The analysis is separated into two stages. The first stage is based on the reverse collaging method. While in the collage design method the process of taking elements from different contexts and moving them into new relational assemblages is considered to design a new reality, here in the analysis stage, we recognise the fragment and trace it back to the original stage. Thus, the first stage applies recognition and definition of urban fragments that we can recognise in the city and their description. These fragments can be of various scales from the scale of the building all the way to the whole city. The scale and boundary of each vest pocket is defined based on their virtual qualities.

The second stage focuses on the development of the precinct over time, applying the figure ground mapping and selection of the individual vest-pocket fragments in the city. It is comprised of the diagramming and recognition of the relationships between the selected vest-pockets fragments over time following the level of persistence over time (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *The Selection of the Vest-Pocket Fragments through the Diagramming of Elements over Time. The Layering of Buildings, Streets, and Public Spaces Making Visible the Persistencies within the Urban Fabric*

*Collage City* applies the figure ground plan as a strategy for reconciling the divergent approaches of the pedestrian-oriented urbanism of premodern cities with the Modernist approach of the object-building.<sup>14</sup> Acknowledging that there are limitations to the figure ground, we have chosen this representation as it offers understanding between built and unbuilt spaces in the city, particularly for the diachronic study. The analysis is based on Conzen's approach in which streets and street system, plots and plot systems and building footprint are essential in understanding morphogenesis of urban landscape.<sup>15</sup> Based on Conzen's analysis of Alnwick a method has been developed for the analysis of Canberra that focuses on the building footprint, streets and street system, and public spaces.<sup>16</sup> The selection of plots has been omitted as they have not played important role in the development of the city's urban core. Furthermore, the emphasis of the public spaces has been added as the most important aspect of the civic nature of the selected case study area.

While the figure ground is an extremely useful tool in investigating the changing morphology of the city, the simplification of the city required for a two-dimensional representation "results in a flattened city, where difference and complexity (beyond the formal) are rendered invisible" by the graphic dominance of black on white.<sup>17</sup> As such, in addition to the figure ground, this analysis explores the diagramming method to further understand urban relationships and interfaces.

The etymology of the word diagram reveals important parts of its definition. Deriving from the Greek words *dia*, referring to the relationship between the two and across, and *gramma*, defining something that is drawn, figure and outline.<sup>18</sup> Thus, diagrams represent a method of focusing on the relational characteristics of an object or a thing, rather than focusing on the thing itself. Furthermore, diagrams are not representations of the physical characteristics of the thing or its form. For Peter Eisenman (1932-) diagrams are the "...representation of something in that it is not a thing itself."<sup>19</sup> They should be differentiated from images and signs. Furthermore, in assemblage theory they have "neither substance nor form, neither content nor expression."<sup>20</sup> Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992) refer to them as a "real yet to come, a new type of reality" as they define not just the current relationships between elements but also potential relationships.<sup>21</sup>

The important aspect of the diagram for this research is that it emphasizes elements or characteristics that are not necessarily directly visible, but elements

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14. M. Hebbert, "Figure-ground: History and Practice of a Planning Technique," *Town Planning Review* 87, no. 6 (2016): 714.

15. M. R. G. Conzen, and Institute of British Geographers, *Alnwick, Northumberland: A Study in Town Plan Analysis, Transactions and Papers* (London: G. Philip, 1960).

16. *Ibid.*

17. B. D. Wortham-Galvin, "The Woof and the Warp of Architecture: The Figure-Ground in Urban Design," *Footprint* 07 (2010), 66.

18. A. Vidler, "What is a Diagram Anyway," in *Peter Eisenman Feints* (ed.) S. Cassara (Milan: Skira Editore, 2006), 16.

19. P. Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 27.

20. G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans.) B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 14.

21. *Ibid.*, 142.

that are implied or virtual.<sup>22</sup> This does not mean that diagrams are less real, however they represent the understanding of what is hidden behind the immediate visible world, and thus they could be defined as virtual. Diagrams are often defined as both real and ideal, reductive and generative, objective and subjective.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, diagrams are not simple illustrations of the objects, which implies that they are not necessarily a static representation of the essentialist characteristics of an entity or its static relationships but depict processes and relationships as dynamic understandings of an entity.<sup>24</sup> This aspect of the diagram offers a potential in application of the diagram as spatio-temporal exploration of the collage.

Diagramming method applied in this study is aiming to connect the figure ground and plan exploration as introduced in the collage city with the sectional and façade qualities of the elements. It uses the process of abstraction to explore the hidden relationships between selected elements. Several types of diagrams have been developed to explore the case study, requiring the extraction and representation of key pieces of visual information to explore the formal characteristics of the vest-pocket fragments and the layering and change of urban elements through time. This process of abstraction and layering can start to expose the unseen or virtual characteristics of the spaces being explored, uncovering the relationships that are hidden, as in the tracing of the historical precedents or the layering of the elements to show the persistent elements. Thus, through this application and use of diagram, the elements of the spatio-temporal collage are further revealed and understood, as are the relationships between them.

The façade and interior courtyard spaces of vest-pocket buildings have been selected for further study, as these are the elements which interface with other built forms to create connections within the urban fabric. Plan and section diagrams have been used to create a deeper and more multi-dimensional analysis. The use of plan drawings through both methods is important for the analysis as it refers back to the original plan by the Griffins and reveals the changes over time to the urban fabric.

### Case Study of Canberra: The Civic Centre

Chosen as the winning entry of the Federal Capital Design Competition in 1912, Canberra was planned as the National Capital by the husband-and-wife architectural team Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin. They planned “an ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future,” thus embedding the utopian aspirations into the city plan.<sup>25</sup> Thus Canberra’s history as

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22. Vidler, “Diagrams of Diagrams: Architectural Abstraction and Modern Representation,” *Representations*, no. 72 (2000): 6.

23. Vidler, “What is a Diagram Anyway?” 2006, 25.

24. M. Muminovic, “Place as Assemblage: Abstracting, Diagramming and Mapping,” *Athens Journal of Architecture* 5, no. 1 (2019): 61-76.

25 W. B. Griffin, *American Designs Splendid New Capital for Australia* (The New York Times, June 2, 1912).

a planned city with utopian influences from the Garden City Movement, City Beautiful and Organic City makes it particularly suitable for study in relation to Collage City as the urban design theory was devised specifically to address utopian cities. This planned nature gives a unique opportunity in relation to the study of the relationships of urban fragments through time, due to the developments that lead to both change and persistence within the plan through its history. The Griffin Plan is centred on a geometrical framework that embeds the city into the existing contours of the landscape.<sup>26</sup> The National Triangle is one of the primary organising elements that distinguishes the Canberra plan, alongside the Land Axis and the Water Axis. The Land Axis originates at Mount Ainslie, crosses through Kurrajong Hill, connecting to Mount Bimberi in the south. Crossing perpendicular to this is the Water Axis, starting at Black Mountain and following the approximate line of the Molonglo River. The National Triangle is anchored on the two axes – the northernmost apex at City Hill, the southern at Kurrajong Hill and the eastern at Russell Hill. Each of these apexes had an intended role: located around City Hill was the Civic Centre, Kurrajong Hill housed the symbolic centre of the city and the nation, and Russell Hill was simply defined as the Market Centre (Figure 2).<sup>27</sup> The connectedness of this geometric framework, in conjunction with surrounding radial star patterns, emphasises the integrated intentions for the plan, and the connection at different scales. At the scale of the city, the National Triangle and the axes connect the whole plan to the site, following the natural features of the terrain, the hills and valley. Moving down a level, the pattern of the radial creates coherent fragments, yet maintains connection to the city scale through the primary avenues.

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26. P. Reid, *Canberra Following Griffin: A Design History of Australia's National Capital* (Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 2002).

27. *Ibid*, 62-64.





**Figure 2.** *The 1912 Griffin Plan with Overlay of Geometric Framework*

While the geometry of the National Triangle and the Land and Water Axes have remained the backbone of the Canberra plan, it has undergone numerous changes since the beginning of construction in 1913, all of which have affected the order and legibility of the different scales and relationships within the city. Thus, Canberra is a good example for analysis of vest-pocket scale, with the traces of

various approaches to the plan, and the reinterpretation of the original plan and new ideas, demonstrating instances of both change and spatial coherence.

The Civic Centre in Canberra has been chosen for the case study as an example to test the approach to analysis, leading to a more detailed exploration of the relationships within the urban fragment. A sampling strategy was applied to the selection of the embedded case study unit, focusing on the identification of an area within the Canberra plan which can deepen the understanding of relationships across various scales through time. Three principles have informed the selection of the Civic Centre embedded unit through the sampling strategy. Firstly, this unit has been designed to create connections across multiple scales within the plan, the hexagonal geometry creating a coherent urban fragment within the wider plan, while maintaining the connection to the broader geometry of the Canberra design. Secondly, this is one of the most established areas within Canberra, creating opportunity to explore the changes and persistencies through time. Thirdly, the design of the Civic Centre in its current form continues to respond to the layout and intentions of the original Canberra plan. As such, the Civic Centre demonstrates the two characteristics of the vest-pocket fragment through elements of the plan and the urban fabric.

The Civic Centre is located within central Canberra, to the north of Lake Burley Griffin (Figure 3). Its hexagonal geometry radiates around City Hill, which forms the northernmost apex of the National Triangle, connecting it to the geometric framework that is the backbone of the Canberra plan. The intention for the Civic Centre site to be the civic and metropolitan heart of the city has remained consistent from the 1912 competition plan designed by the Griffins, with visions for a vibrant and connected urban fabric.<sup>28</sup> While the earliest developments in the city centre began in the 1920s with the construction of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings, it was not until the 1960s that Civic began to take its current shape. The 1959-1964 Planning Report published by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) outlined the first stage of significant developments, with the aim of creating civic, commercial and public spaces for the growing city.<sup>29</sup> This civic and public focused development continued through to the 1980s with the Civic Centre Policy Plan published by the NCDC.<sup>30</sup> Since then, it has seen a slight decline in development with predominantly office buildings constructed and commercial trade moving to the Canberra Centre mall. However, recent years have seen increased focus on urban renewal within Civic, with an emphasis on pedestrian connections and bringing residential architecture to the edges of the city to create a lively and interconnected civic realm.

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28. Reid, *Canberra Following Griffin*, 2002.

29. National Capital Development Commission, *Planning Report Covering Proposals for the Five Year Period 1959-1965* (Canberra: NCDC, 1959), 13-15.

30. National Capital Development Commission, *Civic Centre Policy Plan Implementation Plan* (Canberra, NCDC, 1987).



**Figure 3.** Location of Civic Centre and National Triangle with Highlight of the Vest-Pocket Fragments in Context

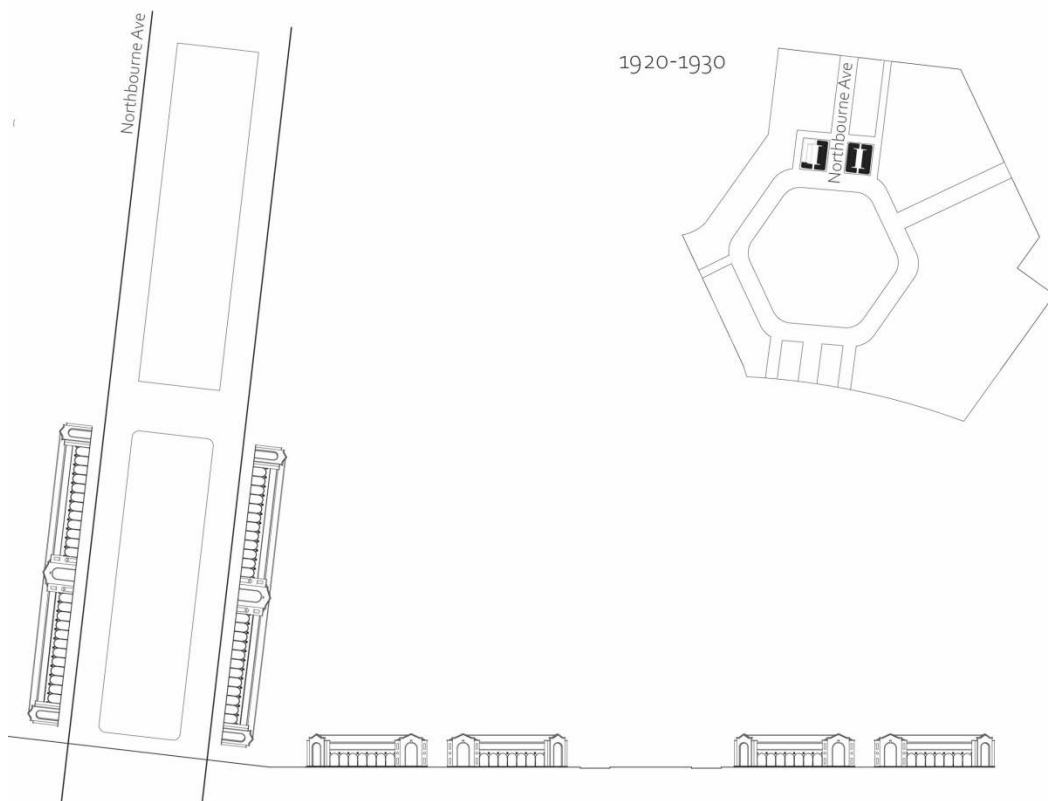
## Results

### Vest-pocket Fragment 1: Sydney and Melbourne Buildings

The analysis of the Civic Centre has identified the Sydney and Melbourne buildings as one of the most important vest-pocket fragments. These are two of the oldest structures in Canberra and remain significant fragments within the Civic Centre due to their role in defining the character and scale of the city's retail area in the early developments (Figure 4). They exemplify this characteristic of persistence and spatial coherence that is central to the vest-pocket through their architectural and urban language. Construction began in 1926 with the Sydney Building completed in 1927 for the official opening of the Civic Centre in December 1927. The completion of the Melbourne Building was delayed until 1946 due to the events of the Great Depression and Second World War.<sup>31</sup>

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31. Marshall, Butler, McCann and O'Keefe, *Sydney and Melbourne Buildings Conservation Management Plan*, 2011, 27-35.



**Figure 4.** 1920-1930 Construction of Civic Centre. Completed Sydney Building on the Right and Melbourne Building to the Left of Northbourne Avenue

Positioned along Northbourne Avenue, adjacent to the City Hill apex, they act as gateway buildings to the National Triangle, offering a sense of arrival to the urban core.<sup>32</sup> This placement creates direct links to the geometric framework of the city. The architectural concept is attributed to J.S. Sulman, primarily the continuous ground level colonnade that generates perimeter block. The buildings as they appear today were designed by J.H. Kirkpatrick in the office of the Federal Capital Commission from Sulman's concepts.

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32. City Renewal Authority, *Sydney and Melbourne Building Precinct* (ACT Government, 2021); Reid, *Canberra Following Griffin*, 2002.



**Figure 5.** *View of Sydney and Melbourne Buildings from City Hill and Northbourne Avenue Intersection*



**Figure 6.** *The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings in their Immediate Surroundings*

While the external form is generally unchanged since construction, their role as markers of the civic identity of Canberra has greatly changed. They continue as landmarks within the city, but their commercial role diminished from the 1950s onwards with the development of suburban shopping centres and the opening of the Monaro Mall in the city in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> They remain integral fragments from the era as they create and hold relationships across the fine-grain and city scales, in contrast to the original development of large footprint blocks which was focused on creating the large-scale geometry of the “urban uses framework.”<sup>34</sup> However,

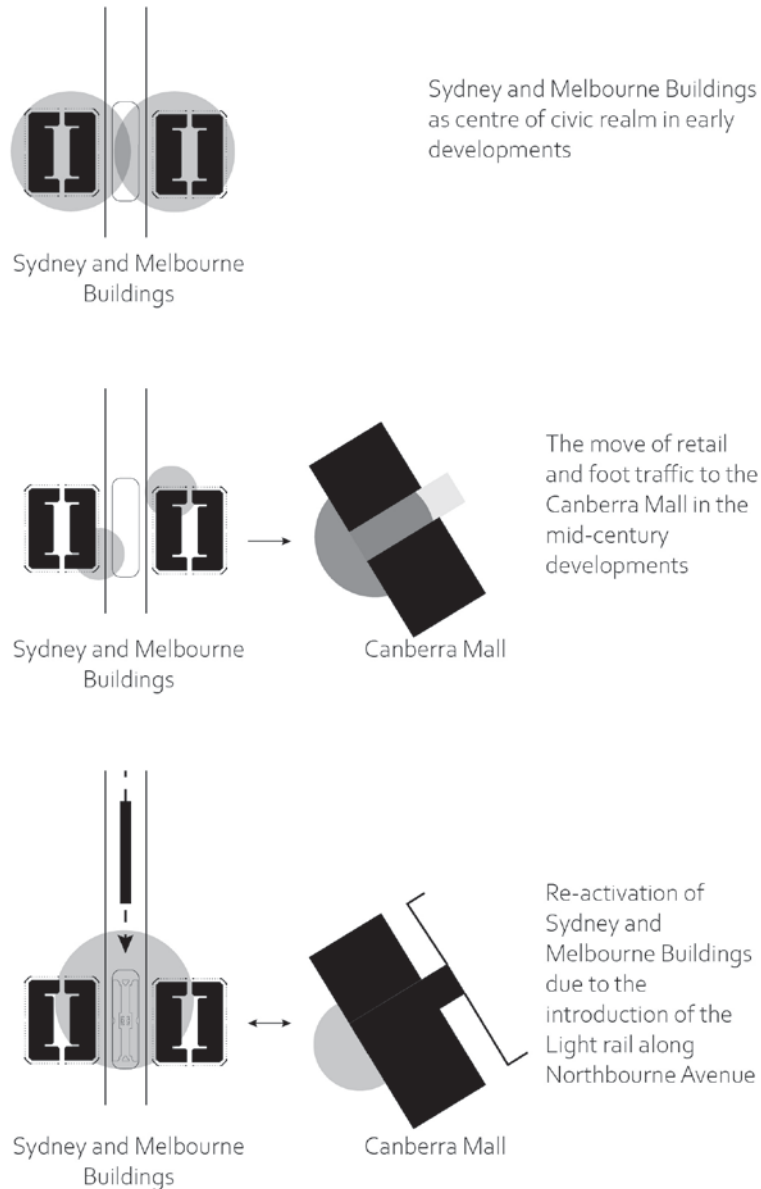
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33. Marshall, Butler, McCann, and O’Keefe, *Sydney and Melbourne Buildings Conservation Management Plan*, 2011, 40.

34. National Capital Authority, *The Griffin Legacy: Canberra, the Nation’s Capital in the 21st Century* (Canberra: NCA, 2004), 54.



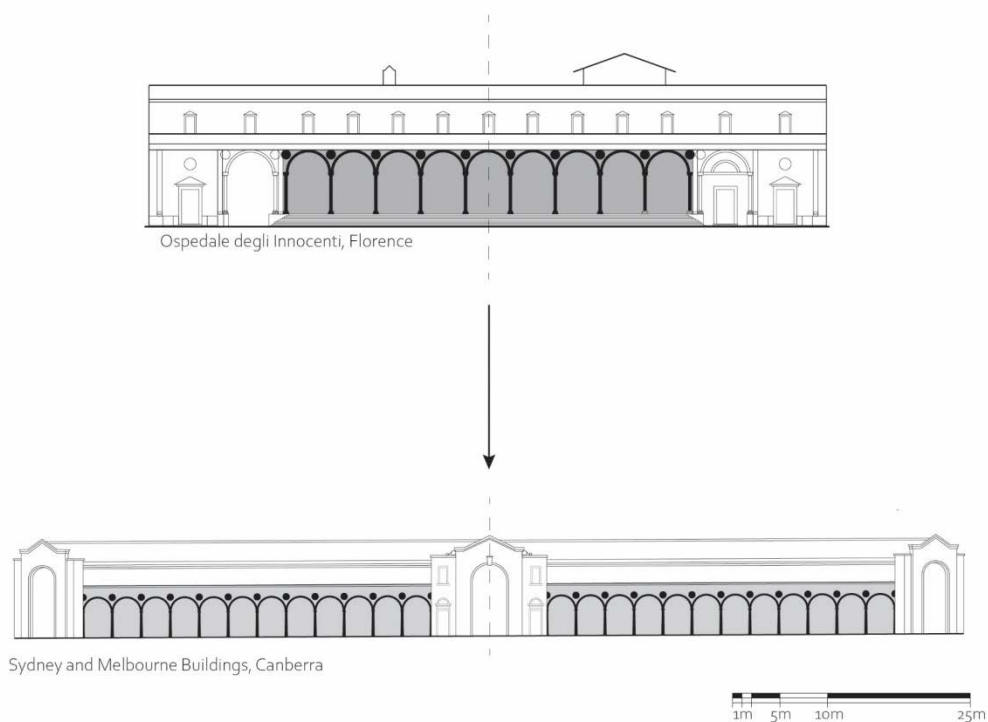
with lack of maintenance and the move of pedestrian retail foot traffic to the mall the types of tenancies were not in keeping with the civic premise of the original intention and their positioning as gateways to the city.<sup>35</sup> This has changed in last couple of years with the introduction of the light rail along Northbourne Avenue, and the revitalisation of empty shopfronts which are now bustling with life, introducing new coffee places, restaurants, and event venues (Figure 7). With these changes the Civic Centre is developing more of an urban character while still maintaining its role as the civic heart of the city.



**Figure 7.** *The Changes to the Retail and Pedestrian Traffic around the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings*

35. Marshall, Butler, McCann, and O’Keefe, *Sydney and Melbourne Buildings Conservation Management Plan*, 2011.

The colonnaded façade of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings was inspired by and creates a direct reference to Brunelleschi's Renaissance design of the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence (Figure 8).<sup>36</sup> This influence is significant due to the historical associations made by transposing this classical motif to the context of the new civic developments, and thus reflects the second feature from the vest-pocket fragment definition. The continuous arcade was intended to encourage perambulation and mimic famous European shopping streets while negating the local climate conditions. The arcade form is a critical precedent, creating familiarity within a newly developing city, while also generating the street and pedestrian scale interface within the larger context. This virtual quality of the vest-pocket is recognised as the main element that defines its character and boundaries.



**Figure 8.** *The Formal Precedent of the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings in the Colonnade of the Ospedale degli Innocenti*

### **Vest-pocket Fragment 2: Civic Hexagon**

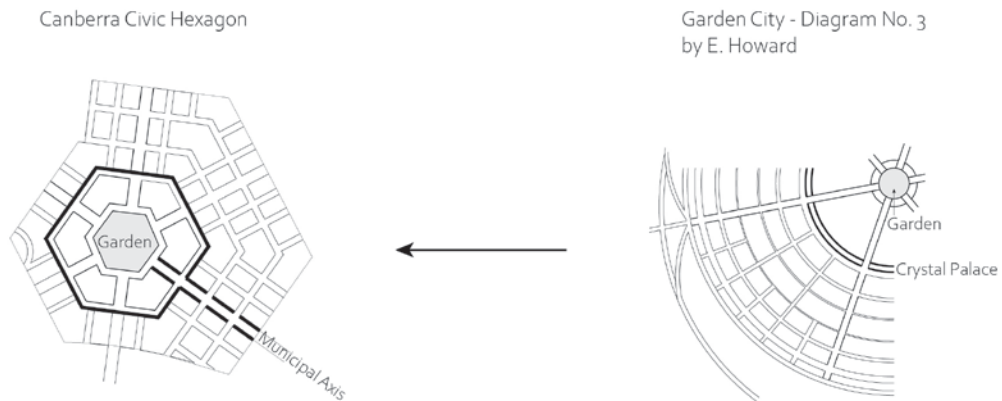
The analysis of the Civic Centre has also identified the central hexagon as another vest-pocket fragment, exhibiting the two characteristics of spatial coherence through time and historical reference that define the vest-pocket. It has remained a constant element within the plan, throughout numerous changes over the years. The avenues radiating from the core on City Hill symbolically connect Civic to the

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36. Ibid, 98-99.

various districts within the plan.<sup>37</sup> The most significant change has been in the shift from what was an architectural urban core in the 1912 Griffin Plan, to a predominantly landscape character in subsequent plans.

This fragment strongly echoes the principles and layout of the Garden City by Ebenezer Howard, where the radial nature becomes basic principle of the organisation, and the polycentric idea of the city (Figure 9). The central place in both ideas is taken by the nature and centralised radial geometry unfolds commercial and residential zones.



**Figure 9.** *The Geometric Precedent of the Civic Hexagon in the Centralised Radial Geometry of the Garden City. Central Garden and Commercial Streets Highlighted*

### **Diachronic Analysis of Civic Hexagon and Sydney and Melbourne Buildings**

The analysis of the development of Canberra is focused on the figure ground analysis. The changes to the Canberra plan at four major points in its development have been selected for this analysis (Figure 10). The 1912 Griffin Plan with its highly geometric and connected urban framework is followed by the 1927 plan, and the first phase of construction in the Civic Centre. This is followed by the 1964 map, characterised by the introduction of the parkway road system, another significant phase of civic development. The fourth point in time is 2020, the city as it currently stands. In this series of diagrams, the persistence of the hexagonal geometry of the Civic Centre becomes evident.

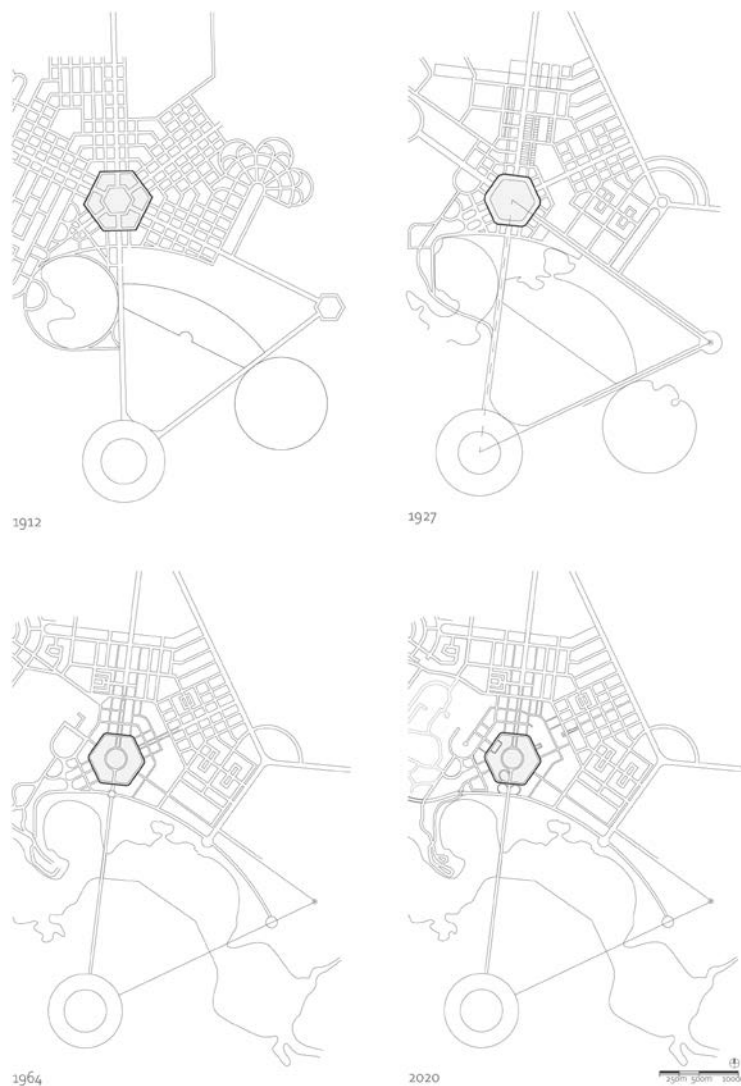
The changes in the connectivity to the City Hill core become evident, as does the size of the streets and blocks (Figure 11). In the 1912 plan, the six radiating streets all connect to the most internal hexagonal core, however this connectivity unravels in subsequent iterations of the plan. In addition, from initial hexagonal geometry, that has been preserved at the Civic centre, the plan has been changed to the circular geometry, particularly at the southern part of the city. The permeability of the hexagon has also changed over the time, planned as permeable, it has decreased its accessibility in the actual realisation of the plan (Figure 11).

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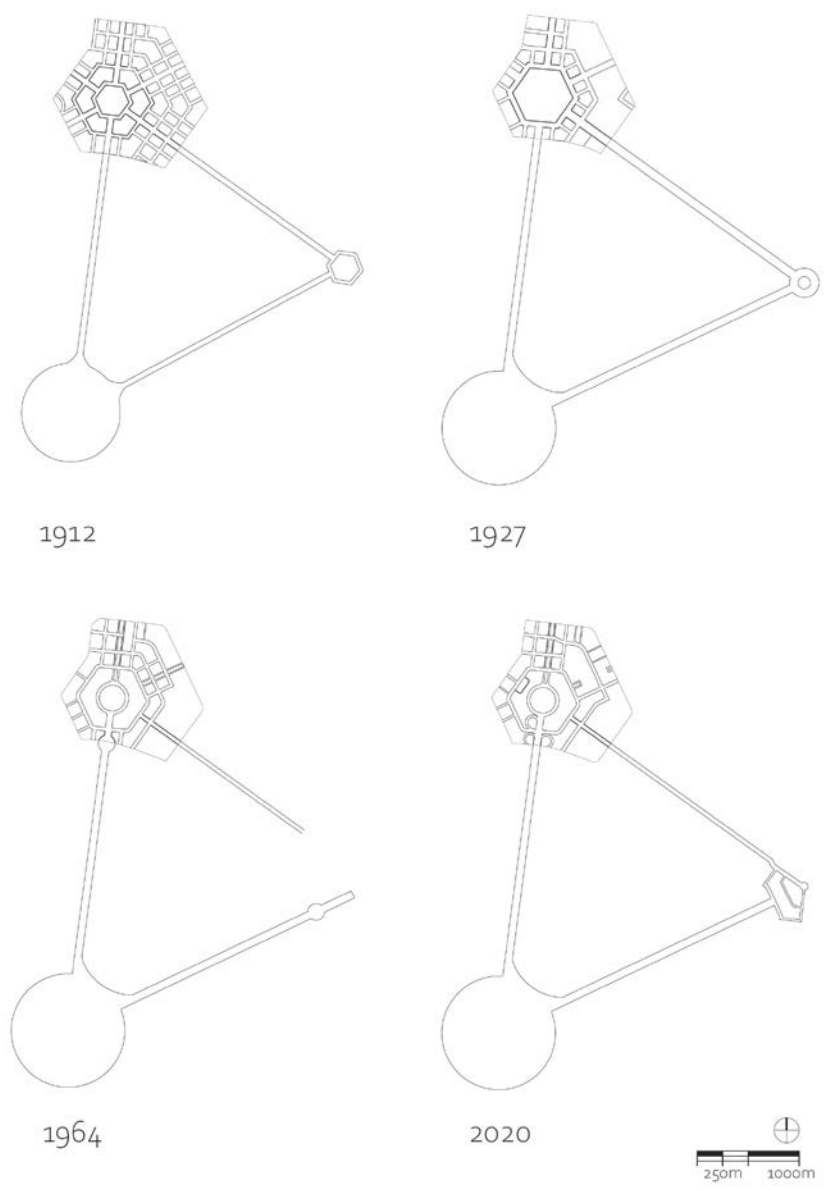
37. National Capital Authority, *The Griffin Legacy*, 2004.



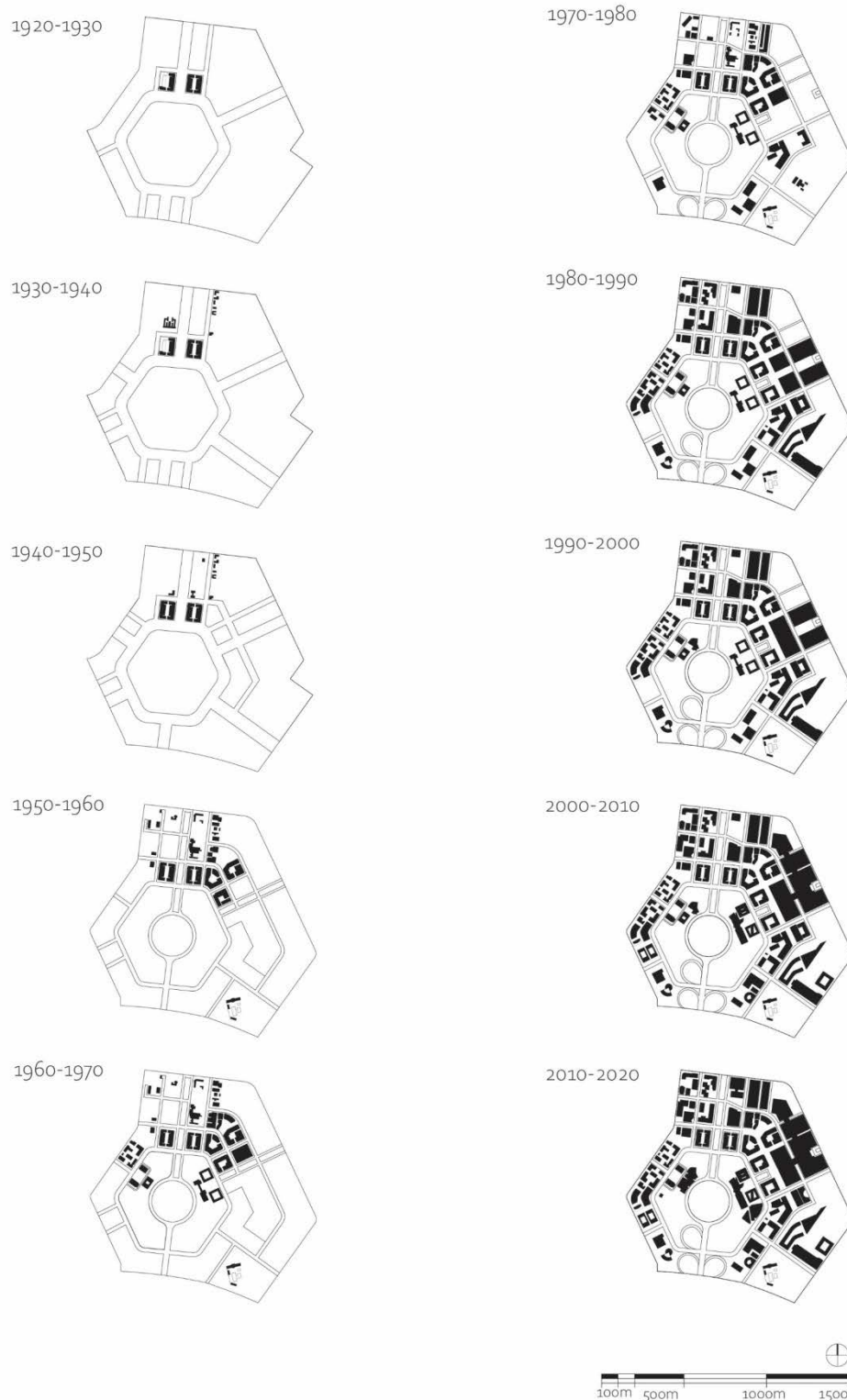
The initial prominence of the Sydney and Melbourne buildings through the first half of the twentieth century is then overshadowed by the large footprint development of the mall on the eastern side of civic, built as separate blocks and then connected between the years 2000 and 2010 (Figure 12). The prominence of self-contained and freestanding forms is visible, connected to each other by the pattern of streets. However, by separating the different urban elements (building, streets and public spaces) and re-layering the information, the spaces and places which have persisted through the city's history become evident (Figure 1). Of note is the space held between the Sydney and Melbourne buildings, straddling Northbourne Avenue. The mirroring of the two facades across the avenue was planned to create a coherent spatial connection and urban relationship, clearly defining the space between. However, with the development of Northbourne Avenue as a primary traffic corridor, the urban connectivity has been interrupted and as a result the Northbourne Plaza space is used foremost as pedestrian walkway rather than public space (Figure 5, 11).



**Figure 10.** *The Civic Vest-pocket in Context through Time*



**Figure 11.** *Civic Hexagon Vest-Pocket Detail through Time*



**Figure 12.** *The Sydney and Melbourne Buildings in Context – Civic Urban Development by Decade*

## Conclusion

The diagramming study reveals two scales of the vest-pocket fragment within the Civic Centre of Canberra: the scale of the buildings (Sydney and Melbourne buildings) and the internal hexagon of the Civic Centre. The Sydney and Melbourne buildings, embody the human dimension through their design, and act as gateways to the urban core through their placement along Northbourne Avenue. This positioning, adjacent to the Civic Hexagon, also connects them to the geometry of the National Triangle and the wider plan. The persistence of these two vest-pocket fragments reveals an interesting juxtaposition of relationships. One fragment refers to Italian cities and plazas, connecting to the fine grain and human scale nature of the city, and European urban tradition while the other ideal, the Garden City connects urbanity to its opposite, nature. On the one hand, this relationship could be considered as a 'friction' between the two extremes. One relationship that focuses on the urbanity and compactness of traditional European medieval cities and the other that integrates nature into planning as part of the reaction to the early twentieth century overcrowding. On the other hand, this relationship between the two extremes generates interesting tension on which this operates, aiming to be the city of the human scale but also the city that embraces the open sky and nature. This tension exists in the differing focus of the scales within the two ideals, and in how the human dimension is reconciled to the landscape scale of the plan. The vest-pocket is a useful tool to examine this tension through the diagramming of these multi-dimensional relationships within the urban fabric. While understanding of the friction becomes visible through this analytical approach, visualisation of this condition becomes challenging. Fragmentation and searching the origins of each fragment has led to a different reading of the city and potential understanding of the unfinished identity of the Civic area.

The diachronic analysis has shown that both vest-pockets are the most persistent elements in the urban fabric. The superimposition of different elements within the urban fabric through space and time, reveals the relationships between the plan, its interpretation, and the current and future meaning in the layered history of the city. It also emphasises those virtual qualities that complement the reading of the city and its urban spaces as a spatio-temporal collage. Furthermore, the persistence of these elements shows the potential role that the vest-pocket fragment plays in development of the city. The process of tracing back to the original fragments of the collage has revealed important friction in the development of the city and thus provided us with different reading of the Canberra, generating a new approach to analysing and understanding urban relationships through scale and time that can lead to further developments within the city as a multi-dimensional urban collage.

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