Urban Dynamics of change in a town

Urban renewal is the process of redevelopment and revitalisation of an area to better meet the contemporary needs of the community. The redevelopment of Pyrmont has been one of the most successful urban renewal programs to be undertaken in Australia. Pyrmont is an inner city suburb of Sydney situated just under 2km south west of the Sydney’s CBD at 33°52’, 151°11’. The redevelopment of this area, caused a repopulation and consolidation of Sydney’s inner west which ultimately resulted in a dramatic transformation of one of Sydney’s oldest suburb.

In 1900, Pyrmont was an important port and industrial area, with a population of almost 30 000 people. There was a wide range of industries and services present including wharves, dockyards, warehouses, abattoirs, wool stores, railway etc. it was deemed a working-class suburb with predominantly Irish/Catholic population. As the income for Pyrmont was only modest, semi-detached cottages were the most common type of housing.

In the 1960s however, Pyrmont was deteriorating at a fast rate and became an unfortunate example of urban decay. The government policy of decentralisation (which is having industries move away from the centre of the city), was having an extreme impact on the suburb’s population. This suburbanisation was due to congestion, obsolete plants, an ageing infrastructure, high cost of land and limited scope for expansion. This led to many of the factories, industries and services being relocated and redeveloped in other areas. As there was no longer enough employment for the working class society, the population of Pyrmont declined dramatically.

Finally, in 1991, the federal government initiated a ‘Better Cities Program’ which aimed to make Australia’s cities sustainable and more liveable. The major objectives were to improve the economic efficiency, social equity and environmental sustainability of Australia’s cities and Pyrmont was a targeted suburb for urban renewal. There were several areas that the program aimed to improve including housing, transport, public parks or open spaces and protection of the environment.

Urban renewal on Pyrmont has had several positive impacts and developments such as new housing, increased availability of transport, community leisure facilities (parks and open space), and sustainable environment.

Prior to urban renewal, Pyrmont had residents with similar incomes. However, to achieve the goal of social equity, plans were made for a mixed, high-density, medium-rise residential area. Approximately 7500 new houses have been constructed plus the renovation of 1400 existing houses. The aim was to cater for all household types such as families, couples and singles, provide affordable housing for middle to low income earners, provide residential houses with waterfront access and with water and city views, protect existing housing, retain a socially diverse residential population which includes all income groups, provide opportunities to live close to places of work and to create a high quality urban environment. It can be seen today that all aims have been met with regards to housing. There are several apartment blocks or terraces with water and city views as well as a diverse range of housing. The process of redevelopment has taken places several times in the suburb to maximise residential areas e.g. the Colonial Sugar Refinery site has been redeveloped into a mix of commercial and residential land use and the Goldsbrough wool store has been transformed into 500 luxury apartments.

An efficient and innovative public transport system was an essential element in the redevelopment of Pyrmont. An improvement to facilities including a larger amount of buses, a ferry wharf and the monorail has been implemented to link the area to Central Station. These measures were designed to reduce the use of private motor cars in the area and encourage people to use public transport.
The access to such a wide variety of transport links is a positive change as residents and workers in Pyrmont will be able to reach their destination with minimal hassle, thus furthering the suburb’s allure.

A primary goal in the urban renewal process was ecologically sustainable development. Particular attention was paid to reducing the consumption of water, reducing sewerage discharge, improving storm water quality, reusing grey water, reducing electricity and energy consumption by designing housing which used renewable power sources such as solar energy and encouraging the recycling of materials. Each of these factors contributed to the redevelopment of Pyrmont and created a more appealing suburb which would be more likely to maintain its high quality status.

The establishment of parkland and open space for community use was an essential factor to consider in the urban renewal process. In 1994 there was only 7.7 hectares of parks and gardens and only 5% of the harbour was accessible to the public. Due to the developments spoken about above the population in the suburb has increased and to cater for this, several community leisure facilities such as pools, gyms and parkland have been made available to keep residents happy. Since 2004 there is now 25.8 hectares of parkland and gardens as well as 60% of the harbour being accessible to the public.

Pyrmont has experienced an era of evolution, from an industrial age to a new vibrant residential community. Though the main plans are completed, there are still a few key projects that are scheduled for completion. The Decade of Renewal for the Pyrmont district has been a success with added housing, efficient transport, more open and public spaces and an ecologically sustainable environment.