Socially Responsible Public Administration and the CBD*

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Abstract
The language used by public administrators is now markedly less reminiscent of 'Sir Humphrey', and more inclusive of progressive private sector jargon.[1] Popular new expressions associated with performance reporting: corporate social responsibility, good governance, sustainable development and triple bottom line, are now an important part of public administration vocabulary. These are 'common sense' terms amplifying notions of a public 'good', and imply a broadening of economic concerns. This paper asks what impact this new socially oriented public discourse might have on our built city centres? For instance, in 2020, will CBDs still be characterised by the sterile and enveloping towering sentinels of yesteryear alongside shiny new constructions showcasing the latest award winning architectural designs, which contrast vividly with an increasingly vibrant streetscape? It is difficult to imagine anything else. So where does the discourse fit in with the buildings in the CBD? Has the discourse got something to say about planning and design, or does it only inform management and business practices? Is it possible for public administrators to exercise these popular new concepts in a way that CBD users will notice – and appreciate? This paper suggests that public administrators must begin to do more than embrace the new language of business. They must learn to define it in tangible and practical ways that make a real difference, setting new benchmarks for the private sector to follow. Endorsing environmentally sustainable (read less unsustainable) current and future developments is not enough – they must reinvent the CBD using principles encapsulated in the notion of socially responsible buildings.

Keywords: social responsibility; public administration; central business district; discourse; benchmarking; socially responsible buildings.

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[1] Botsman, P. (2003) 'Mandarins ripening for a revolution against Sir Humphrey-ism', *the Australian*, May 15, p.13. See also Marteen Hajer (1995) *The Politics of Environmental Discourse* (Oxford University Press: Oxford).

Introduction

This paper commences from the admittedly shaky premise that Central Business Districts are largely the sum of its buildings. While this denies the importance of streets, parks and many other elements of the city centre, it allows a narrower focus for the arguments raised here. These arguments are grounded in the prediction that by 2020 we may have more environmentally friendly CBDs, but it is unlikely we will be enjoying more socially friendly city hubs in terms of the way the built environment is designed and managed. This assertion is based on the assumption that socially responsible commercial buildings provide a major plank towards the socially sustainable city.

The current approach to construction innovation concentrates on embracing sustainable development principles to cater for environmental sensitivities. Meanwhile there is significantly less thought being put into modifying building management practices, or understanding how practices impact on design and *vice versa*, which essentially requires a social approach to development. Moreover, already existing buildings largely escape the scrutiny directed at new constructions, slowing down change significantly. Legislators and relevant self-governing bodies need to realise that transforming commercial buildings into socially responsible entities is not a prohibitively expensive thing to do. By taking the initiative, those administering publicly owned commercial property portfolios can demonstrate how it can be done.

While any broadening of traditionally narrow economic criteria for construction should be encouraged, current initiatives are clearly skewed towards environmental sensitivities rather than social concerns. This claim betrays an emerging paradox between the comparatively stagnant human relationship with the built environment and the socially oriented discourse emanating from the corporate and public sectors alike. If true, public administrators must bear much of the responsibility for getting the social agenda back on track. All the talk from private developers and managers about social responsibility might be conjuring visions of a *brave new world*,[2] but as this paper argues, its up to their public counterparts to lead by example and demonstrate social responsibility in the buildings they commission, administer and occupy.

A defence against the call for a demonstrable social responsibility in the built environment might assert that the term is after all only an administrative concept, and the kind of outcomes it produces are accountability, transparency, social justice and even generosity and philanthropy.[3] Such a view suggests that social responsibility is not demonstrated in a building but in a business model, leading to more equitable outcomes for employees and the broader community. However, this is limiting the term to its managerial and distributive components. Clearly social responsibility also has implications for policy, planning and production, which all find expression in the physical environment. In short, this paper is arguing that social responsibility conveys a strong message of the importance of intrinsically human considerations over competing, often economically-based, and on occasions in the public sector, politically charged considerations. This should result in a dilution of the profit-only (understood in the broadest terms) approach to decision-making. It does not imply a

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[2] Phrase made famous by Aldous Huxley's 1932 classic so titled. Huxley wrote of a rigidly stratified, fundamentally inequitable society made possible by years of intensive "hypnopaedia", or brainwashing. Arguably, the 'feel good' discourse of social responsibility is also a powerful, if a great deal more subtle modifier of normative behaviour.

[3] Geoff Weir, (2004) 'Generosity good for the bottom line', *the Australian*, June 16, 2004, p.9.

reduced-profit approach. Indeed, over the longer term, there are strong economic reasons for prioritising social criteria. Social responsibility conveys an interest in future outcomes and is thereby allied to the notion of social sustainability, which "will only be achieved through the pursuit of social equity".[4] It follows then that socially sustainable buildings are a prime deliverable of developers and managers who clearly embrace an equitable basis to both design and administration.

This paper has been divided up under four sub-headings. The first section provides a brief historical explanation why social responsibility is not evident in the development of the modern city and the CBD in particular. It is argued that social responsibility has had little to do with the way capitalism, and by extension, centres of commerce, have developed, and that public administration is implicated in its relative absence. The second part of the paper looks at more recent developments in public administrations and builds the case for a pro-active socially responsible strategy. In the third section, the new social responsibility discourse is examined, and suggestions are made on how public administrators can begin to use it in constructive ways that will make a 'social' and 'physical' difference in the CBD by 2020. This practical application of social responsibility goes beyond governance models, and it encompasses far more than socially productive and harmonious design criteria. It calls for a systematic approach to the pursuit of equity in the many social aspects of modern life, of which buildings play a prominent part.

Finally, the idea of evaluating social responsibility objectively using social development and management performance indicators is explored. While this idea is very much in its infancy, it is argued that such benchmarking is the logical way to advance a substantive social responsibility in the CBD. Indeed, the blueprint for a buildings social metrics accounting and rating test (to coin an appropriate acronym – *build smart*) has already been established by the numerous environmental rating systems. The major hitch appears to be the dearth of research into how to identify and measure appropriate benchmarks. This final section outlines the reasons why public sector management needs to take up this challenge.

Why CBDs are Socially Irresponsible

The first task in building a case for a visible and liveable social responsibility is to identify and then deconstruct the rationales that presently crowd it out. While there are many competing agendas, it is argued that most can be distilled into three powerful motivations that characterise modern society: economic growth, profit-making and consumerism. These collective goals can in turn be attributed to a handful of influences that have re-organised urban living, ie. individualism, industrialisation, and the increasing dominance of the market.[5] Let us therefore take a closer look at how these influences have taken hold and more specifically, how they have shaped the construction of our modern city centres.

Smith, Whitelegg and Williams argue convincingly that the intellectual roots of individualism derive nourishment from "a misreading of Adam Smith's philosophy that the common good can be maximised through the pursuit of self-interest."[6] Thus:

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[4] Australian Urban & Regional Development Review, (1995) *Places for Everyone: Social equity in Australian cities and regions*, Research report No. 1 (Commonwealth of Aust.: Canberra).
[5] Maf Smith, John Whitelegg & Nick Williams, (1998) *Greening the Built Environment* (Earthscan: London), p.164, 179.
[6] Ibid, p.164.

> "the shared goal of society – or at least the goal assumed by politicians to be commonly shared – became economic growth, and longer term considerations of environmental protection and social contentment and cohesion, were dismissed as the concerns of minority pressure groups. The contemporary built environment is a physical manifestation of that society. It is an expression in concrete and brick, tarmac and steel, of the selfishness and short-sightedness that characterize our lifestyles; it does not reflect a concern for the common good, or the importance of non-material elements of human happiness."[7]

Industrialisation also has some surprising links with individualism because it is enmeshed in the idea of the division of labour. To quote Adam Smith:

> " The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportional increase of the productive powers of labour. The separation of different trades and employments from one another seems to have taken place, in consequence of this advantage. This separation too is generally carried furthest in those countries which enjoy the highest degree of industry and improvement".[8]

This passage underscores how industrialisation was very much a function of the increases in productivity brought about by the individualisation of work within an emerging public domain. And this individualisation process had implications for workers lives in other areas such as family roles, community involvement, and the practices of acquisition and exchange. As political economist Marian Simms explains,

> "The public-private dualism is seen as having emerged at about the time when, as a consequence of industrialism and capitalism, the connection between home and work was severed. People were no longer seen as actually working in their houses. Workers left home (the domestic or private sphere) to go to work (part of the public world). Households no longer made goods for exchange but largely produced services for use. They also consumed goods and services manufactured elsewhere."[9]

In principle, because of productivity gains, industrialisation made resources more affordable for wage earners, laying the foundations for consumerism.[10] Perhaps more importantly though, industrialism demanded a convenient labour force, encouraging urban growth around factory centres and transport facilities, not only stripping workers of their time to devote to subsistence farming, but also denying them access to sufficient productive land. And much of the industrial profit flowed to the owners of production, with workers having the value of their labour resources lowered in relativity to gains in productivity. This expanded and reinforced class gaps, preparing

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Adam Smith (1776) *The Wealth of Nations* (reproduced in *The Economic Nature of the Firm: A Reader* 2nd Ed. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), L. Putterman & R. S. Kroszner (eds.), pp.36-7.

[9] Marian Simms (1983) "The political economy of the state in Australia", chapt. 2 in Alexander Kouzmin (ed.) *Public Sector Administration: New Perspectives* (Longman Cheshire: Melbourne), p.37.

[10] For a more detailed discussion of consumerism and the Australian city see Patrick Mullins (1995) 'Households, Consumerism and Metropolitan Development', chapt. 4 in *Australian Cities: Issues, Strategies and Policies for Urban Australia in the 1990s* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge), Patrick troy (ed.), pp.87-109.

the way for Marxist thought premised on the collective power of the working class, and ultimately led to the strengthening of unionism in the West and a perpetual cycle of worker claims to better pay and conditions. All of this reinforced a dependence on urbanism, and the emerging commerce and manufacturing centres reflected these changes. And as a consequence, traditional ideas of rural and community living were progressively marginalised.

Industrialism thereby forged a historical transformation from mercantilism as understood by the model of oeconomy[11] to the point where governments increasingly recognised the *naturalness* of the economic domains they governed. In other words, once constructed, the market rapidly dominated all aspects of modern life, and informed much of what governments began to do. Following liberal traditions, public administrations facilitated the reconfiguring of the family in terms of *population*, thereby determining governing units by location. Meanwhile, the economic concerns of government were reconstituted into a complex relationship with the interests of *individuals*, involving technological change, social struggle and political bargaining. This established a politics of place, and by targeting this new set of economic interests, modern administrations helped to create *Homo Oeconimicus* or 'economic man', together with the encompassing economic space.

Admittedly this account crudely sweeps at least two centuries of unprecedented social, economic and technological change into a couple of paragraphs. However, it has been included to point out that it is more useful to understand public administration as a function of modern capitalism than as a powerful counter-veiling redistributive force regulating the most inequitable aspects of it. While it clearly does moderate some of the more 'unacceptable' extremes of capitalism, in the post-war welfare era, public administration has evolved to become the prime disseminator of appropriate 'self-governance'. Moreover, it has become the guardian of economic 'truths' such as the triumph of self over public interest, and the social 'goodness' of productive normative behaviour.[12]

Of course, public administration is not responsible for the supremacy of the market, but it is true that in recent years the government sector in most industrialised countries has been doing little to dampen the lofty ambitions of private developers, and redress the inequitable structure of property rights in the most public precincts of cities. And CBDs, perhaps more visibly than any other component of the built environment, are being shaped by the increasing dominance of the market in human affairs as a result. Towering office buildings erected in Australian cities over the last 50 or so years are symbols of this concentration of political and economic power.[13] This connection was not lost on the terrorists who targeted the World Trade Center in New York. These office buildings take up much of the space in the CBD, although they are essentially off-limits for those who have no business in them. They are designed specifically to provide occupancy for public and private administrative purposes, with those rights acquired by the highest bidder in a competitive market. The most profitable businesses are thus best placed to acquire the most prestigious accommodation, regardless of the nature of the business itself. This provides for a situation where the

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[11] For a useful analysis of oeconomy see K. Tribe (1978) *Land, labour and Economic Discourse* (London).

[12] Graham Burchell (1991) 'Peculiar interests: civil society and governing 'the system of natural liberty', chapt. 6 in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in governmentality*, Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon & Peter Miller eds. (Harvester Wheatsheaf: London), p.127; David Williams (1999) 'Constructing the Economic Space: The World Bank and the Making of *Homo Oeconomicus*, *Millennium* Vol. 28, No.1, pp.79-99.

[13] Patrick Mullins (1995) 'Households, Consumerism and Metropolitan Development', p.109.

latest high rise with a respectable 4½ star environmental rating according to the Australian Building Greenhouse Rating Scheme (ABGRS) may attract tobacco or alcohol firms, weapons dealers or any number of unethical businesses as major tenants. Indeed, such businesses may even invest in the naming rights, making a mockery of the socially responsible status 'green buildings' acquire.

'New' Public Administration

From this reading of the evolving economic role of public administration, traditional concerns of civil service have in recent decades been swamped by efforts to fine tune economic space. In other words, the overriding rationale of 'new' public administration is establishing the grounds for capacity building, efficiency and the conditions for optimal accumulation of capital. This has applied to the public service itself as much as to their areas of concern, leading to a scaling down and professionalisation of public administrations since the 1980s. One interesting way this process has been described is the creation of a "hollow state".[14] The hollowing of the state is where basic structure is maintained while the fields of activity of government bureaucracies are increasingly being filled with elements of civil society in order to ideologically appease the preference for less government.

Critics of this movement argue that "states are seeing their policy capacity and political autonomy eroding in a way which cannot be recuperated"[15], resulting in uncontrolled marketisation and what Cerny refers to as the 'competition state'.[16] And the competition necessarily includes the public sector, which is no longer distinctly public in its orientation. This has hamstrung public administrations in their traditional role as an aggressive regulator because the accepted economic orthodoxy is adamant that controlling capitalism is not efficient. And this absence of regulation underscores the importance to public administrators of a ubiquitous social responsibility based on a self-regulating ethic and the upholding of professional codes of conduct and accountability. Moreover, the existence of these new governance bodies mandated to manage their specific domains effectively denies government the opportunity to lead by example. Instead, it is these quasi authorities that are progressively embodying ideas of corporate social responsibility, and forging the notion in the image of the market rather than in the interests of the broader community.

As pointed out, this focus by public administration on efficient economics glosses over an important aspect of modern industrial economic space – that it is ultimately competitive. Public administrations have thus been exposed to the realities of open competition, presenting many dilemmas and internal contradictions for ostensibly fair-minded bureaucrats. While public administrators concerned with property are committed to maximising economic growth on the one hand, they are also commissioned to provide adequate space for non-profit cultural and community uses. And always in greatest demand from both private interests and advocates for non-profit public space are the most prestigious parcels of the built environment, invariably located in the heart of cities. Within the competitive context described, public use allocations therefore represent sites of resistance against the omnipresence

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[14] R.A.W. Rhodes (1994) 'The hollowing-out of the state: the changing nature of public service in Britain' *Political Quarterly* 65:2, pp.138-51.

[15] Philip G. Cerny (1996) 'Globalization and other stories: the search for a new paradigm for international relations' *International Journal* 51:4, p.635.

[16] Philip G. Cerny (1990) *The Changing Architecture of Politics: Structure, Agency and the Future of the State* (Sage: London), chap. 8. For a more complimentary view of competition see Candace Howes and Ajit Singh (eds.) (1999) *Competitiveness Matters: Industry and Economic Performance in the U.S.* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor).

of the market. This struggle by defenders of the public estate intensifies the tensions facing public administration in their role as efficient, growth-oriented arbiters.

Complicating this still further is the blurring of the demarcation between public and private domains. Much of this loss of distinction is a result of the growth of governing bodies and institutions of various descriptions. The bodies are situated at the government-civil society interface, and represent the part of the public domain that intersects both spheres.[17] Their proliferation has meant that public authority has become increasingly fragmented and dispersed. And the shared discourse of these 'virtual' government authorities likewise is diluted because they have very little in common in terms of what they preside over, meaning there are few shared benchmarks to compare practice beyond basic business models.

Clearly these bodies have done much to encourage appropriate business practices. This has been carried out by systematically codifying ethical behaviour, effectively distinguishing between the productive elements of free market enterprise and the more damaging aspects of self-interested and unscrupulous business activities. The injection of moral criteria into what is still in many ways business as usual, at least as far as the construction and real estate industries are concerned, has effectively served to insulate the economic objectives of public administration. It has facilitated the adoption of a lexicon that carries much resonance in the community, but lacks formal obligation to meet currently unarticulated social standards. There is simply no clear unambiguous benchmarking for social responsibility understood in a distinctly social rather than environmental or economic sense. This makes it all the more difficult to question the primacy of economic growth, profit-making and consumerism shaping our CBDs.

Examples of environmentally responsible strategies within the public sector not only help to illustrate their long-term economic benefits, but demonstrate how the size of the publicly owned property portfolio creates economies of scale when implementing improvements. For instance, the United States administration is using enormous bargaining power and private sector partnerships to upgrade the energy efficiency of 500,000 Federal buildings by 2005. Likewise, the British government has implemented the FREE programme (Financing Renewable Energy and Efficiency) in schools and hospitals, with private companies installing energy efficient lamps, air-conditioning systems and heating equipment at no cost. In return, the companies will receive part of the savings from the lower electricity bills for a designated number of years. For instance, a private company invested £2,000,000 to install a combined heat and power system in the Royal Liverpool hospital, providing energy savings estimated at £500,000 a year.[18]

Such initiatives characterise new public administrations in the way they are learning to work with the private sector to deliver public goods and economic efficiencies. It is this dynamic that needs to be transferred to social approaches to developing and managing commercial property. How social approaches actually differ from current methods is not really clear, but it is envisaged that in the very least it would entail thoughtful design aimed at encouraging social engagement, limiting exclusion, more extensive disclosure, and the screening out of unethical influences. What is unhelpful though is the expanding discourse of social responsibility, which may be drawing

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[17] Morten Bøås (1998) 'Governance as Multilateral Development Bank Policy: The Cases of the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank', *European Journal of Development Research* 10:2,, p.120.
[18] Smith, Whitelegg, & Williams, (1998), p.218-9.

attention to the need for more accountable business practices, but is adding to the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the terms being used. We need to take a closer look at what discourse actually is and how it is constructed to understand why this is the case.

Social Responsibility Discourse

Language helps to build reality by making what we see meaningful. However, both language and meaning (linguistics) is shaped by the context in which it is created. And discourse is understood as this wider view of language, or more specifically it is the concurrence of linguistics and context.[19] This understanding by implication denies a uniform or universal meaning of chosen language and terms of expression, suggesting that unhinged networks of social relations potentially contrive various meanings.[20] In this view, particular interest groups attribute distinctive meanings to language, thereby constructing discursive formations.

And it is the coexistence of competing discursive formations that explain different understandings of specific terms. For instance, 'common good', 'efficiency', and 'accountability', which are ideas central to claims of social responsibility, are inescapably ambiguous because they are represented differently by various social formations. For example, corporations generally have a vastly different take on these terms to welfare organizations and many other special interest groups. Paradoxically, this ability to reconfigure ambiguous terms also helps to explain their widespread appeal, simply because the context is diminished in their usage, rendering the various concepts integral to the language less confronting.

The many terms of social responsibility discourse don't need introducing. They are buzzwords that punctuate news reports and attract a great deal of attention from academia. Notions such as sustainable development, corporate governance, transparency and benchmarking have fuelled a revolution in management studies, and are undoubtedly impacting positively on practices. Space prevents us from discussing each term individually, but common threads can be teased out of the discourse that can help us understand it better, with a view to more substantive outcomes from its deployment.

For instance, a prominent aspect of the new social responsibility discourse that has progressively emerged in the last decade or so is that it seeks to differentiate between good and bad self-interested behaviour. 'Bad self-interest' is characterised by unscrupulous business transactions that prioritise personal gain at an obvious public cost. Examples include bribery, patronage, nepotism and many other forms of corruption. 'Good self-interest' on the other hand is linked to outcomes that arguably have a greater common good, and importantly imply efficient economic practise. It is this aspect that appeals so strongly to common sense, making it all the more powerful.[21]

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[19] See Michel Foucault (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Tavistock: London).

[20] Pierre Bourdieu (1985) 'The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and of Field', *Sociocriticism* 2:2, pp.11-24.

[21] Pierre Bourdieu (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power* (Polity Press: Cambridge); Mark Beeson and Ann Firth (1998) 'Neoliberalism as a political rationality: Australian public policy since the 1980s', *Journal of Sociology*, 34:3, p.229.

Related to this, is a need to unpack the popular democratic assumptions that are associated with social responsibility, but which leaves much unsaid about specific social concerns and the disparate forms that open democratic practice can take. And secondly, social responsibility discourse further implies the functioning of relatively autonomous management networks and the devolvement of authority. These new expressions of public, horizontal and delegated decision-making arrangements are likely to resist central guidance and thereby complicate cohesive action.[22] And this resistance is only increased by the depoliticising of bargaining processes as a result of self-regulation, meaning that internal cohesion is gained at the expense of compliance to wider networks of co-operation.

While these observations about social responsibility discourse do not relate specifically to public administration, they point to the insulation of management processes against social struggle. And this is antithetical to any sensible interpretation of social responsibility. The argument being put here is that because social responsibility discourse is so effective, it is worth redeeming. It recognises that this new language largely characterises that which is acceptable in the modern business culture, but is calling for measures to make this discourse of accountability, more accountable to itself.

Many strategies could be thought up to achieve this aim, but in maintaining a focus on city buildings, this paper suggests two ways that this could be done. One way is through the development of a regulative social building metrics rating system that proceeds from the successful platform established by environmental rating schemes such as the ABGRS. The paper explores this proposal in more detail in the final section.[23] A second pathway is leading by example. It is true that an individual firm might accumulate a degree of kudos for initiating social reporting on their premises, which may help develop their business niche.[24] This may have particular appeal for developers, architectural firms and engineers. However, even if many businesses in the construction industry were to embark down this path, it is suggested that this would still be insufficient to encourage the vast majority of related businesses that are unlikely to enjoy financial rewards from social building accounting.

A much greater influence is required. What is needed is for the public sector *en masse* to pursue a measurable social responsibility with respect to the buildings it constructs, manages and uses. Doing this would result in a number of benefits. Most obviously it would establish the public service as leader in the field of social responsibility in regard to buildings. This is important because social responsibility is likely to be an enduring notion that will continue to inform human organization in a plethora of different ways. It would also send a strong message to the market about the need to re-orient our built environment to achieve a balance between economic, environmental and social considerations in a way that will radicalise present conceptions. In other words, the message would not just be a token appeal for triple bottom line reporting – it takes triple bottom line literally. This is likely to have a flow on effect in terms of improved attitudes to urban lifestyles, changes in consumer

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[22] R.A.W. Rhodes (1997) *Understanding Governance* (Buckingham: Open Uni Press), p.59

[23] See also Philip Kimmet (2003) 'Socially Responsible Commercial Property Entities and the Allocation of Cultural Space', paper presented at the International Association for the Study of Common Property 2nd Pacific Regional Meeting, Brisbane, September 7-9. Available at the Australian Property Council website.

[24] For example *The Body Shop* has developed a strong reputation in social reporting in relation to personal, as distinct from building, indicators.

habits along more sustainable lines, and may even encourage a re-assessment of social sustainability across all sectors of business and society.

Because the 'social development model' is yet to be forged, there are several trajectories that future CBD construction and management could take. This in itself creates significant opportunities for the managers of publicly owned property portfolios to send clear messages to the commercial sector. The big message of course is that social responsibility is not negotiable, it shouldn't be explained away as a value system, nor be reported by self-indulgent qualitative statements. A socially responsible public administration needs to showcase an unambiguously socially responsible property portfolio. And there is no better method of doing this than finding ways of quantifying, measuring and reporting appropriate performance indicators. Looking at this in more detail is the subject of the final section.

Evaluating Social Responsibility

Since the late 1980s, perhaps no other socially responsible buzzword has been more widely discussed in public sector management debates than performance indicators.[25] In short this is the measuring of outcomes in quantitative terms, although under some circumstances, many of which relate to socially and politically-based processes, qualitative data is assessed. The problem then becomes how to express qualitative, "non-quantifiable" or "intangible" data in financial terms that contributes to current methods of economically-based decision making. As a risk assessment exercise, this involves scenario building and the measurement of possible secondary consequences.[26] However, as benchmarking texts emphasise, the underlying processes that produce the data are more important than the data gathering exercises themselves.[27] In the context of social responsibility, this simply means systematic attention to social detail.

The important question here then is not so much what constitutes useful social responsibility data, but exploring the various social aspects of buildings to determine what best practice actually means. This will help us to think up ideas to improve the way humans interact with the built environment. And it leads us to our first assertion that a fundamental tenet of a socially responsible commercial property is that its market value should be reflective of its common good attributes. In other words, the higher the value, the more benefits the property should return to the community, or in the context of this paper, the more it should enhance the social function and appeal of the CBD. Clearly this is not presently the case. As Smith and his colleagues quite rightly point out,

> "the value of a modern office building has little to do with the materials and energy used in its construction, but depends heavily on its rent earning capacity. The *real* cost of the development is therefore obscured, but a small number of developers and companies become rich at the long-term expense of the built environment."[28]

[25] David Corbett (1992) *Australian Public Sector Management*, (Allen & Unwin: St Leonards, NSW), p.179.

[26] Adrian Bowden, Malcolm Lane and Julia Martin (2001) *triple Bottom Line Risk Management: Enhancing Profit, Environmental Performance, and Community Benefit,* (John Wiley & Sons: New York), p.31.

[27] See for eg. Johanna Macneil, Jonathon Testi, John Cupples and Malcolm Rimmer (1993) *Benchmarking Australia: Linking Enterprises to World Best Practice*, (Longman: Melbourne), p.19.

[28] Smith, Whitelegg & Williams, (1998), p.194; See also P. Ambrose & R. Colenutt (1975) *The Property Machine* (Penguin: London).

Echoing these sentiments is this statement from an OECD report on *Innovative Policies for Sustainable Urban Development*:

> "A rich society can perhaps afford a highly competitive property sector; but can it afford competition that is based on the wasteful use of resources and on long-term commitments for environmental and social services which are not reflected in the purchase or rental price of property?"[29]

A socially responsible public administration at the very least is obligated to ensure that the social implications of the built environment are not compromised by their development strategies. Bringing social and environmental considerations into the market evaluations of buildings may sound radical, but it is exactly what a literal understanding of triple bottom line reporting calls for.

And this is where a metrics approach to evaluating social responsibility makes such good sense. By using a simple matrix that plots each performance indicator against a star, number or colour-based grade, and adding the sum of the grades and then dividing it by the number of metrics measured, delivers an overall rating. Actually calculating performance against a benchmark is the difficult part, made more complicated by out-sourcing. However, far from relieving owners and managers of their responsibilities, this trend obligates them to clearly spell out performance goals in service contracts. This is very important because it is the working conditions of contractors, tenant employees and others they hire, together with support infrastructure for tenant visitors and customers that are a primary concern of social metrics.[30]

Another important pillar of social indicators relate to society impacts in a broader sense. These benchmarks position the building within its local human environment, while also taking into account the nature and impacts of tenant businesses. Conventional interpretations of social responsibility *vis-à-vis* transparency and disclosure also are surprisingly measurable within the context of commercial buildings.[31]. Without adequate and reliable information, premised on a capacity of the building manager to acquire such information, not only are social provisions compromised, but the ability of management to make decisions concerning efficiency savings, asset replacement and refurbishment for example, is seriously curtailed. Appropriate values and morals should also be evident amongst building occupiers, and finally, but certainly no less significantly, the symbolic acknowledgement of the cultural history and traditional owners of land should also be clearly evident.[32]

Briefly then, evaluating social responsibility is not just about attempts to quantify the social dimensions of buildings, but ensuring that important social benchmarks are appropriately accounted for. This is not merely an exercise in political correctness, but is based on mounting evidence that improved social conditions are linked to increases in productivity, and enhanced psychological and physical well-being.[33] And as more

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[29] Susan Parham and Josef Konvitz, (1996) *Innovative Policies for Sustainable Urban Development: The Ecological City*, (OECD: Paris), p.29.

[30] See the appendix for a list of social metrics that are flagged here for future discussion and research.

[31] Michael Mansley, (2000) *Socially Responsible Investment: A guide for pension funds and institutional investors*, (Monitor Press: Suffolk), p.124.

[32] Kimmet (2003) 'Socially Responsible Commercial Property Entities…'

[33] Judith Heerwagen, (2001) 'Do Green Buildings Enhance the Well Being of Workers?', *Environmental Design & Construction*, available on the World Wide Web posted 30.01.2001,

research in this area comes up with similar findings, evaluating the social responsibility of a building may well become as common-place as plant and equipment audits, or structural safety checks.

Conclusion

It is an enormous challenge to work towards a sustainable built environment, if this is indeed the collective vision for 2020. It demands a comprehensive rethinking of development practices. However, going by past performance, this won't happen. And the reason it hasn't been done, as this paper has argued, is that the nature and pre-eminence of the market simply doesn't make room for it. And that's why it's a waste of time to issue yet another call for sustainable development, never mind a socially responsible development along lines that haven't even been adequately debated in the academic literature. What we can do though is kick off this much needed debate, and then pursue strategies such as the one outlined here – encouraging public administration to remove the shackles of the market and start objectively measuring social responsibility as it relates to the built and human environment it manages.

The social responsibility of public administration is not to efficiently manage the public purse alone. It must balance this task with protecting the social and environmental interests of society. And this requires more than the lip service of adopting buzzwords that emerge increasingly from the market place. It calls for demonstrating this discourse in bricks and mortar, and in systematic process, which potentially will benchmark a whole new development paradigm. And its not that public administration has to start from scratch. The environmental rating schemes are showing the way. These schemes just have to be broadened to include social criteria, and applied more extensively throughout the built environment, rather than focussing only on new constructions.[34]

The discussion here confirms the prediction proffered in the abstract – at our present rate the discourse of social responsibility will have no impact on our built city centres by 2020. However, if public administrators learn how to demonstrate social responsibility by turning buildings in the CBD under their control into exemplars of social building benchmarks, anything is possible. Imagine a CBD that makes *you* feel important rather than just your money, has a smaller 'social' footprint, and believe it or not, is even more productive. As one popular musician of the 60s and 70s sang – it's easy if you try!

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www.edcmag.com/CDA/ArticleInformation/coverstory/BNPCoverStoryItem/0,4118,19794,00.html

[34] The National Australian Buildings Environmental Rating System (NABERS) is designed to rate both new and existing buildings. The Draft Final Version, produced by Robert Vale, Brenda Vale and Roger Fay, dated December 14, 2001, is available on the internet.

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Appendix

A list of social metrics that measure the social responsibility evident in a building and its management:

- Is there adequate disclosure of health and safety records, number and nature of accidents, complaints, and building related illnesses/absenteeism, as well as the existence and quality of joint health and safety committees comprising building management and worker/tenant representatives?;

- Is there transparency of marketing and management negotiations between tenants, agents and owners (including naming rights), and is there a regard to the socially responsible nature of tenant businesses?;

- Is there adequate insurance cover for workers, maintenance crews, and the general public?;

- Is there disclosure of management details, including staff, structure, salaries, contract agreements, audits?;

- Is there sufficient human rights training for security personnel, ect.?;

- What is the level of training and awareness optimising the use of building features?;

- Is there detailed information regarding provision and monitoring of equal opportunity features/amenities?;

- What provision has been made of facilities/amenities/lobby space/furniture for the public?;

- What are the policies for managing stakeholder interests/impacts in local precinct, pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and visiting public; does vehicle access limit conflict points with pedestrians, and is parking sufficient and appropriate?;

- Does the building promote internal walking and walking to and from other places in the locality, and does the building provide public access and connections to designated open space, natural features, public parks, greenways, plazas or malls?;

- Does the building 'celebrate', 'fully utilize', 'contribute' and 'appropriate' street frontage? (does it 'connect' with the social streetscape?);

- Are there sufficient common areas, and do they enhance the utility and appeal of the building?;

- Are common areas, parking and pedestrian space used efficiently and creatively, allowing diverse uses with non-competitive demands?; and

- Does the building maintain or acknowledge prior structure, use, economy, ownership, occupation, story or history, sensitively and effectively, and thereby protects, rediscovers or rekindles cultural values?.