

Darling Harbour is often cited as a waterfront success story. Indeed the project has been successful in many respects; visitor numbers, for example, are in the order of fifteen million people *The New Waterfront: A world-wide urban success story* (Breen and Rigby, 1996). However, when viewed within the wider urban context, it is an example of a major project failing to integrate itself into the fabric of the city. Conceived in the early 1980s, as one of a number of bicentennial projects for 1988, Darling Harbour is a 134-acre harbor redevelopment adjacent to the central business district of Sydney. The project was one of several around the world developed on the Baltimore Harborside model and was made possible by State Government ownership of most of the land. Developed with a mix of public and private sector funding, the intention was to make a “place for people” by converting an obsolete railway yard, crossed by overhead motorways, into a center for cultural, educational and recreational activity.

Given the need to develop the project for Sydney’s bicentennial in 1988, a development corporation was established to hasten the construction of the project. The Darling Harbour Authority, established to facilitate this goal, was both the landowner and consent authority for the development. To fast-track the development schedule, the Authority was granted exemption from development control legislation involving numerous State and Local Government agencies.

The project includes the Sydney Convention, Entertainment and Exhibition Centers, museums including the Australian Maritime Museum, theaters, the Harbourside Shopping Center, the Chinese Garden, the Sydney Aquarium, Cockle Bay Restaurant and entertainment complex and a wide range of bars, hotels and restaurants. The limited success of the project is due to its capacity to accommodate large footprint facilities within close proximity to the center of the city. One wonders why such facilities need to be all in one place; nevertheless the project was able to supply needed large indoor venues. Further, success is gained through the provision of much-needed public open space adjacent to the waterfront in close proximity to a variety of facilities and other adjacent developments, high-density housing and urban parks.

2.12 View from Sydney’s Darling Harbour toward city.

