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City bid to make best use of space

Urban design specialists help council with options

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LOVE strolling along the Cairns Esplanade or sitting under the trees on Shields St?

A James Cook University researcher is getting to the bottom of why people love these urban spaces in order to help Cairns Regional Council develop more areas that people will want to visit and spend time in.

JCU urban design lecturer Dr Silvia Tavares is studying the microclimates of the city centre, exploring how they affect locals' daily lives.

A microclimate includes factors such as temperature, sun and shade, that affect a small area, which could be a courtyard, street block or square.

Dr Tavares, who has also studied climate and urban design in New Zealand, said the Cairns Esplanade – in particular the Lagoon – was a perfect example of integrating a microclimate with urban living.

"It's a good response to the local culture and to the local economy," she said.

"It is certainly making the most of the climate, with a different perspective, for tourists

and locals."

The former Brazilian lecturer also raved about the council's recent redevelopment of Shields St, which has added more seating areas and shade in the middle of the busy city centre.

However, she warned that expanding the same concept throughout Cairns' city centre could undo all of this good work.

"Let's say you have a party, and it's going very well, but then your neighbour asks whether he can borrow 30 of your guests," she said.

"It just kills the party.

"It's the same thing that happens with streets. Shields St might be working very well, but this could be enough for pedestrians.

"The moment you put three more of these streets, you not only kill this street, you create very unsuccessful places."

She said simple tweaks such as adding more shade or even opening an area up to more sunshine and airflow could make a major difference in a tropical urban environment.

Dr Tavares and Associate

Professor Lisa Law will be surveying Cairns residents and asking how they form connections to locations and what values that place on public areas and space.

They will use the study findings next year to help recommend ways the council can build more sustainable and vibrant spaces in the city centre to boost the local economy in the process.

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“IT IS CERTAINLY MAKING THE MOST OF THE CLIMATE, WITH A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, FOR TOURISTS AND LOCALS

DR SILVIA TAVARES

EXTRAORDINARY QUEENSLANDERS

Some homes in Queensland show that, while we might not know it, we already design with climate in mind.

Dr Silvia Tavares says the

iconic Queenslander home is a design that brings people and climate together in a unique way.

According to the Queensland Museum, the Queenslander tradition originated with rough timber huts of early settlement and developed into the multi-gabled bungalows of the 1930s. Buildings continued until, and were adapted after, World War II, leading to contemporary environmentally sustainable timber houses.

The most typical early 20th century Queenslander house is characterised by: timber construction with a corrugated iron roof, highest on timber stumps, single-skin cladding for partitions and sometimes external walls, verandas front and/or back and sometimes the sides, decorative features to screen the sun or ventilate the interior and a garden setting with a picket fence, palm trees and tropical fruit trees.



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EYE FOR DETAIL: JCU urban designer and researcher Dr Silvia Tavares enjoys the newly developed public space in Shields St. Picture: STEWART McLEAN

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