THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING GOLD COAST

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Gold Coast on the eastern coast of Australia is famous for its sun and surf and viewed mostly as a resort town. Its glittering image as a vacation destination with long stretches of beaches, gold lame bikini clad meter maids, tanned surfers, and skyline of skyscrapers dominates the discussions about the city. Wise (2006, 185) sums up the general perception of the Gold Coast accurately when she says:

> "The city continues to be characterized in the national media as a 'cultural desert'. Its neighbour, the state capital Brisbane, is represented as having 'matured' into a 'metropolitan centre' with a 'vital arts life' and definable 'cultural precincts', like Sydney and Melbourne. But in the Australian cultural imaginary the Gold Coast's total identification with leisure, popular cultural excess and dispersion is taken to signify a sort of perpetual adolescence. There is no expectation that it will 'grow up' into 'a real city' where 'culture' occurs".

If we look at the other side of the coin we discover one of the fastest growing cities in Australia, already far larger than some of the state capitals with half a million people, the largest non-metro city, the largest urban area outside the major state capital cities and home to the second most populous Local Government Area (LGA) in Australia. We argue that a real city with two universities, an international airport, national sports teams, regional hospitals and many other amenities is emerging from behind this facade; a city that aspires to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

As Grifffin (1998, 286) notes "Gold Coast isn't an easily definable place with a singular identity." The city has been variously described as "a sunny place for shady people" (Jones 1986, 1), "sin city" (by Brisbane Sunday Mail, Griffin 1998), "the most postmodern of all Australian cities" (by Allom Lovell Architects Griffin 1998), "an urban setting that has already achieved many of the conditions towards which post-industrial urban centres are moving" (Holmes 2001, 179), "the most heterogeneous region in Australia" (McRobbie 1991, vi), a city experiencing "adolescence" (Burton 2009, 1) and a resort centre that is currently evolving into a city (Edwards et al., 2007). Stimson and Minnery (1998,196) suggest that the Gold Coast presents at least four different images to the world: "a city of leisure; a city of enterprise; a city of tourism; and a city in its own right within the South East Queensland `sun-belt' growth metropolis".

With the aim of contributing to the literature on Australia's settlement system by focusing on large scale urbanisation outside of the capital cities this paper provides an in-depth look at Australia's sixth largest city, often taken too lightly. The purpose of the paper is two-fold: to question the accuracy of some widely held beliefs about the Gold Coast that treat it solely as a resort town and attempt to determine whether the nature of urbanisation on the Gold Coast is different. In order to illustrate in what ways the Gold Coast is similar to and different than other major cities in Australia, the paper describes its historical development, the nature of its built environment, social and cultural activities, population growth and demographic structure, and economic indicators. In doing this at times it contrasts Gold Coast with capital cities, the City of Sunshine Coast, the state of Queensland and Australia.

HISTORY

The first settlements on the Gold Coast region were agricultural settlements (see Figure 1). Coolangatta, Tweed Heads and Southport were the major towns established in the nineteenth century as service towns for sugar, timber and dairy production (Mullins 1984). The first railway line from Brisbane to Southport was completed in 1889 to support the farming industry and supported the development of a holiday centre. With the extension of the railway to West Burleigh in 1901 and Coolangatta-Tweed Heads in 1903, what was then called the "South Coast" in reference to Brisbane, started developing as a regional tourism destination (Longhurst 1995). Gold Coast was connected to the southern states directly by rail in 1930 but throughout the 1940s and 1950s most of its visitors were from South East Queensland (SEQ) (Prideaux 2004). From the mid 1930s automobiles became popular in travelling to the Gold Coast.

The introduction of passenger air services in 1947 and direct flights from Sydney to Coolangatta in 1956 made the city easily accessible to the national market (Prideaux 2004). Following these developments large-scale sale of coastal building plots started in 1952 (Hofmeister 1988). Improvement in interstate motorways

and rising car ownership changed the mode of travel and resulted in the closing of the rail lines in 1964 (Longhurst 1995). In the following decades the attractions and services offered developed and diversified and direct airline connections from Brisbane to Europe and Asia enabled the city to become an international tourism destination by mid 1980s. Table 1 presents a historical timeline of the Gold Coast and lists major events in the timeline in its development from a local resort to an international destination.

Figure 1: Gold Coast Region map (Source: Gold Coast City Council [GCCC] 2011).

Administratively, the current city developed from amalgamation of a coastal region of string of separate towns such as Labrador, Southport, Surfers Paradise, Burleigh Heads, Coolangatta as well as inland settlements such as Nerang and Mudgeeraba. The Nerang Shire was the original name given to the larger southern South East Queensland local government area. This region covered an area bounded by New South Wales in the south, the Pacific Ocean to the east, Tambourine Shire to the West and Coomera and Beenleigh to the north. In 1934 the Nerang Shire lost Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach, which went on to became the City of Gold Coast. In 1948 Coolangatta, Southport and the part of Moreton Shire that was in between were amalgamated to form the Town of the South Coast (Mullins 1984). In 1949 the Nerang Shire was incorporated, through amalgamation, with Coomera and Beenleigh Shires, and this larger local government area was named the Albert Shire. The township of Nerang became the administrative centre for the Albert Shire. In 1958 the South Coast town council adopted the informal name used in the local and national media "Gold Coast". In 1959 Gold Coast City was created from an amalgamation of several seaside towns (Mullins 1979). In March 1995, Albert Shire was amalgamated with the City of Gold Coast to form a "super city" (Stimson and Minnery 1998, 199) making the GCCC the second most populous LGA in Australia after Brisbane. Rail link to Brisbane was restored in 1997 (Nightingale 2006) however, rather than following the coast as its predecessor this time it followed in a line parallel to the Pacific Motorway inland.

Table 1: Historical Timeline

2000 BC	Indigenous people from the Yugambeh language group arrived in the area now known as the Gold Coast
1770	Captain Cook sighted the Gold Coast and chartered prominent coastal features
1842	First detailed survey map of the Gold Coast area Timber getting commences providing building products for the growing colony of Brisbane
1859	Queensland declared a separate self governing colony
1860s	Timber now a prosperous industry on the Gold Coast
1869	Hotelier Tom Hanlon names Southport after the seaside resort in Lancashire UK
1870	Cobb and Co commences coach transport to Nerang. The area becomes a popular seaside haven and holiday area for the wealthy.
1874-75	First land sales by auction offered at Nerang
1876	First house built at Southport Blacksmith's opened at Southport
1878-9	Post office, hotel, grocery store open at Southport
1884	Governor of Queensland (Sir Anthony Musgrave) makes his summer residence at Southport. The area becomes known as a place for the wealthy to establish holiday homes.
1889	Railway reaches Southport, making it accessible to more people from Brisbane.
1901	Railway extended to West Burleigh
1903	Railway extended to Coolangatta-Tweed Head
1905	First guesthouse at southern end of the Gold Coast at Greenmount, Coolangatta.
1915	First block of land with ocean frontage at Elston subdivided and auctioned
1918	Southport becomes a municipality
1925	Bridge over the Nerang River links Southport to Elston
1933	Town of Elston renamed Surfers Paradise after the hotel of the same name
1936	Coolangatta airport opens
1947	Regular passenger air services begin
1948	Coolangatta, Southport and the part of Moreton Shire merge to form the Town of South Coast
1956	Direct flights from Sydney to Coolangatta commence
1958	Town of South Coast changes name to Town of Gold Coast
1959	Town of Gold Coast proclaims itself a city
1964	Rail line from Brisbane closed
1966	Marineland opens, the Gold Coast's first major theme park
1972	Ski Land of Australia (later redeveloped as SeaWorld)
1981	Australia's first theme park, Dreamworld, opens
1987	Sheraton Mirage Resort established, the first of a number of major international integrated resort developments
1990	First International Charter flights commence
1990s	Major theme parks open – Warner Bros Movie World, Wet and Wild, SeaWorld
1995	Gold Coast City and part of Albert Shire merged to form the GCCC
1997	Rail link from Brisbane to Robina restored
2009	Railway extended to Varsity Lakes

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Growth of the Gold Coast was undoubtedly developmentally driven. Among the reasons for Gold Coast's rapid growth are the pro development attitude of Queensland government (Morris 2004) and populist local politics based upon a pro growth coalition of classes in the city (Mullins 1979; 1984). Mullins (1984) argues that the Gold Coast's rapid development occurred through the entrepreneurial initiatives of the local petty bourgeoisie and small local capitalists.

History of Development

Since European settlement, the Gold Coast City has grown from a series of small towns to become the sixth largest Australian city and Australia's fourth most visited destination for international leisure visitors; after Sydney, Melbourne and Tropical North Queensland (Tourism Research Australia 2008a; 2008b). From the 1930s domestic tourism in Australia was stimulated by the prosperity of a modernising economy and a

growing cultural attachment to the outdoors and the beach in particular. The Gold Coast benefited from these trends which bolstered land speculation in the area. A group of developers with shady reputations, who became known as the 'white shoe brigade' (Jones 1986; Forbes and Spearritt 2003), tapped into Australia's post-war prosperity feeding a desire for every Australian to have a holiday house by the beach. This trend towards second homeownership stimulated the development of construction industries and property services and secured the Gold Coast's property boom. By the end of the 1959 financial year the value of Gold Coast building approvals was an Australian record (Anonymous 1959) and the City has held this position almost consistently throughout the latter part of the twentieth century.

The image of the Gold Coast began to change dramatically after 1950. Up until then it had been 'Brisbane's traditional seaside resort' (McRobbie 1984, 81). There was nothing fancy or flash about the place, it was an affordable place for the people of Brisbane to escape to (Davidson and Spearritt 2000). The beaches offered adequate camping grounds and many of the holidaymakers participated in communal games and festivities (Condon 2003). However, by the early 1950s the Brisbane Courier Mail was reporting new development on the Gold Coast to be 'tawdry, vulgar, clip joint, millionaire's mile, garish, brassy and Americanised' (McRobbie 1982). This image of the Gold Coast was fuelled, in part, by the extended opening hours of shops, which were restricted elsewhere in the State. In addition, cinemas on the Gold Coast were open on Sunday nights, a practice that was not permitted in other major cities in Australia (McRobbie 1982). Bikini clad meter maids, surfing legends and 'pyjama parties' held at a local hotel helped to consolidate the Gold Coast's saucy reputation (McRobbie 1984; Davidson and Spearritt 2000). According to the editor of a Special Edition of *Architecture Australia* (Editorial 1959, 47) these practices contributed to "a chaos of the worst type of commercialisation … [and] … a wild jungle of indecorum."

In addition to the image of the Gold Coast as being immoral, the changes to the physical form of the city were rapid and significant. Many of the timber and iron holiday or second homes built along the coast were being demolished and replaced with motels, which soon thereafter were demolished and replaced by the emerging high rise architectural typology. Ann Green (1982), a local Gold Coast resident at the time, writes of this phenomenon: "[American style motel developments] are peppering our already littered highways with neon-lighted promises of tea-bag accommodation and the Coast's wonderful old guest houses went into gradual decline, and with them the last traces of Australian individuality". The motel phase was soon overtaken by the growing popularity of apartment accommodation. The new modern 'American' serviced apartments proved so popular that many other holiday accommodation types, including the rapidly dated motel accommodation, were left vacant for much of the year (McRobbie 1984; Burchill 2005). This change of use proved significant in years to come. As land on the coastal strip became scarce and property prices soared, these now humble holiday units, homes mostly to elderly pensioners, became the focus of the economic growth machine; fodder for entrepreneurs and developers.

During the 1960s and 70s there were no town planning schemes in place to deal effectively with the extent and pace of growth in the Albert Shire. Development approval was gained, for the most part, by obtaining a 'single and simple' development permit (Burchill 2005) regardless of infrastructure issues such as adequate water supply, sewage disposal or roads. Consequently, new residential estates flourished in the Nerang area; together with a boom in the commercial, service and light industries. During the 1970-80s the then Gold Coast City experienced unprecedented growth. Because of the size of the City, land was at a premium and residential development needed to take place outside of the City's jurisdiction. The Albert Shire's Nerang township and environs, and in particular the Nerang River floodplains, were perfectly located to accommodate the ever expanding development push from the Gold Coast City. The 1974 floods put a temporary stop to development along the Nerang River floodplains and one of the targeted development areas was the Nerang township itself. Geoff Burchill (2005, 218) describes this period of growth and the effects it had on the Nerang township:

> "Fried egg shopping centres were built on both sides of the river. In less than 10 years, Nerang changed from being a genuine country small town with a saddler, a feed store and a pet vet that served hinterland farmers and rural residents".

By the 1980s the opening of the international airport, high rise hotels and residential towers and the development of canal estates stretching the length of the coast consolidated the Gold Coast as a landscape of consumption (Stimson and Minnery 1998). The opening up of the Gold Coast to foreign visitors also stimulated the rise of unparalleled international investment in the city's property sector. By the 1990s the city had established itself as "simultaneously brash, trendy, sophisticated, relaxed, overdeveloped and over urbanised" (Stimson et al. 1996).

Structure of Development

Mullins (1984) argues that hedonism, which is the locus of resort tourism, fuelled the growth of the Gold Coast city and created a unique built environment that does not resemble other Australian cities. He argues that the Gold Coast is unique with its condominiums, canal estates, shops, restaurants, amusement centres and related infrastructure. He argues that mass tourism resulted in a spatial organisation that encourages and promotes consumption.

Goad (1997) describes the Gold Coast urbanisation as a series of linear strips or bands that run parallel to the coast: the beach strip, the high-rise tower/residential coastal strip, the highway strip, the canal estates, the suburbs and the semi-rural hinterland. One of the reasons Gold Coast is not perceived as a city is its lack of a central business district, "there is no radial hub, only parallel zones that are separated by their function - the coastal tourist strip, a belt for the suburban service class, and the 'alternative' lifestyles' and tourism of the hinterland behind this" (Holmes 2006, 112). In contrast to cities with a typical single dominant business centre it is a multi-precinct city with a distinctive urban form. It is strongly linear with a close alignment to its 57 km coastline, the paralleling North- South oriented Pacific Motorway and the hinterland mountain ranges (GCCC 2005). It covers an area of 1333.8 km^2 less than 25% of which is urban. Physically it has an area that has the "look" of a downtown, with concentration of high rises. However, in contrast to many places with a similar look, the high rises in the Gold Coast are residential. The uses typically found in downtowns such as government, law, cultural institutions are dispersed outside the dominant skyline of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach.

The City of Gold Coast may look similar to other cities at first sight, but for those who are not familiar with the image it might come as a shock with the unexpectedness of it from a place considered a resort town of only half a million people. "Gold Coast has 212 apartment blocks over twelve storeys high, Brisbane has fewer than thirty" (Spearritt 2006, 61) However this mini-Manhattan houses not offices but residences and holiday rentals. Gold Coast has the distinction to host the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere: the 322.5 m (1,058 ft) Q1 tower. When it was completed in 2005 Q1 was also the tallest residential tower in the world (Sunland Group 2006) until the completion of the Torch in Dubai this year (Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat 2011).

Gold Coast contains a greater concentration of theme parks, resort worlds and tourist-oriented shopping centres than anywhere else in Australia with 17 theme parks and 32 shopping malls (Holmes 2006). It outstrips other urban areas in Australia in terms of numbers of retail square meters and car parking spaces (Holmes 2001). According to Holmes (2001, 182) even though the Gold Coast replicates most of the features of large-city urbanisation, it is more distinguishable as a 'pleisure' (pleasure + leisure) landscape because here "the salient features of this postmodern 'kitchscape' are assembled in a display more concentrated than anywhere else in Australia."

Australian Firsts on the Gold Coast

As the Gold Coast has grown as a tourism destination, it also laid claim to 'big things'. First canal estates in Australia were developed on the Gold Coast (approved in 1957) (McRobbie 1991) and today they add to the distinctive physical structure of the city (Figure 2). The city was one of the pioneers of individually saleable strata titled apartments, and home to the first timeshare developments in Australia. Gold Coast is the theme park capital of Australia. Australia's first theme park, Dreamworld, opened in 1981 on the Gold Coast as "Australia's answer to Disneyworld" (Hannigan 1998, 180). Gold Coast also hosts one of Australia's four major casinos (others are in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane) (Hannigan 1998) and Australia's first mechanized water-skiing park Cable-Ski Water Park (Holmes 2001). Australia's first gated community and master-planned resort, Sanctuary Cove, was established in 1986 on the Gold Coast (Coiacetto 2009). The city also is home to Australia's first private university, Bond, founded in 1987.

Global and national events include car racing (which returns $60 million to Queensland economy), the Quick Silver & Roxy Pro Surf Contests, Gold Coast Triathlon and Marathon events, Pan Pacific Masters Games, XXXX Gold Beach Cricket, Conrad Jupiter's Magic Millions Racing Carnival and the Gold Coast Schoolies Week (Gold Coast City Council, 2007b). These characterisations have produced an image of the City that is epitomised by spectacle, hedonistic consumption and competing moralities. As already stated, this image is not new, it began in the early 1950s. Davidson and Spearritt (2000, 146) write that the Gold Coast continues "to offer sun, sand and sex, as it has always done … [but] [t]he marketing ploy of … the 1960s [has] been replaced with an aggressively commercial air, where shops and restaurants and accommodation providers [vie] with each other for market share."

Figure 2: Australia's First Canal Estates (Source: The Courier Mail, 23 December 1957).

DEMOGRAPHY

Population Growth and Demographic Structure

The Gold Coast has grown from a few settlements, which in 1933 had 6,600 (Hofmeister 1988) and in 1961 33,716 people (including Tweed), to become Australia's sixth largest major urban centre with a 2007 population of 583,683 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2008). The LGA had a population of 515,157 in

2007. Throughout 1991-2006 the most prominent growth in Australia outside capital cities was along the coast.

For more than four decades, Gold Coast has been one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, doubling its population between 1954 and 1966, and again between 1966 and 1976, passing 100,000 (Mullins 1979). The city registered the largest population growth among all LGAs in Australia with 74,200 people and an average annual growth rate of 4.8% in the 1991-1996 period during which Queensland was the fastest growing state or territory (ABS 1997). Since then, it has consistently registered second largest growth after Brisbane. Average annual growth rate was 3.6% between 1996 and 2006 (ABS 2007). Table 2 shows that of the ten largest urban areas in the country, the coastal cities of Gold and Sunshine Coasts are the fastest growing.

Table 2: Population Change in Major Australian Cities, 1961-2007 (%) (Data source: ABS 2008)

Ranked Urban Areas	1961-1971	1971-1981	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2007	1961-2007	Percent of national population (2007)
1. Sydney	28.6	14.1	14.6	12.4	5.0	98.5	20.5
2. Melbourne	30.9	8.8	15.9	10.0	9.6	99.0	18.0
3. Brisbane	39.6	18.5	32.0	20.0	14.0	198.8	8.8
4. Perth	67.4	27.8	32.2	17.2	11.6	269.9	7.3
5. Adelaide	43.3	10.6	13.4	4.9	4.5	96.9	5.5
6. Gold Coast-Tweed	**120.2**	**138.8**	**57.6**	**69.9**	**22.9**	**1631.2**	**2.8**
7. Newcastle	68.5	10.7	14.3	10.7	6.3	151.0	2.5
8. Canberra-Queanbeyan	164.8	50.9	33.9	12.3	7.7	547.0	1.8
9. Wollongong	51.1	11.8	10.1	10.1	3.9	112.6	1.3
10. Sunshine Coast*	27.3	164.3	61.6	55.81	23.6	947.1	1.1

* Estimate only

Australian urbanisation is different than other Western societies in the concentration of its population in capital cities. Historically, this has always been less prevalent in Queensland whose population has been much more decentralized (Mullins 1988; Hofmeister 1988). The recent growth of the Gold Coast has been challenging the primacy of the state capital Brisbane even more compared to other capital cities. In fact, the city is more populous than of some other state and territory capitals and recently displaced Newcastle as the sixth largest city in Australia.

Figure 3 shows the changes in the rank order of cities and towns in Australia's national urban hierarchy between 1961 and 2007. The figure clearly illustrates the comparatively faster growth of sunbelt cities (marked in red). All of the coastal sunbelt cities (Sunshine Coast, Cairns, Darwin) have been rising in the rankings with the Gold Coast-Tweed Statistical District showing the most remarkable rise from the 18th place in 1961 to the to 6th in 2007. This rise can be explained by a number of factors. Sunbelt migration and the seachange phenomenon underlies this trend (Stimson et al. 1996). Furthermore, except for Darwin, all these cities are located in the fast growing state of Queensland. Gold Coast's growth is consistent with the state wide trends.

Gold Coast is a city of its own right but its significance does not only stem from its role as a large and rapidly growing urban area, but also from being part of a wider conurbation. SEQ is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia and has been so for a long time. Peter Spearritt (2009, 87) calls this conurbation that extends from Noosa to Tweed "the 200 km city". He argues that (88) the economies of the Gold and Sunshine coasts "are no longer simply dependent on holidaymakers and retirees, but have merged into the wider metropolitan economy that now dominates this coastline." At the centre of the conurbation, Brisbane played a crucial role during the early days of the Gold Coast's development by providing tourists and day trippers but the dependence has greatly lessened since then. In 2001 83.3% of the Gold Coast residents worked within the City of Gold Coast, only 7.3% commuted the Brisbane and 5.6% worked outside SEQ (GCCC 2005). In 2010 22% of the overnight visitors were from Brisbane (Tourism Queensland 2011).
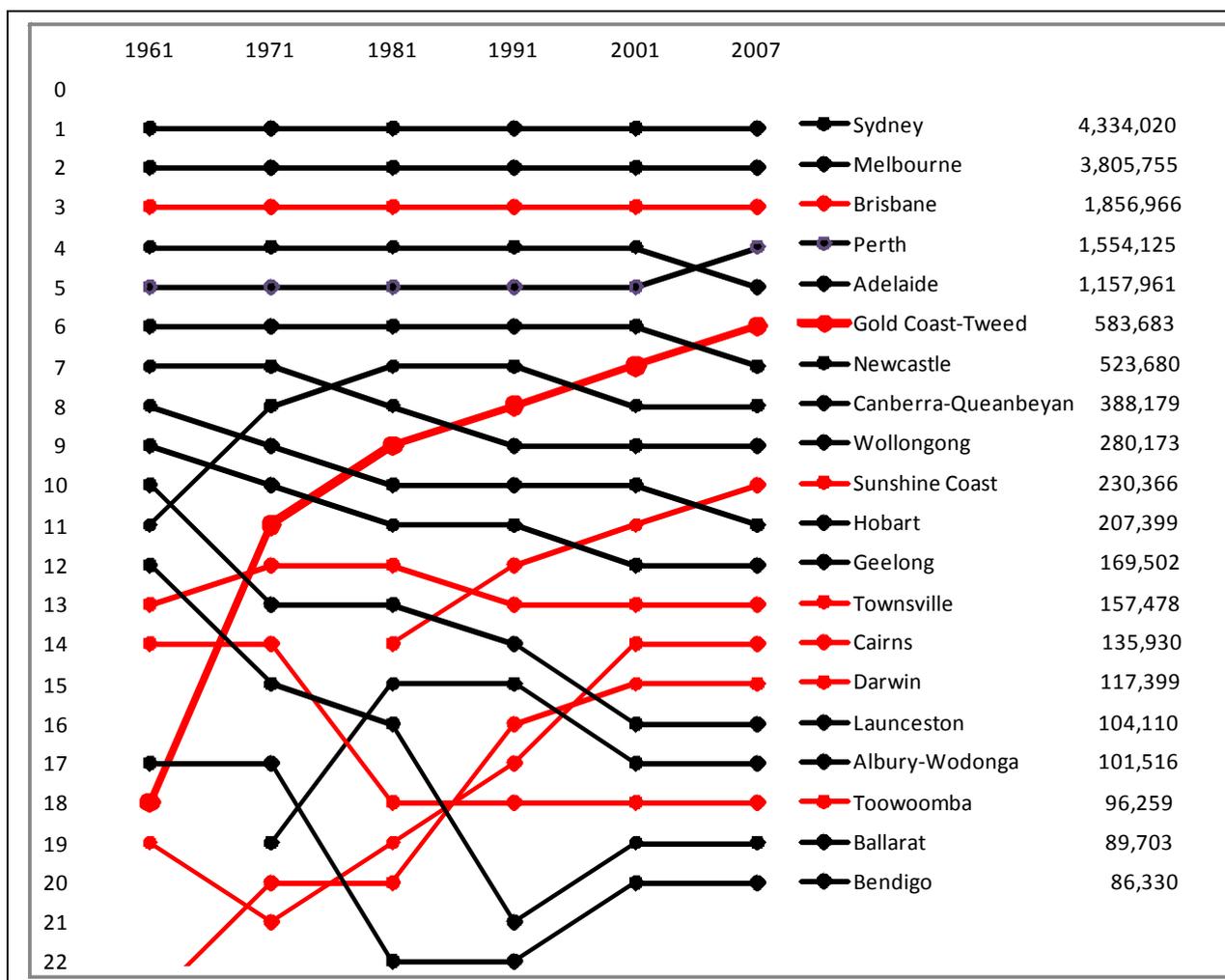
Rank	City	Population
1	Sydney	4,334,020
2	Melbourne	3,805,755
3	Brisbane	1,856,966
4	Perth	1,554,125
5	Adelaide	1,157,961
6	Gold Coast-Tweed	583,683
7	Newcastle	523,680
8	Canberra-Queanbeyan	388,179
9	Wollongong	280,173
10	Sunshine Coast	230,366
11	Hobart	207,399
12	Geelong	169,502
13	Townsville	157,478
14	Cairns	135,930
15	Darwin	117,399
16	Launceston	104,110
17	Albury-Wodonga	101,516
18	Toowoomba	96,259
19	Ballarat	89,703
20	Bendigo	86,330

Figure 3: Changes in the rank of Australia's Twenty Largest Urban Centres, 1961-2007 (Data source: ABS 2008).

Table 3 gives an overview of the demographic structure of the Gold Coast in comparison to the nation, its state and other major urban areas in Australia. The purpose is to evaluate commonly held beliefs such as Gold Coast residents are older, less multicultural, less educated and less likely to stay. The urban areas it is compared to are the capital cities and the Sunshine Coast. Sunshine Coast has been included to provide for a control by being a noncapital high-growth city in the same state. Furthermore, it is the major competitor of Gold Coast in tourism and Gold Coast is usually categorized with the Sunshine Coast as a resort town. The comparison would shed light on whether the Gold Coast is more similar to the capital cities or the resort town.

Gold Coast is below the national and state average in the percent of population aged under 15 years. This proportion is only higher than that of Adelaide. In 1981 26% of the Gold Coast population was aged 55 years or more (Mullins 1984). This has not changed much in the intervening period (26% in 2006 and 25.6% in 2009). However this is only one percent higher than the national average and lower than Hobart, Adelaide and the Sunshine Coast. The commonly held belief that Gold Coast is an older town is not really accurate. In fact Hofmeister (1988, 151) reports that only 14% of residents were 65 years or older which was only 4% more than in Brisbane and concludes that "It was not, as assumed, a great influx of interstate retired people that made for the rapid growth of the Gold Coast." Stimson and Minnery (1998, 212) question "the validity of the popularly held view that `sun-belt' migration to the Gold Coast is dominated by retirees" and report that the Gold Coast migration flows for the 1986-1991 period are characterised by an increasingly more balanced age distribution as well as a relative increase in the proportion of migrants with a degree level qualification and high incomes. Currently population aged 65 or over is less than one percent over the national average and the difference with Brisbane is down to 3%. Clearly, Gold Coast is getting younger with younger people looking for opportunities moving in. Gold Coast is also increasing multicultural. 27.6% of the residents were born overseas, much higher proportion than the national and state average, surpassed only by Sydney,

Melbourne and Perth. Another commonly held belief about the Gold Coast is its having lower than average level of education but in fact the percentage of persons with post school qualifications in the Gold Coast (53.2%) is higher than the national and state levels as well as most of the other cities compared. The ephemeral nature of the population is confirmed however, with the city claiming the highest percentage of persons who lived elsewhere five years ago. It is interesting to note that the Sunshine Coast follows the Gold Coast closely in this indicator.

Table 3: Comparison of Gold Coast Demographic Structure with other Australian Cities*, Queensland and Australia (2009 data unless noted otherwise)

Area	Population	Aged Under 15 (%)	Aged Over 55 (%)	Aged Over 65 (%)	Born overseas (%) (2006)	Population density (persons/km^2)	Persons with post school qualifications of population aged 15 and over (%) (2006)	Internal migration (persons who lived at different address 5 years ago) (%)
Australia	21,955,256	19.1	24.6	13.3	23.8	2.9	52.5	40.3
Queensland	4,425,103	20.1	23.6	12.3	19.2	2.6	50.4	48.9
Gold Coast	**515,157**	**17.9**	**25.6**	**13.9**	**27.6**	**386.2**	**53.2**	**54.7**
Sunshine Coast	323,423	18.8	29.8	16.7	19.3	103.5	52.2	52.9
Sydney	4,504,469	18.8	22.5	12.1	34.4	371.1	52.7	36.1
Melbourne	3,995,537	18.2	23.1	12.6	31.0	519.3	54.2	35.1
Brisbane	2,004,262	19.9	21.7	11.1	23.1	336.9	52.4	46.7
Perth	1,658,992	18.9	22.7	11.8	33.7	308.0	54.7	43.1
Adelaide	1,187,466	17.3	27.0	15.2	25.1	650.0	50.0	35.2
Canberra	351,868	18.4	21.0	10.1	22.9	435.6	61.3	40.9
Greater Hobart	212,019	19.0	26.7	14.5	12.8	156.2	51.5	39.4

* All the urban area statistics are for ABS Statistical Divisions. (Data source: ABS, 2010, National Regional Profiles)

ECONOMY

The Gold Coast is a classic sunbelt city with its economy based on tourism and residential development. Economy of the region has been based on tourism and related construction activities almost from the beginning. The 1910 census indicates that almost 80% of employment in Southport was related to tourism and building industries (Vader and Lang 1980). Construction, retailing and service industries underpin its economy. In 2004-5 service sectors contributed approximately 86% to the region's Gross Regional Product (GRP) while manufacturing and primary industries contributed 9 and 1% respectively (GCCC 2007). In the same period construction and property services together made up for more than one third of the region's GRP with 21.6 and 14.3% respectively (see Table 4). Recognizing the vulnerability in the narrow economic base dependent on the success of tourism and construction industries Gold Coast's Economic Development Strategy 2020 aims to diversify the economic base of the city (GCCC No date [ND]).

Table 4: Industry Contribution to GRP of the Gold Coast Region 2004/5 (GCCC 2007)

Industry Rank	Sector	Value Added ($M)	Percent of GRP
1	Construction	3,443.82	21.59
2	Property Services	2,286.66	14.34
3	Retail Trade	1,167.50	7.32
4	Business Services	1,049.97	6.58
5	Transport and storage	924.02	5.79
6	Health services	640.29	4.01
7	Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	620.50	3.89
8	Cultural services	595.68	3.73
9	Finance and insurance	569.33	3.57
10	Wholesale trade	554.12	3.47
11	Education	517.53	3.24
	Other	3,580.08	22.47
	TOTAL	**15,949.50**	**100**

Urban areas with an economy based on tourism share some characteristics such as low incomes, high unemployment rate, etc. While the proportion of lower paid service sector jobs is still prevalent other commonly held beliefs about the Gold Coast such as a high unemployment rate no longer hold true (see Table 5). Average income is still below national and state average but unemployment rate is below national average as well as that of the metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne and much improved from the 1976-86 when it was 16%, almost double of Brisbane and Sydney (Mullins 1990, 38-40). During the past decade exports increased and unemployment decreased. Over the past five years, approximately 7,600 new jobs were created annually, representing an annual growth rate of 2.7%. The city's Economic Development Strategy aims to create 8,000 jobs per year over the next ten years (GCCC ND). Along with its fast growth rate, number of building approvals in proportion to its population is among the highest in the nation. Number of touristic accommodations in proportion to population is much higher than most of the other cities, but similar to its tourist oriented state and much lower than the resort town of Sunshine Coast.

Table 5: Comparison of Gold Coast Economic Indicators with other Australian Cities*, Queensland and Australia (2009 data unless noted otherwise)

Area	Unemployment rate (%)	Service jobs (trade, service, clerical) (%) (2006)	Average taxable income $ (2008)	Building approvals (total dwelling units) per 1000	Hotel motel serviced apartments (5 or more rooms) per 10,000
Australia	5.0	48.0	53,603	6.06	2.79
Queensland	4.4	49.7	50,591	6.54	3.48
Gold Coast	**4.9**	**54.5**	**48,485**	**8.53**	**3.53**
Sunshine Coast	5.3	52.1	46,236	8.43	5.63
Sydney	5.6	46.9	60,617	3.11	0.97
Melbourne	5.0	48.7	54,813	7.98	0,98
Brisbane	4.0	49.8	52,909	6.31	1.12
Perth	3.7	50.5	59,095	8.38	0.73
Adelaide	5.9	49.7	49,674	6.98	1.09
Canberra	2.9	46.2	59,575	8,17	1.71
Greater Hobart	4.2	50.8	47,926	6.78	3.49

* All the urban area statistics are for ABS Statistical Divisions. (Data source: ABS, 2010, National Regional Profiles)

The Gold Coast attracted almost 11 million visitors in 2010. Of this 60% were domestic day visitors. In 2010 number of day trip visitors to the Gold Coast increased by 6% and overnight visitors by 5% compared to the previous year. Of the total 4,213,000 overnight visitors 19% were international, 43% were interstate and 37% were intrastate (Tourism Queensland 2011). Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta is Australia's fastest growing and 4th busiest international airport (Gold Coast Airport 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper attempted to show that the City of Gold Coast, although unique in the Australian landscape in many ways, is a typical city for its size, not just an overgrown tourist resort. An examination of the city's history shows many first and unique developments. Its rapid growth based on tourism related development adds to its unique attributes. Preliminary results of the demographic and economic analysis indicate that Gold Coast is not solely a resort town marked by low income and education levels, high unemployment rates and larger proportion of elderly residents. Gold Coast has passed the tourism urbanisation stage and is currently evolving into a diverse city of its own right.

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