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Designing to heal

Designing to heal is about cultivating the changes needed in hearts and minds and on the ground to help people recover and communities to renew themselves after disasters. This chapter outlines a way of thinking about urban design and the steps to generating a plan that may be helpful in achieving this goal. These suggestions are based on a scenario where rebuilding in situ is both possible and desirable. However, it is recognised this will not always be the case: for example, sea level rise and increasing frequency of bushfires may require people to retreat from highly vulnerable places. It is hoped the ideas embodied in this book may apply in these circumstances too, but will need careful and critical assessment to establish their relevance on a case-by-case basis.

Who is responsible for 'designing to heal'?

In a sense everyone is. By simply occupying a place we change it; for the most part by just being there we make it safer and more interesting. We do this by adding life and activity to that space and offering passive surveillance that can reassure other people. Taken a step further, when we actively care about a place by installing decorative displays, refreshing tired shopfronts and looking after front gardens, nature strips/verges and adjoining footpath/sidewalks, we improve the context within which other people live and make investments in community. Likewise, choosing street art or displays that are sensitive to the emotional landscape of others can influence how they feel about their surroundings and whether they feel comfortable and welcome there or not.