

## 6 DEEPEN THEMES

The creation of themes is the most abstract activity in the frame creation approach, and the activity that is hardest to grasp by people new to this approach. Yet it is also the step that more than any other defines the depth and quality of the end result. Having a profound understanding of the themes will not only help keep the next steps of the frame creation process on track, it is also a key benefit of the process in itself—we will see in the next chapters that a deeply understood theme will stabilize the core philosophy and identity of an organization, while allowing it great flexibility to cope with the fluidity of its environment. In this way, frame creation contributes to avoiding the chaos of knee-jerk reactions and the stuck quality of the “syndromes” that we saw in chapter 1. But what does this really mean, the “depth” of a theme? As we have seen in the case studies, themes can emerge from combining the riches gleaned from the expanded problem situation, even in a brief workshop session. But those particular themes should be viewed as nothing more than labels to indicate an area of interest that needs to be explored in earnest and at length after the session. Such a systematic examination can be supported by the extensive methodology that can be found in hermeneutic phenomenology, by design-based practices, and by the analysis of the “history of ideas” around a theme. The themes that emerged in the Sydney Opera House case study (case 11) are deep-seated indeed. They are inherent in people’s need to aspire to a higher plane of existence (whether through religion, art, or the experience of nature), lifting us above the cares of our daily lives. There is a deep attraction to places that are out of the ordinary, that symbolize a higher significance, and where one can drink in that experience—albeit temporarily. The Sydney Opera House addresses these themes as a building. Understanding these essential meanings then informs the decisions that the management of the Sydney Opera House takes on the development of the site. Merely preserving the shape of the Opera House as a “museum piece” overlooks its real significance.

## 7 SHARPEN THE FRAMES

It is important to make the frames as sharp and precise as possible. A frame is only effective when it evokes a very clear picture in the mind, and when it does so for all the major stakeholders. Often, honing a frame to convey such a sharp picture can be achieved by combining themes or by combining several frame ideas. It often pays in frame creation to overdo this, and oversharpen the frames: for instance, in the case of the troubled entertainment district (case