

OUT & ABOUT IN PENRITH

Universal Design and Cultural Context:
Accessibility, diversity and recreational space in Penrith

FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Summary of Project

Universal Design principles aim to overcome the marginalization of people with diverse abilities by designing facilities and spaces *physically accessible* to all. But what can be done to ensure *cultural inclusiveness*? This research partnership between Penrith City Council and the University of Western Sydney investigated cultural barriers to public space use experienced by diverse residents of Penrith, and explored stakeholders' interests in design and planning for a range of users. The findings and recommendations aim to directly inform Council's open space planning, with the goal of enhancing community well-being by ensuring more residents and visitors enjoy these local facilities.

Background

Penrith City Council's interest in Universal Design — an approach to design which emphasises 'design for all' rather than special 'disabled access' facilities — emerged from research conducted to explore global innovation in recreation facility design and best practice examples of inclusive outdoor recreation centres associated with the National Centre on Accessibility in the USA. This research subsequently informed the PLANS (Peoples Lifestyles and Needs Study) report which Council adopted in March 2004. The PLANS research had a demographic analysis component that demonstrated the ageing nature of the community. This supported planning the design and development of infrastructure, facilities and services that accommodate the broadest possible spectrum of human ability.

The initiative to explore the potential for a partnership-based Centre of Excellence in Universal Design was recommended as one of the key actions within the report. Preliminary research conducted by Council in February 2005 provided the national and international context to current initiatives in this field and highlighted a need for a co-ordinated approach to promoting Universal Design here in Australia. Council's Disability Access Committee has endorsed this approach.

The project officially titled 'Universal Design and Cultural Context: Accessibility, diversity and recreational space in Penrith', which came to be known under its lay title 'Out and About in Penrith', was funded by co-contributions of cash and in-kind support from PCC and the University of Western Sydney under its Research Partnerships Grant Scheme (total budget \$52,000). Its prehistory included various meetings and collaborations with some members of the research team, as well as work with UWS Design undergraduates. It was launched by the then Mayor of Penrith, Councillor Pat Sheehy, and Professor John Ingleson, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Business and International) at the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation's function centre on May 11, 2007.

The Research Team

Two notable features of the research were the interdisciplinary composition of the UWS team, and the direct involvement of Penrith City Council personnel.

The project was conducted through the Centre for Cultural Research, UWS's innovative hub of applied humanities partnership research, but included researchers from other centres and disciplines to make a highly inter-disciplinary team:

Dr Zoë Sofoulis

Centre for Cultural Research, background in culture, gender, technology; interests in finding solutions to urban problems through a combination of social and technical means. Main roles: project leader, community perceptions research, report writing and editing.

Prof. (Emerita) Helen Armstrong

Centre for Cultural Research; background in landscape architecture and public space in relation to cultural pluralism and migration heritage; interests in site-specific design solutions sensitive to local cultures. Main roles: designed creative mapping kits (with a community artist), conducted mapping workshops and community discussion groups, produced Guide to Creative Mapping, wrote Chapter 3.

Assoc. Prof. Michael Bounds

Urban Research Centre; urban sociologist with background in public housing, urban development and cultural change; interests in power relations and practicalities in open space planning. Main roles: conducted and reported on the Gatekeepers Study; wrote most of Chapter 5.

Dr Abby Mellick Lopes

School of Engineering; background in design and cultural theory, design for sustainability; interests tactile and experiential aspects of design research, links between sustainable and universal design. Main roles: on-site observations of Penrith Parks organised and conducted Playvan research, co-conducted creative mapping workshop with UWS students, contributed to report, especially Chapter 2.

Ms. Tara Andrews

School of Engineering, background in industrial design and sustainable design and supervision of students to develop universally accessible park furniture (with PCC); interests in participatory social innovation approach to climate change adaptation. Main roles: on-site observations of Penrith Parks, researched other Western Sydney Councils, helped conduct discussion groups and mapping workshops, contributed to report, especially Chapters 2, 5, plus formatting.

Additional personnel on the project were:

Ms. Jude Twaddell

Project Officer. Main roles were administratively servicing the team, liaison with PCC personnel and recruiting others in the community; arranged community perceptions discussion groups and other research activities, produced the report bibliography.

Ms. Karen James

Researcher. Researched and drafted Annotated Sources on Universal Design and Cultural Context.

Mr. Nicholas Hobbs

Community Artist. Collaborated with Prof. Armstrong to design versions of creative community mapping kits and run Children's Workshop.

Penrith City Council

Involvement from Penrith City Council was integral to the project. Firstly, the Recreation and Cultural Facilities Planner, **Mr. Grant Collins**, contributed information, ideas, publications and other resources to the research, and he and the City Marketing Supervisor, **Mr. Paul Page**, attended and contributed to most of the project meetings. Secondly, as part of the Community Perceptions and Creative Mapping research processes, a number of other Penrith City Council employees from all levels of the organisation contributed via meetings, informal discussions, interviews, participation in discussion groups, and liaison with other Council and community workers, to help forward the project and facilitate community consultations (see Acknowledgements). Thirdly, selected senior and middle-level personnel in PCC working on various aspects of open space design and planning were themselves research subjects in the Gatekeepers Study. This level of partnership and direct engagement has, we believe, resulted in a project and a report that speak clearly to Council's interests and concerns, whilst still maintaining the UWS research team's independent views on those matters.

Research Questions and Methods

The research started with questions about the **knowledge base** supporting the application of Universal Design, issues of **cultural complexity** in open space planning, and the **practical concerns** of planners and businesses, as detailed below.

1. What is the **knowledge base** supporting the application of Universal Design as a local government strategic planning tool in the context of cultural diversity?

This question was researched in three main ways:

- Review of the literature, partly through the **Annotated Sources** (James and CCR, 2008) which built upon earlier bibliographic research on Universal Design (James and PCC, 2005) and focussed on cultural and social aspects of universal design, especially in relation to open space and recreational design and planning in multicultural contexts. Additionally, the research team added relevant sources.
- **Site observations** of Penrith parks were conducted to gain a sense of their amenity, accessibility and usability as an indicator of the principles and priorities of existing open space design.
- The **Gatekeepers Study** entailed interviews with local government designers and planners (the 'gatekeepers') in Penrith City Council; some questions directly probed their knowledge of design principles, including the application of Universal Design. That study was supplemented by three interviews with planners from other Western Sydney councils, two in areas of high cultural diversity.

Key points from the reviewed literature are presented in Chapter 1 'The Concepts.' Selected site observations are presented mainly in Chapter 2 'Penrith Parks: A Snapshot', while findings from the Gatekeepers Study are reported and discussed in Chapter 5.

2. What are the issues related to **cultural complexity** when planning and designing for accessibility to public and outdoor recreational open space within the Penrith LGA?

Research on this question proceeded on multiple fronts and occupied much team time and project resources. A wealth of data was generated by various means in two parts of the study:

- **Creative Mapping workshops** involved artistic, photographic, tactile and non-verbal processes aimed at eliciting creative expressions of subtle aspects of participants' relationships to open space. With some consultation beforehand, workshops were designed for a variety of different age and ethnic groups, and were conducted with children and young adults.
- The **Community Perceptions Study** entailed consultations with a variety of different Penrith residents of different ages and cultural backgrounds. Methods included **discussion groups** that were later transcribed; formal and informal interviews with Council community workers and other personnel; **questionnaires** and shorter park evaluation exercises. Questionnaires were distributed during consultations and were also available at the Penrith Library and website.
- Some of the data and materials generated through this research required significant analysis, reflection, and interpretation, because unlike questions of physical accessibility, issues of 'cultural complexity' or 'cultural accessibility' are not something we could ask people about directly.

The background and findings from the Community Mapping workshops are in Chapter 3, Appendix 3, and in the separate **Guide to Creative Mapping**. General findings from the Community Perceptions questionnaires are included in the second part of Chapter 2, while Chapter 4 presents findings related to different ages and cultural groups. Many of these findings are presented again in relation to the objectives of PCC's open space planning objectives in Appendix 5 (also Part 2 of the **Strategic Summary and Recommendations** document), and are summarised in Chapter 6 (also in the two-page **Executive Summary**).

3. What are the practical concerns held by developers, major businesses, and PCC planners related to the application of Universal Design within the context of their understanding of the Penrith community?

This question was a central focus of the Gatekeepers Study on the views of council planners, designers and businesses on principles of current open space designs, and knowledge of Universal Design. This was an interview-based study whose findings are reported in Chapter 5, along with those of interviews with personnel from other councils.

Outline of Report

This report outlines the conceptual background to our approaches, analyses and recommendations, and presents the full findings, quotes from participants, and images. As the research is concerned with new ways of thinking about open space planning, as well as possible actions informed by those ideas, material in the full report will help readers grasp the perspectives and rationales that inform our recommendations.

The report's stand-alone chapters are designed to be read independently of each other and in any order, and can be separately downloaded in the web-based document. This allows time-poor readers to read chapters relevant to their interests and still make sense of them.

Chapter 1: The Concepts

This considers concepts of culture and issues around public space use in culturally complex societies; then looks at changing definitions of 'disability' and concepts of accessibility, usability and inclusiveness in design, and proposes Universal Design criteria for addressing cultural barriers to open space use. Critiques and questions about Universal Design are presented in Appendix 1.

Chapter 2: Penrith Parks: A Snapshot

The first part mainly comprises site observations and images for different scale parks in Penrith, along with quotes from participants, while the second part presents findings (largely from questionnaires) relating mainly to issues of physical access, park amenity and residents' expectations of parks.

Chapter 3: Creative Community Mapping

Outlines the rationale for community mapping, theories of mapping and international and Australian examples of creative mapping projects. Reports on mapping workshop designs for this project, details of children's mapping workshop and summaries of other workshop designs and findings.

Chapter 4: Community Perceptions Study

Materials from various sources in this part of the study are arranged under headings relating to age and migration history, starting with toddlers and their carers, middle childhood, youth, then adults (younger, with disabilities, older), followed by recent and well-settled migrant groups.

Chapter 5: Gatekeepers Study

Findings and quotes from interviews with pivotal people about accessibility, Universal Design and open space planning comprise the bulk of this chapter, which also reports research on other Western Sydney councils. Concludes with critical discussion of Universal Design, obstacles to its adoption, and possible strategic responses.

Chapter 6: Executive Summary and Recommendations

Key findings are condensed as responses to the three key research questions outlined in this Introduction, followed by discussion of some key points. Recommendations are presented as short statements with brief rationales.

Bibliography

Includes references to sources in the Annotated Sources, and additional sources referred to in the full report.

Appendices

Include critiques of Universal Design; samples of information sheets, interview questions, questionnaires and exercises used in the research; details of youth mapping workshop; an idea for a flexible piece of park equipment; and findings summarised in relation to the 'Objectives' of the Penrith Open Space Action Plan (corresponding to Section 2 of the **Strategic Summary and Recommendations** document).

Other Project Documents

Besides this full report (available on-line), we refer readers to the following documents:

- Team — **Executive Summary** (Same as first part of Chapter 6 in the current document)
- Helen Armstrong — **Guide to Creative Mapping** (With details of mapping workshops)
- Abby Lopes, Jude Twaddell & Karen James — **Bibliography**
- Karen James, Jude Twaddell, Abby Lopes & Zoë Sofoulis — **Annotated Sources** on Universal Design and Cultural Context.

CHAPTER 1: THE CONCEPTS: UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Universal Design: beyond ‘the standard’

The principles of Universal Design (UD) were pioneered at The Centre for Universal Design, North Carolina University, and were recently incorporated into the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities (2006). As discussed later in this chapter, UD aims at the design of products and environments so that they are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialised design. Universal Design can be approached through a set of principles that embrace equitable use, flexible use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, and low physical effort. Objects, houses or other environments designed according to such principles would not only be usable by people with a range of physical and perceptual abilities, they would also be usable over almost the whole span of someone’s life — a consideration relevant to designing sustainable housing for ageing populations.

Defining ‘Culture’

This project is about Universal Design in relation to cultural context. The notion of ‘culture’ is understood and mobilised in different ways in different contexts. In discussions of planning and local developments, or in local Cultural Plans, ‘culture’ is often thought of as just another element or dimension to be added into consideration (e.g. Mundy, 2000), and is typically associated with community and cultural identity, heritage, arts strategies, tourist interests, and local subcultures. ‘Culture’ in this view can be something static which is to be celebrated and preserved.

By contrast, in the cultural studies traditions that inform our project, people are understood as participants in dynamic cultural formations that can operate at local, urban, regional, national, international or global scales. These cultural formations include:

- the meanings, habits, rituals, practices and practices of everyday social, familial, and workplace life;
- popular media and other cultural forms and meanings;
- communications and consumption practices; and
- the formation and expression of cultural identities and affiliations (personal, gendered, ethnic, religious, generational, subcultural, sporting, local, national).

In this view culture is complex, dynamic and utterly pervasive. Wherever they are or whatever they are doing, people bring with them (and re-create) the sets of meanings, identities, values etc that are part of their way of life. Moreover, objects in the built or landscaped environment are seen as forms of ‘material culture’ that embody particular assumptions and values. So before planners have even started to think about ‘adding’ culture into open space design and planning, cultural assumptions about users, public spaces, and preferred activities are already embodied in the layout, equipment design, and placement of various parks and recreational sites.

Once source of cultural complexity is the way people may have hybrid or multiple cultural affiliations and communities of belonging. Someone may have partial affinities with a variety of different groups (e.g. ethnic clubs, sports groups, work teams, social networks on the web, etc.). This suggests it is more appropriate to think of the diverse ‘communities’ to which Penrith’s residents belong, rather than conceive of a single Penrith ‘community’ defined by local government boundaries.

Parks and the Culture/Nature question

In addition to embodying a range of specific cultural assumptions about users and uses, park designs also express basic cultural concepts about the world, including the difference between culture and nature, indoors and outdoors, private and public. In Australia we tend to think of parks as outdoor places of physical activity, exercise and enjoyment of nature. A typical Australian park might boast expanses of unshaded open grassed areas, usually unfenced, perhaps some bush areas giving people a little taste of local flora and fauna, and an open grassed area where people can kick or bat a ball around. Parks and other public spaces in the urban or built environment are also important places for socialisation and community-building.

Different cultures have different understandings of parks. For example, some of the South Sudanese participants in our consultation wanted open spaces that were closer to the 'cultural' end of the nature-culture spectrum, like the formal colonial gardens and parks of their homelands, with fences, seating, well-kept shrubs and flowers, etc.

Some US urban revitalisation projects have redefined the park to include urban precincts where a range of activities can also be carried out:

'The traditional vision of the urban park — as open space apart and isolated from the residential, economic and social life of the city — must be expanded. Examples abound of communities where urban history, design and planning form the substantive focus for recreation, education, enjoyment, and economic revitalization' (Bray, 1994).

The idea of an urban park is something Penrith is exploring with its City Gardens project and the Department of Planning's City Centre Vision.

Culture, Security and Open Space Planning

People's ability to feel a sense of safety and security in public places is an important dimension of accessibility and usability as well as social inclusion: space is not public if effective access is denied through fear. Anxieties about personal safety and nervousness about members of newly arrived or unfamiliar cultures are coming to overshadow the important community values associated with the enjoyment and accessibility of local open space. In culturally diverse localities, there is an increasing need to understand the everyday challenges that individuals encounter in using public space and outdoor recreational areas (Sandercock, 2000; Low et al., 2005).

Our research identified a wide range of fears inhibiting some residents from either using or enjoying open spaces in Penrith, ranging from safety fears of parents about glass, syringes and condoms in playgrounds, to fears of threats from other people (especially of youth, who also feared members of other youth tribes), and fears of drawing racist comments for acting outside of local norms. Some park users (particularly parents) have been observed to be fearful about groups of children or youth with disabilities and hostile to teenage park visitors.

Although fears may arise from many sources, including intangible cultural barriers (like fear of difference), it is also recognised that good design of public spaces can improve security and safety. The current policy to address safety in public space, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED; see Gilling, 1997, p.53) is one that Penrith and other GWS councils are keen to pursue out of concerns for the safety of users, the high costs of cleaning and repairing vandalised equipment, and potential damages claims from users. High maintenance costs have been used to justify removing facilities (such as toilets) from parks, but we find there are many good reasons to restore local amenity.

Although we did not study CPTED design objects or spaces in detail (other than as part of general site observations), the team believes there are opportunities to pursue CPTED in

conjunction with a UD approach. Several participants in our research expressed a keen understanding of Council's dilemma in regard to drug use, crime, and the costs of providing and maintaining amenity. However, from a landscape design point of view CPTED principles could be brutalist and worked directly against the enjoyment of open spaces and their natural aesthetics, for example, by removing all vegetation from the understorey. One might question the over-reliance on 'technical' tactics like CPTED to solve what are essentially problems arising from social exclusion. Social as well as technical solutions are needed.

Cultural Diversity and Open Space Planning

There are many stakeholders and instrumentalities involved in the planning, design and management of urban public space, but it is local government which has the authority and mandate to administer and manage public and recreational open space. A study on culturally responsive local government processes in selected Western Sydney LGAs demonstrated the need to focus scholarly attention on use of local public space in culturally diverse areas (Stewart et al. 2003).

Theoretical concerns with cultural difference and diversity have been addressed within urban planning (Fincher & Jacobs, 1998; Buravidi, 2000; Gleeson & Low, 2000; Sandercock, 2003). Theoretical recognition of marginality and difference may stimulate innovations in architectural practice and landscape design, but does not necessarily address the everyday practical design needs of diverse users of different cultural groups who seek to access, negotiate and use public and recreational open space for their own interests (Ostroff & Hunter, 2002).

This need to incorporate more complexity and specificity into conceptions of park users was the theme of an on-line discussion of the work of Frederick Olmsted, an early advocate and designer of urban parklands. His assumptions about uses of urban parklands were made at a time when 'culturally diverse open space needs was [*sic.*] not the driver for parks design', and are now criticised as attempts to Americanize immigrants that 'fail to recognize the diverse ways in which different cultures traditionally use open space' (Mandel post, Urban History List Server, April 16, 2007). Planners need to avoid misleading notions of an 'average' user (who doesn't actually exist), and to instead design or renovate parks in consultation with or intimate knowledge of the cultural preferences of the actual communities who are likely to use those parks:

'It is less useful to know what the 'average family' wants to do [in parks] than to learn about the desires of elderly working class men of Italian background, who live in this area and may be expected to use this particular open space.' (Lynch, 1965, cited by Mandel, 2007)

A recent example of cultural research on diversity and open space is Thompson and Whitten's (2006) study of Muslim women in Sydney. They found that the planning assumptions 'that every person should have equitable access to public spaces and that everyone should be able to maintain her/his cultural beliefs and practices [...] do not necessarily hold for all in the community.' In particular, cultural assumptions about shared space and gender mixing are not universal and preclude use of parks by some cultural groups. For example, in dominant Anglo-Australian culture, it is perfectly acceptable for women and men who are strangers to be near-naked with each other in public on the beach, at swimming pools, or in sports and fitness facilities. Thompson and Whitten suggest that to accommodate the needs of women from highly gender-segregated cultures, arrangements might be made for allocating women-only hours to parks and recreational facilities. This would also have the on-benefit of appealing to many (non-Muslim) women in mainstream culture

who could enjoy relaxing and exercising in public space free of male presence, scrutiny or comment.

Although the research team strongly favours the principle of designing open spaces to accommodate the needs of particular local park users, rather than assuming a blandly 'average' visitor, we also acknowledge that this may not be appropriate for district parks and reserves that cater to a wide range of users, including non-locals. Moreover, our research with other councils found there were some drawbacks to being too culturally specific in areas with a number of different cultural groups (see Chapter 5, 'Other Western Sydney Councils'). Instead, designing for different ages and life stages or common interests is a more workable principle that can help communities cohere rather than fragment. The Universal Design precept of designing for flexible use is particularly relevant here.

Rethinking Disability

Local planners, developers, architects and builders are familiar with the notion of 'disability access' as it encoded in a set of design standards and building regulations that specify minimum access requirements for people with disabilities. These codes are the historical legacy of demands for legislation to promote equality of opportunity that were articulated by civil rights and related social movements from the 1960s-1970s and onwards (for example, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act of 1977). The legislative approach puts the emphasis on compliance (see Slatin, 2003; also discussed in Chapter 5). The early emphasis tended to be on retrofitting or implementing special assistive features for people with disabilities to enable them to negotiate an environment that is basically designed for 'average' (and able-bodied) users.

The recently updated United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which also adopts and promotes Universal Design as a standard, defines 'disability' in dynamic terms that recognise that '...disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. In this definition, the key problem is not the person or their physical impairment but that which hinders their inclusion in society. An official media release on the 2006 convention explains how this redefinition marks a paradigm shift away from the view of 'persons with disabilities as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection [and] towards viewing persons with disabilities as 'subjects' with rights', active members of society who are capable of making decisions about their own lives.

Recent discussions of UD and theories of disability and diversity emphasise it as a means to achieve *social inclusion*. In their discussion of UD and other systemic strategies for integrating those with disabilities into the workplace, Ward & Baker (2005) link disability to the notion of social capital. Organisations that discriminate against people with disabilities risk diminishing the social coherence of the workplace and fail to 'optimize facilitation of the mutual benefits of the members'. Impairment in this approach is not located in individuals but in those organisations whose discriminatory or exclusionary practices prevent them from creating social belonging for their members: their use of social capital is sub-optimal.

Extending this logic to our project's concerns, we could appreciate how the exclusion of different kinds of people from public spaces, and from participation in a larger collective social life, is not just a deprivation for those who are excluded, but an impoverishment of the community in general.

Accessibility and its Limits

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) expresses a broad view of accessibility and its 'importance ... to the physical, social, economic and cultural

environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms'. A reduction of 'accessibility' to mere physical availability ignores issues of access to social opportunities, knowledge, and services. This tendency was identified as a problem by Scandinavian researchers Iwarsson & Ståhl (2003), whose review of the state of theory around issues of disability and access found that 'accessibility' was defined differently by various disciplines and professional groups. In planning and building it serves 'as an umbrella term for all the parameters that influence human functioning in the environment, thus defining accessibility as an environmental quantity' (p. 58), which is supposedly able to be objectively measured and assessed in terms of conformity with norms, regulations and guidelines.

Among the problems with this technical-environmental approach to accessibility were that accessibility benchmarks are not as objective as they seemed, and were often based on 'subjective ratings' (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003 p. 64), and the 'opinion of professionals, user group advocates, and industry representatives' (p. 63). Guidelines for access inevitably encode earlier norms and do not necessarily reflect new developments. An example from our study is the motorised wheelchair, which users found too top-heavy for safely negotiating turns and descents in access ramps that meet standards for manually powered wheelchairs. Moreover, accessibility is a static concept of availability or potential that 'states nothing about performance, i.e. how a building or setting actually works for a range of users' (p. 59). As we found, parks might be accessible in the sense that people can get to them, but not usable due to lack of toilets, seating, shade, lighting, or pathways, or because equipment is damaged, dirty or missing.

Usability

Accessibility is a necessary pre-condition for 'usability', a more active concept that includes personal and activity components, or what people can do in and with a facility or environment (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003 p. 60). Taking a more positive approach than a focus on disability, usability 'embraces perceptions of how well the design of the environment enables functioning, performance, and well-being, mainly from the user's perspective' (Iwarsson & Ståhl, p. 64).

One variety of a usability perspective is the model of 'occupational performance', which focuses on the interactions between person, environment, and occupation or activity (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1997; quoted in Iwarsson and Ståhl, p. 60). Another usability perspective is the notion of 'activity-friendly communities' that possess features or adopt measures that make it easier for people to undertake physical activity (Ramirez et al., 2006; Giles-Corti & Donovan, 2002).

Usability-oriented approaches emphasise practice rather than social identity, and acknowledge that not every kind of person will want to — or be able to — accomplish the same tasks in the same way in the same place. For example, some wheelchair-using Penrith residents complained about lack of access to tennis and basketball courts at the Jamison Park sports centre, not because they wanted to play these sports, but because they enjoyed watching them.

The User/Expert

In contrast to apparently quantifiable measures of accessibility, measures of usability cannot be objective, because they take account of the user's well-being and their ability to accomplish activities in particular environments. This user-centred perspective is central to the Universal Design idea of including 'user/experts' in design and evaluation processes:

‘A user/expert can be anyone who has developed natural experience in dealing with the challenges of our built environment. User/experts include parents managing with toddlers, older people with changing vision or stamina, people of short stature, limited grasp or who use wheelchairs. These diverse people have developed strategies for coping with the barriers and hazards they encounter everyday’ (Ostroff, 1997).

User/experts are an important source of knowledge for any planners and designers wanting to build inclusive facilities that improve on current accessibility guidelines. One potential problem is the assumption that ‘anyone with a disability has expertise in all accessibility or universal design issues’, when usually such representatives reflect ‘primarily their own situation’ (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003, p. 63). However, this problem seems to be forestalled by the composition of Penrith City Council’s Disability Access Committee, which includes people with a range of different capabilities and degrees of reliance on assistive technologies.

Our study adopted a user/expert approach where we asked participants to imagine they had the job of evaluating how well a particular park or open space in Penrith worked for ‘people like you’, and to rate the park according to various criteria (see Appendix 2.4). This exercise revealed that even where a park did not rank very well for amenities or allowing people to do the activities they wanted to, it could still earn a high overall enjoyability rating.

Universal Design

It is essential to appreciate that compared to technical access standards and design codes (which do not necessarily embody UD principles) Universal Design has more explicit concerns with social justice, democracy and liberty: it seeks to address the perceived social marginalisation and diminished freedom of movement experienced by people with diverse abilities. Democracy is built into the UD notion of ‘design for all’ or, in the more precise definition of UD’s founder, the architect and wheelchair user Ronald Mace, of designing and building ‘features which, to the greatest extent possible, can be used by everyone’ (Mace 1985, quoted in Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003, p.61) These concerns shift the focus of UD away from the ‘disabled’ individual, and onto the problem of removing physical *barriers to access* to full social activity.

The main distinction between UD and more conventional notions of accessibility can be summed up as follows:

‘In a sense, universal design is focused on making the built environment accessible by accommodating not only physical needs but also psychological and behavioral needs of people over the life of a facility’ (Weiss, 2004, p10).

UD aims at design that is socially inclusive as well as usable. UD also aims to design objects and environments that accommodate a wide diversity of users throughout the lifespans of equipment and users.

The text box on the next page lists the principles of Universal Design, while Table 1.1 (overleaf) summarises the foregoing discussion and highlights the differences between concepts of accessibility, usability and Universal Design.

Several critiques and questions regarding Universal Design are outlined in Appendix 1 and the pragmatic and design philosophy critiques are discussed in Chapter 5.

Universal Design Principles

Equitable Use

This design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Flexibility in Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Simple and Intuitive Use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Tolerance for Error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Size and Space for Approach and Use

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, and mobility.

CONCEPT →	ACCESSIBILITY	USABILITY	UNIVERSAL DESIGN
PARAMETER ↓			
Basic Meaning	Approachable, attainable	Workable, satisfactory performance	'Design for all', ideally usability for everyone
Principal concerns	Static	Activity-focussed	Socially inclusive
Model of Users	Environment (or person–environment) fit Often retrofitted	Interactions of person–environment–activity User perspective	Participation, freedom of choice, & integration Holistic design
Core Values	'Normal' — environment designed to fit; 'Disabled' — environment needs adapting, retrofitting	Users seeking to satisfactorily and effectively achieve goals in a functional environment	Single population of diverse users
Goals	Equal opportunity	Democratic, human rights	Democratic, human rights, diversity, inclusiveness, & Sustainability
Methods & Evaluations	Compliance with codes	Effectiveness, efficiency, & usability.	UD Principles — creatively adapt to circumstances.
	'Objective' measures, Norms	Objective & subjective accounts	Participatory design process. Change societal attitudes
	Experts, professionals, & engineers	Include user perspectives and evaluations as well as professionals	Involvement of different user groups (including those with different abilities) & professional expertise

Table 1.1
Comparing Accessibility, Usability and Universal Design

Inclusion and Exclusion

Although our study emphasises issues of cultural accessibility and barriers to social inclusion, rather than purely physical access issues, the two are not unrelated. For example, the design of children's play areas and equipment can have a strong bearing on the opportunities a child has for social interactions and developing social skills, such as sharing, turn-taking, making friends, interacting with older and younger children, etc.



Inclusive design

The flying fox at Tempe Recreation Reserve (Sydney) is an example of a design that encourages social inclusion and interaction. It seems to attract cooperative play between younger and older children, who can all use it. Youth in our study called for larger flying foxes.

Figure 1.1
Flying fox at Tempe Recreation Reserve.

Reduced usability and inclusion

Playgrounds that work well for able-bodied children can be experienced by children with disabilities as neither accessible, usable nor socially inclusive (Prellwitz & Skär, 2007) Examples of designs that diminish usability as well

as social inclusion for children with disabilities are the slippery slides found in many Penrith parks. Most of these are of a design that has a bar across the top of the ladder, under which users have to manoeuvre in order to sit on the slide. A number of disabled children found it impossible to get under the bar, which also prevented adults from using the slide themselves or with young or physically challenged children.



Figure 1.2
Arrow points to bar to top of slide. Blue Hills Public Reserve, Glenmore Park.



Figure 1.3
Slide with bar - detail from Kompan website.



High usability, low inclusion

Figure 1.4
A Liberty Swing located in locked fenced enclosure

The Liberty Swing illustrates how a design might be usable but not socially inclusive. Specially designed for people in wheelchairs, it is highly usable and reportedly provides a satisfactory swinging experience — so long as users or their carers have access to the MLAK key. For Liberty Swings are normally located in a section of a playground separated from other equipment, fenced off and locked out of concerns about risks the heavy device poses to unsupervised able-bodied children. Although it was initially designed in response to social exclusion, where the child with disabilities is relegated to watching rather than participating in cooperative play, the dominant message built into the Liberty Swing and its enclosure is the segregation of its 'special' users from other park-goers. Trying to solve a social problem by reducing it to an issue of design and mechanics has created a new series of problems. The Liberty Swing does not invite spontaneous involvement or interaction. Able-bodied children

cannot join in, though they are reportedly intrigued by the novelty of the swings. Universal Design instead offers play equipment that is usable by people with or without wheelchairs, or that can only be used cooperatively.

Universal Design and Cultural Dimensions

Social Inclusion and Cultural Non-Exclusion

Fostering social inclusion through Universal Design is a goal that few would dispute. Nevertheless the rhetoric of social inclusion can be questioned for presupposing some social whole into which everyone seeks to be included. This assimilationist logic — which smacks of a populist US American view of society — is arguably not adequate for contemporary multicultural Australia. It does not necessarily recognise or know how to deal with some kinds of unassimilable difference, whether physical or cultural. An example here is the difference between cultures that do and do not practice gender segregation in public space. Moreover, while the idea of designing for social inclusion is especially important for children and youth, it does not encompass the range of reasons for visiting open spaces, including the desire to escape from humans and interact with non-humans like water, plants, trees, birds or dogs. Other people — such as adolescents — like to be out and about with their own social group but do not want to mix with others.

For the purpose of assessing open spaces in this project, the research team concluded that ‘non-exclusion’ was perhaps a more useful concept than ‘inclusion’: a park would be successful if it did not exclude those who might like to use it for the activities they sought to pursue. ‘Non-exclusion’ is a way of thinking about the openness of outdoor spaces, and for identifying cultural barriers to open space use that may be more subtle and less visible than physical barriers.

Cultural Dimensions of UD Principles

Universal Design aims to achieve social inclusion through designs that accommodate a range of physical rather than cultural differences. Its basic design principles have little to do with social interactions, but centre on characteristics of human-technology interfaces. In Table 1.2, Cultural Translations of Universal Design Principles (over), we have translated UD’s physical design principles into cultural terms to come up with some design specifications for open spaces that would be non-excluding to people of different cultures and sub-cultures. The following chart lists the ‘standard’ Universal Design principles in the left-hand column, then ‘translates’ them into cultural considerations in the right-hand column.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES	CULTURAL DIMENSIONS (especially for public open spaces)
Equitable Use This design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.	Non-exclusive The designed environment does not offend cultural sensitivities or exclude different cultures or cultural activities.
Flexibility in Use The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.	Accommodates Diversity The designed environment accommodates a range of cultures and cultural activities (e.g. non-BBQ cooking, music-making, etc)
Simple and Intuitive Use Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.	Understandable The designed environment is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills.
Perceptible Information The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.	Legible and Empathic The designed environment is legible and communicates necessary multilingual and non-linguistic information effectively to the user, including with 'empathic signage' that positively indicates what can be done (i.e. not just <input type="radio"/> but <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>)
Tolerance for Error The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.	Safe The designed environment minimises anti-social or criminal acts and promotes sociable interactions between different groups, and/or provides opportunities for mutual avoidance.
Low Physical Effort The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.	Comfortable People feel welcome and free to use the space, and do not have to work hard emotionally or socially to feel at ease there.
Size and Space for Approach and Use Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, and mobility.	Convenient It is easy for people of different cultures and sub-cultures to pursue their desired activities there.

Table 1.2
Cultural Translations of Universal Design Principles

In the chapters that follow, our comments and evaluations about parks will be informed by the above criteria for thinking about cultural dimensions of open space design: cultural accessibility; usability for different cultural purposes; cultural non-exclusiveness.

Summary of the Concepts

Culture and Complexity

- This chapter has outlined a concept of culture as dynamic, complex and pervasive.
- Cultural assumptions built into park design include the idea of parks as 'nature' more than 'culture'.
- Anxieties about risk and safety in public space and nervousness about other cultural groups can provide intangible barriers to park use, and have influenced park design — not always for the better.
- Parks have tended to be designed around notions of 'average' users, not necessarily meeting the needs of diverse cultural groups.
- Designing for cultural specificity can produce other problems of its own.

Accessibility, Usability and Universal Design

- Definitions of disability have changed from a 1970s emphasis on the person to more recent interactionist models that locate disability in the user-environment interaction.
- Notions of accessibility include access to social opportunities, knowledge and services, but are usually reduced to concerns with physical access.
- Usability goes beyond accessibility and includes subjective measures of how satisfactorily people can accomplish desired activities in a particular environment.
- Some users of public facilities are experts about access and usability problems in their local environments.

Inclusion and Non-exclusion

- Universal Design encompasses both accessibility and usability and aims to facilitate social inclusion through physical design.
- The notion of 'non-exclusion' in public space is more useful than 'social inclusion' in culturally complex societies.
- Universal Design principles can be extended to culturally non-exclusive design aimed at reducing intangible cultural barriers to open space use.

CHAPTER 2: PENRITH PARKS: A SNAPSHOT

'Penrith has a great variety of open spaces' Library, male 25–44.

What kinds of open spaces are there currently in Penrith? How welcoming and usable are they for different kinds of park users? What do they have and what do they lack? This chapter presents impressions of some Penrith parks, using a combination of photographs, edited site observations (by researchers Lopes, Andrews and Armstrong), and a few comments by participants. This is not intended as a comprehensive or objective survey, but rather as a set of glimpses into how current parks are being experienced from park users' perspectives. It closes with an overview of some of the commonly perceived problems relating to accessibility and amenity expressed by participants and supported by our site observations.

Please note that throughout this report, quotes of spoken or written responses from participants in this study are *italicised*, while publications are quoted in the regular font. Below, 'Library' and 'Website' refer to Out and About questionnaires filled out by people at either Penrith or St Mary's Libraries, or over Council's website. 'Playvan' means questionnaires collected in parks during visits of this mobile early childhood service.

Categories of Open Spaces in Penrith

Penrith City Council manages 1,206 hectares of open space. There are 375 hectares of sporting fields and 328 hectares allocated to 540 separate parks, 141 (38%) of which contain playgrounds.

The Open Space Action Plan divides the Council area into various clusters of suburbs or localities, and categorises the open space areas within these mainly according to size, as well as facilities, as summarised below (from the Open Space Action Plan).

District Park

Greater than 5 hectares, it ideally provides a wide range of recreational experiences and facilities for local and visiting people of all ages, with car parking, toilets and change rooms, BBQs and picnic furniture, lighting, landscaped areas, shade and universally designed playground systems.

Neighbourhood Park

Up to 5 hectares in area, with several of the same facilities as a district park, including standard toilets, it typically serves a 'cluster' of suburbs and can include a sports field.

Local Park

From 0.5 to 3 hectares in area, serving a suburban area up to 2km in radius. The Local Park will typically have on street parking, landscaping, natural shade, park benches and seating, and a playground area (no toilet facilities).

Pocket Park

Between 0.25 and 1 hectare in area, and caters for local residents within a 5 minute walk with facilities that include natural surface and shade areas, sometimes seating, informal play and passive recreation areas, and perhaps play equipment.

Linear Park / Drainage Reserves

These reserves are primarily for drainage, but also provide pathway and cycleway access, space for passive play / recreation, and sometimes basic exercise equipment.

Natural Areas (Council owned)

Management of these areas of varying size aims at enhancing their biodiversity significance, protecting the environment, and encouraging community appreciation and awareness. They may include pathways, basic picnic facilities (seating and shelters) and playgrounds.

District Park Snapshot 1: Tench Reserve

'Great playground big enough to help child without getting in the way of others. Lovely scenery and great place to meet up with friends' Playvan mum, Cedars Place.

Located on the Nepean River, Penrith, Tench Reserve was the most popular we encountered during our site observations. Breeze from the water, sound of the wind in the trees, undulating grounds were instantly soothing and invited pause. The park offers a nicely landscaped strip along the river with a combined walkway/ cycleway running its length, and banked grassed areas affording a view from the top down to the path and river. The high location of one toilet block could be an inconvenience for the elderly or people with disabilities.



There are pockets of play, rest amenity, view, shade, sun and a small area of flat grass. One playground is secluded and shaded with large trees, and the other more popular one is surrounded by enough grass for ball sports adjacent to picnic areas. People of a wide range of ages, cultural backgrounds and in diverse social groupings were observed engaged in casual ball play, picnicking, jogging, cycling, climbing trees, walking dogs, fishing and boating. Some teenaged boys were swinging out on a rope and dropping into Nepean River while girls looked on.

Figure 2.1
Fishing at Tench Reserve.



Figure 2.2
Swinging into the Nepean River at Tench Reserve.

'There's a gravel track that people jog and walk their dogs on off road. So that's weaving its way through the embankment. It goes up and down and round, it's quite spaghetti-like. So that's already existing infrastructure if you like' Gatekeeper, PCC.



Figure 2.3
Gathering in shade at Tench Reserve.



Figure 2.4
Pathways and park seating at Tench Reserve..

'There's a concrete path that gets you down to the pontoon, and a bike path, but there's actually no concrete or asphalt path to actually get you into the park area itself, the picnic areas' Wheelchair user, Female, 55+.

District Park Snapshot 2: Jamison Park and Skate Park

'Need more seating. A lot of children play sports here — and adults — and there is nowhere for them to sit' Playvan questionnaire.

Jamison Park is a large open space and sports complex not far from the centre of Penrith and near a light industrial area. The park slopes from the east to the west. The upper slopes have been planted with wide shelterbelt of mixed eucalypts by community groups. The remainder of the park comprises a large, flat unshaded sports area with asphalt netball courts, soccer fields and a skate park. On the first site visit the main park felt bleak and unwelcoming, with the only activity being around the skate park. At a subsequent Thursday afternoon visit, it was full of teens playing different sports, confirming the impression that the main park activities were scheduled sports training and competitions.



Figure 2.5
Netball courts, Jamison Park



Figure 2.6
Jamison Skate Park

During our observations the skate park was used exclusively by male teenagers, though one project participant in his late twenties indicated he regularly skated there with friends. An information board included rules for use, and a phone number for maintenance requests. A

bubbler provided water for drinking, washing and cooling down after exercise. The park is not very close to housing, and we speculated that some of the skaters had arrived by car. A couple of Mums were waiting in the car park, watching over the boys. The most accomplished skaters rode scooters, not skateboards, and none wore protective gear such as helmets, body pads or eyewear. Hats appeared to be worn for fashion not protection. In contrast to children's playgrounds (e.g. Blue Hills observations), where play equipment serves mainly to facilitate existing and spontaneous social relationships, here the relationships between the skaters appear subordinate to the main business of either watching or doing 'runs'. However it was nevertheless a social scene: the skaters seemed familiar with each other, and shared a code of etiquette that included turn-taking, and a general respect for the place and each other.

Local Park Snapshot: Blue Hills Public Reserve, Glenmore Park

'Blue Hills Park. It is perfect for all the family. It should have more footpaths all the way from Muru Drive side of Glenmore Park' Playvan mum.

Shaded pathway access leads into, around and out of this beautifully situated park, providing a thoroughfare that invites stopping and resting. The play area is overlooked by immaculately kept, mostly two storey homes, providing local surveillance and the possibility of parents monitoring children's play from their homes. The absence of litter or 'aggressive' graffiti suggests it is valued as a communal place. Shaded picnic areas included plenty of table surface and seating but the barbeque was virtually untouched — lack of toilet facilities possibly discourages picnicking.



Figure 2.7

Blue Hills Public Reserve, Glenmore Park.

The park has a high degree of amenity for the able bodied but kerbs are sharp and so limit wheelchair access, while the picnic tables sit atop inaccessible concrete islands. A curved retaining wall circumscribes the tree-shaded play area and affords a wide, comfortable top for seating. The playground's shredded rubber soft fall is more amenable to bare young feet — and wheelchairs — than the more typical bark. Activities observed

during two site visits included young boys wearing helmets and riding BMX bikes, a lone teen shooting hundreds of hoops, and mums and dads using the play equipment with pre-school age children. The park is well endowed with Kompan™ play equipment, including a set of four spring 'horses' placed facing each other to invite communal play, which was unusual. But the equipment is not universally designed and caters to a narrow age/size band. Very little children amble from object to object, looking and touching ineffectually, while older siblings deploy the equipment unconventionally: sitting on top of the cubby houses they can't fit into, and using the small swings as props for standing, climbing, twisting and other gymnastic contortions.

'It is a short drive away. It is usually quiet. The children love the equipment. The soft ground covering is great. There are tables' Playvan mum, Muru Drive.

Pocket Park Snapshot: Judges Park

'It used to have tables with their covers on the top and they took the whole lot out. They've just put in new play equipment up the end. There's a walkway through there now' Older Women's Network

Judges Park is fondly remembered by older residents as an enjoyable place to pass through or rest in central Penrith, but it has been encroached upon by a gravel strip car park along its Woodriff Street side, and is overlooked by a multistorey car park. The park retains appeal for its close proximity to Penrith shops, but it is not a particularly inviting place. It difficult to get into and once in there, you feel exposed. The gravel path represents a pedestrian access problem for the elderly, young children and those with wheelchairs, prams or shopping trolleys. The main path through the park was used by nine people during a half hour observation, but others tried with difficulty to cross the grass where there were no paths.

A small gum-tree lined grove with play equipment on synthetic soft fall abuts the car park, with limited seating set away from the play area. The functional equipment bears traces of a graffiti battle, with fresh tags painted over traces of earlier removal efforts. A tokenistic climbing wall with inadequate foot support seems unused except as a canvas for graffitiists. Behind the gum trees is a featureless block of grass littered with broken glass, empty 'tinnies' and an abandoned shopping trolley. Toilets were missing.



Figure 2.8
Judges Park Play Equipment.



Figure 2.9
Climbing Wall, Judges Park.

On both site visits, the well equipped playground was very quiet for such a central location, suggesting that issues of approach and park ambience are critical to usage. On one visit, the only people in the playground were a woman of Asian appearance in her 20s, and three young children close in age. Before she lets the children enter from the car park, she collects beer bottles and discards them outside the perimeter of the park.

'Unkept, dirty, no shade and seating, don't feel comfortable having my 3 year old play in some of these parks. There's no where to sit, i.e. at a table with shade, to enjoy a picnic lunch etc.' Website, female, 25–44.

One young female CBD worker who would have liked to use parks to meet friends for lunch during the working week found:

'Nowhere to eat your lunch in a pleasant public place — outside — without pigeons and with seating so you can face your friend and talk.'

Linear Park / Drainage Reserves Snapshots

'Well, I drive round and look at them, I wonder: 'Gee, is that someone's vacant block they haven't built a house on yet or is that a council park?' You can't tell. It's a worry' PCC Gatekeeper.

Observations of these kinds of open spaces involved the sites but not the users. There may be opportunities for providing more equipment for informal active sports (e.g. soccer goals) and perhaps for temporary and mobile facilities for youth. However these kinds of open spaces are not always very usable.



Figure 2.10
Drainage Reserve Kings St, Cranebrook



Figure 2.11
Drainage Reserve/ Linear Park, Jamistown.

Natural Areas (Council owned)

Penrith's parks include a number of natural reserves, many of which were mentioned as sites for enjoying nature by participants in the study. **Nurrungindy** was one favourite for people with disabilities, especially as it did have an accessible toilet and tracks wheelchairs could travel on.

One male park user whose favourite activity was 'observing nature' frequented **Mulgoa** and **Castlereagh Nature Reserves** and **South Creek Park**. **Mulgoa Reserve** '*has five vegetation communities, historic Regentville landscape, and good opportunity to see a variety of plants and animals*'.

The Great River Walk and **Werrington Creek** were mentioned by another man who hailed the former as an '*Exciting initiative. Pleasant vistas, close to home*' and enjoyed the latter for its '*Natural creek line, natural/native vegetation. Changes with the seasons, flora and fauna*'.

Indicating how memories of previous incidents can be barriers to park use, one older woman hadn't visited **Werrington Lakes** for over three years due to '*Reputation — assaults, robberies. Cleanliness — polluted waterways and surrounding areas*'.

Regarding **Weir Reserve**, one male (aged 25-44 years) wrote on the website: '*Poor facilities. It is in a good location but lacks the facilities of other areas.*'



Figure 2.12
North Andromeda Community Centre, Andromeda Drive

Many of Penrith Council's natural areas are not close to residences, but there are some 'semi-natural' areas close to houses. One example is the area at the back of the **North Andromeda Drive Community Centre** car park, which was criss-crossed with pathways and close to a canal. This was a transit zone in what seemed a quiet residential area. There were a few plantings on the borders of the canal, but nowhere to stop or sit along the paths under the gums.

Community Open Space Snapshot: The St. Mary's Neighbourhood Centre



Another kind of public open space is that surrounding community facilities. One example is the St. Mary's Neighbourhood Centre, situated on a busy road opposite St. Mary's High School. The design prioritises security issues over user-friendliness or a welcoming atmosphere, as signalled by the extremely high fencing surrounding the facility, and the fact all pedestrian gates were locked, rendering tactile indicators on the pathway on both sides of the entrance tokenistic.

Figure 2.13
St. Mary's Neighbourhood Centre



Figure 2.14
Path to locked gate, St. Mary's Neighbourhood Centre.

Entry was via a high gate into a spacious car park, and then a second gate in a fence between the car park and the centre. That gate's pull-up mechanism could not be operated by a person in a wheel chair and there is no intercom or bell system alert. The building has a highly institutional appearance: surrounded by concrete aprons without seating and little shade, it is designed to

prevent loitering and to look clean. Beyond the concrete are grassed areas, with pathways that lead to locked gates or unclear destinations. Although the site is a venue for the Mobile Playvan, hardly any shade falls on the grassed areas. Trees around the border of the grassy area have smaller plantings in bark mulch beneath, preventing use of their shade. As there are no outdoor park amenities like a bubbler or toilet, Playvan visitors must access the centre facilities via a security intercom.

The quality of this category of space emerged as salient to our study through the finding that children in after-school care — often held in community facilities like this — did not get many opportunities to visit parks or other open spaces, either during the week or on

weekends. The liveliness and social connections facilitated by the Playvan's visits suggests that such spaces might be sites where temporary installations of shade and play equipment could improve amenity and enjoyment.

Residents' views of Penrith Parks

The questionnaire component of our research included questions about the parks people did and didn't use, as well as asking people about what their 'ideal' Penrith Park would be. (See Appendix 2 for copies of the questionnaire and park evaluation exercise.)

General views

General comments on parks in Penrith covered a spectrum of assessments, such as:

'Penrith has many parks, probably something for everyone' Library, male 25–44.

'Upon travelling in different Council areas I feel Penrith Council's parks are uninviting and poorly maintained' Playvan grandmother, Cedars Park.

'Generally, open spaces in Penrith are well maintained' Library, female 45–64.

'Overall maintenance of open space and parks has improved in Penrith city. The quality of some of these, particularly in older suburbs, needs significant improvement' Library, male 45–64.

Maintenance issues

Most people were very positive about district parks like **Tench Reserve** and **Penrith Lakes** (though some found this a bit depopulated and unsafe), and although they made use of local pocket or neighbourhood parks, many people expressed dissatisfaction with the level of facilities and maintenance provided. Lack of upkeep and maintenance was often given as a reason for not visiting nearby or other parks:

'Broken glass. This park appeals to my son, however it is usually unsafe' Playvan mum, on **Windmill Park**, Glenmore Park.

'Often overgrown — needs mowing. Glass and debris around playground equipment' Library, female, 23–44 on Local park – **Armstein Cres**.

'Not maintained. Lights only when games are on. No facilities like BBQ/ sheds/ toilets' Library, male 25–44 on **Erskine Park Oval**.

'A good deal of parks are poorly maintained, especially mowing of grass' Playvan grandmother.

Connectivity

Some residents raised general issues not so much about the parks themselves, but how to get there, and how different spaces connect up with each other:

'Need more footpaths so that older people and mums with prams can walk their local area without having to walk in the road due to uneven grass verges and wet grass. Footpaths need to be on both sides of the street. It is very antiquated to have just one side with footpaths. This is a forward thinking young country —get with it Penrith' Website, female 55+.

'Clean and safe with marked cycle/pedestrian areas linking it to the city centre' Website, male, 25–44 on **Tench Reserve**.

*'Improve access in front of the Log Cabin, i.e. easy access for bike riders. Improve footpaths. Provide kms markers. [...] Improve by extending all the way to Penrith Lakes' Library, female, 25–44 on **River Walk**.*

*'I like **River walk**. Leave it like it is — don't add more concrete and keep it green' Library, male 45–64.*

*'In some areas crossings (like the open field between **Glenmore Parkway** and **Inglewood Drive** as an example) could be made more appropriate for bikes — ramp edge rather than up and down curbs. The links between these paths could be more fluid and sometimes the vegetation has grown (great for shade) that could be trimmed to allow better vision/safety for both cars and cyclist crossings' Website, female, 25–44.*

Security

Security issues were another concern:

'More clean public toilets in outdoor areas. More patrolling by rangers and/or police' Website, couple.

'Have security patrols at certain times on different days to make sure their presence is felt' Website, female, 45–64.

'Generally, open spaces in Penrith are well maintained. The destruction of facilities or presence of hoons disrupts attendance at such places or dictates times of attendance, e.g. daylight hours, not at night' Library, female 45–64.

In addition to public open spaces for recreation within and beyond Penrith, respondents also mentioned recreational visits to other kinds of facilities and commercial spaces, including **Penrith Plaza**, the playgrounds at **MacDonald's restaurants**, and the commercial **Lollipop Playlands** centre, and pools and gyms.

Park Expectations and Lacks

This study probed people's perceptions of parks through a number of means. The community mapping exercises worked with memories, imagination, comparisons with other parks, photography and art works. The questionnaire and group consultations explored people's expectations of parks by asking questions about park non-use, as well as use. See Appendix 2 for details of questions, and Chapter 3, Appendix 3, and the Guide to Creative Mapping for more on mapping techniques.

Finding out what people perceive is 'lacking' in current open spaces gives important indicators about their expectations of parks, the barriers that might prevent them making more use of existing parks, and what additional facilities could encourage more park use.

In principle, asking people to name what is lacking in a particular park or network of parks could elicit an infinite variety of responses. But we found a high degree of coherence amongst questionnaire respondents on what was lacking or in need of improvement, expressed also in their lists of features of their 'ideal' parks.¹

¹ As an example of this coherence of expectations, we found that other than one mother who mentioned a 'growing area' as part of an ideal playground for children, no-one mentioned lack of opportunities for growing food in public parks and spaces. Yet in present-day Britain, where there are traditions of council-owned garden allotments, concern over 'food miles' and interest in self-sufficiency are much higher than here, and sales of food seeds and plants have outstripped ornamentals for the first time since World War 2 (with its 'Victory Gardens'). In a new trend, a number of councils are responding to the huge growth in demand for allotments by turning parts of their public parks over to

Key items on the 'lacking' list were:

- **Toilets** — consistent demands for more toilets
- **Seating** — both in parks and along paths to allow pedestrians to rest.
- **Shade** — whether via trees or sails.
- **Lighting** — calls for more lighting were widespread.
- **Equipment** — especially that suitable for older children, teenagers.
- **Soft fall surfaces** — most mothers expressed preference for the rubberised soft fall over the more common bark surfaces on playgrounds.
- **Fencing** — a concern of parents of young children and big families.

Ideal Parks

Although there are some cultural differences in expectations of parks discussed later in this report, we found that whatever their background, most questionnaire respondents shared similar views of what would make an ideal park, as expressed in the quotes below:

'BBQ. Play equipment. Seating. Tables — shade' Playvan mum, Muru Drive.

'Clean toilets. Plenty of lighting. Seating' Playvan mum, Cedars Park.

'Equipment for all ages. Shade, seating, toilet facilities, well maintained' Playvan mum, North Andromeda.

'Large area with toilet facilities, well maintained gardens and grass mowed. Lighting for night-time use. Bike tracks away from the roads. Bright, colourful and up-to-date play equipment and tables and chairs and barbeque areas' Playvan grandmother, Cedars Park.

'Clean toilets, upkeep play area, looking at soft fall under play area; a growing area, and an off-the-lead area for dogs' Playvan mum, North Cranebrook.

'Have an enclosed area with all sorts of age-related activity equipment — from 1 year olds up. Putting soft fall, more seating and shade. Putting toilets closer to activities' Playvan mum, North Andromeda.

'If our nephew came a fenced in area around the recreational area would be good. Is there a list of these in the Penrith area?' Website, female 25–44.

Discussion of an Unsubtle Matter

Site visits and observations disclosed a 'sameness' about park designs, vegetation and play equipment in many local and pocket parks in the network. While some parks like Tench Reserve are 'loved to death' on the weekends, many parks researchers visited (mainly on weekdays) were empty or had very few people. Why are there so few people in parks? In the next two chapters we will identify some of the cultural factors that may be working against people making more of parks in their locality. But here, where we have highlighted issues of

new allotments or community food gardens. Councils are failing to meet demand for allotments 'because they sold off land when demand was not so high,' said the secretary of the National Society for Allotments, Geoff Stokes: 'This will go on because developers are now building houses with much smaller gardens.'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/apr/09/foodanddrink.food> and

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/mar/22/food.gardens> .

physical accessibility and amenity, we can identify a major technical-environmental barrier to park use: lack of toilets.

This project wanted to investigate subtle cultural barriers to open space use, but we kept finding people wanted to talk about the unsubtle matter of toilets: their absence, their dirtiness, their decommissioning or removal, their inaccessibility. It appears that lack of toilets represents a major barrier to people (especially women) making more use of public space; conversely, the presence of toilets is a major attractor to prospective park visitors. Older residents and people with disabilities plan journeys based on the availability of toilets at destinations.

The research revealed a major disparity between Council's classification of parks and facilities and the expectations of residents. Under current categories, and mainly for budgetary reasons, toilets are normally provided only in neighbourhood and district parks, whereas many participants expected toilets in local and even pocket parks. Residents seemed to disregard or were ignorant of Council's park classification system. They were interested in using smaller parks for picnics, etc, whereas Council's planning assumed longer visits would be confined to district parks.

It was not just residents who seemed to pay little attention to Council's park classification system. Council gatekeepers who were asked for comments on examples of different scale parks did not respond strongly in this way, but rather in terms that reflected their local knowledge of the geographical and social characteristics of the specific site (see Chapter 5).

Further factors contributing to the gap between expectation and provision of toilets might be:

- Memories of toilets that had been removed or locked up, apparently in response to vandalism and maintenance costs.
- Rising community expectations of comfort and convenience.
- Greater numbers of older people who are diabetic or taking diuretics, or who have other conditions that require use of a toilet.
- More grandparents involved in park visits with children.
- More people who drive from another neighbourhood to use good park facilities or give their children some variety.
- Rising expectations of using parks for more social and cultural activities, including barbeques and picnics. As the pristine Blue Hills barbeque indicates, such a facility is only usable as part of an assemblage that includes a toilet.

The researchers speculate on whether there may be some alternative and lower-cost approach to toilet provision in parks, for example, using eco-design principles.

Blocks of toilets provided in larger parks are built on assumptions of privacy and gender separation. It is interesting to note that both these assumptions are overturned in the re-branding of 'disabled access' toilets as 'family bathrooms' or 'family restrooms' in built and open public spaces in the USA (<http://www.americanrestroom.org/family/index.htm>). These accessible facilities usually have a urinal, a toilet, baby change table, and hand basin. They can fit someone in a wheelchair as well as their carers. This suggests a possible UD solution: instead of having expensive toilet 'blocks', parks might have just two accessible multi-user toilets.



Sadly, this promising Universal Design toilet solution would not solve the vandalism problem. Even though people keenly regret the loss of park amenity when toilets are removed, or lighting is switched off, many are sympathetic to Council's dilemmas trying to balance maintenance of amenity against the costs of vandalism.

Summary of Penrith Parks

- Site observations revealed a wide variation in the facilities and quality of maintenance of different kinds of parks and open spaces in Penrith.
- There was a 'sameness' about play equipment designed for young children observed across a range of parks.
- People varied in their assessment of how well Penrith parks were maintained, but negative comments predominated.
- There was interest in how parks connected up with each other and with other types of spaces in Penrith.
- Security issues were a concern.
- There was little variability in what people felt was missing, or wanted to see in parks: toilets, seating, shade, lighting, equipment for older children, synthetic soft fall surfaces and fencing for playgrounds.
- Barbeques were virtually unusable for picnics unless there were also toilets.
- Although Council had a classification system for open space that limited toilets and other facilities to District and Neighbourhood parks, residents did not seem to appreciate these different park categories and expected such amenities even in small parks.

CHAPTER 3: CREATIVE COMMUNITY MAPPING

Communities are highly complex and use diverse ways of seeing the physical world. There are significant differences between the elderly, youth, and children in terms of their use of public open space. As well, communities consist of numerous different cultural groups who traditionally have different ways of enjoying public open space.

Parks and open space are embedded within localities by more than their physical qualities. They also include collective and individual memories, activities and relationships. In this context, there may be concealed or little understood barriers to the use of such space. How does one reveal such complex cultural information?

There is a range of conventional ways of gaining information using techniques such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews; however certain groups are not well served by these techniques, in particular children, and people with a non-English speaking background.

To address this planners have undertaken workshops that involve various collective activities including design games and community mapping. Our mapping research was designed to identify cultural barriers to the use of parks and open spaces.

Why Community Mapping?

Mapping can be considered as a spatial embodiment of geographic and cultural knowledge.

Conventional Maps

Conventional maps are deceptively simple and are considered to be accurate representations of terrain. However cartographic procedures include selection, codification and synthesis; thus their objectivity is fluid.

Conventional mapping has certain features such as scale, framing, field, selection, plotting and coding. In essence, maps are constructions of codes and conventions, describing only those things that can be made evident by such techniques. To this extent, their information is limited.

New mapping begins to address this by exploring new concepts of 'site'. Rather than being a defined parcel of land with a set of physical characteristics, 'site' can be recognised as a complex field of phenomena, some real, some speculative. Many of these phenomena can only achieve visibility through abstract representation, making their identification more suitable for creative mapping.

Mapping as a Cultural Project

There is growing interest in mapping human values on geographic terrain, acknowledging that spaces are remade conceptually every time they are encountered by different people. New forms of mapping show how abstract representations can reveal human values such as fear, mystery and desire related to places. It seeks ways in which social imagination and critical appraisal can be integrated into cartography.

The US landscape theorist, James Corner, sees this new mapping as a project that reveals the hidden potential of places, that is, as a collective enabling and emancipatory enterprise.

Orthodox maps have been challenged for some time. As early as 1935, Walter Benjamin questioned the notion of mapping as a means of objective orientation. Instead, he used maps in order to get lost, developing his own maps from a jumble of memories. His were maps of subversion and resistance against established order (Benjamin, 1999).

In the 1960s, the Situationists in Paris similarly saw mapping as an anarchic activity. Influenced by the Surrealists, they developed maps as psycho-geographic expressions of random walks and performances through marginal space in the city (Sadler, 1999).

Geographers in the US in the 1960s were also exploring people's relationship to place by cultural mapping. The geographer/planner, Kevin Lynch, encouraged people to make 'memory maps' by appending sketches with verbal comments directly to the locations where they were made. Lynch called his maps of words 'Speaking Landscapes' (Lynch, 1984).

Performance and mapping were also the focus of the Californian landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, in the 1970s. He explored the use of performance to elicit the Gestalt of places and their experiential values while harnessing a form of collective creativity (Halprin & Burns, 1974).

Building these precedents, while also including new technologies, the New York artist, Jake Barton, has created a narrative map of New York called 'The City of Memories'. This on-line map is about people's shared stories. Employing digital techniques including interactive web pages, he creates 'Emotion Maps' and 'narrative neighbourhoods' which he calls 'World View Maps' (Krygier, 2006).

The concept of cartography and abstract mapping techniques that include cultural values has become increasingly creative.

Mapping as Creative Practice

Linked with a reaction against globalisation, a respect for local distinctiveness has galvanised artists' interest in working with communities to map everyday life. This is associated with a desire to reveal what is unknown, making visible what is hidden and inaccessible. Working creatively with communities is seen as strengthening their understanding of locality and the value of familiar places. These artist-initiated community activities are also seen to engender a sense of belonging. As well, creative mapping offers opportunities for self-expression as an important characteristic of active citizenship.

Various types of creative mapping are identified by Corner (1999):

- **Performance and Installation:** Mappers 'drift' through urban space, making maps of their random journeys and interacting with sites through performance and installation. Many community artists are revisiting creative mapping through walking.
- **Layering:** The process involves making separate maps according to certain criteria, then superimposing the independent layers so that an amalgam of relationships emerges. Unlike the clarity of conventional map, the layering leads to a mosaic of multiple values and experiences. In the Out and About project, we used this technique.
- **Game-Boards:** Based originally on Henry Sanoff's 'Design Games' (1979), this approach is ideally suited to community workshops. Maps are used as a shared working surface representing the contested territory over which competing interests negotiate, with the aim of enabling reconciliation while playing out various scenarios (Sanoff, 2000). Bunschoten (2002) has developed unusual mapping techniques for working on contentious sites, using thematic frames with multiple players and agents whose cultural aspirations are linked to physical spaces. The composite overlay of all the frames conveys the plural and interacting nature of urban space.
- **Rhizomes:** This form of mapping, devised by philosophers Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) is open-ended, indeterminate, de-centred and continually expanding. It is infinitely open with many diverse entries, exits and directions allowing for a plurality of readings, uses and effects.

Rhizomatic mapping reveals that spatial experiences are not bounded only by physical enclosure, but also by immaterial dimensions of time and dynamic relational

connections. Such mapping can unfold and support hidden conditions, desires, and possibilities. Often such maps are animated by computer programmes, a technique taken to particularly illuminating levels by the Dutch architect, Winy Maas, whose 'data-scapes' visualize spatial flows and forces that would otherwise be invisible. The distinctive rhizomatic quality however is its open-endedness (Lootsma, 1999).

Community Creative Mapping — Examples

While progressively more sophisticated images are being generated by satellite imagery, detailed place-based knowledge and wisdom gained over generations is being lost.

Local residents usually hold valuable knowledge about a locality. This knowledge is often very specific to place and personal experiences, including habitual behaviour and social/cultural values and beliefs. Knowledge about public space may not be articulated explicitly within larger forums. In this respect it is quiet knowledge, relatively inaccessible to the decision-making processes of planning.

Community creative mapping can reveal the experience of living in local places through using various techniques such as fragments of personal history, ritual and habitual behaviours, patterns of movement and so on. Some examples are outlined here:

- **Common Ground UK:** This community conservation movement promotes local distinctiveness and the common culture by using the arts to forge connections with landscape and reveal how we engage with the subjective values of place. Common Ground's events and publications reveal the power of partnerships between artists and local communities to make manifest subjective values and meanings embedded in landscapes.
- **Creative Village:** This Australian program involves rural communities, university students in design areas, and professional landscape architects, architects and artists, who collaboratively map the features of rural towns, using a range of creative techniques to reveal collective values and anxieties.
- **Restoring the Waters:** This extensive community arts and mapping project in Fairfield, Sydney, was the first stage in the replacement of 1970s stormwater infrastructure by state-of-art wetland systems. The collaboration involved artists, landscape architects, ecologists, hydraulic engineers, unemployed youth and multicultural communities. Artists developed an imaginary 'memory line' of the sinuous form of the former creek within the park. Rye grass was planted along it and grew as a crop that contrasted with park's large expanse of mown grass. Where the 'memory line' crossed the concrete culvert, artists assisted members of the local unemployed youth group to paint obliquely angled murals which contained messages about the environment.
- **Art of Renewal:** In 2005, Queensland Government explored the role of community arts in strengthening communities. A Guide has been prepared by Arts Queensland and the Department of Housing containing a pathway to community renewal through a variety of creative activities, with detailed explanations of how community workshops can identify issues in the community to feed into a cultural plan.

Creative Mapping in Penrith

The research objective 'to reveal any cultural barriers to using the parks and open space in Penrith' was pursued through a variety of methods including discussion groups and creative mapping workshops used to map community ideas about open space. Participants came from

a range of community groups, including children, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, and representatives of different cultural groups.

Knowledge about public space in Penrith may not be articulated explicitly. The maps were developed in conjunction with an artist using art techniques to reveal such knowledge so that it may feed more effectively into Penrith City Council planning, thereby encouraging greater access to and use of open space in the area.

The aims of the maps were:

- To develop an understanding of the cultural values related to existing parks and outdoor recreational space in Penrith.
- To use art processes to reveal uses and barriers to use of parks and open space.
- To develop creative community mapping as an original design and planning tool for Penrith.

Questions as Catalysts

A number of questions were used as prompts about both positive and negative feelings about the parks and open space in Penrith:

- Where do I go in my local area?
- Where have I never been in my local area?
- Where will I go by myself without fear or anxiety?
- Where are my personal landmarks?
- What places do I avoid or want to see changed and why?

These broad questions informed the different mapping processes developed for specific groups. A model for a music map was explored for people with disabilities. Children undertook interactive group maps, while youth groups developed individual responses building on generic maps of Penrith. The potential to link digital mapping such as Google Earth with creative practice was seen as ideal for cultural groups such as the Sudanese youth. Digital photography was explored with a particular potential for night-time photography for youth groups. Table 3.1 below shows the way the questions are used in mapping and Appendix 3 has the details of each map made by student participants.

Focus Question	Map	Processes	Materials
Where do I go in my local area?	Map of the Known	Identify intention behind journeys.	Local topographical maps on foam-core, pins, cotton
Where have I never been in my local area?	Map of the Unknown	Re-thinking use of open space	Local topographical maps, flags, photos, stories
Where will I go by myself without fear or anxiety?	Map of Safety	Consider open space in times of day/night	Local topographical maps, flags, photos, stories
Where are my personal landmarks?	Map of Hidden Monuments	Locating places of personal significance	Local topographical maps, flags, photos, stories
What places do I avoid or want to see changed and why?	Map of Discomforting Places	Identifying places and behaviour of low value	Local topographical maps, flags, photos, stories

Table 3.1
Questions used in Community Mapping

Layering on Generic Maps

By individualising existing generic maps, participants are able to develop layers which reflect personal experiences, patterns of movement and subjective engagement with their local area. The build up of layers creates a visual web of connections within parks and open space. These independent layers and participants' stories produced a 'thickened' map which was a mosaic of multiple values and experiences.

Staging and Timing

Creative mapping requires staging and timing. Because the mapping seeks to reveal values that are not readily available to the participants, staging of activities and time to reflect, even possibly revisiting places, is important. The mapping workshop process is undertaken in four stages:

Mapping /Workshop Stages			
Initial contact	Gathering material	Making	Interpretation
Purpose/benefits explained Group building activities Site visits	Pre-workshop - Individuals collecting personal narratives & use patterns, photos and materials evoking experiences.	Creating community maps Group participation Skill development activities	Researcher led discussion Sharing and displaying maps

Table 3.2
Mapping Stages

Some of the mapping skills that are used in this project are summarized in Table 3.3 below.

Mapping skills	Key Concept/action	Activity
Accessing memory	Making associations	Memory games Object connections
Articulating awareness of locality & personal history	First hand experience Observation about shared public space Sensitivity to place	Roaming public space Recalling games played Re-enacting uses for open space
Selecting and organizing relevant information	Making associations	Concept mapping 'Map of my life'
Reading topographical maps	Visual spatial awareness	

Table 3.3
Mapping Skills

Interpreting Mapping

The layering of new values and personal stories on existing maps offers rich interpretative potential. As noted, the sharing of stories and the physical act of mapping provided different information to that derived from interviews and focus groups.

Observation notes and photographs taken during workshops also provide further interpretative material. Collectively the maps and discussions reveal particular themes and issues about Penrith parks and open space.

Children’s Use of Parks and Open Space in Penrith

Creative Mapping Workshops

The researchers considered the community consultation process would benefit from direct expressions from children about their experiences and interests in relation to open space use and recreational areas in Penrith. Children are important from a planning point of view, as they have the longest prospective future of using Penrith’s public open spaces. From a social justice and equity point of view, children are amongst the most powerless and voiceless groups in our society, yet they are also the largest users of public recreational facilities.

In September 2007, two mapping workshops were held with children attending Kindana After School Care Centre — Moore St, St Clair. The children were invited to participate, subject to their parents signing a consent form. A week before the workshops, researchers met with ten children to introduce the project, and gave the children coloured folders with pens, drawing paper, notebooks and a personal letter. Children were asked to use these to write down stories about parks they enjoyed, games played in parks, and to collect small things such as leaves etc from the parks. They were also asked to write down or draw their parents’ stories about the parks they visited as children and the games they used to play. They were to bring this material to the first workshop. The children were very enthusiastic and delighted with their coloured folders and particularly their personal letters. Each workshop commenced at 4.00pm after the children had eaten a snack, and finished at 6.00pm

Workshop One: Engaging with a Park



Initial Discussion

The workshop started with the artist involved in the research talking to the children about mapping. The children were then asked to talk about parks. The following tables record sequentially what they said. Initially they appeared to be discussing themselves; later they appeared to be commenting on what others do.

Figure 3.1
Initial Discussion at Kindana

What people do/find in parks	
Cubby house	Cooking in the park — BBQ
Sandpits	Games — baseball, cricket, soccer,
Feeding animals	football, volleyball, netball
Play	Restaurants
Eat with friends — picnics	Wedding
Riding bikes	Smoking
Swimming	Camping
Walk the dog	Discovery
Drink in the park	Walking
Meet people	Bushwalking

They were then asked why we do these things in parks. The summary does not convey the detail in their spontaneous responses. They contributed the following

Why we do this in parks	
Big — there is room Special places for activities Bike tracks Water skiing Paths	Native bushland Unexpected things Strange / unfamiliar More things to do Animals

Children were then asked what they do not do in parks. This discussion appeared to bring out more individuality. With this group it appears that negative prompts are more revealing. Children commented the following

What we don't do in parks	
Throw rubbish Leave cigarette butts Start fires Hurt animals	Take things Sleep No undressing unless swimming Washing — showers

Children were then asked to share the stories about their parents and parks. None of the children had responses from their parents. Most said their parents were too busy to discuss how they remembered parks. One child read a poem she had composed for the workshop. Two of the girls had done drawings about park play equipment under 'what they would like in a park'.

Engaging with a Local Park

Kindana is surrounded by a park that is not accessible as the centre's grounds are fenced and all gates locked. The park consists of mown grass and a few stands of eucalypts. There is no play equipment. Suburban roads form two boundaries, residential back fences a third boundary and the Kindana fencing makes up the remaining boundary, including a brick wall associated with a small group of shops.



Figures 3.2 & 3.3
Park behind Kindana

The children were conducted into the park through the normally locked gate. They were divided into four groups and each child was given charcoal and paper for rubbings, demonstrated by the artist. Children then wandered freely in the park, and enthusiastically collected leaves, glass, flowers, rubbish, gumnuts for the map, and made rubbings of bark, fences, and anything else suitable within their area. Researchers noted activities, movements

and items collected, conversations, etc. Researchers in gloves collected any dangerous objects that the children had pointed out. After 30 minutes the groups returned to Kindana to make the map.

Making the Map

A large 3m x 3m black mapping base was laid out on the paved area in the Kindana grounds. Three children were asked to draw the boundaries of the park in chalk on the black map, then all were asked to add to the map what they had collected and where, and to mark out the journeys they had taken as dotted lines. With researchers' help, children added words to describe the journey, placed on corresponding points on the map.



Figure 3.4
Mapping, Workshop 1

Building up Descriptive Words

Seated around the map, the children then talked about how they feel in this park, finding words to build up a word bank. Researchers and children wrote in words. 'Interesting' was frequently used. This is a bland adult word, perhaps suggested to please researchers. There is the need to dig deeper, perhaps with an activity that will help the children to find the words. Words such as 'bird droppings', 'crunchy', 'scared' next to 'ants' were more evocative.

Workshop Two: Making Individual Maps

Although the same number of children participated, only half were from Workshop One, and the rest had not attended the first workshop. The children's map from Workshop One was laid out but the weather was not good so children worked inside.

Mapping Favourite Parks

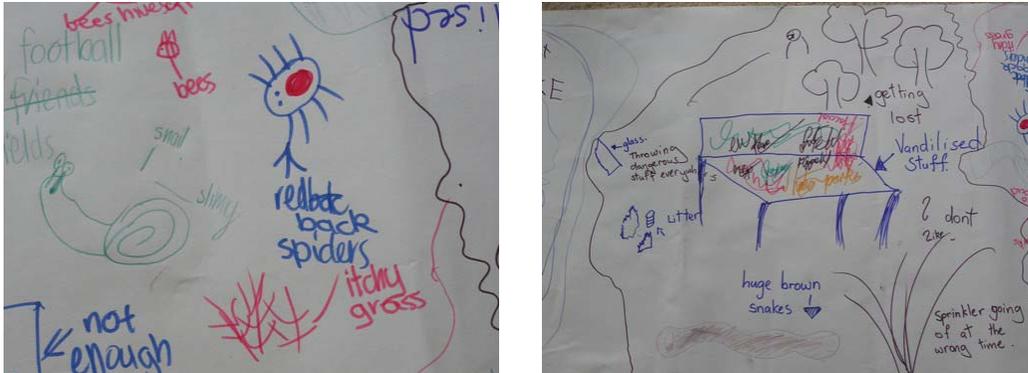
Children were given individual coloured boards, each 600mm x 800mm, and asked to make their personal parks using objects from their local parks that they were to collect over the week. As well there were a number of magazine images of parks available. The children were encouraged to identify and draw parks they enjoy going to and write/list activities, people, feelings associated with these spaces. They were also asked to write about how they feel about their park, describing feelings, memories, experiences.

None of the children brought objects from their local parks. Many had not been able to go to a park over the seven days, despite the parks being close to their homes. Half the children were not allowed to go to parks without their parents. None of the children had been into the park that adjoins Kindana which is fenced off with locked gates for security. During their time at After School Care, children can play in the restricted outside area however access to open space is limited to occasional supervised outings.

Despite this, they eagerly started to draw parks. Most were drawings of park equipment, with some flowers but few words about how they felt.

Mapping Not-Nice Parks

A long strip of butchers' paper was laid out. Children were asked to collectively describe in words and drawings what makes a 'not-nice park'. Again the negative prompt seemed to work as a catalyst as children worked enthusiastically together.



Figures 3.5 & 3.6
Not-Nice park elements from Workshop 2

Children indicated the following as components of a 'not nice' park.

Words written map — accompanied by drawings. (Numbers are groupings along the length of the map)
1. Glass, throwing dangerous stuff everywhere, litter, huge brown snakes, getting lost, vandalised [vandalised] stuff, sprinklers going off at the wrong time.
2. Wombats, dogs eating my food, smokers, glass, not enough swings, red-back spiders, itchy grass, beehives, bees, bull ants, stinky toilets, snakes, football fields, fireworks when they are to[too] loud
3. Magpies swooping in Spring, noisy neighbours, itchy long grass, illegal flares, spiders in the toilets, ants everywhere, especially bull ants, rubbish everywhere, too small sandpits, cigarette butts are everywhere, not enough swings, boring stuff, naughty birds taking your food, getting lost
4. People smoking, grafety [graffiti], birds taking your food, ant scraty [scratching] up me, cat poo in the grass, cat poo in the sandpit, bindis [Bindi-eyes] in the grass – hurts, spider webs, other people's property, beehive, wasps, glass, playing loud music, dead flowers, cips [chip bag] that are empty and that has been put on the grond [ground]

Discussion of Children's Workshops

In contrast to other activities, the final mapping seemed to prompt the children to think about their personal experiences in parks.

By the end of the 'not nice park' mapping exercise, the second workshop had to finish because parents were arriving to pick their children up. This was unfortunate and highlighted the difficulty of trying to do research with children under current constraints. The preferred process would have been a one-day workshop which would have allowed the gradual and iterative accumulation of responses.

It would appear that the children attending after school care are not using local parks, even in the weekends. Half the children are not allowed to go to parks without an adult. As

well a number of children spend their weekends with their fathers in different localities. This was evident in their drawings of individual parks where some children drew the play structures associated with MacDonalds, indicating that was where they went with their fathers on weekends.

Creative Mapping Project with UWS Design Students

It was decided to hold a mapping workshop with UWS students of Design at the Penrith campus. We thought the project would benefit from input from young people who also had some training in how to talk about spaces and facilities. Moreover, it was valuable professional development for the students to participate in a creative mapping workshop to learn how it was done. Some but not all the participants live in Penrith; however, as students at UWS they use Penrith's public space in interesting and divergent ways.

The process involves doing a number of 'maps' that build up layers of cultural information about the way selected students at UWS relate to the open space in Penrith. Using generic maps, participants draw out and highlight their individual and personal journeys, patterns of movement, and subjective experiences related to spaces in their local area. Through mapping, discussions and narratives, a sense of shared knowledge is accumulated. Details of maps are outlined in Appendix 3.

Pre Mapping

Using Google Maps, individuals defined an area of Penrith that includes public open space that they use reasonably often. For each participant, four A3 copies of the defined areas were printed out and mounted on board.

Before the workshop, individuals visited these places. At each location, they wrote down emotions, both positive and negative, that are associated with each place and recorded through digital images. The printed images and field notes were brought to the workshop.

Workshop Design

Each participant made four separate maps:

Map One: Map of the Known

On one base map, long pins indicated specific places. Using coloured cotton, the routes taken were connected between pins.

Map Two: Map of Personal Landmarks

Using another base map, individuals located with pins their personal landmarks as well as secret or private places. On blank paper tags, individuals mounted a small digital image on one side and a narrative about how they feel about the space on the other. The tags were looped over the pins.

Map Three: Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Using a third base map, individuals mark out places that reveal *layers of memory/experience* in the Penrith area, such as where individuals go if they wanted to hide, or to find safety, or experience solitude, or when they are happy.

Individuals made small 'flags' of coloured paper on pins, different colours indicating

- Hiding places
- Safe places
- Places for solitude
- Places for happiness

A legend that indicates the emotions the colours signify was added to the map.

Map Four: Map of Discomforting Places

Using the remaining base map, participants located with pins the places they avoid, don't visit or hesitate to pass through within their local area. Using the same idea of luggage tags, individuals indicated through a small narrative written on one side of the tag, why they avoid these places. On the other side, small photographs were used to reveal the special qualities that act as barriers to the use of these spaces.

Workshop Summary

A diverse range of parks and open space were identified within individual themes.

- A Fishing Map — Weir Reserve and River
- Car Map — Roads to and from Kingswood Campus and Kingswood Park
- Water Map — Tench Reserve
- Escape Map — Skate Park and Netball Court in Jamison Park
- Food Map & Parkouring — From Penrith central, criss-crossing to Kingswood
- Solitude Map — Mainly St Mary's
- A Running Map — 'Claremont Park Soccer Fields' Glenmore Park.
- A Walking Map — Mainly Penrith Central
- Searching for Sustainability Map — Broad scale Penrith area



Figure 3.7
Map of layers of memory

Discussion of UWS Student Workshop

The various University of Western Sydney campuses bring numerous people into Penrith from a range of cultures. They have diverse needs for open space.

Design students use Penrith Parks in a variety of ways, including active and passive recreation, suggesting that open space caters for a range of uses. There are many places that make up personal landmarks which are not necessarily evident to others. Some are related to parks, others to shopping centres and others to the experience of driving on main roads.

A number of cultural barriers exist to the use of public spaces, in particular train stations and public roads. Evidence of neglect and vandalism in parks also acts as a barrier to use.

One participant's interests suggested a new use for Penrith open space — 'Parkouring' (a freestyle obstacle course), though he thought of open spaces in Penrith as '*field of nothingness*' and wanted parks and urban spaces with more surfaces and features that parkourists could utilise.

Other Community Mapping Workshops

As part of this project, mapping workshops were designed for and in consultation with other groups in the community. However due to some misadventures and sudden cancellations by groups, not all were able to be held.

Other mapping workshops have been designed for the following groups, as detailed in the separate **Guide to Creative Mapping** produced as part of this project:

People with Disabilities

This group are significant users of parks and open space, where most attention is on making places physically accessible. But the pleasure people with disabilities experience in parks also needs to be understood. The workshop would be in partnership with the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Centre and is designed to work with musical associations around themes of place, home and belonging.

Sudanese Women

It is important to include migrant women, who are usually underrepresented in planning and have particular needs related to their culture and the issues of settling into a new country. Workshop design includes mapping stories of home, refugee camps, Penrith; using written stories and music, fabrics, beading, memorabilia to evoke stories and incorporate into individual and collective maps. A preliminary consultation was held (reported on in Chapter 4).

Sudanese Youth

Combining a mapping workshop with learning IT skills was agreed upon at a preliminary consultation with a community worker. The workshop participants would use information technology to recall and map personal experiences as they relate to parks in other countries, using the internet resource Google Earth, a satellite based interactive mapping database and search engine. There would also be a park visit with photography exercises and a collective map made using found objects, word associations and digital images.

Indigenous Youth

This workshop was designed for young Aboriginal people in Cranebrook, though it could be used with other youth. It is proposed to build on generic street maps, working to make them more representative of the concerns and knowledge of individual participants. As other youth consulted had expressed concern about being discouraged from using parks at night, mapping using night-time digital photography was proposed in order to understand that barrier to use.

The Elderly

The elderly have particular needs in Penrith's parks and open space, including considerations relating to grandchildren. The proposed process involves doing three maps that build up layers of cultural information about the way the elderly relate to parks and open space in Penrith: a map of connections (between points and spaces visited), a map of personal landmarks, and a map of layers of memory and experience.

Summary of Community Mapping

- Creative community mapping has strong potential as a planning tool. Its particular application in the research on 'Cultural Barriers to the Use of Parks and Open Space' resulted in a number of mapping workshops related to different cultural groups.
- A number of difficulties were encountered when recruiting participants for the project. Setting up workshops often needs at least 12 months lead time.
- The interpretative information in those maps that were undertaken proved to be rich and meaningful.
- Children revealed that their use of parks and open space is changing from general play in neighbourhood open space to organised activities on playing fields at prescribed times. Their out of school activities seem to be increasingly structured, as a result many of them are not using local parks.
- Young people indicated that a diversity of places is used for open space recreation. They are however restricted from using parks and open space at night because of the lack of lights. They are also prevented from gathering in the open space around Westfield by security guards.
- A new open space activity called 'Parkouring' is engaging the youth in Penrith.
- Sudanese women revealed how they felt conspicuous and possibly unwelcome in Penrith's parks. They are accustomed to using parks for large gatherings that include food and music. They do not feel free to do the same thing in Penrith parks.
- A Guide to Creative Mapping, including mapping models developed for different cultural groups, is available for planners and community groups.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

The Community Perceptions research aimed at identifying cultural barriers to park use and the prospects for more 'non-exclusive' design. This was approached by asking what diverse Penrith residents thought about the city's parks, how they liked to use them, which ones they did and did not like or use, and what improvements would make parks more suited to their interests. We had special interests in the perspectives of people with particular needs, and people who might not otherwise have a voice in Council planning debates or decision-making processes.

The methods used included:

- A questionnaire, completed in the researchers' presence by some participants, or at the Library, or accessed over the Penrith City council's website
- Group discussions, in groups ranging from 3-25 participants
- An individual or group exercise asking people to evaluate a park they know
- Interviews and informal discussions with Council workers.

See Appendix 2 for details of research tools.

Our plans to hold discussion groups or community mapping workshops with a wide range of people from different cultural and generational backgrounds encountered some obstacles. Many organisations have well-planned programs and it was difficult to schedule in extra activities. Nevertheless, by the end of the project we had consulted with a range of people who offered a number of insights into their positive and negative experiences of public open spaces in Penrith.

The strongest sets of differences evident in the research materials arose around age, cultural background, and physical ability. The findings of this part of the study are accordingly presented under the headings of Children, Youth, Adults and Migrants.

As outlined in Chapter 2, many of the issues people raised touched on matters of physical access and park amenities, especially toilets. Here we want to concentrate where possible on issues related to cultural expectations about uses and users, social relations and senses of belonging in a place ('non-exclusion' or 'cultural accessibility,' see Chapter 1). But the two cannot ultimately be separated, for on the one hand, the physical facilities (or lacks thereof) convey messages about what kinds of people and activities are catered to (or not), while on the other hand, the activities and experiences people might enjoy in open space require appropriate infrastructures to support them.

Children

Children's services and working with children

Penrith City Council is one of the largest local government providers of children's services in NSW, offering a wide range of non-profit children's services options to meet family needs. Educational programs for 0-6 years include: Long Day Care, Pre-School and Occasional Care. 5-12 year olds can enjoy recreational activities before and after school and during the school holidays. In addition, Council operates a mobile pre-school and mobile Playvan in newly developing areas of the City as well as catering for children with additional needs. Researchers visited four Playvan sites where adult participants filled out questionnaires. We also interviewed the Inclusion Support Facilitator Frances McWilliams about the Playvan service, and the needs of young people with disabilities.

Children are amongst the most powerless and voiceless in community planning yet have the longest prospective use of parks in the district. Research involving children requires

stringent ethics clearance and police checks, which the research team underwent. Because of Department of Education procedures, our project timeframe was too short to allow integration of discussion groups or workshops into school curricula. The regional galleries run children's workshops but had fully committed programs for 2007. The children's mapping workshop was eventually hosted by the Kindana After School Centre in St Clair (see Chapter 3, and Guide to Creative Mapping).

Adults' views of children and play

As most of our findings about children and parks are mediated through adult voices, it is worth reflecting on differences in adult and child perceptions of parks and landscapes.

Whereas adults tend to see the landscape in terms of visible landmarks, according to Californian landscape architect Mark Francis (1990), children speak about small scale elements such as kiosks, bus stops, vacant lots. Children's preferences were for open spaces that afforded access to undesigned, natural areas, and for using a network of spaces in their neighbourhoods (Francis, 1990). Adults tend to prefer designed landscapes for children and are particularly concerned about safety. This is often linked with an aesthetic preference for open uncluttered landscapes which provide easy visibility and surveillance — principles that have now been elaborated in CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). Studies show that while children are also concerned about safety, and fear places with physical or traffic danger, fear is also associated with adventure and is equally desired by children. The researchers believe that current emphases on risk avoidance and inflated fears of dangers facing children are drastically diminishing children's opportunities for free play in open spaces.

Mobile Playvan Observations

The Victorian Government's on-line *Outdoor Play Guide for Children's Services Centres* stresses the importance of flexible spaces and structures which can be used in a variety of ways (rather than single-purpose), and providing an environment with changing supply of loose elements for children to arrange and use for their own creations.²

The Council's mobile Playvan service is already implementing these principles. The centerpiece is a van stocked with a changing array of children's play equipment, furniture, toys and art materials. Experienced Council community workers take the Playvan on scheduled visits to local and pocket parks and neighbourhood centres, bringing opportunities for adult and child social engagement. Playvan visits transform even the bleakest looking environments into hives of positive social activity. The service has a community facilitation role, providing educational and community service information, and a safe environment for DOCS visitations by non-custodial parents. Aside from mothers, grandparents, single dads, and involved neighbours may accompany the young children. The Playvan has a role in getting people into the habit of going to parks; some stay on after the van has gone.

² See http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/16566/ecs_outdoor_play.pdf



Figures 4.2 & 4.3

Muru Drive, Glenmore Park transformed by a Playvan visit.

Community workers observed that those accessing the service in less affluent areas regarded Playvan days as a social highlight, and helped more with setting up and packing than those in more affluent areas, who had stronger demands for service via an evolving program of developmental activities for their children. Indigenous parents seemed unwilling to join Playvan activities, perhaps because of its association with government.

Responses to questionnaires highlighted barriers relating to issues of physical amenities:

- Lack of shade — a near-ubiquitous complaint, related to park designs pre-dating global warming and public health concerns about melanoma
- Insufficient seating for adults near play equipment areas
- Absence of toilet facilities — another major issue
- General lack of equipment in some parks
- Insufficient equipment for younger and older children and teenagers
- Perceived inadequate maintenance — e.g. glass on ground (Playvan workers clear the site and put down mats before setting up play equipment.)
- Soft fall surfaces preferred — bark chips catch in sandals and pram wheels.

The Playvan research gave a glimpse into changing family structures. Adults who access children’s services or visit public open spaces with young children are not necessarily mothers or in conventional nuclear families. Implications for park design include the need for playground surfaces that older people can be stable on, and toilets usable by visiting grandparents and non-custodial parents.

The Playvan service demonstrated that open spaces do not have to offer the same facilities to the same groups of ‘average’ users every hour of the day, and nor do different groups of users necessarily need different open spaces. Instead, park uses and facilities can be temporary, allowing the park to become an attractor for different social and cultural activities at different times. Thought of in this way, the park is not a static space but a *dynamic event*.

Park Preferences in Middle Childhood - Children 5-12 years

Recreational and open space planning at the local council level emphasises permanent facilities, grounds, maintenance, and safety. By those criteria, many Penrith parks do well by providing play equipment and space usable by many at the younger end of the 5-12 years bracket. But do those adult criteria match up with children’s preferences?

One of the most significant findings in studies of children’s play in parks and neighbourhoods is the importance children in middle childhood place on *modifying the landscape* and making constructions, forts, cubbies etc. Studies on children and parks in the

1980s confirmed that spatial richness and meaning is related to their access to natural areas and elements. Robin Moore's studies of urban San Francisco asked children to map their favourite, liked, and disliked places. Modifications to natural and undesigned places were preferred by children, while designed playgrounds accounted for less than 10% of favourite places. As Mark Francis (1990) found, designed playgrounds are what adults prefer for children.

The Victorian *Outdoor Play Guide* notes the kinds of environments that encourage creative play and constructive manipulation of loose elements 'are never "finished" and most of the time will not be neat and tidy.' Messy and mobile elements are the opposite of normal aesthetics of a tidy park with fixed equipment, and it could be difficult to persuade a council to allow free play areas where locally donated large packing boxes and remnant building materials were available for cubby-building, or where children's community garden plots could be established.

Gender becomes salient in park design for this age group. Grimm-Pretner's (2002) study of urban parks in Vienna, Austria, found that open playing areas tend to be designed in a way that makes it easy for boys to run in and dominate spaces, whereas modifications to landscaping and seating may be needed to make it easier for girls to observe as well as join in active play.

Declining Childhood Freedoms

Children's access to the landscape is greatly influenced by the range and freedom of use permitted by the parents. Most participants in our children's mapping workshop could not visit even a nearby park in the course of a week, and half were not allowed to go to parks without a parent. A similar trend was found in a recent British survey conducted by the Good Childhood Inquiry: children today are not allowed to explore local parks unless accompanied by adults (Gill, 2005, Reitemeier, 2007) Although most of 1,148 adults quizzed had been allowed out without an adult at the age of 10 or younger, 43% of them now said children under 14 should not be allowed out with friends. And whereas in 1970, 80% of primary school-age children made the journey from home to school on their own, today the figure is under 9% (Easton, 2007). Experts told the inquiry of the importance of letting children have the freedom to play independently.

Adults' exaggerated perceptions of danger, declining freedoms for children, and the attractions of cyberspace are cultural trends that could well present barriers to children getting out and about in Penrith open spaces.

An event-based approach might help parents and school-aged children become familiar with spaces where children could play. As we will later recommend (see Recommendations 1.13, 2.9), Penrith City Council could develop a 'Local Park Day' program aimed at connecting and familiarizing parents, children and other prospective park users with their nearby parks. Some temporary facilities could be installed, and maps distributed showing nearby parks and details of facilities and possible activities. Such events could help parents meet other residents and become more knowledgeable about local parks, and more willing to let their children use them. Schools and child and youth after-school centres could also be encouraged to make better use of parks in their vicinity.

Could the digital attractions that lured children indoors be deployed to coax them outdoors again? As we will suggest below (Youth) parks might feature more electronic connectivity for portable devices and communications. In this age of surveillance there is the technical capacity to set up CCTV or webcam systems that anxious parents could register to use for monitoring their children in the local park. Could more benign and child-friendly ways of using new media perhaps be developed to enhance children's freedom as well as their safety outdoors?

Youth

Penrith City Council employs a Youth Development Officer who provides information and referral on youth services and programs in the Penrith LGA and Statewide, and co-ordinates and administers Youth Week activities. Council is involved in provision of some of the wide range of youth services listed in the Penrith Community directory. We noted that unlike 'children', 'youth' have no tab or direct link on PCC's home page.

We consulted with a meeting of Penrith Youth Worker Interagency (PYI), an important entity for coordination and communication amongst a variety of youth services and agencies. The chair and three youth workers also participated in a revealing discussion group with eight youth aged 14-16 years. A meeting and simplified questionnaire exercise was conducted with 9 early school leavers (including 4 young mothers) at TAFE. A mapping workshop with Design Students from UWS was another source of information about how younger people, who either lived or visited Penrith, used its open and public spaces.

Youth cultures and 'in-betweenness'

In her study of symbols and rituals of pollution and purification, anthropologist Mary Douglas famously defined dirt as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). Just as the margins and openings of the human body arouse anxieties about pollution and the boundaries between inside and out, people in socially marginal or ambiguous categories can evoke fears about pollution of the social body. The post-World War 2 social category of the 'teenager' is by definition marginal and ambiguous: between childhood and adulthood. The definition has recently become even fuzzier with the elaboration of categories of 'tween' and 'adulescent'. This 'in-between' state makes teenagers vulnerable to being branded as anti-social, inherently unruly and 'out of place,' to be excluded from the orderly social body.

Whereas the passage between childhood to adulthood was traditionally managed via puberty and initiation rituals, Western cultures offer a dispersed series of institutional accreditations and legitimations (e.g. school graduations, age of consent, driver's licence, legal drinking; 18th and 21st birthdays). But over the last four decades increasing numbers of westerners, many of them adolescents, have become 'modern primitives' (Vale & Juno, 1989; Featherstone, 2000) who design their own rites of passage, and mark significant events through body modifications such as facial or other body piercings, tattoos, cosmetic surgery, etc. Youth subcultures continue to adopt less permanent signs of social identity such as particular styles of hair, costume, adornment, and consumption practices, especially music (e.g. Hurley, 1996 on Goth culture).

Although practices such as facial piercing or extreme hair are at one level a form of 'self-stigmatisation' to signal individuality and deviance from social norms of beauty, modesty and propriety, at another level, they are also signs of identification and integration with particular subcultures or groups of friends (Dant, 1999). Moreover, young people whose extreme styles make them stand out or look a bit scary are still offended if 'normal' people don't accept them in their distinctiveness.

Adults rarely appreciate how youth behaviour they judge 'anti-social' may be experienced by participants as highly social. Even such undesirable risky practices as hooning can involve the creation of languages, aesthetic, social and moral codes, and rites of passage amongst social groups of modified car enthusiasts (Fuller 2007).

Youth in Penrith Parks

For the Penrith teenagers we spoke to — and no doubt many more besides — the **Penrith Plaza** and surrounds are the top recreational sites, followed by certain fast food outlets and indoor sports and recreation centres. Some teenagers we spoke to also visited youth centres. Open spaces and parks were not prominent, though a youth worker mentioned taking young people to the **Nepean River Rowing Club** and to a waterhole at **Bents Basin, Wallacia** for barbeques and play with friends. Transport was an issue in reaching such spaces. Contrasting with the 14-16 year olds in the discussion group, questionnaire responses from the TAFE early school leavers group (especially the teenage mothers) were similar to those of adults and Playvan participants in lists of desired amenities.

Penrith has some excellent facilities for those people who engage in organised sport or other fitness regimes. Some young men in the early school leavers group expressed interest in sport, but low incomes mean some youth are financially excluded.

Our consultations revealed that teenagers not involved in formal sport are not well served by current open space strategies in Penrith, and generally do not feel welcomed as occupants of public space. Participants and questionnaire respondents from all age groups — and Council personnel — commented on the lack of park equipment suitable for informal use by people over 12:

'All equipment catering for young children...not a lot of equipment or resources in open spaces for older kids...very much caters for young families and kids' Youth worker.

The teenagers complained that not only was the existing equipment too small for them, they were harassed for being anywhere near it, or for simply using the park:

'When you go to the parks like the parents turn to you 'Don't do that!' The parks are for everyone. 'Go away! You're too old for this...go and play on the highway.' We were just sliding on the slide and giggling. We were just mucking around.'

'We were having a picnic [at a park in St Clair]. These adults told us to go away. They think us older kids do drugs and leave cigarette butts, but half don't even smoke.'

The exclusion of teenagers by unusable equipment and hostile adults sends messages that contradict public concerns about childhood obesity and inactivity:

'They treat us like we're not kids. We should be responsible and mature and we're not allowed to have fun, have to be serious. [...] [They say] you're not being social, putting on weight. 'Be active! Get up and go!' ... stay at home and eat...nothing else to do.'

One implication is that parks need to offer more active play opportunities for youth who are not involved in organised sport and fitness activities. Ideas put forward included:

- bigger play things
- massive flying fox for older teenagers
- decent sized slippery dips
- larger swings with seats they could fit on
- barbeques, food kiosks.

The possibility of a segregated space was discussed, with one participant suggesting 'A fence around the park. You can only go in if you're old enough — fourteen to eighteen'. One of the youth workers suggested a youth-only park — to which one pragmatic youngster added 'Adults could come to park. Adults know how to cook!' Although the young people suggested equipment they were already familiar with, other options include play equipment designed for cooperative use.



Figure 4.4
Example of larger sized play equipment, Cranebrook.

Inclusions and exclusions

Skate parks are a significant exception to general lack of play equipment for youth. These facilities appeal to councils as they are low-maintenance and virtually indestructible. However, they raise their own set of issues. Our research found that skate parks are often situated near light industrial or commercial areas and away from residences — meaning

they are not always within walking distance and are depopulated and potentially unsafe after business hours. (One exception is in a residential park in North Penrith.) The discussion group happened to include a female enthusiast who had campaigned for a skate rink in her neighbourhood, but she is a rare exception. These facilities are used almost exclusively by males, raising the question of what, if any, comparable investment is made to meet the recreational interests of teenaged girls? Rather like the surfing breaks discussed by Evers (2004), skate parks are social sites where groups of males jostle with each other to establish hierarchies of age, social status, and technical skill while constructing and displaying their own risk-taking ‘hetero-normative’ masculinity. They tend to exclude females as well non-normative males, like the teenage boy with a Goth style and an ambiguous sexual identity who feared that: *‘More skate parks [...] mean more teasing for me.’* Interestingly the recent Parkour workshops held at Cranebrook had both boys and girls participating.

Penrith is one of many Councils that have responded to vandalism by discontinuing lighting parks at night, a time when many young people like to socialise with each other. Removing lighting from parks reduces their safety and not only excludes youth, but prevents nocturnal park access by many other kinds of users — including some with disabilities. One promising sign was the outdoor band nights that had been successfully trialled in the reserve behind an inner Penrith high school, and near a youth café in High St. These were seen as making up for a local lack of youth-oriented outside entertainment and alternatives to organised sports.

Inter-youth tensions

Youth in public space also experience hostility from their peers. Some Western Sydney towns have issues with conflicts between groups of (mainly male) youth of different ethnicities, but in Penrith loose affiliations or subcultures have differentiated themselves within the predominantly Anglo-Celtic population. These include the urban subcultures of emos (‘emotional hardcore’, soulful, angsty, black hair, post-punk) and Goths (stylish, dramatic dark clothes, pierced), gangstas (rap music fans), plus the specifically local affiliation of Riff (or Rif) Lads, or Riff Kids (short for ‘Penriff’). Young people reported rocks being thrown at them from other groups, sometimes from cars. Some parks and paths were perceived as dangerous — *‘One of my friends got jumped...gun, machete, baseball bat’*. The Goth participant had experienced homophobia and felt frequently harassed for his looks: *‘Anyone who looks weird and doesn’t fit in they pick on...if you’re different.’*³

³ A reminder that these responses are not necessarily trivial comes from the UK story of two 15 year old boys given life sentences in March this year for the bashing murder of 20 year old Sophie Lancaster and the assault of her

Asked how things could be made better, participants responded in terms of cultural similarities and differences:

'If everyone got along and there weren't all these groups.'

'You can't expect everyone to like one another.'

'If they don't get along just shut up about it!'

'Some things in common, some things will be different.'

Youth in the Penrith CBD

The preferred site for members of youth subcultures to hang out in Penrith is the area between Joan Sutherland Centre and the Penrith Plaza they call 'The Mondo':

'I hang out at the Mondo. ... The Riff kids, big Goth cult the TRK hang out there. Every Thursday night we get kicked out of the Mondo because the [Riff] Lads, Goths and emos apparently have fights there.'

Every youth and youth worker had stories to tell of harassment of young people by the mall security guards:

'Sometimes they actually follow you around. We were in a group of ten. We split up into twos and we had security guards. They don't trust us...they call back-up...we were eating lunch.'

'If you're standing there waiting for people they tell you to move, when we just got off the bus too. Even if you're in a group of four people they tell you to move. They keep staring at us.'

'A security guard at [a grocery chain store] took a mate into Centre management and knocked him into a wall.'

Three key issues here are firstly, the symbolic status of teenagers as 'matter out of place' wherever they happen to congregate. Secondly, the current urban trend for formerly public spaces in shopping and business districts of western cities — including streets and footpaths — to be swallowed up by commercial entities that then control access and surveillance through private police. The third is specific and local. The Youth Protocols that had been negotiated with Council mediation under the former owners of the Penrith Plaza lapsed when Westfield took over, and security guards are reasserting authority over young visitors in public space abutting the Plaza. Given the lack of other usable public open spaces in the Penrith CBD area, and the inevitable attractions of the Plaza and surrounds to young people seeking to enjoy a sense of belonging in a lively urban public space, it seems to us a matter of urgency that Council seek to open negotiations with Westfield with a view to re-establishing appropriate protocols for fair treatment of youth in 'The Mondo'.

Instead of automatically branding youth in public space as a nuisance to be disposed of, consideration might be given to accommodating young people who want to contribute to the life and energy of parks and public open spaces, especially in the CBD. They have basic needs like other user groups: seating, lighting, toilets, shade. In addition, as noted in the discussion of middle childhood, these young people are 'digital natives' in a world of

boyfriend in a Lancashire park simply because they were Goths and 'looked different.'
(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/lancashire/7316601.stm>)

networked communications. Parks or public open spaces that had free WiFi or Bluetooth services, and bollards where iPods and mobiles or other digital equipment could be recharged, and their music played over small speakers, could cater to this generation's needs for connectivity while also enhancing their enjoyment of open space and feelings of belonging in the local community. Such facilities would also be enjoyed by students from TAFE and UWS. Camden City Council, which has a high youth population, has made some moves in this direction by providing facilities for young people, including a youth café in the Library, dark rooms, sound studios, and areas where youth can do homework after school.

Exclusionary messages

In sum, lack of play equipment for children over 12 years old, removal or pre-emptive closure of facilities used by the mislabelled 'anti-social' youth, fear of the very presence of groups of young people, and harassment of young people occupying public places are all social statements giving messages that youth are not wanted: that they are 'matter out of place' who do not belong in the general 'social body'. No wonder some retaliate with destructive acts against facilities that exclude them.

Our findings suggest that to make parks and other public spaces in Penrith less excluding for youth, there needs to be more size-appropriate equipment available, and outdoor cultural and entertainment events. However, cultural barriers to inclusion also need to be addressed through a community strategy to improve tolerance and civility amongst different generational and subcultural groups. Penrith's Youth Week might be a good basis for further initiatives to demonstrate that youth are valued members of the public with entitlements to occupy public open space.

Youth with disabilities

The design of children's play areas and equipment can have a strong bearing on the opportunities a child has for social interactions and developing social skills, such as sharing, turn-taking, making friends, interacting with older and younger children, etc. But as Prellwitz & Skär (2007) found in their pilot study, playgrounds that worked well for able-bodied children were experienced by children with disabilities as having 'limited accessibility, usability and did not support interaction with peers.' They looked to UD for future playground designs whose inclusiveness would facilitate these vital social interactions. However our research indicates that although inclusive designs would certainly allow young people with (or without) disabilities to have more fun in public open spaces, there are still many social barriers to inclusion.

The Inclusion Support Facilitator with PCC, Frances McWilliams, runs a service that takes teenagers with disabilities to public parks in Penrith and beyond. Parks are used by the service not only because they are free, but because they provide an important context for socialising — at least with each other, if not with other (able-bodied) children.

Taking groups of disabled children and teens to parks — some of them in wheelchairs and highly restricted capacities for self-care — is one way to become a 'user/expert' on physical accessibility problems in public open space. The main physical access issues were:

- **Play equipment** — nearly all inappropriate for teenagers. McWilliams suggests a possible solution: to have *'even one activity in each park that our children could access...even a slippery-dip.'*
- **Park furnishings** — picnic tables and benches on raised islands of concrete that wheelchairs can't access; tables too low.
- **Mobility** — uneven surfaces or bark which is completely unsuitable for wheelchairs compared to *'that nice, new rubbery stuff'* (soft fall). Lack of access paths through

bush or to water deprive wheelchair-bound children (and adults) of opportunities to enjoy nature.

- **Toilets** — even ‘disabled access’ toilets do not usually provide room for people who need two carers for toileting.
- **Indoor recreation facilities** — lack of indoor facilities with appropriate accessible toilets.

Access to social activities can be very difficult for children and teenagers with disabilities or challenging behaviours. For many of the teens involved in the Inclusion Support program, going to a coffee shop or MacDonald’s is an activity valued for its normalcy — the fact that (non-disabled) teens do it. For some young people with disabilities (and their carers), the claustrophobic, crowded and noisy shopping centres also pose problems. So even though facilities in most parks are not entirely usable, parks are often preferred to built facilities. McWilliams recounted how much one group of disabled teenagers enjoyed a visit to Windmill Park, in Glenmore Park. On top of a hill that made physical access difficult without extra help from carers was an undercover barbeque and seating where the children cooked and socialised, enjoying its normalcy: *‘We could sit there, like teenagers do.’*

Many people in the community have irrational fears and prejudices about disabled people, and are not inhibited about expressing them. The service stopped going to a local youth centre because the disabled teens were laughed at and felt unwanted. Other park users are often intimidated by disabled kids, and parents may either tell them to go away or immediately withdraw their own children from the play areas *‘which is a shame, because [...] We’re out there to socialise and to be included in society’* (McWilliams). (We’ve noted that able-bodied teenagers elicit similar responses.) Solving problems of physical access would help these young people have more fun in open spaces, but would not necessarily remove the cultural barriers.

The problems encountered by participants in the Inclusion Support Program remind us that physical accessibility is not an end in itself, but a means to enable social inclusion and other ‘normal’ activities — including teenage socialising. Better play equipment would improve physical enjoyment for able-bodied as well as disabled teens, while simple improvements in basic amenities for physical accessibility would facilitate more socialising. Such improvements would lessen the physical labour of Council workers, who at present heroically haul wheelchairs uphill and over pathless land to provide pleasant moments for those in their care.

Adults

Discussion groups or workshops were not specifically planned for ‘average’ able-bodied adults (25-44 years; 45-64 years) in Penrith. Our rationale was that parks had already been designed with such users in mind, and that members of dominant social groups would by definition encounter few of what we are calling ‘cultural barriers’ to park access and use. However, questionnaires were placed in the Penrith and St Mary’s Libraries and on PCC’s website to gather responses from a self-selecting sample of adult residents who used those information services. Thirty questionnaires were received this way, 17 of them from people in the 25-44 age group, and 7 with migrant backgrounds. The main points from those questionnaires were reported in Chapter 2 and will not be reiterated here.

Young adults — UWS students

A mapping workshop with UWS Design students (most aged under 25) found many travelled to Penrith for university and left soon afterwards for homes in other western suburbs: they were ‘in and out’ rather than ‘out and about’ in Penrith. (See Chapter 3 and Appendix 3.) Cars

and roads were prominent in their maps, evoking discussion of how Penrith is designed around the car, with barriers to walking and engaging with open public spaces. The maps covered the CBD and commercial centres, fast food places, as well as the various parks and reserves students visited for quiet recreation, sometimes in longer breaks between classes.

The Weir area and Tench Reserve were important antidotes to the stress of university, cars and the M4. Some had good memories of no longer existing facilities such as Penrith Ski Park and the BMX track behind Panthers. Barriers to greater use of public space for this group included the lack of interesting public places to engage with; the general cultural shift to multi-media entertainment, an over-programming of time; some experiences of territoriality in local areas ('us and them'), and various signs of the fear of litigation that had resulted in reduced amenity.

This group reminds us that not all users of Penrith parks are locals or even weekend visitors: there are pools of regular visitors at TAFE and UWS Penrith Campus who could be making more use of local recreational areas. Perhaps a map showing driving routes to parks, and interesting walking trails could be produced and distributed to students. These young adults would probably be avid users of any connectivity provided in parks or CBD public space.

Adults with Disabilities

'I think that's the biggest issue, the fact that the parks, particularly around Penrith, aren't accessible. I mean, you can organise transport, you can organise carers, you can have all the money in the world, but if they're not accessible, what's the point?' PDAF member.

Our consultations with people with disabilities were via discussion following our presentation to a meeting of PCC's Disabilities Access Committee (DAC), and in two two-hour guided discussions with the Penrith Disabilities Action Forum (PDAF). These groups included 'user/experts' who had an articulate and detailed knowledge of problems with physical accessibility and mobility in Penrith's parks and open spaces. Concerns were very similar to those encountered by youth with disabilities, including the issue of toilets that can also accommodate carers: *'I mean, I don't go to parks because there's nowhere for me to go. The only place I go to is Tench Reserve, because I know that there's toilets there.'* Absence of park lighting makes many open spaces inaccessible for people with disabilities (though its anti-vandalism intent was acknowledged).

Parks are categorised as open spaces, but from the point of view of people with impaired vision or mobility, they are an array of pathways and surfaces, some more traversable and connected than others. Problems with paths, surfaces and mobility included:

- Difficult pedestrian and wheelchair access getting to and around Jamison Park.
- Disconnectedness at Tench Reserve, where paths connect with each other but not to other parts of the park, like the picnic areas.
- Nurranginy Reserve, appreciated for its wildlife and toilet facilities, had poor shade and a dirt road that was difficult (though not impossible) for wheelchairs.
- Paths not wide enough for both prams and wheelchairs
- Bark surfaces: *'Please get rid of the chip bark! Please! ... It's a wheelchair's nightmare'*
- The intense heat of Penrith summers posed a climatic barrier, especially as wheelchairs cannot readily manoeuvre in the dusty areas under shady trees.
- Picnic tables perched on inaccessible concrete pads — people were enthusiastic about the wheelchair-accessible picnic table designed by a UWS student Sarah Buttigieg; one suggested chess tables for people in wheelchairs.
- Lack of disabled parking spaces, including at Tench Reserve.

- Better transport needed to Tench Reserve and the white water rafting centre.
- Illegality of using loading zones to ‘unload’ a person in a wheelchair from a car not a van.
- Existing disability access standards inadequate for motorised wheelchairs, taller and heavier machines that can tip forward dangerously when negotiating disabled access ramps of car parks (like the one near Centrelink one participant labelled ‘treacherous’).

Despite these various complaints, the general feeling was that Penrith City Council took seriously the views of residents with disabilities, and was *‘the greatest, one of the better councils in the state in regards to provisions for disabled access in most areas.’*

Further improvements in paths, lighting and other amenities would surely help people with disabilities physically access more open spaces. But would those spaces be usable, socially inclusive and culturally accessible?

The ‘expert users’ had enlightening perspectives on the assumptions built into park design, and the cultural aspects of park uses (and abuses). Some physical access problems have cultural components, such as the built-in assumption that a typical park using family will consist of a pair of able-bodied parents and their children. One severely disabled woman in a wheelchair said she loves to play with her grandchildren, push them on swings, etc. but could only do so in Judges Park, an already diminished facility that at least was close to a car park and had a rubberised soft fall surface instead of bark in the playground.

The vandalism whose prevention rationalises removing the facilities and lighting needed by disabled people was identified as a kind of cultural issue (DAC). For example graffiti didn’t necessarily make facilities unusable but renders them what many consider aesthetically spoiled. Those who vandalised equipment were acting out some kind of alienation from the broader community.

A few people with disabilities commented that lack of sensory stimulation was one reason they did not spend much time in parks. There were few gardens and mainly grass and trees, and the dominant uses were for sport and fitness. PDAF members highlighted the sense of entitlement to path space exhibited by practitioners of fitness activities like jogging and especially cycling:

Researcher: *Who gives way to wheelchairs?*

Female 1: *Nobody. I have to stop and back off so that they can go past me. [...] The adults tell the children to go through, and the adults just ignore you. You’re invisible.[...]*

Female 2: *Yes, I think that’s quite true, because there’s a culture of sport and being fit, and fit people think they’ve got the rights for everything. [...] I am fit! [...] I can do bicycle, I can run, I can do whatever, and I can’t understand why you can’t do that. And this is my park, and I am protecting my park because it’s my activity park.*

One member of the DAC bemoaned the lack of a local culture of using parks for social events, or for promenading and people-watching. Members of PDAF suggested more socially oriented events in parks, such as festivals, outdoor concerts, Jazz in the Park, markets. This is further support for our idea of ‘the park as event’, and for rethinking parks as cultural and technical as well as natural spaces.

Older adults

A discussion was held with two researchers and three members of the Older Women’s Network who between them had accumulated over 130 years of living in Penrith. As two no longer drive, issues of pedestrian and transport access were important, especially to Tench Reserve and the white water rafting centre. Memories of changes in the landscape and park

facilities were a predominant theme in discussion. All recalled better water-based recreation and riverside facilities, including a kiosk, prior to major floods, though they praised Council for recent riverside park and path developments. One referred to waterways that no longer exist:

'We have a lot of open spaces around us in Maxwell St, where all the waterways were. The water has all been covered, the creeks, right through to Mulgoa Rd. They couldn't build on it. It's been piped and covered. You could walk the dog for an hour and not go near roads.'

All bemoaned the erosion of size and amenity of Judges Park, which used to be larger and had shaded seating and tables:

'They took part of it for another bowling green and a bit for the car park They should never have taken it. It was a beautiful area where people used to take their children.'

The participants also mentioned numerous examples of parks in older areas of Penrith where toilets, playgrounds or both had been removed, and speculated on the reasons:

'We've got playground equipment there but unfortunately there are vandals and it's not always at night, sometimes it's during the day. The Council spent a lot of money there, renewing all the playground equipment. The other day we went there with the grandchildren and all the slides and swings were gone [...] A lot of them are gone because they're updated and because of the liability insurance. That's why they taking them and renewing them.'

The lack of toilets or their unusability (locked or dirty) was considered a major issue for older people and their grandchildren. Other needs were expressed for shaded bus shelters, especially on Station Street, where the bus stop had been moved to a spot that became unbearably hot on summer afternoons. Good walking paths with seating in the CBD area and connecting paths through to the hospital and specialist precincts were considered important.

The youth scene at 'the Mondo', especially the Goths '*bored and in their black and their chains and things*', presented a somewhat intimidating cultural barrier to these older women. They were basically sympathetic to the youth being there — '*There's nowhere else for them to go*' — and made connections between the current subcultural styles and the fashions of their own youth: '*What about when the mini-skirts were in, what about our periwinkle shoes? We probably looked stupid but we didn't hang out in masses, did we?*' This last comment gives a clue that what most bothers the women is the sheer numbers of young people in a small space and the uncertainty of how to interact in such proximity:

'I walked through there one Thursday night [...] It was an experience. [...] They never said a word it's just that when you come across a mass of them and you have to walk through the middle of them. [...] Do you say 'Hello' or what?'

Another participant commented that many Goths also use the Penrith Railway and bus station, '*but because they're spread out it's not as intimidating.*'

The problems older people have about dealing with youth are potentially resolvable through a combination of design solutions (e.g. more seating, better pathways, more CBD public space), and cultural solutions (e.g. community facilitation and mediation that could be part of Youth Protocols renegotiation process).

Migrants

The researchers were interested in how established and newly arrived groups of migrants in Penrith were engaging with parks and public spaces. Sources of information here were a meeting and guided discussion with 10 women from the well-established Maltese community at Llandillo; a meeting with 20 recently settled South Sudanese mothers and children at

Mamre House; and short questionnaires and 'hypothetical' park evaluation exercises (see Appendix 2.4) conducted with adult students learning English at TAFE.

Shared public space and cultural diversity

Research on how migrants use public space has typically focussed on particular cultural groups (Armstrong, 2004; Stewart et al., 2003), but the real planning challenge is the interrelationship between people from different cultural backgrounds in shared public space. People from diverse cultures — and from different genders and generations within these cultures — have different systems of meaning that effect how they experience shared public space (Sandercock 2003). There are social obligations within the migrant's community about one's behaviour in shared open space, including rules of appropriate gender behaviour and cultural codes of how and with whom one is seen in public (Powell and Risbeth, 2008). Often outdoor places prompt migrants' memories of and comparisons with the home countries. But the migration experience itself creates even more complex transnational identities (Massey, 2005). As well, long periods in refugee camps or Australian detention centres disrupt memories of place and can affect forging connections with the new country.

A salient distinction is between new and established migrant communities. Settling in a new country requires on-going efforts to learn new rules and common expectations of courtesy and custom, including day to day abilities to negotiate the local neighbourhood. Those who arrive without a strong 'receiving community' find the public realm a most important resource for the social rules of living in a cosmopolitan context (Alexander, Edwards & Temple, 2007). Recent research in the multicultural UK city of Sheffield found that use of public open space by first generation migrants reflects their cultural identities (Powell & Risbeth, 2008; see also Walking Voices website www.walkingvoices.group.shef.ac.uk). Such identities are not static but are influenced by and influence the environment in which they live. Various factors can support or act as barriers to their feeling of belonging, including public visibility within the migrant's own community.

Earlier studies (Amin, 2002; also Watson 2006) had found migrants mainly engaged with people in their own group in public spaces and established territory in public space at different times of the day. Amin (2002) stresses the limitation of public space to facilitate intercultural dialogue, other than through casual exchanges in market places. Powell & Risbeth (2008) question the concept of disengagement, arguing that open space and local streets offer random opportunities for intercultural contact, as well as non-verbal interactions and multi-sensorial engagement with localities. Unfamiliarity with the local environment was identified in their research as a component of 'culture shock' for new migrants. Engaging in the public landscape increases individual and community confidence through the development of local knowledge. Migrants were able to learn new skills, including improving English literacy by deciphering outdoor signage. Powell & Risbeth argue that because acceptable behaviour within shared open spaces is culturally defined, it can present misunderstandings between members of different communities. Despite this, they conclude that by spending time in outdoor public spaces, newly arrived migrants can grow more confident about their ability to settle and belong.

New arrivals: Sudanese women, English language students

A distinctive group of recent arrivals in Penrith hail from sub-Saharan Africa, many of them impoverished refugees who fled violence and have endured years in camps and detention centres. Groups of Sudanese are living in St Mary's and in community housing in Cranebrook, with a small number of South Sudanese in Werrington.

Sudanese women were the target of the recent Penrith City Council WALK project, which organised group walking for fitness and socialising, and outings outside Penrith. Key issues

for the women were poverty, isolation, depression, loss of homeland, cultural dislocation, and English language learning. The project report⁴ noted that some participants had to choose between WALK and learning English at TAFE, leading to the suggestion for conversational walking in future. The women very much enjoyed walking, along with singing and dancing together, but faced difficulties with lack of affordable childcare and inadequate public transport — especially a problem for the Cranebrook residents. Participants wanted more information about child- and pram-friendly areas with access to toilets.

Our consultation with Sudanese women (mediated by a translator) found their background experiences and expectations of parks varied from Australian norms. They had no local or pocket parks in Sudan like those in Penrith, because they lived in houses clustered within walled compounds, where children could play under trees and move between houses. Their parks were larger and designed on the colonial template of formal 19th century city parks, with gardens, paths, fountains, seating, rotundas, etc. Travelling musicians would play during holidays. People used parks for big social gatherings and would bring music for dancing and food to cook. There were also riverside parks where they would picnic and swim.

The families like to use larger parks in Penrith, such as Jamison Park, Cook Park, St Mary's, and Victoria Park. The young children liked the swings and slides, but older children were too busy to visit parks after school and are only permitted to go on weekends if accompanied by an adult. Issues of physical accessibility and amenity are similar to those reported by Playvan participants and others, with a stress on the need for toilets in parks, and safety — especially fencing around playgrounds for young children. Toilets and fencing are related issues, as many of the women have numerous small children and find it difficult to look after them in the unfenced local parks, particularly if one of the children needs to use a toilet.

Cultural differences and barriers

A predominant feature of this group of participants was their experience of cultural barriers to enjoying parks. They do not use local parks because they feel people stare at them and their children. It is perceived as racism. The women worry their children might make too much noise. Fear of provoking racist responses from other park users also inhibits them from taking their music or food to large parks: they are anxious about offending and being conspicuous. Their overriding need at this point is to feel accepted and part of the community – including by curtailing their interests in order to fit in with local norms of outdoor space use.

Another group of recent migrants participated in this study via their TAFE English class, which included some Sudanese people. Their evaluations of Penrith parks yielded the familiar litany of wants for more toilets, shelter and shade, safety fences for children, barbeques, night lighting, play equipment, transport and parking. Some mentioned areas and basic facilities for informal sport, including netball, volleyball, and soccer. Additional points were better security to be provided through rangers or guards, and opportunities (and electricity) for music so people could '*play and dance*' in parks. A few participants who knew no parks nearby described ideal spaces which included flowers, gardens, and 'waterfalls' (which probably meant fountains) – suggesting the formal garden styles familiar to Sudanese women.

Contrasting with typically Australian expectations about parks as 'nature', some of the South Sudanese and other participants in our consultation wanted open spaces more like the formal parks and gardens of their homelands, where primary activities were socialising,

⁴ See the WALK project website, www.walk.org.au.

cooking, music-making and dancing. Their desire was for parks that were closer to the 'cultural' end of the nature-culture spectrum.

Our study found many other participants also wished that Penrith parks were less 'natural' and more 'cultural' and that they could be livened up as venues for cultural events, music, festivals, and markets. In their traditions of outdoor park use, Sudanese residents have a cultural resource that could benefit other parts of the community. But without support to facilitate cultural change and improve tolerance of difference, the Sudanese will try to conform to existing 'Aussie' norms. Neighbourhood social events in the parks might help overcome perceived racism and xenophobia, by opening up the park as a space for diverse activities by diverse people on different occasions. Our suggested 'Local Park Days' (see Recommendations 1.13, 2.9) could be occasions where local Sudanese residents could make music, dance and cook, and hopefully accustom other users to relaxedly sharing the space with each other.

Settled migrants and cultural hybridity: the Maltese

In contrast to the recently arrived Sudanese residents who are still finding their feet and acutely aware of their physical and cultural differences from the rest of the community, the Maltese migrants are in a stable state of cultural hybridity: they are comfortably settled in Australian society and fluent in English, but also enjoy facilities and activities amongst their own ethnic and language group. The Maltese community established the La Valette Social Centre in Blacktown in 1964, which today provides a club house, chapel and presbytery. The Centre's six acres of land in Blacktown has facilities for five bocce courts, a *gana* style folk singing group, bingo, and an active senior citizens group. Key community networks are maintained through church attendance and its hugely popular soccer team, the Parramatta Melita Eagles Soccer Club.

Researchers met with a lively group of Maltese women in their 60s and early 70s, who told stories of migration and marriage in pursuit of the Australian dream of home ownership, achieved through years of physically demanding and time-consuming work as strawberry growers and market gardeners in the Llandilo and Plumpton areas. Those involved in farming in Malta had lived in villages or towns and walked to farms on the outskirts. Public parks were small with formal gardens and flowers. Coming to Australia was especially difficult for those who had been city girls earning good money working in international hotels, and they found themselves isolated on 5-acre blocks doing back-breaking labour that would eventually require their early retirement.

Some regretted that hard work had precluded recreational time when their children, who were also expected to '*help us in the garden*' after school:

'We are too busy to bring the kids to the park when they were young. [...] I have all the time in the world for my grandchildren, but for my children, I had to work on the farm.'

Grandchildren were now a major focus of their recreational interests. Some still lived on 5-acre blocks where visiting grandchildren could run around and enjoy private open space, but they also wanted the option of a public park or picnic area. Wilson Park was identified as the only park in Llandilo but it was unusable because '*it's locked all the time. We don't know where the key is, the toilets are locked, so we couldn't even bring our grandchildren to play there.*' The facilities they wanted were toilets, a barbeque area with tables and seating, shade, swings for the children, and somewhere for the men to play bocce (which some do in Luddenham and Quaker's Hill):

The thing with the park is, you have to have something for everybody.

Summary of Community Perceptions

Accessibility

- Different kinds of people had similar expectations about basic park amenities.
- Lack of toilets, shade, seating and lighting prevent people using parks more often (including at night).
- Transport access to open space is a particular issue for youth, older people, people with disabilities, and newly arrived migrants.

Children and Youth

- The Playvan service provides a temporary environment with movable elements for creative play and social interaction, and is a model of how a park can become an event.
- Park use in middle childhood is being inhibited by parental fears.
- Parks in Penrith lack active play equipment suited to older children.
- Hostility from adults in parks, and harassment by security guards in the CBD make young people feel unwelcome in public space.
- Teenagers with disabilities face physical access problems as well as hostility in parks and other places where they like to socialise.
- Older children, teens and young adults value digital connectivity.
- Students at UWS and TAFE campuses visit commercial and recreational spaces in Penrith and might benefit from driving maps featuring parks.

Other Cultural Issues

- Parks cater to a culture of sport and fitness that can exclude adults with disabilities and others interested in sensory and social stimulation.
- Playing with grandchildren is an important recreational interest for older residents, especially the Maltese who had little fun with their own children.
- Older people are uncertain how to interact with the large numbers of youth encountered in the public space between the Joan and the Plaza ('the Mondo').
- Sudanese migrant women fear provoking racist responses in local parks and feel very inhibited about socialising in parks in the Sudanese group style.

Our findings suggest there is an excellent opportunity in Penrith to regenerate the park as a cultural space by accommodating different social and cultural activities at different times: the park as event. Many community participants expressed the desire for more cultural activities in parks, including outside entertainment, band nights, games, music-making, singing, dancing and cooking as well as community-building neighbourhood events. Such temporary uses circumvent the need for 'culturally sensitive' permanent facilities beyond basic amenities and follow our sense of Universal Design being non-exclusive rather than inclusive. We propose a program of 'Local Park Days' to help reduce parental anxiety over children playing there, and to get everyone more familiar with using their local parks in more diverse ways (see Recommendations 1.13, 2.9).

CHAPTER 5: GATEKEEPERS STUDY

Gatekeepers Research Framework

Whereas the previous chapters reported on different kinds of residents and park users in Penrith, this part of the research concerns those professionals we are calling the ‘gatekeepers’ (or sometimes, ‘stakeholders’), that is, well-informed key players involved in the creation and ordination of recreation and open space. We inquired into gatekeepers’ knowledge of, and attitudes to, Universal Design, in order to identify possible bases for acceptance or resistance to implementing Universal Design principles in the creation or transformation of open space. Stakeholders including developers, PCC personnel and urban designers reflected on practical applications of UD within their understanding of the Penrith Community. In addition to interviews for the Gatekeeper Study, less formal interviews were conducted with recreational and open space planners from four other Western Sydney Councils, with the aim of finding out the principles of open space planning they were prioritising, and what, if anything, their Councils were doing to implement Universal Design.

The Method and Observations on the Method

Council identified ten key personnel who were contacted and interviewed for the study. Although focus groups had initially been planned, it was judged more effective to interview subjects individually. While this generated a vast amount of information (amounting to 113 pages of interview transcripts), it also generated more ‘thick description’ of the situation in Penrith than would a focus group. A number of potential respondents from outside Council were contacted but all but two of this external group were reluctant to be interviewed. Each potential respondent was provided with a copy of the schedule and the briefing documents assuring confidentiality. Internal and external group respondents were provided with their transcripts and a summary of findings, in accordance with the Delphi strategy that allows them to feed back to the researcher impressions of their own and others’ interview responses.

The resistance of developers to interview could stem from various sources. It is possible that in spite of the information and assurances of anonymity provided the respondents felt that genuine answers might prejudice their relations with Council — particularly in the context of debates regarding S94 developer contributions. Or perhaps the low response from externals indicates their disinterest in reflective processes compared to practical aspects. A more intensive, protracted and involved research and participation process would have been needed to attain ‘insider status’ with this group.

Concepts and Contexts

This research was undertaken in the context of Council enthusiasm for the concept of Universal Design reflected in the Council’s Open Space Action Plan (adopted 25/6/07) which states that, ‘Development of open space land will be in accordance with universal design principles and standards’ (p. 9). Universal Design aims at being usable by all people but this is generally qualified by the rider ‘*to the greatest extent possible.*’ This qualification allows those implementing Universal Design to define the parameters of the concept and the extent of its contextual possibility, that is, to find design solutions in and for specific real-world contexts. A key problem is how to move from the general aspirations of Universal Design ‘for all’ to its practical application in particular contexts, where it serves the needs of target groups at specific sites (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 1).

Internal Responses

Synopsis of Interview Responses

The respondents within and external to PCC covered a great breadth of experience and expertise. The interviewees and their attitudes were perceived to be pivotal to the creation of open space. They included a developer, an urban design academic, personnel from architecture and landscape architecture, community development, planning, environmental services, recreation planning, disability services, parks technical support and development assessment. The respondents demonstrated a passionate commitment to improving the quality of development and access to open spaces and recreation facilities. They also evinced acute awareness deriving from experience of the financial and practical limitations facing council and users in relation to some aspects of access.

Some researchers are sceptical about the objective value of interview responses, arguing that respondents may provide a self interested account to skew the survey. Or alternatively, that interviewees may be unable to penetrate the logic of their own position to provide a fair account; they may carry a prejudice about others or events that taints their view; or they may wish to promote a situation different from that which prevails. Others feel pressure to conform from the organization which leads them to repress their own views. One caveat to these concerns is that it is generally held by social researchers that when discussing their realm of work and expertise, professionals are likely to be objective and reliable witnesses (Lee, 2008).

Any or all of these positions have impacted on the interview responses we discuss below. All we can say about these responses is that they are a fair reflection of the views expressed by professionals of their own volition without pressure or sanction. If those attitudes are critical or supportive of Universal Design, Council practice or current open space management, it does not indicate that they are right or wrong in an objective sense. It simply tells us that here are a group of well informed and pivotal people who hold these attitudes.

Stewardship

The PCC has stewardship of recreational and open space categorised at different spatial levels and facilities provision, ranging from Pocket parks to Regional Parks and Natural Areas (see Chapter 2). Respondents discussed Phoenix Family Park Cranebrook, Penrith Station Forecourt, Great River Walk, Mulgoa Rd, Glenmore Park, Mulgoa Park, Waterside, Erskine Business Park, and several referred to Tench Reserve.

One female respondent from the council described public domain as:

'Public domain at its poorest is the space between buildings. At its best, the lively connections that people make between spaces [...] open space [...] people probably can move around more [...] There's not social constraints upon your physicality in those spots.'

Spaces, functions and users

Gatekeepers were asked to talk about the location, structure, function and typical user group of particular parks at different spatial levels (Neighbourhood, Regional, etc). Respondents chose spaces that were familiar to them, whether from having recently worked on it, through using it as a consumer, through having recently audited or visited the space, or because they wished to make a particular point about ideals. The hierarchy of spaces was intended to organize the responses and perhaps elicit generic problems, advantages or functional benefits at particular spatial levels. Some of this did emerge, but each space had its own unique disposition to the surrounding area and the needs or social character of the

surrounding area. Interviewees' discussions of locations yielded a number of insights and details.

Multi function

There was a strong sense that spaces should be malleable and adaptable for use by different demographics and sub groups, which accords with findings and suggestions elsewhere in this report. The proximity of pocket parks and their exposure to residential surveillance made them popular places for different groups. As youth also reported, this sometimes led to conflict:

'...playground equipment that was designed for small children that adolescents like to use, as well. Because it's something to sit on, and be in constant motion while you're talking to your mates [...]. Little pocket parks and playgrounds were connecting points for young people in their community.'

Connectivity

The principle of connectivity was a recurrent theme whether in reference to biodiversity corridors, walking paths, traffic movement from residential to retail areas or links between neighborhoods. Respondents were able to see the physical and cultural connections created by spaces:

'I think if you read Ian McHarg from the 1970s, planning with nature, the idea of connectivity between people and nature [...] of getting people mixing and moving through the environment. [...] Getting it to happen naturally, I think, is the trick.'

Residual spaces

The development practice of designating remnant or residual land as pocket parks, together with the existence of Council vacant landholdings, sometimes leads to confusion over what are and aren't parks:

'Well, I drive round and look at them, I wonder: 'Gee, is that someone's vacant block they haven't built a house on yet or is that a council park?' You can't tell. It's a worry.'

Some remnant lands between houses can pose problems of management, but as noted above they form important corridors and 'connecting points' for residents in adjoining dwellings.

Commercial use and parkland

Penrith is actively involved in the creation of new employment areas but appears to lack a policy regarding the creation of recreational and open space for them. This is in part a product of experience of underutilization of such spaces:

'We've negotiated with the landowners and the Department of Planning, of Conservation, to get a biodiversity corridor. [...] I think we haven't in the planning really sat down and thought deliberately about recreational demands that would be generated by an employment area. [...] Council [...] inherited land in [the Dunheved estate] for the establishment of parks. [...] they were never used. [...] we negotiated with the business entity [...] and we sold off the parks. And the money [...] was generated back in to other infrastructure improvements in the area. [...] They didn't want the parks.'

Riverside topography and management:

The natural topography and beauty of the environment is a major attraction to users but poses problems of accessibility and management. The very qualities which render the landscape interesting, natural and challenging can also limit the user groups able to access it.

'The river is a very fragile environment in terms of its embankments [...] we try to design to 14-28 ... we said it's not going to work. We don't have the funds [...] We can make it accessible with assistance, we can't make it according to the standard. [...] So we have a handrail [...]. If you were in a wheelchair you might hold on to that [...]. In an open

environment, light's changing all the time.[...] it's quite difficult to design to that. And I think I'm not the only one who has that problem. A lot of people in the industry struggle with that problem.'

Disability Access:

Council officers have to make difficult decisions regarding how much they can invest to make open space accessible and where that investment is best deployed.

'[W]e put in three accessible parking bays along that area, we cut some logs and made it wide enough for wheelchair access, the pathways from the accessible parking bays to the facilities. That's always one issue ...the topography of the area, and of course, as a Council officer we always have a limited budget and we need to try and get best value.'

Competition between users:

Some areas as one respondent remarked are 'loved to death':

'Walking tracks, jogging tracks, cycle pathways, picnic areas, place to take the family on a Sunday for a barbecue in pleasant surroundings. ... some of those places that fit that bill, they're being loved to death. Like Tench Reserve, the boat ramp [...] Every weekend it's just got people teeming through it.'

This respondent also noted Council was looking to meet recreation needs beyond 'active sport for 10 to 18 year old boys', but finding that it was 'somewhat difficult [to get] gender balance more successfully,' especially with trends for more girls playing sports like soccer, cricket, and rugby.

Some of Council's sports facilities are being 'trodden into dirt' by school students, particularly in areas where schools do not provide their own sports grounds. This arrangement offloads grounds maintenance costs from the Department of School Education onto Council. At the same time, local schools, which according to Departmental policy are supposed to share their grounds with Council, are not doing so, largely for fear of indemnity claims. They will hire out halls but generally not sports facilities.

Competition between spaces:

The popularity of spaces like Tench Reserve warrants further investment in them, but this comes at a cost to resources invested in older, poorer or more remote areas. Our respondents are faced with difficult choices. Clearly the volume of usage requires investment in maintenance and development of highly popular areas, but less conspicuous spaces also require investment, such as Mulgoa Road into Glenmore Park:

'It's also got some great aspects such as a natural lake, there's a lot of birdlife and wildlife activity [...] I see, a lot of mums and bubs. A lot of young families that will be walking around with their kids and dogs [...] fitness people that'll run around that lake[...]. They don't have to cross a lot of roads to get a really good routine. So, you don't sort of have to be so strict on the supervision, especially with young children.'

What are the positive and negative characteristics of the space?

Generally respondents were positive about the open spaces at every level available in Penrith. There was a strong sense, deriving from council concern with the issue, that older and established spaces were falling behind new development recreation areas in terms of quality and maintenance:

'[T]he population's hollowing out in those areas [...] parks and playgrounds, they look tatty in the older areas. They're not as well maintained. Park staff possibly see it as, 'Why would we look after this? People here don't deserve it...' You know, whatever. All the stereotypes that come with it.'

It was also acknowledged that many open spaces traditionally provided on estates were unusable, often as residential land which was not only inadequate but had come with its own problems of access, maintenance and usability.

Particular points to emerge in relation to positive and negative characteristics were:

- Rural parkland had a sympathetic character to its surrounding area.
- In general paths were too narrow for pedestrian traffic.
- Children's playgrounds were rather dated and many of the desirable spaces for children's recreation and walking lacked toilet facilities in close proximity:
'There's no facilities other than to walk around so if you got the circumstance where you're a carer and you need to get that person to a toilet, you're busted custard. You've got a ten-minute walk.'
- Concealed spaces in proximity to houses created opportunities and also nuisance, while desirable spaces for youth were often closed down due to the perception of nuisance
- Parks could work well in proximity to other facilities:
'Phoenix [...] the community has good ownership of the park... It's well utilised, it's connected into community facilities. There's a local DOH house there where they do their connection, they provide outreach services to residents [...] The negative ... the drought has made it, the ground cover not as good ... there's all back fences along it. Which are prone to graffiti attack.'

What are the positive and negative characteristics for the users?

Respondents to this question were more likely to be reflecting their own experience of the space than that of users:

'Glenmore Park [...] The negative side would be the width of the footpaths. I see that when you've got a mum with a pram it's very hard for somebody else to walk past [...] The poor maintenance. Generally vandalism, graffiti, you know, vegetation that's not looked after. [...] You can walk around the lake and get up to the shops and have a coffee and walk home. [What] they haven't addressed is providing a proper pram ramp at the entrances and exits [...] ... there's nowhere where you can wash your hands or have a drink from a bubbler, or dispose of light rubbish. Lighting. It's quite poor in some of the crucial areas [...] no barbecue facilities [...] no play equipment, there's paths that go through there, but that's it. There's nothing. Yeah, it's just really sad.'

Regional parks that provided both organized sport and playground facilities catered for multiple users. Riverside parks offered aesthetics and access for a variety of users. Some interstitial parks offered ideal spaces for youth to congregate. New open space development was able to be flexibly created to enable visitors and locals to enjoy without interfering with each other's amenity (i.e. non-exclusive design). One example was pathways in Tench Reserve:

'[I]t's our number one park in terms of the community, because it's on the river. Everyone is just attracted to the river. This has already got assisted pathway network through it. On the other side of the river, there's open space. There's a gravel track that people jog and walk their dogs on off road. So that's weaving its way through the embankment. It goes up and down and round, it's quite spaghetti-like. So that's already existing infrastructure if you like.'

However, the Reserve lacked *'a nice café, somewhere where you can go and sit and have breakfast, Sunday breakfast'* and the existing restaurant was *'this bunker, and it's got no relationship with the river at all.'*

What are some of the principles underlying the creation of these spaces?

Most respondents found it difficult to grasp the idea of particular principles, theories or ideas informing the creation of existing spaces. This was less the case for planners who cited the ideal ratio of open space per resident, and those charged with creating spaces who drew on experience, the design brief, and contemporary examples of good or best practice. The question also elicited some very detailed and logical responses as to what ought to inform the creation of open and recreational spaces. Yet most respondents either did not know what the past designers of existing public spaces had had in mind, or felt the design was a product of pragmatic and practical considerations rather than philosophical or design principles or briefs:

'Cranebrook [...] designed in terms of trying to be accessible to the community [...] Ideally, open space should sort of not have a caged in or closed in feel. That particular park, it's got a narrow entrance and then a big sort of area and that's all the back fences. So it does have a bottled effect, which is not a good... if they have equipment on them that that should be able to be viewed from the road, but not so close to the road that parents have to be continually vigilant about it... Shade's obviously important. Using the natural attributes of the land and the trees that are there to create spaces, little mini spaces within it.'

Even where respondents felt quite strongly that heritage factors impinged on the open space due to its age and history, they could not cite who had designed it or what the principles of its design might be:

'[M]y suspicion is that most of the parks are in places that couldn't be built on, so land use has influenced heavily where things have been.'

How successful are these principles in satisfying user needs in the spaces?

As indicated above most respondents felt the overall provision of recreation and open space was good. Perhaps this reflected the general ethos of the Council that Penrith's principal virtue is its access to open spaces and nature. There was however a prevailing sense that inequity existed between old and new areas in favour of the new. It was felt that the governance and maintenance of open space was driven by budgetary and maintenance considerations in the first instance. Many of the spaces fell short in terms of accessibility, facilities, aesthetics and diversity of use. Specific groups, in particular youth, were ignored or excluded from the use of open spaces.

What are some of the impediments to improving the spaces?

The principal impediments to improving spaces were the budgetary constraints and cost of retrofitting, the topographical limitations (e.g. of riverside space), the physical constraints of residual sites originally gazetted as open space, and resistance of council or neighbours to transforming the space for example for youth to use:

'Probably what we want to do these days is to make whatever we build easy to maintain, and also cost-effective. Ease of maintenance. Not too fussy. I think my normal input wouldn't have been the initial design, but some of the landscape architects do provide a fussy design that over the years is hard to maintain.'

'Young people. Sixteen and seventeen year-olds of a night time. We've just pulled out a skate bowl. There's one up at Cranebrook that's attracting antisocial behaviour, so we're going to fill it up.'

'[I]f a park is at the level that we say we'll put a reasonable playground in, then we'll put fifty thousand dollars aside for a playground that has climbing equipment and a swing and a slide [...] part would be on this rubber soft fall, so a high capital expense but low maintenance and cost, so we're trying to go for that in our future Section 94 contributions.'

'Yeah. We're working on something now which is for the older areas, the redevelopment of the older areas. We might collect the money and – say we're building something at Emu Plains, even though we collected the money from Colyton [...] You've got to be careful, because you should spread it out evenly, but you might find that some areas redevelop more quickly than the others [...] equity is difficult.'

What are the interests of stakeholders in influencing the character of spaces, the mix of users, the funding agencies, the Council's goals?

Here the distinction between new and established spaces is particularly important. The new spaces are determined by State Government requirements, the marketing interests of developers and the negotiating position of the Council. In established spaces the stakeholders are the Council and residents:

'Originally the space was maintained by the developers, they had a contract that they had to maintain it for a certain period of time. And once that was handed over to Council there was quite a significant decline in the landscaping, maintenance of grass, there's a lot of weeds that have come up.'

In the case of the transport interchange this includes the Rail Authority:

'It's not a place you want to meet, because it's too hostile..... The bypass – the widened bypass route – has nibbled into the space in recent time, and the principle has been one of bypassing the city, rather than creating a space which has public amenity.'

There are quite different dynamics and power relations prevailing in relation to these spaces. Cases in point are the new water front developments and in Ropes Crossing and in particular the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation lands:

'[W]e've got a fairly reasonable response to date. There's always argy bargy over the actual areas and how much are we going to put on. But the developers understand our obligations to deliver those sorts of community elements.[...] It satisfies their marketing strategies in some cases. [...] sometimes they go in and splurge and landscape things for example [...] to maintain these things in the longer term is a fairly costly exercise. [...] difficult for us to sustain. [...] We have a healthy and vigorous discussion internally here about what sort of improvements ought to go into these recreation facilities.'

The relationship between developer and Council and Section 94 contributions was an ever present element in discussion of funding open space:

'[T]he minister would bypass the council's ability to have its own Section 94 plan for place, or negotiate a separate Voluntary Planning Agreement with the developer concerned. That's, I must say, the troubling prospect – it's contributing to that unaffordability [...] the UDA keep hammering the government [...] The government's not shouldering its traditional obligations.'

Do you already know about Universal Design, can you name some of the principles?

A few of those questioned could name the principles, and most grasped the central concept of non-discriminatory design:

'It's about broadening the concept to say, well we need to provide an environment that can function in all circumstances and without differentiating between people. [...] People who carry things with them, or people who push things like prams ... larger than normal or smaller than normal [...] Obeying universal design and principles looks at it from a positive point of view...the Australian Standards we're kind of working with [...] is focussing on people's disability... it's still talking about disability rather than accessibility, and I think that's the difference between the two, in a very broad sense.'

How do these principles differ from the goals currently informing open and recreational space design?

None felt that the Universal Design principles differed radically from the aspirations which already informed the creation of open space:

'I don't see they differ much at all. I think it's just an embellishment of the sorts of things we aspire to. It's just getting development industry and Council cued up to those sorts of things, raising the awareness of users. Universal design is for all users. [...] but how you do that in existing areas, I'm not sure. I suppose there is a cost, and there is ongoing maintenance, and that sort of thing. I'm not the expert there, but I think there's a whole-of-organisation approach needed to this....'

'I think there's probably limitations with the term Universal Design, in terms of understandability. I like the term inclusiveness because it probably engenders in people a bit more understanding of what you're talking about. [...] So you need to look at how it can be the most efficient design in its use of materials, in its inclusiveness, in its life cycle and so on. So, to me, Universal Design is part of doing things in a much more sustainable way.'

How do you see principles of Universal design being applied in any of the spaces you have mentioned?

Interviewee: *I can't really think of an answer for that. I don't think there is much difference.*

Researcher: *If we applied Universal Design principles to it, what would we come up with? That was different to what we've got now?*

Interviewee: *What's our budget? Are you going to give me lots of money?'*

Apart from the desire for increased path widths, few could identify specific innovations which would derive from Universal Design principles to enhance the spaces they had been discussing. Generally speaking they saw improvements as innovations that reflected their general approach to more accessible, aesthetically pleasing, and inclusive space. This in its way reflected an overall sense of responding appropriately to the possibility of spaces and user groups rather than being driven by a common philosophy.

Major open space developments came with a brief and a set of financial and physical constraints which the staff responded to. Existing spaces were constrained by stakeholder interests and most importantly and consistently financial limitations. These were the parameters that dictated their responses:

'I guess – what I can say is that we can always improve on what we've got. Look, there's a number of key points here. One is that it needs to be economically viable. It's all well and good to have these views of having a completely accessible environment, but it's totally uneconomic, and simply not possible. On the other hand, often I see certain environments where if the person who designed it in the first place had thought about access for all, we wouldn't have to go in there and retrofit it, and often the solutions are very simple.'

External Responses

The Developer

This interview gave insights into the constraints on developers who seek to make a profit while also meeting a range of other obligations. While developers work within the Council concept plan and reach compromises through negotiation, the measures agreed to and

proposed by developers are often rejected. The Council reduces its own cost of maintenance and acquisition of riparian corridors but they are still obliged to be maintained by the developer. Developers are becoming increasingly conscious of S94 costs and growth centre contributions, and delayed Council approvals add to these costs:

'No aversion to providing open space, it is a question of how much to provide, as street widths have increased with walkways and cycleways, but one way or another it has to be profitable.'

Penrith has higher standards than other Councils and limits use of retention basins as active open space, which imposes extra costs. It is important to have some sense of the utility of open space and not simply leave wasteland. Children tend to use the backyard under parental scrutiny in younger years, while public open spaces are often used by adolescents. This poses further problems of letting younger children play there. As noted in Chapter 4, those in middle childhood might want to build cubbies in such spaces, though parents are increasingly likely to disallow it. One could pose it as a question of health versus security in developing areas.

There are plenty of natural parks but little space for structured sports activities, which tend to be overcrowded when they are used:

'[S]ome developers will provide facilities for the community with few parks where people can afford to maintain those facilities. There is only a certain amount of money people can spend and there is an opportunity cost to more public space: it is less private space.'

According to this interviewee, Council should be foreseeing future demand and balancing regional and local needs. For example, is Penrith Lakes to be an active or passive recreation area?

There are no real bench marks for open space: it is what the development can afford. Developer provision of open space is based on demographics and affordability and different Council requirements. Currently Council takes the developer's land and does with it as they like; the land may sit there for ten years after the developer has made the contribution. Under the new S94 regulations developers will have a say and they will do it themselves. Maintenance costs have to be built into community subdivisions, and levies for maintenance and young people's behaviour are active questions. Youth break-ins, graffiti and burnt down plastic playgrounds are a vast cost to the community and the developer.

Using residual land as open space is often inappropriate as land which is difficult to develop is also difficult for people with different abilities to use. Developers are increasingly conscious of the need to provide accessible facilities, and requirements on commercial developers (buttons in Braille, etc.) have generated an increased level of community awareness. Facilities have to be accessible and usable by all, but if it is just accessible by wheelchair it is going to create resentment. The developer is working on norms for accessible open space, but major issues for the future are water bodies, fencing and insurance.

The Designer

The Designer was concerned with practical open space solutions and offered a design philosophy critique of Universal Design. Most people who are designing think they are designing for everybody but they do it in the context of the local culture:

'[I]f you live in Japan you want an apartment designed for Japan. Take Centennial Park, surely wherever you come from you are going to find something to enjoy.'

The interviewee pointed out that on a Saturday afternoon in Centennial Park you will find every ethnic group *'universally designed around a barbecue'*. Points made in the interview include the 'big issue' of how design accommodates children and adolescents, keeping them out of trouble. Once above this age people can cope for themselves. Developmental age

dictates ability. Often youth don't like spaces designed for them as they prefer an element of anarchy. The environment itself has to be malleable. The current alienation of public space has been exclusionary: the public sector hands management of public space to the private sector which regulates access — a problem we noted for youth around Penrith Plaza (see Chapter 4).

'We know exactly how to solve the problems of access: capital and expertise can take care of it. It is willingness that is required.'

The designer thought it was a worry if the facilities used by many cyclists are sacrificed to a few wheelchairs. A critique of UD was offered: that it appears to be a structuralist concept of one size fits all, but that is an almost useless idea as it is impossible to fit all. Every design has an element of universality and specificity. Built-in adaptability is always there. It is a question of what is essential and what is contingent:

'Replace the concept of Universal Design with the concept that every design has specific and generic characteristics. The question is where do we set the bar?'

Other Agencies

Briefings from the Disability Council of NSW and their literature did not address the concept of Universal Design but targeted achievable goals for working with the public and private sectors to advance accessibility and utility in specific design standards⁵.

Commissioner Graeme Innes for HREOC spoke to the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design forum in Sydney 8 November 2006 and addressed the question of accessibility to housing as a human right. This concept effectively highlights the difficulties of engaging with the concept of accessibility in the built environment under legislation, even before we reach the broader concept of accessibility in open space. Innes was keen to keep the ambitions of Universal Design realistic and to take an achievable step by step approach:

'While not wanting to lose sight of the goal of applying Universal Design principles in housing, I am of the view that currently we may need to begin on that path by finding common ground on some limited low cost and no-cost requirements and other initiatives that will give us experience and confidence to move forward to more broadly address the market demands we inevitably face.'

Other Western Sydney Councils

We asked professionals in other Councils in Greater Western Sydney what approaches were being taken to Universal Design. This was to help contextualize PCC's approach, and gain insights into how open space design was being approached by Councils with more culturally and linguistically diverse populations than Penrith's. Recreational planners from Fairfield, Camden and Liverpool Councils were interviewed, and strategic planning documents reviewed, to determine how Universal Design principles were integrated into Council planning, and to find examples of Universal Design in parks. Other questions were how community groups were engaged in UD planning; how diverse cultural groups use open space, and how the Councils catered to those groups.

⁵ See the Disability Council of NSW Position Statement on Housing at <http://www.disabilitycouncil.nsw.gov.au/portfolios/accommodation/housing.html>

The planners and their Councils' documents reflected a sound understanding of and commitment to Universal Design in its broadest sense. As public space planners their prime directive is to design for all and to do it well. However, Universal Design has not really entered other Councils' vocabulary, nor are its principles applied in any strict sense. Instead, in planning and implementation terms like 'social inclusion', 'disability access', and 'age-friendliness' are used. Each of the Councils had examples of Universal Design, but these were one-off disability access playgrounds, built with external funding. Planners stated that for cost reasons, it was not feasible to make these more widespread. Although there is an underlying equity agenda and ethic, other councils lacked the ambition reflected in Penrith City Council's Open Space Action Plan regarding Universal Design. For instance, individual planners recognised a need to avoid the stigmatisation of 'special use' facilities, but planning documents aimed only to provide diverse users 'access'. Penrith's plan aims higher than just improving access and is attempting to work toward enhancing the experience for all users, for example, discussing potential opportunities for meaningful recreational experiences including sensory gardens and wheelchair-accessible play equipment (Open Space Action Plan, p. 12). For the other councils, Universal Design does not have the same priority.

Accessibility and social inclusion are the norm in Council strategies and implemented in the design process, with some participatory mechanisms to ensure that this is achieved (e.g. the mandatory Disability Access Committees, and other forms of stakeholder engagement). Post-build, there are people on the ground making sure that basic access standards are met and maintained. How successful this is depends upon Council structure, size, communication, and cost. For instance, appropriate feedback mechanisms from installation and maintenance back to planners are essential to ensure that the design achieves its intended accessibility. This may require post-build adjustments.

Access, equity, and inclusion are applied by councils in ways that reflect local demographics, social issues and the planners' own ethic (as an interpretation or prioritisation of what they see as the main social issues for the areas' residents). This may be why UD is not as high on other council agendas. PCC's demographic projections of an ageing population indicate a real need for UD. In other areas, ageing is not ignored as a design consideration, but population projections are for more young people, and/or greater cultural diversity in the coming decades, so these issues are prioritised.

The planners we spoke to strove to reach a basic standard of provision for all, but some went beyond basic provision for particular cultural or age groups if it was felt that certain groups needed specific attention.

Fairfield

The social disadvantage and cultural diversity which characterises the Fairfield area informs how design decisions are made. The planner's job is to design for cultural diversity and cooperation: to keep everyone happy and engaged or represent everyone equally. Designing for specific groups can become exclusionary as it encourages ownership, or groups marking what they see as their own territory. Moreover, key migrant groups change over time (e.g. in Fairfield from Italian, to Vietnamese, and now Sudanese). By making the space culturally accessible to all groups, cultural intersections and exchanges are facilitated, and resources can be used efficiently. For example, playgrounds for all parents act like the 'waterhole' around which various groups gather in cross-cultural exchange. The planner from Fairfield suggested their approach had been successful because it is designed for age groups rather than specific cultures, capitalizing on commonalities rather than designing for difference. The only conflict that arose was due to lack of provision for varying family group sizes. Another key design principle was for long term flexible use that allowed for people making use of the

space in unforeseen ways. Artists and cultural planners played an important role in bringing together different cultures to tell stories which were then integrated into park design.

Camden

In Camden, social inclusion is not about cultural diversity with such a huge Anglo population (90%).⁶ Here the cultural orientation in planning is to maintain the rural and historical character and culture. Like some of the Penrith gatekeepers, the planner there expressed concern for youth, whom he believed had been socially excluded in the planning of recreational facilities. Facilities for youth had been placed 'out of the way' so as to cause the least offence to the wider community. This age bracket is due to increase as the area undergoes rapid development, so the planning orientation for youth now is seen as a means to pre-empt potential social issues.

Liverpool

Real social problems are keenly felt across this community and there is a struggle to get and maintain basic amenity because of crime and drug use. For example, there was reticence to put in public toilets because of drug use. Universal Design is low on the agenda here, compared to design for crime prevention or emergency vehicle access to drug users or victims of crime in recreational spaces. UD in this social context would be somewhat of a luxury. Council strategy is to design more engaging youth-oriented spaces to facilitate drug- and crime-free activities for young people.

Findings And Discussion

Some key findings

Pragmatic concerns

A major finding from the Gatekeeper Study was that the prevailing approach to development of open space was largely pragmatic and driven by financial and budgetary considerations. These related to the source of funding, including through the S94 developer levies; the associated growing disparities in open space amenity in new versus older areas; the costs of maintaining grounds and facilities, added to by vandalism; the expense of quality and universally designed equipment, etc. The opportunity costs of Universal Design were seen as enormous compared to the benefits of simply having open space available and serviced. At present many open spaces are underutilized, unfunded and decommissioned due to funding and servicing constraints. The response to vandalism by a minority of youth of behaviour perceived (by adults) as 'anti-social' tends to be a punitive reduction of amenities for all, rather than a strategy to improve social inclusion.

No culture of design

Another key finding to emerge is that there is no apparent culture of design being the driving force behind open space. Developers are moving toward providing increasing levels of amenity as they displace Local Government in this context, but they are driven by marketing

⁶ Recent local debates and the Council's strong rejection of a proposed Islamic school in the area revealed how adamantly some residents want to maintain this non-diversity.

rather than design philosophy. This they share with everyone involved in the creation of open space, though there are also some who can articulate other principles (such as connection with nature, enhanced quality of life, environmental concerns, etc.). Hardly any of the gatekeepers could name what design principles or philosophy had informed the design of current spaces. And yet most felt there was little difference between Universal Design and the aspirations currently informing open space design. Making gatekeepers and planners aware of the design principles that inform (or in some cases, fail to inform) past and present open space designs would be a useful cultural shift as a prelude to tackling questions of Universal Design. We suggest a series of design workshops would be an effective way to do this (Recommendation 1.2).

Common interests and site specificity

Part of design is not simply function but appeal. If we are interested in cultural accessibility, then we must account for the fact that all design in the built environment incorporates cultural knowledge, and is in some ways accessible because it accords with (or at least, does not exclude) particular sets of expectations, memories and associations, and delights visual and other senses. But in multicultural contexts, making urban open spaces too culturally specific can create more problems, so designing for age groups or common interests can work better. An ongoing challenge of outdoor space design is to be both culturally and physically accessible, while also taking account of the natural topographic features and seasonal changes of the particular site.

Some Critiques of Universal Design

The study elicited two kinds of critiques of Universal Design: the design philosophy critique and the pragmatic critique — or just straight pragmatism. (See Appendix 1 for more on critiques and questions about UD.)

Design Critique

The Designer who was interviewed articulated a design philosophy critique: the conventional assumption is that good design implies some concept of the users or user group. The concept of universality implies no specification of a user group. It therefore cannot be good design.

Here we have the paradox that designers may feel that the failure to discriminate for different levels of user capability may deny rather than create accessibility. The interviewee's solution was *'the concept that every design has specific and generic characteristics. The question is where do we set the bar?'*

Designers on our research team have a design critique friendlier to UD: the problem is not that Universal Design fails to specify a user group, but that it is not in essence 'universal'. UD principles in fact specify a low-capability user, with the on-benefit of usability for people of higher capability. The design achieves a quasi-universality by designing for a low-capability minority ('setting the bar low') rather than designing for an able-bodied average or majority.

Pragmatic Critique

Virtually without exception those who have an inkling of Universal Design simply assume it reflects what any designer would ideally do in the best of all possible worlds. But we live in a real world that is far from the best. It is on the basis of this ideal versus real distinction that the pragmatic critique of Universal Design is launched: UD sounds great in theory, but is unrealistic and expensive to implement.

The problem with the pragmatic critique is that those with their hands on the purse strings always lay claim to having firmest grasp of reality, which they define as a matter of financial costs and practicalities. That which is not yet real (e.g. new design solutions) is by definition expensive and impractical. This perspective is typified by the response: *'It's all well and good*

to have these views of having a completely accessible environment, but it's totally uneconomic, and simply not possible.' At stake here are 'the politics of reality': that is, the question of who gets to define the dimensions of reality that count as 'the real' or 'possible', and whose kinds of practicalities and what kinds of costs are to be taken into consideration. For example, it seems that until very recently no gatekeepers questioned whether it is 'realistic' or 'practical' to prioritise expensive community sports and recreational facilities that catered primarily to '*active sport for 10 to 18 year old boys.*'

To people who cannot enjoy freedom of movement, equality of access or social inclusion because fittings and environments are designed only for an 'average' user (or a teenage boy), the issue is not 'ideal' versus 'real,' but about different realities and practical concerns experienced in the same environments. In a definition of 'reality' that included social reality, 'costs' may be measured in terms of social capital, not just dollars: the cost to a family of a woman in a wheelchair not being able to push her grandchild on a swing or watch her nephew play tennis; the loss to communities, businesses and other organisations from not including the talents, experiences and wisdom of a diverse range of people in their operations. Social justice and social inclusion are not calculable qualities that slot into spreadsheets. The core issue is not cash but priorities, that is, social values and political will. As the Designer aptly summed it: '*We know exactly how to solve the problems of access: capital and expertise can take care of it. It is willingness that is required.*'

Corporate reluctance to implementing UD

Pragmatic concerns

Whether or not one accepts the above critique of pragmatists' objections to UD, the practical reality is that most of the gatekeepers are themselves pragmatic realists with a clear focus on their limited budgets. Therefore strategies to implement Universal Design will have to begin more or less on their terms. Hence the importance of HEREOC Commissioner Graeme Innes' proposed incremental strategy that would start: 'by finding common ground on some limited low cost and no-cost requirements and other initiatives that will give us experience and confidence to move forward.' Strategies he identified were publicly funded housing and accommodation programs; building regulation and certification at different government levels; anti-discrimination laws; industry incentives; and education and awareness-raising. Were Penrith to adopt such an approach in open space design, it could begin by identifying some small-scale, low-cost and achievable innovations to implement in parks. Or even, as the HEREOC Commissioner seems to imply, it could start with implementing UD principles essential for housing before moving out to open space.

Lack of knowledge

Although pragmatic or budgetary constraints were foremost for Penrith's open space 'gatekeepers', these are not the only obstacles governments and businesses face in implementing Universal Design. US researchers Vanderheiden & Tobias (1999) studied corporate reluctance to adopt Universal Design and found a key issue was lack of in-house expertise on UD, coupled with over-reliance on designers external to the company. They found 'One frequently-suggested model was to provide general training to the teams and then to bring outside consultants in for in-depth participation on the design process.' Company heads and middle managers also had a strong demand by for actual examples of UD objects or environments, to help them get a more realistic sense of what was involved.

Regulations: an argument for

A major issue they discussed that is relevant to our study was regulations. They concluded that although improving knowledge and championing of UD within an organisation helped in the adoption of UD, regulation had the most lasting effect.

As this project has found, many gatekeepers equated UD with general notions of physical 'accessibility', especially parameters of physical accessibility like those codified in current access standards. But as we have noted (Chapter 1), UD builds upon accessibility by bringing in the additional dimensions of usability and social inclusion. Equating UD with accessibility encourages the idea that UD's core principles could be codified into a set of 'objective' guidelines and regulations that could simply be applied and conformed to like current access specifications. Some see this as compromising UD, whose advocates insist is a process not a product. Codification would not require any structural changes in governance and implementation processes, and is a way of leaving users and 'user/experts' out of design processes and evaluations. A reduction of UD principles to codes and standards avoids the extra complexity and innovative thinking required to discover appropriate UD solutions relevant to particular sites and the interests of their user groups.

Vanderheiden & Tobias (1999) found that on the one hand, the risk of regulations is to establish benchmarks that are taken as minima and maxima, which discourages attainment of the higher standards sought by UD. But on the other hand, regulation was the only incentive 'that was found to provide substantial and consistent motivation' for companies to adopt UD. They contend that although not fully consistent with the holistic design approach of UD, regulations based on UD principles would at least represent a significant improvement upon current access standards. This logic is in accord with the strategic approach suggested by HEREOC, and is probably behind the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, whose General Obligations include the aim to 'promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines'.⁷ We noted that the website for the NGO Adaptive Environments, a major advocate of Universal Design, has a section devoted to UD codes and guidelines.

Regulations: an argument against

Regulations themselves may not be the most effective way to raise access codes to the standard of Universal Design, according to Slatin (2003), who examined why US building professionals have embraced sustainability features more enthusiastically than accessibility or universal design. He attributes this largely to the difference between the proverbial 'carrot' versus the 'stick'. 'Going green' is encouraged by a certification program (LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) administered by a non-government building council whose '*green imprimatur also carries with it a host of marketing possibilities,*' and attracts municipal and state financial incentives for sustainable housing. By contrast, accessibility standards are legislated by the Department of Justice under a Federal Act: '*Compliance and cost are its watchwords.*'

Compliance qualifies businesses for some tax benefits, but it does not excite designers and is not used as a marketing strategy: '*What good does it do to say one has met the minimum standard?*' (Slatin, 2003) Because of the emphasis on compliance with minimal standards, there is '*little value-added in the effort*' of the creative few who do strive to go further and incorporate UD into designs for the built environment. A related issue noted by a

⁷ See Article 4 (f) of Convention at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

recent commentator is that there is little market advantage in incorporating UD accessibility features:

[P]art of the problem with getting these features included in mainstream design is that they are so ordinary; there is nothing special to look at if builders were to market the features. Step free entries, marginally wider corridors and plywood on the walls is not all that exciting from a marketing point of view. (Roennfeldt, 2007).

And yet as we have seen above these innovations come at a financial and opportunity cost, one that developers in Australia seem reluctant to bear beyond a legislated requirement, especially if they erode the marketability of the built form.

That the US's green building program offers a beckoning carrot, while their legislative accessibility requirements — like Australian ones — hold a threatening stick, arises from their different political histories. The American Disabilities Act was 'the climactic result of protests by disenfranchised citizens' seeking entry into mainstream society, whereas the green certification program had 'emerged from consensus-building efforts across a spectrum of grassroots advocacy and professional groups' (Slatin, 2003). Slatin speculates that another factor might be that people collectively share a sense of urgency and wanting to do something about environmental degradation and climate change, whereas individual vulnerability to disease, accidents and ageing 'is a truth that humans rarely confront.' (Slatin, 2003).

Sustainability and Universal Design

Sustainability measures are usually considered separately from accessibility, but there are prospects for developing links between Universal Design and sustainability. According to Adaptive Environments⁸:

Universal Design and green design are comfortably two sides of the same coin but at different evolutionary stages. Green design focuses on environmental sustainability, Universal Design on social sustainability.

There are arguments to be made about the economic and environmental economies of building features designed for whole of lifespan use. UD features are especially relevant for low-income or public housing stock, for they afford flexible use without needing special adaptations and renovations: the same features work equally well for the aged, wheelchair users, and parents with prams. These considerations are being pursued in parts of Europe and in Japan, where housing for an ageing population is a pressing concern. e.g. Koukkari & Sarvaranta, 2005⁹.

Strategic Options

Considering these ideas in the context of Penrith City Council's aspirations to promote and implement Universal Design, we can identify four strategic options, none necessarily exclusive of the others:

- *Pursue a regulatory approach:* As social justice arguments for UD can usually be sidelined by the pragmatic critique, they seem unlikely to provoke significant change in budgetary allocations. Compared to the idealistic Americans who appear more

⁸ See Adaptive Environments website at <http://www.adaptiveenvironments.org>

⁹ See also Australian Network for Universal Housing Design: www.anuhd.org/about.html and Accessible/Adaptable Housing National Network www.ped.org.au/ahnn).

willing to adopt progressive ideas on a voluntary basis, the pragmatic Australians conventionally rely more heavily on legislation to bring about change. In this context, pushing for improvements in accessibility standards and regulatory frameworks is probably worthwhile, even at risk of producing boring architecture that merely conforms to functional (but improved) minima (See recommendation 3.3).

- *Offer more 'carrots'*: Find ways to make UD more interesting and something to aspire to. For example, PCC could inaugurate a biennial competition with prizes for Universal Design, with winning entries built in Penrith (see Recommendation 3.4). This could be an effective way to promote UD within and beyond the region, whilst building up a 'portfolio' of working examples of UD that other councils and businesses could see in action. A panel of local users, stakeholders and appropriate design experts could be formed, and sponsorship for prizes or building the facilities sought from government or corporate sources. A distinctive difference from other design awards would be consideration of social inclusion and the involvement of user groups in the design and evaluation process.
- *Grow the knowledge base*: Building up 'in house' knowledge of Universal Design as well as greater awareness of the design principles that inform previous and current open space designs would give Council more confidence with finding effective UD solutions (see Recommendation 1.2). Developing and supporting a short professional program that offered training in UD principles and solutions would be another way to build up expertise across a range of groups, and is something that could potentially be done in collaboration with a university (such as UWS) or a consortium. A potentially significant link here is with the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design (www.anuhd.org/about.html), which has recently won a grant to expand its website beyond housing to include Universal Design more generally.
- *Link to sustainability*: This is an important strategic direction for Penrith 'the sustainable city,' and may be one way to start gaining greater acceptance of UD. Aside from the political and ethical connections between sustainability and UD (see L. Kaner Weisman, 1999), there are practical, environmental and economic reasons why it makes sense to build flexible-use open space facilities that are resource- and energy-efficient and do not need remodelling to cope with multiple uses and users in changing kinds of user populations. This also connects with the idea of the park as event, occasionally enhanced with mobile and temporary features.

Summary of Obstacles and Opportunities to Implementing UD

The Gatekeeper's Study showed that there are both obstacles and opportunities for implementing Universal Design. The following is a summary which has been used to inform our recommendations in Chapter 6.

Obstacles & Negatives	Opportunities & Positives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong sense of financial constraints ▪ Perception of UD as ideal, costly and unrealistic (the pragmatic critique) ▪ Confusion of UD with earlier ideas of (mainly physical) access catering to a 'disabled' minority, rather than multi-capacity whole population ▪ Poor knowledge of past and current design principles ▪ Difficulty in servicing or improving existing grounds, especially in older areas; partly related to S94 funding arrangements ▪ Response to vandalism tends to be removal of facilities rather than strategies for social inclusion ▪ Large area of open space and many parks to service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy commitments to enhanced social inclusion ▪ Policy commitments to implement Universal Design ▪ Future-oriented; acknowledges issue of ageing population ▪ Knowledgeable champion for UD within the organisation ▪ Strong interest in sustainability ▪ Passionate interests of gatekeepers in enhanced quality of life and recreational opportunities for Penrith residents ▪ Willingness to partner with other organisations to research and develop ideas, with potential for short course development ▪ Responsive to needs of residents with different physical capabilities ▪ Well developed connections with community groups and latest trends ▪ Openness to new ideas ▪ Developed whole of Council approaches to strategic issues.

CHAPTER 6: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Research Findings

The main research findings are presented as responses to the original research questions.

1. What is the **knowledge base** supporting the application of Universal Design as a local government strategic planning tool in the context of cultural diversity?

Accessibility and inclusion — The term ‘accessibility’ is variably used but is mostly reduced to physical access. The literature on Universal Design (UD) additionally articulates goals to diminish stigmatisation or achieve social inclusion. UD has been applied in public open space and across a range of facilities and built environments. Its value to sustainable housing design is increasingly recognised.

Inclusion and ‘non-exclusion’ — UD supports social inclusion by reducing physical barriers, but non-exclusive open space requires lowering of cultural barriers.

User/Experts — The Council’s Disability Access Committee is a model of using local knowledge of user/experts to identify accessibility issues and plan solutions.

Low level of knowledge — We found no apparent culture of design informing open space planning. Hardly anyone could identify design principles embodied in current spaces, and most equated UD with existing general notions of accessibility.

2. What are the issues related to **cultural complexity** when planning and designing for accessibility to public and outdoor recreational open space within the Penrith LGA?

Different public space norms — Complexities exist both within and between cultures. One issue for planning in culturally diverse contexts is that different cultures, sub-cultures, and generations have different assumptions and conventions about who uses public space, with whom, how, and when. Older women can feel intimidated by young people publicly socialising in large groups. Sudanese migrants like to make music, dance and cook in parks, but fear hostile looks and racist comments if they act outside current Australian norms of open space use

Anxiety and public open space — Anxieties about risk and safety in public space and nervousness about other cultural groups are cultural factors that influence park design, and lead many parents to disallow children’s unsupervised park play.

Different cultures, shared interests — Designing open spaces for culturally diverse communities may not be too difficult as most express the same basic needs (toilets, shade, etc). Culturally specific designs can exacerbate territoriality, while designs for shared age, life stage and interests can foster cohesion.

Parks, nature and physical culture — Australian park designs emphasise ‘nature’ and physical exercise more than ‘culture’ and arts. Few gatekeepers have questioned the traditional priorities on sports facilities serving 10-18 year old males. The mainstream culture of outdoor sport and fitness is experienced as exclusive to people with disabilities, who are expected to give way to cyclists and joggers.

Parks as cultural and technological spaces — There are indicators that people increasingly want parks with more ‘cultural’ features, with amenities for comfort (especially toilets), and holding outdoor events like concerts, festivals, markets,

etc... Some would like to play music through speakers. Many young people and adults would appreciate outdoor spaces that had WiFi connectivity.

Changing families — Changing family structures, work patterns and child care complexities mean that young children increasingly visit parks with non-custodial fathers and grandparents. Some children hardly ever visit parks, while many do not play organised club sport. These mean changing demands on park design and usage times. (e.g. wheelchair-accessible playgrounds; nocturnal access).

Exclusion of youth — A lack of play equipment usable by older children and teens, hostility from families with children in parks, harassment by security guards in the CBD, and the removal of facilities where youth congregate all give strong exclusionary messages to young Penrith residents seeking to occupy public space. Some youth also fear hostility from members of other youth subcultures.

‘Quiet knowledge’ — It is harder for many people to say what they like in parks than what they don’t like, and harder to name cultural barriers than physical ones. Creative consultation processes in open space planning allow expression of non-verbal aspects of local landscape experience (‘quiet knowledge’), and help identify subtle cultural barriers to access.

3. What are the practical concerns held by developers, major businesses, and PCC planners related to the application of Universal Design within the context of their understanding of the Penrith community?

Pragmatic approach — Gatekeepers were passionate about enhancing the quality of life and recreational opportunities for Penrith residents. But the prevailing approach to development of open space was largely pragmatic and driven by financial and budgetary considerations, including over funding sources (e.g. S94 levies) and related disparities in new versus older parks, costs of maintaining facilities, vandalism, and the expense of quality UD equipment. Lack of in-house knowledge of UD or working examples of it may also be barriers to adoption.

Vandalism — The costs of vandalism present a major disincentive to undertaking park improvements. The response to vandalism perpetrated by a minority of youth tends to be a punitive reduction of amenities for all. CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) solutions to vandalism are being pursued, but there did not appear to be any social inclusion programs addressing the problem.

Open space (under)use and UD — Funding and servicing constraints mean many open spaces are under-maintained or decommissioned. Compared to the benefits of having open space available and serviced, the opportunity costs of UD seem enormous. UD is thought of as an expensive retrofit serving a minority; few gatekeepers connect it with ideas of whole-of-lifespan use, or sustainability.

Regulatory questions — As social justice arguments for inclusive design are more morally than financially compelling, regulatory change for improved accessibility standards is one way to broaden UD applications. Experience with the regulatory approach shows it encourages conformity to minimum standards rather than the user-involved design processes and high aspirations of UD.

Future-oriented policy — Many gatekeepers regard UD as impractical at the moment, but Council’s strategic and policy commitments to it are based on a longer-term practical interest: how to plan for an ageing population with increasing numbers of mobile but variously impaired residents out and about in Penrith.

Discussion of Selected Findings

Practical Considerations

Penrith City Council is unusual amongst local governments in its aspirations to implement Universal Design, to which it committed itself an impressive two years before the United Nations' Charter on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (updated in 2006). Nevertheless, for most of the pivotal people (gatekeepers) in open space and recreational design, practical and funding constraints to implementing these principles are of primary concern — especially in relation to possible changes in S94 legislation. Other issues include lack of knowledge of design principles generally, and lack of practical working examples of UD, as well as the pros and cons of regulatory means for improving standards of accessibility and inclusiveness.

Responding to these concerns, we have tried to think of strategies and make recommendations for taking achievable steps towards realising UD aspirations, namely:

- Start with some no- or low-cost UD features to help build confidence
- Identify attainable benchmarks for which kind of UD fittings might be installed at parks of different categories (local, neighbourhood, etc.)
- Link UD to design for sustainability
- Sponsor a professional development program to build in-house knowledge of UD and other design principles
- Inaugurate a UD competition with prize-winning entries to be constructed in Penrith, creating a portfolio of UD examples
- Take advantage of local knowledge held by 'user/experts' (as already happens for people with disabilities)
- Contribute to UD-informed changes in access standards and regulations.

'Quiet Knowledge'

The Creative Mapping workshops and Community Perceptions studies revealed that it is easier for park users (and non-users) to name what they don't like in parks than to articulate what they do like. It is also easier to identify physical barriers to access and usability compared to intangible cultural barriers that prevent people from full enjoyment of public open space. People possess 'quiet knowledge' of localities like parks and natural reserves, and have memories, experiences and pleasures associated with localities that are not always easy to verbalise. For example, in the park evaluation exercises undertaken by young TAFE students, several respondents had complaints about particular parks they visited and said they could not necessarily do what they wanted to do there, but still rated the sites as very enjoyable. Emotional responses are not necessarily shared: for example, some people are thrilled to be in open space without any other humans around, whereas others feel uneasy without at least a few people within shouting distance.

Council is committed to being consultative and responsive to community needs, and there seems to be opportunities for workers in the field to communicate their clients' needs with senior Council officers. But these processes are typically all about talking and writing, or checking tick-boxes on park use questionnaires. One value of creative community consultations (like mapping workshops) as part of open space planning is that they allow investigation of 'quiet knowledge' of local landscape and its positive values, and help bring to light some of the cultural barriers to access that would need to be taken into account in designing open spaces that were culturally non-exclusive.

Child Non-Users

The children's Creative Mapping workshop gave a glimpse into changing patterns of park use by children over the past three decades. Although middle childhood is a time when people traditionally enjoy independent play with mobile elements (e.g. for cubby-building) in 'undesigned' or natural areas, overseas figures suggest about half the children are not allowed out without parental supervision until they turn 14, due to parental fears of risks to children in public space — not to mention the attractions to children of indoor digital equipment. Many working parents are simply too busy to take their children to parks. This situation suggests a possible two-pronged strategy. One would be to make parks more usable by parents supervising children, for example, having WiFi broadband so they could catch up on email. (This connectivity would also be an attractor to children and adolescents.) The other is to try and reduce the exaggerated parental perceptions of risk, for example through our suggested program of Local Park Days that could make parents and children more familiar with their local parks and more relaxed about using them.

Park as event: A walk in the park – or a park on the walk?

Council's mobile Playvan service — whose visits transformed even uninspiring outdoor spaces into hotspots of activity and social interaction — fed our enthusiasm for the idea of the park as an event, and helped expand our focus from the stand-alone park to the network of parks. The park as event idea combines the cultural, spatial and temporal dimensions of park use, and is based on the notion that a park is not just a space with some built facilities, but becomes functional or usable through interactions with humans in a time- and space-specific assemblage that also entails encounters with assorted natural entities and technologies (e.g. water, horses, bikes, skateboards, iPods, cars), and some degree of dependence on various infrastructures (including transport, utilities, toilets).

Applied to park design, the 'park as event' idea suggests designing for flexibility that supports diverse realizations of possible park events. This is in contrast to the narrow range of options (and predictable abuses) provided in most fixed park equipment.

As an example of flexible design for multiple events, the team (mainly Bounds) came up with the idea of the multi-functional 'Penrith Park Posts' (see Appendix 4). Two sturdy and immovable poles spaced several metres apart would have holes and rings for affixing different equipment at optional heights (flying foxes, hoops and nets for games, shade cloths, party lights etc.). Some equipment could be provided by or hired from Council, or people could bring their own. The poles could be trialled at Wallacia, where people already can hire outdoor spaces for large parties. Designing the posts could be a project for UWS Design students.

Other suggestions for enhancing the park as an event that have emerged in the research include outdoor concerts, festivals, markets, music-making and dancing. We have also proposed Local Park Days in which residents as well as local schools and community centres could participate; the use of parks by different cultural groups for festivals or celebrations on days of ethnic, religious or national significance; and the temporary installation of play equipment (especially for older children and youth) from a pool that could rotate around the park network. The ideas of facilities that move around the network of parks, and of parks as sites of temporary events, gave rise to a possible promotional theme that inverts the cliché of a walk in the park: a park on the walk.

Recommendations

These recommendations are grouped under similar questions to the three original research questions, the difference being a shift in emphasis from ‘*what is going on?*’ to ‘*how might things be improved?*’

1. How can the knowledge base be improved to support application of Universal Design in local government strategic planning?

Concepts and Assumptions

Recommendation 1.1 — That PCC reviews the understandings and assumptions associated with key terms and strategic objectives related to Universal Design with particular attention to ideas about parks and park users, notions of access and usability, as well as ways of planning, designing, funding and managing facilities.

Rationale — Refers to the findings and conceptual shifts outlined in this report.

Recommendation 1.2 — That PCC holds a series of Design Workshops to explore design principles and to identify strategies and impediments to realizing inclusive and usable design in Penrith’s parks and open spaces.

Rationale — These offer a professional development opportunity for local government workers, while building the knowledge base and confidence to apply inclusive design principles in planning. They would improve understanding of the differences between accessibility and UD principles. Other WSROC councils might be involved, and a future development might be to develop short courses on UD.

Recommendation 1.3 — That in view of the cultural complexity of 21st Century societies, planners avoid the misleading notion of an ‘average’ user and a single unified Penrith ‘community’, and instead acknowledge the many and diverse ‘communities’ to which Penrith’s residents and visitors belong.

Rationale — Methods based on the ‘averaging’ of data from numerous individuals are incompatible with notions of diversity because they disguise variant patterns of use and interest. They undermine site-specific design by encouraging provision of identical amenities for ‘average users’ across different sites. Cultural complexity entails hybrid or multiple cultural affiliations beyond local government boundaries. These represent cultural resources for local communities. Penrith park use and community cohesion could be enhanced by events that brought together a wide diversity of local people.

Recommendation 1.4 — While the principle of design for social inclusiveness is generally supported, it is recommended that PCC adopt planning and design criteria of ‘non-exclusion’ and ‘cultural accessibility’ as principles more compatible with cultural complexity.

Rationale — The idea of social inclusion implies a social totality that everyone wants to be in. But in the context of cultural complexity, ‘non-exclusion’ is more helpful for thinking about open space design: a successful park would not exclude those people and groups who want to use in their own ways. ‘Non-exclusion’ alerts us to cultural barriers more subtle than physical barriers to access. Evaluating parks in terms of exclusions helps identify gaps in provision for significant user groups (e.g. no equipment for teenagers).

Recommendation 1.5 — That PCC develop innovative participatory processes, based on involvement of ‘user experts’ at early stages of planning and design, and close consultations with local residents, park users, community workers, and relevant community interest groups about current and future park developments. (*Links to 2.9*)

Rationale — Council’s ‘Disability Access Committee’ is one working model for involving user experts in planning. Without requiring the same formality, the principle of consulting with local and special interest users could be applied more broadly, especially with local youth. This could generate a greater sense of community ownership and responsibility for public open spaces.

Categories and Uses of Parks

Recommendation 1.6 — That assumptions about parks and their uses be reviewed and expanded to accommodate potential cultural and social uses, and the technologies and infrastructures that could support those uses.

Rationale — Not everyone wants to use parks for sport and fitness activities. Irrespective of their background, almost everyone called for better facilities to support social and cultural activities e.g. barbequing, picnicking, promenading, sitting and talking, interacting with grandchildren. Many residents we consulted expressed desires for Penrith parks to host more cultural and artistic events like picnics, festivals, performances, markets.

Recommendation 1.7 — That the current system for classifying parks and allocating facilities be supplemented by other criteria (such as comfort of diverse users, usability, inclusiveness, support of sociality).

Rationale — Penrith parks are classified by size and level of facilities provided. A supplementary classification could link different categories of parks to different types of UD facilities, to establish achievable goals for implementing universal design. Similarly, existing and planned spaces could be assessed in terms of their accessibility to users of different abilities, and their usability for different activities and purposes. This information could be made public and council resources allocated in order to maintain the desirable levels of amenity in different parks and reserves.

Recommendation 1.8 — That PCC plan to provide toilets across more categories of parks; and more toilets usable by people who need two carers to assist. (*Links to 2.2, 2.3.*)

Rationale — Council provides toilets in neighbourhood and district parks for all-day visitors, but most residents expected toilets in local and even pocket parks used on shorter visits. Adults who needed carer assistance found few toilets large enough in Penrith parks or downtown. Council could investigate cost effective models for increased provision of universally designed and sustainable toilet facilities that would be accessible to these various users.

Spatial Dimensions of Parks

Recommendation 1.9 — That open space planning strategies recognise site specificity so that design accords with a park’s unique geographical disposition and the particular social character of its users and surrounding areas.

Rationale — Instead of the current ‘sameness’ of parks with their (non-UD) standardised playground equipment, there are opportunities to find creative design solutions — including for play — that are designed with respect for the site and its natural and social surrounds, and in processes that involved local user groups (including youth). Site-specific design encourages people’s attachment to the site’s natural features, as

well as its specific architecture, while providing a greater variety across the Penrith park network.

Recommendation 1.10 — That PCC planners pay close attention to the principle of connectivity, including social and communicative connections, in designs for parks and public spaces. (*Links to 2.1.*)

Rationale — This is about a shift in focus from the ‘stand-alone’ park to parks as nodes in networks, and as sites for networking. Each park is part of the Penrith parks network but it also has connections — or gaps in connection — with other public spaces, and commercial or residential areas. We found UWS and TAFE students (some of them recent migrants) made recreational use of networks of commercial and public spaces in Penrith, but people without cars found it hard to access larger parks.

The park as site of social connection was highlighted by the mobile Playvan, a service that allowed children, parents and grandparents to connect with each other, council workers, and other support services. Pocket parks are important points of social connection for youth. Connectivity for 21st century parks could include places for people to recharge their electronic devices, access wireless broadband over laptops, or plug in their Mp3 players to play through built-in speakers.

Recommendation 1.11 — That PCC undertakes to develop legible, accessible and usable pathways through the city, its parks (including linear drainage parks), and major facilities (recreation, educational, medical, commercial), and to promote these for pedestrians, cyclists, and wheelchair-users, as well as to visitors, including UWS and TAFE students.

Rationale — Parks can present a series of challenging surfaces to people with wheeled devices, poor balance, or visual impairment. An appealing site might be geographically close but functionally remote for someone who requires a footpath to get there. A path too narrow for wheelchair and bicycles is not functional if able-bodied cyclists expect right of way. Long paths from one place to another could be more usable by older pedestrians were there some shaded seating and perhaps toilets along the way. Hard copies and downloadable versions of maps could be made featuring information for different kinds of users and needs.

Temporal and Flexible Dimensions of Parks

Recommendation 1.12 — That PCC review its open space planning objectives and policies to support more creative and flexible uses of park time, including time-sharing, temporary facilities, acknowledgement of current and earlier place-making and memories of place, and support of nocturnal park use. (*Links to 2.5.*)

Rationale — One way to meet diverse residents’ open space needs is to use parks differently at different times and seasons. For example, one participant who disliked dogs suggested allocating dog-walking hours in her local park so she could avoid them. A currently existing model of a temporary, shared, mobile park facility is the Playvan, whose scheduled visits can help ‘prime’ the park for use at other times, helping build social connections in shared outdoor spaces.

An alternative to building expensive permanent facilities in just a few large parks is to create temporary, possibly seasonal, inclusively designed facilities for open public spaces, perhaps featuring demountable shade structures, composting toilets, or other ecologically intelligent designs that could model appropriate technologies and activities. Similarly, items from a rotating pool of play equipment for older children and

teens could be set up in local parks for weeks at a time. This approach could potentially be a more resource efficient response to the changing social complexion of open public space.

Recommendation 1.13 — That PCC initiate ‘Local Park Days’ as a way to encourage parents to let their children use local parks, including ‘safe parks’ activities highlighting the value of unsupervised play for middle childhood. (*Links to 2.9.*)

Rationale — The creative mapping workshops showed that children were not encouraged to go to local parks unless supervised by an adult. This verifies research in the UK about how, unlike their parents, children lack the freedom and opportunities to explore their locality in middle childhood. PCC-initiated ‘Local Park Days’ could start to address this problem.

Recommendation 1.14 — Given the significance of creative play in middle childhood, that PCC planners and designers explore ways children could modify the landscape within areas of parks, making constructions, forts, cubbies, gardens, etc. (*Links to 2.9*)

Rationale — This measure is conceived to counter the emergence of a second ‘cotton wool’ generation, drawn indoors by digital technology, prohibited by parental fears from independent play, and prevented by the risk-averse ‘nanny state’ from having too much fun if they do escape to public open space. This could be trialed over school holidays, with recycled materials donated by local residents and parents.

Recommendation 1.15 — That taking into account the principles of cultural complexity, connectivity, mobility, temporary features and festivals, planning and design for public open spaces in Penrith be approached through the concept of the park as an *event*.

Rationale — The notion of ‘park as event’ responds to the expressed interest for more cultural uses of parks. Our findings point to opportunities to regenerate Penrith parks as cultural spaces simply by scheduling and accommodating different social and cultural activities at different times. Desired cultural activities in parks included outside entertainment, band nights, games, music-making, singing, dancing and cooking, as well as community-building neighbourhood events. Such temporary uses of parks would meet PCC’s objective to ‘provide outdoor entertainment spaces for community events, festivals, performances’, while circumventing the need to build extra permanent and ‘culturally sensitive’ facilities.

2. How can issues of cultural complexity be addressed in relation to the design of public and outdoor recreational open space within the Penrith LGA?

Access and Usability

Recommendation 2.1 — That pedestrian and transit links between public open space, commercial areas, and population areas within Penrith, be designed with user-friendly directional signage, and accompanied by maps for pedestrians and various kinds of transport users. (*Links to 1.10.*)

Rationale — See Rationale for Recommendation 1.10.

Recommendation 2.2 — That PCC respond to the findings from this project where all cultural groups expressed concern about current available park facilities not meeting the expectations of park users, especially for basic amenities like toilets, seating, shade, water, paths, and fenced areas for small children. (*Links to 1.8.*)

Rationale — Rather than calling for fancy new equipment, most participants highlighted the need to provide and maintain basic amenities. See also Recommendation 1.8.

Recommendation 2.3 — That in pursuing its objective to ‘provide adequate indoor recreation, cultural and sporting facilities’, PCC give particular attention to the need for toilets suitable for people who need two carers to assist. (*Links to 1.8.*)

Rationale — Community consultations revealed that lack of indoor recreation options with toilets large enough to fit wheelchairs and carers was an issue in central Penrith.

Recommendation 2.4 — That in pursuing its objective ‘to encourage more water-based activities in Penrith,’ PCC address transport and mobility access associated with those activities and sites.

Rationale — This responds to participants’ reports of difficulties accessing Tench Reserve and the white-water rafting centre by public transport. People in wheelchairs have particular difficulties getting close to water and consideration might be given to designing a sunken seating area like the UD park in Japan that allows people in wheelchairs to get close enough to the water to dip their hands in it.

Recommendation 2.5 — That PCC accepts that groups of young people can be nocturnal users of parks, and accordingly reviews its policies about nocturnal park use, with consideration to designating more parks and park time for such use, and providing early morning clean-up services. (*Links to 1.12*)

Rationale — Nowhere, it seems, is it acceptable (to adults) for youth to socialise in public open space in Penrith, not even at night. Night use of parks is discouraged by withdrawing lighting, which also affects other nocturnal park users — whose numbers might be expected to increase with global warming making more days too hot for exercise. Penrith is an outer suburban centre with some inner urban problems (drug use, vandalism and some violence between rival youth cliques) and accordingly needs an urbane and harm-minimisation approach to such nuisances (e.g. scheduled early morning clean-ups), rather than a punitive quasi-parental reaction of withdrawing amenities and ‘grounding’ everyone indoors.

Recommendation 2.6 — That in plans for open space developments in Penrith, Council explores opportunities for active fun rather than only organised ‘sports’ for youth.

Rationale — Although councils have by convention prioritised building sports facilities (and skateboard parks) catering mainly 10-18 year old males, we suspect there are growing numbers of youth not involved in organised club sports, and that both females and males in this age group would benefit both physically and socially if public open spaces offered them facilities for active physical fun.

Communities and Consultations

Recommendation 2.7 — That in order to ensure to keep pace with changing communities, family structures and recreation needs, PCC continues to conduct research on local park users, non-users, and expectations about parks, facilities and uses.

Rationale — Statistical and averaged data (e.g. from Census figures) is helpful but does not capture cultural complexity or details of park users and uses. Supplementary qualitative research and user group consultations, including creative mapping and similar processes, can help Council keep in step with local cultural shifts. Such research is potentially fundable through partnerships with the higher education sector.

Recommendation 2.8 — That PCC commit to continuing creative and artistic processes for community consultation, and in particular the .community mapping workshops designed as an innovative planning tool for Penrith, with the aims of:

- improving understanding of the cultural values related to existing and planned parks and outdoor recreational space in Penrith;
- using art processes to reveal uses and barriers to use of parks and open space, and eliciting expressions of connection/ disconnection with local parks network.

Rationale — These processes can probe dimensions of experience and forms of ‘quiet knowledge’ that are not easy to articulate in verbally-oriented methodologies like interviews and surveys. They can generate images, sayings and stories that could be used as part of park designs, walking maps, and promotions. See also Recommendation 2.7.

Recommendation 2.9 — That to help meet its objective to ‘promote the wide range of recreation and cultural activities to the community’, PCC could hold ‘Local Park Days’ and actively support the diverse Penrith communities to use parks for festivals, celebrations and cultural events. (*Links to 1.5, 1.13, 1.14.*)

Rationale — This responds to participants’ expressed interests in parks as potential sites for arts-based and other cultural events (Recommendation 1.5), and is proposed as a strategy for improving community tolerance for a broader range of cultural activities in parks, while also for building familiarity with local parks so parents will let children play in them (Recommendations 1.13, 1.14). Schools and child and youth after-school centres could be encouraged to make better use of local parks, especially as children attending them may have few opportunities for outdoor play. Organising and holding such events give opportunities for Council staff and planners to consult with local residents.

Recommendation 2.10 — That PCC consults with communities and users of facilities before deciding to remove open space amenities like toilets, youth facilities (e.g. skateboard parks), or developer-introduced improvements, where Council perceives these to constitute a nuisance and their maintenance a financial burden.

Rationale — The social costs and benefits of open space amenity need to be factored in along with financial considerations. The tactic of pre-emptive reduction in park facilities in reaction to perceived ‘nuisance’ punishes the innocent majority along with the inconsiderate minority of culprits (see Recommendation 2.5). Social approaches ought to be tried first (e.g. consultation with local park users, developers, community workers, volunteer groups, etc.).

Recommendation 2.11 — That PCC develops a set of communications procedures regarding youth-friendly public spaces, and in particular, seek to re-establish the protocols developed for security guards’ negotiations with youth when policing the Wesfield Plaza and the immediate external space.

Rationale — This is a major issue mentioned by youth and youth workers, and is a public space access problem that requires a social rather than a technical solution. The problem is also symptomatic of broader trends for formerly public open space to be taken over and policed by commercial interests.

3. What could be done to address the practical concerns about the application of Universal Design held by developers, major businesses, and PCC planners?

Encouraging/ Implementing Universal Design

Recommendation 3.1 — That in response to planners' and developers' tendencies to see Universal Design as unrealistic, mainly due to cost criteria, PCC promotes UD as socially necessary, environmentally sustainable and financially achievable.

Rationale — The pragmatic critique of UD tends to reduce what is 'realistic' down to a set of financial constraints, whereas the key question is about the politics of whose realities count when budget priorities are determined. Few Penrith 'gatekeepers' grasped the links between UD and the ageing population or sustainable design. There needs to be better understanding of changing demographics, including increasing numbers of people with disabilities living outside of institutions, with expectations for mobility, employment and recreation. The environmental and economic benefits of design features that are flexible and do not need replacing as people age need to be made more obvious to decision-makers.

Recommendation 3.2 — That in order to encourage Universal Design within development applications in Penrith, PCC provides practical Universal Design examples in open space and built environments.

Rationale — This is in response to findings from the literature on the importance of working examples of UD in overcoming reluctance to adopt, and is also prompted by our own study's findings that gatekeepers did not have a strong understanding of how UD differs from current ideas of physical accessibility.

Recommendation 3.3 — That after clarifying the pros and cons of regulatory approaches, PCC articulates and commits to a minimum set of enforceable standards on accessibility and usability in commercial building and public spaces, backed up with guidelines for end-user consultation.

Rationale — Even though the regulatory approach encourages conformity to minimal design standards, it is probably the most effective long-term way to overcome gatekeeper resistance to implementing more inclusive design.

Recommendation 3.4 — That in order to encourage and implement more creative approaches to public open space designs and promote Penrith as a hub of inclusive design, Council commits funds and seeks external sponsors for establishing a biennial prize for Universal Design for public open space, with the prize-winning entry built in Penrith.

Rationale — A design prize would help counteract the tendency of regulatory approaches to foster minimal achievements rather than design excellence. It would make Universal Design a more exciting concept, and build up a portfolio of working examples of UD. Each round could target a different category of parks, and a distinct feature would be involvement of user groups in the design process.

Recommendation 3.5 — That PCC conduct a review of access to open and recreational space for workers in business parks, the CBD and industrial areas, with a view to making available 'in between' parcels of land and other open spaces for relaxation and exercise.

Rationale — Recreational open space needs of workers have not been a focus for Penrith planners, but the research showed undeveloped potential to turn currently unused and ‘in between’ land parcels in Penrith into sites where employees can enjoy open-air breaks and physical activities. Partnerships with private operators and business owners could be pursued to make more sites available for worker use.

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APPENDICES

This document contains Appendices to the Final Report of the project *Out and About in Penrith* (Official project title: Universal Design and Cultural Context: Accessibility, diversity and recreational space in Penrith).

Appendix 1: Some Critiques of Universal Design— This complements material in Chapter 1 'The Concepts'.

Appendix 2: Research Materials—This Appendix contains copies of materials related to information and questions given to research participants in the three main parts of the study: Creative Mapping (related to Chapter 3 of report), Community Perceptions (Chapter 4), and the Gatekeepers Study (Chapter 5).

Appendix 3: Youth Mapping Workshop – Outlines the creative mapping workshop conducted with University of Western Sydney students, and gives details of maps produced by participants.

Appendix 4: Penrith Parks Poles—This outlines an idea the team had for a flexible design that offers a multi-functional park facility.

Appendix 5: Findings in Relation to Penrith's Open Space Action Plan—This is a comprehensive summary of findings, arranged under headings provided by the 'Objectives' of the Plan. This Appendix comprises Section 2 of the document *Out and About in Penrith: Strategic Summary and Recommendations*.

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APPENDIX 1: Some Critiques of Universal Design

Universal Design is a set of principles, tenets and design ideals which even proponents agree cannot be perfectly realised in practice. Besides our own gentle critique of Universal Design for focussing on the physical barriers to social inclusion while not having much to say about the more intangible cultural barriers (See Chapter 1), there are other critiques of UD on theoretical and practical grounds.

Pragmatic critique of UD

This critique comes from businesses and governments rather than theorists and concerns the practical and realistic limits of implementing design modifications that cater to a small minority of users. The pragmatic critique is discussed in Chapter 5 on the Gatekeepers Study.

Critique of 'design for all'

Some design theorists criticise UD on the grounds that it is practically impossible to design for everyone. In design theory, good design is usually defined as an optimum fit between user and product. By default, 'design for all' produces poor design as it leaves the designer without any specific users to design for. (See also Chapter 5.)

Critiques of 'universal'

This argument is that 'universal' is a misnomer, because UD targets population minorities that require special design features. But the flow-on benefits are usability and convenience for those currently without special accessibility needs.

Design philosophy critique of 'user-centred' design

This critique leads us back to our earlier point that 'culture' is not something that can simply be added in to urban space planning: it is always already there, built into existing urban and suburban geographies, and into the expectations and habits of the prospective users:

[P]ositing 'users' as the privileged source of design problems and solutions, obscures the bigger picture of how designed things actually design those who use them, inscribing needs, attachments, physical and mental habits, and, more generally, making up entire, and entirely familiar, worlds of dwelling and their accompanying capacities, competencies, expectations and much more. (Editorial on User-centred design, *Design Philosophy Papers* 01 / 2004)

That users are 'pre-designed', including by the open spaces they already know, was apparent in some findings of this study, one being the high degree of consistency in people's expectations of what amenities ought to be in parks. Similarly, when teenaged participants were asked what kinds of play equipment they'd like to use in parks, they named larger versions of things they already knew, such as swings, slides and flying foxes. Yet, we think teenagers would enjoy equipment of kinds that they were unfamiliar with, such as devices for active play that can be used in groups or require more than one person to operate.

Site-specific versus Universal Design

This is not a critique but a set of worries that ‘universal’ design solutions could result in standard sets of UD equipment or landscape plans applied at a range of sites over-riding the need for open space design to take into account the geographical, historical and socio-cultural specificity of particular sites and users. Rather than standardisation, UD principles of holistic and participatory design processes with locals and user groups ensure the most is made of the context.

UD and size of play equipment

Play is an activity where scale is important, for example, young children need to play with things small enough for them to handle or climb on and still feel safe. Teenagers find Penrith parks lack play equipment big enough for them to play on. Playgrounds and equipment built on UD principles, however, seem to be designed for children of different physical abilities within a defined age band, rather than for a wide age and size range. This suggests that even if it is universally designed, separate equipment may be needed for younger and older children.

Level and scale of ‘universality’

Practical as well as theoretical questions may be raised about the level or scale at which the ‘universality’, accessibility and usability of equipment are to be embodied in open space design: at the level of the device, the park, or the network of parks? That is, does every single item of play or activity equipment in a park have to be universally designed for all users? Or are usability and inclusion to be assessed at park level as an assemblage of equipment, surfaces and spaces that offers things for users of different sizes and physical capacities to enjoy—even if they can’t use everything? This heterogeneity could extend to the next level up: different kinds of facilities would be available across a network of parks in the district. Children and adolescents with disabilities could benefit if each park had one usable UD play feature, with different equipment offered in different parks.

Counter-example to ‘barrier-free’ environments

Some people in Western Sydney are already practicing the emergent urban art of parkour, a freestyle obstacle course technique where built and natural features are rapidly traversed by running, leaping, turning, climbing, etc. Whereas Universal Design aims at designing environments that are barrier-free, *parkour* enthusiasts seek the opposite of a ‘barrier free’ environment. This is not a critique of UD or an argument against it, but a reminder of the scope of diversity in a population including able-bodied people who seek out and surmount physical challenges in urban outdoor spaces. (See Map 5, Appendix 3.)

APPENDIX 2: Research Materials

2.1 Information Sheet – Community Mapping

OUT AND ABOUT IN PENRITH A study about cultural and physical barriers to the use of parks and open spaces in Penrith

The Community Mapping Workshops

Most people like to get out and about to enjoy open areas and public parks in their neighbourhood. But how well do these places actually cater for everyone, including people with a variety of physical abilities, of different ages, and of different cultural backgrounds? The OUT AND ABOUT project explores this question, with a special emphasis on finding out about cultural issues that may affect the ways people use recreational open space.

Penrith City Council wants to ensure that their parks and open spaces are accessible to everyone. They are exploring the idea of 'Universal Design' to make open space physically accessible. The OUT AND ABOUT project extends this idea to cultural inclusiveness, so we need to understand if cultural barriers exist that interfere with the use of shared public open space.

This project will undertake group discussions and creative workshops to map community ideas about open space accessibility with a range of community groups including children, youth, mothers with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and representatives of different cultural groups.

Why Work with Artists?

The way we relate to our everyday places is not always easy to explain. To help understand what parks and open space in Penrith mean to different groups in the community we are working with artists in mapping workshops. Using a range of materials to make maps will help different groups in the community express their subjective responses to everyday places.

We are looking for how you feel about parks and open space, whether you are happy or unhappy to be there. How do you engage with the parks in Penrith, whether neighbourhood drainage reserves, small pocket parks, riverside reserves, urban parks, or large sporting parks? Revealing how we feel about places is not easy. It reminds us that communities experience anxiety as much as compassion and that communicating this needs sensitivity. Artists help us give expression to how we feel in a thoughtful way.

Why Make Maps?

Every day we negotiate through familiar and unfamiliar places using road, bus, and train maps. From sketching a meeting place on a scrap of paper to finding a site on the internet, maps are used as a second language. Again artists can help us find this language.

So much of surveying, measuring, fact gathering, analysis and policy-making leave out the very things which make a place significant to the people who know it well. The great thing about making maps with artists is that you can choose how to do it, what to put in and what to leave out.

Examples of Community Maps

- The **Lawson Map**, hanging in the Lawson Community Centre. This map used images from pin-hole cameras people made from Post-Packs.
- The **Parish Mapping Project**, Common Ground, UK where local communities use a range of intriguing ways to map the places they care about in their everyday environment. See www.commonground.org.uk

'OUT AND ABOUT' Mapping

We are looking for 8-10 people to be involved in the following maps

- Children 8-12 years Maps
- Sudanese Adolescent Girl's Maps
- Aboriginal Youth Maps
- Elderly Culturally Diverse group's Maps
- People with Disabilities' Maps

Timetable for Mapping Workshops - August to September

The mapping workshops will involve preliminary discussion with artists, then 2-3 half days in a designated space at Penrith City Council as well as site visits. We will use a range of fun techniques.

Out and About website. There is also a web site hosted on PCC's website, inviting comments and questionnaire responses from the public.

Research Team – UWS:

Dr Zoe Sofoulis
Prof Helen Armstrong
A/Prof Michael Bounds
Dr Abby Lopez
Ms Tara Andrews

Partner - Penrith City Council:

Grant Collins (Partner Investigator)
Paul Page
Geoff Shuttleworth

Community Artist

Nicholas Hobbs with consultation from
Jenny Turpin and Jade Oakley

Project Contact: Jude Twaddell, Out & About Project Officer; Mobile: xxxxxx, Email: xxxxxx

2.2 Information Sheet – Community Perceptions

OUT AND ABOUT IN PENRITH A study in cultural and physical barriers to public use of outdoor and recreational spaces in Penrith City.

Most people like to get out and about to enjoy open areas and public recreational spaces in their neighbourhood or district. But how well do these places actually cater for everyone, including people of different ages, and with a variety of physical abilities and social interests?

In the past, provision for disabled access to public buildings and other areas has tended to concentrate on providing specially-designed fittings (such as wheelchair-accessible toilets and ramps). A recent theory called Universal Design approaches the problem of equal access in a different way: by designing environments and objects that can be used by nearly everyone, with diverse abilities, to the greatest extent possible, and by the young through to the elderly. These Universal Design principles—which could be summed up as ‘multi-user friendly’—often go beyond basic Australian design standards for accessibility, and they can cost more than standard designs and fittings.

Penrith City Council is planning to apply Universal Design principles in its future buildings and public spaces, so that more Penrith residents can enjoy getting out and about in the city.

But as a starting point it needs to find out:

- What recreational and open spaces do Penrith residents like (or don't like) to visit?
- What issues do different kinds of residents have with access to public spaces?
- How ‘friendly’ are the spaces and fittings in Penrith’s public places to different kinds of users?
- Are there other barriers besides physical ones that prevent some people from using parks or other recreational areas as much as they would like?
- How well do public spaces allow for the different activities Penrith residents want to do there?
- How could public open spaces be designed to cater to a wider variety of people?
- How well Penrith City Council and other stakeholders in the city’s future understand and accept Universal Design principles, and what practical problems do they foresee in applying them?

To investigate these issues, in 2007 Penrith City Council is collaborating with a multidisciplinary research team from University of Western Sydney. The researchers want to explore these questions with residents from a variety of backgrounds and with different needs and interests, and will also be consulting with PCC planners and major business stakeholders with practical and economic concerns with how more equitable design principles might be applied in the future.

The research team invites Penrith residents to have their say through the following activities:

- **‘Community Perceptions’ discussions** with small groups of participants from a range of interest groups.
- **Community Mapping workshops** with diverse groups using specially created mapping games and visual exercises to identify barriers, enablers and values around accessibility and recreational open space.
- **Out and About website** hosted on PCC’s website, where anyone can contribute comments, images, and answer a questionnaire.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT

ZOË SOFOULIS ON xxxxxx OR EMAIL: xxxxxx

2.3 Community Perceptions Group Discussion Questions

GENERAL COMMENTS

There will be slightly different question sets for different groups, with some overlap. Key questions for all groups aim to allow comparison of responses about issues of accessibility, physical and cultural barriers, and awareness and acceptance of principles of Universal Design (or of needs such principles might address).

GENERAL USE QUESTIONS

Do you **like to get out and about** much in Penrith? What kind of places do you normally like to go? (Stimulus: for example shops, Plaza, swimming pools, other sporting facilities, parks in your neighbourhood or other parks and open spaces, such as the Nepean foreshore)

What kinds of open areas, parks and gardens and other recreational spaces and **facilities do you know about** in the Penrith city area or nearby? (PCC includes Wallacia, Kingswood, St Mary's, Cranebrook, etc and the actual suburb of Penrith)

Do you **like to go to outdoor or recreation areas**? Which ones of these do you use frequently, regularly, occasionally, never?

BARRIERS QUESTIONS

Are there recreational or outdoor areas you would **like to visit, but don't**, or not as often as you like?

What **stops you from visiting** those outdoor and recreational areas as often as you like to? What would need to change make it easier for you to visit more often?

Are there some places you could visit, or **have visited, but didn't feel comfortable** or able to fully enjoy yourself there? What would need to change to make you feel more comfortable and relaxed about the place?

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL QUESTIONS

What places do you normally **visit alone**, with just a **small group** of friends or family, or with **larger groups** of people?

When you go to different open spaces or recreation areas, what kinds of **things do you like to do** there?

Are there things you would **like to do there that you can't do**? Or things that you could do but find aspects that are awkward, annoying, embarrassing, or difficult or even unwelcome to others?

NEEDS AND CHANGES

What **would need to change** so you could do the things that you wanted to in the recreational areas you visit (or would like to visit more often)?

Do you have **special needs or requirements** when getting out and about in Penrith's parks and recreational areas?

QUESTIONS FOR MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Where do you like to take your children to play? (Prompt to bring out different open space, shopping malls etc)

Do you see a difference between parks and other public space?

What is your favourite local park to spend time in with your children and why?

What would be your ideal park and what would be its distinctive features?

What would you change about this (current) park to make it more enjoyable for yourself/ your children?

How have your needs for public open space changed in the last five years and how do you envisage they will further change in the next five years?

How often does something like a McDonalds 'park' inside a shopping mall win out over the local park and why (Prompt if needed: lack of effective shade provision; access to facilities?).

UNIVERSAL DESIGN QUESTIONS

Discussion point: Universal vs Specific:

Do you think places for recreation and facilities in open spaces should have areas, equipment and fittings that are designed to be inclusive so that **nearly everyone with diverse abilities can use them**? Or do you think it would be better to have **special kinds of equipment and areas set aside** in separate spaces to meet the needs of certain kinds of people, such as people who use wheelchairs?

Discussion point: Majority (or LCD- lowest common denominator or 'median') vs Minority:

Should open public space and recreational areas be designed to cater for the kinds of activities the **majority of Penrith residents** want to do, or should more provision be made for activities that **people in particular minorities** might want to do? How do you imagine a good balance be found?

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND EXERCISE

The following evaluative questions are the core of the EVALUATION EXERCISE (App. 2.4) and would be appropriate to put to some groups in this simplified form:

What kind of people seem able to make best use of the space? (or: Who was it designed for?)

Are there people who might have problems or difficulties using the space or facilities there?

Do people like you have any difficulties there?

What improvements do you suggest?

2. 4 Park Evaluation Exercise (Community Perceptions)

Imagine you have a job as an **independent consultant** to Penrith City Council. The job is to assess how well the public open and recreational areas in Penrith are designed to meet the different needs and interests of a special group of residents: **people just like yourself**.

Thinking about a particular place you have visited, what **mark out of 10** would you give it for meeting the following needs of this special group, and explain why.

NAME OF PLACE:	
CRITERION	Mark (of 10)
Physical needs — allowing bodies like yours get to the place, and once there to move around where they want, and do the things they want or need to do with ease.	
Social needs —allowing people like you to be in that place with the people they want to be with (or are stuck with anyway!), and in the size and kind of group they enjoy and feel relaxed with.	
Cultural needs —allowing people like you to feel comfortable about performing the kinds of activities they wish to do in those kinds of spaces (the ceremonies, rituals, exercises, games, sports, singing, quiet contemplation, etc)	
Environmental needs —allowing people like you to enjoy the natural features and/or the built environments, with facilities like play equipment, seats, shade, toilets, water etc., that make people like you with bodies like yours feel welcome, safe, and comfortable.	
The 'X-factor' (Enjoyment rating) —how well overall people like you can enjoy that place	

In your consultant's report to Penrith City Council, you are asked make **3 key recommendations** about how to improve the design of this space. What do you suggest?

2.5 Community Perceptions Questionnaire

NOTE: Lines and spaces for participants' responses deleted.

INTRODUCTION TO QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a research project about how people living in Penrith use public open spaces and recreational areas in the Penrith City Council area, and about any obstacles they experience to enjoying these areas more.

By the **Penrith City Council area**, we mean not just the central business area of the City of Penrith, or the suburb of Penrith, but also surrounding areas in the council, including Wallacia, St Mary's, St Clair, Kingswood, Llandilo, Cranebrook, Glenmore Park, Leonay, etc.

Examples of public open spaces and recreational areas include:

- small 'pocket parks' close to where you live
- larger neighbourhood parks, perhaps with equipment
- district or regional parks and reserves
- bushland or river foreshores
- sports areas like Jamison Park, tennis courts, swimming pools.

The questions fall into the following categories:

- **Who you are** – details about yourself and your household
- **What you like to do** – your preferred activities in open spaces
- **Where you like to go** – places you like to visit and why
- **Where you don't go so much** – places with problems for you
- **Your ideas for improvements** - suggestions for better open spaces
- **Parents and children** – questions for those with young children.

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval no. 07/007. If you have queries about the research please contact Zoë Sofoulis on XXXXX. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Human Research Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Officer on (02) 4736 0883. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

A. WHO YOU ARE – details about yourself and your household

A1. Gender 1. Female 2. Male

A2. Where you live (street, suburb, but NOT street numbers)

A3. Household Description

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Single person | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. A couple with child/children. Number of children (under 18) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Group of individuals | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. A sole parent with child/children. Number of children (under 18) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Related adults | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. A couple (married/de-facto/living together), with no children | |

A4. Age group (your own) [You will be asked children's ages in question F1]

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. 18 to 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. 65 to 74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. 25 to 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. 75 to 89 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. 45 to 64 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. 90+ |

A5. Household income bracket (OPTIONAL)

- 1. up to \$20,000
- 2. \$20,001 to \$30,000
- 3. \$30,001 to \$40,000
- 4. \$40,001 to \$50,000
- 5. \$50,001 to \$80,000
- 6. \$80,000+

A6. Background (OPTIONAL)

- 1. Born in Australia
- 2. Born overseas
 - 2a. Country of origin:
 - 2b. Number of years in Australia:
- 3. Australian citizen
- 4. Not an Australian citizen
- 5. List ethnic, cultural, or language groups or nationalities you belong to or identify with (e.g. Australian, English, Indian, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Italian, Somali, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, etc.):

B. WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO – your preferred activities in open spaces

B1. Do you ever visit public open spaces or recreational areas? YES NO

B2. Do you **ever visit** public open spaces or recreational areas?

Around Penrith? YES NO Elsewhere? YES NO

If you visit other areas outside Penrith, please state why you go there

B3. How often do you like to visit open spaces or recreational areas in Penrith or elsewhere?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- About once a fortnight
- About once a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- Never

B4. Preferred activities. These questions are to find out more about **what you do** in these spaces. Tick boxes for activities you like to do, or write in your own answers in the space provided.

- Play sport in organised teams or groups
- Play sport in informal groups
- Running or jogging
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Walking
- Walking pet
- Relaxing quietly
- Watching people and scenery
- Meditation
- Play on playground equipment
- Supervise children playing on playground equipment
- Meet and socialise with friends
- Have a barbeque or picnic
- Other activities (list activities)

B5. Main activities. Look back over all your answers to Question B4. Which are your three top activities. Please put a number 1, 2 or 3 next to the THREE activities you most like to do in parks and other recreational areas. For example, if your favourite activity is running, put a 1 next to 'running or jogging'.

B6. Special needs. Please list any **disabilities or special needs or requirements** you have when getting out and about in Penrith's parks and recreational areas.

B7. Things you would like to do but can't. Are there some activities (legal ones!) that you would like to be able to do in public open spaces, but for some reason or another find that you can't? *These reasons could have something to do with you (e.g. physically unable), or might have something to do with the park's design and equipment (or lack of it).*

Activity 1 you would like to do:

Reason you can't do this:

Activity 2 you would like to do:

Reason you can't do this:

C. WHERE YOU LIKE TO GO – places you like to visit and why

C1. Preferred places.

We would like to know about the kinds of public open spaces and recreational areas you like to visit. Please list up to THREE public open spaces or recreational areas you like to visit in the Penrith City Council area, starting with your favourite place.

Place 1 (Favourite) :

Place 2 :

Place 3 :

(If the questionnaire is completed with a researcher, a map will be shown so participants can show where they go in relation to where they live.)

C2. Your favourite place (Place 1)

Why this is your favourite place to visit?

C3. Why you like visiting the other places

C4. Other places visited

Please use the space below to name and comment on any outdoor or public places you like to visit:

- that are outside Penrith OR
- that are in Penrith but **are privately owned** (e.g. gyms or spas, MacDonalds playgrounds, malls).

D. WHERE YOU DON'T GO SO MUCH – places with problems for you

D. The researchers want to find out what factors prevent people from using or enjoying some public open spaces as much as they would like to.

- First we will ask you to name a place you don't visit as much as you could (D1).
- Next, we will ask you to list the three main problems you have with it (D2).
- Then we will ask for more details about problems (D3-D6).
- In the section (E) that follows we will ask about ideas for improvements.

D1. Places less visited. Name a park, open space or recreational area that you don't visit or enjoy as much as you could...

D2. Three main problems: What are the main problems (list up to THREE) that prevent you for visiting or enjoying this place as much as you would like to? Or, what are the reasons you don't visit it as often as you might like?

D3-D6. Problems in detail. There may be a number of factors affecting your enjoyment (or lack of enjoyment) of this open space, such as:

- how easy it is to get to
- the design and layout
- how safe or comfortable you feel there.

To get more detail, we ask you to tick the boxes that apply in your case, and/or use the spaces provided to add in your own points. You can tick more than one box for each section, as well as items already on your list of three main problems.

D3. Time and location factors

- Lack of time to spend there
- Too far away from home or work
- Transport problems
- Other time and location factors (write in your own):

D4. Design and Layout factors – the park environment (*Tick any that apply to your example.*)

- Hard to move around the park area
- Not enough paths
- Paths too rough
- Too many slopes
- Can't get to where you want
- Can't move pram around
- Too much lighting
- Not enough lighting
- Lack of shade
- Too shady
- Lack of visibility of play area
- Lack of security of play area
- Don't like appearance of the place
- Lack of facilities (like water, toilets)
- Poor condition of facilities
- Lack of equipment for sport, play
- Unable to use the equipment
- Poor condition of equipment
- Not interested in what is there
- Lack of things to do there
- Not suitable for young children
- Other design and environment factors (write in your own):

D5. Comfort and Safety factors - personal and social issues

- No reason to go there
- Not permitted to go there (e.g. by parents)
- No-one to go with
- Feel afraid or unsafe
- Don't feel comfortable
- Feeling of not belonging
- Bothered by other people there
- Have a disability that prevents good use of the place (see also Question B7)
- Other personal and social reasons (write in your own reasons)

D6. Other factors or comments Please write in any other reasons you have for not visiting this place as much as you would like to, or any further comments on the place and any problems you have with it.

E. YOUR IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS - suggestions for better open spaces

E. Imagine you had the job of increasing enjoyment of public open spaces in Penrith by people just like you. What changes would you make?
Please think about a specific example – either the same place as in the previous section, or a different one you know of.

E1. What place are you thinking of?

- Same place as in previous section (D)
- A different place – if so, state which one

E2. Making it EASIER. What would you change to make it easier for you to visit more often or more convenient to get around when you are there?

E3. Making it SAFER. What would you change to make you feel more safe or comfortable at this place?

E3. Making it more FUN. What would you change so that people like you could have more fun in this place?

E4. Other changes. Are there any other changes would you recommend?

E5. Ideal park or recreation area. Now you've answered all the questions about public areas and activities (other than those relating to young children, and final comments), we would like you to describe or list the features of **your ideal** park or recreation area.

F. FOR PARENTS OR CARERS OF TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

F1. How old are your children? (list ages)

F2. Where do you like to take your children to play?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local neighbourhood park | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial areas (e.g. MacDonalds, mall) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Larger park | <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming pool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional park | <input type="checkbox"/> Other places |

F3. What is your favourite local park to spend time in with your children and why?

F4. What would you change about this (current) park to make it more enjoyable for yourself/ your children?

F5. What kinds of things would be in an ideal park for you and your children?

G. FURTHER COMMENTS (write below).

2.6 Gatekeepers Study – Information Letter



[Researcher contact details omitted]

10 May 2007

Penrith City Council

Dear [Name],

This letter is to invite you to participate in a new research project looking at planning for the diverse and changing needs of Penrith residents, especially in relation to public open and recreational spaces.

Penrith City Council and an interdisciplinary team from the University of Western Sydney are undertaking the partnership project 'Universal Design in Cultural Context: Accessibility, Diversity and Recreational Space in Penrith.' Universal Design is an approach to the design of facilities, devices and the built environment that goes beyond current accessibility standards by promoting an inclusive design approach that is more sustainable and ultimately better for everyone. This joint initiative on Universal Design seeks to plan more effectively for all people with diverse abilities within our community and as our needs and abilities change over time.

Some PCC people have already been approached by PCC Recreational and Facilities officer Grant Collins or other members of the research team, for help with information and contacts, related to the community perspectives part of the research.

In addition, the investigators want to find out what relevant personnel within PCC think about issues of physical and cultural accessibility of facilities in Penrith, their responses to the idea of Universal Design, and any problems or opportunities foreseen for future planning and implementation. Similar questions will also be asked of businesses, developers and others with stakes in planning for Penrith's future.

You would be asked to attend a small group discussion and or interview guided by A/Prof. Michael Bounds. The session would last between 40 minutes and one hour, and will be held in PCC rooms during business hours. Discussion topics will explore knowledge about public open spaces in Penrith, understanding of Universal Design principles, and any issues about these—especially in relation to future planning and practical implementation. Some individual interviews may also be held with selected people, either prior to or following up the group discussions.

The sessions will be recorded and transcribed, and points consolidated into a draft report, which would then be circulated to participants, who would be asked to make any further comments and reflections. This will also give participants the opportunity to amend, revise or erase comments made by them. Quotes from participants may be used in written publications or other disseminations. These quotes will remain anonymous (i.e. without using real names),

unless the participants give researchers express permission to identify the source of the quote.

The research will be conducted according to UWS Human Research Ethics Committee guidelines, and with consideration to issues arising for managers and participants interviewed about their organization's operations. The recordings and transcripts will be stored securely at the University of Western Sydney by the researchers and will be accessed only by them.

We have received permission from the General Manager to invite your voluntary participation. There will be no disadvantage or penalty for not participating and you may withdraw your participation at any time. Please look over the enclosed Consent Form, which we will ask you to sign it on the day of the session.

We will be following up this letter with a phone call over the next month to discuss your participation and any further queries you have about the project. If you would like to discuss any general aspect of the project or project before then, please contact Dr Zoë Sofoulis on xxxxxx or email xxxxxx, and to discuss the stakeholder study in which you would be specifically xxxxxx. Grant Collins can also discuss the project, especially from PCC's point of view.

We are looking forward to collaborating with you on this research, which is aimed ultimately at encouraging greater enjoyment of Penrith's built environment and open areas by more of the city's diverse residents. The experience and expert knowledge of professionals within PCC will be important contributions to this end.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Zoë Sofoulis

Chief Investigator

Universal Design in Cultural Context

A/ Prof Michael Bounds

Chief Investigator, Stakeholder Study

Universal Design in Cultural Context

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval no.07/007. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Human Research Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Officer on (02) 4736 0883. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

2.7 Gatekeepers Study – Interview Questions

NOTE: These questions were sent to participants ahead of their interview.

PERSONNEL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Please feel free to fill in these questions as best you can in advance or wait until we meet.

A. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been at PCC and what is your position?
2. What sort of involvement have you had with the provision and design of open and recreational space in PCC?

B. TARGETED DESIGN INITIATIVES FOR RECREATIONAL AND OPEN SPACE EXAMPLES

PCC has stewardship of recreational and open space at four spatial levels, Pocket, Local, Neighbourhood and Regional or Natural Area.

We would like you to identify and discuss one particular space at one or more of these four levels (In interview I will ask you to identify this space or spaces on a map)

- Pocket: Name the Space
- Local: Name the Space
- Neighbourhood: Name the Space
- Regional or Natural Area: Name the Space

Questions for each space:

- Talk about its location, structure, function and typical user group.
- Identify some of the positive and negative characteristics of the space from your perspective
- Identify some of the positive and negative characteristics of the space from the perspective of the prospective users

C. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Can you identify some of the principles/sources of information/ theories at work in the creation of these spaces?

How successful are these principles in satisfying user needs in the spaces?

What are some of the impediments to improving the spaces?

Discuss the interests of stakeholders in influencing the character of spaces, the mix of users, the funding agencies, the council goals.

APPENDIX 3: Youth Mapping Workshop

Workshop Outline

Led by Prof Helen Armstrong and Dr Abby Lopes, eight Design Students and a Lecturer from the University of Western Sydney participated in a mapping workshop at Penrith City Council Library on 20th December 2007.

The workshop design took advantage of what was known about participants' technical competencies and access to digital technologies. Some but not all the participants lived (or had lived) in Penrith; some had migrated from other countries. As students at UWS they use Penrith's public space in interesting and divergent ways, as indicated by the thematic titles for their maps.

The process involved doing a number of maps that built up layers of cultural information about the way youth (or young adults) relate to the open space in Penrith. Building on existing maps, new maps revealed and interpreted the concerns and experiences of individual participants.

Using generic maps, participants drew out and highlighted their individual and personal journeys, patterns of movement and subjective experiences related to spaces in the parts of Penrith they visited. Through this mapping process, a form of 'quiet knowledge' was made visible and a visual web of connections in the local area emerged. Through discussions and narratives a sense of shared knowledge was accumulated. In a fuller planning process, a next stage could go on and make combined or collective maps. See Chapter 3 and the separate Guide to Creative Mapping for conceptual background and other workshops.

Pre-mapping activities

Prior to the workshop, students used the internet resource Google Maps to define an area of Penrith that included public open spaces that they use reasonably often. The researchers then printed out four A3 copies of this area and mounted them on dense foam board.

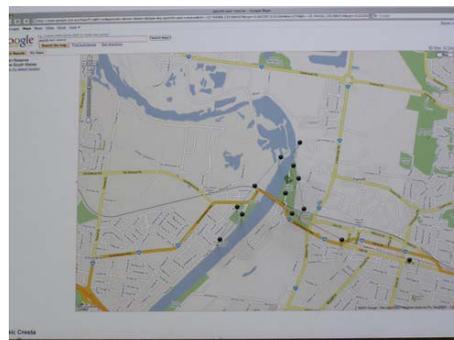
Individuals were asked to walk or drive to these places before the workshop. At each location, they were to write down the positive and negative emotions they associated with the place, and to record digital images there. The images were emailed to the researchers, who printed them off in small format and brought them to the workshop. Participants also brought their notes to the workshop.

Four types of maps

Four maps were developed, each based on a Google Maps printout of the participant's defined area, mounted upon an A3 board.

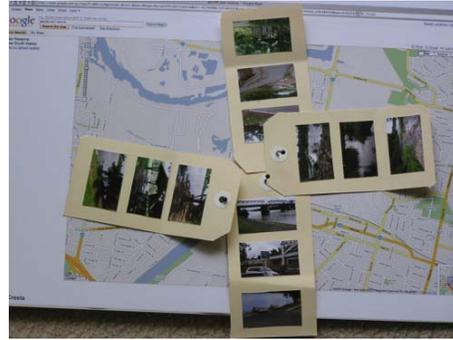
Map One: Map of the Known

On one base map, long pins indicate specific places. Using coloured cotton, the routes taken are to be connected between pins.



Map Two: Map of Personal Landmarks

Using another base map, individuals locate with pins their personal landmarks as well as secret or private places. On blank paper tags, participants mount a small digital image on one side and a narrative about how they feel about the space on the other. The tags are looped over the pins.



Map Three: Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Using a third base map, individuals are to mark out places that reveal **layers of memory/experience** in the Penrith area, such as where they go if they wanted to hide, or to find safety, or experience solitude, or when they are happy.

Individuals are to make small 'flags' of coloured paper on pins, different colours indicating:

- Hiding places
- Safe places
- Places for solitude
- Places for happiness

A legend that indicates the emotions the colours signify is to be added to the map.



Map Four: Map of Discomforting Places

Using the remaining base map, participants locate with pins the places they avoid, don't visit or hesitate to pass through within their local area. Using the same idea of luggage tags, individuals are to indicate through a small narrative written on one side of the tag, why they avoid these places. On the other side, they are to use small photographs to reveal the special qualities that act as barriers to the use of these spaces.



Descriptions of Individual Maps

Each participant made four maps, and gave them a general thematic title. The following is a summary of each of their maps. To preserve anonymity we removed names and where necessary refer to people by number.

1. Fishing Map

Featuring Weir Reserve and River

1. Map of the Known

Map focuses on Weir Reserve.

Red cotton journey from GWH, through High St to Weir Reserve and Regatta Park.

1. Map of Personal Landmarks

There is a Rowing Club and a concrete weir. It's really dangerous to cross but nice on the other side. Tranquil into the bushland. There are wetlands that people don't know about - 'lost beauty'. Lots to do – bike riding, fishing. Also uses Regatta Park and River Rd. Reserve.

Tags were made as follows:

Nepean Rowing Club, Weir Reserve

Sense of community gathering.

Parked boats show area is used for popular leisure activities such as fishing and rowing.

Weir Parkland/reserve

Weir Reserve garden wedding.

Sense of celebration and tranquillity .

Beautiful view and clean, fresh surrounding environment.

Sheltered areas and park benches for public access. Quiet and peaceful with only the sound of running water and animal life.

Clean and aesthetically pleasing.

Weir Reserve

Flowing water, sense of nature and its beauty.

A very green pasture.

Tranquil environment.

Great for a walk or bike ride around river.

Easy access.

Abundance of animal life eg fish, birds.

My experience: cross the weir went through isolated bushland.

Regatta Park/River Rd Reserve

Public walkways and parklands along the water.

Quiet strolls along the waterside – green and healthy pasture.

Evidence of infrastructure eg park benches and eating areas.

My experience: went fishing and caught a 45cm bass.

Bass fishing championships. Mapmaker 1 goes fishing for bass on the weir in between lectures, 3 or so times a semester.

1. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

The colour code used was:

Green – tranquil, quiet, green pasture, peaceful – Weir Reserve.

White – dirt road, pebble walkways, open bushland, isolation, quiet – west side of river opposite Weir Reserve.

Red – fishing area, red-eyed bass, cheerful, happy – Regatta Park.

1. Map of Discomforting Places

Tags were made as follows:

North point of Weir Reserve

Human litter along board walks, leaves an untidy image.

Overgrown areas 'drowning' the river.

Graffiti vandalism.

Too many reeds and reed build up – needs dredging.

Regatta Park

Graffiti.

Untidy park benches.

Grass and plantation maintenance.

Human litter in the water, detrimental to marine life.

2. Car Map

Featuring roads to and from Kingswood Campus of UWS

2. Map of the Known

Colour code for cotton threads:

Pink - drive along Bringelly Road to Liverpool.

Red - drive to UWS along GWH.

Pink/red - pedestrian trip from Kingswood Station to UWS.

Short walk across Kingswood Park when uses the train. Kingswood Park is a transit zone.

2. Map of Personal Landmarks

Tags were made as follows:

Bringelly Road

Lots of convenience shops/stores. You can do so much on the one road.

2 school zones within meters of each other, quite fascinating.

Parking readily available.

Link to 2 major roads, GWH and the Northern Road.

Kingswood Park

Youthful, used by uni students quite often during morning and afternoon.

Peaceful during midmorning.

You can sit in the shade of the trees and not want to move on.

Largest piece of unconstructed land in chosen area.

My Car

Most relaxing place for F1 is in her car - homeward bound trip on Bringelly Rd.

From Nigeria – does not live in Penrith – commutes to UWS from Liverpool.

2. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Red – Hang-out spots - Westfield, Kingwood Campus, Werrington Campus.

Green – Quiet and peaceful – Kingswood Park , Werrington Campus.

Pink – Relaxing Areas – Peppermint Crescent, Cnr GWH and Bringelly Rd.

Tags were made as follows:

Westfield

Hang-out spot with friend between Uni and home or between classes.

Spends time at Westfield Penrith in gaps between lectures. With friends – shopping, eating, hanging out.

Hardly ever uses outdoor areas around Penrith. Climate is 'perfect' in Westfield.

Pleasant place – practical reasons to go there to socialise.

Kingswood Campus

Most of time spent in Penrith is at UWS.

Hang out with friend between classes and get to meet more people.

Werrington Campus

Quiet campus.

Peaceful in comparison with Kingswood campus.

Hang out with friends between classes.

Likes Peppermint Reserve – a quieter area.

2. Map of Discomforting Places

Tags were made as follows:

Kingswood Station

Discomfort in crowds.

Most discomfort with Kingswood train station – feels unsafe. 'Unsavoury' people, say rude things when you walk past. Screaming school children.

Only use it when I don't have access to my car (my car might be broken down or used by someone else).

Full of 'yobbos' drunk people at any time of the day.

Loud school children.

Rushing to catch train or missing train after uni.

Poor design of station, have to go upstairs to buy a ticket and then come down.

Great Western Highway

Crowded and congested in peak hours.

Kingswood Park

Visibility of youth in Graffiti at this park – slight uneasiness.

3. Water Map

Centred on Tench Reserve

3. Map of the Known

Colour code for cotton threads:

Blue – blue pins with blue cotton in the river.

Black – for Jamison Road.

Red – Tench Reserve. Map juxtaposes Jamison Road and Tench Reserve.

3. Map of Personal Landmarks

From Turkey – where parks (*Kayseri*) are 19th century formal designs with big trees. He likes to drive along Jamison Road in anticipation of reaching Tench Reserve when he needs quiet.

The Nepean River

This is the place where he feels most comfortable. He likes spending time there because it is a peaceful environment that you can listen to yourself, take your time. It is like a little escape from everyday life and its obligations.

He likes to sit on the benches which face the water. He feels the good thing with the benches is that they are in harmony with the environment 'giving you the possibility of making your mind alone for some time'.

When he does not feel like sitting, he walks along the path near the water.

The water is relaxing and takes away his problems.

In such a peaceful place, he feels there are few things that ruin his solitude.

Tags were made as follows:

Path beside river

It is a nice path to walk by- time to walk and think.

The path reminds me of life itself; it looks endless but you know that there is an end. Still walking and trying to sort things out, sometimes don't even know why.

Fishing spot

The child in the photos probably represents me.

Taking a role in nature – nice clean natural life away from the industrial world.

Bench facing river

The bench itself inviting you to get rest and join nature.

It is green and made of wood, blending with nature.

Time to watch water and trees and think... a journey to your inner world.

Swinging Rope over River

This is good. It is fun and allows you to interact with nature.

Reminds me of my childhood – good safe days.

Rope swing looks like it is part of the tree.

Pergolas (picnic shelters)

It is good that pergolas are not close to each other which allows people to enjoy their privacy.

3. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Red/green/pink/blue/black - The River -emotions are all together.

It is a bit confusing, like water, it is relaxing, fearful, danger, harmony, life, the basic elements for life – all good memories.

Green - tree overhanging river – the beauty of nature.

Water jetty – leads you to the water. I used to row back in Turkey and I believe takes your stress and worry away.

Pink – Tench Reserve parkland.

All good, nice feelings, memories. Reminds me of my dog, the beauty of nature; amazing world and how small people are. Also how harmful people are for the environment that we are living in. *'We are digging our own grave for years and years...'*

Water there is relaxing and an escape from the stress of life and travelling on roads. Turkish saying, *'If you tell your problems to the water, it will take them away'*. Reminds him of canoeing on river in Turkish city of Sakarya as undergraduate student. Reminds of absent friends and extra time. In Turkey had time, lots of art tools, recreation. Here, need to work to support study and live. Water 'tops up' well-being. Vertically layered flag indicated these various emotions.

3. Map of Discomforting Places

View of Motorway over the river

In Tench Reserve, the highway passing close by can be noisy.

This picture reminds me of the industrial life. The highway up there is calling you back from your escape to the real life in a competitive world.

The beauty of the park and the mood I am in is ruined by the road

Play equipment under blue sunshade.

The brightly coloured playgrounds seem to be contrary to colours of the rest of the area.

The park is an escape place for me so the noise of children playing is also disturbing.

Driving along roads

Jamison Road a discomforting place. Driving is really stressful for me. I usually get lost. The streets are quite alike to me.

Industrial world – competition even on the roads, rules, lots of rules – not allowed to improvise.

Discomforting event on campus

Walking between lecture theatres attacked by magpies. Now far less inclined to walk.

Open green space carries threat like Hitchcock's *The Birds!*

4. Escape Map

Featuring Jamison Park

4. Map of the Known

Map focuses on Skate Park at Jamison Park and the way M3 gets there along Jamison Road, Taloma St and Smith St.

Rides BMX to skate park. Stops at shops at Smith St and servo to put air in tyres. Cuts through oval but in summer the bindis puncture his tyres.

The skate facility is popular and always has people using it. Weekends kids on scooters also use. It's next to an industrial area so people don't tend to complain about noise etc.

4. Map of Personal Landmarks

Tags were made as follows:

The Skate Park

It offers an escape from life.

A place where I can ride to achieve my own goals and be with friends.

My problems, issues and weight of the world do not exist.

The Netball Court

The adjoining empty netball court offers solitude.

A place where i can be alone.

It is an empty canvas for me to fill with my own style of riding and focus solely on the task at hand.

4. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

'Escape Map'. Didn't grow up in Penrith – has been here three years living with girlfriend. The skate park is very important to him – it is escape. Netball court near skate park is 'safe zone' too. Skate there when you need solitude. Place for spontaneous social meeting 'if you are there you are there' don't plan to see people. The people you skate with are different to your other friends. When you 'ride with someone' you are basically watching each other do 'runs' – challenging each other.

Red – Places of Safety

My friends are at the skate park.

They would help me and stick up for me if I needed it.

Green – Places of Solitude

Netball court offers solitude' people move from the skate park to the netball courts to be alone - to focus on issues in their lives or things that have happened.

If you see someone on the netball courts for a while, you go and ask what is up?

Other – Places of Happiness

Feeling of happiness through landing a 'trick' and trying to get a cheer from the guys.

Or just flowing around the park being as smooth as possible.

4. Map of Discomforting Places

Public Toilet Block

What's annoying is the dodgy toilet block – you have to take your bike in so it doesn't get stolen but it's always smelly and dirty.

Territorialism.

Feeling of territorialism when riding to skate park – 'Jocks' training on the oval make Mapmaker 4 feel a 'clash of cultures'.

Seems very stereotypical but I feel a little uncomfortable riding past the footballers training on the oval.

5. Food Map

Penrith central criss-crossing to Kingswood

5. Map of the Known

Driving motivated by necessity re uni and food pit-stops. Chicken Man in Kingswood, Krispy Kreme, Kebab Pizza in High St. Little outdoor café near Plaza.

5. Map of Personal Landmarks

Emotional connection concerned with social memories – friends, places, parties.

Welcome solitude in the car on the road, long, straight drives in and out of Penrith.

Tags were made as follows:

Krispy Kreme, Penrith

Happy memories of KK's as a meeting point.

Hours of Car Chat, joking around, lots of doughnuts in between.

Strong link with car scene.

Popular place to be 'spotted'.

Meet people and hang with mates after long drive to Penrith.

The Plaza, Penrith

Pleasant memories of first date at coffee shop.

Nice place to hang out; comfortable, safe.

Can sit for long periods and enjoy the ambience and people watch.

Few places in Penrith to do this. 'There aren't many places in Penrith that you can stay for more than half an hour without feeling you have to move on' (security presence; general pace).

Chicken Man, Kingswood

Common meeting place during Uni periods.

Pleasant memories of conversations and socializing over a piece of chicken.

King St, Kingswood

Location of a friend's house.

Has many memories attached to it, mostly pleasant eg hanging out, parties etc.

Library Courtyard, UWS Werrington

Good place to do work, quiet, serene, comfortable.

Nice coffees makes it a good place to socialize and chat with friends.
Mostly happy memories of 'ditching' class just to sit and enjoy a nice day.

5. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Black – Hiding Places

Kingswood University car park.

Sometimes I disappear to hide/sleep/study in private in the car.

Red – Safe Places

University – both because lots of people around.

The Plaza – ditto.

Apple Green – Places for Solitude

Main roads where I spend a lot of time by myself to think and contemplate.

Green – Places for Happiness

Training in Parkour – using built environment to move like an animal, fluidly and efficiently. It is an outlet for emotions, a source of self-expression, improves fitness and strength. A form of meditation, focuses and clears the mind. It involves kinaesthetic feelings through movement, invoking happiness, fear, and achievement.

'Parkouring' around the university campus or mucking around with friends.

Parkouring at the children's playground in the park eg Kingswood Park.

Because of Penrith Plains and limited built obstacles, it is difficult to find places to train in Penrith.

5. Map of Discomforting Places

Chicken Man, Kingswood

Can be an uncomfortable place when 'bogans' are loitering, but never pose any real threat.

The culture of surveillance and Westfield

Fields of Nothingness

Mapmaker 5 describes Penrith parks as '*fields of nothingness*'.

As a parkour practitioner, he had an interesting insight that there is nothing to play *with* (public sculptures to climb, walls to run etc).

Majority of City of Penrith

He has not visited area in depth but to him, it looks like an industrial area with working class housing.

It is a flat area with a lack of greenery, kind of depressing and not very interesting.

High Street Penrith

Shops and pedestrian way is dirty, grubby, concrete 'banality?'

Also full of junkies and troubled people, particularly around the court house.

As a result feeling of discomfort and reduced safety.

Not the nicest place to visit.

The Other Side of the Tracks

In the 5 years of frequenting Penrith, I have never been over to the other side of the railway lines.

From what I have seen from the road and the train, there seems to be a ghetto situation.

An unappealing and undesirable place to visit.

6. Solitude Map

Mainly centred around St Mary's

6. Map of the Known

Green cotton – linear, mostly showing driving and a small area defined around Plaza and Queen St. for walking.

6. Map of Personal Landmarks

Hog's Breath Café

Interest in steak and kidney.

Like the party feel of the place.

Always wanted to go but never been.

Expensive.

Hobby Shop, St Mary's

Interested in toys and gadgets.

A form of entertainment with things to see.

Royal Kebab, Queen St, St Mary's

Nice food.

Good outing place.

Train station

Different to shopping.

Trains as technology are just as interesting.

Lots of people.

6. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Has a Kebab on Queen St and visits Hobby stores – toys and gadgets. Enjoys driving down Queen St. as opposed to the highway – different style of driving - pleasant, slow, 'open' driving experience.

Black – Hiding Places

South Creek Park, Waratah St, Benalong St, St Mary's.

Green - Safe Places

South Creek Park, Little Chapel St Park and streets, St Mary's.

Charles Hackett Drive.

Pink – Places of Solitude

Driving along GWH.

Orange – Places of Happiness

GWH, St Mary's.

Queen St, St Mary's.

6. Map of Discomforting Places

Has mixed feelings about being out and about in Penrith – safety and solitude in his car.
Green places where there is opportunity for solitude also shadowed by uneasiness – isolation and potential threat from other people.

Great Western Highway - Road rage, traffic, dangerous.

Shops in Queen St, St Mary's – People don't engage; Different culture, strange and unknown.

7. A Running Map

Centred around Glenmore Park

7. Map of the Known

White cotton connecting home and what he calls 'Claremont Park Soccer Fields'.

A very 'located' map at human pace - running, bike riding.

Glenmore Parkway, Sunbird Terrace, Woodlands Drive.

7. Map of Personal Landmarks

Soccer Fields

A keen soccer player.

Lots of good emotional connections to this place and the route between – engagement, interest, socialising. Anticipates spending Wednesday and Sunday there.

Runs there – solitude, contemplative time and warm up for soccer.

The Kids Park, Sunbird Terrace

Beautiful park but seemingly abandoned.

Used to take his kid sister there.

Drives through at different times and notices very few people ever using it.

The Bike Trail

Uses bike trail for running.

Before used to cycle with his father.

Used to stop near Kookaburra Crescent to take a 'breather'.

7. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Red - Safe, Solitude and Happiness.

The journey to the soccer fields.

I run through the side streets.

'In that 5 minutes run is of my '[me] times' where I pump myself up for training and reflect on what's been happening with me at the time.'

Red – the Soccer Fields.

I go to the soccer fields to kick the ball around and train as break from work and my studies.

It's my one 'happy place' in Glenmore Park.

7. Map of Discomforting Places

Vandalism at children's Park, Sunbird Terrace.

Vandalism and discarded beer bottles at a child's playground conjure up feelings of negativity and surely deter people from bringing their children to play here.

8. A Walking Map

Featuring Penrith Central

8. Map of the Known

Two discrete aspects:

Red – travels in by train.

Yellow – drives in and shops on High Street and in Plaza.

8. Map of Personal Landmarks

Hiding Place

A nice café where I wait while my family shops.

Quiet, hardly anyone visiting.

Riley Street

Creates an impression of having arrived somewhere important – a 'Landmark'.

Entrance to Westfield

A landmark for orienting self within Penrith.

High Street

Walking down High Street enjoys the smell of food, the engaging sellers on the street.

The discovery of quieter lanes where there are good coffee shops.

A very active place.

Good to spend time looking at curios, books or get something quickly to eat.

Planting beds at Intersection of High St and Henry St

Good place to wait for banking related work or while request is being processed.

Good eating joints nearby.

8. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Yellow Pins – places to leisurely move around – High Street.

Green Pins – quiet place to read a book while eating or having coffee – quiet arcade.

White Pins – Visually interesting, great food – Riley Street.

8. Map of Discomforting Places

Finds discrepancy between affluence and new buildings and old, unkempt places. Warned off finding accommodation on 'other side of the tracks' at Kingswood – still wary of that area. Certain visual indicators – old plus graffiti = bad area.

Dark parking lots – Scary.

Old looking places

The negative emotion associated with Penrith was influenced by a colleague who suggested Kingswood and Penrith areas are not safe to live in. *'It tuned my eye to avoid old looking places.'*

Older shops on High St

Visually old, boring, connotations of not being safe.

Kingswood Train Station

Finds Kingswood train station discomforting.

From St. Mary's on, 'bad parents' smoking on the platform, screaming at their kids.

9. Searching for Sustainability Map

A car-dominated landscape

This participant was an adult with a PhD in Industrial Design who now educates 'sustainable' industrial designers. He lives in the Blue Mountains and his defined area was on a broad scale from Leonay to Claremont Meadows.

9. Map of the Known

This was largely a driving map, with some public transport.

Black – Near-daily commute along M4 and to Claremont Meadows IGA for food.

Yellow – Public transport commute via uni (shuttle bus) to Kingswood train station.

Green – Mulgoa Road – weekend shopping by car at Bunnings, Mall, bank.

Red cotton - Recreation on – boating, wake boarding, water skiing on Nepean River, walking in from Glenbrook National Park.

9. Map of Personal Landmarks

Tags were made as follows:

Highway Journey Home

Leaving work, heading home to the Blue Mountains.

The view along the river in both directions is very pretty.

The scenery on the trip up the mountains provides excellent views.

I drive an old car at 80km up the mountains, very pleasant trip home to my 'mountain retreat'.

Nepean River

Nepean River – really good memories of boating, waterskiing and wakeboarding on the river as an undergraduate.

Great many memories of morning's wakeboarding on the river.
Combines physical activity which is cathartic with beautiful scenery.
Once around the bend and through the 4 knot zone, the sandstone gorge is spectacular.
A 5 minute boat trip from Penrith is the middle of nowhere.

Personal landmarks

Mainly physical, practical – 'surprisingly little emotional connection to the place I spend so much [work] time.'

General Landmarks

Penrith Plaza.
Mulgoa Road.
UWS Werrington South.
Claremont Meadows.
Kingswood Bowling Club – staff drinks.

Anthony Crescent Kingswood

Genuine 1960s middle Australia time warp' houses.
Walking from Kingswood station to uni takes a detour – loves Anthony Crescent – poor but neat and well cared for.
Extremely neat street that is well maintained yet has little affluence.
Reminds me of the saying 'you don't have to be rich to be neat'.
The pride of the street is evident via the well-kept gardens.

Claremont Meadows Shopping Centre

Pleasant neat neighbourhood.
Friendly service from an Indian man who kindly refers to me as 'mate' or 'brother'.
Service with a bit of a chit chat.
One of the few places where I am remembered in the area.

Indoor/outdoor Eating areas in Plaza

Comfortable when Plaza is open – feel claustrophobic when within the Mall – too many bright lights, air conditioning and sterile places.
Outdoor areas far more pleasant.

Penrith Panthers Ski Park & BMX track

Strong happy memories (shared by other students at the table) of Penrith Ski Park and BMX track which was accessed in big gaps in timetable between lectures. No longer there.
Panthers in decline '*full of pokies and nothing else*'. A plan to mine the river area and put in golf course so that clientele would spend money in the club after playing or stay in local hotels.

9. Mapping Layers of Memory and Experience

Place of Happiness – Highway journey home; Claremont Meadows Shopping Centre.

Safe Place – Anthony Crescent Kingswood.

Hiding Place – View from Office – More escapism than hiding.

Place of Solitude – on the Nepean River.

Stressful Emotions – Walk to Kingswood Station.

No connection with place – neutral. Always appear to be late – have to run towards the end of the trip. ATM is 200m from the station – have to walk further to get money, buy ticket and then if lucky catch the train or wait.

9. Map of Discomforting Places

Abandoned Garage, Great Western Highway

Feeling of being threatened by abandoned garage/warehouse and people milling on other side of Kingswood station.

I am a 6ft tall male who has travelled a lot.

The garage is a hangout for long neck cigarette smokers on the rough side.

It is the only place in the area where I feel physically uncomfortable.

I hustle by to the ATM.

Penrith Plaza Road Rage

By the time I get to the Plaza via car, I feel like I have wasted an eternity.

Very unpleasant entrance from car park, especially when all I need is a quick transaction at the Bank.

Bunnings Car Park, Mulgoa Road

Visit out of necessity only – to purchase things for an old house that are no longer made.

The combination of traffic, parking, poor customer service and lack of product make the experience unpleasant 9/10 times.

Road experiences - Visual pollution of structures surrounding Mulgoa Road including large car parks; removal of any local identity from the strip.

Car-dominated Landscape

Donkey trails between shops if you choose to walk.

Land of Megastores that offer no more than smaller local stores.

Hopelessness of the West to live in a sustainable way without cars.

I cannot access any area without my car.

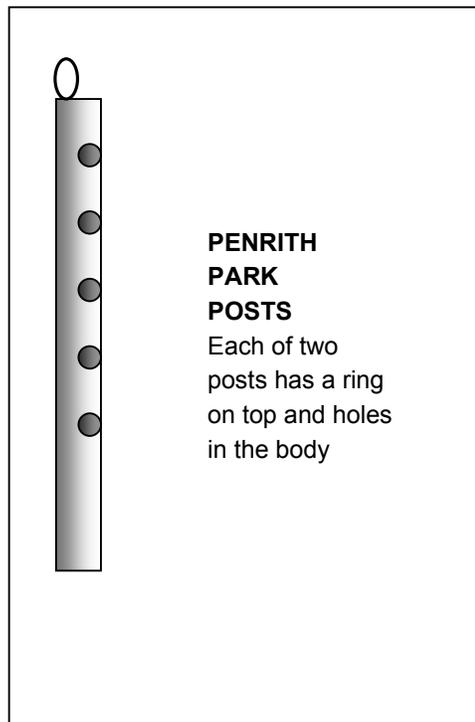
Observations

- The various University of Western Sydney campuses bring numerous people into Penrith from a range of cultures. They have various needs for open space.
- Design students use Penrith Parks in a variety of ways, including active and passive recreation, suggesting that open space needs to cater for a range of uses.
- There are many places that make up personal landmarks which are not necessarily evident to others. Some are related to parks, others to shopping centres and others to the main roads.
- A new use for Penrith open space – ‘Parkouring’ suggest that parks need more surfaces and features (see Map 5).
- A number of cultural barriers exist to the use of public spaces, in particular train stations and public roads. Evidence of neglect and vandalism in parks also act as a barrier to use.

APPENDIX 4: Penrith Park Posts

This is an idea suggested by researcher A/Prof Michael Bounds at a team meeting, and complements suggestions for temporary installations of play equipment in parks, and holding more events in parks.

Two sturdy posts featuring rings and holes for attaching ropes and other objects could be set up in parks. Council workers would move adaptive equipment from park to park utilizing the posts for a variety of functions; alternatively residents themselves could bring their own equipment to attach (nets for sports, strings of lights, shade cloth), or perhaps hire it from Council. The details of these posts could be part of a design competition for a low cost low maintenance structure, perhaps in conjunction with UWS Design Students.



Some possible uses and functions:

- Flying fox between posts through rings.
- Bars put through holes to form climbing frame.
- Canvas drawn across cable between posts through rings and across bars to form a shelter for rainy day play or for fairs etc.
- Sailcloth suspended around post to provide shade for a play area underneath.
- Maypoles.
- Pillars for lighting to illuminate park for night fairs, barbecues, etc in summer.
- Art exhibition with paintings attached to sheets suspended between the posts.
- Plays using scenery suspended from posts as a backdrop and a changing room for actors.
- Totem pole for dance to bring rain.

APPENDIX 5: Findings in Relation to Penrith's Open Space Action Plan

NOTE: This also appears in the Strategic Summary and Recommendations.

Here we present research findings and comments under headings and subheadings provided by the 'Objectives' of Penrith City Council's Open Space Action Plan (July 2007), omitting those for which we had no relevant findings. The concluding discussion of additional findings that was in the Out and About Strategic Summary is incorporated into Chapter 6 of the full report.

Objective 1 —Maximise use of existing cultural and recreation facilities

Provide high quality recreational open space for all members of the Penrith community (general, active and passive)

- The research findings suggest the classification of recreational activities or spaces as 'active' (e.g. formal sports facilities) and 'passive' (less structured spaces) is unhelpful for thinking about the needs of young people and adults for active play and informal sports outside sports clubs and grounds, where there is a need for facilities to support 'active' use within so-called 'passive' spaces.
- The many respondents who wanted more toilets, seating, shade etc indicate that 'open space' itself is not very usable without amenities for comfort.
- Both gatekeepers and residents are aware of the growing disparities in quality of recreational space in older compared to newer areas of Penrith.

Improve access to existing recreation and cultural facilities

- The concept of 'access' is usually reduced to physical access. Dimensions of physical access include *transport* and *mobility* access to places and the various areas within them, and *facilities* access (e.g. toilets, picnic tables). Other dimensions of access include *cultural* access (welcoming, open to variety of activities, friendliness or no harassment from others); *information* access (e.g. to information about parks and their facilities; information within parks); and access to various *services* (e.g. child care and inclusion support services, especially those that visit parks; possible access to internet services within parks).
- Recent developments in design for people with disabilities goes beyond mere *physical access* to look at *usability* – what people can do there; and *inclusion* – who feels welcome there. In recognition of cultural complexity, and the fact that some people want to use parks alone or within their own cultural or sub-cultural groups, and not necessarily as members of some inclusive social whole, we articulated the more open-ended principle of 'non-exclusion': that open spaces do not exclude people who want to use them. We found it is analytically useful to examine public open spaces in terms of whom they exclude as well as include.

- The research findings question the Open Space Plan’s implied distinction between ‘recreation’ and ‘cultural’ facilities, which can be outlined in somewhat exaggerated form as follows:

‘RECREATIONAL’

Nature
 Sports, physical play
 Physical, ‘getting out and about’
 Open spaces
 Space + Equipment

‘CULTURAL’

Culture
 Arts, ‘high’ culture
 Creative, educational, reflective
 Theatres, galleries
 Space + Events

- Responses indicate growing interests in using open spaces for social and cultural events (e.g. picnics and barbeques, visits and play with grandchildren, dancing and music-making). Demands for facilities like toilets, paths, tables, seating, shelter, parking and events like festivals or concerts indicate that open spaces are being increasingly coded as ‘cultural’ and expected to provide infrastructures to support social and cultural activities. An ideal open space is imagined by some as less like a tree-bordered sports field where people ‘rough it’, and more akin to an outdoor room affording access to natural areas as well as convenience and comfort.
- Many ideas in the report bridge the tacit divide between ‘recreation’ and ‘cultural’ facilities. We highlight the importance of socialising in play and outdoor recreation from childhood and through to teenage years and beyond. For new migrants, occupying public open space is an important way to learn to belong in the landscape and the local community. We draw attention to participants’ interests in outdoor recreational experiences centred around social and cultural activities, and suggest teenagers could combine their strong socialising interests with opportunities for active play. The park as event idea, partly inspired by the mobile Playvan service, highlights the potential of the park to act as a social and cultural space.

Encourage water-based recreation activities within the Penrith LGA

- There were many positive feelings expressed about parks in Penrith and especially Tench Reserve, Jamison Park (despite access problems), the Great River Walk, and the Penrith Lakes area (though some found this a bit too underpopulated for comfort). Some older residents wanted a return to easier riverside access from the Penrith CBD—something featured in the City Centre Vision for Penrith .
- Some residents did not need encouragement but enablement to engage in water-based recreation. People who do not drive experience problems reaching areas like Tench Reserve or the white-water rafting centre, especially on weekends. A wheelchair-user reported pathway access problems in reaching the ‘Sailability’ program for people with diverse abilities operating from the Regatta Centre—though a Council interviewee detailed logistical difficulties in improving the paths.
- It was difficult for people in wheelchairs to access waterside experiences, suggesting that the universally designed garden in Japan with an accessible sunken area where people can dip their hands into the water has potential in Penrith.
- Recreational visits to water bodies in the Penrith area featured in some of the university students’ maps. One created a ‘fishing map’ and noted sites of good catches. For others,

waterside peace and solitude offered welcome respite from the stress of the driving, and complicated lives combining study and work.

Establish equitable, affordable fees and charges for recreational, cultural and community facilities

- Some young TAFE students called for more affordable sports facilities (of which Don Bosco centre was one example); another participant thought bus fare subsidies could help youth access recreational facilities. Perhaps Council could act to broker subsidies or entry discounts for low-income youth to use facilities.
- Council charges modest fees to allow people to reserve designated picnic areas and barbeques for large group gatherings (e.g. Wallacia). This can help people of different groups to feel more confident and entitled using public space. Something similar might also work for groups wanting to use local parks.
- A relevant issue not investigated was the regulatory and financial barriers to people setting up food vans or kiosks in park areas on weekends.

Promote available recreation and cultural facilities and activities to all segments of the community

- The idea of a whole community divided into segments is less helpful than a model of cultural complexity that understands Penrith residents as each belonging to different, overlapping and multiple communities, cultures and subcultures.
- Not all communities share the same basic codes about public space use: who is seen, with whom, when, and doing what. For example, older residents have different norms about the size and attitudes of groups occupying public space than those expressed by contemporary youth. Anglo-Australian norms permit females and males to swim and do sport together in various stages of undress, whereas traditional Muslim communities have rules of gender segregation and clothing customs that apply to recreational, sports and social activities in public.
- Although the culture of sport and fitness is a dominant one in Australia, not everyone is interested in using open spaces primarily for these pursuits.
- Promoting something as available is not the same as making it usable or inclusive (or non-exclusive). Inclusiveness would require some enhancement of local tolerance of difference and civility towards non-dominant groups (youth, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, the aged, Muslim, African and other non-Anglo groups), as well as expanded Council and community understandings of acceptable activities in open spaces (e.g. different kinds of cooking; music-making, etc.)
- Residents and gatekeepers recognise that youth are largely excluded from parks by inappropriately sized play equipment. Youth also report hostility from adults in parks.

Objective 2 —Rationalise recreation and cultural resources in the Penrith Local Government Area

Develop an integrated community facility network

- Spaces around neighbourhood centres do not necessarily provide stimulating environments for children and youth in various care and recreational programs.

- The children's mapping workshop found indicators that neighbourhood centres and after-school care services could make better use of nearby open space recreational opportunities for children in their care, who might not otherwise make it to parks, as parents may forbid them to go unsupervised yet be too busy to accompany them.

Provide quality open space areas

- Participants in this study generally did not express needs for fancy equipment, just better basic facilities in existing areas, and options for nocturnal use.
- There was high coherence in expectations of basic facilities: toilets, shade, seating, tables, barbeques, paths, usable equipment, mowed and safe grassed areas. But expectations of toilets in Local and Pocket parks were out of alignment with Council policies to provide them only in Neighbourhood and District parks.
- For people using wheeled devices for mobility or recreation, quality open space means traversable surfaces and interconnected pathways.
- For those in middle childhood, quality open space may be undesigned, messy and contain mobile elements to play and construct with.
- For youth, quality open space includes equipment they use in active and child-like ways, and facilities that support socialising with friends—including at night.
- Connectivity with the digital world may be emerging as an attractor for young people and adults to make more use of public space.
- Gatekeepers acknowledged that some open space areas—especially linear drainage areas and pocket parks—were on otherwise unusable or awkward land.
- Even 'low quality' open spaces like linear drainage areas could be put to better use as informal sports sites for young residents, through the provision of soccer goals, basketball hoops or poles for string nets between. Parcels of unused land in industrial areas could be allocated for recreational use by workers (see Obj. 5).

Objective 3 —Provide new recreation and cultural facilities that are undersupplied in the Penrith Local Government Area

Progressively build upon the existing network of local/regional walking/cycling paths

- This would be welcomed by many, especially those too young or old or physically unable to drive.
- Existing paths are found not wide enough for a wheelchair and pram or bike to pass.
- The cult of sport and fitness means people in wheelchairs are expected to give way to joggers and cyclists. There may need to be some user group consultations, a community education campaign and signage on 'rules of the pathway'
- It is important to provide seating along path networks as some pedestrians, especially older residents, need them. There was an expressed need for attention to walking paths and shaded shelters through the Penrith CBD, especially after the erosion of the once-loved Judges Park to little more than a messy thoroughfare.
- UWS and TAFE students are regular visitors to Penrith and users of recreational space. Driving maps indicating parks and walkways could enhance their use of these facilities—and their wellbeing.

Provide outdoor entertainment spaces for community events, festivals, performances

- Our findings strongly indicate such events are likely to be popular, including amongst people with disabilities. Events could be based around existing parks, to help attract users to them. Recent outdoor youth entertainment events had proven very popular and would likely help youth feel more included in public space.
- Council may have in mind special purpose facilities, but participants want existing and local parks used in these ways. The research team is suggesting upgrading basic park amenities to support using all kinds of parks for temporary events, even on a scale as small as the Playvan visits. The principle is flexible use of the same space for different purposes, for different groups, at different times.

Provide adequate indoor recreation, cultural and sporting facilities

- This was an issue for youth and adults with disabilities. There is a dearth of indoor facilities with toilets big enough for those who need toileting by two carers.

Encourage water-based sports to operate within the Penrith LGA

- Some residents had problems accessing or using water-based activities due to lacks of transport access, paths, toilets, shade, and wheelchair access.
- Given many residents' interests in more social and cultural open air recreational activities, as well as enjoyment of nature, perhaps water-based social and cultural events and natural history excursions could also be encouraged.

Provide quality sporting fields for growing sports, based on demonstrated need and growing membership numbers.

- Reportedly more girls are today playing the same kinds of team sports as boys.
- Not all young people have the desire, the finances, or the parental chauffeur needed to participate in organised sports and clubs, but they still want active outdoor fun.
- *Parkour* (or 'free running') is an emergent physical art (already established in Fairfield), which does not need fields, but rather, interesting features of the built environment to climb, jump or bounce off, etc. — features which one participant found lacking in Penrith. Liaison with Council, police and security guards would likely be needed were a *parkour* group ever to be established in Penrith.

Provide appropriate recreation and cultural facilities for children and families

- Although there were some complaints about children's' play equipment being removed, there was a relative over-provision of facilities for families with young children, and an under-provision for children in middle childhood and teens.
- Not only families but groups of peers, especially younger people, seek to use public space. The sense of entitlement to space that families with children possess in parks is demonstrated in the hostility some express towards small groups of teenagers (both able-bodied and with disabilities) to discourage them from using open space.
- Fencing for small children's play areas is a safety consideration for sole parents visiting parks with more than one child, and especially for large Sudanese families.
- Changing social norms (especially patterns of marriage, divorce and child-rearing) require a rethink of assumptions about the 'families' that use parks or other child-oriented services or facilities. Non-custodial fathers, grandparents (some in wheelchairs), and

other relatives or neighbours may accompany children. Some cultures like to visit parks in extended rather than nuclear family groups.

- The needs of visually or mobility-impaired older people visiting parks with grandchildren have implications for park and playground design, and are a strong argument for universally designed facilities. Rubberised soft fall surfaces are much preferred over bark chips, which were unusable by prams, wheelchairs, or people with balance problems. Council also recognises the superiority of soft fall, which is low-maintenance but expensive.

Provide appropriate recreation and cultural facilities for young people

- This is a major issue, as recreational needs of youth are not well catered for by play equipment in open space areas. There seems to be an assumption built into current facilities that young people either exercise via organised sport or do nothing
- Young people, parents, Council professionals and youth workers all call for more equipment and opportunities for informal active fun for youth (e.g. swings, slides and flying foxes; soccer goals for casual use).
- Size needs of teenagers seeking active fun need consideration, and may work against the idea of universal design governing every single piece of equipment.
- Different gender needs have to be considered. It is not known whether councils invest as much money in recreational facilities for adolescent females as they do in facilities like skate parks that cater almost exclusively to males.
- For many young people, a major recreational activity is to socialise with peers in commercial areas within reach of food, drink, entertainment and transport. They like to look at other groups of young people, and to feel part of a lively 'scene'. However, many adults seem to treat youth almost like vermin and consider it a problem for groups of young people to be seen anywhere in public.
- Today's youth tend to socialise in larger groups than those of previous generations, and adopt dramatic appearances which older people can find intimidating.
- Youth feel harassed by security guards in urban public space near the Penrith Plaza. The Youth Protocols established under the former owners had lapsed.
- Youth can get caught up in a vicious circle of social exclusion. Socialising activities and youthful displays of identity are misunderstood by authorities as anti-social, and the misbehaviour of a minority becomes a justification for excluding from public spaces all young people—and everyone else—by removing lighting, toilets, playgrounds, skate parks, etc. This fuels further adult hostility towards youth, who are blamed for causing the loss of public amenity. This exacerbates young people's sense of social exclusion, which could be expressed in actual anti-social behaviour. Some better approach is clearly needed.
- 21st Century young people seek both mobility and connectivity, and carry entertainment and communications devices everywhere. 'Appropriate' facilities might be those that afforded connectivity with digital communications networks, and accommodated desires for immersion in music (e.g. spots for recharging mobiles and iPods, or playing them over built-in speakers).

Objective 4 —Encourage Community Involvement in Facility and Service Provision

Establish clear guidelines for sporting and recreation groups regarding their responsibilities in relation to facility development and management

- This seems an equitable objective. However, there is no equivalent process for sharing responsibilities with users of parks and open spaces more generally.
- Developing some means whereby local communities shared some responsibility for parks in their area could be a way to maintain park amenity within Council's budgetary constraints. For example, donations of cubby-building materials or contributions to maintaining community or children's gardens in parks could enhance recreational opportunities for children in middle childhood at low cost. Engagement of local teenagers in voluntary park maintenance activities could enhance their sense of social belonging and reduce vandalism.
- Ensure all stakeholders have regular opportunities to assist Council to plan, manage and develop cultural and recreation facilities / services
- Involvement of users in the planning and evaluation of facilities for open space and public areas is consistent with basic principles of universal design, and is one way to foster more inclusive parks.
- Explore how to achieve this objective in relation to local parks and open spaces. A community process of consultation, design, building and maintaining might be a way to enhance senses of youth and community ownership.
- Council already has well-developed connections with some 'expert users' of parks: people with diverse abilities on its Disability Access Committee. Although people with disabilities call for various improvements in accessibility, they are satisfied that Council listens and takes their needs seriously.
- People possess 'quiet knowledge' of localities like parks and natural reserves— memories, experiences and pleasures associated with localities that are not easy to verbalise, but can be elicited through creative community consultation approaches (like creative mapping). (See discussion in Chapter 6, p. 80, and *Guide to Community Mapping*)
- Ensure sports and recreation clubs remain viable and responsibly manage respective facilities.
- Sports are subject to fashions. Old pursuits will always have enduring 'hard core' adherents who want to keep clubs alive. The process of ensuring viability of sports and clubs has to be balanced by a process of reviewing which practices are being abandoned and which are emerging with valid claims for access to facilities.

Objective 5 —Facilitate Diverse Recreational & Cultural Program Development

Provide resources to co-ordinate and facilitate recreation and cultural activities to meet community needs

- Workers' recreation and exercise needs do not seem to be appropriately catered for in Penrith. There a lack of quality public (non-commercial) spaces in the CBD where workers can go for lunch, and other commercial and light industrial areas lack open

spaces for recreation and exercise. There are opportunities for Council to undertake a needs study and form strategic partnerships with local businesses to make use of parcels of open land, and develop walking pathways in industrial and commercial areas to enhance recreational opportunities for workers.

Ensure that Council-managed community, sport and recreation facilities offer a variety of relevant recreational and cultural facilities and services

- The Universal Design principle of flexible use favours development of adaptable, changeable and multi-purpose facilities over specialised and single-purpose sites: existing parks can become temporary outdoor cultural facilities.
- In open space planning, designing landscapes and facilities with attention to site specificity is one way to offer park users a diversity of experiences.
- Making parks available for different uses and users at different times is another way to accommodate a diversity of interests, rather than presuming 'average' users who use the park in similar ways at any time. For example, one respondent suggested scheduling dog-walking hours in her local park so she could avoid them.
- Present park playground equipment has a 'cookie-cutter' feel to it, designed to a template that offers the same narrow age and size band of children only minor variations from site to site. An alternative approach is to develop special features in different parks. This would be much appreciated by youth with disabilities, who find most existing equipment unusable, and who rely significantly on park visits for opportunities to have fun and socialise.

Provide appropriate recreation and cultural facilities for the wide range of cultures within Penrith

- This may not be as difficult as it sounds for open space planning, as most people mention the same basic needs.
- Councils in highly multicultural areas, or towns where there are different cultural groups competing for public space, have found it works to design for similarities in age, life stage and interests, rather than design for cultural differences (e.g. whatever their cultural background, parents of young children, or older persons have similar needs). Park designs and facilities need not be permanent but can be adaptable to suit needs of changing populations (and migrant groups).
- Council's Open Space Planning Objectives give special mention to families with children, children, and young people, and do not specify specific cultural and recreational goals for older people. While concerns for Penrith's ageing population inform Council's policy commitment to UD in open space planning, it is not clear how specific recreational needs of older people might be identified or met.
- Some well-established Anglo-Australian norms and expectations about appropriate activities in open space include the bias towards 'roughing it', the high value placed on fitness and sport, cooking by the barbeque method, visiting in small and relatively quiet family groups. These norms are felt keenly by recent Sudanese migrants who want to fit in but would also like to use parks in different ways.
- Provision for diverse cultures' activities is not only about built facilities but could be about changing the norms and expectations about park use, for example through events and programs to break down local prejudice and intolerance of people who are physically,

culturally or generationally different. Creating a welcoming social atmosphere would help diverse people feel more comfortable using parks.

- The problem of accommodating different cultural interests need not always have spatial solutions (e.g. creating separate facilities), but could be approached through temporal solutions. For example, Council's role might be to coordinate the use of parks by different groups at different times (e.g. celebrations and festivals in parks around important dates for other nationalities or traditions).

Facilitate participation in arts and cultural activities by community artists

- Community artists and designers can also contribute in important ways to recreational and open space planning. Other Councils in Western Sydney have found artists and cultural planners can play an important role in bringing together different cultures to tell stories which were then integrated into park design. (See *Guide to Community Mapping*, and Final Report, Chapter 3, and Appendix 3.)
- Several varieties of creative community mapping exercises, each appropriate to different kinds of park users, were designed as part of this project and are available in the form of a separate guide.

Objective 6 – Provide Effective and Sustainable Management, Support and Resources

Maximise external funding opportunities to assist in the future provision of sport, recreation and cultural resources

- Recently announced changes in Section 94 of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979), on how open spaces and recreational areas can be funded and developed, could deprive Council of a significant source of funding for open space developments. Even under the pre-existing S94 arrangements, increasing disparities were evident in the quality of open space in older areas of town compared to newer areas where developers had been levied to provide good open space facilities. There are stories of developer-provided facilities subsequently removed because councils considered their upkeep unaffordable. Other external sources of funds will need to be pursued to develop, redevelop or simply maintain spaces and facilities, especially in older settled areas of the city.
- Other Western Sydney Councils have used external funds to build state-of-the-art universally designed playground equipment, and PCC is planning to do so.
- An opportunistic approach makes sense in an uncertain planning and policy environment, where detailed strategic plans may not be implementable.

Enhance the information gathered by Council regarding recreation and cultural usage, satisfaction and demand

- Council's own community and field workers are valuable sources of knowledge about interests and problems for different open space users. There is some evidence that this knowledge 'trickles up' to inform Council's policies and planning.
- Research on park usage and demand needs to investigate non-users of public open spaces and the reasons for non-use—something this study has tried to do.

- In addition to park use surveys, there needs to be regular qualitative research and creative and participatory exercises (like mapping workshops) to identify trends and aspects of relations to open space (including quiet knowledges) that are not easily put into words or arise in response to a quick questionnaire item.

Encourage the development of recreation and cultural groups in the Penrith LGA.

- 'Recreation and cultural groups' would not necessarily include those engaged in so-called 'passive' recreation or informal sport and cultural activities in parks.
- Local park user groups may be one means of facilitating greater park use by diverse people, enhancing a sense of local ownership and responsibility for parks.
- A significant implication of pursuing the idea of the park as (cultural) event is that sections of council concerned with open space would need to work in coordination with sections dealing with community development, culture, the arts, youth, etc.

Promote the wide range of recreation and cultural activities to the community, including community groups.

- Several findings suggest that enhanced community tolerance of difference would be a precondition to the effective promotion of a wide range of park use activities to different community groups (see Objective 2 , 'Promote ...activities to all segments')
- Council already aims to be sensitive to the diverse and emergent activities different community groups are interested in pursuing. As with other aspects of planning, diverse communities and user groups need to be involved in defining, shaping, planning and evaluating the range of recreational/cultural activities.

Discussion

See 'Discussion' in Chapter 6 within the main body of report for discussion of additional findings under the following sub-headings:

- Practical Considerations
- Quiet knowledge
- Child Non-Users
- A walk in the park – or a park on the walk? (Park as event).