

What if we asked the parks?

Strategic Partners
Best Practice in Parks Forum
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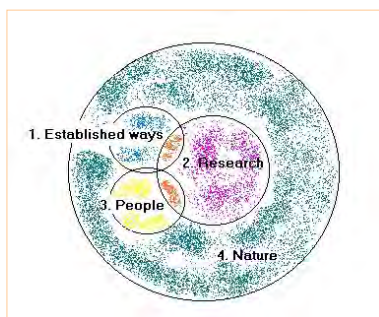
What people say about our neighbourhood parks.....

" You ask about our parks? They're definitely not ours. They're dominated by outsiders who wreck them. They're boring, barren, uncomfortable, and nothing good ever happens there. Nobody seems to care for them. They're dangerous and they have a bad reputation. People like us - and particularly our kids - wouldn't go there."

Let's imagine ...
we are planning a
neighbourhood
(or even a regional) park...

*Where do we look
for guidance?*

Four Realms informing park planning



Four Realms informing park planning

Realm 1: Established Ways

- **What park planning and design experts/practitioners tell us...**
 - what's best practice
 - the latest fashion; the 'glossies'
- **What we've done before...**
- **What other places are doing**
 - innovations
 - case studies
 - localities with a good reputation
 - our overseas trip(s)

What can happen
when we rely solely
on the approaches
in Realm 1
(Established Ways)?

- Untested, un-evaluated models
- Trends and current fashions may have (unknown) long-term negative outcomes
- "Resting on laurels" (times change)
- Transferability (different cultures, crime rates)
- Focus on current users, not potential demand; changing users
- Adults speaking on behalf of children and young people

Realm 2:
What systematic park
research tells us...

- Research not always easily accessible
- guidelines are often based on use, not non-use

Designers are "frequently hampered
by not having the time to reach out
to appropriate, people-based
research."

Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis, *People Places*, 1998:8

So, looking at Realm 2
(systematic research)...

What makes a good
neighbourhood park?

Advice from experienced park
planners
and operators...

"It is the **people and activities**
in the park which contribute
to a park's positive or negative
impact on the community..."

Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org)

Most important conclusion:

"...while spaces are inequitably distributed and used differently, people seem to *value* similar qualities in outdoor space... they value clean air, trees, natural landscapes, places that make them feel better, safe places for their children to play, and places to walk and sit outside."

Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis, *People Places*, 2nd ed., 1998: 89
citing a study of Seattle's open spaces by Tuttle, 1996

With an understanding of a park's use patterns, management is able to make more informed decisions on:

- how to maintain areas in a park which are underused or overused and need special attention,
- which facilities are appropriate for current uses and should be upgraded,
- why people come to a particular park,
- what activities they engage in,
- when it is used and for how long, and
- what types of design elements support these activities."

Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org)

"We must communicate what is currently known about the linkages between design, location and use."

Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis, *People Places*, 1998:8

Designing for Use

"Public space design has a special responsibility to understand and serve the public good, which is only partly a matter of aesthetics..."

"... When designs are not grounded in social understanding, they may fall back on the relative certainties of geometry, in preference to the apparent vagaries of use and meaning. Both designs and clients may easily confuse their desire to make a strong visual statement with good design."

Carr et al., eds., *Public Space*, 1992: 18

Realm 3:
What the community
of current and potential local
and other users tells us...

Realm 3: The Users

Park (Play) Needs

From the perspective of children
in their middle years (6-12)

- Convenient access within walking distance at neighbourhood scale
- Variety of diverse play spaces, formal and informal, for all types of play
- Safety (from cars, unwelcome older children or adults and extreme injury)
- "Wild" and natural spaces to explore
- Stimulating and manipulative components (sand play, raised garden beds, interactive sculptures, fountains)

URLC, *KidScape*, 2002

Innovation and Appropriate Design

"Design is a profession enamored of innovation . . . the general public is relatively conservative in its preferences for housing and public space . . . there is no need to always reinvent the wheel.

In these places, much is to be gained by attending to what has worked well elsewhere and by embracing incremental improvement over total change."

Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis, *People Places*, 2nd ed., 1998:9

Common Themes in Good Public Places

Public places should be:

- **Accessible** to everyone (including children, people with a disability and older people)
- **Clear**: Conveys clear, appropriate and user-friendly messages
- **Beautiful**: enhances the health and emotional well-being of its users
- **Safe**: Provide a feeling of security and safety
- **Culturally appropriate**
- **For all**: Encourage use by different users, without any one group's activities disrupting the other's enjoyment.
- **Comfortable**, in regard to sun, shade, wind, etc.
- **Ownership**: Encourages community ownership and caring through involvement in design, construction, and/ or maintenance.

From *People Places*, 1998

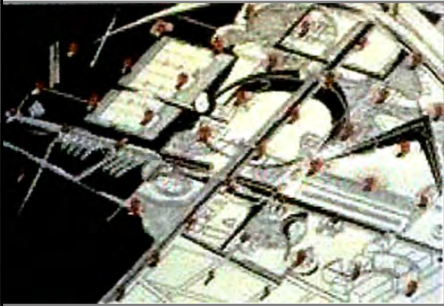
Good Public Spaces

- **Responsive**: designed & managed to serve the needs of their users.
- **Democratic**: accessible to all groups & providing freedom of action
- **Meaningful**: allowing people to make strong connections between the place, their personal lives & the larger world

Carr *et al.*, eds, *Public Space*, 1992:19-20

So . . . if this information has
been available
for a long time . . .
why do we have parks like
Paris's
Park de La Villette?

Park de La Villette



Aerial perspective of the city's largest park.

At its longest point, the Park is 1000m and 700m at its widest point.

The Park was conceived as "deriving from the disjunction and disassociation of our time."

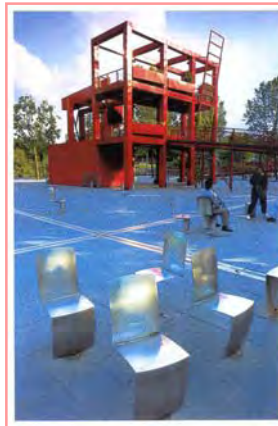


The Design

Treated the site as devoid of context (*tabula rasa*).

Bernard Tschumi writes that its 'only context was its urbanity.'

It derived more from literary analysis than from landscape or architectural design precedents.



The site "... could be conceived as one of the largest discontinuous buildings ever constructed."
-Bernard Tschumi

An outdoor pedestrian area with chairs designed by Philip Starck...

User Needs and dis-satisfaction

- **Common complaint:** the only common thread through the Park was the cultural themes of facilities.
- Lack of explanation, suggested uses or signage.
- Distinct separation between venue users and Park users: venue users know only about their venue; Park users know Park's other attractions.
- Site operators not benefiting from added value of concentration of diverse facilities.

(1996 report on park usage by Sophie Tievant)

Most frequent user requests

- better signage.
- better shelter.
- more extensive planting.
- more information about onsite cultural aspects and activities.
- greater legibility of the activities in the *folies*.
- more standard park-like features.

A play area...



A place for families...?

The Euro-Urbanist flop...

“Too many sparsely used public spaces in the United States have been modeled on European examples with little understanding that their success in Europe was largely based on surrounding activity-generating land uses and significant historical symbolism.”

Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis, *People Places*, 2nd ed. 1998 2

“[In North America] we don't have:

- The density to obtain it
- The physical forms to contain it
- The economic structure to sustain it.”

M. Brill, *Transformation, Nostalgia, and illusion in public life and public place* 1989:14-15

Principle 5:
Ask the park directly

- Through paying attention to the lay of land, the ecology and...
- Through the agency of local people who know and care about the land.

Realm 4:
**What could Nature
(the parks) tell us?**

(more to come)

So what *can* we do?
Some suggested principles...

Principle 1:
Be guided by the land

Be led by the land, country, the ecosystems of the site via technical, scientific and anecdotal study.

Find out what's there and what it needs, e.g., water, plant diversity, fauna, cultural heritage.

Principle 2:
Ask about our needs as a neighbourhood

Ascertain and build community knowledgeability of park planning and design

- teach local people to be astute consumers
- teach them to be literate about local crime, nuisance, inappropriate behaviour and vandalism and graffiti

Principle 3:
Ask who is in the neighbourhood and who is expected in the future

Assess the catchment and the context

- SEIFA indicators/socio-economic statistics
- crime statistics
- population trends
- benchmarks and provision; gaps

SEIFA data for QCL Riverside Park, Brisbane

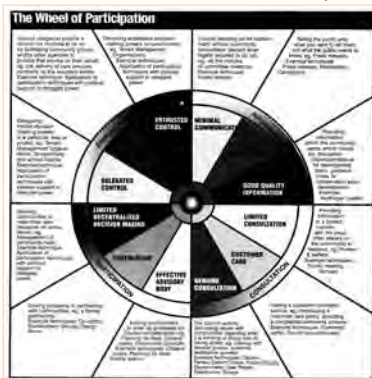
| Indicator | Jamboree Ward (%) | Brisbane (%) |
|---|-------------------|--------------|
| Population Growth 1991-1996 | 12.1 | 6.2 |
| % Population aged under 15 | 21.6 | 17.9 |
| % Population aged 65 + | 10.4 | 13 |
| Family households | 83.3 | 67.4 |
| Dwelling rented | 21.2 | 32 |
| Dwellings other than separate house | 6 | 23.8 |
| Dwellings with no car | 4.8 | 14.6 |
| Speaks English 'not well' or 'not at all' | 7.6 | 8.8 |
| One-parent families | 11.8 | 15.2 |
| Families with below \$15600 per year | 6.1 | 10.8 |
| Unemployment rate | 5.6 | 7.9 |
| Ages 15-24 Unemployment rate | 12.8 | 15.6 |

Selected socioeconomic indicators profiling Jamboree Ward
 Compared to totals and averages for the entire City of Brisbane

Principle 4:
Engage in authentic community participation

- Determine who the key user groups are (and will be) whose needs should be met by the park
 - determine their values, preferences, tastes
 - *Wheel of Participation*
- Marry these local needs with **generic** needs of these user-groups, e.g., 6 - 12 year olds.

The Wheel of Participation



Principle 5: Ask the park directly

- Through paying attention to bioregional issues, the lay of land, microclimate, the local ecology and...
- through the agency of local people who know and care about the land.

Back to ...

Realm 4:
What could Nature
(the parks) tell us?

Stories in a Park



Eagleby: A Snapshot

- Centrally located: 30 kilometres from Brisbane CBD and Southport CBD.
- 13.7 square kilometres
- 1996 Population: 8500
- Average yearly growth rate (1991-1996): 1.8%

Project Goals

- To involve Eagleby residents (especially young people) and key government agencies in the design of appropriate and safe public open spaces.
- To trial a participatory action research method for creating supportive environments for physical activity (SEPA-Q).

Reconnecting Ceremony

Eagleby, Gold Coast
Health promotion project
May, 2000

Part of 3-month
Stories in a Park
participatory
park-planning process

Project Timetable

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| 12-13 April | Step 2 Two-day Training Intensive |
| 14 April-4 May | Step 3 Interviewing and Story collecting |
| 4 May | Step 4 Storytelling Workshop |
| 5-19 May | Step 5 Information Dissemination |
| 8-31 May | Step 6 Designing Elements |
| 27 May | Step 7 Listening to the Nonhuman Voices |
| 31 May | Step 8 Design Workshop |
| 1-17 June | Step 9 Model Building |
| 3 May-17 June | Step 10 Celebration preparations |
| Saturday 17 June | Step 11 Community Celebration (Winter Solstice) |

Step 7: Listening to the Non-human Voices Reconnecting Ceremony (Saturday 27 May)

- Based on the Deep Ecology ceremony, a *Council of All Beings*
- deeply moving process
- 20 participants: insights into needs of *non-human Nature* in Eagleby's natural environments.

Residents' Perceptions of Eagleby, 1999



The dimensions of Stigma

NEED MORE bushes landscaped.
Position centrally to keep watered.
Council NEEDS TO BE COMMUNITY
friendly AND PROVIDER. (CUSTOMER SERVICE - also
NEEDS TO BE COMMUNITY friendly AND PROVIDER.)

**WE ARE THE FORGOTTEN
END OF THE GOLD COAST**

DRY AND DUSTY
DEPRESSING AND APPALLING
POLITES - KEEP PEOPLE
happy.
Rubbish bins NOT MAINTAINED.
LITTER REMOVAL
FREQUENCY NOT ENOUGH.
Indesitables IN PARK.
Not enough bins. MUST be
ADDRESSED.
NEEDLES NEED to. Need large
watch for every day. bins.

Bushland CARE PROGRAM
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.
Present AS A benefit TO ALL CONCERNED

What participants said about *Stories in a Park*

People are now willing to say hello.

The average person has substantially more growth and is stronger. There is more spirit in the community.

People talk about problems with neighbours now. *Stories in a Park* got to the common bloke, the average woman. It made people grow.

Heather, Eagleby resident, 2001

What Participants Said about Stories in a Park

You can't change twenty years of neglect in three months.

Eagleby resident, 2001

People in Eagleby are a lot friendlier now. More helpful. Stories in a Park opened up a way and gave people something to talk about.

Participant, 2001

Planning Outcomes

- Changed perception of parks
- Parks better used
- Local people engaged in planning process
- Community capacity building
- Increase in community self-esteem
- More questioning of crime risks
- Understanding of processes required to plan and manage large community events
- Raised understanding and knowledge
- Reduced fear about possible park dangers

Creating the Nonhuman Being



Urban and Regional Land Corporation, Victoria March 2001

Consultant Project Team, Epping North, Melbourne

2-day residential workshop for consultants and project management



"Nature is a great work of art and design."

Michael, Roads, *Talking with Nature*, 1987:11



Two faces of the Beloved

