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Making Sense of Urban Parks: In Wollongong City Centre

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Abstract
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Making sense of Urban Parks

In Wollongong city center

Hayden Knobel

‘A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirement of the Honours Degree of Bachelor of Science in the Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities 2014’.
Abstract

In a policy context of healthy, sustainable and livable cities, the urban parks are a key research agenda in the social sciences, with the notable exception of human geography. This thesis aims to help fill this gap in the literature by combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a benchmark survey of how apartment dwellers make sense of Wollongong city centre parks as part of their everyday life. The thesis draws on a survey of 340 respondents and 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with apartment dwellers in Wollongong city centre, a regional city on the east coast of Australia. The survey results explore the trends of park use, value and experiences. Then, using John Wiley's concept of landscape phenomenology, insights are provided to how participants make sense of city centre parks. Attention is given to explaining how and why MacCabe Park stands out as a problematic space, the tensions between city centre parks valued as inclusive public spaces and desire for regulation and exclusion, and the city centre park as an 'escape' from the everyday.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Significance and Aims

‘We have parks dotted up and down our coastline. Many of these have barbecue and picnic areas and regional playground facilities’. http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/facilities/parks/pages/default.aspx

Urban parks on Wollongong City Council home page are pitched by the City Council as a tourist attraction, and as a venue to hire for special occasions. This example of place-marketing is evidence of how municipal authorities finding themselves in a competitive environment where they must attract and retain residents and businesses through their amenity and urban quality to sustain economies. (Kaplan, Wheeler and Holloway, 2009) This is particularly important for an industrial city like Wollongong, operating in an increasingly post-industrial environment and a slow decline in traditional blue-collar manufacturing in the region. Notably absent from the Council web-page is how urban parks are made sense of by city residents as part of their everyday life. At a time when Wollongong City Council is seeking to revitalise the city centre, this project with its focus on city centre urban parks and residents living in apartments (multi-dwelling housing) emerged as part of larger Australian Research Council Linkage Project with Wollongong City Council “Lively City’ that is exploring everyday life in the city centre.

The city centre parks of Wollongong may have been overlooked in the past given Wollongong is a coastal regional city of approximately 292,190 people (ABS, 2012) with large tracts of land that could be categorised as ‘green open space’, including the Illawarra Escarpment, golf courses, race courses, leisure centre and nature strips. The coastline and the rainforest covered escarpment are an important part of the city’s imagined identity and
character. (NSW Dept. of planning, 2006) At the same time, the Illawarra region is one of the most bio-diverse in NSW; it’s bordered by a mountain range to the west, the Royal National Park to the north and Tasman Sea to the east, with the majority of the population no more than 10 minutes from the coastline. The study area of the city centre is located on the coastal fringe and is back-dropped by the Illawarra Escarpment. The city centre itself has a number of parks and open space. When compared to other industrial cities around the world, Wollongong city centre is not particularly ‘nature poor’ or overly dense. This context may impact on how residents make sense of Wollongong city centre parks.

The significance of the project must also be understood in context of rapid urban consolidation, increased population density and numbers within the city centre through private residential development of high rise apartments since the 2000s. (NSW Dept. of planning, 2006) Urban consolidation is expected to increase for a while longer. This period of housing growth has been met with community concern about potential impact to resident’s quality of life and more specifically whether there is, or will be “adequate” provision of green space. (ABC, 2003) In this context, the project aims are twofold:

1. To provide a benchmark survey of how apartment dwellers use and value Wollongong city centre parks.

2. To investigate how city centre parks are made sense of by apartment dwellers as part of their everyday life.

1.2: Structure

The thesis is structured into 8 chapters to address these aims. Chapter 2 situates the project within the literature. Attention is drawn to the notable silence on work by human geographers on urban parks and the dominance of work with the field of public health that documents the mental and physical health benefits of living in proximity to ‘green space’. The conceptual lens of self/world relationships is introduced to help think about how people making sense of urban parks is the outcome of relational process. Chapter 3 outlines the methods. This project uses a mixed - method approach that combined a questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews and ‘go-alongs’. The quantitative survey enabled the first benchmark survey of how city centre apartment dwellers use and value city centre parks. The semi-structured interviews and ‘go-alongs’ provided insights to how residents
made sense of parks as the result of the interplay between meanings, practices and experiences. Chapter 4 documents trends of use and value from the questionnaire survey of 3970 households. Chapter 5 conceives of McCabe Park as a borderland to help explain why this park is constituted as problematic and was least valued in the survey. Chapter 6 investigates if Wollongong city parks are understood as democratic spaces. Chapter 7 explores if city centre parks are made sense of as an escape from the city. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by returning to the research aims and outlining a research agenda.
Chapter 2: Literature review

The study of urban parks, their design, function and potential benefits to promoting ecosystem and human health is a resoundly interdisciplinary research agenda. However, surprisingly, human geography has made only a few direct contributions. It is well beyond the scope of this review to document all the cognate literature on urban parks. Consequently the literature review is restricted to three key themes central to this thesis: (1) the sets of ideas that inform how people think about urban parks; (2) the geography and social sciences of urban parks; and, (3) the contribution of this thesis.

2.1: The historical geographies of Anglo/American park design and creation.

The sets of ideas that underpin parks, their perceived functions and purposes change over time. Different cohorts of park designers bring different ideas about the role of parks in city living (Bachin, 2003). Threads of past ideas continue to be woven into present day park design and programming amongst community mangers and influence public thinking. Galen Cranz (1982) identified four ideal types of city parks that describe their design and use philosophies over the past 150 years: the “pleasure ground” or landscape park (1850-1900); the “reform park” (1900-1930); the “recreation facility” (1930-1965); and, the “open space system” (1965-?). While writing from an American historical/social perspective they are analogous for Australian cities. Reflected through the design and form of these ideal park types are different ideologies, social purposes, and moral agendas.

2.1.2: The “pleasure ground” or landscape park (1850-1900)

The “pleasure ground” is traced to the industrial revolution. Industrialisation in the 18th and 19th centuries brought high infant mortality rates, rickets, and frequent epidemics of cholera.
and typhoid, particularly amongst the most socio-economic disadvantaged by the factory system of production (Ståhle, 2008) Public health theorists at this time attributed the demise in public health of the labouring social groups to the lack of sunlight, and ‘fresh’ air. Green space was valued as antidote for the demise of public health. The Garden City Movement (Howard, 1902) reflected these sets of ideas, where the ‘ideal’ city was planned to include large amounts to ameliorate the health impacts of rapid industrialization (Cranz, 1982; Bachin, 2003; Ståhle, 2008) The point here is that the sets of ideas behind designing urban parks went beyond its aesthetic value that had previously informed the gardens of gentry and royalty. Many urban park advocates in the 19th century thought of them as medical technologies (Byrne and Wolch, 2009). The “landscape” parks offered a remedy to the consequences of industrialisation, with urban parks popularly conceived as the cities “lungs”. (French, 1973)

2.1.3: Parks as the premier public space: democratic and inclusive

In the 1800s, the democratic community space was another main set of ideas informing planning discourse around the functionality of parks. Early park advocates of the industrial age envisioned the park as a premier public space of the city, where different social groups can interact and foster democratic inclusiveness and community (Cranz, 1982; Bachin, 2003; Ståhle, 2008). The park as democratic space continues to inform contemporary city planning. For example, Gobster (2001) argues one of the biggest challenges to urban park planners, mangers and landscape designers is to balance the tensions between providing community ‘spaces’ that cater for a diverse and changing range of uses and activities, while preserving/ managing the parks qualities (values, meanings, perceptions) that make it a unique community ‘place’. Yet, much contemporary research about parks suggests the lived experience does not match the imagined geography of city planners. For example, urban parks are often places of feared by particularly older people, children and women (Byrne and Sipe; 2010; Babey, 2005; De Vires et al, 2007).

2.1.4: The reform park (1850-1930)

Not only were industrial cities harmful to public health, but also morals. Park advocates in the late 19th and early 20th century also imbued parks with a kind of moral power. Cities were often portrayed by in social reforms agendas as sinful, corrupt and degenerate place.
The reform park tapped into Romantic discourses to imagine urban parks as wholesome places. The rationale that underpinned park design over the course of the late 19th and early 20th century was that people needed to experience a pastoral landscape that, while “civilised” would help instil middle-class moral values associated with leisure activities including leisure walking, boating, picnics and bandstands. Many parks where built with or retro fitted with playgrounds, to meet growing community demand and because structured play was seen as a deterrent to youth crime and loitering. (Canz, 1982) There was a belief that exposure to the “right” kind of “nature” would have the power to uplift individuals making them “morally proper socially responsible and economically prudent” (Byrne p746). In the Australian context this often meant replicating typical Anglo-European landscapes, flora and fauna and downplaying any native atheistic. In essence urban parks where posited not only as form of medical technology to revive urban residents of the stresses of urban life but also to inspire “wholesome” moral values in their visitors (Young 2995).

2.1.5: The “recreation facility” (1930-1965)

The recreational facility reflects a more nuanced discursive shift in the 1930s in terms of sets of ideas informing appropriate outdoor leisure activities for different social groups. At this time, the central set of ideas framing park remained those around promoting healthy citizens through physical activities. However, parks gradually where designed to accommodate a more diverse set of niche recreational needs. Hence, many parks gradually became segregated into playgrounds, museums, garden spaces, sports fields. One underpinning assumption was that in the wake of the growth of the suburban city, many families now had access to their own private green-spaces in their backyard, but needed larger recreational and sport facilities. Cranz (1982) argues that the resulting banality of urban parks from this time may have dulled our ability to think of them as a premier public space that can be entertaining, stimulating and exciting.

2.1.6: Open space system: (1965-?)

The open space system understood parks along with streets, plazas, squares and empty lots as part of a greater city network of open spaces. City centre parks became understood as integral to the commercial life of cities, as rest sport for business people on lunch breaks. City centre parks were incorporated into place-marketing campaigns, commonly as venues
for festivals, public art pieces and musical performances. Overall the underlying ideology of park design, purpose and value of this time is that of an “open space system” is not only integral to the social but also commercial life of the city. (Cranz, 1982)

2.1.7: The ecological park

Extending the original Cranz (1982) typology of parks is fifth set of ideas that configure the ‘ecological park’. Historically, parks were never designed overtly because of concern for ecological issues. Urban parks designed and used as places for people, not for nature (with perhaps the exception of the botanical garden). However, Cranz and Boland (2003) argue that new park types are at least being proposed that bring ideas of sustainability to the fore. Sets of ideas that inform some urban park agendas include questions about “native plants, restoration streams or other natural features, integrations of “appropriate” technologies or infrastructure, recycling, community-based stewardship and restoration of wildlife habitat and native plant communities.” (Cranz and Boland, 2003, p45) The sets of ideas that underpin this way of thinking about parks relate to sustainability concerns and the potential to use parks to contribute to the effort of learning to live in a more sustainable way (see Cranz and Boland, 2003; Andersson et al., 2014; Folke et al., 2011; Gabriel, 2011; Gomez-Baggethun and Barton, 2013; Kowarik, 2011; Perring et al., 2013; Swanwick, 2009; Tzoulas et al., 2007).

2.1.8: Discussion and significance

The set of ideas that inform the design, form, and meaning of urban parks is not static. The lesson we can take, is that park form follows immediate social goals, and ideologies about order, nature and cultural attitude towards the city. While the history of the urban park is presented as a temporal sequence no ideal type has disappeared or been replaced by its successor. Rather each ideal has often operated concurrently to the others. At any given point we can find examples of several types. As Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) notes, past ideas around the purpose and functionality of park spaces continue to dominate and determine their present design and management. Cranz (1982) makes the argument that park providers have a tendency to combine a hodgepodge of elements from the model of the past which are based on differing value systems, because they don’t often know what appropriate is for the citizenry. Additionally park designers and the general population may
have a rather eclectic view on what parks are for, and who they should best serve. The work of Gold (1977) and Cranz (1982) found that park planners have a tendency to favour a scattershot approach in the hope of covering most of the bases, which can work but may not always be appropriate. (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995) As identified by Kellet and Rolfe (2009) there are plenty of tensions and contractions in parks designed as multi-functional space, for example biodiversity and public access, water sensitive urban design principles (WSUD) and child safety, balancing CPTED Principles (Crime prevention through environmental design) with the meeting atheistic standards and changing community needs over time.

Charting the different sets of ideas that inform urban parks is important for this project because this literature provides clues to the meanings that participants may tap into to inform how they make sense of themselves and other in this place. We need to remain alert to the different and sometimes conflicting sets of ideas that may configure contemporary understanding of urban parks. The following section details the social science research that explores the various role of urban parks in city living.

2.2: Living with Urban parks

Why have urban parks? The International Institute for Environment and Development, (2013) posits that this questions is important now more than ever before in a context of unprecedented extent of urbanisation, climate change and new lifestyle and consumption trends associated. However, for many years, this research question has been explored across a wide array of disciplines including, geography public health, environmental psychology and urban planning. A review of all the urban park literature is not be possible here. The aim of this section is to chart the contribution of geographers to the field of urban park literature. Then attention turns to the question of the dominant approach within the field of urban park literature. In doing so, this section demonstrates how this these makes a contribution to the field by identifying a gap in the literature within the context of how cultural geography can contribute to how people make sense of urban parks.

2.2.1: The geography of urban parks

The silence of particularly human geographers is one of the most notable features of the field of study on urban parks. Lo and Jim (2010) and Hitchings (2010) note that this relative
absence is a surprising oversight given the commonality of urban parks in cities. Important exceptions, include the work of cultural geographers that have pointed towards the importance of situated knowledges (see Burgess et al, 1988; Noel et al; 2000; Bhagwat, 2009; Derenthen, 2009; Hung, 2010). Where geography along with environmental scientists has made a contribution to the study of urban parks is in identifying the range of eco-system and environmental services they provide to cities. Listed, these include air and water purification, microclimate stabilisation and ambient temperature regulation, (which can combat the urban heat island effect from concrete and glass etc) protecting bio-diversity in cities for flora and fauna, as well as acting as noise and wind breaks, vegetation contained in urban parks as sequesters carbon and mitigates storm-water flooding. (See McPherson and Simpson, 1999; Liu et al., 2010).

2.2.2: The Public Health of Urban Parks

In contrast to the notable silence around the social and cultural geographies of urban parks there is a sizable body of literature in the field of public health. Living with urban parks is explored in terms of the physical and mental health outcomes as well as social cohesion (see Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2007; Green-space Scotland; 2008a; Green-space Scotland; 2008b; Velarde, et al, 2007). The physical health of people who live close to green-space tends to be statistically better than those living further away. People living close to urban parks are statistically more physically active than those who do not (Maas, et al, 2006). One such study by Ellaway (2005) studied the population of 8 European cities and found those living in areas with high levels of urban green-space were three times more likely to be physically active. Further, the chance of being overweight or obese, was about 40 % lower than in people living in similar areas with low levels of greenery. These associations are supported by a positive correlation between the amount of green-space in urban environment and positive health outcomes. (Vries et al, 2003) Green-space use increases the life span in elderly urban dwellers in a statistically significant way (Takano et al, 2002).

The public health literature provides substantial evidence to support arguments that green-space has a positive effect on stress levels mental health, emotional resilience and recovery from mental fatigue in addition improving an individual’s overall sense of wellbeing. While
urban landscape forms have the opposite effect to varying degrees of intensity. (Velarde et al, 2007) For example a study by Orsega-Smith (et al, 2004) demonstrated the stress levels of older people can be reduced by regular use of urban parkland. Maas (et al, 2009) has shown a measurable spatial relationship between green-space, people’s homes and patterns of stress, disease and ill-health. A Swedish study conducted by (Grahn, et al, 2003) found that the more time people spend in green-spaces the less stress they report feeling and suffered from fewer stress related illnesses. This occurs irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity or socio-economic status. American study by Kuo (2001) found that access to more green/open spaces such as park land allowed underprivileged communities, such as public housing tenants, to better cope with the stresses and mental health impacts of poverty. Conversely, an English study by Tibbatts (2003) found that dissatisfaction with local green-space was associated with poorer mental health and self-esteem. In addition to the extensive body of self-reported data (Velarde, et al, 2007) Research has also been conducted on the physiological effects of using such spaces. That found greenspace (Velarde, et al, 2007) reduced blood pressure and heart rate, and other biomarkers of chronic stress. (Roe et al, 2013)

The public health literature suggests that simply viewing green and open spaces without proximity is beneficial to people’s health. For instance a study by More (1981) found that prison inmates required less medical help if they viewed open/green-spaces from their cells than those who faced a closed court yard. Viewing such spaces has been found by Ulrich (1984) and others (Kaplan, 1995) to speed recovery times in hospitals by a factor of days, as well as reduce the number of painkillers required during recovery. (Ulrich, 1984) These health effects occurs from brief expose rot from viewing pictures or paintings of natural scenes and tailored green-spaces; lowering blood pressure levels, improving positive emotional outcomes and reduced stress levels. (Lohr and Pearson-Mims, 2006)

The community cohesion of open or vegetated space in urban areas is an important emergent theme in the literature that points to the importance of social interaction in parks and questions about social exclusion. (Green-space Scotland 2008a; Green-space Scotland 2008b, Kuo et al, 1998; Kuo and Sullivan, 2001) This work illustrates that urban green-space provides areas of social interaction and encourage social contacts. For example one such study by DePooter (et al, 2004) found people in green space engaged in social activities in
such spaces 83% more one average when compared to barren or paved community spaces. Such studies are significant when contrasted with those such as Dinnie et al, 2013 who found that social interaction was important in encouraging use and enjoyment in the park. Social interaction was also found to be an inescapable part of what makes green-space meaningful experience. And thus impacts on how people value, use and perceive such spaces. Furthermore the sufficient abundance and quality of green space has been shown to alter how people perceive and experience their town or neighbourhood, fostering a stronger sense or urban quality, urban character and sense of attachment to place. (Crow et al, 2006; Kuo et al, 1998). This follows several studies that note a several social-emotional benefits such as a higher sense of safety, a better sense of their own health and wellbeing, decreased levels of anger, aggression and anti-social behaviour when people both utilise parkland, gardens and other forms of green-space as well as simply viewing it from an office window or picture. (Kuo et al 1998; Kuo and Sullivan, 2001; Ulrich et al, 1984)

Many of these perceptions are backed up with statistical data (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001b) which show the incidence of vegetated spaces is a statistically significant predictor of crime; with the more green-space in an urban area the less violent and property related crimes are reported to occur. This correlation holds after other known predictors crime and the built environment where accounted for. Despite there being statistically less crime in urban green-spaces, a significant factor in determining experiences of urban green-space is the perception of safety. Access to safe parkland is a predictor of physical activity, and the perception of unsafe parklands is associated with inactivity and obesity. Kellett and Rolfe (2009, p 21) make the observation that this is particularly interesting given that much of the anxiety experienced in regards to public spaces relates to the presence and usage of young people. Still, much has been written about public spaces and the fear of crime and safety concerns people hold. Specifically how they constrain the movement and usage of certain demographic groups such as young children, women and the elderly. Several studies also show that women feel less safe in parks than men, perceiving them as places of potential danger (Byrne and Sipe; 2010; Babey, 2005; De Vires et al, 2007).
2.3.1: Literature Gaps and Conceptual Framework

The existing social science literature has made substantial contributions to understanding the physical and health benefits of open-green space, including urban parks. Furthermore, the social sciences literature has demonstrated how social inclusion and exclusion operate in and through urban parks. Clearly while urban parks are often imagined as democratic spaces, the lived experience is often different for particular social groups. Yet, the approaches of the research is often dominated by quantitative methods, and contribution of cultural geographers is notably absent with the recent exception of Hitchings (2010) and Lo and Jin (2010).

Consequently, most studies focus on the park as pre-existing public space and measure elements or categories of things (number of trees, people, toilets etc). Quantitative or positivist approaches is the way it tends ‘reduce’ people social phenomena to relatively undifferentiated categories and makes universal claims particular responses. For example the green-space literature finds linkages and correlations, but no cause and effect relationships. We lack understanding of the actual mechanism that causes green-space to give such well-rounded benefits and how these effects vary in relation to contextual and localised differences. (Green-space Scotland 2008b, Hitchings, 2013)

Likewise, many studies tend to focus on why people like to use green-spaces. What designs will bring them in as opposed to asking what factors (intrinsic, extrinsic or personal) keep them away. We know comparatively little about why many people are content to go without using green-space throughout the course of their everyday lives. A Park may be visually appealing but people may still avoid using them. This is because other factors on individual lived experience dictate if people will use the parks. Hitchings argues much of the literature “overlooks the power of personal routine” (Hitchings, 2013, p100). For example changing work and leisure patterns in the west mean that many people spend 90% of their time in buildings. (Hitchings, 2010) The implication of this for planners and policy makers may be they are making these places attractive to an atypical group, and not learning what may encourage those who avoid green-spaces. Given that range of health and community benefits these are the people who should be of interest to researchers.
Equally, the lack of qualitative studies on this topic means issues surrounding the contextual dynamics around people’s social positions lived experiences, and whether experiences of green-space remain important to people is not very well explored. (Hitchings, 2010) Few studies take a more relational approach that explore how parks are made sense of the context of everyday life, that is how parks emerge as public through the meanings, practices and connections between bodies and things. Ironically, resident’s views are often stated as being pertinent in urban park design and management, yet they are often reduced to numbers in survey questionnaires. Analysis of socio-cultural factors of different group’s experiences of green-space is lacking.

The conceptual framework is inspired by recent discussion of the concept of landscape in geography lead by John Wiley (2010). Instead of assuming that the value of urban parks can be measured in universal terms this project draws on recent arguments advocated by John Wiley (2010) in cultural geography. John Wiley’s notion of landscape phenomenology is deployed in this these to rethink value as the outcome of an ongoing embodied practice through which self and world are made and remade. John Wylie (2007 p150-151) argues that the ‘observer and observed, self and landscape, are essentially enlaced and intertwined in a ‘being-in-the-world’. In other words, indebted to a long line of argument in humanistic geography drawing on the work of Heidegger, John Wyle points to the impossibility of separating bodies from place, instead the each is an reciprocal relationships with the other. Hence neither urban parks nor the bodies with them are pre-existing, but are made and remade in relationship to each other. Hence, they are always a tension between the world ‘out there’ and understanding of ‘the thinking/self/body’. Furthermore, John Wiley, like humanist geographers is alive to the importance of sound, touch, smell as well as sight. However, unlike humanist geographer, following John Wiley, urban parks are not conceived as free floating. Instead, they are embedded with different discursive structures that operate to gender, class and racialize urban parks. Thus the participants who are interviewed for this project, the people and things they encounter there are conceptualised as active participants in making the urban park. In part this how they tap into different sets of meanings (discourses) and embodied experiences that shape their everyday activities. In part it is how they enrol their sensuous bodies evoke emotions. Hence, the value of urban
parks is understood as an outcome of an ongoing embodied practice, that helps shape and reshape self/world relationships.

**2.4: Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to provide a literature review and chart the contribution of this thesis. To do the chapter was divided into three sections. The first section explores the sets of ideas that inform how people think about urban parks. The sets of ideas that frame urban parks are tied to ideas about democracy, public health, pristine nature, community and sustainability. Second, the chapter explore the contribution of geography and cognate social sciences to the study of urban parks. Attention was drawn to the notable silence of particularly human geographers, despite the commonality of urban parks in cities. Instead, the literature is dominated by public health that has demonstrated the benefits of urban parks for physical health, mental health and social cohesion. The third section turned to critique the dominant quantitative approach to examining urban parks. Parks and people who use them are turned into objects of study. Use and value are reduced categories. The value and use (and non-use) is abstract from everyday lives. As one way to address these concerns this project proposed a conceptual framework that understands value as an outcome of everyday practices that configure self-world relationships. At the fore of this thinking are how urban parks are not pre-existing but emerge through meanings, practices, and the senses. The next chapter outlines the methods employed to explore the value and use of city centre parks in Wollongong that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods.
Chapter 3: Methods

3.1: Introduction

This chapter provides a justification of the multi-method research design as a mechanism to establish research rigor while addressing its ethical considerations. As argued by Baxter & Eyles (1997), a mixed method (triangulation) provides validation of one source of data by another, increasing reliability. Validation is enhanced in this project through combing survey, semi-structured interviews and go-along techniques to better understand how participants ‘value’ city centre parks. The chapter is structured into five parts. The first details the ethical considerations. The second discusses the survey questionnaire in relation to survey design, sampling and recruitment. The third part turns to justify the value of semi-structured interviews. The fourth part discusses the application of go-along interviews and solicited photo dairies. The final part turns to the questions of analysis of numerical, textual and experiential data sources.

3.2: Ethics

This section outlines the ethical considerations. Dowling (2010) notes that ethical issues in qualitative research are dynamic, changing in the relationships between the researcher, the subject matter and research method. Each method brings different potential harm and benefits. (Walter; 2006) Therefore, attention to ethical considerations at all stages of the research process is essential. Broadly speaking, the strategies used to ensure ethical considerations can be separated into two main categories. First, the ‘formal’ ethics procures of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Second, the ‘informal’ unlegislated ethics considerations that are negotiated in the field. The informal considerations require
continual critical reflections on the interactions between the researcher, the participants and the subject matter.

3.2.1: Formal ethics guidelines

The University of Wollongong requires that all research involving people must be approved by the HREC. THE HEREC is informed by the strict set of formalized guidelines based on the principles of; protecting the participants from physical and mental harm, protecting the rights, dignity and safety of participants while ensuring that all research is to the benefit of the wider community. (NHMRC; 2007) The application process therefore required outlining:

1) That informed consent was adequately obtained.
2) Known risks of participation where divulged including any burden of time.
3) That the data collection process was transparent.
4) The privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

To address these ethical considerations the following measures were taken. In The first PIS (appendix A) discussed how filling out and returning the survey would be considered tacit consent. Further because survey required that no identifying information, once submitted the participant could not withdraw their survey at a later date. The second PIS (appendix B) was concerned with the semi-structured interviews and go-alongs. It discussed how a participant’s privacy and confidentiality was assured through the use of pseudonyms, removal of identifying information (address, job, or group affiliations) that came up in conversation, as well as providing participants with copies of transcripts if requested.

3.2.2: Beyond formal guidelines

While Ethics Committee procedures are an important part of ensuring ethical rigor, they are not unproblematic for qualitative researchers. There is merit in casting a critical eye on the process and attempting to move beyond its range of considerations. Dowling (2010) discusses that the formalized HREC procedures provides a static understanding of ethics and cannot account for moral dilemmas. Likewise, Valentine (2005) argues “the danger is that the rubber stamp of an ethical committee can both bureaucratese ethical reflection and also lull us into forgetting the need to take the responsibility for thinking ethically on a day-to-day basis” (p485). Consideration for ethics needs to extend beyond the scope of the ethics
committee and be brought into the moment during field research. Care must be taken to develop individual responses to potentially unique circumstances that can easily arise.

3.3: A postal survey: measuring the value of urban parks in Wollongong

A postal survey was justified for a number of reasons in this project. First, in the absence of baseline data on how people use and value Wollongong city centre parks, a postal survey is one of the most cost effective methods to collect data from a target sample in a relatively short timeframe. (Bryman, 2008; Sinclair et al, 2012) Second, perhaps most importantly for this project, open-ended questions may elicit rich qualitative responses if respondent being interested in the topic being researched and their willingness to invest their time and thought. Survey respondents have the privacy and time to consider and develop their responses in detail. (Bryman, 2008; Hay, 2010) Third, open and closed survey questions were used to complement other methods including mental map to gather cognitive insights into how people understand the city center. Finally, the survey was used to invite people to participate in future research. 94 of the 341 participants accepted this invitation.

3.3.1: Survey design

The survey was designed in consultation with Wollongong City Council. The survey went through three broad iterations. Early drafts are shown in appendices (C and D). Several processes went into determining the final design. These were personal review, planners at Wollongong City Council and piloting. Suggested changes by the Wollongong City Council planners were in regards to the layout, formatting and sequence of questions; the latter being moving the demographic questions to the back of the sequence. This was primarily due to increasing the amount of “white space”, making the survey appear simpler to complete. The final survey was piloted by 5 individuals. The process revealed minor improvements to wording and sentence structure to clarify meaning.

A copy of the final questionnaire survey entitled “Our City Spaces Survey” is in appendix E. The survey began with simpler, shorter quantitative questions. These questions related to proximity to a city centre park and frequency of use. The second group of questions focused on possible reasons why the individual did or did not use the parks. It then progressed to mental mapping exercise (see 3.3.2), followed by a Likert scale relating to
valuing named city centre parks. Following this were two open ended questions. The aim of the open ended questions was to provide more contexts to the responses. Without these open questions the survey would prove a relatively anemic descriptive account of how named city centre parks were valued, or not. These Likert scales provided no account as to “why”. Hence, the first open ended questions asked: “Why did you circle this level of agreement for the above Statement: “I value city centre parks in Wollongong”?”. The open question provided participants with the possibility to explain their response. Similarly, the second open ended questions asked: “What (if anything) would you change about the city centre parks in Wollongong? Any additional comments?” This question allowed entry to what participant regarded as the strengths and limitations of the city centre parks.

3.3.2: Mental maps

Within the survey, participants were invited to draw their mental map of the city center of Wollongong. Following Kevin Lynch (1960) survey respondents were asked to sketch the city center as it came into their minds. Influenced by debates about how to humanize geography, Lynch worked with a behaviouralist approach and was concerned with understanding how people perceived their surroundings to improve urban design. Since this time a number of geographical studies have found mental maps to provide particular strengths to the discipline. (Hayden 1997; Dennis 2006; Kreuger 2010; Powell 2010; Mondschein 2007; Pink 2006). The survey included an invitation to draw a mental mapping to provide information about how people acquire, perceive, code, integrate and recall information and knowledge of Wollongong City Centre. What an individual does and does not draw on a map generally reveals the areas of knowledge/ familiarly as well as ignorance/ un-familiarly. Are city centre parks familiar or unfamiliar places? In the language of Kevin Lynch, are Wollongong City Parks landmarks, districts and places that participants structure their spatial reasoning around?

In practice, the key role of the mental map in this project was as an ‘ice breaker’ in the semi-structured interviews (see section 3.10). In the survey, despite being named ‘Our City Spaces’, the mental maps were comprised by the cover letter outlining the focus on city centre parks, and the first second of questions exploring respondents’ frequency of named park use. Furthermore, only 197 participants attempted to draw maps to varying levels of effort and utility. Respondents often wrote comments instead – such as “As an elderly carer
with a disabled son I would like adequate seating and toilet facilities around the Wollongong cbd” (Participant 299) some were uncertain about the usefulness of the exercise “what is the purpose of this?” (Participant 185) or found it difficult “too hard” (Participant 243) “unable to draw” (Participant 292). Hence, for these reasons, the mental maps are not included in the analysis of this thesis.

3.3.3: A targeted sample and response rate.

In May 2014, 3970 survey questionnaires were distributed by letter box drop to all the medium and high-rise apartments in Wollongong city center. Recruitment was based on three criteria.

- Participants had to be 18 years or older
- Live in multi-dwelling housing such as an apartment or flat.
- Had to live within Wollongong city center.

The area defined as the “city center” was refined through consultation with Wollongong City Council. See appendix (F) for the specific area. Apartment dwellers where chosen for three reasons. Firstly this project operates under the context of increasing urban consolidation within the city center of Wollongong. Housing densities have increased in the study area for over a decade and this is continuing trend. (.id, 2012) the planning literature recommends that as housing density increases so should the number of parks to offset the loss of a backyard (Byrne and Sipe; 2010). Secondly, community concern are increasingly voiced over provision of public green spaces across this period of increased housing density. For instance, the local media provides increased coverage of this community concern (ABC, 2003). Finally, in practical terms, the target sample kept the postal survey within budget and potential respondents manageable given the scope and limitation of an honors project.

The total number respondents (n=341). The response rate was 11.6% Due to the surveys distribution and sampling some social groups where underrepresented, other over represented and still others were excluded altogether. Sample bias is a well-documented limitation of survey questions. This survey was no exception. By gender, the returns demonstrated a bias towards females. 59.8% of returns were from females and 37.2% male, with one individual identifying as non-gender specific. (0.3%) Figure 3.1 show the
distribution of respondents by age: 9.4% of respondents were aged 18-30 years, 17.6% where aged between 31 to 45 Years, 18.5% where aged between 46-60 years and 54 % were aged over 60 years.

Figure 3.1: The age distribution of survey respondents

By age, Figure 3.2 suggests that the sample is not representative of adults living in flats, units or apartments in Wollongong City Centre. According to the ABS census data (2011) the mean age of people living in the study area is 38.6 years. Meaning mature age people are over-represented in the sample, while young people are under-represented.

Figure 3.2: The age distribution of adults in the study area - living in Flats, units or apartments
By ethnicity, the respondents were relatively homogenous and mirrored census data (Social Atlas, 2012). 74.5% of respondents were Australian born with the largest group being born overseas coming from the UK. Additionally, the majority of people had both parents born in Australia followed by parents born in the UK.

Thinking about the representative of the sample it is important to note the absent or underrepresented voices that could have made important and potentially insightful contributions to this study. First, there is an understandable absence of children and adolescent minors’ voices – that is those aged 0 to 18 years of age. The formal ethics requirements excluded those not legally an adult from the scope of this study. The park is often central to children’s city geographies but missing from this study. Hence, while MacCabe Park is reported to be the least valued by adult respondents, this park is equipped with a play area and is adjacent to Wollongong Youth Centre (Chapter 5). Second, missing are the voices of the homeless people who live in these parks. Given recruitment was based on a postal survey, the topic of homelessness is only addressed from the perspective of those living with a permanent address. Also absent from the survey are insights from people of Anglo and non-Anglo Australian cultures living beyond the city centre. The survey provides an Anglo-Australian account of how predominantly mature age white women and men living in mid- and high-rise apartments use and value city centre parks.

3.4: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a staple method for geographers conducting qualitative research; the popularity of semi-structured interviews primarily rests on their propensity at investigating complex behaviors, emotions, opinions, and values and capturing a diverse range of human experiences. As discussed by Dunn,

*Interviews bring people ‘into’ the research process. They provide data on people’s behaviour and experiences. They capture informant’s views on life. Informants use their own words or vernacular to describe their own experiences and perceptions* (p135).

A semi-structured interview utilizes a number of prepared questions to guide discussion on the topics and themes deemed relevant by the researcher. The semi-structured format also allows or indeed encourages the researcher to interject with a series of secondary
questions. These can be tailored to the responses of the individual participant acting as prompts to elicit more information about a particular topic or theme that was emerging. More rigid interviewing designs have been shown to severely limit participant responsiveness. (Bryman, 2008, p315; Beardsworth and Keil, 1992) Additionally the flexibility afforded by secondary questions which can be tailored to the individual at hand, further encouraging the participant to elaborate and even take the conversation in an unanticipated direction. Perusing these new paths of discovery as they emerge the researcher can find a wealth of information and insights previously unconsidered. These ensure rigor by guaranteeing that a set of key questions are asked of all participants while providing the benefit of preventing the interview moving too far from the research topic. Semi-structured interviews often allow access to more intimate perspectives and behaviors in ways that are difficult if not impossible to raise in survey questionnaires and focus groups. This ability to examine personal opinions, values and experiences has the potential to be very rewarding to researchers and potentially empowering participants with a voice. Nevertheless, researchers must remain alert that this method may become exploitative, with participants feeling manipulated or invaded. While interviews have established as a backbone of qualitative research, they are therefore not without noteworthy ethical, methodological issues and limitations that need to be considered. The following sections detail justification of the semi-structured interview design, the significance of social power relations, the significance of participant/researcher rapport and the limitations of semi-structured interviews in capturing data relevant to this study.

**3.4.1: Semi-structure interview design**

In this project the semi-structured interview was structured to enable people to tell narratives about how they value urban parks, by paying attention to how this place helped make sense of themselves, family, friends, others and the city. The interview questions (appendix G) were therefore separated into 5 main themes; biographical, cognitive, descriptive, opinion and experience. Each of the interview “themes” addressed a different purpose. The interview opened with the biographical questions to building some rapport and general association sought to understand the participant’s social and personal context which may impact on how they use and view the parks. Hence, these questions asked participations to talk about where they grew-up, why and how long they have lived in
Wollongong City Centre. This was followed by a discussion on their mental map of the city centre from their survey, or asked to draw/sketch one. To explore their familiarity with the Wollongong City Centre participants were asked to explain or “walk me through” what they had drawn, and why they drew it. The information gathered by this exercise did vary greatly. Not all participants felt comfortable drawing, and held different levels of articulation. Regardless this mapping provided narratives about the city centre and worked as ice breaker, easing participants into the interview process. Descriptive questions examined the participants habits and routines in their daily life in the city centre and then in regards to the parks in the study area. Opinion questions aimed to get an understanding on how the participant views the various parks differently, and how this translates into different perceptions, uses and different ways they can be valued. Experience themed questions, aimed to see how participants experienced different named city centre parks. A series of questions were asked about the social relationship fostered in city centre parks and the presence of others to gain insights into the anxieties, anger and fears as well as the joys, pleasures and delight. Finally the value focused questions on how people engage with the park on a regular basis – looking, walking, running, picnicking – to better understand how people make sense of the parkland for themselves, and the city, through their everyday engagement. 18 participants accepted an invitation to participate in a semi-structured interview. The age and sex distribution of these participants is shown in Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Age and sex distribution of semi-structure interview participants
3.4.2: Power and positionality

The dynamic social power relations that underpin the interview process shape the interview and the knowledge it produces. The narrative is influenced by the social context of the interview and the responses, prompts and interpretations of the researcher. The narrative of the semi-structure interview is therefore a product of both parties. As Taylor (et al, 1998) explained, “An interview is the coming together of two subjectivities, and an adequate analysis of and report of an interview must recognize that the content to which the interview refers is shaped by the intersubjective context”. The researcher cannot be considered a neutral part of the production of knowledge and the interview cannot be considered a wholly objective account. Instead the knowledge generated is best thought of as situated and partial. (Dunn, 2010)

How people are situated in various contexts of power, whether they are gendered, racial, ethnic, political, social and economic, affects the way they understand the world and how they communicate this understanding. This is true for both the participant and the interviewer. To overcome such concerns Lees and Freshwater (2008) argue that “writing ourselves into the research process” and make explicit the researchers role in knowledge production. This can be achieved with constant self-conscious scrutiny of the self as the researcher and of the research process. Lees and Freshwater (2008) encourage researchers to acknowledging their social position and to remain reflexive during the research process. These research strategies allows researchers to become alert to when power is being exploited, affecting what is being said and how. Following Lees and Freshwater’s (2008) advice, during this project a research diary was kept in which reflected on the changing positionality of the researcher (Box 3.1), the role of the researcher in generating knowledge during the interviews (see Box 3.2) and the research design in accessing value (see Box 3.3)

Box 3.1: Positionality

Being predominantly and ‘indoors person’ who does not live in the study area, I was not overly familiar with the various park spaces there, and have had limited experiences of them over the course of my life. Additionally I have always lived in a low density area of Wollongong, had have no experiences of living in an apartment style dwelling or a higher density area.
Box 3.2: Negotiating social power during the project

Throughout the project I was never positioned as an expert on urban parks, but rather a young male university research student who was dependent of community participation to complete my research. Positioned as a white young male student, the interview process and allowed participants to talk freely about a broader range of park issues. However, the project association with Wollongong City Council most likely influenced what was and was not said. As participants knew that information may make its way back to council some participants weaved in complaints, such as traffic concerns, nearby road works and maintenance. Indeed, some participants were generally more forthcoming about their complaints and concerns in regards to maintenance and regulation of access.

3.5: ‘Go-alongs’ and solicited photo-diaries

Actually to put into words too, about what it is you value about a park is quite difficult sometimes, isn’t it? I think... you know like its “pretty” but value kind of feels like a bigger deeper thing like that.” (Jean, 60+)

This quotation from the semi-structure interviews illustrates the limits of methods that omit to consider the embodied dimensions from their research design. Jean articulates that how she values parks is more than how she appreciates their aesthetics as ‘pretty’. ‘Go-along’ and solicited photo-diaries were employed to gather a more “in-depth” understanding of how people value Wollongong city centre parks by paying attention to emotions and affects triggered by the touch, sounds, smell and sights of parks. Embodied research methods are notable absent in the field of ‘open-space research’, yet considered key to understanding of how interacting with parks becomes a meaningful experience. (Hitchings2013; Jorgensen, 2011). For the purposes of this project participants were invited to either participate in ‘go-along’ interviews or complete a solicited photo diary.

The solicited photo diaries requires participant to take photos to inform a follow-up conversation in a manner comparable to a photo-elicitation interview. Waitt et al (2004) successfully used this method to access the embodied understandings of everyday walking in helping fashion a nature reserve. However, none of the 18 participants elected for this option. Instead, the 4 participants who accepted the invitation of this stage of the project articulated the go-along interview more convenient (see Table 3.2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Attributes of stage 3 Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>60 something, retired woman who has lived in Wollongong for 14 years and previously had lived in Sydney. Has three children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>30 something born in Wollongong and has lived in city centre for 8 years steel works engineer, unmarried, keen distance runner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>65-75 years old, retired, married father of two. Former engineer/academic who has lived in Wollongong for 25 years. Avid fan of parks and green spaces. “I love parks, And I love walking in the parks and running in the parks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>70 something retired lived in Wollongong for 25 years Identifies as an outdoors person who enjoys walking and swimming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Attributes of the participants who complete the go along

A ‘walk-and-talk’, ‘go along’ or a ‘walking interview’ is a research method where the researchers walk with the interviewee, observing their behaviour, listening to them and asking them questions as they go about their routines. Such a method can be considered a hybrid of participant observation and interviewing. Evans and Jones, (2011), Carpinao (2009) and Kusenbach (2003) discuss the go-along as an ideal technique for exploring issues regarding people’s embodied sensory experiences, including the practices of the body, the non-cognitive, the habitual and the haptic (Lorimer, 2011). Go-along help reveal the embodied activities that may seem like mundane details of their everyday. Evans and Jones (2011) make the observation that it seems “intuitively sensible for researchers to ask interviewees to talk about the places that they are interested in while they are in that place” (p1). This intuition is backed up by a body of geographic literature that highlights several key advantages of walking and talking for this project on urban parks. There may be cases where interviewee’s comments about their relationship to parks may make little sense if the researcher lacks knowledge of a comparable environment, or experience. Alternatively, for some participants being in the park may help communicate by showing, or employing the researchers’ senses, some aspects of the environment that may be difficult to verbalize within the context of interview conducted elsewhere. Hence, Kusenbach (2003) argues that go-along interviews provide greater access to aspects of the lived experience as it brings to the surface issues that may be overlooked by the participants because they do not figure predominantly in their awareness, or dwell in the non-verbal regions of their minds. Whereas Carpinao (2009) argues that go-alongs generate richer data as participants are more readily prompted by their surrounding environment. The embodied and social relationship the participant has with the space is brought to the forefront of their mind.
Hitchings and Jones (2004) provide a good example of the application of go-along interviews in a similar research project. Their methodology involved accompanying participants as they engaged with the garden environment around them. Their research found participants where much better able to verbalize attitudes and feelings towards this particular place when they were “in” that place, performing the actions and activities that formed the basis of their relationship with it.

Another benefit of go-along interviews is discussed by Kusenbach (2006) who highlights how such a method has a tendency to strengthen the rapport built between the researcher and the participant. The argument being that meeting with someone in “their” space, joining them in their activities and practices while having a conversation about it produces a social connection resulting from sharing space, experience and time together. This strength as a rapport builder is acknowledged by Carpinao (2009) who argues it increases the participation of the respondent, and reduces the interviewer/interviewee power disparity, as the participant is given the opportunity to act as the tour guide or teacher. The importance of reducing the relationship of power in the interview context has been well documented (Hay, 2010)

**Box 3.3. Accessing value**

Reflecting on the research design I did somewhat expect that people would have varying abilities or indeed levels of interest in responding to my questions about city centre parks. I found value to be an elusive concept for participants, even though they may have deep feelings and well-formed opinions about these places. Generally, people could more easily articulate how they use parks, their opinions on these, different features within them, and town planning decisions. I knew, however that it would be wrong to assume that participants would somehow be less articulate on how they value and think about these places than “experts”. What became more apparent early on in the research project was that some people struggled to articulate answers to my questions on value because they had never really dwelt on the role parks play in their lives and in the community. For some this was because the provision of urban parks spaces seemed like taken for granted occurrence in our cities. The topic or urban parks seems banal, commonplace or every day. Meaning people often haven’t dwelt or thought about, the significance of merits of these places. One participant described city centre parks as:

“But I do think mainly, that we don’t really think about what we value. Things that we take for granted are things like parks, physical things like parks that have always been there.”

“Stella” (60 something, retired, 25 years a resident of Wollongong)
3.6: Analysis

Analysis is clearly one of the most important steps in the whole research process. Four analytical techniques were deployed to interpret the data: descriptive statistics, content, discourse and narrative analysis. The survey was the starting point of research rather than the end. Hence, descriptive statistics guided the interpretation of the closed survey questions, particularly frequency distributions and percentages to identify underlying trends of use and value. Descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS. Content analysis was used to identify emergent themes within open-ended questions. The world cloud generator “Word it out” was used to assist in the identification of thematic clusters of words.

Discourse analysis is a well-established and often used approach to interpreting the textual data in geography. Foucaudian discourse analysis critically identifies the sets of ideas or meanings that people use to make sense of the world, those that have become naturalized as common sense while others may be marginalized. (Waitt, 2010) Doing discourse analysis requires identification of how the various statements function at the level of language. That is unique, or representative wordings are selected and examined in detail. Discourse analysis is therefore well suited for the project aims, allowing for the identification of the different sets of ideas that people draw upon to make sense of city centre parks. Discourse analysis followed the steps outlined by Waitt (2010) that requires identifying overarching themes through a form of content analysis, before investigating for abstract effects of ‘truth’ and discursive structures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for doing discourse analysis</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choice of texts</strong></td>
<td>Transcripts read to determine quality and strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suspend pre-existing categories:</strong></td>
<td>Become reflexive on my own pre-conceptions about both the community in the study area and ideas around urban parks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Become reflexive</strong></td>
<td>Thinking critically about the social context of the texts- its authorship, technology, and intended audience what social dynamic have flown into the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarisation</strong></td>
<td>Transcripts investigated for effects of ‘truths’ about, cites, nature, parks, outdoor activities, public space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects of ‘Truths’</strong></td>
<td>Transcripts investigated for contesting ‘truths’ about who are parks for? Who and what does not belong and in what contexts? What roles do parks play in the city? ect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inconsistencies within Texts</strong></td>
<td>‘What is not being said?’ and alerts the research to how privileged and dominant discourses silence different understandings of the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 3.3: Line by line procedure of discourse analysis
3.7: Narrative analysis

Finally narrative analysis was employed to remain mindful of the role of embodied knowledge in how city centre parks are valued. With discourse analysis there is a risk that the snappiest of text taken as quotes for analysis lose their context; reducing “richer” information into “data”. (Crang, 2001; Fraser, 2004) Narrative analysis is designed work through these issues of interpreting and understanding multiple layers of meaning in interview talk that can be lost using coding techniques. Narrative analysis is more interested in how meaning is conferred onto experience. Personal storytelling is a source of knowledge production through which experiences and perspectives become accessible. Narrative analysis in this project employed a series of stages or steps outlined by Fraser (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies s for doing narrative analysis</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing the stories</td>
<td>Observing body-language; maintaining an open dialogue; experiencing each other’s emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Immersion in and familiarisation with the data; repeated and thorough reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Identifying dominant themes and contradictions within individual texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanning across different domains of experience</td>
<td>Examining personal stories for intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural and structural aspects persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking the personal with the political</td>
<td>Examine texts for reference to popular discourses, eg urban parks as the antidote to the industrial city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing stories</td>
<td>Connecting common and different plots, events and themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Pulling together different stories and translating participant’s oral talk into academic knowledge; recognition of multiple possibilities for representing stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 3.4: Line by line procedure of narrative analysis

3.8: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to outline and evaluate the research methods applied in this project in regards to their rigour and ethical considerations. The project employed a mixed methods approach. Empirical data was sourced through a combination of survey responses, semi-structured interviews, and ‘go along interviews’. Although it can be time consuming and arduous a mixed methodology enhanced the dependability and credibility of results through data triangulation and a greater range of in-depth information. There were some difficulties in the research design. Firstly the, sampling method had the incidental effect of
excluding what may be significant and insightful voices, such as the homeless and children, each of whom have relationships to the parks in Wollongong. Secondly, there was an over representation of women, particular those aged 60 years and over. The data gathered through these methods was analysed using descriptive statistics, thematic content analysis as well as narrative and discourse analysis techniques. This analysis generated a wealth of information on survey respondents’ and participants’ relationships to Wollongong city centre parks. Due to the constraints of the honours project it is not possible to present an interpretation of all the data. Instead, the following results chapter focuses on different insights to the question how city centre parks are valued. To begin the overarching trends are reported from the survey.
Chapter 4: Stage one - Survey results

Patterns and trends in urban park use and value

4.1: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the patterns and trends of how respondents use and value urban parks. It specifically targeted through use of a postal survey, apartment dwellers living in Wollongong City Centre. Amongst this group it targeted those who also work in the city centre and how they use and value the parks in the context of the working day. The chapter contains 3 broad sections. The chapter begins by reporting how often people say they use the parks, what activities they use parks for; what keeps people out of the parks. This is followed by a quantitative account of which parks are the most valued and the reasons why. The third section explores what respondents would change about the city centre parks. The last section opens up a discussion around the results.

4.2: Reporting use trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often to respondents use the city center parks?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>341</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1: How often to respondents use the city center parks*
Respondents recorded how frequently they used the parks in the city center. The responses to this question are represented in Table 4.1. The most common response was “usually” at 32%. Nearly 60% of respondents identify as “always” or “usually” using parks. 89.2% of respondents reported either always (27.6%) usually (32%) or sometimes (29.6%) using the parks. Only 9.1% of people responded as either rarely (5.9%) or never (3.2%) using any of the city center parks. While mindful that the response rate may be skewed by Interest in the Subject matter, these results suggest that the parks are integral part of the lives of most survey respondents who live in the city centre.

4.3: For what purpose?

Respondents recorded the activities that bring them into the parks, as well as those that may keep them away. Participants could select more than one reason or activity. Leisure/walking was reported as the most frequent use with a count of over 280, followed by “relaxing” with a count of 148. Social activities were reported as the second tier of frequency of use such as children’s play, socialising and using the park as a meeting place. Each of these social activities reported a frequency count of just over 100. The least reported activities where sport, personal training, running and outdoor gym equipment. The more physical activities are clearly the lowest reported. But should be held in the context of the demographic range of the sample with the majority of respondents (54%) aged 60 years or older. The report use in part reflects the design of the parks, which may be termed ‘passive parks’. With the exception of Lang Park and its outdoor gym equipment, these spaces are not specifically designed for sporting use, unlike Beaton Park. In regards to “other” respondents where afforded space to write their answer; some of these response may overlap with the pre-given categories ie “Biking/cycling” could fall under sport, picnics could be considered a form of socialising. Regardless these results show that picnic activities are reasonably popular, with 10 individuals citing it as something that brings them into the parks. (Table 4.3)
What respondents reported they do in the city centre parks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure/walking</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>93.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relaxing</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialising</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting place</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s play</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A shortcut</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking space</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor gym equipment</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>running</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal training</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sport</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=304

Table 4.2: What respondents reported they do in the city centre parks

Figure 4.1: Graph to show the frequency distribution of what respondents reported they do in city centre parks
## What respondents do in the parks- Written response to “Other”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heath/Exercise x10</strong></td>
<td>• Meditation, yoga, workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bike/scooter riding in Lang park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Biking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In Lang Park the Gyms are rarely vacant!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Attend festivals ect run there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dog walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dog walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Skateboarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Getting my Vit D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picnics x10</strong></td>
<td>• Picnics and BBQs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• BBQ facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Picnics, BBQs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enjoying the Environment x7</strong></td>
<td>• Communing with nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scenery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bike Tracks/ aesthetically satisfying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• water birds and admire roses in pioneer park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fresh air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Simple enjoyment of attractive open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Admiring roses and other flowers in Pioneer Park. Showing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grandchildren plaques about pioneer cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art/intellectual x4</strong></td>
<td>• Reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reading, drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uni work/Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch x3</strong></td>
<td>• Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lunch time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other x2</strong></td>
<td>• Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.3:* Unpacking the category of ‘other’ in the response to what respondents reported they do in the city centre parks
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for rarely or never using parks</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal routine</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer other forms of leisure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No shade</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowded/ Noisy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about dirt, sweat ect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never considered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N= 31</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 4.4: Table showing the distribution of reasons for rarely or never using parks

### 4.4: Reasons for ‘Rarely’ or ‘Never’ using the park

Many studies tend to focus on why people use urban parks or what physical designs will bring them in as opposed to asking what factors keep them away. Following the advice of Hitchings (2013) this study explored what factors relating to individual lived experience may dictate against park use. Interestingly, few people reported being put off from the park spaces due to overcrowding, noise, dirt or personal hygiene. The three most reported reasons for respondents that rarely or never use urban parks were; (1) not part of their personal routine, (2) other forms of leisure preference or (3) they simply lacked the time. These results echo Hitchings (2013) findings that the importance of personal routines and daily habits in explaining wether people will choses to visit parks as part of their daily lives.

11 people selected “other” as the reason they avoided parks. They were offered space to explain this selection. These answers are represented in Table 4.5; of interest here is the role of urban parks as a ‘contact’ zone between different social groups. For some, contact with different social groups raised issues around personal safety, categorising contact with some people as “undesirable”, particularly those aligned with drinking and drug use. For others, the issue was more in terms of access and the territorialisation of the park by personal trainers or boot camps. Both these themes are discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6. In sum, the design of the park was not frequently reported as what kept people out of parks, rather time, preference for other forms of activity or anxiety from the interaction with a particular social group categorised as ‘undesirable’.
What keeps people out of the parks – responses to “other”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Undesirables” x3</td>
<td>• Drug addicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Undesirable people, drinking in sheds particularly the shed nearest the children’s playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Undesirable people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/security x2</td>
<td>• Never use the parks at night mainly as a safety precaution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lighting/security. Being hit by bikes in puckeys reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainers x2</td>
<td>• Domination by fitness groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal Trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other x3</td>
<td>• Dog Droppings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Too far, use Stewart park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nothing there for me to enjoy/ use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial x1</td>
<td>• Too many Muslims they take over the parks!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Responses to “other” what keeps people out of the parks

4.5: Use of parks for people who live and work in the city centre:

This project also had an interest in people who live and work in the city centre. Do people who live and work in the city centre use parks in a different way to those who only reside there? The number of respondents who also worked in the city centre comprised 18.8% (64) or of the total sample. Overall people who work in the city centre reported a lower frequency of use than the sample as whole. The two strongest responses were “sometimes” (21) and “never” (20)
Table 4.6: How often people who live and work in the city centre use parks during working hours (e.g., work breaks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response – City centre workers frequency of use</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not work in City Centre</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Reasons why people who work in the city centre but do not use parks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response - City centre workers not using parks during working day.</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowded/Noisy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal routine</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about dirt, sweat etc</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer other forms of leisure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No shade</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Considered</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 shows how people that work and live in the city centre more frequently report ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ using parks during working days. Table 4.8 show that those participants who work in the city centre and use the parks sometime during their working day, reported more frequently partaking in passive activities (such as socialising, relaxing, thinking, and leisurely walking) than more physically active pursuits, such as port or running.

Table 4.7 illustrates that what more frequently prevented city centre workers from using the parks was predominately a lack of time, followed by use not being part of their personal routine.
Response – How city centre workers use the parks in the work day | Frequency
---|---
leisure/ walking | 21
thinking space | 14
personal training | 2
children’s play | 1
Running | 2
outdoor gym equipment | 5
meeting place | 9
Sport | 3
a shortcut | 8
Relaxing | 14
Socialising | 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Weighted Total</th>
<th>unsure/unfamiliar</th>
<th>No-Response</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value city Centre parks</td>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flagstaff Hill</td>
<td></td>
<td>270</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td></td>
<td>271</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osborne</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td></td>
<td>192</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer</td>
<td></td>
<td>137</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCabe</td>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Why people who live and work in the city centre do use parks during the working day. (eg break times)

4.6: Reporting value trends

Respondents were presented with a Likert scale asking them “irrespective of use to circle there level of agreement with the statement: “I value city centre parks in Wollongong””, followed by statements to quantify how respondents valued the seven city centre parks.

Table 4.9 shows that, overall, respondents strongly agreed with the statement: “I value city centre parks in Wollongong”. Parks were valued collectively, more strongly than any individual park. Table 4.10 shows that Flagstaff Hill is the most valued park, followed very closely by Stuart Park. These parks are also well known/ familiar places to residents. Only 3% and 2 % of all respondents were unfamiliar/unsure with Flagstaff Hill and Stuart Park.
respectively. According to the Likert scale, MacCabe is the least valued, with 10% of respondents either unfamiliar/unsure. Pioneer Park is seemingly the most unknown park amongst respondents in the city centre, with 20% unsure/unsure.

4.7: Demographic differences in value

Does age and whether they live and work in the city centre matter when in terms in how people value parks? To explore these questions responses to the valuing question was explored by difference in age, and place of work. Age is split between those over the age of 60 (54%), and those between the ages of 18 and 60 years. (45.5%) as this separation accounts for a nearly equal split of respondents. Table 4.10 shows that those aged over 60 are more frequently to strongly value the parks. With the exception of Stuart Park and Flagstaff Hill, which are valued strongly and in comparatively equal terms by both age groups, older participants more frequently agreed with strongly valuing Osborne, Market, Pioneer, Lang and McCabe Park. Parks appear to have particularly strong value for older city centre apartment residents.
## Age differences in value responses between over 60 and under 60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>unsure/unfamiliar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value city Centre parks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-60</td>
<td>count</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10: Age differences in value responses between over 60 and under 60.
4.8: How/Why participants Value the Parks:

Figure 4.1: Thematic word cloud of why participants value parks

(Values too small to see: Toilets, spiritual, history/heritage)

The survey asked participants “why did you circle this level of agreement for the statement, I value city centre parks in Wollongong”. These results were thematically analysed using content analysis. Figures 4.12, 4.18 and 4.20 illustrate the frequency of particular themes as word-clouds. Notably absent for the main part are valuing parks for their history, or heritage value (2 instances), or the trees, plants or animals present in these places (3 instances). Instead, the theme, “counter-the–city” was the most prominent reason respondents gave to valuing city centre parks. The majority of responses explained the value of the parks in relationship to the surrounding built-environment. The built urban environment was positioned as something negative that needed to be ‘escaped’ or ‘alleviated’. Parks were understood to provide that service. Parks were understood as a necessary antidote to urban living. Table 4.13 presents a selection of responses that illustrate this theme of antidote.
Participant | Response – Counter the city
---|---
21 | “I value open space as a relief from buildings and dollar driven enterprise. Parks = freedom from "have to" - have to buy, do, act work.”
279 | “All of the parks are a wonderful relief from the hustle and bustle of the city centre. Most have trees, flowers and gardens.”
140 | “Green spaces are vital to compensate for the urban spaces - they are the lungs of city spaces”
145 | “It’s important to have a place to go to, a patch of grass to sit on is better than a concrete jungle”

Table 4.11: Sample selection of comments under the theme “counter the city”

A second related theme was parks were categorised as ‘essential’; Comments where categorised into this theme if they made specific references to the parks being vital, essential, or fundamental, or expressed the same sentiments in different words. Several were blanket statements with little explanation as to why or how parks are essential, to their own lives or to the city. For example respondents 157 and 123 wrote respectively: “Because parks are a vital part of any city” and “It is essential to maintain attractive open space in and around the city centre”. Some respondents suggested that parks are central to forging a whole range of intersecting ‘quality of life’ measures including collective identity, aesthetics connections to the past and health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Comment - samples demonstrating “Essential” theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Outdoor spaces are essential for a good standard of life. Having Green, a lovely space is healthy. Promoting the use of these spaces is beneficial. I love and use them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>Parks are an essential part of the Social framework of our community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>These spaces are vital to the ambience and historical value of the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Open city parkland as listed above is vital to the wellbeing of both the city and its people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>330</td>
<td>Fundamental to the identity of Wollongong city centre and make it attractive and useful for residents and visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12: Sample selection of comments under the theme “Essential”

Indeed, the theme of visual aesthetic was integral to how many respondents valued parks, which often coupled with valuing parks as relaxing places. Statements outlining the relaxing qualities of parks sometimes overlapped with the theme of “counter-the-city”. For example comments participant 74 wrote: “Because we need green areas in the city centre especially for workers to sit and relax away from motor vehicles.” Likewise, participant 114 wrote: “Parks are essential for relaxation and green space amongst concrete of the city” Finally,
respondent 227 wrote: “Because they take away the feel of the city it makes you feel relaxed = not blocked in by high rises, given me my friends a place to have a BBQ”.

A third theme to emerge was valuing city centre parks in the context of high-rise apartment building development, with 27 comments falling under this theme. Mature-aged respondents comprised 62% of respondents concerned with development/high-rise and who had lived in the Illawarra for more than 15 years. Identifying whether they were also longer term residents was inconclusive, as close to half of the respondents who fell under this theme did not answer how long they had lived at their current address. While objectively, the study area is not particularly dense when compared to other industrial cities Nevertheless; in the mind of some respondents the recent growth of apartment living in the city centre added further value to urban parks. Many of these responses juxtaposed increased density with the provision of open-spaces becoming more significant; a selection of these responses are shown in Table 4.15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response – Development concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>216</td>
<td>Since the city is being over whelmed by high-rise, we need to ensure open spaces in future development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Important for our environment as it provides open green spaces in an area which is getting very congested due to increasing traffic and unit developers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>Parks are &quot;open space&quot; something Wollongong is losing with high rise buildings going up everywhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13: Sample selection of comments under the theme “Development/High-rise concern”

A fourth theme emerged around outdoor recreational activities. This included both passive exercises, such as leisurely walks and more vigorous forms of activity. These where expressed from a perspective of personal use by the individual or on the assumption that anyone has access to parks for outdoor activities. Table 4.16 provides a sample of comments by way of illustration.
Table 4.14: Sample selection of comments under the theme “exercise”

A fifth theme emerged around the role that parks played in hosting community events and festivals. As contact zones, parks are valued as places for social interaction and social wellbeing. “Open spaces are extremely important for community events and everyday leisure activities.” (Participant 88) and “Our green spaces are extremely important places for community events that are available to everyone.” (Participant 178) As this project targeted people living in multi dwelling housing, several of the respondents mentioned that parks where valued as they act as a surrogate backyard, offering opportunities for rest and play that they may otherwise lack. “I think for some living people need green spaces. More and more people live in apartments and work in offices. Green spaces are our backyards and gyms.”(Participant 334)

Family (n= 16) and children (n=25) emerged as related sixth and seventh theme. Several respondents valued parks in terms of children’s’ play. For example, respondent 67 wrote: “Because we live in a unit in north Wollongong. We use the parks and play areas as our backyard for our son.” Related to discussion around children were comments regarding parks being valued for their play equipment such as participant 81 and 272 “The City centre parks are my world at the moment. I have a 2 yr [year] old and value the space, Equipment and Social aspects for my child, me, Community.” “City parks provide a green space for all residents - Many positives - clean air, social aspects, Health and fitness, they provide, provide a playground from the many children, in the area who live in units.” Generally parks where valued for children’s play and their benefits to families, more so than for adult “play” eg sport.
A final theme emerged around the economic imperatives of parks as both enhancing property values and as a tourist attraction for visitors. For example, respondent 66 wrote that “I value having a park close to where I live. All residents should have access to a local park. It is beneficial, adds to the quality of life and property values. (Participant 66) Urban parks were also value for their place marketing potential, help to change the geographical imagination of Wollongong as a steel city. This sentiment was expressed directly by respondent 330: “Fundamental to the identity of Wollongong city centre and make it attractive and useful for residents and visitors”. Table 4.15 provides further examples of respondent valued parks as an attribute that could be pitched as a marketing asset.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Comments; sample on tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>I think the parks circled with 1 are important to the tourist attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Parks are valuable to the people of Wollongong For recreation, Family time, Outdoor activities; tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>I think flagstaff hill and Stuart Park are tourist destinations; we must keep our parks in the city looking good to attract residents and tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Green space is very important personally and as a positive for tourism and local pride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>They offer fantastic venues for sport events, public use with family ect also a great tourist attraction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.15: Sample selection of comments under the theme “tourism”*
4.9: Reporting what respondents would change to urban parks

Figure 4.2 Thematic word cloud based on Content analysis of what would participants Change or Add. (words too small to see; skate park, Osborne changes, Lang positive, Stuart positive, market positive, pioneer positive, pioneer changes, flagstaff changes, flagstaff positive, dogs good)

Insights to how city centre parks are valued, was also revealed by content analysis of the question “What would you add/change about the city centre parks in Wollongong? Any additional comments?” Mirroring the valuing response, very few participants suggested changes to the buildings, layout, plants or animals. Instead, reflecting the thematic trends of
how respondents value parks as a place to relax, exercise and/or socialize with friends, most discussion was around the parks facilities, amenities and services. For example discussion around the outdoor gym equipment was always positive and appreciated. A comparison to the stage two interviews shows similar trends. While only discussed a small number of times the interviewees where generally supportive of the idea of the equipment with at least two out rightly stating they had used them in the past. While the maintenance theme was applauded by 22 respondents and a similar number appealed to no change, others identified inadequacies. Specifically discussed was the lack of adequate seating (34 instances) shade and public toilets (tied at 21 instances) followed by the maintenance and provision of BBQs (15), picnic facilities (11), bins (9), gym equipment and parking (figure 4.2). For example, participant 279 wrote: “The major problem is parking. Whilst I can enjoy most of the parks because I live near them, out of towners have no way of having the pleasure of our parks.” And participant 163 wrote “Stewart Park will need timed parking. Commuters park and catch free bus to city centre. Definitely NO CAMPING.” Whereas, Participant 316 commented on the usefulness of the gym equipment in Lang Park. “Charge Savvy/Fitness Groups higher rates and local ratepayer’s less. Install useful (own body height/cross-fit) gym equipment monkey bars, chin ups, step ups, push ups, like Bondi or Manley have. Lang’s park equipment sucks. Only useful for the elderly as there is minimal resistance.”

Likewise, given how respondents valued parks in terms of sustaining families and community, improvements to children’s- equipment or activities was mention by 21 respondents, including requests for more, enhanced safety and improving existing structures. For example, several respondents (n=14) reflected on events and festivals. Participant 234 illustrate a general call for “more Community art and music and family events” (participant, 234). Whereas participant 329 pleads for larger events: “When council holds events make them bigger. E.g. International goods markets - more stalls/ music. Late at night in summer time- make crown street outdoor dining when it’s done, it will liven up the night time.”

And again, as a social contact zone, some respondent sought tighter surveillance of “anti-social behavior” (drinking and drug use) and restricted access of different “undesirables” from dog walkers not using leashes, to boot camps to the homeless, to racialized calls to
exclude particular ethnic groups. For example, respondent 90 asked for. “Fewer hordes of Selfish "Keep Fit" Runners and Cyclists. Fewer commercial running events that restrict public access and make the area dirty and overcrowded.” (Participant 90) Whereas, respondent 94 described boots camps as “intimidating / inconvenient for others” (Participant, 94) and respondent 253 expressed their concern of boot camps as “taking over certain parks in Wollongong, taking up all the parking facilities and intimidating other park users” (Participant, 253).

Of particular interest to this project is the third most discussed theme as to what people would change about city center parks were directly pointed at MacCabe Park (n=24) followed by Stuart Park (n=14) and Lang (n=11). The discussion around MacCabe Park was predominately negative; many voiced complaints about the park itself and/or suggested changes. Table 5.1 illustrates a selection of these comments. While comments were made suggesting changes to Stuart, they were generally more supportive on the park and focused on problems with particular features or merely suggested additions to enhance the park (see Table4.16). For Lang Park, the respondents wished to remove the homeless people who have taken-up residence in the heritage listed shelters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Example of comments made about Stuart park.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>303</td>
<td>I’d renovate Stuart park, make it more friendly for younger kids, the location is great, parking is close but the play area is small and not many kids come there, also the benches are too far from play area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Stuart park has only 1-2 working BBQs which is ridiculous. I would build more BBQs and Huts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Stuart Park is a very big park. I feel there should be another amenities block over closer to the restaurant - Northern end.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16: Sample selection of comments concerning Stuart Park
4.10 Discussion:

This chapter discussed the patterns and trends regarding how participants use and value the various parks and open spaces in Wollongong city centre. Uncovering which parks are valued the most, which the least and giving some indication as to why. It showed that age differences are relevant to how parks are valued and that the parks are used primarily for passive activities. The survey has thrown up a number of topics that could be explored further in this thesis. But due to constraints it is not feasible to do so. Instead several of the more prominent topics that relate more directly with the project aims will be discussed in latter chapters. These are; the issues surrounding MacCabe as a highly discussed problem space, which has been flagged as a space of interest by the local council. The topic of social tensions in parks and desires for regulation of activities resonates with additional themes of the parks idealized as democratic social spaces, which arose mainly in the interviews. And finally the most prominent theme is by far how people appreciate the parks and are motivate to use them in order to escape the feeling of the city, and experience the sensuous environments for emotional benefit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative social aspects</th>
<th>Underutilised</th>
<th>Perimeter access</th>
<th>Toilets</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MacCabe Park feels unsafe - even in the day. Security needs to move loiterers on. I was yelled at by drinkers in the park.</td>
<td>MacCabe Park is a future centre piece for Wollongong (see Main Park in centre of Sydney)</td>
<td>MacCabe Park has no purpose other than play ground; the site should be developed and smaller park areas of high quality should be established to provide residents with a meaningful park.</td>
<td>Toilets in MacCabe Park needed for children and adults</td>
<td>More lush vegetation in parks! (So much has been removed from Lang park and MacCabe over the last 20+ years!!! too much!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCabe Park is full of undesirables, drinking swearing asking for money.</td>
<td>I Think MacCabe Park is underutilised, if money cannot be spent on changing its face at least many events or markets could be staged. Most important LACK OF PUBLIC TOILETS!</td>
<td>MacCabe Park is shut off by buildings. Needs to be visible and visibly accessible by foot from the mall.</td>
<td>Public amenities E.G. Public toilets - Being a mother it was at times difficult to get one quickly - Seen many parents changing on grass ect in MacCabe park. Lockable toilets like the ones at market Square area would be good.</td>
<td>Stuart MacCabe Park both need more under cover picnic areas BBQS I would transfer markets from crown street to MacCabe Park, Lots more room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make MacCabe Park and market square safer (from the drug addicts, who use them regularly)</td>
<td>I like them, they are clean, and the playgrounds are well maintained there are always nice people around (except at MacCabe)</td>
<td>I’d make MacCabe park more accessible from Burelli Street (Knock Down that ugly Building!)</td>
<td>Public toilets (MacCabe)</td>
<td>more large trees in MacCabe park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCabe Park has no purpose other than play ground; the site should be developed and smaller park areas of high quality should be established to provide residents with a meaningful park.</td>
<td>Liquor shops should not close to park. Though there are signs board no-smoking/ alcohol free area but there are people gathering in MacCabe Park with alcohol and some people smoking</td>
<td>I’d make MacCabe park more accessible from Burelli Street (Knock Down that ugly Building!)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Master plans for MacCabe, Lang, Stuart, Flagstaff hill - revise existing (if there are any) engaging involving the community (meaningful not the usual &quot;token&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacCabe Park, Childrens playground is underused</td>
<td>The parks need to be safer as I was attacked at Xmas last year in MacCabe Park by bored children (teenagers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make MacCabe Park and market square safer (from the drug addicts, who use them regularly)</td>
<td>People drinking in MacCabe park next to Childs playground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More development around MacCabe Park to increase its value and use</td>
<td>MacCabe park - allot of adults 'drinking' in the park next to children’s playground - Needs monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.1:** Table of all survey responses concerning MacCabe Park thematically arranged
Chapter 5: MACCABE – A dead, disorderly, ugly and deficit space

5.1: Introduction

This results chapter turns to MacCabe Park. There are two reasons for this focus. First, MacCabe Park was one of the most discussed places across all three stages of this project. Across participants this park was often constituted as a “problem” space that required the most change. Second, urban planners at Wollongong City Council have a longstanding in this park because of its proximity to the city centre, size and ‘negative’ public perceptions particularly around safety after dark. (Developing a long term vision for MacCabe Park, 2011; Wollongong City Council, 2010). The aim of this chapter is to better understanding why MacCabe is the least valued of Wollongong City Parks (see table 4.6). Following a discussion of the historical geography of MacCabe Park, attention turns to four main intersecting themes that emerged from the content analysis of the open questions of the surveys, semi-structured interviews and go-alongs: (1) a ‘dead space’; (2) a borderland space (3) imagined geography of lawlessness, and; (4) an amenity deficit space. The chapter argues that how MacCabe Park is configured as a borderland helps explain why it is normally configured by negative experiences and meanings.

5.2: Location and Historical Geography

MacCabe Park is located on the southern edge of Wollongong city centre, bounding the main commercial district and Crown Street Mall (see Figure 5.1). At 5.8 hectares it is one of the larger parks in Wollongong city centre, bordered by Church Street to the east, Keira Street to the west and Ellen Street to the south. At its northern end bordered by Burrelli
Street is one of the main traffic arteries in the city centre, which also contains a major bus interchange. The ‘Green’ shuttle bus stops directly across from the park. Unlike many other Wollongong City Parks this location is not adjacent to the ocean nor does the park offer views of the ocean or beach. Now located at the edge of the city centre, and bounded by carparks and streets, it is not necessary to walk through the park to access facilities offered within the city centre.

MacCabe Park was designated in 1929. Following Cranz’s (1982) typology, the original park was influenced by ideas of public urban parks as a ‘recreation facility’. Hence, the park contained four tennis courts, a cycle racing track and a football field. In the 1950s these recreational facilities were closed, given the opening of recreational urban parks with the growth of suburban Wollongong, including Beaton Park. MacCabe Park was reimagined as public place of remembrance and an Art Park. A war memorial is now located on the eastern border facing Church Street. The Nike sculpture is located at the North end of the park is the one and only sculpture was ever realised in the plan of an Art Park. Perhaps because of these plans there are few mature trees. The only mature trees are located on the boundaries of the park, planted with the park was first designated as recreational facility. In the 1990s, a Youth Centre was opened on the North western corner (*Developing a long term vision for MacCabe Park*, 2011; Wollongong city council, 2010). Since the 1990s, MacCabe park is the site of the annual Viva La Gong festival. In the 2000s, the children’s play area at the north end of the park was upgraded. In short, the lack of planning vision for MacCabe Park since the 1950s has created a park that operates as a borderland. As a borderland, MacCabe park is a vague undetermined space, that operates as border between the city centre and the residential suburb to the south. The results suggest that those who pass through, or go through MacCabe Park live outside of domain understandings of ‘normal’ in Wollongong.

5.3: ‘Dead space’

‘Dead’ space was one of the most prominent themes to emerge in both the surveys and the interviews around MacCabe Park. Many people do not enter the park, despite being located at the edge of the city centre close to both commercial streets and the main shopping thoroughfare, and busy public transport links. The observable lack of people was read as
one reason people avoid this park. For example Nathan (30 something, 8 years living in city centre) discussed the lack of people in MacCabe at lunch time:

This park has a lot of potential because it’s so close to the CBD. You would think at lunchtime that this should be packed with workers having their lunch. You come here in the middle of summer at lunchtime and you count on one hand the number of people sitting here having their lunch. If it cannot attract people from the city, the thousands of people working in the city during a lunch break then there’s something wrong with it.

Users are not passive participants of the parks, instead they can be understood as an element of the park itself. Accepted activities enliven parks, which in turn activates more people into the space (Muller-Pereband, 1979). Dinnie (et al, 2013) also argued that social interaction through accepted practices was important in encouraging use and enjoyment of parks. The presence of people doing accepted activities is an inescapable part of what makes green-space meaningful. And thus impacts on how people value, use and perceive such spaces. For Nathan, there must be ‘something wrong with it [MacCabe Park] because it is devoid of office workers eating their lunch. Nathans narrative was indicative of several participants who suggested the people avoid entering the park. For example Ian infers that much work needs to be done before ‘good’ people can enter the park:

Researcher: So when you think about these city parks which one’s first come to mind?

Ian: ... McCabe Park comes to mind. More from its lack of utilization and its ugliness; and the fact that nothing has been done to it is quite frustrating part for me, but I’ve never used it.

Researcher: how would you describe the park in other words maybe or in other ways?

Ian: Unimaginative, no design, no aesthetics. Yeah, it’s just really a bit of grass with a few chairs and crisscrossing pass and nobody has really sat down and thought about turning it into a jewel of the city which most many country towns around Australia do have with a feature park so close to the city. It is clotted by buildings around the outside and if I look at it now, I cannot see one person in the park. Here we are on a sort of very nice day but on an afternoon, there is not even a person walking through it. It just is testament to the lack of sort of work that’s been done on it to make it a good park.
Ian depicts MacCabe Park as “unimaginative”. This is not a place that reflects back an understanding of himself. The next section explores how those who walk through or hang out in the park are put into profound isolation. They are often understood as living outside of the dominant set of ideas of the normal.

### 5.4 Borderland space

The theme “undesirables”, or the wrong types of people, was frequently discussed in the survey, semi-structured interviews and go-alongs. Narratives of living beyond sets of ideas that frame the normal are attached to the people who are seen in this park, including drug and alcohol consumption. For example Brie (20 something, receptionist) said:

“Oh, yeah. That one {MacCabe} seems dodgy. Okay.”

- What is it that seems dodgy? (Interviewer)

“Well the bums that are around there or the, like I know this is not very nice to say, lower socioeconomic that are around it. Not that you feel they are going to do anything to you but you just feel like you’re going to get robbed or not necessarily get robbed but I don’t know. It just feels a bit dodgy and that you need to wear jeans and joggers or you need to wear ugly clothes so you won’t feel so out of place. I think that’s more it. You just feel really out of place in that one.” (Brie, 18-30)

Brie illustrates how ‘you just feel really out of place in that one’. MacCabe Park is not a place where Brie wishes to be seen or linger. This is not a place that confirms to how she understand the normative way to dress in Wollongong. Instead, those who are seen in MacCabe Parks are ‘bums’. Membership into the collective ‘we’ of Wollongong is impossible through being seen in MacCabe Park. The narrative that people who dwell in MacCabe Park are marginal people that do not confine to the ‘normal’ prescribed by white middle-class ideas of park as a public place. Instead, according to participants they are alcoholics, drug-users, street people and youth. This evident in the following quotations.

“There are often people there that are alcoholics that tend to habituate the area. Nothing against them, they got to be looked after but that is stopping people going to the park.” (Nathan, 30-40, steel works engineer, Born in Wollongong)

“I’ve heard that it's inhabited by drug users and so forth” (Liam, 60+)
“There are people around there and people using the equipment. {kids playground} There are even obviously street people or people with some mental health issues hanging around in the park but not in a “hanging around” way.” (Jean, 60+)

“I was a bit scared the other day in MacCabe Park. There was a large gatherings of youth, and I was by myself walking that night and so I did feel slightly intimidated. They didn’t do anything on, it was just I had that feeling. All the other parks, I feel fine, even, there’s always a lot of people using the ones along the Foreshore but I never feel intimidated there.” (Elanor, 30-40)

Elanor, Jean and Nathan where increasingly apprehensive about the presence of certain “others” in MacCabe Park, the mentally ill, drug and alcohol users those of low socio-economic status and to a lesser extent youth. Much has been written about the death or decline of public space (Mitchell, 1995) and the role of middle class desires to be insulated from such “others” leading to the withdrawal from public life and activity. Issues regarding social tensions and conflicts in the parks are further discussed in chapter 6.

5.5: Imagined Geographies of lawlessness

Researcher: How would you feel about MacCabe Park?
Fiona: It’s just got such a bad name.
Researcher: MacCabe, yeah.
Fiona: Because of things that happened there... (Fiona, 60+ retired,)

MacCabe is also imagined as borderland regardless of lived experience. In Fiona’s words MacCabe Park has a ‘bad name’. Fiona was not alone in emphasizing the importance of discourses that configure MacCabe as ‘bad’, irrespective of the actual degree of safety and inclusiveness of the space. For example Chester said.

I don’t go there very often. It has a bad reputation. It had a reputation years ago as some crimes committed ... your too young to remember but in the early ’90s there was a few heinous crimes, some rapes or something in the MacCabe Park.....Yeah and I don’t know the details now but I just remember all this talk. And I wasn’t in Wollongong at the time because this was 25 years ago, 20-25 years ago. I don’t know whether it’s still there but I’ve ... I’ve never really walked through it much to be honest.” (Chester, aged 40-50)

Chester illustrates how narratives of crime are recirculated that help to stabilise MacCabe Park as unlawful place. As a borderland, MacCabe Park becomes an unlawful place of ‘heinous crimes’. Like many participants, Chester chooses to avoid this place. Likewise, Kate
illustrates the power of narratives in forging geographical imaginations of MacCabe Park as unsafe. Kate said:

“Back in the day, in MacCabe Park, It used to. There was a bad vibe about that place but apparently, you know, I don’t know why but people said, “They’ve done a lot of work to make it better” and I don’t know what they’ve done but you do walk through there and it feels safer. So, I don’t know whether it’s just a psychological thing that people have talked about it and it started to get better. I don’t know. So, that would be the only place that I’ve felt a negative vibe to, I guess. You know, MacCabe.”

(Kate, 30 something, born in Wollongong, 25 years a resident)

Kate points to how changes to the discourse can reconfigure the geographical imagination of places. In this case a narrative about ‘work’. Yet, overall participants imagined MacCabe Park as borderland, and hence those people within as inherently dangerous. For example, Stella reflected on the subject of the person waiting in MacCabe Park as the ‘loiter’.

**Researcher:** ...you had something to say about MacCabe in terms of the people who are likely to use it or something?

**Stella:** ...that’s what I meant when I mentioned people loitering up there and probably down south, yes. Which I supposed loitering that’s what the parks are for, isn’t it? To relax or to hang around and wait for people. So, it’s probably a wrong perception from reputation.

**Researcher:** Yeah, so do you think that MacCabe Park maybe suffers from a bad reputation?

**Stella:** Yes. Yes. True or false, I don’t know. That’s what reputation is, isn’t it? [Yeah].It’s not necessarily true. (Stella, 60+)

Whereas, Nathan spoke of the person in MacCabe Park as the drug addict.

**Researcher:** you feel that MacCabe Park does have a certain connotations or perceptions with a history of sort of antisocial behaviour? Do you think that still exists?

**Nathan:** I think there is a little bit of that but it is not too bad. I mean we’re not talking about the Bronx here or anything. Occasionally, I’ll walk through here and there’ll be some drunk people or some people who’ve clearly been on drugs or whatever. I think to use that as an excuse not to do anything is not really acceptable, but I think it is a perception and it probably does stop people coming into the park, especially when it doesn’t feel secure and you’ve got a space to be walked in on two or three sides. (Nathan, 30-40)
A comparison of actually reported instance of crimes from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR, 2014) reveals that non-domestic assaults or malicious damage to property in MacCabe Parks is no more prevalent than other areas of the city centre and lower in relation to robbery. Reported robberies are higher around Wollongong train station, as well as in the southern end of Lang park adjacent to the entertainment Centre. Perceptions of safety have been shown to influence the nature and extent that people use spaces and places (Thompson, 1996; Burgess; 1995) while crime does occur in MacCabe Park the fear of crime is inconsistent with its actual levels. Ward Thompsons (1996) study of American parks found that through western cultural histories parks are embedded in our psyche with a particular symbolism as a paradise and refuge from urban life, and thus if crimes take place there, they take on a “shock value out of all proportion to the likelihood of such crimes on adjacent streets” (Thompson, 2002, p66) Perhaps this is why the narratives around crimes that have happened there decades ago have created a reputation have stuck. Additionally the CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) identifies understandings of personal risks are also underpinned by visual aesthetics, impeded visual sightlines from surrounding buildings that make it partially isolated, physically segregated from its surroundings, and lack of pedestrian activity for informal surveillance. (Crowe, 2013)

5.5: Vague Park Aesthetics

MacCabe Park becomes configured as borderland because the design and layout work against being understood as urban park. Instead the aesthetic of MacCabe Park help configure it as undetermined place. “I think probably MacCabe, it hasn’t much attractiveness to it” (Fiona, 60+). Likewise Peter said:

Peter: I think it’s because it’s not defined. I think it’s sort of not square. There’s the old little building on the western side that [pause] around it and you’ve already mixed in the Youth Centre. There's another centre on the other side of it, I think. (Peter, 50-60)

Other participants spoke of how the parks landscaping made MacCabe Park a borderland. For example, Nathan bluntly said “It’s too vast because there's nothing in there.” Likewise, Stella remarked standing in MacCabe Park that it is:
Too big, open and exposed. .. I need once again those trees to shelter me, to closet me and it's smaller. I don't need big open spaces. That's a contradiction because a while ago, I said I do not need space, but it doesn't need to be this big. (Stella, 60+)

Additionally, at least four participants indicated that the layout of the park seems to evoke a sense that it lacks a purpose or design was put together haphazardly. This was articulated to varying levels of intensity and expression, but is well illustrated by Shelly.

**Researcher:** For you, what is the best urban park and which one would be the worst one?

**Shelly:** ...The worst one [pause] would be [pause] probably MacCabe Park, that’s that one there.

**Researcher:** Yeah.

**Shelly:** I don’t really know it very well but it’s not inviting. I have walked through it. When I've been doing a long walk, I’d walk through it, but it’s not inviting.

**Researcher:** What is it about it that’s not inviting?

**Shelly:** It’s got those things, I think as well. I don’t know, it’s just ... doesn’t please me and that’s something that’s not quantifiable [laughs] probably. [Pause] It’s just ...there! You don’t actually ever see a lot of people in it. Not that I’m there every day; I'm not. Probably when they’ve got activities there like Viva la Gong, they’ve had it there and everything. ...

**Researcher:** Do you think that MacCabe sort of ... is it the lack of the ocean or is it just the building?

**Shelly:** No, no, no. No, coz it’s not far from the ocean. It’s just there! I think it’s almost like it was an afterthought. Put a little bit of green here but without thinking about it. And there’s a lot of blocks of flats or units or apartments or whatever you call them nowadays; around there I'm sure would use it. (Shelly, 60+)

Shelly is quoted at length because she illustrates how MacCabe Park is understood as a borderland, a place that configures the lives of those who live outside of normal white middle class values that inform everyday life of Wollongong. MacCabe Park becomes understood as borderland because it has a vague and undetermined geography. In Shelly’s words ‘an afterthought ... put a little bit of green here but without thinking about it’. The undetermined geography is enhanced by emotions of fear, and discomfort that are attached
to this place. This is not place where ‘respectable’ people linger. In Shelley’s words, MacCabe Park is not ‘inviting’.

5.6: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to better understand why MacCabe was the least valued park in the benchmark survey and often framed as ‘problematic’, including Wollongong City Council planning documents (Developing a long term vision for MacCabe Park, 2011; Wollongong City Council, 2010). The chapter drew on a content analysis of the open survey questions, semi-structured interviews and go-alongs. Four intersecting themes were highlighted dead space, borderland space, imagined geographies of lawlessness and vague park aesthetics. MacCabe Park may be the least valued because it is constituted as a borderland, a place that operates outside of dominant white middle class social norms of public life in Wollongong. The absence of people confirms assumptions that this is a place that operates outside social norms. Narratives of who are present in the park are always those live outside the accepted social norms – ‘bums’. Narratives help constitute MacCabe Park as a lawless place, regardless of crime statistics. The aesthetics of the park help confirm ideas of lawless and it being an undetermined space. The final chapter explore the question; are parks valued as democratic spaces?
Chapter 6: The democratic park?

The aim of this chapter is to explore the implications arising from how city centre parks in Wollongong are valued as public places to socialise through chance encounters, meeting-up with friends or taking a leisurely walk to relax. To explore the implications of valuing city centre parks in Wollongong that are used by different social groups (walkers, runners, families and friends) to create public spaces this chapter is divided into two sections. First, attention is given to participants who narrated city centre parks of Wollongong as democratic spaces, with open-ended possibilities. Second, while spoken about as a democratic and family-friendly spaces, city centre parks in Wollongong are also important sites of exclusion, where particular social groups constantly monitoring the behaviour of those that do not confirm to dominant understanding of who can occupy parks.

6.1: Urban parks narrated as socially inclusive and democratic spaces

Urban parks, like all public spaces, are often romanticised and constituted in the urban planning literature as democratic space. According to advocates (Bachin, 2003), parks are inherently inclusive places where the boundaries between different social groups can be accommodated. Indeed, some survey participants wrote of the pleasure of encountering social difference in parks. For example, ‘Anna’ noted:

I mean I see that as the lungs of the city, MacCabe Park. Yeah and then about the multicultural activities that they held there when they had all the food stalls. It was just so lovely. Just some of those tents representing so many different cultures in Wollongong area.
‘Anna’ illustrates how parks are valued as gathering place to help imagine cities as inclusive of cultural difference. Studies by both Loukaitou-Sideris (1995) and Peters, Elands and Buijs (2010) argue that urban parks are imagined as sites where people of all walks of life can be seen. The park is valued as a public space where diverse social groups share access on equal terms and come together for shared experiences. People who would not otherwise routinely share space are able to do so. Urban parks provide municipal councils with a city space for the population to imagine itself as a united entity, and foster a shared civic identify; whether for large public festivals, recreational activities, such as games and sport or quiet contemplation.

Likewise, city centre parks provide different social groups within the city who use and claim these spaces to imagine the city as inclusive space as well as making themselves visible, and public. For example, city centre parks were valued by some participants as an inclusive place that encouraged social interaction and a sense of civic communality. For example, participants Kate (30 something, born in Wollongong, 24 years of residency) and Jean (60 something, retired, 9 years a resident of Wollongong) celebrated how parks can act as equaliser, welcoming and inclusive to all social groups:

**Kate:** for the society and social cohesion in all of those things. Parks are important because they're a space where everyone can come there. They're very egalitarian. Anyone can be there, anyone can use them. There's no rules in itself as to how the park are used so it’s a bit of a space where people can ... It’s quite a social space so people work out how to share the space, how to use the space. I think it’s important socially to have parks but then it’s obvious there are health benefits to

According to Kate Wollongong city parks are imagined as full of possibilities, where people interact and learn how to share the space. As argued by Zukin (1995 p1) “the question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended’.

**Jean** discusses how she values parks for the way they can foster social interaction in incidental and unexpected ways. She contrasts the opportunity for social interaction within an apartment building, with that of the park.

**Jean:** human beings are social animals and along with that, getting out of the quarter acre block and moving into high rises, I think we have become ... intuitively, you’d think that would make us more sociable because we live on top of each other but I think because of
that, we’re actually shutting our doors to people more than we did in a quarter acre block. I think parks and open spaces again, incidentally encourage communality, encourage the social. even if we’re not going out there for that … We’re sitting down and somebody walks past and it’s like, “Hi” “How are you?” or “I’ll be finished with the barbecue in a minute.

Jean contrasts the constrained possibility of meeting people in an apartment block in contrast to the possibilities of city centre parks. Jean values the social interactions in sustaining a sense of communality and sociability between people.

Kate and Jean were not alone in narrating the city centre parks in Wollongong as places that they envisaged democracy at work that forged community co-cohesion and fostered a democratic egalitarian space. For example, when Oscar (60 something, retired, 26 years of residency in study area) was asked: “What has been your experience with other park users”, he first drew attention to how different social groups come together and help create urban parks:

Oscar: Well, you can split that into picnickers and walkers and people doing exercise groups and people going short distances, people going long distances, running I think all of those groups use parks to their advantage so I am in favour of all of them making use of parks in their own way.

Oscar then went onto explain the possibility of forging new social groups and social networks of runners through the interactions between people running in and through city centre parks when asked to consider unusual events.

Interviewer: Do you have any stories about times you’ve been in parks when something unusual happened? I asked this because you’ll never know what stories somebody has

Oscar: Well I guess I can start with my running group. It was one particular fella I call Rey who would see other runners running on their own and will stop and say: “Hi, I’m Rey how about running with us. Overtime we eventually formed Rey’s running group because it could grow, grow and grow. He just seems to attract more people to running with us. It became a very large group of enthusiastic runners. Running all over parks and bush lands of Wollongong area.

Running groups in urban parks is relatively recent. Oscar demonstrates how people value parks are constantly changing. Furthermore, he illustrates how people running in the park have become public and helped sustain his understanding of city centre parks in Wollongong as democratic places where strangers can come together.
City centre parks envisaged as democratic spaces, where seemingly all people have access generated narratives of the park during warm, sunny days as a safe and child-friendly places, regardless of gender. For example, Phoebe (60 something, retired, 25 years of residency in study area) spoke of how in their experience, people tend to be more sociable in the parks than elsewhere in the city centre.

**Hayden:** What’s been your experience with other park users?

**Phoebe:** My experience with other park users; if I am walking in a park, people have a habit of saying ‘Hello’, which they wouldn’t if they’re walking along the street, which I always find fascinating [laughs]. So I haven’t found any … I haven’t found not any bother at all in parks. I found people mostly … I think always really, even young people, they just didn’t know it really. But okay, it’s quite a social place and Wollongong is a very family city, I think. So if it’s a nice day, you can bet your life, there’ll be lots of people in the parks or out in the water, whatever, or kids.

**Hayden:** So, you’ve never seen any anti-social behaviour?

**Phoebe:** No, but that doesn’t mean I don’t think it happens. It just means I haven’t been there when it would be happening.

Phoebe’s narrative of the park is closely associated with when, and who occupies the park on a ‘nice day’. Echoing the words of Zukin (1995), Phoebe illustrates who can occupy city centre parks sustains understandings of the image of the city. In Pheboe’s words “Wollongong is a very family city’. Likewise Jean when asked ‘What’s been your experience with other park users” replied:

I’ve always found them really, really terrifically cooperative and [pause] yeah, I like ... [pause] I think ... I mean, I find Wollongong a very friendly city anyway but in parks, people seem to be [pause] yeah, they’re very open to: “Good morning” and sharing and ... yeah, being able to acknowledge that [pause]: “Would you like to sit down?” or move along, let you sit down; that cooperative kind of stuff.

Jean again illustrates that amongst those who are understood to have a legitimate right to be in city centre parks during daylight hours is based on the history of urban park design (leisurely walkers; picnickers; families; informal sports/games). The city centre park is experienced as democratic space where strangers can interact in ways no longer possible on the city streets of Wollongong. However, in discussing the democratic qualities of the city centre park in Wollongong it is important to point out that the action of Council, the police
and claims of certain social groups can all restrict particular individuals and social groups from accessing city centre parks.

6.2: Urban parks narrated as socially exclusive

The survey results identified the social tension and competing interests around notions of belonging and appropriate practices. For two respondents the city centre parks were inherently white spaces. White racism is evident by how two survey respondents narrated their individual prejudice against particular ethnic and religious groups. Survey respondent 207 wrote: “Get rid of Wogs + Bogans + Musos (sic) - the city would be better”. Whereas, respondent 127 wrote: “Get rid of the Muslims they take over the parks”. This cultural racism is illustrative of misinformed discourses that position social groups as a threat or inferior that seeks to exclude particular social groups of people from parks. Dunn (et al., 2004) notes that Muslim-Australians have long been identified as key ‘others’ to the Australian national imaginary. Such ethnic groups are not positioned as inferior; rather they are differentiated as threats to ‘social cohesion’, ‘national unity’ and to the cultural values and integrity of the dominant (Anglo-Celtic) 'host' society (Jayasuriya 2002, 41-42). For all other respondents people are not regarded as legitimate park users because certain activities are considered inappropriate rather than their race. Social conflict in parks over appropriate activities is nothing new. Historically there have always been a number of tensions around what constitutes appropriate park use and by whom (Byrne, 2009). In the city centre Wollongong parks tensions exist in 2014 around the legitimacy in parks of boot camps, dogs, bicycles and alcohol/drugs.

The boot camp demonstrates how use of the parks is consistently changing. The boot camps are a commercial enterprise and relatively new phenomenon in urban parks, but one which has gained recent growth in a number of Australian cities. The boot camp is the most recent of many articulations of physical fitness activities that is performed in parks; from organized sports, to children-plays areas to walking. In the media, the debate is often framed in terms of the presence of a private business as contrary to understandings of public space understood in terms accessible to anyone. Boot camp supporters argue that they have an equal right to use the space as they pay rates too. And that they benefit society, by providing cheaper access to personal training for lower income people in an increasingly
sedentary and obese nation (Harshm, 2013; Stephens, 2014; Jarosky, 2013). However, in the survey, as discussed in Chapter 4 these commercially organized and run fitness “boot” camps with personal trainers were framed in terms of “taking over” or “competing” with other more passive park activities. Additionally, some survey respondents named them ‘intimidating’.

The dog is also a source of social polarization and tensions between park users. Many dog owners desired greater access to urban parks, including animal play areas. For example, survey respondents 309 and 135 write that: we need more dog-friendly/allowed parks in the Illawarra. Likewise respondent 135 wrote that: Animal play areas. dogs allowed like they are in centennial park Sydney. In contrast, others sought further regulation and enforcement of policies that restricted dogs in parks: For example, survey respondent 198 wrote: “Enforce "dogs on leash” policies” and respondent 216 wrote: “Rangers to follow up on people who allow dogs to leave poo on parks and walking tracks”. Walking without dogs on a leash, and failing to pick-up dog feces becomes a way to subverting assumptions about orderly parks spaces. The city centre parks understood as a democratic space becomes a site for articulating difference and for legitimating the rights of particular social groups and animals to be part of the ‘public’. Dogs as companion species in parks are highly contested worldwide. The debate is normally framed in terms of territorial access and control (Fridlund & MacDonald, 1998; Guégin & Ciccotti, 2008; McNicholas & Collins, 2000; Robins, Sanders, & Cahill, 1991; Rogers, Hart, & Boltz, 1993; Wells, 2004; Wood, Giles-Corti, Bulsara, & Bosch, 2007; Weston et al, 2014). Outside this debates, research suggest that dogs as companion species in parks facilitate social interactions and communities of interests through how dogs interact with other dogs and people and dog owners as statistically more likely to engage in casual conversation with members of the broader community (Graham and Glover, 2014; Messent, 1983).

Likewise, bicycles are source of social polarization. Those who ride bicycles requested more support, For example respondent 129 requested: “more/better access to cyclists”. Whereas, respondent 325 demands: “Keep fast riding bikes out of our parks and onto the roads where they belong”. Likewise, respondent 90 wrote: “Fewer hordes of Selfish "Keep Fit" Runners and Cyclists”. And, respondent 227 wrote “I do not believe that bike riders
should be allowed on the walking path - too narrow and very busy on weekends”. Equally, evidence from the interviews echoes the social polarization identified in the survey. Ben (30-40 years of age, health care worker 8 months of residency in study area) For instance talks about his opinions on the behaviors of cyclists;

If I may add one thing that does annoy me and I think it’s dangerous; for all of Wollongong and I use a bike, the speed at which some of the people ride their bikes on shaded pathways. I think there’s only about 3 bells on a bike in Wollongong so I was like no. People don’t use bells and they just go too fast.

The bicycle becomes understood as problematic in city centre parks when they are travelling too ‘fast’ and are too numerous. Some participants argue that bicycles should be taken out of parks, and placed on roads that have the capacity for speed and numbers. These results echo findings that show conflicts and contestation between pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Each mode of transport sustains a particular understanding of the city, and what belongs. However most of this literature surrounds tensions that exist between cyclists and motorists. For example, Granville (et al, 2001: p.7) reported that cyclists are generally not considered to deserve priority on the road by most other road users: “Whilst cyclists generally regard themselves as equal to other road users, this status is not assigned to them by others”. Motorist commonly complain of cyclists on the road as being too slow for road traffic. In Australian cities, given the dominant modes of transport cyclists are accommodated neither on roads or footpaths.

6.3: Alcohol/ Drugs

However, the presence of the homeless and bodies of alcohol/drug fuelled strangers in creating the public space of the city centre park was perhaps the greatest source of concern. According to survey respondents the bodies of the homeless and alcohol/drug fuelled strangers had no right to be in this public space. The concern was heightened particularly in terms of the proximity of the bodies of the homeless and alcohol/drug fuelled strangers in the shelters in Lang and MacCabe Park. Several comments tapped into discourse that frames the bodies of homeless as ‘dirty’ and ‘undesirables’. For example, respondent 42 write. “They [parks] are necessary but some need cleaning up. By this I mean certain undesirables who go there.” 42 illustrate Douglas (1966) longstanding argument around the
social construction of ‘dirt’ as matter out of place. In this case, it is the homeless living in the shelters of Lang Park that are out of place in this public space. Others collapsed the homeless with alcohol/drug fuelled bodies, fashioning them as a danger to the family-friendly park. For example respondent 327 wrote.

_Use the parks but don’t like the drug users and drinkers hanging around the play areas where the seats are. I don’t feel safe especially with my child there - get rid of them it’s made for children not drug addicts_

Likewise respondent 268 wrote.

_I love Wollongong parks, however the huts in Lang-park need to be looked at, the drunks and drug users destroy the family environment often. Living in Parkside I see it all. If I could draw it would be a hut with police Drag/ Sort out the drama. That happens on a weekly basis._

The everyday awareness of the possibilities of harassment and abuse from alcohol/drug addiction heightens them to the potential of risks to family when in the park. Their anxiety is associated with the disorderly. As Valentine (2001: 175) argued “groups of young people or the homeless on the street are often read as sign that the space not looked after or controlled, either formally by the police or private security forces, or informally by local residents”. To this list, these respondents added drunken bodies.

Likewise, semi-structured interview often turns to the alcohol fuelled behaviour, particularly of young people, often as practices that failed to be counted as legitimate activities. For instance Jean discussed a time when a group of younger residents would go to Market Square to drink and play cricket and socialise.

**Researcher:** You’ve never had any conflict with other park users or seen any anti-social behaviour?

**Jean:** Look, I’ve seen a bit of what people might call anti-social behaviour but that’s really [pause] young people drinking a bit much but I mean, hello, they’re young people. We did have an issue ... it’s interesting; there’s a bunch of young people who live in a unit block, a couple of unit blocks around here, around Market Place. And last summer, I think every night after work, they’d come down into the park down here and have a cricket match, girls and boys and obviously, drinking a bit. And that, “Look, it was fun.” My husband and I used to sit up here and kind of keep score and see how they’re going and then I don’t know, a guy appeared from somewhere and told them to “Get out of the park now. You’re making a noise” and he was gonna report them to the cops. It was like, what’s going on here? I didn’t get it. They were just having fun and they always picked up after themselves, picked up their beer bottles, put them in the rubbish bin. I’ve seen that but I don’t think that’s park users. ...
I think whoever this guy was... being a pain in the ass, really. But I've seen people drinking a bit, I've heard people speaking in very loud voices obviously having an altercation between themselves. But not... never directed towards me and not in a way that I've thought [sucks air] "I need to get out of here."

Jean's narrative illustrates how residents living close to the park, police activities to maintain a social order that excludes intoxicated young people playing cricket. The geographies of alcohol consumption always point to the relative importance of city parks for socially marginalized groups constrained from entering commercial drinking places (Jayne, Valentine and Holloway, 2008). Young people often gather in parks after dark to drink as a means to empower themselves within friendship circles.

Likewise, Fiona also talked about "undesirables"; those people who participated in drug use, alcohol consumption and slept in the picnic shelters at night. Fiona begins by underscoring the importance of living in close proximity to these demonized 'others' in the park.

**Fiona:** It's funny, so, when you live on a park, you probably have a different attitude altogether from somebody that lives up there in the main street and comes in the park for a purpose.

Her concerns as a grandmother are heightened because she is witness to the 'everyday' incidents in the park. Indeed, her family does not picnic in the park, despite her apartment bordering Lang Park.

**Fiona:** We don't go and have a picnic in the park because we live on it. Sometimes, I think, you tend to see the negatives a lot more than you see the positives. The park is beautifully maintained. I will say, they do the best. It always looks nice. They put a little playground for the kids, they put these exercise stations.

Fiona points to how she understands how orderly parks a places that are well maintained and have provisions for children and exercise stations. However, the presence of drunk bodies in the park erodes her confidence of accessing this public space. Fiona went onto say:

**Fiona:** which has been marvellous. It's been really good for the park. But They haven't got rid of the drunks!
Researcher: For you, what would be your ideal park?

Fiona: The one that I’ve got now......Yeah. Let’s say, undesirable element removed. I mean if some signs up that say no drinking, why don’t they just come and take the drink away? I’ve seen the police come there and nothing happened. We used to call it breach of the peace, being a public nuisance but nobody seems to be prepared a bite the bullet and get with them because it just moves somewhere else.

According to Fiona, while the parks are well maintained, it would not be sensible to picnic in the park. Fiona’s response is one example of a time-space avoidance strategy to distance her and family from perceived danger by living a home-based life within the private sphere. Fiona acknowledges that punitive action of moving the homeless from Lang Park is not a solution. For homeless people, parks at night are sites that offer a relatively safety to conduct what are constituted as belonging in the private realm. As Mitchell (1995, p118) argues “for those who are always in the public, private activities must necessarily be carried out in public... public parks and streets began to take on aspects of home; they become places to go to the bath room, sleep eat drink or make love – all socially legitimate activities when done in private but seemingly illegitimate when carried out in public’. The city centre park as a home becomes a ‘problem’ for how the presence of the homeless troubles the notion of neat private and public realms.

6.4: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the implications arising from how city centre parks in Wollongong are valued as public places to socialize through chance encounters, meet-up with friends or take a leisurely walk to relax. The results were presented in two parts to illustrate the paradox in how parks are valued as democratic spaces. First, attention was given to participants who narrated city centre parks of Wollongong as democratic spaces, with open-ended possibilities. Next attention turned to how city centre parks in Wollongong while values as public spaces are also sites of exclusion along the grounds of white racism,
but more commonly particular activities including physical training of boot camps, dog-walking, cycling, sleeping and drinking alcohol or injecting drugs. These conflicts and tensions start to help shed light on how city centre parks are integral part of how as public spaces city centre parks in Wollongong are valued as a way of imagining and representing the city as democratic, family and child-friendly city. Indeed, survey respondents reported and participants spoke about the quality of encounters in city centre parks as way of interacting with strangers. Possibilities still remained of saying ‘hello’ to strangers that no longer existed in passing people in the street. The decline of access to city centre parks is therefore understood as threatening participants’ ability to enjoy and feel safe in the city and deteriorating the quality of encounters in the park. There is an openness to engage with strangers, rather than flee or avoid talking or eye contact. That said, because many participants have an idealized, and romanticized, understanding of city centre parks it is associated with a particular moral and social order that operates to exclude people on established ‘norms’ of appropriate ways of behaving towards each other in city centre parks. Some city centre apartment residents in Wollongong are therefore particular concerned about ‘other’ social groups who are thought about as threatening the orderly space of the park in particular those who are too noisy, too fast, and too territorial, too drunk, too messy. These residents normally call upon the policy or council to police ‘undesirable’ others who they often regard as threatening their safety.
Chapter 7: A natural place to escape the city?

7.1: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine if participants understood the city centre park as place to escape the city. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the dominant set of ideas framing city centre parks in Western cities is as an antidote for mental and physical stress associated with living in cities. The park as ‘pleasure ground’ tapped into a particular Western understanding of nature and natural places a separate from humans. As natural places, urban parks operate as the antithesis of city living by providing opportunities to tap into a slower pace of life, to relax, and to find one’s “true self”. This chapter explores the question; do residents living in apartments make sense of Wollongong city centre parks as natural places to escape the city?

7.2: The urban park as a natural place to escape the city?

The urban park as a natural place was a dominant emergent theme within the open questions of the survey data, the semi-structured interviews and the ‘go alongs’. The therapeutic qualities of green space was one reason participants gave of making sense of urban park as a natural place. Participants documented the emotional changes they felt when walking through the urban parks, such as becoming relaxed or comfortable. For example, survey participant 147 wrote: “The parks are comfortable and peaceful places to be. When I go outside for walks I want to see parks/ grass not buildings.” Similarly, survey participant 182 wrote: “We need green areas within our cities for relaxation and clean air, and feeling of space.” For these participants the qualities of greenness, cleanliness and openness is how they make sense of urban parks as natural rather than human designed places. The idea that visiting green spaces like parks lessens stress and mental fatigue is
nothing new. Ulrich (2002) traced the perception the restorative benefits of greenery, and water provide as far back as ancient Greece and the Persian Empire. Likewise, contemporary studies form public health and environmental psychology, through both self-reported and epidemiological studies, consistently found statistically significant connections between green, spacious environments and stress reduction and ‘positive’ emotional states (Korpela 1989; Sansone and Sansone, 2010). Conversely, built environments are statically associated with mood and anxiety disorders (Peen et al., 2010) Those people living in built environments lacking greenery are statistically more likely to self-report a lower sense of wellbeing. (Hartig et al, 2003; Lohr and Pearson-Mims, 2006).

One of the most prominent themes to emerge in almost all the interviews was the sense of pleasure individuals gained from the sense of temporarily escaping the roles and responsibilities of city living provided by being in an urban park as place for nature. Overall, participants understood parks as a place for nature through their restorative capacities. For Kate replied (30 something, born in Wollongong, lived in area 25 years) when asked ‘why do you think cities have urban parks?’

Kate: Coz they’re beautiful. [Pause] I think we were meant to live in nature. When we live in a crowded place, you need those places to feel like a human being maybe, I don’t know. Look at that, it’s incredible! You just need to feel, I don’t know, just to calm down maybe, to be in a space that’s not surrounded by things that are manmade, you know what I mean?

Kate taps into conventional Western culture/nature binaries to constitute the city as a place for people, and the urban park as a place for nature. The urban park becomes a place of wonder. In Kate’s work ‘it’s incredible’. Kate goes onto compare the pleasurable experiences of visiting an urban park as similar to that of going on a holiday.

Kate: Traffic, people everywhere – it just gets a bit much sometimes. It’s not nice to be able to go to a place where there’s no one around ... well, not no one around but people able to enjoy themselves away from those things. I think that when you go to a space like that, for some people it might clear their head; it might help them relax – all those things. It’s almost like a mini version of getting out of the city for the weekend. But it’s just a smaller version of that, going to a park.
Kate was not alone in discussing the pleasures of the parks understood as places to encounter a natural world constituted in terms of the seeming absence of human artefacts. Likewise, Jean (60 something, retired) spoke about the sensory aesthetic pleasures of urban parks in terms of both calming and re-energising:

I think that they actually have that kind of [pause] that psychic kind of benefit of calming down – the green space, the beauty of it; just calming you down a bit as kind of a way of ... almost like getting oxygen into your ... as you're gonna head back into the hard surfaced mall and all that stuff. ... Even a park that’s not landscaped has still got that soft edge or just the grass under your feet or a tree. I think that’s what the Town Centre stuff, it’s all ... it’s all hard, not a soft edge. ... I think because the natural world gives is to us. I think we dismiss it a lot but I think anything to do with nature, it’s like a walk on the beach or a walk in the park. I think the natural world actually kind of energises us in a way that we’re not aware of.

In part, how Jean’s senses of the material world through her feet are used to help constitute a boundary between the city as built environment and the urban park categorised as part of the ‘natural world’. The ‘soft edges’ felt by her feet are integral to categorising the urban park as part of the natural world, whereas the city streets are in her words ‘all hard’. Jean even differentiates between the ‘hard’ air quality of the mall and that of the urban park to help sustain her categorisation of the urban park as part of the natural world. As Wylie (2007) reminds us, touch and textures are integral to how we make sense of places as natural. Jean draws our attention to notion of affect, when she discusses how things that she categorises as the ‘natural world’ have a force operating below consciousness help to energise people.

Chester (50 something, steel worker, 10 years a resident) also spoke about the importance of the sense in making sense of urban parks as natural. However, unlike Jean, he focussed on the sights and sounds that enable him to categorise urban parks as natural.

... I think it’s beautiful though. That being so close to the city, just seeing open spaces and everything; it’s very [pause] it’s uplifting, I think. It’s like tranquilly ... you feels tranquil, away from the noise of the traffic and away from the hustle-bustle of everyday life, you work and then you ... and in the factory you ... It’s all go-go-go! It’s nice and what is in the
park, you can just chill out and just have quietness and peace and just see beauty. So, you do feel peace, I think.

Chester draws attention to the soundscapes that helps him differentiate between the city and the park. Alongside the sounds, the sights understood as ‘beauty’ help his body to relax. Like Kate, Chester spoke about the visual aesthetic qualities of urban parks constituted as ‘beautiful’ through the notion of openness. In Chester’s words to ‘chill out’. Chester goes on to say that:

I don’t mind the dense urban environment but I do like the beauty like I go back to the ocean and swim and everything. It’s just the beauty, natural beauty. Whereas the parks, even the manufactured, their art; they're trying to replicate the natural beauty. Instead of having to travel an hour to go to a national park or really natural beauty, you can go to it in your city. It’s just [pause] nice admiring the natural beauty of a nice park.

Chester is well aware that the parks are a human artefact, a simulation of natural beauty he locates in national parks. However, this does not detract from his experience because of proximity and access within the city.

Ben and Shelly who both understood parks as natural places spoke of the importance of the emotional connections and personal well-being of visiting these places. For Ben (50 something, health care worker, recent resident < 1 year) in his discussion of regular walk along the Blue Mile towards Flagstaff Hill Park he draws attention to the embodied experience of the horizon that enable emotional connections to Wollongong.

I’d say I have an emotional connection up on the lighthouse. [Flagstaff Hill Park] It’s probably because of the view. You can just see so much. It’s just opens it up, for that and my wife and I high-five each other quite often. [Laughter] We just walk along and we just high-five each other and say, “What a great decision we made!” [Laughter] We quite often do that just walking along the Blue Mile in different spots depending on ... looking back this way or looking out that way; it just depends. The view is just [pause] life.

As Wyle (2007) argues the horizon acts a point of reflection. For Ben, the horizon operates as point of reflection for the decisions they made to move to Wollongong, a critical attribute of urban parks.

Shelly (60 something, retired, English born) also draws our attention to the place-based attachments, and emotional well-being she ascribes to visiting parks. Shelly visits Market
Square only three or four time a year, normally following a health check-up. Nevertheless, these visits are very important to her well-being and sense of place. As Shelly explained:

so I come here [Market Square] for lots of reasons emotional, spiritual, psychological, and I like watching people.

These findings resonate with the place attachment literature (Manzo, 2003; Irvine et al., 2013) Shelly goes onto explain how her strong sense of place is intimately tied to how the greenness of the plants found in Market Square help confirm her sense of self as English. Shelly described the affective and emotional pull of green in the following way:

Shelly: Green. Lots of green, lots of trees which has a huge emotional connection for me. When I lived in Sydney, I used to go and a few sad things happened in my life and I used to go into the botanic gardens and sit under the gum trees and cry. It’s like it’s a very peaceful place, probably for people who are religious which I’m not. But for people who get that probably when they’re going into a church or some way people can... I can get it in an art gallery sometimes or, but for me, here, it’s the green and the trees and probably because I’m English. I think green is important to me because there’s lots of green in England coz it rains a lot. So, trees and green are huge emotional pull. So if I come to sit in a park, any park, there is some emotional reasons for doing that, not just doing it for the sake of doing it. I get strong ... in someone, in some parks and other parks. I don’t get it in Wollongong botanic gardens, which is very sad because it’s very close but I don’t.

For Shelly, the greenness of the plants in the urban park are valued as a site of emotional respite. The literature to date has omitted to consider how parks are important places that help some people cope with personal crises. Additionally the spiritual connection noted by Shelly to urban green space is underplayed in the literature. Gomez et al (2013, p 240) argue that spiritual connections to urban parks as natural places are atypical “in the sense that they are often substituted by spiritual values for religious buildings and monuments rather than natural features” (Gomez et al, 2013, p 240) The expressions of interconnectedness and tranquility found in this study demonstrates that urban green spaces may take on spiritual values. For Shelly, the sense of serenity and clam provided by a park take on a role analogous to a religious experience. Not being a religious person, parks take on the role of an emotional sanctuary that may be provided in a more cultural setting such as a church.
Similar findings have been found, but in wilderness settings (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999) indicating that even urban green space can enhance spiritual wellbeing. Within geography, the literature focuses on people’s relationships to wilderness settings and national parks. Byrne and Wolch (2009) note the deficit of literature on people connections with urban parks. This results chapter undermines the assumptions that urban parks have less potential for affective intensities than ‘green’ spaces more distant from cities. These results suggest an underestimation of depth and importance of the experiences that urban parks can provide.

7.3: Absent presence of city centre parks

The absent presence of parks is a final key theme emerging across the survey, interviews and ‘go-alongs’. For many of the participants the city centre parks the benefits derived from the parks was not from regular visits. Many spoke of not being ‘familiar’ with certain parks. Yet, all articulated the importance of urban parks living in Wollongong. For example, Kate, 30 something did not speak as being “familiar” with the Market Square, but still spoke highly of this park. In Kate’s words, she appreciated this park for “just being there” (Kate). Likewise Chester’s (aged 40-50) spoke of Market Square in terms of Market Square in terms of the absent presence in his live.

Chester: On that, just like ... [Pause] Market Square, even though I don’t use it, I don’t interact with the park but I do walk through the park. And I might not be one of the ones who ... go in the park and sit there for hours or [pause] but I walk past it and I admire it. Even if you don’t go through it, you walk around the outskirt or the streets around it, you can still appreciate it and still value it. But because it’s there and you’ve got it there on your doorstep and ... you walk around it but you just value it. You don’t have to sit in it to value a park. It’s like the ocean; you don’t value the ocean if you don’t go into the ocean. If you walk past the ocean, you’re still valuing it because you’re appreciating just seeing it and just having it there.

Chester does not interact with the park. He does not sit in the park, nor regularly walks through it. However, Market Square I still important to how he makes sense of living in Wollongong. The absent present Chester articulates in terms of ‘just having it [Market Square] there’. The absent presence has important implications when assessing the benefits derived from urban parks Many studies focus on those people found within urban parks.
Less attention is paid to those who experience urban parks in more incidental ways. These results show the psychological and emotional benefits begin derived from the absent presence of urban parks. When assessing how valued an urban space is we need to recognize that the park is embedded in the surrounding urban landscape not isolated from it. In a time when urban parks are facing development pressures (Lo and Jim, 2010) and concerns over the public utility of excess urban green areas, these results help call into question the partiality of using quantitative methods such as observational studies in assessing community value or appreciation of public space.

7.4: Missing Values

Absent from the empirical data was making sense of Wollongong city centre parks in terms of the ecosystem services they provide, such as microclimate stabilisation, air purification, noise breaks or storm water absorption. These findings support Dallimer’s (et al, 2014) study in Sheffield, England, on what factors are likely to encourage use of urban green space. They found no statistical association between frequency of use and ecological knowledge. Likewise, Dearborn and Kark, (2010) pointed to the challenges of aligning the human health/liveable cities age anda with the increasing concerns toward urban conservation. Likewise, the results from this project suggested participants understood urban parks in terms of human-centric concerns.

7.5: Conclusion

This chapter had demonstrated many participants do understand the city centre park as place to escape the city. The empirical evidence that participants rely upon embodied experiences to help them make sense of urban parks as part of the natural world includes the touch of the ground, the absence of certain sounds, the sight of the horizon, the greenness and the quality of the air. This embodied knowledge is integral to explaining the emotional pleasures of urban parks that participants spoke about in terms of relaxation and comfort. Even for people who not regularly visit parks, urban parks were spoken about as playing an important role in their personal well-being and place connectedness for ‘just being there’. The absent presence of “the pleasure park” points to how the importance of these spaces in people lives that arise from their presence in the city, rather than actual visits. Given future plans for continued high-rise developments in Wollongong, will city
centre parks continue act as an ‘escape’ from the city for apartment dwellers as population numbers increase? Work by Hammitt (2000) presents a pessimistic outlook. He argues that the ‘green space effects’ found in city centre parks may not be adequate enough to fully compensate greatly everyday stresses of urbanity; therefore increasing leisure based travel, with more people leaving the city for weekend ‘green space’ fixes.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

8: Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter revisits the aims, summarises the key findings, and outlines future research agenda.

8.1: Revisiting the aims

In a context of urban revitalisation in Wollongong, the overarching aim is to better understand how residents living in multi-dwelling housing make sense of the urban parks in the city centre. Specifically, the thesis aims are twofold:

1. To provide a benchmark survey of how apartment dwellers use and value Wollongong city centre parks.

2. To investigate how city centre parks are made sense of by apartment dwellers as part of their everyday life.

The thesis addressed these aims by: conducting a literature review (Chapter 2), designing a mixed-method project (Chapter 3) and exploring the most prominent findings (Chapters 4-7).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 drew on the work of Cranz (1982) and Bachin (2003) to outline the historical discourses’ and ideologies that underpin the different sets of ideas that shape urban parks. Four ideal ‘types’ of Western city parks were identified over the past 150 years: the “pleasure ground” or landscape park (1850-1900); the “reform park” (1900-1930); the “recreation facility” (1930-1965); and, the “open space system” (1965-). Attention then turned to review the social science literature exploring urban parks and ‘urban green space’ more generally. The public health literature pointed to how ‘green space’ should be valued by various arms of the state for the mental and physical health benefits (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2007; Green-space Scotland; 2008a; Green-space Scotland; 2008b; Velarde, et al, 2007, Maas, et al, 2006, Grahn, et al, 2003). The economic and urban
planning literature suggested the urban parks should be valued in terms of building civic identity, sites of socialisation/community, increased property prices and as an attraction for place marketers (Crompton. 2001, Bachin, 2003). Environmental scientists and physical geographers point to the know benefits arising for carbon sequestration, certain birds and birds, as well as air and water quality (Gomez and Barton; 2013, McPherson and Simpson, 1999; Liu et al., 2010). Attention was drawn to gaps in the literature, and particularly discussions by social and cultural geographers. The review showed a relative absence of qualitative approaches that draw on more recent rethinking of space as ongoing and how people and space are mutually constituted. Instead, most studies focus on the park as pre-existing public space and measure elements or categories of things (number of trees, people, toilets etc). Most studies focus on the physical space of the park rather than its extrinsic qualities and community perceptions. When people are studied their relationships to urban parks are often arranged around socio-demographic variables not accounting for personal factors, and embodied knowledge’s. These critiques provided the basis for the methodology and for the conceptual framework, which drew on John Wiley’s notion of ‘landscape phenomenology’ to rethink how people make sense of and come to value urban parks as the outcome of embodied practice through which the self and world are made and remade.

Chapter 3: Methods

Chapter 3 outlined and evaluated the methods applied in this project in regards to their rigour and ethical considerations. The research design reflects the project aims and help address the gap identified in the literature. Quantitative methods in this project were the starting to provide a benchmark survey of how apartment dwellers use and value of city centre parks. The survey was the starting rather than end point of this project. Alongside the survey, a combination of qualitative methods are deployed in this project – semi-structured interviews and ‘go-alongs’ – to provide insights to how individuals made sense of city centre parks in the context of their everyday lives. This chapter also acknowledged the partial knowledge generated by the methods. The questionnaire sampling method excluded the voices of the homeless and children, each of whom have relationships to the parks in Wollongong. Secondly, women are over represented, particular those aged 60 years and over.
Chapter 4: Trends of use and value

Chapter 4 discussed the postal survey results, documenting the trends of use and value urban parks. Several key themes emerged that shed light on the thesis aims. The survey results showed that Flagstaff Hill and Stewart Park widely valued as ‘jewels’, while Pioneer Park and particular MacCabe were constituted as a ‘problem’. Survey results suggest that city centre parks were often valued in relation to their surrounding built environment, continuing housing development and increased population density. Survey results also suggest that urban parks are regarded by most respondents as an essential public good and as an ‘escape’ from the city.

Chapter 5: MacCabe Park

Chapter 5 focussed on MacCabe Park. This focus was in part due to survey results discussed in chapter 4 which often constituted this city centre park as a “problem” and a longstanding interest in re-developing the park by the local government and planners due proximity to the city centre, size and ‘negative’ public perceptions. This chapter addressed the project aims by exploring how participants and respondents made sense of MacCabe Park as part of their everyday lives as a borderland. Four main intersecting themes emerged from a content analysis that provides insights to MacCabe park as a borderland: (1) ‘dead space’; (2) a disorderly space from the presence of “undesirables”, (3) a visually impaired or ‘ugly’ aesthetic space by the buildings and car park that line its perimeter, and; (4) an amenity deficit space; including toilets and lack of commercial activity.

Chapter 6: A democratic place?

Chapter 6 explored if participants understood city centre parks as a democratic place through chance encounters, meeting-up with friends or taking a leisurely walk to relax. Urban parks are narrated as socially inclusive and democratic spaces resonating with the historical discourses of parks being the premier democratic space of the. Several participants demonstrate that in their experience the parks were more socially inclusive and fostered more socialisation between people than would occur elsewhere in the city centre. Yet, paradoxically urban parks where often narrated as socially exclusive places. Multiple narratives were identified around who should be allowed to use the spaces and for what
purpose. Tensions were raised around dog owners, cyclists, public drinking and homelessness. These were explored further to better understand the sources of contestation.

Chapter 7: A natural place?

The aim of Chapter 7 is to better understand participants understood the survey findings that positioned the city centre park as a place to escape the city. To explore this question turned to the embodied knowledge of participants. In doing so, this chapter helps to fill a relative gap in our understanding of how people make sense of urban parks. Participants shared understandings of the city centre park in terms of the natural, and aligned the natural with bodily capacity to relax and achieve a sense of comfort when routinely comparing urban parks to the city surroundings. At the same time how the natural was valued was related to individual biographies, including place of birth, live events and sporting activities. Equally important, participants discussed how for people who not regularly visit parks, urban parks as places for nature were spoken about as playing an important role in their personal well-being and place connectedness for ‘just being there’. The absent presence of “the pleasure park” points the importance of these spaces in people lives often arise from their proximate presence, rather than actual visits.

8.2 Further research:

Future urban parks research could benefit from more depth of information rather than the ‘breadth’ provided by a statistical approach. Future research could incorporate more qualitative assessments of park activities/inactivities to provide a companion to observational studies. Future research may seek to build on the value of using mixed methods and qualitative approaches to the study of urban park experiences, practices, motivations and values. Qualitative inquiry could therefore assist in informing park design and management tailored to the specific community needs.

This study found a gap in the literature in relation urban parks as an escape from the city. To date, human geographers tend to focus on experiences of tourists to “wilderness” settings beyond the city, in particular national parks. Future research may seek to close this gap in
the literature, paying particular attention to the diversity of embodied knowledge of urban parks of those living in cities that make sense of urban parks as an escape.

Future research may seek to further explore the disconnection between how parks are idealised as socially inclusive public spaces and the social tensions and conflicts that play out within the parks. Such conflicts raise particular questions. Who defines what acceptable behaviour in a park is? And does local government have the right to regulate park use? On the latter, recent developments in both scholarship and policy in planning and public health are increasingly looking towards cities open and public spaces to perform more functions such as improving civic liveability, revitalising local areas and combat certain urban ills such as societies growing waistlines. There is interest in making parks livelier, more inclusive, spaces that promote physical activity. (Green-space Scotland; 2008a) More and more people may seek access to parks for a diverse range of activities due to growing density and population. People who would not otherwise routinely share space may increasingly do so in parks. In principle parks are democratic spaces, but like a democracy people won’t always agree or get along. The question is will the social benefits of parks lie in the opportunities for all individuals and groups to see and be seen by others, with familiarity breeding acceptance. Or will people’s innate ability not to get along breed more tensions and conflicts?

Future research may seek to explore how children, the homeless or those from minority ethnic groups make sense of urban parks in their everyday. Children and the homeless are key groups of people who are found in parks. Chapter 6 discusses the significance of urban parks to the homeless. These social groups are likely to have very different and insightful perspectives and relationships to urban parks. Yet such groups are generally disengaged or excluded from the public planning process hence they could be regarded as a research priority... For instance, public health researchers suggest that children living in higher density housing have a greater need for publicly accessible green spaces for play, mental health and social and physical development. (Woodley, 2006; Brown, et al, 2001; Cutumisu and Spence, 2008) Children need safe plays where their parents can monitor them, and who bring them into conflict with other apartment dwellers. Parks provide a place to meet and for children to participate in physical and social play. Promote healthy growth and development and may even mitigate attention deficit disorder in children. (Taylor et al., 1998)
The experience of ethnic minorities is a key focus of future urban park research, given that urban parks may be a context in which white racism unfolds and the prevailing whiteness of much urban parks literature. Important future research agendas are provided by a focus on children, the homeless and ethnic minorities.

Finally, future research may seek to explore the theme of the absent presence that emerged in Chapter 7. This thesis is important given the priority often given in urban planning decisions to use through counting and mapping the presence of people. Yet, many interview participants who identified as ‘non-users’ or were unfamiliar with a particular park still valued these places in their everyday lives for “just being there”. For those whose everyday routines and practice do not incorporate urban parks a better understanding of how they make sense of urban parks remains crucial.
References


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ABC, (2003) Council urged to offer more CBD open space,


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Appendices

APPENDIX A: STAGE ONE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet - Urban Parks Survey

The Project: The aim of this project is investigate how residents value Wollongong City Centre. The purpose of the research is to better understand the relationship between the amenities in Wollongong city centre and how they affect the quality of life for residents. Benefits for participants arise from creating an opportunity to directly inform Council’s City Centre Revitalisation Strategy. Survey results will be published in a Research Thesis, and may be used in academic journal articles, reports, books, conferences and media publications.

How to participate: It should only take a few minutes to complete this short survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary; you are not obliged in any way to fill in these forms. If you do chose to participate, do not write your name on the survey. All information gathered by this survey is done so anonymously. Please post the completed short survey in the prepaid envelope provided by 16 June. Your competition and return of this survey is tacit consent for use in research. There are no known risks associated with participation.

Invitation to participate in future research: This short survey is the first stage of this project. The second stage involves talking with Hayden. Participation in this stage is again voluntary. If you would be happy to participate in follow-up conversation about public amenities in Wollongong City Centre, please indicate, and fill in the enclosed form with your survey.

Due to the anonymity of the survey, your survey can not be retracted once posted. If you chose to participate in the follow-up conversations by filling in the attached form; you can withdraw by contacting the researcher at any time. The decision not to participate, or to withdraw from the study, will not affect any current or future relationship with the University of Wollongong.

If you have any enquiries about the research, or should issues arise, please contact: the Ethics Officer (Research Office, University of Wollongong) or Gordon Waitt (Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong) Or Hayden Knobel (Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong)

Contact details:

Ethics Officer – email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au Telephone: (02) 4221 3386
Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Urban Parkland

The Project. The aim of this project is investigate the role of the urban parkland in the lives of the residents of Wollongong City Centre.

The purpose of the research is to better understand the relationship between the parkland in Wollongong and peoples quality of life in the city. Benefits for participants arise from creating an opportunity to share stories of their experiences and opinions about parklands in Wollongong city centre. For scholars and urban planners this project provides an opportunity to better understanding how and why people living in Wollongong City centre value and experience parklands.

What you will be asked to do. Your role in this project involves participating voluntarily in two stages. In the first stage you will be asked to answer questions that are structured to produce a conversation about the parkland in Wollongong City Centre. The emphasis is always on your ideas, activities, experiences and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will take about 30 minutes or more. The risks of participation are envisaged as low. The research design does not involve lines of questioning that may evoke emotional distress, or techniques that may sustain physical harm, through the use of invasive procedures. As a participant, you always have the right to cease the interview or your involvement at any time, and to withdraw data you have contributed (without providing a reason why). Typical questions in the interview include: How long have you lived in Wollongong? How often do You visit parks? What do you think is the best/worst urban park? Why do you hold these opinions? What are the most pleasing/displeasing aspects of the city centre? The last date for withdrawl is 31st of July 2014. You will be asked to give a pseudonym to be used in the project to ensure your anonymity. Interviews are digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to assist interpretation. However, the transcripts always remain confidential. Access to the transcript is only by the researcher.

The final stage has two options. First you are invited to photograph your experiences of urban parklands over a week. These photographs then form the basis for the follow-up conversation. The follow-up interview will take about 30 minutes or more. Typical Questions include; tell me about why you took this photograph. What sorts of experiences do you associate with this item in the
photograph? Does the item in the photograph trigger any memories? Again interviews are digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to assist interpretation. However, the transcripts always remain confidential. Access to the transcript is only by the researcher. If you give permission to the researcher to use/ keep the photos for the research project, these will be digitally altered to protect the identities of the people within these images, including yourself. Alternatively, you may prefer to accept the invitation to go for a walk with the researcher through Wollongong city centre parkland that is meaningful to you. During the walk you will be asked to talk about how you value the parkland. Typical interview questions include: Tell me about the route through the park that we are talking today. Why is it important? What do you value about walking through the park? What things do you notice?

The walk takes about 30 minutes or so. Again the conversation will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to assist interpretation. However, the transcripts always remain confidential. Access to the transcript is only by the researcher.
APPENDIX C: FIRST DRAFT OF THE SURVEY

Public Spaces, Public Life Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Non-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

Are an Aboriginal Australian or Torres Strait Islander?

Yes  No

Occupation

Suburb

Country of birth

Parents

Country of birth

1

2

1. How long have you lived at your current address?

2. How you lived in the Illawarra?

We want to understand Wollongong City Centre as residents see it. Hence, we are asking people who live in Wollongong to draw a map. This is not a test of memory or skill. We don’t expect a perfect drawing – just a sketch or mind map of what you recall. Start by drawing the things that are most familiar to you in Wollongong City Centre.

Please name the places that you do remember, even if the names are your own. Don’t worry if you cannot recall the name of places. Remember, this is your version of Wollongong City Centre. Hence, the names you would normally use.
Tell is what you think about Wollongong City Centre parklands

1. Do you work in Wollongong City Centre? (YES/NO)
   If no, please go to question 5.

2. If yes, how close do you work to a parkland of Wollongong City Centre?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next to or adjacent to</th>
<th>5 minute walk or less</th>
<th>5 to -10 minute walk</th>
<th>Greater than 10 mins</th>
<th>Outside comfortable walking distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Do you use Wollongong city centre parklands in the course of your everyday work-related activities? This may be break-times or walking to or from unpaid or paid work. (YES/NO)

4. If no, what prevents you visiting city centre parkland in the course of your everyday work? (You can select more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety concerns</th>
<th>No shade</th>
<th>Too crowded or noisy</th>
<th>Concerns about dirt, sweat etc.</th>
<th>Personal routine</th>
<th>Lack of time</th>
<th>Concerns about professionalism</th>
<th>Never considered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other – Please indicate

5. How close do you live to a Wollongong City Centre parkland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next to or adjacent to</th>
<th>5 minute walk or less</th>
<th>5 to -10 minute walk</th>
<th>Greater than 10 mins</th>
<th>Outside comfortable walking distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Do you use any of the Wollongong City Centre parklands? (YES/NO)
   If yes, please go to question 7. If no, please go to question 8.

7. If yes what do you do/use the parklands for? (You can select more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walking</th>
<th>Jogging</th>
<th>entertaining</th>
<th>meeting place</th>
<th>children’s play</th>
<th>Socialising</th>
<th>Thinking space</th>
<th>Relaxing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other (please indicate)

8. If No, What prevents you from using Wollongong City Centre parklands in the course of your everyday leisure activities (You can select more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety concerns</th>
<th>No shade</th>
<th>Too crowded or noisy</th>
<th>Concerns about dirt, sweat etc.</th>
<th>Personal routine</th>
<th>Lack of time</th>
<th>Prefer other forms of leisure.</th>
<th>Never considered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other – Please indicate

9. Irrespective of use, do you value Wollongong city centre parklands? (YES/NO)

10. If yes, which city centre parkland(s) do you value most?

11. Why do you value this/these Wollongong city centre parkland(s)?

12. What do you like most about the city centre parklands as a feature of Wollongong?
APPENDIX D: SECOND VERSION OF SURVEY

Public Spaces, Public Life Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18-30</th>
<th>31-45</th>
<th>46-60</th>
<th>60+</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Non-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are an Aboriginal Australian or Torres Strait Islander? ☐ Yes ☐ 10

Parent's Country of birth 1 2

Street
Country of birth

Occupation

Less than 2 years 2-5 years 6-15 years More than 15 years

1. How long have you lived at your current address? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
2. How long have you lived in Illawarra? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

We want to understand Wollongong City Centre as residents see it. Hence, we are asking people who live in Wollongong to draw a map. This is not a test of memory or skill. We don’t expect a perfect drawing – just a sketch or mind map of what you recall. Start by drawing the things that are most familiar to you in Wollongong City Centre.

Please name the places that you do remember, even if the names are your own. Don’t worry if you cannot recall the name of places. Remember, this is your version of Wollongong City Centre. Hence, the names you would normally use.
Tell us what you think about the city centre parks of Wollongong

1. How close do you live to one of the city centre parks in Wollongong? (Minutes walking time)
   - □ Next/adjacent to
   - □ 5 minute walk or less
   - □ 5 to -10 minute walk
   - □ 10 – 15 mins
   - □ Greater than 15 mins

2. How often do you use city centre parks in your free time?
   - □ Always
   - □ Usually
   - □ Sometimes
   - □ Rarely
   - □ Never

3. If always, usually or sometimes, what do you use the parks for? (You can select more than one)
   - □ Leisurely Walking
   - □ Sport
   - □ Thinking space
   - □ As a shortcut
   - □ Other

   □ Meeting place
   □ Running
   □ Relaxing
   □ Outdoor Gym equipment
   □ Personal training
   □ Socialising

4. If rarely or never, what prevents you from using the parks? (You can select more than one)
   - □ Safety
   - □ Personal routine
   - □ Concerns about dirt, sweat etc
   - □ No shade
   - □ Lack of time
   - □ Crowd/Noisy
   - □ Never Considered
   - □ Prefer other forms of leisure
   - □ Other

5. If you do not work in the city centre go to question 8. If you do work in the city centre, how often do you use city centre parks? E.g. work breaks
   - □ Always
   - □ Usually
   - □ Sometimes
   - □ Rarely
   - □ Never

6. If always, usually or sometimes, what do you use the parks for? (You can select more than one)
   - □ Leisurely Walking
   - □ Sport
   - □ Thinking space
   - □ Other

   □ Meeting place
   □ Running
   □ Relaxing
   □ Personal training
   □ Socialising

7. If rarely or never, what prevents you from using the parks? During work hours (You can select more than one)
   - □ Safety
   - □ Personal routine
   - □ Concerns about dirt, sweat etc
   - □ No Shade
   - □ Lack of time
   - □ Crowd/Noisy
   - □ Never Considered
   - □ Prefer other forms of leisure
   - □ Concerns about professionalism
   - □ Other

8. Irrespective of use, Please circle the number that best represents how you agree or disagree with the following statement

   I value city centre parks in Wollongong

   Strongly agree
   1
   2
   3
   4
   5
   6
   Strongly disagree
9. Why did you circle this level of agreement for the above Statement “I value city centre parks in Wollongong”?

10. **Please circle** the number that best represents how you agree or disagree with the following statements; or circle “not familiar with this park”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>(not familiar with this park)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value MacCabe Park (on Burelli Street)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Market Square Park (At end of Market Street)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Pioneer Park (Rose Garden, corner of Bank and Kembla Street)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Lang Park (Behind St Marys High school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Osborne Park (Directly across from the Harbor foreshore)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Stewart Park</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Flagstaff Hill Park (lighthouse)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>(not familiar with this park)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. What would you *change* about the city centre parks in Wollongong? Any *additional comments*?

This Questionnaire is the first stage in a social research project on how the residents of Wollongong City centre use and value the its Parkland and open spaces. **The second stage involves interviews. If you would be happy to participate, please indicate, and fill in the enclosed form with your questionnaire.**

Please post the completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided by the first week of June.

Thanks for your assistance.
How do you value and use parks in the City?

Wollongong City Council and the University of Wollongong are partnering to support a research project about how City Centre residents value and use parks in the City. This survey is being conducted as part of a project on City Center public amenities by Hayden Knobel, an Honours student with the Department of Geography and Sustainable Communities at the University. The work he undertakes, and information he collects, will directly inform Council’s City Centre Revitalisation Strategy, and more specifically, Wollongong Public Spaces Public Life Wollongong.nsw.gov.au/PSPL.

Get involved – volunteer to complete a survey

Fill out the short survey (attached) and return in the pre-paid envelope by 16th June 2014. You must be 18 or older. Your response will be used in this important research about your City and your information will remain anonymous.

Nominate to be interviewed by Hayden about the public amenities in Wollongong City Centre. An Invitation to participate in this future research is attached.

Your help in conducting this project is greatly appreciated and will be valuable in understanding how residents value and use their City.

Thank you for your time

Contact Information

Ethics Officer – email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au Telephone: (02) 4221 3386
Gordon Waitt - email gwaitt@uow.edu.au Telephone: (02) 42213 684
Hayden Knobel – Email hk664@uowmail.edu.au Telephone 0437042982
Participant Information Sheet - Urban Parks Survey

The Project: The aim of this project is to investigate how residents value Wollongong City Centre. The purpose of the research is to better understand the relationship between the amenities in Wollongong city centre and how they affect the quality of life for residents. Benefits for participants arise from creating an opportunity to directly inform Council's City Centre Revitalisation Strategy. Survey results will be published in a Research Thesis, and may be used in academic journal articles, reports, books, conferences and media publications.

How to participate: It should only take a few minutes to complete this short survey. Participation in this survey is voluntary; you are not obliged in any way to fill in these forms. If you do choose to participate, do not write your name on the survey. All information gathered by this survey is done so anonymously. Please post the completed short survey in the prepaid envelope provided by 16 June. Your competition and return of this survey is tacit consent for use in research. There are no known risks associated with participation.

Invitation to participate in future research: This short survey is the first stage of this project. The second stage involves talking with Hayden. Participation in this stage is again voluntary. If you would be happy to participate in follow-up conversation about public amenities in Wollongong City Centre, please indicate, and fill in the enclosed form with your survey.

Due to the anonymity of the survey, your survey can not be retracted once posted. If you chose to participate in the follow-up conversations by filling in the attached form; you can withdraw by contacting the researcher at any time. The decision not to participate, or to withdraw from the study, will not affect any current or future relationship with the University of Wollongong.

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Contact details:
Ethics Officer – email iso-ethics@uow.edu.au Telephone: (02) 4221 3386
Gordon Watt - email gwatt@uow.edu.au Telephone: (02) 42213 684
Hayden Knobel – email hkn664@uowmail.edu.au Telephone 0437042982
Our City Spaces Survey

Wollongong City Council and the University of Wollongong are partnering to support a research project about how City Centre residents value and use parks and green space in the City. Please Fill out the short survey (attached) and return in the pre-paid envelope by 16 June 2014. You must be 18 or older. Your response will be used in this important research about your City and your information will remain anonymous.

How do you use parks in the City?

1. How close do you live to one of the city centre parks in Wollongong? (Minutes walking time)
   - [ ] Next/adjacent to
   - [ ] 5 minute walk or less
   - [ ] 5 to -10 minute walk
   - [ ] 10 – 15 mins
   - [ ] Greater than 15 mins

2. How often do you use city centre parks in your free time?
   - [ ] Always
   - [ ] Usually
   - [ ] Sometimes
   - [ ] Rarely
   - [ ] Never

2a. If always, usually or sometimes, what do you use the parks for? (You can select more than one)
   - [ ] leisure/ walking
   - [ ] meeting place
   - [ ] thinking space
   - [ ] sport
   - [ ] personal training
   - [ ] a shortcut
   - [ ] children’s play
   - [ ] relaxing
   - [ ] running
   - [ ] socialising
   - [ ] outdoor gym equipment
   - [ ] Other ________________

2b. If rarely or never, what prevents you from using the parks? (You can select more than one)
   - [ ] Safety
   - [ ] Lack of time
   - [ ] Crowded/Noisy
   - [ ] No shade
   - [ ] Personal routine
   - [ ] Never Considered
   - [ ] Concerns about dirt, sweat etc
   - [ ] Prefer other forms of leisure
   - [ ] Other ________________

3. If you work in the city centre, how often do you use city centre parks? E.g. work breaks (If you do not work in the city centre go to question 4).
   - [ ] Always
   - [ ] Usually
   - [ ] Sometimes
   - [ ] Rarely
   - [ ] Never

3a. If always, usually or sometimes, what do you use the parks for? (You can select more than one)
   - [ ] leisure/ walking
   - [ ] meeting place
   - [ ] thinking space
   - [ ] sport
   - [ ] personal training
   - [ ] a shortcut
   - [ ] children’s play
   - [ ] relaxing
   - [ ] running
   - [ ] socialising
   - [ ] outdoor gym equipment
   - [ ] Other ________________

3b. If rarely or never, what prevents you from using the parks? (You can select more than one)
   - [ ] Safety
   - [ ] Lack of time
   - [ ] Crowded/Noisy
   - [ ] No shade
   - [ ] Personal routine
   - [ ] Never Considered
   - [ ] Concerns about dirt, sweat etc
   - [ ] Prefer other forms of leisure
   - [ ] Other ________________


4. Sketch your City
We want to understand Wollongong City Centre as residents see it. Hence, we are asking people who live in Wollongong to draw a map. This is not a test of memory or skill. We don’t expect a perfect drawing – just a sketch or mind map of what you recall. Start by drawing the things that are most familiar to you in Wollongong City Centre.

Please name the places that you do remember, even if the names are your own. Don’t worry if you cannot recall the name of places. Remember, this is your version of Wollongong City Centre. Hence, the names you would normally use.
Our City Spaces Survey

What Value do you place on parks in the City?

5. Irrespective of use, Please circle the number that best represents how you agree or disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure/ Don’t know this park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I value City Centre parks in Wollongong</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value MacCabe Park</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Market Square</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>I value Pioneer Park</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>I value Lang Park</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>I value Osborne Park</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>I value Stuart Park</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value Flagstaff Hill</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6. Why did you circle this level of agreement for the above Statement “I value city centre parks in Wollongong”?

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Invitation to participate in future research

This form invites you to participate in further research. This will be a short interview(s) to discuss the public amenities in Wollongong city center and will be held at a time and place of your own convenience.

- Filling in this form only indicates an expression of interest.
- You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.
- Your contact details will not be shared or used for any other purpose other than this study.

If you would be happy to participate, please fill your contact details below and enclose this form with your questionnaire. Post the completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelope provided by (Date 16 June 2014).

Thank You for your consideration.

I, ____________________________, would like to be interviewed as part of this research study.

(Print your name here)

__________________________________________  (Sign your name here)

__________________________________________  (Date)

__________________________________________

Email address

__________________________________________

Mobile Phone  Home Phone

☐ I consent to the researcher contacting me in regard to arranging a convenient time for an interview. I understand that I will be given further details about participation in the project.

If you have any inquiries or wish to withdraw, please contact

Hayden Knobel - Email hk664@uowmail.edu.au - Phone 0437042982
APPENDIX F: THE STUDY AREA OF WOLLONGONG CITY CENTRE

The boundaries of the postal survey are marked by the red border.