Better Rural City Park Planning and Measuring Walkability to Improve Older People’s Health and Well-being

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Better Parks for People project

Why and how do older people use parks in regional and rural Australia?
Are parks and facilities in the right places?
What is the impact of changing parks and facilities?

Project funded by FACS Liveable Communities Grant Round 1 (2016-2017)
Rachel Whitsed, Rosemary Black, Alexandra Knight and Robin Harvey, in collaboration with AlburyCity
Walkability project

How easy is it for older people to walk around Australia’s regional and rural cities?
Mapping and analysing walkability helps councils better address this important component of liveability

Project funded by FACS Liveable Communities Grant Round 3 (2018-2019)
Rachel Whitsed and Ana Horta, in collaboration with AlburyCity
Better Parks for People project

Spatial tool for strategic park planning in regional towns

Used by councils to plan and develop parks, targeted to the needs of older people

Prototype tool developed in conjunction with AlburyCity
Parks are important for older people

Research shows that using parks provides physical health, mental health and social benefits for older people

Walkability is particularly important

• What attracts older people to parks?
• What limits park use by older people?
• How can we make parks more useful and accessible for older people?
Project approach

Social research
- Online survey
- Focus groups
- Park observations

Spatial research
- Park mapping and classification
- Features and amenities
- Access and connectivity

Prototype tool
Social research: online survey

143 respondents, 57 aged over 65

How often do you visit parks in Albury?

Why do you visit the parks and playgrounds in Albury?

How important is it that facilities are in the park?
Toilets, seats, paths, car park, playground,…

How important is it that the facilities are quick and easy to get to from one another?

How important is it that the park is easy to get to?

How important are natural features of a park to you?

• Water, trees, bird life,…
Social research: focus groups

6 focus groups, 4-18 people in each, aged over 65
Walking is the key activity undertaken in parks
Socialising, community events and quiet enjoyment of nature are also very important
Facilities which support these activities include toilets, paths, frequent seating, shade (including trees and shelters)
Natural features are very important – trees, river, birdlife
Places for activity – free tennis court, seniors’ playground
“Well, you’re in the bush. You’re away from the traffic. You have good toilets. There’s tables, there’s seats”

“...the sportsground has probably bugger all shade. You can’t sit down anywhere. So I think as far as parks go you’d avoid sportsgrounds. You’d keep away from them. But then as long as there’s somewhere to sit in the shade and somewhere reasonable to walk on. It doesn’t have to be concrete, but as long as it’s reasonable and not full of pot holes”

“I don’t go if there isn’t a toilet”
Social research: park observations

Observed 15 park locations over 6 days at 4 different times

Modified SOPARC methodology to get key information on facility use by different demographics

1,660 people observed, 135 aged over 65
Estimate park catchment based on walking distance – specifically calibrated for older people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive – more likely to visit</th>
<th>Negative – less likely to visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water features – river, lake</td>
<td>Sporting field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of tree shade</td>
<td>Skate park</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paths</td>
<td>Rugged terrain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Not maintained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toilet facilities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Large playground</td>
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Spatial research: tool output
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Spatial research

The tool helps address a number of questions
What are the demographics around each park?
Are the right parks in the right places with the right facilities for the demographic catchment?
Where are there gaps in open space provision?
What happens when changes are made to parks and facilities or demographics in the area?
Summary: Better Parks for People

Tool developed specifically for regional cities
Provides rapid and robust analysis and scenario modelling of open space provisions for different demographics
Highlight parks where changes could have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the local aged community in a regional city
Valuable insights into what older people in regional cities value in parks and how they use them

http://thinkspace.csu.edu.au/bpfp/
Assessing and developing a walkability index targeted to older Australians in regional cities

- Measure the walkability for older people in Albury
- Model and map walkability by selecting and validating appropriate factors that contribute to this measure
- Model the relationship between health status, walking and the built and natural environment

Source: Bilal et al. 2016
Walkability project

Participants are recruited to wear a small GPS tracker for two weeks (QStarz BT-Q1300ST)
Demographic and self-reported health data collected via survey
Repeated over 2-3 seasons (spring, summer, autumn)
Locations, levels of activity and time of activity mapped
Walkability project

Index of walkability will be developed related to natural and built environment
In Albury but would like to expand to other regional locations simultaneously
thinkspace.csu.edu.au/walkability/
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