

CONTESTED SPACE. FUTURE CHALLENGES AND PATHWAYS FOR OPEN SPACE IN AUSTRALIAN SUBURBS

AIM: To understand the contemporary dynamics of open space distribution and management in an Australian city and inform a future sustainable pathway for policy and practice.

Current open space policies have not been developed with the capacity to regulate infill development in a way which would allow open space across land uses to provide continuing health, recreational and environmental services. Future planning will require an integrated approach across all land uses to be able to provide a functional system that can incorporate population growth pressures and mitigate the urban heat island effect in a time of changing climatic conditions.

What are the political, economic and social dynamics that influence open space distribution and management?

What role does the built environment industry have in open space provision?

How can land use policy and management practices provide a resilient open space system?



Figure 1: Open space in the suburbs of Melbourne.

Methodology

The city of Melbourne is being used as a case study. Open space at a

metropolitan, municipal and neighbourhood scale is investigated; distribution and development and management practices are being considered as a process involving multiple world views and human actors. Mixed methods combining aggregate data analysis to measure open space distribution, qualitative interviews with built environment professionals in the public and private sectors, and policy document content analysis will be used.

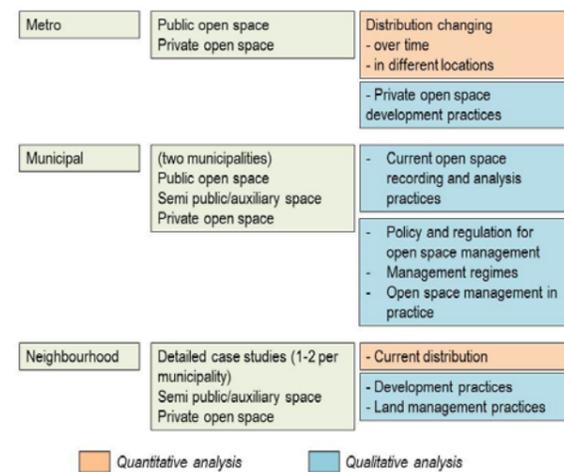


Figure 2: Focus of enquiry: spatial scales of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Results

Melbourne's open space system spans property boundaries and provides key social and ecological services. With significant population growth predicted over the next 50 years, high levels of infill housing will be required. Current housing pressures and open space availability varies significantly throughout Melbourne; a predicament which will be exacerbated as higher density residential zones are applied around public transport routes and activity

centres in clusters or tracts, and low density zones overlaying much of the greater suburban area. These zoning practices do not take into account availability of nearby public or surrounding adjacent private open spaces.

In areas with predominantly smaller lots, or areas with significant proportions of growth orientated planning zones which allow for greater subdivision, the open space allocations are such that there may be wide tracts of residential land which when fully developed, will be unable to support large canopied trees. In contrast, some municipalities with larger lot sizes may have greater capacity for infill development whilst maintaining higher levels of open space, but current zoning prevents development.

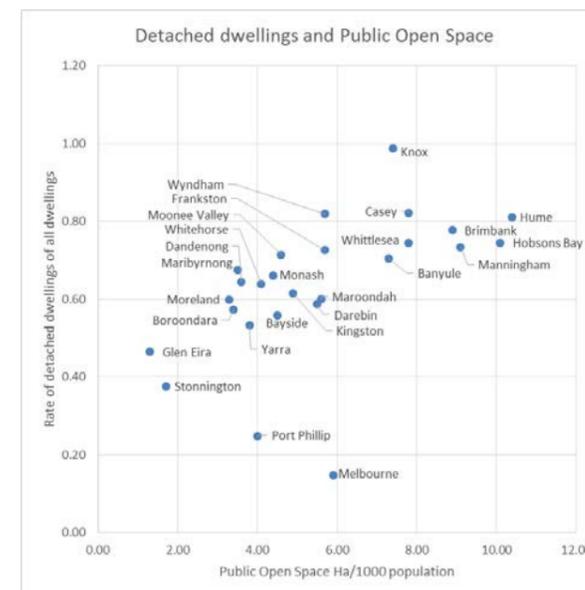


Figure 3: Distribution of public open space and private open space using rates of detached dwellings (median .65) in Melbourne, by municipality. Sources: Office of the Victorian Valuer General (2012), Victorian Environmental Assessment Commission (2011).

For the open space system to deliver ecosystem service and urban microclimate benefits; open space, both public and private needs to be more evenly distributed across the suburban landscape. Population projections show higher growth will be focused on municipalities with low existing rates of public open space, and where in some cases, private open spaces currently make a significant contribution to the open space system.

Public parks & reserves can't replace backyards; but a mix of public open space, private open space and streetscapes may.

Anticipated impacts:

Contribute to the growing body of multidisciplinary research that can contribute to system wide open space planning and management in Australian cities.

Develop a framework that can facilitate high quality open space system development as a part of broader suburban infill development processes.

Identify requirements for professional education about open space systems and requirements.

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