

Research Directions

Office of Research Services

Universal Design and Cultural Context

Dr Zoe Sofoulis and Adjunct Professor Helen Armstrong, Centre for Cultural Research, Associate Professor Michael Bounds, Urban Research Centre, Dr Abby Lopes and Ms Tara Andrews, School of Engineering, together with Penrith City Council have been awarded a UWS Research Partnership Program grant to investigate cultural barriers to accessing recreational spaces in Penrith.



'To overcome the marginalization of people with diverse abilities, principles of Universal Design are drawn on to make public facilities and spaces more physically accessible' says Dr Sofoulis. 'But what can be done to ensure such facilities are also culturally inclusive? The principles for Universal Design embrace equitable use, flexible use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, and low physical effort. In Australia, design standards that ensure useability and accessibility to public open space are mandatory, but their effectiveness needs to be reviewed.'

This project will explore innovative uses of community arts, including mapping games, as a tool for gathering and interpreting data. The community mapping project will make use of Prof. Armstrong's prize-winning work on landscape and migration heritage, and her developments of creative community consultative processes derived from methods used by Common Ground UK and the Creative Village program in NSW. Prof. Armstrong explained, 'In culturally diverse communities such techniques have proved useful to explain many issues often difficult to find out about using traditional observational and focus group research methods.'

The community mapping project will involve artist Jenny Turpin, who draws from her background with Fairfield City Council's innovations in community involvement in planning and design, including the 'festival days' in public parks specifically aimed at identifying park-user needs in culturally diverse communities, and the 'Restoring the Waters' project with its extensive community arts involvement. The views of local and regional stakeholders, including major businesses, land developers, and other key organisations with interests in Penrith's development, will also be sought.

The findings from this research will feed directly into the Council's planning for recreational spaces, and enhance community well-being by ensuring more residents and visitors enjoy local facilities. Penrith City Council sees the project as a step in building stronger and multi-faceted partnership relationships with UWS.

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

Funding has been set at: \$24,997
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<http://www.uws.edu.au/ccr>

For more information on UWS Research Partnership Program, check:

<http://www.uws.edu.au/about/adminorg/devint/ors/fundingopps/internalgrants>