



Urban nature-based solutions: Sense of place and stewardship

Urban green-blue spaces, such as parks, waterways, street trees, gardens and nature reserves are essential elements of resilient and liveable cities. As well as being aesthetically pleasing, green-blue spaces provide many functions and benefits for people and the other species that call our cities home. They cool our cities, treat air and water, provide space for recreation and connection, and habitat for biodiversity.

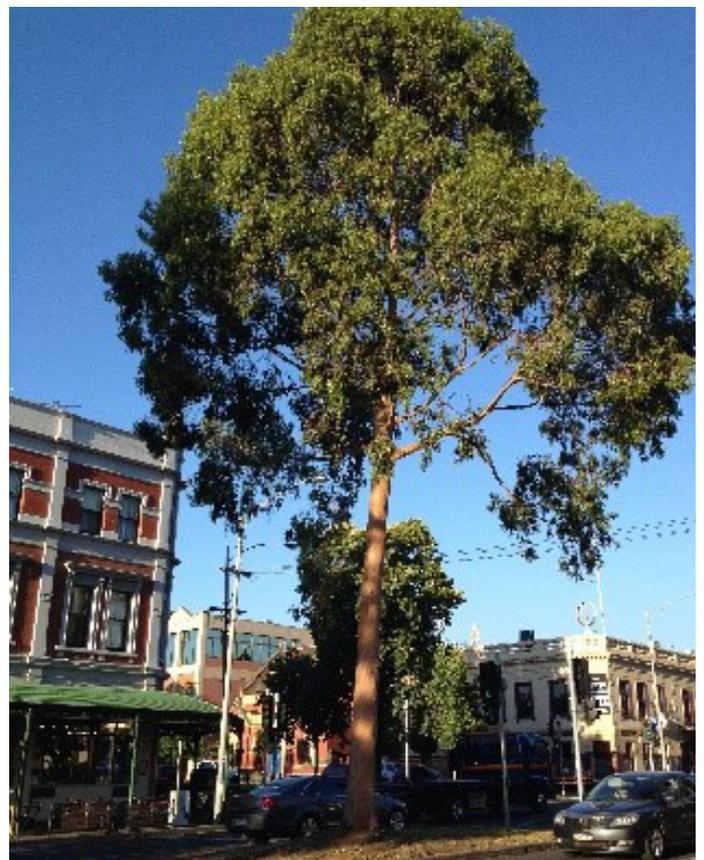
The green-blue spaces in cities are important in creating and defining a 'sense of place': the local character and personality of place. Indigenous people's custodianship of Country brings deep knowledge and understanding to this sense of place. Green-blue spaces also provide residents with 'breathing space' – places beyond the 'concrete jungle' to play, relax, meet friends and family, have adventures or find quiet spaces for solitary dreaming and contemplation. As people's connections with their local urban nature strengthen, there are opportunities for stewardship of nature through involvement in on-ground activities, citizen science, and protecting and caring for the biodiversity, plants and animals in local patches of nature, gardens and streets.

Attachment to nature in place

Green-blue spaces often feature large in memories of childhood adventures, reinforcing that our relationship with nature is also often an emotional attachment to place. 'Place' is the intersection of nature, social relations and meaning.

In creating and sustaining place, nature can be considered both a passive element but also an active participant. In designing and building cities, green spaces are created within the urban fabric as one of the elements of the built environment. Formalised urban planning approaches have long recognised the importance of urban green spaces for their aesthetic and recreational functions. More recently, green spaces are increasingly recognised as providing a wide range of benefits and 'ecosystem services' including regulating temperature, air pollution and stormwater runoff. Importantly, it is often the elements of nature that connect us to place, and that make places special for us.

What's your favourite local patch of nature? Perhaps it's the local park, or maybe it's the sound of running water in the local creek, or the magpies warbling in the street trees.



Images: (right) Street tree in Carlton, Melbourne. Second page: (left) *Acacia dealbata*, Brunswick, Melbourne and (right) Darebin Creek, Alphington, Melbourne. Credit: Judy Bush.

Indigenous perspectives and connections to Country

For First Nations peoples, stewardship of the land is deepened to obligations for custodianship of Country, expressed as rights and responsibilities to land and social existence. Custodianship of land, water and sea, articulated as 'caring for Country', is deeply embedded in Indigenous peoples' culture, and is handed down in stories, art, practices and spirituality across generations for tens of thousands of years. 'Country' encompasses the land, peoples and non-human inhabitants. Indigenous perspectives on stewardship of place are based on fulfilling mutual responsibilities for the long-term survival, productivity and biodiversity of the land, and knowledge of Country.

Engagement with Indigenous perspectives on caring for Country that take a whole-systems approach – a mutual responsibility to the other human and non-human parts of our complex urban ecosystems, through dialogue, not appropriation – can underpin a deepened relationship to sustainable care of place.



More information

CAUL Indigenous Engagement Program: <https://nespurban.edu.au/about/indigenous-engagement/>

CAUL Indigenous Engagement Program activities: <https://nespurban.edu.au/about/indigenous-engagement/resources/>

Indigenous plant use: <https://nespurban.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Indigenous-plant-use.pdf>

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Nature stewardship

Urban green-blue spaces provide the location for continuing opportunities for connection with nature in place, and for building knowledge and a sense of stewardship for the local ecosystems and biodiversity. Stewardship that incorporates active involvement in nature-based planning, management and maintenance may provide opportunities for increased connection with nature, and increased social connectedness and wellbeing.

With increasing sustainability challenges at both local and global scales, mechanisms for strengthening stewardship of our places, the landscapes and biodiversity, have increased importance.

For local residents: Get involved!

- Find out about the Traditional Owners of your area here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>. Local Indigenous ecological knowledge reflects wisdom developed over thousands of years of experience and embeds deep understandings of complex relationships between people, nature, land, culture and ecology. Connect with the stories of place, the traditional land management practices, local foods, local crafts, language and place names.

For policymakers and planners: Lead with good practice!

- Support and co-design programs with local Traditional Owner groups. Support Traditional Owner-led programs and implementation, including the design of materials such as interpretive signage. Work with and purchase from First Nations' owned businesses for services such as design, materials, maintenance; employ Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people as urban rangers.

Find out more here:

Indigenous knowledge and nature in our cities <https://nespurban.edu.au/about/indigenous-engagement/resources/>

Sources

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CoM and MSI. (2016). *Caring for Country: an urban application*. The possibilities for Melbourne. Melbourne: City of Melbourne and Monash Sustainability Institute Retrieved from https://nespurban.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CaringforCountryReport_Apr2016.pdf

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