

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way William Blake

#### TO TREE OR NOT TO TREE:

THE CHALLENGES OF GROWING A FOREST IN AN URBAN SETTING

Dr May Carter Edith Cowan University mayc@upnaway.com

#### Before we start ...

• How did a Western Australian (who is not an arborist) get to be in the UK talking to you???



#### About me ...

- Over the past 30 years I've worked in a variety of roles in outdoor recreation and leisure, adventure tourism, environmental education and community development.
- Since completing a PhD in Environmental Management in 2009, I worked with a not-forprofit organisation and as a consultant researcher promoting the human and environmental benefits of access to good quality urban green spaces.
- I now work with the Western Australian government as a policy advisor on recreational access and protected area management.

#### Recent projects

Research and development of policy and strategy relating to health and urban landscapes, environmental management, parkland use and community engagement in urban parkland planning and design.



PUBLIC PARKLAND PLANNING PROCESSES & PRACTICE PUBLIC PARKLAND PLANNING AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

urtin University



Landscape Design Guide for Public Open Space in New Residential Developments

Helen Brown, Dianne Katscherian, May Carter, Jeff Spickett

Cool communities: Urban trees, climate and health



CITY OF SUBIACO PUBLIC OPEN SPACE PLAN



# So what are we going to talk about today...

- The many challenges to growing an urban forest ...
- The challenges as I see them from a social-ecological perspective ...
  - Changing urban landscapes
    Planning for urban consolidation
    Understanding community attitudes
    Working together to grow greener cities

### Urban landscapes

- Engineered urban landscapes are influenced by land use history, cultural preference, socio-economic status and patterns of residential development.
- How does urbanisation transform ecosystems?



# Why is urban biodiversity conservation important?

 Conserving biodiversity in cities is an important global issue as urban environments play a role in the conservation of local and regional species and provide a platform for urban citizens to understand the natural processes that ultimately govern global health and human sustainability.



Hostetler, Mark, Allen, Will, & Meurk, Colin. (2011). Conserving urban biodiversity? Creating green infrastructure is only the first step. Landscape and Urban Planning, 100 (4), 369-371.

#### Urban ecosystems ...

• The study of ecology has historically focused on pristine ecosystems, most often found outside cities.

• For some people the big question is whether biodiversity conservation and management should only be concerned with endemic and native species, and not include introduced and exotic species.

#### Redefining urban biodiversity ...?

- Do we need to redefine our understandings of biodiversity in urban systems where human intervention is the norm ... and introduced species are commonplace?
- What does biodiversity conservation mean to the people who live in cities?

• Is nature nasty or nice?



#### Suburban nullarbor



## Streetscapes: old & new





#### Urban consolidation



Aerial photos of a three-unit redevelopment in Nollamara, dated 26 September 2009, 31 October 2009, and 23 October 2010 respectively. The extensive vegetation of the parent lot (which in some cases is iconic to certain streetscapes and local communities) is entirely cleared. Although neatly fandscaped', many months after occupation of the three dwellings, little exists in terms of vegetation to replace the original flora.

## The Workshop: Perth 2013

- Focused on issues relating to health, heat island effect, urban consolidation and tree canopy management
- Discussion included:
  - Benefits; social, environmental and economic influences; perceived opportunities and conflicts
- 34 professionals working in urban planning and development, urban design, horticulture, arboriculture, parkland management, natural resource management and public health

Brown H, Katscherian D, Carter M, Spickett J. Cool communities: Urban trees, climate and health. Perth, WA: Curtin University and WHO Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health Impact Assessment, 2013.

#### Key concerns

#### • Health, urban development and planning

- lack of clear policies and guidelines;
- lack of awareness and formal accounting of tree value, and
- cost of retaining trees during development.

#### • Horticulture, arboriculture, park management and natural resource management

provision of adequate space for trees; and
lack of tangible incentives to retain trees.

#### Key points of agreement

• Role that community engagement plays in:

- highlighting benefits
- pressuring policy-makers
- encouraging the market place to change current practice

 Community will not generally react unless substantial tree loss or obviously detrimental changes to amenity and comfort

## Huggers & haters

• The scope of community attitudes, perceptions and beliefs held about trees is conflicting and confusing.





## The 3 Fs

 Fear of forest: influenced by tradition, experience, level of knowledge, nature connection

 Fall & Fire: influenced by risk aversion, experience and reported outcomes of extreme events GOING TO THE WOODS IS GOING HOME; FOR I SUPPOSE WE CAME FROM THE WOODS ORIGINALLY.

- JOHN MUIR

TREEPEOPLE



#### BE CAREFUL





#### Fear of forest

- History and tradition: fairy and folk stories
- "Up to no good": hideaways and haunts
- Evolutionary preference: wide open spaces
- Biophobia: snakes, spiders and bitey things
- No nature connection: "scary, disgusting and uncomfortable"

Fall



## Fall

• For every tree that falls in a storm, many more stand

• Trees need to be managed like any other asset

• The right trees in the right places

## Fire



### Fire

- A major issue in Australia with new legislation restricting development in bushfire zones (a home in the forest is becoming a thing of the past) and creation of cleared buffer zones
- Tree selection: a shift to planting of less volatile non-native species
- Is a hotter, drier global climate going to see this happen in more places in the world??

## Influencing communities

What else influences people to grow, or more importantly not to grow, trees?

• Lack of knowledge?

- Lack of space?
- Reluctance to sweep leaves?
- Worried about their plumbing?
- No time, no money?

If people better understood the benefits of urban forestry, will they be more willing to grow trees?

## The other problem ...

#### •What's an urban forest???

#### What's an urban forest?

The city version?



## What's an urban forest?

#### The suburban version?





# What's an urban forest?

#### The built version?

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Singapore



# What's an urban forest?

#### The natural version?



### Imagine ...

A city designed around retaining trees and where planting trees near buildings, in parking lots, around your house, on the street and in parks, is the norm, not the exception.

## Aussies in action ...

202020 Vision
 <u>www.202020vision.com.au</u>



- City of Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy and Precinct Plans
- <u>http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/</u> <u>community/parks-open-spaces/urban-</u> <u>forest/Pages/urban-forest.aspx</u>



# Involve local communities

- Start local: explore local traditions and current needs
- Encourage community ownership: local problems need local solutions
- Build local knwledge, partnerships and capacity

## Build understanding

- We need to understand different decision drivers:
  - Social attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, experience and knowledge
  - Environmental opportunities and constraints, emerging urban ecosystems and long term urban sustainability
  - Economic and financial models for urban development
  - Political landscape

### Work together

•We need to better articulate the importance of urban trees and enable more people to understand what they contribute to urban landscapes and to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

•We need to work together

### Want to know more ...?

### Dr May Carter mayc@upnaway.com +61 409 889 270

