

A FIELD OF RESEARCH STRENGTH IN THE SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY PLANNING & ARCHITECTURE: *Indigenous People-Environment Research*

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Background

The Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC) is a largely self-supporting research and resource centre based in the School of Geography, Planning and Architecture at the University of Queensland. It was originally established in 1976 as the 'Aboriginal Data Archive' (ADA) and had evolved, by 1995, into a UQ Category 1 Research Centre. The Centre now fulfils three primary functions: as a research and consultancy practice, a teaching centre, and an archive, and focuses its work on the cultures and environments of indigenous peoples. Within Australia, the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre provides a national focal point for issues of Indigenous housing, architecture and a related set of socio-cultural problems to which members of the academic, government and community sectors can refer. The personnel of the AERC comprise the Director, a visiting Fellow, an Adjunct Associate Professor, several administrative staff, several research assistants, several professional consultants, a book-keeper, and between 9 and 13 RHD students some of whom are employed as research assistants and consultants on projects within the Centre.

The Indigenous People-Environment Field

The development of the research strength, *Indigenous People-Environment Relations* within the AERC is based on a purposeful decision in 1976 when the Centre's predecessor Unit (ADA) was founded. At this time the field of study was defined based on the theoretical foundations of the discipline (or multidiscipline)² of Environment-Behaviour Studies and overlaid with the social anthropology of Indigenous Australia and associated anthropological theory of culture and cultural change. Following this decision, the actual work of the AERC, as it has emerged over the last 30 years, can now be defined in accordance with the following map of research topics. For each of these topics it would be possible to separately identify publications and reports by AERC personnel and linkages with other national and international scholars and practitioners.

Map of the current Indigenous People-Environment Field at the AERC:-

Geographic Environment

Indigenous geography
Indigenous constructs of place
Cultural landscapes
Indigenous cultural heritage (site/landscape specific)
Native Title practice
Land Claim practice

Built Environment

Traditional Aboriginal Architecture
Aboriginal housing design and management
Aboriginal settlement history, classification & design
Public architecture – culturally appropriate design
Hospital environments for Indigenous people
Correctional environments for Indigenous people
Indigenous museums and cultural centres
Environmental health
Vernacular architecture

Artifactual Environment

Material culture studies
Cultural change and artefacts
Fish trap ethnography

Social Environment

Social groups and identity
Violence occurrence and prevention
Household studies
Crowding
Homelessness
Urban public place dwelling
Social problems and governance
Dispute Resolution (mediation) between Indigenous peoples, and between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous peoples and institutions
Sociospatial structures and territoriality
Sociocultural regions and residential mobility
Behaviour setting theory
Environmental control theory
Indigenous tourism
Transactional models of behaviour/environment
Indigenous place and social identity
Social Capital

Conceptual Environment

Indigenous geographic knowledge
Space and time constructs
Semiotics and environment
Religious constructs
Spatial perception and environmental meanings
Aboriginal environmental psychology

If there is a unique theoretical base that can be defined as emerging from Aboriginal People-Environment research, as opposed to those theories belonging to purely architecture or to anthropology, human geography etc. then such a theoretical base must rely for its uniqueness on its multi-disciplinary strengths. Assoc Prof Joseph Reser, a visiting Fellow at AERC writes in this context:-

.....contemporary work, whether it be land rights, the psychology of place, Aboriginal housing, or ethno-archaeology, is characterised by a real desire to better understand the nature, quality and meaning of people-setting transactions and experience. What assists all of us in the work we do are the emerging and merging discourses and perspectives of environmental studies, cultural studies, historical archaeology, virtual and phenomenological geography, and environment psychology. Such perspectives change what we do by changing how we think about what we do.

Aboriginal cultural perspectives on the nature of connections between people and place will continue to profoundly influence how we think about design and planning issues, and how it is that our built environment both determines and expresses how we see and experience our relationship with the natural and social world.

Longstanding AERC strengths

- The AERC is unique in maintaining a focus on Indigenous culture, environment and architecture, a reasonably sized postgraduate body, and a significant publication count and engagement with industry, government and professions, considering its size and funding levels.
- The theoretical framework of people-environment relations as applied to Indigenous contexts generates a wealth of research subjects and problems that span across a range of natural and built environment disciplines, the social sciences and philosophy. It exposes a number of gaps in the pure and applied research of more conventional disciplines that focus on Indigenous studies. Such a challenging framework continues to produce a stimulating culture of research amongst the AERC's postgraduate students and collaborating researchers.
- Aside from other areas of research activity, the AERC provides a national focal point for issues of Aboriginal housing and architecture. In this regard the Centre has gained widespread recognition from Architecture and Anthropology Departments within Australian Universities, as well as from a range of government agencies and Indigenous organisations.
- The Centre houses a substantial collection of literature and other data (photographs, cassette recordings, genealogies, maps, interview materials, etc) that provides an invaluable resource for postgraduate students, visiting researchers and consulting projects.
- Another of the Centre's strengths is the depth of the current Director's research experience. It involves more than 30 years studying Indigenous Australia from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes architecture, anthropology, environment-behaviour studies and related areas. These skills are transferred to AERC staff and postgraduate students.

The overall strength of the AERC performance in the Indigenous People-Environment Research field is assessed using seven sets of indicators. The first four indicators show strong performance and are partly a result of the unique origin and growth patterns of the AERC. These four are postgraduate numbers, publications, external engagement with industry and professional impacts. Three further indicators of performance are then put forward which have been more constrained by the limitations of the AERC growth in comparison to the first four. These last three are grant performance, linkages to other research groups and relation to other University of Queensland research strengths. These performance data are set out below and largely pertain to the last three or five years as respectively indicated.

Postgraduate Numbers, 2001-2004

Since 1995, the Director of the AERC has been the Principal Advisor for a significant number of postgraduate students.

Table 1: The number of P/G students supervised within the AERC during 2001-2004:

	2001	2002	2003	2004 (1 st semester)
Fulltime PhD:	4	4	5 (inc. 3 ext. enrolled)	3 (inc 1 ext enrolled)
Part time PhD:	3	4	5	5
Fulltime M.Phil:	2	3	2	-
Part time M.Arch.St.:	1	1	1	1
Total No.:	10	12	13	9

Of the above enrolments, the following graduations have occurred during this period (2001 to mid-2004)

PhD: 3
 M.Phil: 2
 M.Arch St: 1

Note: • At the time of writing, one further student was submitting his PhD thesis.

- During 2003, \$14,363 was generated from externally enrolled RHD students.

Publications

Assoc Prof Memmott is the author of 6 books, 100 published papers and over 200 technical reports for research clients. Since the provision of RHD supervision at the AERC in 1995, the postgraduate students have also generated numerous publications from their work.

Table 2: Summary of Publication Numbers (2001-2004)

	2001	2002	2003	2004 (to June 30)
1. Books/monographs	2	-	-	1
2. Book/monograph Chapters	-	-	-	-
3. Journal articles (refereed)	-	6	7	1
4. Journal articles (non-refereed)	2	3	1	3
5. Published conference papers (refereed)	-	5	5	1
6. Published conference papers (non-refereed)	-	3	2	2
7. Published consultancy reports (inc website)	1	5	2	2
Totals:	5	22	13	9

External engagement with industry (last five years, 1999-2004)

Consultancy to industry commenced in 1979. Since then, the Director has integrated his private consultancy practice (Paul Memmott & Associates – PMA) with the Centre in a mutually supportive manner and in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement signed with the School and EPSA Faculty. The Centre's applied research and consulting work currently encompasses Australian Aboriginal heritage surveys, native title claims, land claims, site recording, social impact assessment, social problem analysis, settlement and regional planning, housing design briefs and post-occupancy evaluation, institutional architecture design briefs (prisons, hospitals, courts), cultural centre design briefs, tourism, government policy advice, and expert witness work. Clients over the last five years (1999-2004) include the following:-

- Native Title and land rights industry. Clients:
 - National Native Title Tribunal (Cth)
 - Federal Court
 - Indigenous Representative Bodies Aboriginal Corporation (eg CYLC, CLC, Qld South, Gurang).
 - Indigenous Land Councils (eg Quandamooka Land Council)
 - National Oceans Office (Cth)
 - Indigenous Land Corporation (Cth)
 - Qld Main Roads Department
- Indigenous housing and homelessness. Clients:
 - Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
 - Department of Family and Community Services (Cth)
 - Royal Australian Institute of Architects
 - Department of Housing (Qld), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing
 - Department of Housing (NSW), Aboriginal Housing Office
 - Departments of Housing and Health (NT) and Indigenous Housing Authority of N.T.
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
 - Island Coordinating Council, Thursday Island
 - Aboriginal Coordinating Council, Cairns
- Indigenous violence. Clients:
 - Office of the Status of Women (Cth)
 - National Crime Prevention, Attorney-General (Cth)
- Cultural Heritage. Clients:
 - Aus Heritage
 - Mornington Shire Council

- Public architecture (Indigenous content). Clients:
 - Davenport Campbell and State Library of Qld (Millennium Arts Precinct, Brisbane)
 - Peter Hunt Architects, Perth (Magistrates and District Courts, Perth)
 - Broad Leighton Joint Venture (Perth CBD Courts Project)
 - Musgrave Park Cultural Centre
 - Spowers Architects (Secure Mental Health Facility, Townsville)
 - Cox Rayner Architects (Weipa Hospital)
 - Yam Island Community Council

Table 3: Number of unpublished consultancy reports produced by PMA in association with AERC , University of Queensland

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (to June 30 th)
18	9	10	11	7	3

Note that following the appointment of Paul Memmott as AERC Director on a half-time basis in 2002 (formerly on a quarter-time basis), the annual number of PMA consultancy contracts and reports has fallen due to the increase in University work. However a range of publications under the name of AERC continue to derive directly or indirectly from these consultancy projects.

Professional impacts (last five years, 1999-2004)

- AERC personnel as invited guest speakers (external to UQ) 1999-2004:

Memmott, P. & Eckermann, K. "Cultural Issues in the Architectural Design of Indigenous Custodial Facilities", Australian Institute of Criminology's "Best Practice Interventions in Corrections for Indigenous People" Conference, Adelaide, (1999).

Memmott, P. "Houses and Humpies Exhibition", Cobb & Co. Store Museum, Surat, Official Opening (1999).

Memmott, P. National Forum on "Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs, Where to Now?" National Crime Prevention, Canberra (1999).

Memmott, P. Paper on Indigenous violence to the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Working Group on Indigenous Family Violence, Canberra (1999).

Memmott, P. "Recent Changes in Indigenous Politics in Australia and the Changing Role of the Anthropologist", Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaysia (2000)

Memmott, P., Moran, M., Stacy, R. Long, S. & Holt, J. "Home Ownership for Indigenous People Living on Community Title Land in Queensland, Preliminary Community Survey" at the National Housing Conference, Brisbane, (2001).

Roman, C., Memmott, P. & Damaso, C. "Indigenous 'itinerants' in the Darwin and Palmerston Region", National Housing Conference, Brisbane (2001).

Memmott, P. & Fantin, S. "Ethnoarchitecture of the Northern Territory", for N.T. Chapter of Royal Australian Institute of Architects, at Northern Territory University (2002).

Memmott, P. & Meltzer, A. "Modelling Social and Institutional Capital in a Remote Australian Indigenous Community" at "Social Capital and Sustainability in Rural Communities – What is the Link?" By Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management, University of Technology, Sydney (2002).

Memmott, P. "Categories of Indigenous homeless people and good practice responses to their needs" at "AHURI: Work In Progress Seminar", Darwin (2003).

Memmott, P., Long, S. & Spring, F. "Categories of Indigenous homeless people and good practice responses to their needs", for the National Indigenous Homelessness Forum, Melbourne (2003).

Memmott, P. "Indigenous Cultures and the Design of Custodial Environments: Impact of design on human behaviour" at the Fourth National Corrective Service Administrators Conference, Fremantle (2003).

Memmott, P. "Values of a bi-cultural society in Alice Springs", at the "Charles Darwin Symposium Series 2003, Symposium 4: Emerging Futures", Alice Springs (2003).

Memcott, P. Homelessness Policy Futures Think Tank (Indigenous issues), Adelaide, as part of the National Evaluation of Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP IV) (2003).

Moran, M. "Governance Matters: Participation in Planning and Governance at Kowanyama", presentation to Qld Premiers Department and Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Brisbane (2003).

Grant, E. "Stemming the Flow: Designing Prisons – 'Correctional Facilities' for the Future", National Indigenous Custody Conference, Adelaide 14th – 15th October 2003.

Memcott, P., Bell, M., Long, S. & Brown, D. "Between Places: Indigenous mobility in remote and rural Australia". Work in Progress Seminar of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Darwin (2004).

Memcott, P. Paper presented to Queensland Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Forum on "Indigenous People and Public Spaces", paper titled "Public Place Dwelling Indigenous People: Alternative Strategies to the Law and Order Approach", Brisbane, 27/2/04.

Memcott, P. Presentation on "Aboriginal Housing – Past and Present" at Museum of Sydney, 17/5/04.

Memcott, P. Presentation to the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, Canberra, 10/8/04.

Grant, E. "Doing it hard: Aboriginal peoples in the Australian Prison System", presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Custodial Health Working Group, 29th July 2004.

• **Appearances of the AERC Director as an expert witness, 1999-2004:**

- Land Court of Qld
- Federal Court
- District Court, Mt Isa
- Family Court
- Qld Land Tribunal

(The Director, Paul Memcott, has made some 11 appearances as an expert witness.)

• **Awards, 1999-2004**

- 1999 AERC Members of winning design team for PLEA 99 contest, at the 16th International Conference on Passive and Low Energy Architecture, for the design of an Indigenous Museum at Moreton Bay, University of Qld, 1/10/99. [Co-entrants were Justin O'Neill of Arkhefeld and Medha Gokhale of Advanced Environmental Concepts.]
- 2002 Paul Memcott/Winner of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Sisalation Prize, resulting in editorial contract for *Take 2: Housing Design in Indigenous Australia*.
- 2002 Mark Moran/Growing the Smart State Award recipient from Queensland State Government.
- 2002/2003 Craig Jones/Australian Rural Leadership Foundation Scholarship
- 2003 Craig Jones/Growing the Smart State Award recipient from Queensland State Government.

Grant performance (2002 - 2004)

The Director of the AERC has only been in a position to apply for conventional competitive grants since January 2002 when he was provided with a half-time appointment.

The following table shows the number of funded projects operating in each of these three years, funded from competitive grant sources, which involve at least one researcher or a graduate student from the AERC as the principal investigator.

Table 4: Competitive Grants received by AERC personnel, 2002-2004

		No. of Grants	Value of Grants
2002	UQ	2	\$5,556
	External	4	\$23,870
2003	UQ	1	\$2,379
	External	5	\$65,781
2004 (to June 30th)	UQ	1	\$40,000
	External	2	\$154,894
Sub-Totals	UQ	4	\$47,935
	External	9	\$244,545
Totals		13	\$292,480

(Note that the Director has also been involved with other collaborative grants in which he is not a Principal Investigator. These are not listed.)

Associate Researchers

During 2003-2004, the following persons have either been Chief Investigators in research projects involving the AERC, presenters at the AERC's Seminar series, or authors of publications or collaborative research proposals associated with AERC.

- Prof John Western (Director of Social and Economic Research Centre, School of Social Sciences, UQ)
- Dr Patrick Mullins (School of Social Sciences, UQ)
- Professor Bob Stimson (Director, Centre for Research into Sustainable Regional Futures, School of GPA, UQ)
- Dr Scott Baum (Research Fellow, Centre for Research into Sustainable Regional Futures, School of GPA, UQ)
- Dr Basil van Horan (GSP Department, UQ)
- Peter Blackwood (Consultant Anthropologist, Cairns)
- Prof Bruce Rigsby (Emeritus Prof of Anthropology, UQ)
- Dr Lee Sackett (Consultant Anthropologist, Brisbane)
- Dr Gavan Breen (Linguist, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs)
- Prof David Brereton (Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, UQ)
- Assoc Prof Joseph Reser (Charles Darwin University)
- Assoc Prof Martin Bell (Director, Queensland Centre for Population Research)
- Dr John Taylor (Senior Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU)
- Mr Fred Spring (Indigenous Projects Consultant, Relspre Pty Ltd, Perth)
- Sandi Taylor (Indigenous Projects Consultant, Brisbane)
- Rachael Stacy (Consultant Anthropologist, Brisbane)
- Dr Ian Lilley (Reader, Aboriginal and Islander Studies, UQ)
- Dr John Bradley (School of Social Science, UQ)
- Dr Errol Stock (The Australian School of Environmental Studies, Griffith University)
- Dr Richard Robins (consultant archaeologist, formerly Curator of Anthropology, Qld Museum)
- Assoc Prof Nicholas Evans (Dept of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, University of Melbourne)
- Prof David Trigger (Dept of Anthropology, University of Western Australia)
- Dr Neville White (La Trobe University)
- Dr Sheila van Holst Pellekaan (Visiting Senior Research Fellow, School of Biotechnology and Bio-molecular Sciences, University of NSW).

Linkages to other research groups

These linkages have been developed and/or maintained throughout the last five years. Personnel from these groups have participated in AERC research activities in various ways (eg as guest speakers, in seminars, in RHD examination, as referees, co-authoring/editing papers or collaborative grants). Personnel of the AERC have in turn travelled to most of these locations.

- Links to people-environment researchers:
 - Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand.
 - People and Physical Environment Research (PaPER), University of Sydney.
 - Asia and West Pacific Network for Urban Conservation, Penang, Malaysia.
 - Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology, Architecture Dept, Kansas University.
- Links to sociology, anthropology and archaeology researchers:
 - UQ, School of Social Science, UQ SRC (formerly SERC).
 - UQ, ATSI Studies Unit.
 - James Cook, Native Title Research Centre.
 - ANU, School of Archaeology and Anthropology.
 - University of Technology, Sydney, Centre for Australian Community Organization and Management.
 - University of South Pacific, Dept of Land Management and Development, Fiji.
 - Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, Subang Jaya, Malaysia.
 - Charles Darwin University, Desert Knowledge Centre.

- Links to housing, planning and settlement researchers:
 - UQ and UWA, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).
 - University of Sydney, I.B. Fell Research Centre (housing), Faculty of Architecture.
 - ANU, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
 - UQ, Centre for Research into Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures (CR SURF, SGPA).
 - UQ, Qld Centre for Population Research (SGPA).
 - Centre for Appropriate Technology, Alice Springs and Cairns.
- Links to Indigenous tourism researchers:
 - Southern Cross University, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.
 - UQ, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining.
 - Murdoch University, Remote Area Developments Group.
- Selected Benchmarking Centres (for comparative performance measure):
 - University of Adelaide, Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Architecture (CAMEA), for quantitative benchmarking.
 - ANU, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), for qualitative benchmarking.

Relation to other University of Queensland research strengths

In recent years the University of Queensland has explicitly defined its areas of research strength which have demonstrated national and/or international significance. The work of the AERC relates to the following research strength areas in this list.

Australian and Postcolonial Studies

- Australian Social and Cultural History
- Australian Politics and Government
- Aboriginal Studies

Cognition, Performance and Human Interaction

- Social Psychology

Cultural, Historical and Media Studies

- Cultural Theory
- Television and Film Studies
- Histories of Religion

Governance and Citizenship

- Dispute Resolution
- Governance and policy

Social and Economic Disadvantage

- Social Policy
- Indigenous Health
- Prejudice and Discrimination
- Urban and Regional Housing and Sustainability
- Rural and Remote Health Care

Environment, Biodiversity and Sustainability

- Environmental Management and Rehabilitation
- Water Management
- Social and Behavioural Aspects of Sustainability
- Sustainable Mining and Minerals

Marine Studies

- Coastal zone management

Emerging Research Strengths

- Architecture

There are a range of AERC projects and personnel linking and articulating to these areas, but they need to be better defined and operationalized.

Conclusion

Apart from the Director's half-time salary and a modest consumables allowance (phone, photocopying), the AERC operates as a financially self-supporting Centre. Its stability and strength partly derives from this independence, but simultaneously imposes a practical limitation on the Centre's growth capacity. Growth is modest but stable. The current vision is to increase this growth rate through the attraction of one or two post-doctoral fellows to supplement the leadership of the Director. Despite the limitations to the size and resources of the Centre, the academic and consultancy work of the AERC nevertheless represents a nationally recognized research strength for the University of Queensland. A special case needs to be made for supporting this Centre whose scope of work and growth path³ has been quite unique in academic Australia.

(Footnotes)

¹ The AERC's Director, Assoc Prof Paul Memmott, has had a half-time UQ appointment since January 1st, 2002. Prior to this he had a quarter-time appointment (from 1995). From January 1st 2004, Memmott's appointment was made continuing.

² This discipline is best characterised through the theory and methods scientifically debated in the organizations of Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) of North America, International Association for People-Environment Studies (IAPS) of Europe, Man-Environment Research Association (MERA) of Japan and People and Physical Environment Research (PaPER) for Australia and New Zealand.

³ Future growth proposals for the AERC have been outlined in a Vision Statement for the Centre (dated 17/10/03).