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Disability access and local government: Co-researching the City of Bunbury's aim to become the most accessible regional city in Australia

This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Adam Johnson

Edith Cowan University

School of Arts & Humanities

2019

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

iii. contain any defamatory material.

Signed,



Adam Johnson

October 2019

PREFACE

i. Acknowledgements

Firstly, I acknowledge my fellow researchers and collaborators Debbie, Kate, Josef, Suzanne, Paul, Jenna, Jacque, Dayle, Ann, Kathryn and Colleen who worked closely with me throughout the data collection process. I thank them for their willingness to go on this journey with me, their enthusiasm and commitment along the way, their amazing personal insights, and their great sense of humour that made every step enjoyable. They were the heart and soul of the project.

I thank the City of Bunbury for supporting the study through financial contribution to the industry engagement scholarship, and for opening the door to genuine dialogue. Council's unanimous endorsement of the research report recommendations was a moment of triumph for all involved. I particularly acknowledge Cr Brendan Kelly for his unwavering support for the MARCIA vision and for the study.

I thank my supervisors Prof Kathy Boxall and Dr David Rhodes for their tireless support, guidance and wisdom throughout my PhD candidature. I also thank ECU for the industry engagement scholarship opportunity, and enthusiastic promotion of the study.

And finally, I thank my family for their wonderful love and support that got me across the finish line.

This work is dedicated to fellow researcher Dayle Johns, who sadly passed away soon after the data collection phase was completed. His perspectives as a young professional whose life changed radically after stroke, infused the study with richness and rawness. He always made us laugh and will be remembered with great fondness.

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iii Abstract

This study used Participatory Action Research (PAR) to investigate the facilitators of disability access in local government, with a focus on the City of Bunbury in Western Australia. In 2014, the City of Bunbury adopted a long-term aspirational goal to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (MARCIA), and the findings and recommendations from this study are intended to inform strategic priorities for achieving that goal, including a potential change of corporate approach required to attain MARCIA status. The thesis critically evaluates the historical, cultural and systemic factors that have influenced accessibility and inclusion in the development of Bunbury's public infrastructure, situating this discussion in the context of national and international disability research. It also draws on literature about deliberative democracy, knowledge partnering and co-design.

A defining feature of this study is its methodology. Participatory Action Research seeks to position the researched as researchers and activists, engaged in a concurrent process of inquiring, sharing and influencing. To achieve this aim, eleven people with lived experience of disability were recruited as co-researchers, working alongside the PhD student who adopted the role of PAR facilitator to 'animate' and facilitate the process of inquiry. Together, they engaged Informants from the City of Bunbury (elected members, executives, managers and technical officers) in deliberative dialogue about the system of public design. Interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed, and analysed using the Framework Analysis method. Informed by an extensive literature review undertaken by the PhD student, the framework was developed collaboratively with the project's co-researchers.

Historically, universal design has been minimally and inconsistently applied by regional cities such as the City of Bunbury in the development of public infrastructure, including buildings, facilities, services, information and events intended for use by the public. The study found five key facilitators of universal design in public infrastructure: documenting and applying *benchmarks* and *safeguards* for best practice in universal design, providing *training* and *technical support* for staff and contractors, and engaging people with lived experience of disability in *co-design*. The five facilitators of universal design in local government are presented in this thesis as a model of *Universal Public Design*, that may be usefully applied in other public design contexts, including other local governments, other tiers of government, and the commercial sector.

In keeping with the action research philosophy of Participatory Action Research, and to fulfil the obligations of the 'industry engagement scholarship' that supported this study, the preliminary

findings and recommendations were presented to Council in a research report in June 2018, and endorsed unanimously for implementation by the City of Bunbury. The thesis concludes by detailing some of the progress that has been made to date by the City, and situates the study in the context of global efforts, especially by the United Nations, to engage 'neighbourhood' leaders such as local governments in fulfilling a key objective of the United Nations' New Urban Agenda – accessible, inclusive and sustainable cities.

iv. Glossary

MARCIA	Acronym for *Most Accessible Regional City in Australia*, the City of Bunbury's goal adopted in 2014.
MARCIA Research Report	A report presented to and endorsed by the City of Bunbury in June 2018 containing the preliminary findings from the present study.
City of Bunbury	A local government authority in regional Western Australia.
Public design	The process of designing infrastructure intended for access by the public (see public infrastructure). Public design can be undertaken by and for government or commercial entities.
Public infrastructure	Buildings, facilities, services, information and events intended for access by the public. The definition in this study includes both the physical and the service elements of a public environment.
Universal design	The design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.
Co-design	The process of involving people with lived experience of disability as partners and collaborators in the design process.
Universal Public Design	A model of public design presented in this thesis, which outlines five facilitators of universal design in public infrastructure.
Participatory Action Research (PAR)	The methodology used in the present study to empower those most affected by the research problem, by facilitating their involvement as co-researchers, regardless of ability, expertise or qualifications.
Participatory Narrative Inquiry	A data collection method used in the present study in which groups of people participate in gathering and working with raw stories of personal experience, and focus on the profound

	consideration of values, beliefs, feelings, and perspectives through the recounting and interpretation of lived experience.
PAR Facilitator	The PhD student who led and facilitated the study.
Co-researchers	The title given to the participants with lived experience of disability who collaborated in the process of collecting and interpreting data, as well as contributing personal stories and perspectives.
Research Group	The collective term used to denote the PAR Facilitator (PhD student) and Co-researchers working together.
City Informants	The title given to staff and elected members of the City of Bunbury who participated in deliberative dialogue with the Research Group.
Deliberative dialogue	Facilitated discussion held between the Research Group and City Informants to help identify the systemic barriers and facilitators of disability access in public design.
Knowledge partnering	Knowledge partnering recognizes that many different kinds of knowledge are relevant to development decision making. It works to catalyse innovative solutions to development issues by helping diverse communities and organizations bring their different kinds of knowledge together.
Local Government / Council	Local government is the third tier of government in Australia. It is governed by a Council of elected members. It is considered the tier of government that is 'closest to the people'.
Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP)	Plans for improving disability access and inclusion, produced by most government departments and local governments in Australia. Sometimes known by similar names.
Disability Advisory Committee	Committees formed by local governments to advise them about matters of disability access and inclusion. Usually consist of

	people with disabilities, carers, industry professionals and government officers.
Industry Engagement scholarship	An academic scholarship designed to engage an industry professional to undertake a PhD research project in collaboration with an industry partner, and co-funded by the industry partner.
Social model of disability	A way of understanding disablement as the product of social forces such as discriminatory attitudes and inaccessible environments, as opposed to impairment which is the product of physical, sensory or cognitive limitations.
The Standards	Refers to mandatory Australian building design standards aimed at ensuring minimum levels of accessibility in the built environment.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research topic including background, scope and research question. The chapter introduces the City of Bunbury's aspiration to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (MARCIA), and then outlines the PhD scholarship arrangement that instigated the present study. It also introduces the participants of the study, including the Participatory Action Research (PAR) Facilitator / Lead Researcher (PhD student), the Co-researchers (people with lived experience of disability), and the City Informants (stakeholders associated with the City of Bunbury).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Origins of MARCIA

MARCIA is an acronym that represents the City of Bunbury's aspiration to become the *Most Accessible Regional City in Australia* (MARCIA). MARCIA was first conceived in 2013 by the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee (made up of people with disabilities, carers and disability industry representatives). Members of the committee wanted to understand how Bunbury compared in terms of disability access and inclusion to other similar-sized regional cities in Western Australia (cities such as Geraldton, Albany or Kalgoorlie), or Australia more broadly (cities such as Geelong, Bundaberg and Rockhampton). These cities range in size from around 30,000 people to more than 300,000, with Bunbury situated at the lower end of the scale with around 67,000 people in the greater Bunbury region, and 32,000 living in the Bunbury municipality area (South West Development Commission, 2018). There appeared to be few indicators by which a local community could make any kind of comparative self-assessment regarding disability access and inclusion. The City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee explored the idea of developing a 'friendly competition' for the title of the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia, as a way of promoting action on access and inclusion (similar to the Tidy Towns award concept). The committee then posed a challenge: *What would it take for Bunbury to become the most accessible regional city in Australia?* Council responded by adopting the following resolution: *Council Decision 263/14: That Council sets a goal to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia by 2020* (City of Bunbury, 2014a).

The City of Bunbury Council included MARCIA as Outcome 1.1 in the Strategic Community Plan (City of Bunbury, 2015), and a public consultation session was held to develop some award criteria, which were summarised as follows:

- Accessible public spaces
- Access to public spaces
- Assistive technology (provision/ presence)
- Access and disability aware community
- Uniform guidelines (development and implementation)

The City recognised that achieving MARCIA called for a 'whole of community' approach – including businesses, Council, and the broader community:

> *It is clear to the committee that this project must reach beyond local government responsibilities... our vision is that Australian regional cities will build on the work they have already done to create Disability Access and Inclusion Plans and work (collaboratively) with community, schools, business and government. Cities will be invited to join in a friendly rivalry to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (MARCIA) (City of Bunbury, 2015).*

Whilst a 'whole-of-community' effort was considered vitally important, it was envisaged that local government would continue to play a strategic role in facilitating change while working in partnership with other sectors.

There was no specific plan devised following the adoption of MARCIA as to how the goal might be achieved, or any kind of agreed definition of what it meant to be an 'accessible city'. Nor was there any clear understanding of how the City's corporate approach to dealing with disability access and inclusion and people with lived experience of disability could contribute to achieving the MARCIA goal. There was however acknowledgement that the City would need to consider how it might go 'above and beyond' existing compulsory design codes and standards, and how it might involve people with disabilities as "full collaborating partners" in the process of researching the way forward (Huxham & Eden, 2002). The City recognised, in principle at least, that it would need to engage differently with people with disabilities in order to better understand and address their needs.

1.1.2 PhD Industry Engagement Scholarship

To help inform a plan for progressing the MARCIA aspiration, the City of Bunbury and Edith Cowan University (ECU) entered a partnership to co-fund a PhD 'Industry Engagement Scholarship'. This was part of a larger ECU program in which 14 industry-based research projects were established with the purpose of "growing both the number of PhD students and projects engaged with industry… and enhancing the professional development and career opportunities for doctoral candidates"

(Department of Industry [WA], 2015, p.1). It was intended that the industry partners would complement and build on ECU's research strengths, contribute significantly to the research direction, and provide funding and in-kind support appropriate to the project (Department of Industry, 2015). Candidates for the Industry Engagement Scholarship were selected on the basis of:

- research background and relevance to the proposed area of research;
- commitment to the project;
- ability to work with external partners, and
- communication skills (Edith Cowan University, 2015)

I was fortunate to be selected for this scholarship opportunity. I had been involved with the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee for the previous ten years, both as a committee member and for a time as an employee of the City of Bunbury. I had also worked more broadly in disability support and advocacy services within the government and non-government sectors. I was intimately involved in the formulation of the MARCIA aspiration, and I possessed an extensive network of contacts within the Council and local community. Having been employed by Council was also advantageous in that I had a working knowledge of the processes, policies and culture of the organisation. The challenge for me was how to use my existing knowledge of the system and the rapport I had developed as an 'insider' to the advantage of the study, without allowing my personal perspectives, opinions or experiences to unduly bias my interpretation of the findings. I believe I was able to manage this complex position effectively and will discuss some of the challenges that arose later in this thesis. For clarity, I was not a salaried employee of the City of Bunbury for the duration of the PhD period.

1.2 Project management

1.2.1 Spaces

As a PhD student, I was provided with a desk and computer at the Council's headquarters, and I was positioned within the Community Development team. The research meetings and activities took place at various venues within Bunbury, predominantly at the City of Bunbury's public meeting rooms. I was also provided with an office at Edith Cowan University's South West Campus in Bunbury.

1.2.2 Timeframe and Deliverables

The present study was conducted over a three-year period between 2016 and 2018. The first twelve months involved research design and preparation of the study (a description of which can be found in Chapter 3). The second twelve months involved data collection (see Chapter 6) and the final twelve months involved collation and analysis of the data, including a detailed report to Council containing findings and recommendations which can be found in Appendix 1. The report was presented to Council in June 2018, and unanimously endorsed. The research report was distributed widely amongst other local governments in Western Australia via email, and is published on the City of Bunbury's website (see Appendix 1). Many recommendations were subsequently implemented by the City of Bunbury executive and staff members, a summary of which can be found in Chapter 11.

1.2.3 Data management

All data was stored electronically within a secure password protected database, and managed in accordance with Edith Cowan University's *Research Data Management Policy*.

1.2.4 Project Steering Group

A project steering group was formed with five members consisting of the City of Bunbury's Director Community and Corporate Services, Manager Community Development, Team Leader Community Development, myself and my principal university supervisor. The steering committee met six times during the course of the project and provided overall guidance and feedback, and clarification of expectations in terms of process and outcomes.

1.3 Research question and participants

1.3.1 Research question

The study set out to answer the following question:

Research Question: What are the facilitators of disability access in the City of Bunbury?

The research question related directly to the City of Bunbury's stated goal of becoming the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (MARCIA) (City of Bunbury, 2014a, 2014b).

1.3.2 Participants

The three main parties involved in the present study consisted of

- Participatory Action Research Facilitator (my role as PhD student),
- 11 Co-researchers (participants with lived experience of disability), and
- 32 City Informants (employees and elected members of the City of Bunbury).

In this thesis, the PAR Facilitator and Co-researchers are collectively referred to as the *Research Group* (see Figure 1).

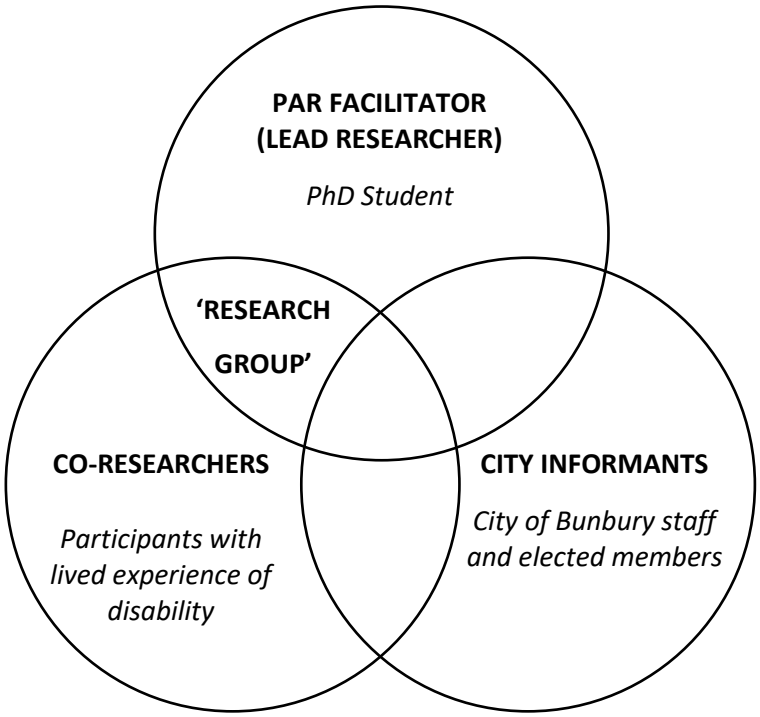


Figure 1: Key parties involved in the study as participants

About the PAR Facilitator

In keeping with the PAR methodology (see Chapter 5) My role in the study was intentionally multi-faceted and included researcher, facilitator, negotiator, animator, mentor, connector and knowledge translator (Boydell *et al*., 2017). The terms animator and knowledge translator are explained in Chapter 5.

I was embedded within Council's Community Development Team for 12 months and granted permission to engage with stakeholders at any level of the organisation in connection with the aims of the project. This degree of access to stakeholders within a host organisation is rare and provided opportunities for gathering a wide range of perspectives on the research topic, from elected members and CEO through to officers carrying out responsibilities 'on the ground'.

About the Research Group

The Research Group was made up of eleven people from Bunbury with lived experience of disability, and myself as PAR Facilitator. Three of the eleven were existing members of the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee, and the rest were community members who responded to a public invitation to participate (see Chapter 6.1).

The following individuals actively participated in and contributed to this research as Co-researchers:

- Adam Johnson
- Dayle Johns
- Ann Clapp
- Jacque McKeig
- Colleen Matthews
- Josef Bandera
- Debbie Harris
- Jenna Davis
- Suzanne Axon
- Paul D'Vorak
- Kate Gild
- Kathryn Hewitt

A brief biography of each Co-researcher is provided overleaf.

About the City Informants

The City Informants consisted of 2 elected members and 30 employees of the City of Bunbury who were engaged in the research by the Research Group, including the CEO, directors and a variety of technical and managerial officers. As it transpired, the engagement involved meetings with two separate groups – the executive group, and the technical/managerial group.

Introducing the Research Group



Adam has worked professionally in the disability and local government sectors since 1999, and he is currently working towards a PhD researching MARCIA. His father developed a severe disability through stroke in his early 40s.



Dayle had a unique perspective on community access after experiencing a stroke, and was passionate about seeing greater opportunities for inclusion for others like himself. Dayle contributed a great deal to the Research Group, but sadly, passed away in March 2018.



Ann works at Morrissey Homestead in Bunbury. Siouxi her second child has a severe disability which means she uses a wheelchair and is nonverbal. Ann is passionate about making Bunbury more access-friendly for visitors and residents.



Jacque has worked in the disability sector for 28 years. She has been a support worker, a Social Trainer and relief EA. She enjoys helping people to find ways to improve their quality of life, and making change happen.



Colleen has worked as an education assistant and support worker for the past 17 years, and is a volunteer with WA iSports. She believes in an inclusive community where all can achieve their best, regardless of abilities.



Josef is an advocate for people with intellectual and other disabilities, and has a passion for social inclusion through sport. He helped establish iSports in Bunbury, which has seen many people discover hidden talents and make friends.



Debbie has an adult daughter who had an accident in 2014 and now uses a wheelchair. Moving back to Bunbury they quickly realised how important access is. Debbie joined the research group to help her daughter's life and others.



Jenna wants to see younger people have more of an awareness of disability and to be educated about it. She has a 10-year old daughter with autism, and has a passion for people from all sectors of the community working together for inclusion.



Suzanne has cerebral palsy and uses a walker to get around town. She likes to keep active and is involved in a singing group, bootscooting, craft group and more. She wants to see all people with disabilities able to be as active as she is.



Paul sustained a spinal cord injury at 34 years of age and is a wheelchair user. He delivers injury prevention talks in schools, hospitals and workplaces. He wants to see people with disabilities free to integrate with the rest of the community.



Kate has M.S. and while she appreciates that she needs help, she is passionate about getting people to change their way of thinking. She wants people to see the person, not the disability, and to be aware of the need to include others.



Kathryn has low vision and runs her own business as a clinical hypnotherapist and Reiki Practitioner. She was involved in advocacy boards and committees and is passionate about breaking down barriers and adopting a 'can do' attitude.

1.4 Breakdown of chapters

This thesis contains three literature review chapters.

Chapter 2 contains the first of three literature reviews. It provides an overview of some of the ways in which the term disability has been historically constructed, and the implications of public policy on the lived experiences of people with disabilities. It explains how proponents of the social model of disability began to distinguish between disability and impairment, arguing that people with impairments are disabled more by society's discriminatory attitudes to impairment than by the impairment itself (Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2013). The global human rights and universalist movements and their impact on societal responses to disability in Australia are also discussed.

Chapter 3 contains the second literature review chapter. It discusses how Australia's historical attitudes to disability have impacted on disability access and inclusion in the public realm. It looks at arguments that barriers have been introduced into the built environment through flawed public design processes, causing people to become 'disabled by design' (Imrie & Imrie, 1996; Imrie & Thomas, 2008; Bennett, 2002). The chapter posits that Australia's history of segregating people with disabilities away from society (Cocks, Fox, Brogan & Lee, 1996) has profoundly shaped public design in that it has allowed public designers to disregard diversity in human ability, or treat it as an optional consideration (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012; Green, 2011). A key argument is that ability is a spectrum and that impairment is a normal, expected feature of the human condition (Bickenbach, 2014). As such, designers of the public realm are obliged (from a human right perspective) to apply universal design principles in the planning stages of all public infrastructure (Bennett, 2002; Imrie, 2012; Mace, Hardie & Place, 1991). It is argued that the disaffiliation of people with disabilities from society has led to their disconnection from the structures of decision-making about public design. Through the literature, it is suggested that local governments can play a key role in reconnecting people with disabilities to the structures of decision-making about public infrastructure through the practice of co-design.

Chapter 4 contains the third literature review chapter. It problematises conventional research as a tool for the powerful that can be used to reinforce the status quo rather than change it (Letherby, 2003, Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008). The chapter explores arguments for a change in the social relations of research production by involving people with disabilities in the co-production of research (Oliver, 1992). This chapter provides a rationale for the study's methodology.

Chapter 5 discusses the methodology used in this study, namely Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is used in research situations involving disadvantage and powerlessness, where people's lives are profoundly affected by the decisions of others over which they have little or no control (McIntyre, 2008; Hall, 1992; Reason & Bradbury, 2009). PAR positions the 'researched' as the 'researcher', which can radically alter the "social relations of research production" (Oliver, 1992, p.102). This chapter also discusses how the data was analysed using Framework Analysis.

Chapter 6 explains the specific methods of data collection that were used in this study: (1) *participatory narrative inquiry* (facilitated dialogue involving the Research Group members only), (2) *deliberative dialogue meetings* (facilitated dialogue between Research Group members and City Informants), and (3) the maintenance of a *field journal* by myself as PAR Facilitator. The chapter also explains how participants were recruited, and the ethical considerations involved in undertaking Participatory Action Research with people with disabilities, and with local government.

Chapter 7 outlines the scoping of the research problem by the Research Group members. This includes exploring life in Bunbury for people with a disability, defining accessibility, gathering examples of access and inclusion problems, and examining individual and collective perspectives on the nature of these problems. This chapter shows how the Research Group narrowed the scope of the research topic (disability access and inclusion in Bunbury) to focus on systemic factors determining the use of universal design in public design, and a perceived lack of engagement of people with disabilities in the Co-design of public buildings, facilities, services, information systems and events.

Chapter 8 details the data gathered from deliberative dialogue held between the Research Group members and three City Informants who were senior or executive employees at the City of Bunbury, in which a number of lines of inquiry were established in relation to the City's policies and practices that impact upon disability access and inclusion. These lines of inquiry were used by the Research Group to guide subsequent dialogue with technical staff and managers within the organisation.

Chapter 9 details the data gathered from deliberative dialogue held between the Research Group members and City Informants operating at technical and managerial levels within the City of Bunbury. The data is organised by theme and presented as direct quotes taken from transcripts of the recorded material. The themes relate to systemic factors that impact upon access and inclusion in public design, such as policies and procedures, staff training, public engagement, facility auditing, and regulatory controls.

Chapter 10 presents a detailed analysis of the data using Framework Analysis. It also includes a case study from within the City of Bunbury that illustrates the key findings.

Chapter 11 discusses and develops the findings into a new model of *Universal Public Design* that incorporates systemic measures for embedding universal design and Co-design into the system of public design. The *Universal Public Design* model identifies five key measures that will support universal design and co-design in local governments. This chapter also highlights the impact that the present study has *already* had on the City of Bunbury's processes and policies, in keeping with the 'action' philosophy of PAR.

Chapter 12 explores the experience of being involved in PAR from the participants' perspectives, and reflects on the experience of facilitating PAR from the perspective of a PhD researcher. It also discusses issues related to managing the expectations of participants and the sponsoring organisation, and reviews the limitation of the study.

Chapter 13 concludes by situating the present study within its historical and conceptual context, discussing the implications of the research, and identifying potential benefits to different consumers of the research.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the background to and significance of the present study, as well the as the research question and the roles of the two participant groups – Co-researchers and City Informants. It has also provided an overview of the different chapters in this thesis. The factors that contributed to the evolution of MARCIA from an idea to an aspiration, and the willingness of the City of Bunbury to support the study both in terms of financial contribution and openness to inquiry require further explanation. These factors are rooted in the history of how disability has been constructed and responded to by Australian society, and societies globally over the past 100 years, and particularly the developments of the past 30 years that have re-shaped public perceptions of and responses to disability. Concepts such as human rights and the social model of disability have profoundly influenced community attitudes to disability and disability policy, and this will be the focus of Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW (PART 1): UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

In Western history, shifting societal attitudes towards disability and inclusion have profoundly shaped the lives of people with disabilities. They have also profoundly shaped our cities in terms of the functional design of buildings, facilities, and services that collectively make up the infrastructure of a city. This is because public design is fundamentally an expression of cultural values (Rappolt-Schlichtmann & Daley, 2013; Berger & Luckman, 1966). Buchanan observed that:

> *design is not merely an adornment of cultural life but one of the practical disciplines of responsible action for bringing the high values of a country or a culture into concrete reality… design is the way we plan and create actions, services, and all of the other humanly shaped processes of public and private life… design is the way we plan and create the complex wholes that provide a framework for human culture – the human systems and sub-systems that work either in congress or in conflict with nature to support human fulfillment… the vivid expression of national and cultural values (Buchanan, 2001, p.38).*

The design of public-user infrastructure in Australia has been problematic for people with disabilities for decades, reflecting societal attitudes that have historically devalued disability and sought to segregate people with disabilities away from society (Imrie & Imrie, 1996; Green & Jackson, 2014). People with disabilities have felt stigmatised and 'shut out' of society in large part because our buildings, facilities and services have not been designed in ways that cater for the full spectrum of human functioning and abilities (National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, 2010).

Predominantly, Australia's history has been one of devaluing disability, segregating people with disabilities out of mainstream society, and ignoring or dismissing the wide diversity of human abilities (Cocks *et al*., 1996; Chenoweth, 2000) particularly in the public design process. People with disabilities in Australia have been "faced with extermination, exploitation and exclusion; labelled as incompetent, invalid and infirm; and treated with disdain, discrimination and disapproval" (Carling-Jenkins, 2014, p.43). Today this manifests as physical and attitudinal barriers within our public infrastructure. But what were the origins of these circumstances? This chapter explores five different 'models' of disability that have evolved over the past 200 years of Australian history: the *charity* model, *medical* model, *social* model, *human rights* model, and *universalist* model of disability. Their links to public design will also be examined. A key distinction is that the charity and medical models

located the ‘problem’ of disability within the individual, which resulted in policies and programs that stigmatised people with disabilities and segregated them from mainstream society. In contrast, social, human rights and human diversity models of disability locate the problem within the disabling structures of society around the individual, and are now used as arguments to support the development of policies and programs that aim to remove barriers to full participation in the community (Oliver, 1996; Goodley, 2013; Beresford, 2016; Shakespeare, 2013; Harpur, 2011; Mladenov, 2013; Bickenbach, 2014).

2.1 Individual models of disability

2.1.1 Charity model

Before and during the nineteenth century, Western society world views were predominantly influenced by religious and charitable perspectives of human welfare. Disability was seen as a personal tragedy at best and the product of moral deficiency at worst, and was usually accompanied by a sense of shame, burden and inferiority (Mathieson *et al*., 2008). Charitable responses often involved the provision of institutional care, ranging from convalescent homes for the physically disabled to asylums for the mentally impaired. These were commonly large, imposing buildings constructed away from urban centres, such that people with disabilities were physically and metaphorically separated from society (Kitchin, 1998). These structures served to reinforce negative stereotypes about people with disabilities as belonging ‘elsewhere’ and unable to function in society. Terms such as ‘invalid’ were used to describe them (Cocks *et al*., 1996; Hughes, 2009). Imrie observed that conceptions of charity “underpinned the emergence of new landscapes, built upon socio-spatial segregation”, fuelled by a desire to ‘help’ those conceived of as the “unfortunate few”, yet subsumed by a wider ethos of “keeping the 'diseased' and malevolent disabled apart from the normal population” (Imrie, 1996, p.54).

Such characterisations of disability played out at a crucial time in history – the rise of urbanism that followed the second industrial revolution (from the 1880s to the First World War). People were moving into cities in large numbers for work (Prior, 2015). As cities grew, public designers met many challenges in adequately addressing public-user infrastructure needs such as electricity, sewerage, water, and other amenities, as well as the construction of buildings and facilities for businesses and civic purposes. But negative societal attitudes towards people with disabilities and their systematic removal from society meant that they were ‘out of sight, out of mind’ for public designers, and the challenge of eliminating barriers for people with impairments through sensitive urban design did not

receive due attention until quite recently (and continues to be a work in progress). As noted by Steinfeld and Maisel,

> *not only is the inmates' spoiled identity reinforced by the message that they cannot take care of themselves or participate productively in society, but the lack of accessible environments in the outside community also reinforces the belief that they are 'incompetent' and cannot live like everyone else (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012, p.17).*

From the 1970s onward, circumstances began to improve for people with disabilities as parts of Europe and the United States and Australia moved towards ideas of 'normalisation' (that people with disabilities should lead lives as close to 'normal' as possible) (Wolfensberger, Nirge, Olshansky, Perske & Roos, 1972), 'integration' (that people with disabilities should be integrated into their families and communities rather than living or working separately) (Racino, 1999) and universal design (that all products, buildings and exterior spaces should be designed to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible) (Mace *et al*., 1991). Institutions and hospitals were closed, and the residents gradually reintegrated into society. The presence of people with disabilities today in schools, workplaces and public spaces means they are more visible, and public awareness campaigns and popular media have helped reduce stigma by challenging common stereotypes and discourses of disability as disease, a burden or threat to society, or deserving of pity or ridicule (Cocks *et al*, 1996; Grue, 2015), though it is important to note that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities still present barriers to equality in Australia today (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; Imrie & Kumar, 2010; World Health Organisation, 2011).

Integration has also been boosted by the introduction of the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2013, which has greatly increased personal supports for people with disabilities to access the community and contribute to society. However, a key legacy of the charity model of disability has been widespread failure to design accessibility into public-user infrastructure, which continues to present barriers to community access and participation (National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, 2010; Imrie, 1996; Kitchin, 1998; Mathieson *et al*., 2008).

2.1.2 Medical model of disability

The start of the twentieth century saw the rise of medical practice as a respected and sanctioned profession, propelled by the massive injury rates of soldiers and civilians sustained during the first and second world wars. Rapid advances in rehabilitation technologies and medical interventions meant that all forms disability came to be interpreted as potentially benefitting from medical treatment. Hospitals were built and filled with patients, including those with long-term physical and

intellectual disabilities (Wolfensberger, 1975). Under the medical model, doctors were given the power to diagnose patients by comparing them to what was considered to be a 'normal' range of functioning and behaviour, and labelling patients as deviant or sub-normal (Cocks *et al*., 1996). They also had the power to determine how long people would be required to stay in hospitals. Those who did not respond successfully to treatment were labelled 'incurable' or 'deficient' and were often not sent home again (Cocks *et al*, 1996). Instead, they remained in hospital under state care indefinitely.

Like the charity model, the locking away of people with long-term disabilities in institutional settings, ostensibly for their protection and 'rehabilitation', reinforced conceptions that the design of public infrastructure did not need to account for accessibility. Within the hospitals and institutions, most inmates became estranged not just from society but also from their families, leaving them exposed to rampant abuse and neglect (Cocks *et al*., 1996, Wolfensberger, 1975; Quinn & Degener, 2002). Conditions commonly became deplorable. When evidence emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Cocks *et al*., 1996) showing the scale of the neglect, families, advocates and eventually governments changed their views about institutional care (Carling-Jenkins & Sherry, 2014). This led to the closure of most large institutions in Australia and the gradual reintegration of people with disabilities back into the community (Cocks *et al*., 1996; Carling-Jenkins & Sherry, 2014). From the 1970s onwards people with disabilities were less likely to be removed from society to be placed in asylums, hospitals or prison-like environments. However, ingrained attitudes towards disability continued to locate the 'problem' of disability within the individual rather than society's discriminatory attitudes or inaccessible urban environments, and even today governments continue to fund segregated settings for people with disabilities such as special schools, group homes and sheltered workshops. As Green (2011) notes, "institutional and medical models have traditionally informed, and in many cases still are entrenched in the minds of, policy makers and shapers of the built environment" (Green, 2011, p.255).

2.2 Social model of disability

A foundational concept examined in this literature review is the social model of disability, conceived of in the late 1970s and further developed during the 1980s and 1990s most notably by British academic and activist Michael Oliver. Oliver (1996) made an important distinction between the experience of *impairment* and the experience of *disablement*, and questioned the causal link between the two experiences. He argued that it is not people's impairments that necessarily cause their experience of disablement, but rather disablement can be caused by a combination of inaccessible environments, social discrimination and exclusionary practices. This shifted the location

of the 'problem' of disability away from conceptions of individual deficiency to conceptions of societal deficiencies. In this view, disability stems from "the failure of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of citizens with disabilities, rather than from the inability of the disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society" (Hahn, 1986, p.128). For example, under the social model, employment should not be considered a matter of individual capacity to work, but rather the capacity of the workplace to remove physical and systemic barriers that will allow an impaired individual to successfully gain and maintain employment (Roulstone, 2004).

The origins of the social model can be found in social constructionism, a perspective that argues that reality is socially constructed and subjective, rather than an objective state of being, and that in effect there are multiple and competing 'realities' (Charmaz, 2007; Frauenberger, Good, Fitzpatrick, & Iversen (2015); Jorgenson & Phillips, 2002). This perspective allowed social theorists to challenge normative structures of power that relied on previously uncontested definitions of concepts such as disability. It gave proponents a conceptual framework with which to 'deconstruct' society's underlying assumptions about disability, and then 'reconstruct' disability in more empowering terms using a social justice framework (Ife, 1995; Kristiansen, Vehmas, & Shakespeare, 2008).

In the 1980s collectives of disabled people mainly in Europe and America were active in politicising the social model, and became known as the Disabled People's Movement (Goodley, 2013; Beresford, 2016). The social constructivist underpinnings of the social model and the political nature of the Disabled People's Movement linked them with other anti-oppressive movements including Feminism and Marxism (McIntyre, 2008). Social model proponents questioned the cultural, political and economic structures that perpetuated the disadvantage of people with disabilities, labelling this a form of oppression from which people with disabilities required emancipation (Kemmis, 2010; Barton, 2005). They called on governments to take affirmative action to reduce the social inequality experienced by people with disabilities (Oliver, Sapey & Thomas, 2012).

As a result, the social model has had a profound impact on social policy globally, and specifically on policy related to urban development. For example, the United Nations' *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2017) called on nation states to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the global trend of urbanism (people moving to cities in large numbers) to diminish the poverty associated with disability by developing accessible public-user infrastructure. The social model has also influenced Australia's National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which commits all tiers of government to the goal of developing "accessible and inclusive communities" (Department of Social Services, 2011b, p.29). However, the progress of translating such policies into practice at the local

level has been criticised as being too slow (Community Affairs References Committee, 2018; Davy, Fisher, Wehbe, Purcal, Robinson, Kayess, & Santos, 2018), and some of the reasons behind this may be revealed by the present study.

2.3 Universalist model of disability

Some disability scholars argue that human abilities ought to be thought of as a spectrum of ability, and that each individual's abilities can vary throughout the lifespan due to age, injury, illness or impairment (Zola, 1989; Green, 2011; Bickenbach, 2014). This concept challenges the disabled/non-disabled binary and undermines notions of deviance from narrow constructions of what is 'normal' human ability (Iwarsson, 2003). Patson wrote:

> *even the social model, with its disabled/non-disabled comparison, perpetuates our dualistic view of society by virtue of function... This method of classification is logically flawed, because it does not acknowledge the impact of context (Patston, 2007, p.1626).*

Universalism views ability as diversity and variations in ability as an expected part of the human condition, either as people age or acquire impairments. Bickenbach, Chatterji, Badley, & Üstün contended that "universalism as a model for theory development, research and advocacy serves disabled persons more effectively than a civil rights or 'minority group' approach" (1999, p. 1173). This is because it removes a (false) dichotomy of disabled/non-disabled that is reinforced by the individual, social and human rights models of disability (Bickenbach *et al*., 1999). The universalist perspective suggests that rethinking cultural norms around disability as deviance is required, and this potentially has profound implications for public design (Bickenbach *et al*., 1999). Instead of thinking about disability as an adjunct to design, or an accommodation, the full spectrum of abilities is considered as a starting point for all design work (Australian Network on Disability, 2015).

Bickenbach (2014) argued that social policy should likewise not continue to treat disability as something separate and distinct to other human rights and needs. He calls for a move towards "universalised disability policy" in which social policy that promotes disability rights is progressively replaced by a universal human rights policy for all citizens (p.1320). Based upon universalist principles, universal policies would emphasise the "sameness with everyone else" to secure political equality, rather than emphasise difference and unique needs or requirements (p.1320). The authors observe that disability will always pose important challenges for design, policy and the implementation of human rights, but universalising disability policy is inevitable because

"impairments themselves are inevitable, [and]… in the end, these things make us human" (p.1326). They believe that disability will "disappear as a separate agenda item, either for policy or for design, since it is merely one of many forms of human diversity" (p.1326).

2.4 Human rights and disability

Early conceptions of human rights did not translate to meaningful action for the disabled population (Quinn & Degener, 2002). Their forced segregation from society and the abuse and neglect they suffered in State care were evidence of this (Cocks *et al*., 1996). In 1975 the United Nations developed the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons proclaiming that "disabled persons are entitled to have their special needs taken into consideration at all stages of economic and social planning" and that nations have an obligation to ensure that people with disabilities can "enjoy a decent life, as normal and full as possible" (United Nations, 1975, s.3). No longer were states just responsible for the passive protection of basic rights, but also the *active realisation* of rights for disabled people (United Nations, 2007). In 1981 the United Nations' Commission on Human Settlements cited a critical need for accessible urban development and member states were encouraged to develop strategies to "eliminate barriers in human settlement areas that would hinder or impede full participation" (United Nations, 2004, p.1). That same year the United Nations declared the Decade of Disabled Persons, and the ensuing decade saw an intense period of activity by the United Nations in association with the Disabled People's Movement, including new anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation introduced in Australia during the 1990s. Handley described the introduction of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act [DDA] (1992) in Australia as having…

> *immense symbolic significance for people with disabilities. Such recognition legitimises one's status and interests – where these were formerly ignored or denied – and imbues them with considerable moral import and establishes the recipients as equal participants in a democratic whole (Handley, 2001, p.157).*

The DDA provided people with disabilities and their advocates a mechanism for prosecuting cases of alleged discrimination. However, the DDA attracted strong criticism from disability advocates for providing inadequate protection because in practice, individuals were forced to go up against powerful corporate entities in court and risk incurring expensive court costs if the case were lost (Community Affairs References Committee, 2018). This resulted in a reluctance to prosecute cases of disability discrimination (Productivity Commission, 2004). The 1990s also saw the development of

legislation in Australian States that introduced more contemporary systems of community-based support for people with disabilities, such as the Disability Services Act 1995 (WA), which drew upon human rights principles. This piece of legislation was notable in that it required all Western Australian state government departments and local governments to develop Disability Access and Inclusion Plans detailing how services and facilities would be made more disability-friendly (Australian Local Government Association, 2016).

In 2006 the United Nations revised the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (United Nations, 2007) and called on nations to become signatories to the Convention (Harpur, 2011). The CRPD was intended to "enhance opportunities for people with disability to participate in all aspects of social and political life including access to employment, education, health care, information, justice, public transport and the built environment" (Department of Social Services, n.d., p.4). The CRPD was explicitly designed to shift society's treatment of people with disabilities from "objects of charity, medical treatment and social welfare" to "subjects who can claim their rights and be active members of society" (United Nations, 2018, p.2). The CRPD re-defined disability as the product of social-environmental forces, which was considered a "paradigm shift" (Harpur, 2011, p.2). According to Mladenov (2013), such a shift was "concerned with nothing less than a transformation of the very understanding of disabled people's 'way of being'… it has profound existential-ontological consequences" (p.72). Harpur (2012) contends that the CRPD "goes further than merely re-stating rights… it creates a new rights discourse, empowers civil society and renders human rights more obtainable for persons with disabilities than any time in history" (p.4). However, authors such as Peter Mittler (2015) have expressed concern about the pace of progress of the CRPD, and how the requisite 'paradigm shift' might be achieved. Mittler (2015) spoke of the CRPD as being a potential catalyst for a radical reappraisal of policy and practice among governments and organisations (p.79), and argued that:

> *The CRPD has reached a critical watershed. Following ratification by most governments, action now needs to be taken at all levels from grassroots to the UN to translate policy into practice in ways that will directly benefit persons with disabilities and their families. Although persons with disabilities must by definition be at the centre in this process, responsibility for taking action rests with all sections of civil society. (Mittler, 2015, p.86)*

Australia became a signatory to the CRPD in 2008, and set about developing rights-based social policies that would give effect to the CRPD. A key social policy development in Australia was the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (NDS), developed by the Council of Australian Governments

(COAG) to provide a framework for shared responsibility between State and Federal Government entities. The NDS identified a key strategy as the development of

> *accessible and well-designed communities with opportunity for full inclusion in social, economic, sporting and cultural life. (Department of Social Services, 2011b, p.2).*

However, progress against this particular strategy of the NDS has recently been criticised by advocacy groups as slow (Community Affairs References Committee, 2017), and there are calls from the United Nations for central (state and federal) governments to work more cohesively and coherently with local governments to achieve inclusive and accessible environments for urban regions at the ground level, as an aide to fulfilling fundamental human rights (United Nations, 2015).

2.5 Conclusion

The social model of disability, human rights and universalism have profoundly reshaped conceptions of disability. They have effectively shifted conceptions of disability as being an individual tragedy, burden or illness that needs curing, towards the view that impairment is universally experienced as a normal and expected part of the human condition, and that it is a matter of fundamental human rights that a society's mainstream organisations take responsibility for removing barriers to the full participation of all citizens, regardless of ability. These views shaped the design and scope of the research report and this thesis. The research did not set out to investigate how individual impairments might be addressed through technology, aids or equipment (person as problem), rather how the City of Bunbury as a local government authority could change its corporate approach in order to address systemic impairments that, for decades, have introduced barriers into public infrastructure (society as problem). However, understanding the current status quo requires an understanding of Australia's cultural history of segregation and stigmatisation of disability given form through the design of the urban environment, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

3. LITERATURE REVIEW (PART 2): DISABILITY AND PUBLIC DESIGN

This chapter explores some of the historical implications for public design of Australia's culture of 'disaffiliation' from disability, the effect this has had on the built and service environments, and political drivers to achieve 'reaffiliation' through the active participation of people with disabilities in the decision-making structures of society. The concept of universal design is defined and discussed, as it will become a central theme in later chapters as a key facilitator of disability access and inclusion in local government[1]. This chapter also examines the links between the United Nations' call for more accessible urban development, and the strategic role local governments can play in giving effect to this goal at the local level. Of particular interest is the idea that local governments could look to engaging people with disabilities as partners in public design, called co-design.

3.1.1 A history of disaffiliation

The forced separation of people with disabilities from mainstream society, both physically and metaphorically, is reflected everywhere in the design of the built environment and in the culture of our cities and communities (Kitchin, 1998). Rob Imrie (1996) scathingly referred to this situation as a 'design apartheid' and a form of structural oppression. In Australia's recent history people with disabilities were 'shut in' to institutions and segregated spaces, and then 'shut out' of the places and spaces of daily life frequented by the rest of society (National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, 2010). People with disabilities continue to face stigmatisation and discrimination in their everyday lives, and are often spoken about or treated as something 'different' from the norm (Hughes, 2009). Difference is typically feared and shunned by society (Owens, 2015), and negative conceptions of difference or disability have become ingrained through the types of language used to refer to it – for example, labelling someone as 'invalid', 'defective' or 'deficient' (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; David, 2013). The use of such language establishes a power differential between those considered to be 'normal' and those labelled as 'different', that creates an 'us' and 'them' mentality (Donnelly Roark, 2014, p.27). A tendency to separate, or 'disaffiliate' can follow. This happens when people avoid associating or affiliating with someone that they consider to be physically, culturally or socially different (Harpur, 2011). Disaffiliation, especially when played out in many relationships in a

[1] Note that in Australia, there are three tiers of government – Federal, State/Territory and Local – and that Australian local governments do not have the same portfolio responsibilities as in other countries such as the UK or USA. For example, Australian local governments do not typically provide personal care and support to community members, but do provide sporting, cultural and recreation facilities and programs. Furthermore, portfolios such as urban planning and service provision are shared across the three tiers of government.

person's life, can lead to acts of social and physical exclusion. It was Castel (1998) who first proposed that the term social exclusion be replaced with the term 'disaffiliation', because, he argued, exclusion is relational and involves "the rupture of relationships between people and the society in which they live" (Mathieson *et al*., 2008, p.13).

Exclusion can take on a spatial dimension when people seek to disaffiliate themselves from others by establishing separate physical spaces for the such as special education classrooms, group homes, day programs, sheltered workshops and the like (Mathieson *et al*, 2008). These behaviours manifest as discriminatory cultural attitudes that become enshrined into social policy (Noffke, 2009). Disaffiliation distances the powerful from the marginalised and allows negative assumptions about them to proliferate unchallenged (Castel, 1998). Those labelled as disabled may be forced 'out of sight, out of mind', and can become progressively disconnected from the structures of decision-making that affect their lives (Castel, 1998; Cocks *et al*., 1996). Disaffiliation permits the powerful to make important decisions affecting other people's lives without first consulting them, and thus people with disabilities are frequently prevented from influencing important decisions about their environments (Radermacher, Sonn, Keys & Duckett, 2010). Barriers introduced into the urban environment through insensitive public design have caused many people with disabilities to become isolated from the everyday spaces and social or economic activities of their communities, leading to forms of deprivation and poverty that are endemic for people with disabilities in society (Goodley, 2010; Bickenbach *et al*., 1999; Azpitarte, 2014).

3.1.2 The participation problem

The links between poverty and inaccessible urban environments have occupied the attention of the United Nations for more than three decades. In that time, the UN has published numerous manifestos such as the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2017) and *Good Practices of Accessible Urban Development* (United Nations, 2016a) in an effort to drive action by governments to increase the physical accessibility and social inclusiveness of cities globally. As stated on the UN website,

> *Making cities and towns accessible and inclusive for all, including persons with disabilities, is essential for sustainable urban development and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for all. For an estimated one billion persons with disabilities across the world, ill planned and developed towns and cities that lack accessibility often present a combination of physical, environmental, technical and social barriers to physical and virtual infrastructures, facilities and public services. Poor planning and unregulated urban development can have particularly*

> *devastating consequences for persons with disabilities. Lack of access to basic services and facilities pose significant obstacles to inclusion and participation in everyday life and development and can prevent persons with disabilities from escaping poverty and inequality (United Nations, 2016b)*

Here, the UN links poverty with impoverished processes of urban design brought about by a *lack of participation in development*, in other words, a lack of opportunity for marginalised people to influence public design because of the negative effects of disaffiliation. Therefore, it is possible to observe a cycle of poverty that is linked to the design of community, in which the rupture of relationships (disaffiliation) gives rise to social exclusion, which in turn can lead to inaccessible public design, which in turn can compound poverty. Completing the cycle, poverty reinforces the rupture of relationships because of the stigma it holds (Gordon *et al*., 2006). It appears logical therefore that tackling disaffiliation will require strategies that foster participation by people with disabilities in civil society and public design (Radermacher, *et al*, 2010).

3.2 Disabled by design

3.2.1 A structural oppression

The maxim 'nothing about us without us' made popular by disability activists in the 1990s, including James Charlton (1998) who published a book of the same title, was intended to mean that no policy or course of action should be decided upon by any decision-maker without the "full and direct participation of those whom the policy affects" (Owens, 2015, p.387). Charlton's view was that the widespread oppression of people with disabilities in Western cultures has been "a human rights tragedy of epic proportions" in which people with disabilities have been "systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation" (Charlton, 1998, p.8). Feminist theorist Iris Marion Young observed that oppression can be perpetrated simply by the "everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" and argued that "oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of the intentions of a tyrant" (Young, 1990, p.41). She suggested that the causes of oppression are embedded structurally in the "unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules, and the collective consequences of following those rules" (p.42).

Charlton (1998) advocated resistance and empowerment as an antidote to oppression, and urged people with disabilities to remain politically engaged in defending their right to have greater control over the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In addition to political action, engaging in

research and public education were other ways scholars have suggested that oppressed groups can work to overcome oppression (Baum, 2006; Noffke, 2009). This is reflected in Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that inspired scholars and activists to seek new ways of empowering communities experiencing deep disadvantage through research, education and collective action (Bradbury, 2015). Freire wrote:

> *No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 1970, p. 54)*

Conversely, Freire appealed to 'oppressors' to be willing to examine their role in the oppression if true liberation is to occur:

> *those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly (Freire, 1970, p.60).*

Freire's words constituted an appeal to those working in powerful yet socially conscious organisations (for example, local governments) to constantly reflect on the potentially oppressive effects of their decision-making culture, and (by implication) to take proactive measures to reduce such negative effects. This theme is reflected in Australia's National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which states that "the idea that people with disability can be more disadvantaged by society's response to their disability than the disability itself is leading to a greater focus on policies that seek to remove these barriers" (Department of Social Services, 2011b, p.16). Society's response to disability has led to people becoming "disabled by design" (Bennett, 2002, p.1). Disability scholar and activist Sue Kroeger (2016) even believes that urban designers have *deliberately* disabled community members by 'conveniently' failing to account for the full spectrum of human abilities when designing public infrastructure.

3.2.2 Participation and the power to influence public design

Australia's National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 linked participation with urban design when stating that,

> *through valuing the participation and contribution of people with disability, the Strategy encourages innovation in the design of communities and environments to*

> *invite participation on a universal and equal footing (Department of Social Services, 2011b, p.22).*

In this way, the architects of the National Disability Strategy spelled out the need for governments to foster urban design processes that will *invite participation*, leading in turn to the creation of urban environments that will also *invite participation*. Reindal (2009) emphasised the relational element between impairment and social or environmental barriers, suggesting that many disabled individuals lack the ability to influence critical decision-making because they lack relationship with those who hold power over resources. Fiske and Berdahl described power as "always socially situated", with a key element of power being the ability to *influence* others (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007, p.680). They defined influence as "strategies that change behaviours as a result of personal interaction" (p.678).

People with disabilities commonly lack influence over the design of their environments because they have become disconnected from those who control resources (such as people working in local government). As Fruend noted,

> *people with little power rarely have a voice in the negotiations over space, and thus their interests are often ignored, which makes it even more difficult for them to achieve functional independence and social participation (Fruend, 2001, p.693).*

Imrie and Kumar (2010) added that,

> *the ability of disabled people to contest and challenge the disablist nature of the environment is circumscribed by their powerlessness in relation to professional control over key decisions concerning land use and building design (Imrie & Kumar, 2010, p.362).*

Hall & Imrie (1999) linked this powerlessness to influence the urban environment to systemic polices, practices and values that overlook human diversity:

> *The sources of disabled people's exclusion from many facets of the built environment are multiple and complex yet are linked, in part, to the policies, practices, and values of professionals involved in design and construction processes. In particular, some argue that architects and designers tend to operate in ways which are inattentive to end users (Hall & Imrie, 1999, p.409).*

Even though people with disabilities hold an important status as 'end-users', their needs continue to be overlooked in public design. Such powerlessness was reframed by Young as a form of domination,

and she suggested that people are being dominated when "other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action" (Young, 1990, p.38). Thus it could be construed that if public designers (such as those working in local government) are not made accountable for their actions to disabled people in relation to inaccessible design, then they maintain positions of domination and oppression.

Inaccessible public infrastructure can reinforce powerlessness as well as perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about disability, as Kitchin observed:

> *an understanding of how disabled people have become marginalised and excluded within society cannot be understood without an appreciation of the socio-spatial processes that reproduce social relations (Kitchin, 1998, p.344).*

Spatial structures and places within the landscape provide a set of cultural signifiers that tell us if we are `out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Kitchin agreed, adding that "spaces are social texts that convey to disabled people that they are `out of place'" (1998, p.344). He argued that "good inclusive design will send positive messages to disabled people, messages which tell them: `you are important' ; `we want you here' ; and `welcome'" (1998, p.344). Because we live and interact in spaces that are ascribed meaning and convey meaning, a city is not just a set of buildings, roads, parks and other infrastructure, a city is also a (cultural) text which we read and react to (Donald, 1992).

Efforts to increase the participation of people with disabilities in democratic decision-making can help to challenge existing relations of public design, and begins with the work of social inclusion - simply connecting people to each other at a local level so that they share the same everyday spaces and activities. Such basic participation helps to reconnect the marginalised with the powerful in natural, normal ways (Kitchin, 1998). The presence of people with disabilities in the everyday spaces and places of their communities, and particularly their participation in socially valued roles (such as in employment or on committees) challenges stigma and stereotyping of disability, and encourages wider cultural acceptance (and even celebration) of disability and diversity as something that is 'normal' (Wolfensberger, *et al*. 1972; Nirje, 1985). In this way, participation and social inclusion are precursors to empowerment (Taket, Crisp, Graham, Hanna, Goldingay & Wilson, 2013).

3.2.3 The role of local governments in accessible public design

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon, with more than 50% of the world's population now residing in cities (United Nations, 2016). Australia is one of the most urbanised nations in the world, with close to 90% of the population living in urban centres (ABS, 2018). According to the United Nations (UN),

the urbanisation phenomenon affords nations an unprecedented opportunity to eliminate barriers to participation in the community for people with disabilities through accessible urban design:

> *The New Urban Agenda will provide the international community with a distinct opportunity to transform current patterns of urbanization by fully incorporating accessibility and disability inclusion in urban development policy and practices (United Nations, 2016b, np).*

However, the UN recognises that nation states face significant challenges in overcoming barriers such as negative cultural stereotypes and attitudes to disability, and reshaping the policies and practices that govern the design of community infrastructure (United Nations, 2016a). Increasing the accessibility of the urban environment has been recognised by the UN as requiring "full and active participation of persons with disabilities and broad-based multi-stakeholder partnerships for advancing inclusive and accessible urban development" (United Nations, 2016, p.11). The work of the United Nations to establish conventions and protocols that promote accessible urban design, in particular the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2007) and more recently *Good Practices of Accessible Urban Development* (United Nations, 2016) and the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2017), has helped propel affirmative action in Australia towards improving disability access and inclusion.

The most prominent example is the *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020* (Department of Social Services, 2011b) strategy of achieving 'inclusive and accessible communities'. The strategic position of local governments was scarcely recognised in the National Disability Strategy, yet the *National Disability Strategy: Second Implementation Plan* (Department of Social Services, 2015) contained a much stronger acknowledgment of the "major role" some local governments play in facilitating participation of people with disabilities, observing that they are often "innovators and leaders in how they respond to the special needs of their communities, developing local level solutions to meet the needs of people with disability" (Department of Social Services, 2015, p.47). Local governments have been described as the tier of government that is 'closest to the people' (Social Inclusion Board, 2011; Ohlin, O'Donoghue, & Closhessy, 1996), and most attuned to "community aspirations, needs and priorities" (Morris, 2012, p.9). Local governments have also been described as key players in building social capital because of their ability to foster community networks, build local leadership and bring residents into dialogue with government and community agencies to plan for and address local needs (Brackertz, Zwart, Meredyth & Ralston, 2005; Brunet-Jailly & Martin, 2010). According to Mowbray (2011) Australian local governments play a part in:

- locating and controlling access to urban amenities and services;
- shaping the built and natural environment;
- creating liveable neighbourhoods;
- providing institutional means through which people are included or excluded from hierarchies of status, power and influence, and overall social relations;
- regulating development behaviour, directly and indirectly, through law enforcement and urban design (Mowbray, 2011, p.1).

Dollery and Worthington argue that local governments need to be understood as key shapers of local culture and environments, with an ability to "foster a 'sense of place' in the development of social capital" (2000, p.7).

There is growing acknowledgement in the literature of the strategic role local governments play in the development of accessible infrastructure and in the provision of leadership and support to other sectors to do the same. Local authorities possess social capital through their ties to the community and commercial sectors (Dollery & Worthington, 2000) that could be leveraged to foster more accessible communities. They also possess expert knowledge around the application of design standards and building codes, and regulatory authority in connection with the design of community infrastructure (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). Furthermore many local governments are conscious that the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010, and the Building Code of Australia (Australian Building Codes Board, 2016) "do not always meet the needs of all people with disability", and sometimes play a role in trying to "influence a higher standard for inclusion as part of local government planning and development processes" (Hunting, Goodall, Pavkovic, Lawrie, & Ryan, 2017, p.58). Local governments thus play "a significant role in program and policy development, service and infrastructure delivery, and ensuring inclusion and access for people with disability" (Hunting *et al*., 2017, p.3).

Legislation regulating local governments has become more permissive and less prescriptive, broadening their leadership potential and allowing them to act more innovatively in meeting community needs. For example, in Western Australia, the Local Government Act 1995 (WA) permits local governments to do anything that "provides for the good government of persons in its district" as long as it does not contravene any other law (Parliament of Western Australia, 1995, Section 3.1). This permissive approach stands in contrast to the earlier Local Government Act 1960 (WA), which limited a local government's ability to do anything not specifically prescribed by the Act (ultra vires) (Hood, 1998, p.214). The autonomy that local governments now enjoy is also what affords them

power to lead at the local level by, for example, declaring as Bunbury did an intention to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (City of Bunbury, 2014), and working in partnership with the whole community to achieve such a goal (City of Bunbury, 2015).

Local governments play an increasingly pivotal role in the lives of people with disabilities because of their broad mandate and range of responsibilities related to public design. They have been described as…

> *multi-functional, with extensive responsibilities and activities across property, community and human service areas and all of these functions directly or indirectly have an impact upon the quality of life of the people with disabilities who live and work in their local communities (Disability Services Commission and the Western Australian Local Government Association, 2005, p.7).*

The introduction of Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) in the 1990s focussed local government attention on how their services and facilities might facilitate community access for people with disabilities. According to submissions received by the Community Affairs References Committee (while examining progress under Goal 1 of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities), in regions with improving levels of accessibility, "evidence presented shows that local governments appear to be leading the way in providing accessible facilities in their communities, with many councils already in the second or third iteration of disability and inclusion planning" (2017, p.33). However, the report found that local governments, particularly in rural and regional areas, depend upon federal government grants to fund accessible infrastructure, especially where existing structures need upgrading to meet accessibility requirements. Furthermore, the report found that local governments "need guidance about accessible infrastructure beyond buildings, such as footpaths, playgrounds, and road crossings, particularly for groups with specific needs" (Community Affairs References Committee, 2017, p.33).

Whilst on the whole Disability Access and Inclusion Plans were welcomed as a positive move, Richard McGrath was critical of the discourse and terminology underpinning most local government DAIPs. He observed that "while these documented plans may be considered to be value-neutral, they also have the potential to propagate particular views and ideologies" (McGrath, 2008, p. 168). McGrath found that the DAIPs focused heavily on barriers in the built environment, and tended to overlook strategies for addressing barriers to inclusion in services such as sporting and cultural programs. He argued that local governments were 'stepping back' and waiting for people with disabilities to engage in society, adopting a 'laissez faire' governance strategy that, in effect, risks perpetuating

social exclusion (McGrath, 2008, p. 182). He highlighted that barriers such as high cost of participation, poor service quality and lack of inclusive programs needed to be addressed. Importantly, he also found that systemic barriers to disability access and inclusion in local government (such as policies and practices) were "either briefly addressed or found to be non-existent" (McGrath, 2008, p.168). The author concluded that the information provided in Australian local government DAIPs was mainly a reflection of a broader neo-liberal, socio-political environment that supports non-interventionist practices over and above providing direct services to particular groups in society (McGrath 2008).

McGrath's writing suggests that local governments should be more proactive in addressing the needs of community members with disabilities, as a matter of equity. However, what a more proactive approach by local governments actually looks like, and the extent to which local governments might be expected to tailor services and infrastructure to meet the particular needs of people with disabilities must also be considered in light of the principle of universal design.

3.3 Universal design

Universalism is synchronous with universal design (Imrie, 2012). Universal design is "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (Mace *et al*., 1991, p.1). It is synonymous with terms like 'inclusive design', 'design for all', 'accessible design' and 'barrier-free design' (Persson, Åhman, Yngling, & Gulliksen, 2014). According to Iwarsson and Ståhl (2003) universal design is based on the principle that there is only one population, comprised of individuals representing diverse characteristics and abilities. The authors argue therefore that the difference between accessibility and universal design is a matter of democracy and equity among citizens.

For people with disabilities, universal design is "a challenge to the disabling values and attitudes of society" realised through the development of products and places that are designed to be accessed without the use of assistive or specialized techniques and technologies (Imrie, 2012, p.874). Universal design seeks integration for people with disabilities into society by eliminating discrimination through design and thus not drawing attention to a person's impairment that, otherwise, might be a target for pejorative attitudes and stigmatization (Imrie, 2012). Examples of universal design include electric self-opening doors that benefit not just wheelchair users but also parents with prams, the elderly and others. Signage using symbols instead of words will benefit people from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as those who cannot read.

The message behind universal design is that the full range of human diversity can, and therefore should be anticipated in design, and that public designers should seek to educate themselves about the spectrum of human abilities (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012), and 'learn from the margins' (Rappolt-Schlichtmann & Daley, 2013). According to Mace *et al*. (1991), major changes in design requirements, both market-driven and legally mandated, are creating a new dilemma for designers. These changes "signal a wide array of opportunities for designers to apply their creative energies to the solution of practical, social and psychological problems", but they may also "hurl design practitioners into a chasm of uncharted territory without the benefit of appropriate training or technical assistance" (Mace *et al*., 1991, p.3).

Universal design is underpinned by the belief that design ought to benefit as many people within society as possible (Chard & Couch, 1998, p.22). Laslett (1991) used the concept of universalism to challenge designers to conceive of public design as 'designing for our future selves'. This "shifted the focus from 'them' to 'us' and emphasised a duty of care for the future that rested on the shoulders of the design community" (Clarkson & Coleman, 2015, p.237). As Allan Sutherland wrote,

> *we have to recognise that disablement [impairment] is not merely the physical state of a small minority of people. It is the normal condition of humanity (Sutherland, 1981, n.p.).*

However, Steinfeld and Maisel (2012) observe that while interest is growing, universal design still has not become a mainstream idea, and is taking a long time to become embedded in public design. The United Nations has responded by calling upon all nation states to incorporate universal design into their urban planning, stating:

> *the work of Habitat III would be greatly supported by promoting accessibility following universal design approaches and disability inclusion. This requires strong commitments in concrete terms including inclusive urban policy, regulatory norms and standards, universal design approach planning, allocation of necessary resources, and a broad-based partnership that involves and engages all community members, including persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2016a, p.6).*

One criticism of universal design has been a lack of attention paid to the discourse that underpins it regarding the concept of disability. Hamraie argues that universal design should be underpinned by positive cultural representations of disability that reflect a desire to "accept and preserve" disability rather than treat it as something to "cure or rehabilitate" (2016, p.4). Hamraie (2016) contends that more inclusive ideological assumptions about disability are needed, not simply more accessible

structures. He suggests that proponents often treat universal design as "a de facto good, untouched by broader social and political forces, and neutral toward disability" (p.4). By contrast, critical disability theory "offers historical and theoretical tools for examining the persistence of ableism in contemporary universal design discourses" (p.4). Hamraie concludes by citing Garland-Thomson's assertion that the design of "habitable worlds" must involve "treating disability itself as a valuable way of being in the world, one that societies must work to accept and preserve rather than cure or rehabilitate" (Garland-Thomson, 2014, p.300).

Another critique of universal design observed by Bickenbach (2014) relates to the ideological tension between those that advocate targeted or specialist design solutions suited to people with particular disabilities, versus those that advocate universally designed solutions that aim to be accessible to all. He suggests that…

> *an undiluted faith in the ideal of a single best design would be constantly frustrated by the particularities of specific need, and a dedication to respecting every difference in the disability experience would undermine any hope of universal design.*

Nonetheless, universal design remains an important and relatable concept that has the potential to revolutionise public design.

3.4 Co-design

This section will explore what some authors argue local governments could be doing to make the structures of decision-making about public design more accessible to people with disabilities, and conversely what marginalised people and their supporters could be doing to engage local government in order to overcome spatial oppression. This section will also discuss the concept of co-design of public infrastructure as a desirable tool for achieving universal design outcomes.

Knowledge partnering for co-design

The lack of involvement by people with disabilities in the design of urban environments has had "devastating consequences" for them (United Nations, 2016b, p.1). This is because urban environments have historically been designed "as if all people are the same – able-bodied" (Matthews and Vujakovic, 1995, p.1069). According to the United Nations,

> *A truly inclusive New Urban Agenda needs to actively include and engage persons with disabilities in its discourse and development… (United Nations, 2016b).*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests that fostering a culture of knowledge partnering between communities and governments may help to create 'enabling environments'. The WHO's *World Report on Disability* (World Health Organisation, 2011) advocates enabling environments as a key priority for governments globally, suggesting that they focus on building a *culture of accessibility* so that "once the concept of accessibility has become ingrained… it becomes easier to raise standards and attain a higher level of universal design" (p.169). Inviting participation is linked to design 'culture', and so enabling environments is about the *culture* of design – not just the *end product*. In other words, if the culture of public design enables people with disabilities to participate as partners in the design process, then the environments that result will foster participation in the community. Public design will become a natural expression of an inclusive, collaborative culture. That said, Iversen, Halskov and Leong (2012) believe knowledge partnering for co-design must be robust enough to withstand "conflicts and dilemmas", and this can be achieved by establishing a culture of dialogue and discourse through which designers and collaborators "cultivate the emergence of values, develop the values and ground the values" that inform the design (Iversen *et al*., 2012., p.88).

Eversole describes knowledge partnering as:

> *a community development approach [that] recognizes that many different kinds of knowledge are relevant to development decision making. It works to catalyse innovative solutions to development issues by helping diverse communities and organisations bring their different kinds of knowledge together (Eversole, 2014, p.8).*

These types of knowledges can be expert know-how such as technical or managerial skills (eg. in public design), knowledge derived from lived experience (such as lived experience of disability), local knowledge of 'how things work around here', and so forth (Eversole, 2014). While the principles and intentions behind knowledge partnering appear sound, the reality is that people with disabilities are 'hard to reach' in public engagement efforts (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008; Brackertz *et al*., 2005; Cook, 2002). The Victorian Local Government Association admitted that local governments struggle to make their consultation processes go beyond "the usual suspects" (cited in Brackertz *et al*, 2005, p.15). There are many reasons why people with disabilities might be perceived as being hard to reach, including lack of resources, social disconnection, lack of accessibility, experiencing oppression and so forth. But Cook argued that what makes population groups like people with disabilities 'hard to reach' is not their distinctive characteristics, but rather "the inability or unwillingness of consulting authorities to seek involvement in the appropriate manner" (Cook, 2002, p.523). Thus, the 'problem' of the hard to reach rests not so much with the subjects of consultation, but rather

with those conducting it. Cuthill (2002, p.80) added that bureaucratic and political decision-makers have shown little commitment to diversifying engagement strategies or sharing their power-base through education programs, community consultation and stakeholder participation.

However, scholars are not unified in this stance. Marcus Lane (2005) believes participation has become a central feature of government policy, and that old notions of 'government' have largely been replaced by forms of 'governance'. Brunet-Jailly and Martin suggest that participation has become "a key part of local government in Australia", and that participation can occur "through a range of mechanisms as citizen, as consumer, and as advocate" (2010, p.10). Governance, they argue, is tested by the following questions:

> *Is there evidence that those affected are engaged in dialogue with decision-makers about how the actions of government will impact particular communities? Is the voice of these communities heard and reflected in the final decision? (Brunet-Jailly and Martin, 2010, p.12).*

Thus, rather than relying on solutions imposed from above, governments are increasingly "relying on a network of decision-making relationships that link government and civil society across many scales" (Van Driesche & Lane, 2002, p. 237). However, some authors feel that local governments need to go further to achieve genuine engagement with their communities. For example, Ryan and Hastings suggest that local governments should use 'community indicators' of economic, social and environmental wellbeing as a tool for

> *engaging citizens and communities in informed discussions about shared goals and priorities, and as a policy tool for guiding evidence-based planning to address issues identified as important by communities (Ryan & Hastings, 2015, p.33).*

Other scholars have observed a trend towards inter-disciplinary research and practice within the field of accessible public design, as designers seek to better understand who they are designing for, and end-users seek to increase their influence over the design process (Bowen *et al*., 2016; Ho, 2011; Frauenberger *et al*., 2015; Ryan, 2012). This has opened up new roles for 'knowledge translators' (Susawad, 2007; Boydell *et al*., 2017) who support a process in which people from technical and non-technical backgrounds collaborate and share their knowledge towards the solving of a problem they may share in common, a role that is well suited to practitioners from social science backgrounds (King, Bridget & Feltey, 1998; Ife, 2002). As Sanders and Stappers observed:

> *The landscapes of design and design research will continue to change as design and research blur together. At the front end, design will become synonymous with design research, creating new landscapes of opportunity for designers and researchers. The fuzzy front end will become populated with hybrid design researchers and research designers. Already research is becoming more prominent in the curricula of the quickly growing university-based design programs, and links between, e.g., the social sciences and design are getting stronger (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, p.15).*

John Gaventa argued that there is a need to work on participation from 'both sides of the equation': that is, to increase both the participation of civil society, and the responsiveness of government institutions (Gaventa, 2003, p.27). Community engagement in government decision-making is not uncommon, usually taking the form of 'consultation' which is at the lower end of the public participation scale (IAP2, 2018; Arnstein, 1969). Deeper forms of community engagement are growing in popularity as part of a trend towards more participatory governance or participatory democracy, in an effort to combat growing disillusionment and disengagement with traditional forms of representative democracy (Ife, 2008, p.137). Good practice in community engagement is now considered to be that which moves beyond basic consultation towards deeper, more deliberative forms of engagement (as reflected in the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation) (IAP2, 2018; Glackin & Dionisio, 2016). In fact, Arnstein's typology regards mere consultation as 'tokenism' (Arnstein, 1969). Deep engagement goes beyond consultation to promote cooperation and partnerships between government and community towards solving issues of mutual concern (Cuthill, 2002; Gaventa, 2003; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000), using methods associated with 'empowered deliberative democracy' (Fung & Wright, 2001). Fung and Wright suggest that such methods have the potential to be:

> *radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people, deliberative because they institute reason-based decision making, and empowered since they attempt to tie action to discussion (Fung & Wright, 2001).*

It also gives recognition to the idea that, rather than relying exclusively on the privileged knowledge of 'experts', there can be many forms of knowledge (including that gained from personal or professional experience) that might be brought into dialogue with each other (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kindon, 2007) – something Robyn Eversole (2014) refers to as 'knowledge partnering'.

Co-design as participatory democracy

There is growing acknowledgement of the strategic role of local authorities in the development of accessible infrastructure and in providing leadership and support to other sectors to do the same. Local authorities possess social capital through their ties to the community and commercial sectors that could be leveraged to create more accessible communities (Dollery & Worthington, 2000). They also possess expert knowledge around the application of design standards and building codes, and regulatory authority in connection with the design of community infrastructure. Local governments therefore have "a significant role in program and policy development, service and infrastructure delivery, and ensuring inclusion and access for people with disability" (Hunting *et al*., 2017, p.3). According to a report prepared for the South Australian Government titled *Strong Voices*, local governments are viewed as playing a "fundamental role in… shaping accessible and inclusive communities" (Social Inclusion Board, 2011, p.32). However, fostering knowledge partnering between local governments and citizens with lived experience of disability may require new approaches to engagement that involve actively empowering and equipping both sides for dialogue and collaboration. It may also require an appraisal of the engagement culture in local government. It was recently acknowledged that there has been little guidance or support for local governments about how to undertake effective community engagement (Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, 2019).

One issue that distances ordinary citizens from the design of the world around them is the professionalisation of public design. Rob Imrie (2012) notes that most writings about design reinforce a concept of the user as…

> *a remote figure, external to the professional fields of the [designer], and conceived of as an object to be "acted on" rather than embedded into the design process (Imrie, 2012, p.878).*

The implication is that design professionals are the experts who hold the important knowledge and that users ought to be kept at arms-length from the process. Such an approach…

> *reinforces the epistemic primacy of professional expertise as the basis of scientific and societal progress and does little to challenge, fundamentally, the distinction between those who are deemed to know from those to be guided through the complexities of the design process, that is, the users (Imrie, 2012, p.878).*

Imrie advocates that in fact it is the designer's responsibility to "encourage, even create, a coherent public able to influence, knowledgably, the social relations of design production" (2012, p.878). In fact, recent participatory research has shown that people with lived experience of disability "have valuable insights as to facilitators and barriers to participation based on the principles of universal design", and the "process of coming together as a group enables sharing of knowledge, networks, and resources" (Copeland, 2014, p. 120).

Cuthill recognised that not all people can engage equally, and believed it to be the role of local governments to build capacity for community participation through the provision of information, resources, and skills training that is "meaningful and appropriate to the capabilities and characteristics of the stakeholders concerned" (2002, p.84). Importantly, he also saw that public participation requires clearly articulated policies and strategies that outline communication, consultation, and participation processes (Cuthill, 2002). Co-design can be understood as a form of participatory democracy, but the democratic role and function of elected representatives (councillors in local government) in co-design is uncertain, particularly with the growth of digital democracy innovations (Hanckel, Bruce & Ryan, 2016), and may require further investigation.

In 2011 in Western Australia, co-design became enshrined in a progressive government policy when the State Government released a document titled *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy* (Department of Finance, 2018):

> *Engaging relevant stakeholders in the co-design of Community Services is a requirement of the Policy. Public Authorities… must adopt a genuine and transparent partnering approach when co-designing services with organisations, the community and service users. (Government of Western Australia, 2018, p.13)*

The specific intent of this policy was to build partnerships between State Government and non-government organisations, which unfortunately meant that local governments were left out of the scope of the policy. However, it could be argued that this policy should apply equally to Western Australia's 139 local governments, given that local governments are regulated, partially controlled and substantially funded by the WA State Government (for example, State Government operates a Department of Local Government that provides funding to local governments, and the Minister for Local Government has the power to enforce legislative requirements or even suspend a Council). However, as things currently stand, local governments appear to be under no compulsion to engage citizens with disabilities in co-design.

According to King *et al*., administrators often recognize the need for participation, but "cannot find ways to fit the public into decision-making processes" (1998, p.319). They argue insincere forms of engagement risk resulting in citizens "rendered cynical or apathetic by vacuous or false efforts to stimulate participation that asks for, yet discounts, public input" (p.139). Left unchecked, citizens may find themselves "moving from potentially cooperative to confrontational situations that pit administrators against citizens in an adversarial way" (p.140). This can be aggravated when consultation occurs at a late stage in the design process (when, for example, a building is almost complete), or does not occur at all (Copeland, 2014).

Jim Ife (1995) posited five principles that should be observed when facilitating public participation in deliberative democracy (and by extension, co-design):

1) people will participate if they feel the issue or activity is important;
2) people must feel that their action will make a difference;
3) different forms of participation must be acknowledged and valued;
4) people must be enabled and supported to participate; and
5) structures and processes must not be alienating (Ife, 1995, pp.74-78).

One significant challenge is how to enable and support people with disabilities to participate meaningfully, and how to make the structures and processes of local government decision making more inclusive of people of varied abilities. Cuthill (2002) observed that to achieve meaningful citizen participation, four key areas need to be considered:

1) access to information;
2) administrative assistance;
3) political and bureaucratic support; and
4) clear processes (p.84).

Smyth *et al*. (2005) saw citizen engagement as integral to participatory and deliberative democracy, by expanding opportunities for informed, deliberative decision-making about policies, directions and priorities. Sarmiento-Pelayo also posits that design is a form of 'reflexive dialogue', and that "whoever is involved in such processes with the intention of transforming a current scenario into a desired one can recognise themselves as a designer" (2015, p.150). Ho, Ma and Lee argued that it is incumbent upon designers to "tease out the genuine needs of those who are socially excluded" (2011, p.363), and that design should always include end-user participation. They add that engaging ordinary citizens to become meaningfully involved in the design processes of local government "adds

important value to designs through the integration of local knowledge and community perspectives", as well as "generating dependability, trust, assurance, and… social capital" (p.364).

Eversole believes that development organisations, both inside and outside of government, are increasingly "repositioning themselves as enablers, facilitators and external supporters of community led development processes" (2014, p.5). However, citizen engagement still concentrates power into the hands of the organisation doing the engaging to determine the terms and conditions of engagement. What about the idea of people with disability engaging local government on their own terms?

Self-organising for co-design

Fruend reflected on ideas of self-organising and activism as antidote to spacial oppression and observed that…

> *it is no coincidence that civil rights activists recognize the relationship between dominance and space and seek to alter both oppressive spatial and social practices (Fruend, 2001, p.693).*

Civil rights activism can be effective at amplifying the voices of people with disabilities to influence public policy, as reflected in the way the UK Disabled People's Movement of the 1980s engaged government policy makers through activism to achieve new policy outcomes (Barnes & Mercer, 1997), such as Direct Payments (cash payments made to individuals with disability which they could use to pay for their social care). According to Kitchin, "representations of and myths surrounding disability are sociospatial constructions… specific methods for keeping disabled people `in their place'" (Kitchin, 1998, p.352). Kitchin discussed `geographies of domination', and described resistance as "the opposition of power: the oppressed fighting back against the injustices imposed by their oppressors" (Kitchin, 1998, p.352). He added that "resistance like domination has spatiality, geographies in which it is mapped and which it seeks to change" (Kitchin, 1998, p.352).

Self-organising has been a powerful strategy used by some disabled people. Rather than waiting for government to engage them, by self-organising, people with disabilities can engage government on their terms and in a time-frame that suits them – a kind of 'reverse engagement'. There is strong support in the literature for a self-organising approach to participation in policy-making, and is linked to notions of active citizenship. For example, Cornwall and Gaventa see citizenship as practised rather than given, and call for recognition of the agency of citizens as "makers and shapers" rather than as "users and choosers" of interventions or services designed by others (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000, p.50). Robyn Eversole (2011) reinforces this stance, suggesting that community agency should

be at the heart of a community's development, not government efforts at engagement. She argues that communities (including self-organised groups of disabled people) possess agency in the sociological sense – the ability to act and be agents of their own development. They possess ideas, energy, social capital and local knowledge - key ingredients for solving entrenched policy challenges, such as social inclusion and accessible design of the environment (Eversole, 2011).

King and Cruickshank support this view, suggesting that it is more effective to consider the issue from the perspective of communities engaging government rather than government engaging community (King & Cruickshank, 2012). However, they also focus on another dimension of reverse engagement – the role of 'change agent'. They contend that if the goal is to empower groups of people within community to engage decision-makers, then change agents should work with these groups to increase their skills and capacity to do so. In this way, communities of people may become empowered to drive policy development, rather than policy driving community development (King & Cruikshank, 2012).

Perhaps the key point of engagement between government and people with disabilities is to increase the latter's influence over decisions related to the design of environments they use. The World Health Organisation's *World Report on Disability* posited that "environments – physical, social, and attitudinal – can either disable people with impairments or foster their participation and inclusion" (World Health Organisation, 2011, p.169). Sue Kroeger argues that "design is the most important function in our society" (Kroeger, 2016, n.p.). She believes that everyone holds a keen interest in the design of the world around them, and possesses creative potential. Martha Sarmiento-Pelayo's (2015) views concur, and she stated that:

> *The ability to design is innately human, allowing us to imagine, define and plan the transformation of the environment to make it more applicable to the necessities or aspirations of an individual or group of people. The built environment is the platform that moulds human life. This categorizes the built environment as a crucial determinant in the quality of life, and its practice pertains to all aspects of our daily life and thus is of great importance (Sarmiento-Pelayo, 2015, p.150).*

In applying the principle of knowledge partnering (Eversole, 2014), people with disabilities can be viewed as experts of their own experiences (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) and as social actors endowed with creativity, organisational capabilities and entrepreneurship, capable of developing new design solutions (Manzini, 2016).

Participatory design, or 'co-design' is what occurs when the practical knowledges of disabled people are brought into dialogue with the professional knowledges of public designers (Bjögvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2012). Lee (2008) sees design participation as a part of 'sustainable development', and that bringing users into the design domain produces a shared "living knowledge" that can "emancipate" people (p.48). Co-design, the conditions for its success and how it relates to the present research findings as a facilitator of universal design will be examined in more detail in Chapter 11.

3.5 Implications for present study

It was important for the present study to reflect the key principles and intentions of participation, knowledge-partnering and co-design discussed in this chapter. It would have been incongruous to employ a research methodology that failed to empower people with disabilities to engage directly in the act of research as co-researchers and co-designers of the research process, with control over forms of inquiry and production of new knowledge that could address their identified priorities, while developing working relationships with key decision-makers that would allow them to influence the status quo (as researchers often intend to do). Chapter 5 will expand on why Participatory Action Research was selected as the most appropriate methodology to achieve this goal, and how it was designed to facilitate meaningful participation in and control over the research process by people with lived experience of disability.

3.6 Conclusion

Bunbury's desire to be the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (City of Bunbury, 2014) reflects a cultural shift in attitudes to disability and an acknowledgement of the wider benefits of fostering an inclusive community. Public policy plays a central role in how cities are designed, but some policies have been described as 'insensitive' to the needs of disabled people, and shaped by prejudices, stereotypes, and misperceptions (World Bank, 2013). People with disabilities are typically disempowered and disconnected from the processes of public design, which tends to design 'for' rather than 'with' the populations they are administering (Imrie & Thomas, 2008, p.480). For design policy to change, the processes of decision-making about public-user infrastructure must evolve to become more participatory, and engage more effectively with people with disabilities in ways that are sensitive to their needs (Ho *et al*., 2011). Local governments, as the tier of government 'closest to community', can take a leadership role in connecting disabled people with the structures of decision-making power, and introducing participatory design mechanisms (Hunting *et al*., 2017; Brackertz *et al*., 2005). Alternately, people with disabilities can elect to self-organise and engage

government on their own terms, in order to increase their influence over the public design process (King & Cruikshank, 2012).

Participation in collaborative research is one way to legitimise a partnership between government and citizens seeking change, however, the field of Australian disability research has itself been scrutinised and found wanting in terms of producing research that might catalyse systemic change, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

4. LITERATURE REVIEW (PART 3): A NEW DISABILITY RESEARCH AGENDA

Who should decide what gets researched? This question speaks to the political nature of research, as research does not occur in a political vacuum. Rather, as this chapter will reveal, research is an inherently political act that gives a small number of people control over the production of knowledge and how it is applied to social policy. This is problematic because research can be used to justify oppression rather than challenge it, and to reinforce the status quo rather than bring about political and systemic change. This chapter explores the political nature of disability research, and the complexity of researching disability access and inclusion.

4.1 A new disability research agenda

In the disability field, dominant discourses and narratives of individual-as-problem rather than society-as-problem have permeated disability research (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Disability scholars such as Colin Barnes and Mike Oliver have long argued that conventional disability research has done little to empower people with disabilities. Oliver (1992) believes that the disability research agenda has been controlled by elites who "treat people as fragments and use them for someone else's ends, resulting in alienation from the processes and products of research" (Oliver, 1992, p.103). He posited that expert researchers have been complicit in the oppression of disabled people by treating them as isolated individuals inexperienced in research, and thus unable to reformulate questions in a more appropriate way. He argued that this can create a belief in the disabled person's mind that their problems are caused by their own inabilities rather than the inabilities of society to include them (Oliver, 1992). A paper written by Mike Oliver in 2002 gave a negative appraisal of disability related research as a whole conducted up to that point in time. He claimed,

> *Firstly, it has failed to accurately capture and reflect the experience of disability from the perspective of disabled people themselves. Secondly, it has failed to provide information that has been useful to the policy making process and has contributed little to improving the material conditions under which disabled people live. Thirdly, it has failed to acknowledge the struggles of disabled people themselves and to recognise that disability is not simply a medical or welfare issue, but a political one as well. The result of this situation is that many disabled people have become alienated from both the process and product of social research (Oliver, 2002, p.2).*

Paul Abberley argued that many researchers have attempted to examine the complex and subtle through crude and simplistic measures (Abberley, 1987). Gordon, Brown, Bergman & Shields agreed, arguing that disability researchers need to "avoid the simplistic and instead acknowledge the complexities of living life with a disability" (2006, p.6). It would of course be unfair to characterise all disability research in this manner, but the point is that research methodologies need to take into account a myriad of factors that determine quality of life for people with disabilities, including linking their subjective experiences of their environments with structural factors that have perpetuated their social and physical exclusion.

Imrie and Thomas (2008) identified a problem in the social relations of research production between expert knowledge and user knowledge, believing that "people with disabilities are often defined, managed and patronised by experts"; and asserted that "the experts are usually less informed about the lives of disabled people than they are, and therefore less expert than they claim" (Imrie & Thomas, p.480). While acknowledging that the specialised knowledge of the research expert is actually important and useful, Imrie and Thomas (2008) argued that inappropriate control by experts must be challenged. They suggested that the claim to expertise can be used to justify inappropriate levels of control and intrusion into disabled people's lives, and that so-called expert knowledge actually devalues the experiential knowledge of disabled people. Knowledge, they asserted, is "not disembodied and abstract, but is produced in concrete social relations" (p.481). The problem, therefore, is "not one of reconciling abstract bodies of technical and experiential knowledge" but, rather, one of "re-shaping the social relations within which these kinds of knowledge arise and make sense" (p.481).

The question of who decides what gets researched is problematic in the field of disability inquiry. Oliver asserted that the very idea that small groups of 'experts' can set the research agenda for disability is "fundamentally flawed" (1992, p.102). He saw such an idea as the "product of a society which has a positivistic consciousness and a hierarchical social structure which accords experts an elite role" (p.102). He saw that control over the research agenda is essentially a political struggle. Tom Shakespeare believed that the majority of disabled people have rarely become organised as a collective, saying "much of their lives are constructed in ways that work against an active, progressive politics and politicisation of issues" (Shakespeare, 2006, p.481). Gordon *et al*. (2006) asserted that the voices of people with disabilities have not been heard in defining the needs that are addressed through disability research, and that those controlling the research agenda need to ask of themselves: "are we democratic, or autocratic, in our methods and goals?" (p.6). These circumstances have, in Australia at least, resulted in a body of research knowledge that Llewellyn

(2014; 2017) described as largely 'not fit for purpose' in serving the disability reform agenda, which emphasises among other things, the empowerment of disabled people. She surmised that "a concentrated effort is required to stimulate research which addresses the concepts that are explicit in the disability reform agenda" – including research that empowers people with disabilities and connects them with the political agenda (p.8).

Those who problematised disability research also called on disability researchers to re-examine the "social relations of research production" (Oliver, 1992), and to develop research that is essentially transformative, relevant to and significant in the lives of disabled people – a 'new disability research agenda' (Oliver, 1992; Barton, 2005). As Goodley and Lawthom (2005, p.137) observed, disability studies ought to turn the focus away from 'disability-as-impairment' to 'disability-as-sociopolitical and cultural exclusion'. Proponents of a new disability research agenda have argued that disability research should be concerned with issues of social justice, equity and citizenship and address political issues, especially material and ideological barriers to participation (Barton, 2005; Oliver, 1990; Imrie & Thomas, 2008; Harpur, 2011). They have advocated that disability research should be particularly focussed on exploring "institutional discrimination, exclusion and the lack of political will at the local and central state level to engage with these issues" (Barton, 2005, p.318). In doing so, "the voices of disabled people must be given primacy", and "the output of research must provide the basis for action" (Gordon *et al*., 2006, p.6).

In Australia, alongside the development of the National Disability Strategy, work began in 2011 to establish a National Disability Research Agenda. This document laid out six principles intended to guide future disability-related research: that it should be *inclusive and rights based*; *responsive and diverse*; *practicable and outcomes orientated*; *collaborative and cross disciplinary*; *accessible and communicated*; and *efficient and targeted* (Department of Social Services, 2011a). The present research, with its PAR methodology and industry context, fits most of these criteria.

4.2 Conclusion

If research is an inherently political act, then changing the social relations of research production will require a politically engaged approach to research – one that positions people with disabilities as researchers rather than researched, and as social actors for systemic change. The following chapter will outline the methodology that was chosen with a view to achieving these aims – Participatory Action Research.

CHAPTER 5

5. METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Methodology is understood as the research strategy used, its rationale, and lens for analysis (Saldana, 2011; Brookshier, 2018). This chapter will discuss the origins of PAR, explore the concepts of oppression and emancipation that inform PAR, discuss the facilitation of PAR within the current study, and examine its epistemological underpinnings.

5.1 Background

Participatory research is "undertaken collaboratively with and for the individuals, groups or communities who are its subject" (Pain, 2004, p.652). Participatory research has a well-developed history (e.g. Beresford, 2000; Reason, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014; McIntyre, 2007). PAR practitioners aim to engage people affected by an issue as co-researchers investigating the issue at hand, rather than as the subjects of the research (which can paint them as 'the problem'). It is "the practice of engaging those whose lives are impacted by the research directly into the research process" (Boser, 2006, p. 11), a democratisation of research (Kidd & Kral, 2005) that "creates parity for individuals and communities in their relationships with professionals, [and giving] promise of effecting systemic change' (Cahn, 2004, p. 23). PAR emphasises the importance of stakeholder participation in all levels of the research process, including the design, data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings (Kemmis *et al*., 2014, p. 4). This helps to ensure authenticity, ownership and transparency (Reason & Bradbury, 2009, p. 4).

Selener (1997) described that pioneers of the PAR movement were dissatisfied with the traditional positivistic research methodology, which looked at people solely as subjects of study, depriving them of any input in the research process other than responding to the researchers' questions. According to Chambers, the essence of such an approach is "changes and reversals" of typical roles, behaviours, relationships and patterns of learning (1997, p.103). That is, in participatory processes, "outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn…they do not impose their reality; they encourage and enable local people to express their own" (Chambers 1997, p.103).

The present study, developed as a partnership between the City of Bunbury and Edith Cowan University, presented a unique opportunity to involve people with lived experience of disability as co-researchers of disability access and inclusion in the City. The design of the study encouraged the Co-researchers to take some control over the process of knowledge production and dissemination,

framing questions from their point of view, and engaging key personnel from the City of Bunbury in deliberative dialogue.

Thus, the study involved two groups of participants – *Co-researchers* (people with lived experience of disability who helped to conduct the inquiry), and *City Informants* (technical and managerial stakeholders from the City of Bunbury who were invited to participate in the research). My role as PhD student and PAR Facilitator was to facilitate the process, record data, and to write up the findings and recommendations at the end. This approach to research is underpinned by three important principles that will now be explained.

5.2 Principles and phases of Participatory Action Research

5.2.1 Principles of PAR

The term PAR encapsulates three key principles:

- Participation principle: the people most affected by the research problem should participate in ways that allow them to share control over the research process;
- Action principle: the research should lead to some tangible action within the immediate context;
- Research principle: the research process should demonstrate rigour and integrity (McIntyre, 2008; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008).

The following sections explore the conceptual foundations of these three principles in more detail, and situate them within the context of the present study.

Participation principle

PAR seeks to democratise the act of 'research' and challenges the notion that research is strictly an academic endeavour that should be conducted by 'somebody else' who may be more qualified but less connected to the problem at hand (Pain, 2004). Rather, those most affected by the problem have a role as researchers of the problem, participating in collective and self-reflective inquiry that helps them to improve the situations in which they find themselves, and the practices they participate in (Baum, 2006). PAR emphasises the importance of stakeholder participation at all levels of the research process, including the design, data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings (Kemmis *et al*., 2014; McIntyre, 2007; Coons & Watson, 2013). This stands in contrast to conventional research that is done 'to' people, rather than 'with' them or 'by' them. In this way the research is "grounded in the perspectives and interests of those immediately concerned and not

filtered through an outside researcher's preconceptions and interests" (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.4). Context is critical, and it has been argued that "only people within a context really know and understand what it is… outsiders rarely understand the historical and relationship complexity of a community, or are able to contextualise change processes" (King & Cruikshank, 2012, p.9). For Reason and Bradbury, participation is much more than a methodology, it is a "political statement as well as a theory of knowledge" (2006, p.10). The political dimension of participation is that it "affirms people's right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and which claim to generate knowledge about them" (Reason & Bradbury 2006, p.10).

Action principle

PAR can be conceptualised as being about "working with participants to achieve the change that they desire" (Kindon, 2005, p.208). The knowledge gained through PAR may be used to equip participants to take appropriate action within the immediate context to improve their circumstances, through advocacy and improvements to policies and practices (Kemmis *et al*, 2014; McIntyre, 2007). PAR is aimed at making changes directly, rather than waiting for someone else to implement changes based on their reading of the research findings (Noffke, 2009). This contrasts with conventional research that emphasises the decontextualizing of data and the production of generalisable theory for application elsewhere (Charmaz, 2014). Where conventional researchers may be satisfied with having 'added to knowledge' and seeing this as an end rather than a means to an end (Prilleltensky, 1997), proponents of PAR advocate that there should be "no research without action, and no action without research" (Adelman, 1975, cited in Townsend, 2014, p.8). Shirah Hassan, a practitioner and advocate of PAR, adds that:

> *PAR is important for communities because it changes our lives - as opposed to academic research which may have a long term effect, but it will have an effect that is far away from us. PAR has an effect on us while we're doing it. You're holding the data and all of the results in the palm of your hands. So if you have a finding, you can make an immediate change - you can take an immediate step, and you don't have to wait years for the results to come in from an outside source. You can start seeing trends and start responding to those trends in real time (Hassan, 2016, p.1).*

Action within PAR has been defined as "any concerted effort to remove some impediment that hampers the growth of a group of people, be it structural or ideological" (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p.189). Kidd and Kral conclude that ideally, PAR serves as the "start of a catalytic process of action and growth that becomes a part of local culture, and the 'PAR' element essentially disappears" (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p.189).

Research principle

The foundations of research are systematic and rational inquiry, and PAR is no exception (Noffke, 2009). However, the democratic approach to inquiry that PAR entails creates an unconventional research context in which power and control over the research process are shared with participants who are not necessarily trained in, or constrained by, the accepted conventions of research. PAR is a complex, messy and unpredictable form of inquiry (Baum, 2006). Some scholars of action research believe conventional research and policy-making has failed to adequately account for complex social problems (Clarke & Stewart, 1997), such as homelessness, racism and discrimination against people with disabilities because the complexities brought about by the interplay of many obtuse social and political factors are difficult to define, measure and control (King *et al*, 1998; Frauenberger *et al*., 2015).

However, the departure from conventional research methodology that PAR entails has led critics to raise questions around rigour and accountability (see Kidd & Kral, 2005). PAR proponents Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that rigour and accountability in PAR ought to be evaluated using alternative frames of reference, for example, trustworthiness and authenticity, rather than reliability and validity. Trustworthiness, they argue, ought to be evaluated by the PAR project's degree of credibility (good design based on established practices and submitted for peer review), transferability (produces rich accounts of the process), dependability (keeps complete and accessible records of all phases, and provides justifications), and confirmability (not allowing personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the researcher's conduct and findings) (p.391). Authenticity can be judged through the degree of fair representation of different viewpoints, and the degree to which the process is educative and catalytic and facilitates involvement in change action (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Likewise, Frauenberger *et al*. (2015) emphasise that rigour and accountability in PAR can be evaluated through evidence of serious debate, critique and reflection. For McIntyre (2008), the validity of PAR is measured by the degree of impact it has had on improving the circumstances of the people engaged according to their own subjective assessment, and that any transferable knowledge resulting from the process is positive but not critical.

Participatory Action Research and its methods are valid forms of scientific research, driven by a set of principles rather than a set of methods (Kidd & Kral, 2005). Thus, any conventional data collection methods can be employed by the Research Group to collect data, including the full gamut of qualitative or quantitative methods (Kidd & Kral, 2005). However, qualitative methods are often better suited because the "critical and practical knowledge developed in PAR emanates from an understanding of meaning" (p.190). Where qualitative methods are used, PAR should "give 'thick'

(detailed) descriptions of the participants and their various roles, reflect on the emergent knowledge, and reveal the changes (or lack thereof), both structural and personal, for the people involved, including the researcher" (p.191).

5.2.2 Phases of PAR

There appears to be no universally accepted model of PAR, and so I have devised a diagrammatic representation (Figure 2) of three distinct processes that run parallel to each other that I found discussed in relevant literature (for example Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Balcazar, Keys, Kaplan, & Suarez-Balcazar, 1998; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, Kemmis *et al*., 2014). In the middle are seven phases in the process of conducting PAR, and identified either side are the parallel processes of self-empowerment and facilitation that are implicit in the literature about PAR, and that are considered critical to its success. The purpose of this diagram is to visually present the processes of self-empowerment and facilitation in relation to the research process that are otherwise hidden or implied.

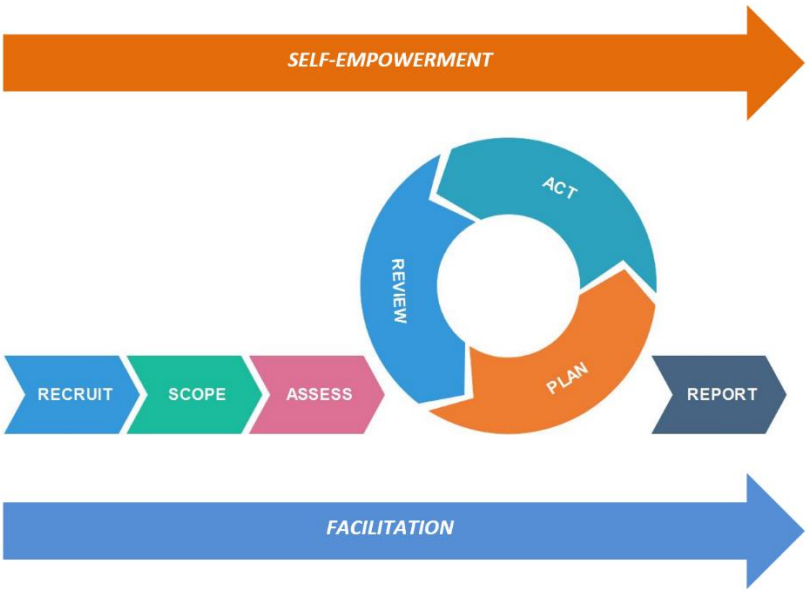


Figure 2: Phases in the PAR research process, and parallel processes of self-empowerment and facilitation.

The relevant academic literature about action research discusses seven common and distinct phases in the PAR process (see for example Reason & Bradbury, 2008), although each author presents a slightly different model with some seemingly over-simplified, and others quite complicated. Hence, I felt it necessary to produce a diagram that identifies all seven phases in approximate order (see figure 2) to aid my own conceptualisation of the phases of PAR. These phases are not as linear as the

diagram suggests, and at different times the research group may need to return to and re-examine earlier phases (McTaggart, Nixon & Kemmis, 2017).

The first phase is the identification and recruitment of participants the study seeks to engage as co-researchers. The second phase is about the research group defining the scope of the study with further refinement occurring in the next two phases. The third phase is about the research group making an assessment of the problem or needs. It begins with group members sharing stories and perspectives about the problem to develop a shared narrative (Harpur *et al*., 2004). This information is then analysed for key themes and helps to identify the people and processes that need to be engaged into the study. During this phase, background information is also gathered such as facts and figures to inform the action strategies. Next, the research group develops a plan (fourth phase) for engaging and influencing the people and processes identified and then implements the actions (fifth phase) outlined in the plan. Data is gathered before, during and after the process to review (sixth phase) the effectiveness of the actions and identify key outcomes that can be reported (seventh phase) to stakeholders, sponsors and other interested parties. The review information may also be useful for further planning for research and action which is characteristic of the iterative cycle of Participatory Action Research (Pant, 2014).

5.3 Participatory Action Research as emancipation from oppression

5.3.1 Emancipatory potential of PAR

Research can be used in ways that reinforce the status quo, or to help emancipate people from oppressive cultures and practices (Pant, 2016). The treatment of people with disabilities by society was framed by disability activists as a form of oppression, which led to a push for 'emancipation' and the emergence of the Disabled People's Movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Barnes & Mercer, 1997). The concept of emancipation is found in philosophies and movements that champion the cause of oppressed communities, such as feminism (women's rights), Marxism (rights of the oppressed worker), and post-colonialism (rights of colonised peoples) (McIntyre, 2008). Feminist authors, such as Gayle Letherby (2003), questioned research practices that reinforced the status quo, and she exhorted researchers to examine the power, position and politics of their research context.

Alice McIntyre draws attention to the influence of feminism on PAR, suggesting that PAR is "making the invisible visible" and "bringing the margin to the centre" (McIntyre, 2008, p.4). Feminist research disrupts traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings, a process that [is about] becoming "both/and"—insider and outsider (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.3). In PAR, connections are made between

the personal and the political by translating private troubles into public issues (Wright Mills, 1970). This helps to move the focus of the problem away from the individual, and locate it in the surrounding structures of power and decision-making. According to Hall (1981), PAR borrows from Marx's view that oppressed people need to engage in critical reflection about the structural power of dominant classes and take action against oppression; and Gramsci's views on addressing the uneven distribution of power in society through self-actualisation, reflecting that people are, and can be, catalysts for change (Hall, 1992).

According to Colin Barnes, research can be used as a tool to expose and confront oppression, not only in relation to research findings but also within the research process itself (Barnes, 1992). Selener (1997) described that pioneers of the PAR movement were dissatisfied with the traditional positivistic research methodology, which looked at people solely as subjects of study, depriving them of any input in the research process other than responding to the researchers' questions. They were concerned that the participants of research often experience further disempowerment or marginalisation through the research process, which they believe has been largely a "tool of the powerful used against the powerless" (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p.13). They question whose interests the research really serves, the purpose of the research and how the results will be used (Alson & Bowles, 2003; Oliver, 1992). Oliver (1992) argued that conventional research has failed to meet the needs or expectations of people with disabilities, primarily because it has framed research from individual and medical model interpretations of disability rather than from social model or human rights perspectives, and uses methods that fragment and decontextualize people's experiences so that the data becomes meaningless to them (Oliver, 1992; Huxham & Eden, 2008).

5.3.2 Dialogue and practice architectures

From the literature, it appears that PAR can be used in two key ways to overcome oppressive practices:

- **empowering practitioners** to undertake research that combines action and reflection with theory and practice, thus seeking meaningful and inclusive ways of generating knowledge together in the workplace to improve local situations and enhance professional practices (Somerville, 2014);
- **empowering marginalised people** to critically examine their reality and the structural causes of their oppression, to then take action to influence the cultures and systems oppressing them (Pant, 2016).

The first I refer to as *evaluative PAR*, and the second as *emancipatory PAR* – a distinction that is not always clear in the literature, which can be confusing. Evaluative PAR happens when a team of practitioners (such as a work team) engage in constructive and collective evaluation of a problem that affects their practice to identify potential solutions – such as a change to workplace norms, policies or procedures. This is similar in a way to appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Emancipatory PAR on the other hand occurs when a group of oppressed or marginalised people (who may not know each other but share an issue in common) engage in collective evaluation of a shared problem that affects their wellbeing, in order to discuss, research and take action to address the issue. The two types of PAR can be conducted independently of each other but are more effective in unison whereby two groups (for example, those who implement policy and those who experience its effects) enter into dialogue with each other.

According to Breitbart, dialogue is a most fundamental feature of participatory research, as it allows professional knowledges to work ‘‘in a dialectical tension” with other forms of knowledge to produce a more complete understanding of a situation or environment (2003, p.164). This is akin to the concept of knowledge partnering advocated by Robyn Eversole, Alice McIntyre and others, which is usually facilitated by a skilled ‘knowledge worker’ (Eversole, 2014; McIntyre, 2008), or in the present case, a PhD research student. The present study was designed to bring the technical and managerial knowledges of local government practitioners into dialogue with the lived experience knowledges of people with disabilities, in order to better understand the barriers and facilitators to achieving an accessible city.

Although the present study emphasises the emancipatory PAR elements and the participation of people with disabilities as co-researchers, the intention was that practitioners from the City of Bunbury would, through engagement as Informants in the study, be encouraged to critically evaluate their practice related to disability access and inclusion in public design. McTaggart *et al*. suggest that the work practices of practitioners are “held in place by ‘practice architectures’—cultural-discursive, material, economic, and social-political arrangements found in or brought to the sites where practices happen” (2017, p.26). These arrangements hold practices in place and provide the resources (the language, the material resources, and the social resources) that make the practice possible. Such practice architectures, they argue, shape or prefigure social practices, so “changing a social practice typically requires participants to disrupt or change the practice architectures supporting it” (p.26). Engaging in PAR helps to create the “public spheres” in which practitioners can engage in “conversations where people strive for intersubjective agreement about the ideas and the language they use, mutual understanding of one another’s perspectives, and unforced consensus about what to do” (p.25).

Can involving the people most impacted by local government practices in the conversations about practice architectures help inform the discussion and potentially change those practices – especially if they enter the conversation from a position of power as a 'researcher'? That was a primary question the present study aimed to discover.

5.3.3 The political dimension of research

Susan Noffke argued that all forms of action research are political because participants are "learning to become active citizens", and adds that "the act of gathering information can be dangerous" (Noffke, 2009, p.15). Knowledge is power, and taking control over the production of knowledge is empowering because it can be used to influence the structures that perpetuate the problematic status quo (Pant, 2016). PAR pays careful attention to power relationships, advocating for "power to be deliberately shared between the researcher and the researched: blurring the line between them until the researched become the researchers" (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006, p.854).

Participation of marginalised people in research can help them to develop 'critical consciousness' about the nature of their oppression by relating individual experiences to socio-political realities (Friere, 2005; Pant, 2014). Paulo Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to "intervene in reality in order to change it" (p.38). As participants develop their critical consciousness through analysis of the systems and constructs of power, they develop a sense of 'collective efficacy' to work towards greater equity in those systems, and they act upon it (Maguire, 1987, p.14). Knowledge production itself becomes a form of mobilization, embedded in the iterative cycle of action-reflection-action (Pant, 2014, p.293). Thus, "through theory and praxis Participatory Action Researchers seek to demonstrate how the oppressed could be producers of knowledge and creators of a new reality" (Brinton, Lykes and Mallona, 2008, p. 114).

PAR brings people together to critically reflect on common problems and needs (Pant, 2014); to be effective, the process needs to engage participants from both sides of the equation – the powerful and the marginalised (McIntyre, 2008). In this way, PAR can be empowering. Pant (2014) observes that empowerment "fosters capacities in individuals, groups and communities to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (p.290). He discusses how the process of empowerment builds individual 'agency'—the "ability to act and change the world" (p.291).

Pratto argues that the key to individual agency is "transformational relationships" (2016, p.10). She sees all people as political actors, and as "part of the context for others" (2016, p.10). Context, Pratto reflects, "is not static – people's desires, options, and understandings of their own identities

and those of others, change – and because needs are not static, power relations are not static" (p.2). Thus, PAR presents opportunities for 'transformational relationships' to occur between practitioners and the people profoundly affected by their practices – and in the case of the present study, between practitioners in the City of Bunbury responsible for public design, and people with lived experience of disability who rely on public infrastructure. The same goes for the relationship between professional researchers and participants. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) suggest that epistemologically, constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant and their co-construction of meaning; therefore researchers, in their 'humanness', are part of the research endeavour rather than objective observers. The central role of the PAR Facilitator will now be discussed.

5.4 Facilitation of Participatory Action Research with people with disabilities

PAR has been described as fluid, multifaceted, co-created and idiosyncratic (Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013, p.620). The role of PAR Facilitator is likewise multifaceted and there is no agreement in the literature for how such a role ought to be conducted. Rather, proponents provide guidelines, principles and advice, the application of which varies depending on the context. Thus, Fook and Gardner (2007) exhort practitioners to critically examine their own practices and methods.

Emancipatory research proponents argue that research is never 'value-free', and that researchers should always examine their underlying values and assumptions (Alston & Bowles, 2003, Charmaz, 2008). PAR facilitators play a critical role in bringing people together, helping them overcome barriers to participation, and providing the resources and support needed to begin a PAR process (Balcazar & Keys 2006). The ideal in PAR is that participants self-organise (Shakespeare, 1993). However, oppressed people often face barriers to self-organising for the purposes of investigating a problem they face (Barton, 2005; Mladenov, 2013), including barriers such as social isolation, lack of resources, time pressures, social stigma, physical barriers, communication or comprehension difficulties, and so forth.

A key point of departure in PAR from conventional research relates to the positioning of the PAR facilitator as an active agent who interacts with and influences the participants, rather than maintaining a neutral stance (Soltis-Jarrett, 1997). The facilitator-researcher actively encourages participants to critically reflect on their problem from different perspectives, educate themselves, and challenge the status quo rather than to simply describe their experiences of it (Klocker, 2008,

Huxham & Eden, 2008; Selener, 1997). This is activism and research rolled in together. According to Alston & Bowles,

> *The job of the emancipatory researcher is to uncover the myths, beliefs and social constructions that contribute to the continuation of the status quo, in order to reveal how power relations are really operating to control the powerless. In the process, emancipatory researchers aim to liberate, enlighten or empower those people who are subjugated. (Alston & Bowles, 2014, p.14)*

The role of PAR Facilitator requires well-developed planning, negotiation and communication skills, as well as skills in fundamentals of research (Soltis-Jarrett, 1997). Where they lack experience they may need to first equip themselves with these skills before embarking. To address this I undertook a course of study in research methods as a student with Edith Cowan University, and I read extensively about PAR including other PhD theses that used this methodology.

5.4.1 Animating and educating

The role of animator has a well-established history in international and community development. According to Donnelly Roark (2014, p.38), concepts of community development and 'Animation Rurale' were developed in the late 1940s, when groups of farmers were being trained as 'animateurs' to work with rural villagers to facilitate grass-roots engagement with oppressive governments. Animators, facilitators, advocates, action researchers and community development workers have since sought to work as agents of change with a range of oppressed groups, using education, awareness-raising and self-organising strategies to empower them to address their oppressed state (Frauenberger *et al*, 2015, p.101).

Rahman (2010) refers to an 'animator' as one who works as a "key to unlock self-thinking and self-initiatives of the people" (p.52). Clement & Besselaar (1993) noted that for successful PAR projects, "it was not the particular methods and techniques that were decisive, but a strong political focus on participation, communication, and learning", and observed that "what was critical to their successful application was effective animation" (p.33). Animation helps to create a sense of momentum and energy for action from within the oppressed group, while education helps the participant group members to gain power through knowledge. The animator should promote participation and capitalise on participant's skills and strengths (McIntyre, 2008, p.26).

As animator, the PAR Facilitator does not try to adopt a neutral stance in the research process (as is usually the case in conventional research), but rather is an active agent of change who seeks to raise the consciousness of participants about the realities of their own disadvantage – and to provide

opportunity for them to acquire the tools and knowledge needed to bring about change through political action informed by research. In the present study, as the embedded PAR Facilitator I sought to 'animate' the Co-researchers, encouraging their active participation in evaluating barriers and facilitators to disability access and inclusion in Bunbury, planning for action, collecting data, analysing data and disseminating the results.

Clement and Besselaar (1993, p.33) suggest that an animator should have "strong ties to the work setting" (p.35), which is the setting where the research is being conducted and where the source of the problems lay. I found that a critical role as PAR Facilitator was negotiating access to key personnel within the City of Bunbury, to secure their participation as Informants. This dialogue between the Research Group and the City Informants was helped immensely by the fact that I had existing networks within the City of Bunbury and knowledge of the permission-seeking protocols (having previously worked there, and also being physically located there for the duration of the data collection period).

5.4.2 Facilitator role in collecting and analysing data

The degree to which the PAR Facilitator should be involved in the data collection process and their role within it is debated. Some proponents such as Maguire (1987) argue that the PAR Facilitator should step back as far as possible from the process, and try to 'get out of the way' and let the participants control the agenda. They suggest that too much control or interference by the PAR Facilitator risks positioning them as 'expert' and reinforcing the passive position of participants (Maguire, 1987). The other risk is that the PAR Facilitator may try to impose their particular perspectives rather than encouraging and recognising a diversity of perspectives (Bowles, 1996).

However, some proponents argue that empowerment in PAR does not necessarily mean participants taking control over all decisions and resources, but that PAR is about a gradual sharing of control with the participants and increasing their influence over data collection, analysis and dissemination (Garcia-Iriarte, Kramer, Kramer, & Hammel, 2009). The role of PAR Facilitator therefore is about helping and enabling, as opposed to telling and persuading (Susawad, 2007). It is about connecting people with common problems and issues and building trusting relationships of co-inquiry (King & Cruikshank, 2012). In addition, the PAR Facilitator should work to impart research knowledge and skills to research subjects to allow them to be meaningfully involved in the process of data collection and analysis (Kitchin, 2000).

Common to all PAR is a concerted effort to democratise research and use it as a tool to empower ordinary people to influence policies and practices that disadvantage them, and therefore part of

writing up a PAR project is reporting on the success or otherwise of this goal (Anderson, 2017). So, academic PAR projects such as this one are complicated by virtue of the need for the PAR Facilitator to collect, analyse and report data about the problem of empowerment, as well as working alongside the Co-researchers to collect, analyse and report data about the problem that has occupied their research efforts.

My role in data collection and analysis was to:

- conduct an extensive literature review;
- facilitate research meetings and audio-record them for analysis to determine key themes and insights;
- support the Co-researchers to engage in dialogue with City Informants (audio-recorded), and reflect on what was learnt;
- conduct an academic analysis of the data;
- maintain a reflective journal;
- write and co-present a MARCIA Research Report (see Appendix 1) for Council; and
- write a PhD thesis.

McIntyre (2008) also noted that the role of PAR Facilitator is to also pay attention to summarising, analysing, and critiquing the data so as to present aspects of the project to various academic audiences, including writing articles, conference presentations, and informal discussions with interested groups.

5.4.3 Researching with people with disabilities

Facilitating PAR with people with disabilities presents a number of practical and theoretical issues for consideration. To begin with, there is an argument that research *for* people with disabilities should be conducted *by* people with disabilities if it is to be authentic (Oliver, 1992), and that non-disabled researchers should avoid interfering in the process. However, in their paper *Parasites, pawns and partners: disability research and the role of non-disabled researchers* Stone and Priestley (1996) recognise that disabled people as a group are in an oppressed position, meaning they have been systematically denied access to the education, resources, and opportunities needed to participate equally in society. This has had profound implications for participatory disability research in that it is conducted in a wider context of oppressive social relations (Stone & Priestley, 1996). Therefore non-disabled academics can and should use their privileged position to help people with disabilities to overcome oppression by facilitating their involvement in research that is meaningful to them, and

(as individuals committed to the politics of disability rights) “politicise the unpoliticised” and act as advocates for the social model of disability amongst participants (Stone & Priestley, 1996, p. 711).

According to Kitchin (2001) PAR should be a collaboration of disabled and non-disabled people, and the disabled status of the researcher is a non-issue as long as they approach the research from a ‘disabled-friendly’ position. My personal position of being a person with lived experience of disability (when I was a young child, my father developed a physical and cognitive disability as the result of a stroke) certainly influenced my approach to the study, providing me with the passion, empathy, and commitment needed to undertake such a complex study. However I would not consider personal or family experience of disability to be a critical success factor for researchers undertaking PAR, what is needed is a commitment to social justice.

The next issue to consider when conducting PAR with people with disabilities relates to the provision of support for participation. According to Radermacher *et al*., empowerment is about providing participants with the tools they need to equip themselves to exert influence over decisions that affect their lives, and particular attention needs to be paid to ensuring that

> *different forms of participation are valued, that structures and processes of research are empowering, not alienating… and that the appropriate supports (such as training) are in place to enable participation (Radermacher et al., 2010, p.335).*

According to Jan Walmsley (2003), conducting social research with people with disabilities should comply with the following:

- a research question that is owned by disabled people;
- furthers the interests of disabled people;
- it is collaborative;
- disabled people are involved in doing the work;
- disabled people exercise some control over the process and outcomes; and
- questions, reports and outcomes must be accessible to people with learning disabilities. (p.95)

Contrary to one of the principles of PAR, the Co-researchers were not fully involved in all aspects of the research process. It was simply impossible to achieve involvement in all aspects because a PhD research project is primarily an academic endeavour that requires scoping, planning, ethics approval, facilitation, academic analysis and writing up of findings, all of which are unreasonable to expect unpaid participants to be fully engaged in.

The following table outlines the phases of the research and the degree of involvement by Co-researcher participants.

Table 2: The degree of participation by Co-researchers in different phases of the research

Phase of research	**Degree of participation by Co-researchers**	**Approximate timeframe**
Scoping and Literature review	**Low**	12 months
Developing lines of inquiry	**High**	3 months
Initial data collection and review	**High**	3 months
Focussed data collection	**High**	3 months
Analysis to identify key themes	**Medium**	3 months
Academic data analysis	**Low**	6 months
Report writing (thesis)	**Low**	6 months

What this table highlights is that the Co-researchers were not completely involved in all aspects of the research process, and while they played an integral role in many key phases of the study, they mostly informed the process rather than controlled it. For example, their contribution to the analysis of the data could be described as 'medium' in terms of identifying key themes, and their involvement in the academic analysis was 'low'. However, involvement in developing lines of inquiry and data collection could be described as 'high'. I would argue that the Co-researchers' influence over key elements of the research (developing lines of inquiry, data collection and broad level data analysis) was substantial.

Some additional matters regarding the involvement of people with disabilities in PAR from an ethical point of view are discussed in Chapter 6.

5.4.4 Involving people with learning difficulties in the study

The successful inclusion of two participants who self-identified as having learning difficulties was a particularly encouraging aspect of this study because for people with learning difficulties,

disablement is often compounded by their lack of engagement in research and discussions about their experiences (Boxall, 2002). Where appropriately supported to represent their own experiences, their participation challenges traditional views of people with learning difficulties as incapable, powerless and passive (Boxall, 2002). According to Ollerton & Horsfall people labelled with learning difficulties have the right to name the world as they see it and the right to access support to participate in accessible research that is rigorous and facilitated (Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013).

A publication produced with and by people with learning difficulties in the UK called *Let Me In – I'm a Researcher* (Bewley, McCulloch, & The Learning Difficulties Research Team, 2006) provided some practical advice for PAR facilitation, summarised as follows:

- A focus on participant involvement in every aspect and at every stage of the research process (p.18)
- A focus on group cohesion, including social time together to build trust and unity (p.21)
- A focus on abilities, talents and diverse individual views rather than on disabilities (p.22)
- Allowing enough time for adequate preparation in the planning stages and a jointly developed plan of action (p.26)
- The provision of training in research techniques, such as interviewing and presentation skills, and data analysis (p.27)
- Good support systems in place to keep everyone meaningfully engaged (p.27)
- Reflexive methodology, such as participants keeping research diaries and contributing to group discussions about the efficacy of the research process (p.29)
- The sharing of personal stories and experiences by participants using creative formats such as poetry, photography or artwork to inform the process (p.29)
- Holding regular meetings and maintaining communication between meetings (p.41)
- Clear ethical expectations and boundaries (p.48)
- The development of resources and information in easily accessible formats (p.60)
- Control by the group over resources such as money and access to funds for out-of-pocket expenses such as travel costs (p.86) (Bewley *et al*. 2006).

Regarding concerns about the authenticity of research involving people with learning difficulties when they do not have complete control over all aspects of the research process, Ward and Simons observe that there will "need to be some 'division of labour' where non-disabled researchers undertake some of the technical tasks" (1998, p.130). They argue that, provided the people with

learning difficulties are involved in the critical decisions, “this does not necessarily undermine their role as co-researchers; most research teams involve a balance of skills with specialist roles” (p.130).

Barton suggests that one of the main issues to consider when involving people with learning difficulties in research is “the question of power and the realization of a dignified relationship for all participants within the research process based on trust, respect and reciprocity” (2005, p.319). Aldridge agrees, observing that one of the main advantages of using participatory methods to involve people with learning difficulties in research is that these methods…

> *take into account not just the nature and extent of participants' vulnerabilities, but also the participants' specific needs. Such approaches help build relationships of trust and understanding between researcher and participants via consultation as part of the ongoing research process. This approach fosters collaboration, discussion and a process of coming to know one another (Aldridge, 2014, p.8).*

Thus the cultivation of trust through relationship is considered to be an essential element to the successful inclusion of people with learning difficulties in research. Also, finding creative ways in which people with learning difficulties can participate meaningfully in the data collection process is important, particularly if verbal communication is difficult. For example, one technique used as a communication aid in this study was photo elicitation (also called Photovoice). Wang and Burris identified three stages that participants should be involved in when using photo elicitation: selecting (choosing those photographs that most accurately reflect the community’s needs and assets); contextualising (telling stories about what the photographs mean); and codifying (identifying those issues, themes, or theories that emerge) (1997, p.380). The facilitator uses open-ended questions designed to prompt the participants to expand on their contributions. Questions like “tell us more about what that means to you”, “what happened next?”, “how did you feel about that?”, and “what do you think should be done about it?” can help the participants to recall the salient points in their stories.

Another similar technique used was video narration. This was useful for participants who experienced difficulty with constructing a fluent or coherent narrative. I enlisted the assistance of a college media student to produce short videos in which a Co-researcher was interviewed, and the responses edited into a coherent narrative that captured the salient points the Co-researcher wished to communicate (see Appendix 3 for a sample). This was checked back with the Co-researcher to ensure it accurately reflected their intended message, before it was played to the rest of the Research Group.

5.4.5 Negotiating access to City Informants

As PAR facilitator, my role was not just to successfully engage Co-researchers in the study, but also City Informants. Clement and Besselaar (1993, p.33) suggest that a PAR Facilitator should have "strong ties to the work setting" (p.35) where the research is being conducted and where the issues lay. I found that my existing knowledge of permission-seeking protocols within the City of Bunbury helped immensely in securing the participation of City Informants (having previously worked there, and also being physically located in the building for the duration of the data collection period). This process is further explained in Chapter 6.

5.4.6 PAR Facilitator reflexivity

According to McIntyre (2007), it is critical that the PAR Facilitator can engage with the research reflexively by "attending to their personal biography" (p.8). A personal biography informs the PAR Facilitator's ability to listen, question, synthesise, analyse and interpret knowledge. At many points in the research journey, I found that my personal perspectives and beliefs were challenged, and I needed to reflect on how and why I had constructed particular views about the world during my professional career. For example, I had difficulty with the notion of oppression prevalent in critical disability studies. I could not reconcile in my mind how people working for local government (my former colleagues) could be characterised as oppressors (Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2013), somehow deliberately colluding in activities that were aimed at oppressing disabled people. I could not think of any individual amongst my former colleagues who held such malice towards people with disabilities, though I knew many who cared little enough for disability access and inclusion to consider taking any action beyond that required of them. As I developed an understanding of the nature of oppression through preparing the literature review, I began to see how the collective effects of ignorance, systemic failings and lack of action on access and inclusion had an oppressive effect on people's lives, by constantly introducing barriers to access and participation, or failing to remove them. It was not a malicious form of oppression, rather it was casual and unintended (Shriner & Scotch, 2001).

Another example relates to a point in the research when I was challenged on a comment I made to one of the Co-researchers in which I said "I know it's hard for you as a vision-impaired person", to which she retorted "it's not hard for me – don't make assumptions about my abilities!". We had an in-depth conversation about disablist assumptions causing me to reflect on my perceptions of disability and helping me to realise that the way I viewed 'difficulty' and 'adversity' in connection to disability was not necessarily how those with disabilities might see their own circumstances.

Other proponents of reflexive PAR recommend that the PAR Facilitator demonstrate:

- a commitment to the democratisation of content and method (Chataway, 2001);
- an open and critical attitude (Kidd & Kral 2005);
- an awareness that they are in the middle of the lives of the people involved, and therefore must be prepared to care deeply and personally, be confused and frustrated, and be quiet when necessary (Maguire, 1987);
- an understanding that PAR involves the development of human relationships and friendships with participants, and that 'authentic participation' is motivating, contributes to personal growth and reduces the barriers between people (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Fals-Borda, 1999; Maguire, 1987);
- being conscious that the researcher can, in very subtle ways, silence voices and undermine the entire research process (Rahman, 1991);
- being aware that oppressed people have been acculturated into powerlessness and may resist the sharing of power the PAR Facilitator offers (McTaggart, 1997, Rahman, 1991);
- being open to multiple perspectives while committed to a shared vision and bringing knowledge rather than imposing it (Kidd & Kral, 2005);
- being amenable to change (Kidd & Kral, 2005);

5.5 Critiques of Participatory Action Research

The legitimacy of PAR remains contested, not just in terms of its methods but also in terms of its goals. According to Noffke (2009), action research, unproblematized in terms of its goals, can act to reinscribe existing practices rather than focus on social justice. Unless driven by social justice principles, it may simply become another form of fashionable community engagement doesn't actually challenge or change the status quo. Cornwall and Jewkes observe that some academics judge PAR as "biased, impressionistic and unreliable", and regard the methods as 'soft' (1995, p. 1667). Protagonists of PAR contend that it is not a 'method' at all, but an 'approach' to research that is based on a philosophy of empowerment, and can use a range of data collection methods traditionally associated with both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms in order to achieve an outcome in-situ (Kemmis *et al*., 2014, p. 20). Some critics see PAR as necessarily 'one-off' projects and criticize a lack of repeatability and, hence, lack of rigour. These criticisms are countered by the argument that involving oppressed people in research about things that actually matter to them provides a richness of insight that could not be gained in other ways (Reason & Rowan, 1981; Whyte, 1991).

PAR positions the researched as researcher, but Danieli & Woodhams (2005) provide a word of caution about researching the powerful and involving them as partners in the process of data collection and analysis. They ask, can emancipatory PAR be adopted with, for example, managers who may have different agendas to those of the disability rights movement, and should they be allowed to define the nature of the questions, or to take part in the analysis of the data? They suggest it would not be wise to attempt to involve them at all stages of the research process, and that to "expect such respondents to collaborate in the exposure of their own potentially discriminatory practices seems to us to be at best naïve and at worst a strategy to ensure that access will not be granted" (Danieli & Woodhams, 2005, p.289). This was indeed a central consideration in the present study – the extent to which the stakeholders should be invited as collaborators in the process of exposing discriminatory practices. On reflection, it was probably only the City of Bunbury's commitment to becoming the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia that kept the door open so the Research Group could engage in deep dialogue and analysis together with the City Informants to the extent that took place (see Chapters 8-9).

5.6 Data analysis (Framework Analysis)

5.6.1 Framework Analysis

Qualitative research like PAR produces a large amount of data that must be rigorously analysed. There are many tools available to a researcher to conduct a structured analysis of qualitative data. For example, grounded theory's use of constant comparison, phenomenology's application of hermeneutics, ethnography's description of cultures, and a focus on text and the use of language within discourse analysis (Ward, Furber, Tierney & Swallow, 2013). Framework Analysis is one such recognised method for organising, classifying and analysing qualitative research data that applies an interpretive framework to identify themes, issues, and root causes in order to develop findings that address the research question. The Framework Analysis method sits within a broad family of methods termed 'thematic analysis' or 'qualitative content analysis' (Ward *et al*., 2013). These approaches identify thematic links and associations in qualitative data, examine relationships between different parts of the data, and draw descriptive and/or explanatory conclusions clustered around themes (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid & Redwood, 2013). Framework Analysis has been described as:

> *aptly suited to applied policy research, [and] is better adapted to research that has specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample (eg. professional*

participants), a priori issues, and the potential to create actionable outcomes (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009, p.73).

The defining feature of Framework Analysis is a matrix of rows and columns that delineate cases (dialogues) and codes (keywords), into which 'cells' of summarised data are placed (Ward *et al*., 2013; Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). This matrix provides a structure into which the researcher can systematically reduce the data, in order to analyse it by case and by code (Ward *et al*., 2013). In-depth analysis of key themes can thus take place across the whole data set, whilst preserving the context of each research participant's views (Ward *et al*., 2013; Ritchie & Spencer; 2002). Gale *et al*. (2013) note that whilst Framework Analysis is highly systematic, there is still a need for the researcher to make analytic choices and to appropriately interpret the matrix by generating descriptions, categories, explanations and typologies. Moreover, reflexivity, rigour and quality are fundamental to the process just as they are in other qualitative methods (Gale *et al*., 2013).

The process contains five steps, as outlined in the following table:

Table 3: Steps in the process of Framework Analysis

Familiarisation	The researcher becomes immersed in the data by reading and reflecting on notes and transcripts, and clustering data into key themes. The themes are informed by *a priori* concepts and by new concepts that emerge from the data.
Identifying a thematic framework	The researcher identifies recurrent themes and issues which emerge as important to the respondents, and linking portions or sections of the data that correspond to a particular theme. This process involves more logical and intuitive thinking than being an automatic or mechanical process. It involves making judgements about meaning, relevance and importance of issues, and about implicit connections between ideas in the context of addressing the original research question.
Indexing	The researcher assigns reference IDs to portions or sections of data that correspond to a particular theme, so they can be traced back to their original textual context. Numerical or descriptive text markers can be used.

Charting	The researcher lifts the data from its original textual context and places it in charts or spreadsheets that consist of headings and sub-headings based on the thematic framework, or from *a priori* research inquiries, or in a manner that is perceived by the researcher to be the best way to report the research. It involves abstraction and synthesis. Charting also ensures that researchers pay close attention to describing the data using each participant's own subjective frames and expressions in the first instance, before moving onto interpretation.
Mapping and Interpretation	The researcher reviews the charts and research notes, comparing and contrasting perceptions, accounts or experiences; searching for patterns and connections; and seeking explanations for these within the data. It is a search for structure rather than a multiplicity of evidence, requiring intuition and imagination, and a triggering of associations. The process should achieve the objectives of qualitative analysis: defining concepts, mapping range and nature of phenomena, creating typologies, finding associations, providing explanations, and developing strategies. Strategies and recommendations developed must echo the true attitudes, beliefs and values of the participants.

Adapted from Ritchie & Spencer (2002), Gale et al. (2003), and Srivastava & Thomson (2009).

The key benefits of using Framework Analysis are:

- It is grounded in the observations and accounts of the participants;
- It is dynamic, allowing the analysis to begin from the outset of the process;
- It is systematic and methodical, yet flexible;
- It allows within-case and between-case analysis and enables comparisons between cases and associations within cases to be made;
- It enables easy retrieval of data from the original context (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009).

Framework Analysis is used to apply structure to the process of distilling the data into findings and recommendations, using tools such as Excel spreadsheets, mind maps and journaling. I initially began to develop themes and codes as the literature review sensitised me to *a priori* issues. Other themes emerged as the research progressed and transcripts were analysed and codified. Within the matrix, themes and sub-themes were logically connected to one-another in a cause-and-effect

manner. Samples of the tools used to conduct the Framework Analysis are provided in Appendix 7. The results of the Framework Analysis are in Chapter 10. The data collected and subjected to Framework Analysis in the present study consisted primarily of transcripts of Research Group meetings, and meetings between the Research Group members and City Informants (see Chapter 6.1). The structure of the meetings is detailed in section 6.2.

According to Gale et al. (2003) Framework Analysis is not aligned with a particular epistemological viewpoint or theoretical approach and therefore can be adapted for use in inductive or deductive analysis or a combination of the two (e.g. using pre-existing theoretical constructs deductively, then revising the theory with inductive aspects; or using an inductive approach to identify themes in the data, before returning to the literature and using theories deductively to help further explain certain themes). The Framework Method is considered appropriate for thematic analysis of textual data, particularly interview transcripts, where it is important to be able to compare and contrast data by themes across many cases, while also situating each perspective in context by retaining the connection to other aspects of each individual's account (Gale et al., 2003).

5.6.2 Limitations of Framework Analysis

There are limitations to the Framework Analysis approach, as with other qualitative data analysis methods. Framework Analysis can be time consuming as the researcher carefully considers the relevance of each piece of data and how it might be located within a larger thematic framework (Ward *et al*., 2013). Framework Analysis has also been criticized for lacking the same theoretical underpinning as other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory and ethnography (Smith & Bekker 2011), though it has been suggested that this difference can have advantages. Pope *et al*. (2000) suggest that the flexibility inherent in Framework Analysis can be a limitation because there is the potential for researchers to think that this flexibility means that shortcuts can be taken, which Pope *et al*. argue is not the case. Parkinson, Eatough, Holmes, Stapley & Midgley (2016) observe that, as with most research methodologies, there is a risk that researchers will engage with data in an 'unthinking' way, and "treat the five stages (especially the indexing and charting stages) as mechanical steps to follow" (2016, p.125). They suggest it is essential that researchers remain focused on the research question, and are clear on how the framework will assist in answering it. The authors add that, despite the relatively straightforward description of the stages of framework analysis, "this does not mean that researchers can use it to by-pass the time-consuming process of immersion and meaning-making, that is a core element of all qualitative research" (p.126).

5.7 Conclusion

The use of PAR as methodology provides an approach to inquiry that changes the 'social relations of research production' (Oliver, 1992), and was used to re-position participants with lived experience of disability as Co-researchers, sharing control over the way data was collected and the meaning that was constructed from it. The next chapter will outline how the data was collected including the recruitment of participants, an overview of the methods used for data collection, and an exploration of various ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 6

6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection in PAR has been described in the following manner:

> *Collecting data in an action research project is not a snapshot of a single incident, like a test score. Nor should data collection rely on a single type of data… Rather, action research is a series of quick looks taken at different times and in a variety of ways. In this sense data collecting in action research is much like collecting soil samples: you collect little bits of soil in different places over time (Johnson, 2012, p.1).*

This chapter outlines the methods used for data collection in the present study. It describes the purpose of data collection, the context in which it was collected, and the specific methods used. It also provides background information on the research participants (Co-researchers and City Informants) and discusses matters of ethics relating to their participation. Finally, this chapter will describe the project deliverables and potential consumers of the research findings.

6.1 Participants

As mentioned earlier, the two key participant groups involved in the study were:

- *Co-researchers* (people with lived experience of disability); and
- *City Informants* (City of Bunbury employees or Councillors with influence over public design decisions).

6.1.1 Co-researchers

The opportunity to participate as a Co-researcher was advertised through existing disability networks and in the local media using both the ECU and City of Bunbury logos on materials to indicate the jointly-supported nature of this research endeavour. I held a community information forum for interested community members at the City of Bunbury function rooms, at which it was clarified that the research was being conducted by myself as an ECU PhD student, and not by the City of Bunbury. This forum was attended by around 20 people and prospective participants were invited to submit an expression of interest form.

The only criterion for consideration as a Co-researcher was that the applicant be eligible for membership of the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee, which in effect precluded

people with profound disabilities who were not able to participate meaningfully in local government deliberations, but did not preclude their carers or other representatives. The intended size of the Research Group was approximately 8-10 participants, with shortlisting to be applied if the project exceeded 10 applicants, and/or if greater diversity in the makeup of the group was considered necessary.

Nine applications were received with applicants possessing a significant variety of lived experience of impairment, eliminating the need to shortlist. The final group was made up of six people with disabilities and three parents of people with disabilities, plus two support workers (providing personal assistance for participants with disabilities, but who became participants in their own right), making eleven participants altogether. All group members had lived experience of physical, sensory or cognitive impairments resulting from spinal injury, stroke, learning difficulty, autism, low vision, and cerebral palsy. I met with each participant individually to discuss the study with them, and to take them through the consent form. A copy of the consent form was provided in an 'easy-read' format with pictures and simple language (see Appendix 5). A signed copy of the consent form was also kept on file.

The Research Group, made up of myself as Research Facilitator and the eleven Co-researchers, met once per month on average to engage in data collection and research-related activities, over a 12-month period. Some research activities, such as deliberative dialogue sessions with City Informants, were held at other times in the data collection process. The frequency of activities, though time-consuming, provided a sense of continuity and momentum to the project. The Co-researchers:

- spent time engaged in Research Group meetings in which they shared personal views about the barriers and challenges they and others with disabilities faced in the community (the meetings were audio recorded and analysed for key themes – see Chapter 7);
- spent time engaged in facilitated dialogue with Informants from the City of Bunbury (the meetings were audio recorded and analysed for key themes – see Chapters 8 and 9);
- played an integral part in collecting and interpreting data, and to a lesser extent, analysis and dissemination of findings, many of these activities taking place outside the monthly group meetings (see Chapters 10-12).

6.1.2 City Informants

City Informants were people associated with the City of Bunbury who were identified by the Research Group as key people they wished to engage in deliberative dialogue. The process for determining who to invite was derived from discussion within the group about the kinds of issues we

identified as needing further investigation, and mapping those issues back to specific roles within the organisation. For example, issues to do with accessibility in public events were mapped to Events staff, or issues to do with design standards in development approvals were mapped to the Planning and Building departments.

City Informants were invited to participate in deliberative dialogue using a written invitation. Permission was first sought from their executive managers. In addition, I made appointments with prospective City Informants to speak with them face to face rather than relying on an email or letter of invitation only. This provided an opportunity to explain the purpose of research to the City Informant, and allay any initial concerns they may have had. Some did express reservations about what their involvement would entail, what they might be expected to say, or how their words might be interpreted, but almost all agreed to participate following clarification and reassurance. Many initial conversations involved statements like “but these people have to understand that we can’t please everybody” or “we only have limited resources” or “we are doing all we can already”. I was usually able to overcome their reluctance by explaining that such considerations were part of helping the Research Group to understand the real-world limitations people faced in their work. Others were much more enthusiastic and welcomed the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Research Group.

These preliminary discussions proved crucial to the success of the engagement, because they gave prospective City Informants time to think through their initial reservations or assumptions and, on nearly every occasion, they agreed to participate. I then sent a letter of invitation with a date and time to meet, background information and a consent form. Those who did not agree to participate suggested a more appropriate person to act as an Informant.

6.2 Data collection methods

6.2.1 Purpose of data collection

Data was collected for three primary purposes:

- To answer the research question: **What are the facilitators of disability access in the City of Bunbury?**
- To empower all participants (including the Co-researchers and City Informants) through research by increasing their knowledge about and influence over access and inclusion in Bunbury; and

- To add to the existing body of knowledge about conducting PAR with marginalised groups, in particular, people with disabilities.

The issue with conventional qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups is that they create a one-way flow of information from participants to researchers (Frauenberger *et al*., 2015). In PAR, the participants become the researchers, and researchers become participants, engaged in a process of co-inquiry (Baum *et al*. 2006; Coons & Watson, 2013). Thus, dialogical methods that promote deep discussion and collaborative reflection are more suited to the aims of PAR research (Jorgenson & Phillips, 2002). The specific data collection methods used in this study are outlined later in this chapter.

6.2.2 Site of data collection

The site of data collection was the City of Bunbury Council offices. At the commencement of the study, I was provided with office space at the City of Bunbury head office, and situated within the Community Development team. Access to the City's policies and document database was provided for research purposes. I was also provided access to staff members at all levels of the organisation, within the limits of protocol. This kind of access for a researcher is rare and provided an invaluable advantage to the study, as I was treated as an 'insider' for the duration of the project.

I worked alongside the Community Development Officer (CDO) for Disability Access and Inclusion. The CDO was new to the role and eager to learn from the project. I invited the CDO to attend research meetings and activities as an observer, which he did from time to time. This was useful to the project because part of the exit strategy for the study involved the CDO continuing to work with the Co-researchers to involve them in the longer-term implementation of the research recommendations.

6.2.3 Phases of research

The research covered seven distinct phases, as outlined in the following table:

Table 4: The phases of research, data collection and analytic approaches used.

	Phase of research	Approx time frame (months)	Data Collected	Analytic Approach	Chapter /s
1	Scoping, planning and literature review	12	Literature, discussion with supervisors, field journal	Literature analysis	2 to 4
2	Group formation, developing lines of inquiry	3	Meeting transcripts (Research Group), field journal	Participatory narrative inquiry	7
3	Initial data collection and scoping review	3	Meeting transcripts (Research Group meetings, deliberative dialogue with Executive informants), field journal	Participatory narrative inquiry	8
4	Focussed data collection	6	Meeting transcripts (Research Group meetings, deliberative dialogue with Technical / Managerial Informants), field journal	Participatory narrative inquiry	9
5	Group data analysis and Council report writing	6	Meeting transcripts (Research Group meetings), field journal, activities involving the Co-researchers (especially delivery of presentations to different audiences)	Participatory narrative inquiry, Framework analysis	10
6	Academic data analysis	6		Framework analysis of all data collected	11
7	Thesis writing	6			

Note: a Facebook Group was established for and used by the Research Group members, but was not used for data collection purposes. Its purposes are described in section 6.2.6.

6.2.4 Data collection – literature review phase

I began the literature review by conducting web and library searches around the concepts of disability rights and the social model of disability. For each relevant article found, I reviewed the reference list to identify further sources of information and related topics. I then reviewed topics around engagement, empowerment, participation and public design. This led me on to subjects such as deliberative democracy, knowledge partnering, participatory design and universal design. I then reviewed the literature around the role of local government in fostering disability access and inclusion.

To find relevant sources of literature, I searched keywords using ECU's library search and Google Scholar. I also accessed research articles through databases such as Proquest and Web of Science. Articles were selected on the basis of their relevance and appropriateness to the research question. This study necessarily drew upon a number of grey literature sources. For example, there are several industry publications related to disability access and inclusion that can be accessed through association websites such as the WA Local Government Association (WALGA; 2016) and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA, 2016; 2019). State and Federal Government websites also contain a variety of reports about disability access and inclusion and government, many of which are research-based and undertaken in partnership with a university (for example, Hunting *et al*., 2017 and the Australian Network on Disability, 2015). I preferenced those reports that demonstrated an association with a research institution. I also drew in (a limited way) on blogs or online lectures or interviews produced by recognised academics but not formally published in peer reviewed journals (for example, Hassan, 2016; Kroeger, 2016). I used the grey literature information to illustrate key points drawn from the peer-reviewed literature. Finally, I drew upon a number of Government documents such as policies, strategies, standards and legislation, as well as publications and conventions from the United Nations related to disability rights, social inclusion and disability access.

As I progressed through the literature review, I developed a mind map of concepts to help identify key nodes and intersection points between the different bodies of knowledge (see Figure 3).

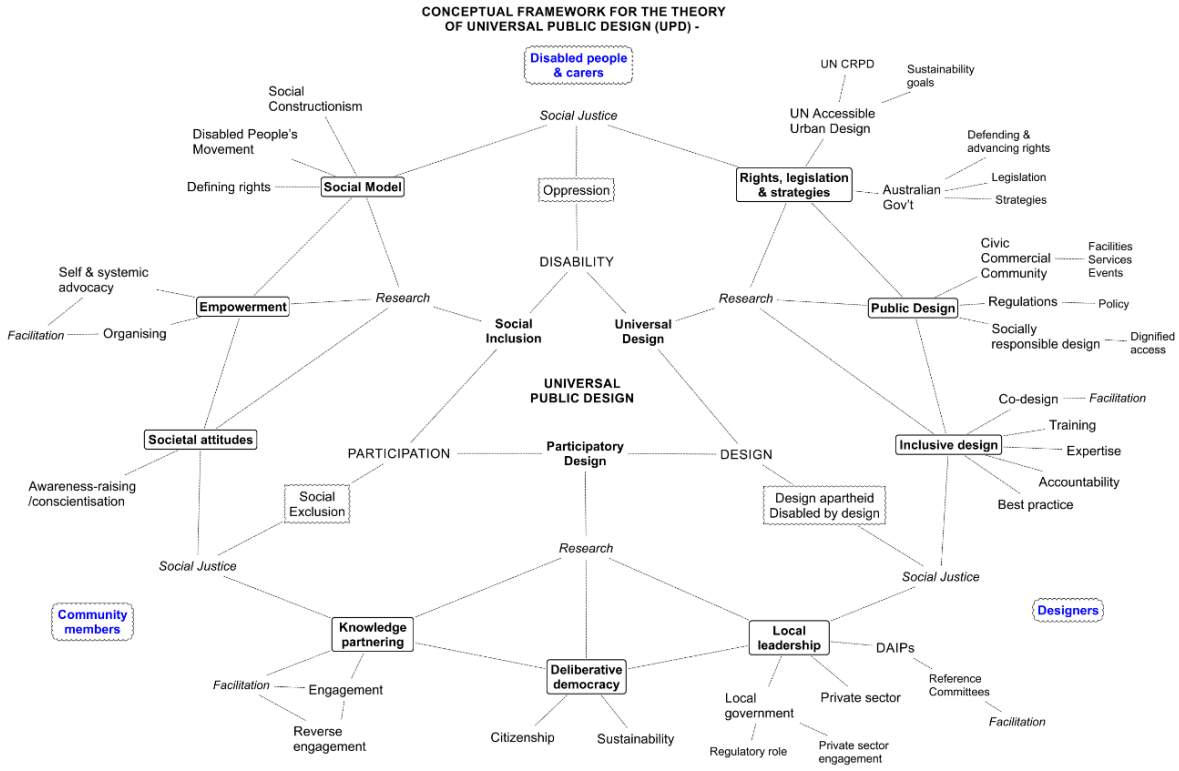


Figure 3: Mind map depicting the conceptual framework used for the literature review.

The mind map was built around a framework of social justice, and related concepts of oppression, social exclusion and design apartheid. This mind map helped inform analysis of the data collected in the present study, and was also informed by it.

I also used Venn diagrams extensively to explore the possible relationships and intersections between different concepts (see Figure 4)., which helped to define and refine thematic nodes in the conceptual mind map.

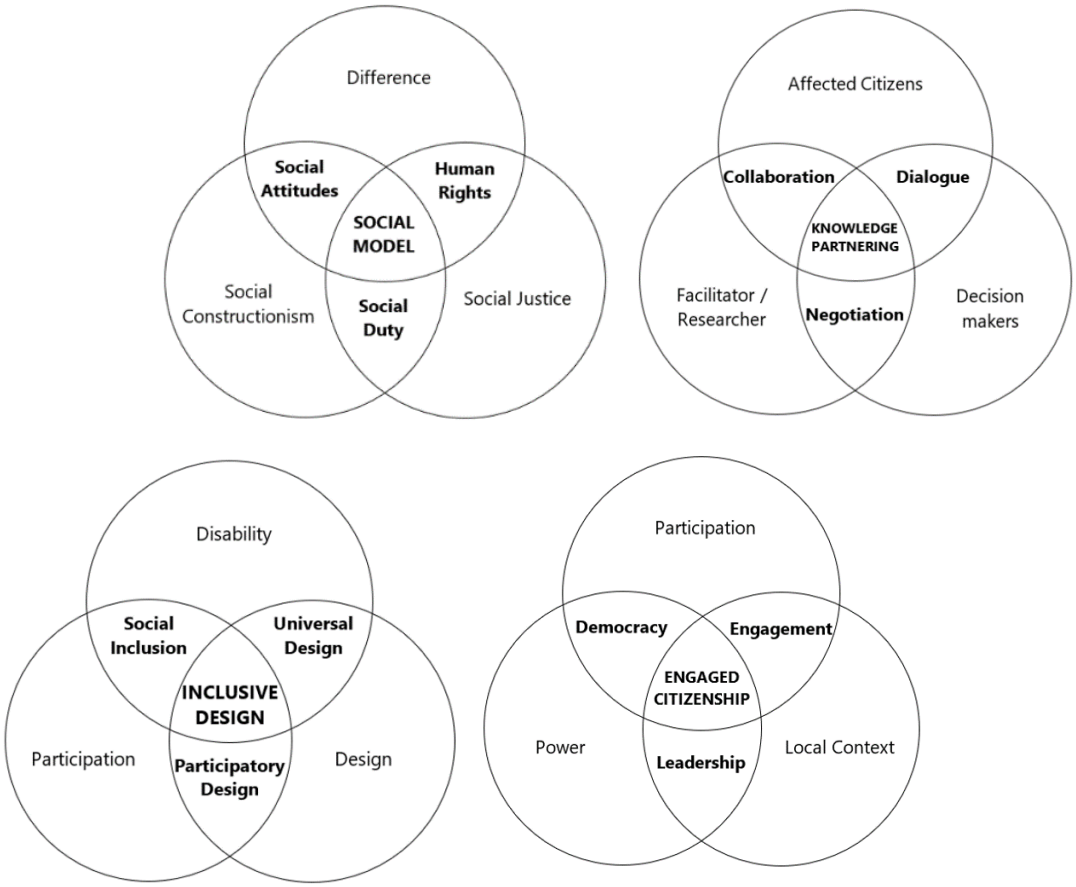


Figure 4: Sample of Venn diagrams used to explore the relationships and intersections between different concepts.

I used an excel spreadsheet to organise and analyse the vast number of concepts, statements and quotes lifted from the literature, in the following manner (see Figure 5). In the first column I placed overarching themes (nodes), and in the second column, sub-themes (codes). The codes and the quotations under them were constantly arranged and rearranged until they were logically connected and sequenced. I simply used the Author, Year and Page Number to reference the extract back to its original source. Having all of the information in one spreadshe*et al*lowed me to easily keyword search the quotations.

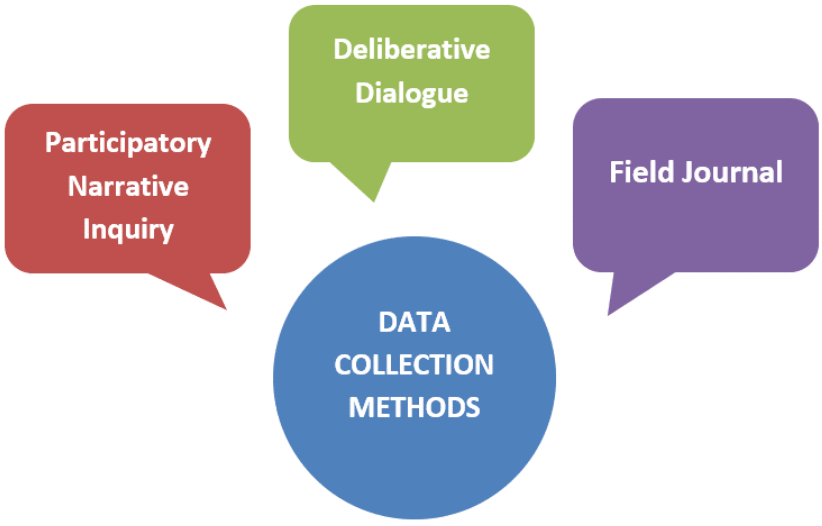
In addition, to assist my search of the literature, I saved every source I could find as PDF files into a single folder on my computer, allowing me to keyword search the entire collection using Windows search function. I also used a password protected app called Evernote to store my field notes, articles, facts, video and audio, snippets of information, documents I had collected and so forth. Evernote has powerful search and tagging functions which proved invaluable for filtering data. For mind mapping I used a basic piece of software called Scapple.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
68		Disability as human variation better alternative - acknowledges diversity				
69			*Bickenbach et al. (1999) explain that universalism reflects the view that 'disablement is a universal human phenomenon' rather than a minorit*			
70			*A universal approach to disability shifts the focus from 'special responses for special needs' (where such needs are competing with those of the*			
71			*ALGA: Communities, organisations and individuals should view impairment as an expected part of human diversity and accommodate it accor*			
72			*Fruend 2001 p.692: But nearly everyone reading them will, at some point, suffer from one or more chronic diseases and be disabled, temporar*			
73		Important for design - designing for our future selves				
74			*Clarkson & Coleman 2015 P.237 2.3. Designing for our future selves Inspired by Laslett's directive that to successfully address the challenge of*			
75	**Power, participation and public design**					
76		Disaffiliation results from stigma, a rupture of relationships, perpetuated by language and cultural norms				
77			*Foucault theory on the construction of the concept of normality. Logophobia - the fear of discourse that threatens parts of society; prohibition*			
78			*Mathieson - rupture, disaffiliation, results in lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in normal re*			
79			*Burchardt (in Mathieson) - an individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in the key activities of the society in which they live*			
80			*Social Inclusion in Australia - Being socially included means having the resources, opportunities and capabilities to learn, work, engage and ha*			
81			*Shut Out report: There are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about people with a disability. These include that they are a dang*			
82			*Shut Out report - see my PhD proposal*			
83		Disaffiliation leads to a lack of participation in decision-making, lack of power				
84			*Hunting et al 2017: Inclusion and accessibility relate to the participation of people with disability in the community. Both inclusion and accessil*			
85			*For Young, then, oppression is injustice and justice, first and foremost, refers to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and*			
86		This includes decision-making in the development of public infrastructure				
87			*Imrie 1996: design apartheid, which serves to segregate and separate the disabled person from the mainstream, is evident everywhere and so*			
88			*Imrie 2013 While the design of urban space provides an opportunity to create places sensitised to the manifold complexities of the body, place*			
89			*Fruend 2001, p.693: People with little power rarely have a voice in the negotiations over space, and thus their interests are often ignored, whi*			
90			*Imrie & Kumar 2010: p.362 the ability for disabled people to contest and challenge the disablist nature of the built environment is circumscribe*			
91			*Imrie & Kumar 2010 : The material shows that many disabled people feel estranged and oppressed by facets of the built environment and gen*			
92			*Imrie & Kumar 2010: p.367 a key problem is the inability for disabled people to influence the practices of professionals. . Following Young, it is*			
93			*Young 1990 (in Imrie & Kumar 2010): Young (1990), one can conceive of the built environment as infused with what she refers to as the values*			
94			*Kroeger 2016: "Society is deliberately perpetuating the disablement of many of its citizens", and argues that "rights, benefits and opportunitie*			
95			*Bratteteig & Wagner, 2012: Design is decision making, and decision making "is the exercising of power"*			
96		Design is central to cities that enable				
97			*Buchanan 2001 P.38 Design as the expression of cultural values. Not only is design grounded in human dignity and human rights, it is also an*			
98			*Kroeger 2016: believes that design is being recognised as the most important function in our society, and likens it to the industrial revolution.*			
99		Poorly designed public infrastructure compounds social exclusion - disabled by design				
100			*WHO 2011 - Environments – physical, social, and attitudinal – can either disable people with impairments or foster their participation and inclu*			
101			*Shut Out report: people feel shut out of our way of life*			
102			*Committee on Rights of PWDs 2017 - "general accessibility of all public places, transport, information, communication and facilities and servic*			
103			*World Bank - Physical spaces have a social, political, and cultural character that solidifies systems and processes of exclusion.*			
104			*Kitchin 1998: p.344 First, the role of space in reproducing and maintaining the processes of exclusion should be recognised. An understanding*			
105			*Matthews & Vujakovic 1995: environments and buildings designed as if all people are the same - abled-bodied (Matthews and Vujakovic, 199*			

Figure 5: Showing how I used a spreadsheet to organise information from the literature review into themes and sub-themes.

6.2.5 Data collection – engagement phase

The three primary methods of data collection were as follows:



Each method will now be described in detail.

6.2.6 Method 1: Participatory narrative inquiry

Description of method

A key method used for facilitating discussion and collecting data from the Research Group meetings was Cynthia Kurtz's Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI). Kurtz considers PNI to be "a subset of Participatory Action Research", with an emphasis on "working with stories" (2014, p.85). She explains that PNI is founded on the use of raw stories of personal experience, and is suited to those settings in which "the profound consideration of values, beliefs, feelings, and perspectives is required" (Kurtz, 2014, p.86). Unlike conventional narrative inquiry, PNI invites its participants to work with their own stories and engage in structured group 'sensemaking' activities where participants ponder issues and problems collectively in a group setting (Kurtz, 2014). In this study, I use the term story to refer to personal stories and narrative to refer to a shared or common story, which by definition links individuals and communities (Harper *et al*., 2004).

The facilitator's role in PNI is to "help the stories get to where they need to go to help the community achieve a goal" (p.86). To do this a PNI facilitator engages in collecting stories, asking questions about them, and "helping people look at, think about, and talk about the stories, the answers, and the patterns they form" (p.86). The goal is for the participants to begin, collectively, to develop a deeper understanding of their own stories in order to "understand a conflict, or their own feelings, or the nuances of a topic, or how things got to be the way they are, or how things could improve" (p.87), thus contributing to broader narrative.

A PNI project involves three phases, as follows (see figure 6):

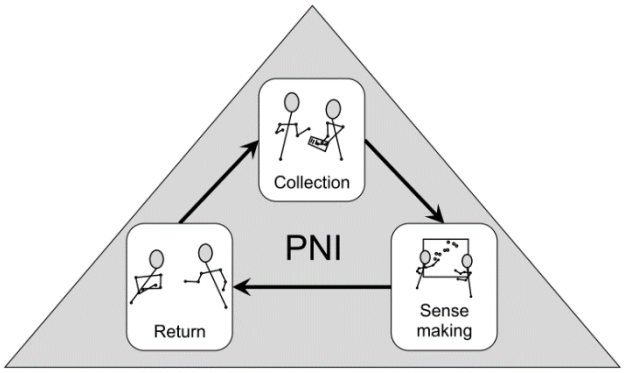


Figure 6: The three phases of Participatory Narrative Inquiry. From Kurtz (2014), p.88.

1) **Collection**: Community members form a group to tell stories around a topic of concern (related to the goal of the research), and those stories are interpreted by answering questions like "Would you say this experience is common or rare?" and "What does this

story tell us about our topic?". Group members are invited to participate in the interpretation of stories told by others, so that each story "becomes surrounded by a cloud of interpretations from many perspectives" (Kurtz, 2014, p.88).

2) **Sensemaking**. Group members (and sometimes interested others) participate in group activities in which they "negotiate meaning as they construct larger stories" (Kurtz, 2014, p.88) – collective narratives that 'make sense' of problems by developing shared interpretations of individual stories.
3) **Return**. What has been gathered and produced in the first two phases is returned to the community and enters into collective discourse. Such a return may include formal reports and communications, and informal story exchanges about people's experiences surrounding the project. Kurtz believes these informal storytellings may be more influential than the formal outputs, and calls for conscious attention to be paid to the return phase as a mark of projects that have lasting positive impacts (2014, p.88).

In the present study, Research Group meetings generally followed a structure whereby I introduced a topic for discussion related to the research problem (see table below for a list of meeting topics), shared some information about the topic, and invited group members to discuss the topic. The Co-researchers drew heavily on their lived experience of disability to relate to each topic, which aided 'collection' and 'sensemaking'. How the Research Group meeting topics were determined is discussed in the section titled *Research Group Meeting Topics* below.

In the early months of the project, I asked each participant to prepare a short 10-minute talk about themselves and why they had become involved in the research study. At selected group meetings, a Co-researcher was invited to share their story with the others present. Not every Co-researcher wished to share their story, and they were not pressured in any way to do so – but five did so willingly. I believe the sharing of these stories helped in developing the overall sense of cohesion and solidarity that characterised our later meetings. I also shared some of my own story of how disability affected my family. Our stories provided an emotional and at times deeply profound insight into each other's lives, and allowed group members to gain a broader appreciation of the experience of 'disability' from perspectives other than their own. To aid in storytelling, the Research Group members were encouraged to use photographs, video recordings, music, and other forms of media.

Stories are powerful conveyors of emotion and can help to build empathy and awareness in any audience. For this reason, dialogue sessions with City Informants (described in the next section) often commenced with a Co-researcher conveying their personal story, before formal dialogue began. Furthermore, to fulfil the 'return' component of PNI, I arranged meetings with and

presentations to audiences outside of the formal Research Group meetings (using opportunities such as meetings of disability groups, local service clubs like Rotary, industry forums and disability-related conferences) to share with the wider community the individual stories and collective narratives emerging from the work of the Research Group. Preparing for these community meetings and presentations gave the Co-researchers who participated opportunities to reflect intensively on their stories, as they sought to explain to the audience how their personal experiences linked to the emergent themes of the Research Group.Speeches developed by the participants for different audiences as part of the group activities were also collected as data, especially as they reflected individual contemplation and analysis of information discussed at Research Group meetings. Significant data from other Research Group activities were captured within meeting transcripts for data analysis purposes.

All Research Group meetings were recorded and transcribed to allow participants to refer back to the notes for further analysis, and for data collection purposes. Prior to each meeting, Co-researchers were sent preparatory materials and an agenda identifying the meeting topics. Wherever possible I helped the Co-researchers to prepare for upcoming Research Group meetings or other research-related activities by meeting with them individually or making phone contact.

Implementation

A total of twelve Research Group meetings were held during the data collection phase of the project (approximately one per month). The duration of each meeting was approximately three hours, with a lunch break in the middle (catered). The frequency and length of these meetings together with other research activities meant participation was a substantial commitment, yet most meetings were well attended, and all of the Co-researchers remained actively engaged throughout the research period. Attendance varied between five and eleven Co-researchers at each meeting, with each Co-researcher attending around 70% of the meetings.

Initial meetings were held at local library activity rooms. This was chosen because it was a neutral space and easily accessible. However, availability of parking proved a problem and the meetings were later moved to the City of Bunbury head office (see Figure 7). This was a more formal space, but the participants preferred meeting here, given its proximity to the structures of power and decision-making (City of Bunbury staff and executive offices, and the Mayor's office), as well as ease of parking.



Figure 7: A Research Group meeting at the City of Bunbury with one Co-researcher discussing photographs of barriers in the community.

All Research Group were audio-recorded and transcribed (de-identified sample transcripts can be found in Appendix 4). Minutes were distributed after the meeting by email, and verbally presented at each subsequent meeting for the benefit of those who could not read them.

Research Group meeting topics

The Research Group meeting topics identified in the following table were carefully selected as to create structure around which the inquiry could occur. . The meeting topics were not determined by the Co-researchers but rather were determined by myself as Facilitator in consultation with my supervisors, and were designed to layer opportunities for group learning and mutual investigation. Some topics were informed by the key themes identified the literature review including the social model of disability, empowerment, rights, advocacy and universal design. Other topics were more action-focused, providing points of focus for how we would engage the City Informants. In this way, the Co-researchers were able to prepare for and explore each week's topic in a collaborative manner, learning from each other, as well as from external 'collaborators' (industry professionals) who were invited to contribute their specialist knowledge to the Research Group meetings on three occasions (see table below). The Research Group also had the opportunity to review documents such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007), the Shut Out report (National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, 2010), and the National Disability Strategy (Department of Social Services, 2011b). As each topic was discussed, the Co-researchers related back their own stories, reflections and experiences which enriched the discussion and aided co-operative learning. Furthermore, in keeping with the principle of Participatory Narrative Inquiry (Kurtz, 2014), Co-researchers were invited to prepare a story about their experiences as a person

with lived experience of disability in Bunbury to share with the group, which five Co-researchers agreed to do (see right-hand column in table below).

TABLE 5: RESEARCH GROUP MEETING TOPICS (SOME MEETING INVOLVED GUESTS WITH SPECIALISED INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE AS 'COLLABORATORS')				
	Date	**Topic**	**Collaborators (industry professionals)**	**Story shared by:**
1	23/02/2017	Introduction; What is access, inclusion and co-design?	Collaborator: Prof Kathy Boxall, Edith Cowan Uni Professor of Social Work	
2	15/03/2017	Disability rights; the experience of disability in Bunbury.		Paul
3	29/03/2017	What is power? Who has power? What City Informants should we engage?		Debbie
4	26/04/2017	Role of Co-researchers		Jenna
5	10/05/2017	Lived experience of disability as expertise. Knowledge partnering. Exercise: audit of group assets/strengths – what we bring		Josef
6	24/05/2017	Refining research scope; and discussion about the role of Australian Design Standards		
7	7/06/2017	Deliberative dialogue and engaging City Informants – who, what, where, when, why?		
8	21/06/2017	Universal design and education of designers	Collaborator: Mohamed Asar, TAFE College Certificate of Design Course Coordinator	
9	30/08/2017	Individual research assignment allocation of topics		Suzanne/ Jacque

10	20/09/2017	Systemic advocacy – what is it? How are we involved?		
11	4/10/2017	Systemic advocacy – how does it work in practice? Links to bigger picture.	Collaborator: Samantha Jenkinson, Executive Director of People With Disabilities WA Inc.	
12	25/10/2017	Review draft recommendations for research report		

The meeting topics were designed to help address the research question by encouraging the Research Group members to look beyond their immediate concerns (such as those barriers usually raised at Disability Access Committee meetings), and to think in more systemic terms about issues such as power, decision-making and advocacy, the value of lived experience, public design, and how the work of local government relates to principles of human rights and universal design. In this way I was able to provide the group a meaningful way of engaging with many of the concepts that I had been learning about in my review of the literature.

In terms of lived experience, the Co-researchers brought to the Research Group meetings a rich tapestry of perspectives, experiences and knowledges gained from experiences of disability, and also work-related experience gained from previous or current employment in roles such as quality auditing, business management, administration, education, governance, group training, and building and construction.

Individual research assignments

As the research project progressed, it became apparent that we would a different strategy to engage with the technical and managerial Informants to the way we had engaged with the Executive Informants. For one, it was intimidating for these Informants to field questions from a large group of people all at once. Also, the large group format meant we were limited to how many meetings we could have with Informants, because of the time commitment involved. I therefore suggested that individual Co-researchers take on a topic of interest related to one of the many Informant portfolios in the City. I drew up a list of different work portfolios that involved elements of public design (see Table 7 below) and invited each Co-researcher to select a topic of interest to them (as a 'research assignment'). I explained that I would arrange Deliberative Dialogue meetings with the relevant Informants and personally accompany each Co-researcher, so that I could take part in the dialogue and audio-record it. I also spent time individually with each Co-researcher preparing a list of

discussion points for the meeting with the Informant/s. To share our findings with the wider Research Group, we (myself and the Co-researcher who attended the meeting with the Informant/s) then provided a summary of our findings at subsequent Research Group meetings, which had the effect of providing the broader group with an opportunity to 'analyse' the data through discussion and reflection (a key part of the process of Participatory Narrative Inquiry). I was able to use the Research Group's analytical discussions to inform my own academic analysis of the data by mapping the key themes and assertions made to the appropriate thematic nodes. A total of nine individual research assignments were allocated (see Table 7 below), and the results are laid out in Chapter 9.

Facebook group as a tool to support participation

One of the challenges of Participatory Action Research can be keeping participants engaged and connected between meetings. A month can be a long time between meetings, and momentum can be easily lost, and so I made use of a closed Facebook Group. I did not use it specifically for data collection purposes, but to encourage interaction and trust-building amongst the Co-researchers. The medium allowed the Co-researchers to post and comment about topics or news items related to the study. The closed Facebook Group was monitored by my principal research supervisor, who was also a member.

Facebook is rapidly gaining recognition as a powerful research tool for the social sciences (Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov & Stillwell, 2015). According to Tong and Walther (2011),

> *Facebook and other social network services provide an ideal platform for relationship maintenance interactions to occur quickly, with multiple others, and with low transaction costs because they enable wide dissemination of messages and foster participation, feedback, and interaction through various communication channels (Tong & Walther, 2011, np).*

The advantage of using Facebook is that it is a familiar and low-cost platform for connecting with research participants (Townsend, 2014), as well as being accessible to those with vision impairment. Also, the design of the software facilitates informal sharing of information between users, and encourages discussion and debate. A record of conversations is kept that allows members to easily refer to (although users reserve the option to delete or edit their comments at any time). Also, users can engage with the discussions at a time and place that suits them, and can pick up threads of conversation from days or weeks gone by. The medium can also be used to remind participants of research engagements or introduce a topic for discussion at an upcoming meeting.

Privacy is the first concern that comes to mind with social media platforms. The key privacy measures relating to closed Facebook groups are that only members of the group can see what other members post within the group, and that only members can see stories from the group in their news feed. Facebook takes measures to maintain privacy, such as removing the ability to 'share' content to an individual's news feed. Group moderation of the group is another concern. Stancanelli observed that there are strong parallels to face-to-face group facilitation, saying "online focus groups and traditional focus groups have more commonalities than differences" (2010, p.764). All of the challenges and skills required to maintain a positive and cohesive group environment come into play. In fact, the online environment creates a new set of challenges for the facilitator (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2015), as the facilitator may be 'offline' while conversations are taking place, and may not be able to effectively moderate interaction between participants in real time.

The use of Facebook also encourages participants to 'friend' each other and the facilitator, which could be considered problematic in conventional research, but in PAR it could be understood as beneficial to the building of 'social capital' and social connection that PAR relies upon, considering it is a process that is built upon trusting relationships and solidarity.

6.2.7 Method 2: Deliberative dialogue

Description of method

Deliberative dialogue describes the process of engaging City Informants in discussion about their role in public design, and defining the barriers and facilitators to disability access and inclusion. Deliberative dialogue has its roots in Habermas' concept of the 'public sphere', an independent space in which all members of the public, regardless of status or means, are free to participate in dialogue about matters of public importance, without interference from state, religious or corporate entities (Crossley & Roberts, 2004). Habermas argued that encouraging the free and open exchange of views between all citizens (using newspapers, journals, and face-to-face forums) plays an important role in keeping authorities accountable. He saw the media as an important facilitator of democracy, but criticised a modernist trend towards corporate control of mass media as well as towards representative democracy (Crossley & Roberts, 2004). These Habermas saw as significant threats to the health of the public sphere because of their tendency to control the discussion agenda, and thus advocated for more independent and participatory forums for citizens to engage in public dialogue. Interestingly from a disability point of view, in advocating for deliberative dialogue, Habermas observed that an 'ideal speech situation' would need to address issues of social inequality, and the fact that not all citizens possess the same capacities for discourse (Crossley & Roberts, 2004).

Deliberative dialogue is a form of public discourse, but according to Scott London,

> *deliberative dialogue differs from other forms of public discourse – such as debate, negotiation, brainstorming, consensus-building – because the objective is not so much to talk together as to think together, not so much to reach a conclusion as to discover where a conclusion might lie. Thinking together involves listening deeply to other points of view, exploring new ideas and perspectives, searching for points of agreement, and bringing unexamined assumptions into the open (London, 2005, p.1).*

London explained that the process usually revolves around a pressing question that needs to be addressed rather than a problem that can be efficiently solved. Deliberative dialogue assumes that people's views and positions on an issue are not fixed, but subject to change. In deliberative dialogue,

> *a question may 'invite' an opinion, but it also may modify and recast it. In this sense, people typically do not 'have' opinions but are, rather, involved in 'opinioning'. Predetermined opinions tend to obstruct rather than further dialogue. When people become identified with their ideas and assumptions, they struggle to defend them and persuade others of their validity. The purpose of deliberative dialogue is to move beyond the clash of opinions and arrive at a deeper and shared level of understanding (London, 2005, p.3).*

By actively *thinking together*, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of alternative points of view, and searching for a common understanding, shifts in perspective can open up new approaches to dealing with seemingly intractable problems (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Black, 2005; London, 2005).

Dialogue as method is supported by Lincoln and Guba's statement that in PAR, 'humans' should be the primary data collection instrument since it is difficult to envisage non-human instruments (such as surveys) that could interact with participants in a way that would reveal their multiple constructed realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By fostering trust with all participants, the PAR Facilitator mediates the dialogue in a controlled and respectful environment, in which participants can explore the different facets of the problem and reframe their perspectives of the problem's causes and its possible solutions (Huxham & Eden, 2008; Selener, 1997). Reframing occurs during dialogue as different perspectives are proffered (for example, how decisions are impacting on the marginalised, or what constrains the powerful in their decision-making), as new information surfaces, and as people become better educated about the facts of the situation. Deliberative

dialogue is a natural fit for PAR as a principal data collection method, because as McIntyre (2008) observed:

> *…it is there in that dialectical process of investigation and consciousness raising, that participants rethink positions, imagine new ways of being, acting, and doing, and grapple with the catalytic energy that infuses PAR projects. It is by participating in critical dialogue, in discussions in which people agree, disagree, argue, debate, are affirmed for their views, and challenged for their views the participants truly experience the 'a-ha' moments that come with self and collective scrutiny. It is that type of participation that provides space for people to reflect on what is being discussed in the group sessions and then, upon reflection, to take the necessary steps to improve their current situations (McIntyre, 2008, p.31).*

Deliberative dialogue is relatively unstructured and allows participants to explore different lines of inquiry together (Charmaz, 2014, p.103). The key purpose of facilitating dialogue is to reveal shortcomings in systems as well as opportunities for improvement in policy and practice. The emergent relationships of co-inquiry between participants result in 'deep engagement' (Glackin and Dionisio, 2016). One author described dialogue and conversations as 'the digestive system of thinking theoretically' (Campbell, 2009). Deliberative dialogue allows participants to question social structures and institutions that they previously accepted as immutable (Ollerton & Horsfall, 2013).

Implementation of deliberative dialogue with City Informants

A series of deliberative dialogue sessions with City Informants from the City of Bunbury were planned and initiated by the Research Group over an eight-month period. The sessions occurred in one of two formats:

- FULL GROUP: Sessions involving members of staff meeting with the full Research Group (see table below).
- SMALL GROUP: Sessions involving members of staff meeting together with just one Co-researcher and myself as PAR Facilitator (see table below).

The full group sessions were reserved mainly for City Informants who held senior executive roles, whereas the one-on-one sessions were a more appropriate format for technical and managerial level staff, as it was less confronting for them to be in open dialogue with a small number of researchers than facing a room full of strangers asking questions about their roles and actions. The sessions were mostly conducted at the City of Bunbury head office, with two sessions held at other locations.

TABLE 6: DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE SESSIONS INVOLVING ALL RESEARCH GROUP MEMBERS				
	Date	**Theme**	**City Informants (position title)**	**Researchers**
1	12/04/2017	City Services design standards and processes	COB Director City Services (Engineering and Works)	Full group
2	5/07/2017	COB policies in relation to access and inclusion, role of policy	COB Manager Policy; COB Chair Policy Committee	Full group
3	19/07/2017	CEO's perspective of City's performance in access and inclusion, opportunities for improvement	COB Acting Chief Executive Officer	Full group
4	10/11/2017	Social inclusion – efforts by the City to promote inclusion	COB Director and Managers of Community and Corporate Services	Full group
5	14/11/2017	CBD accessibility (this meeting followed a wheelchair tour of the CBD)	11 members of the COB Planning/Building Dept	Full group



Figure 8: Deliberative dialogue sessions held between City of Bunbury senior executive Informants and the full Research Group

TABLE 7: DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE SESSIONS INVOLVING A SMALL GROUP OF RESEARCHERS				
	Date	**Theme**	**City Informants (position title)**	**Researchers**
1	31/05/2017	Safer Communities (an initiative to educate the community to prepare for a large-scale emergency)	COB Manager and Project Officers for Safer Communities / Emergency Management Initiative	Ann and Adam
2	10/08/2017	Public open space	COB Manager of Open Space	Paul and Adam
3	17/08/2017	Employment of people with disabilities, recruitment procedure	COB Human Resources Manager and HR Officer	Debbie and Adam
4	29/08/2017	Staff training and awareness of universal design and disability	COB Human Resources Officer, COB Training Officer	Kate and Adam
5	31/08/2017	Events – access and inclusion	COB Events Manager and Officer	Dayle and Adam
6	5/09/2017	Community engagement – inclusive engagement practices	COB Communications Officer	Kathryn and Adam
7	21/09/2017	Sports and Recreation – access and inclusion	COB A/Manager of SW Sports Centre	Josef and Adam
8	13/10/2017	Community infrastructure	COB Director City Services (Engineering and Works)	Paul and Adam
9	9/11/2017	Social Inclusion	COB Community Development Team Leader	Jenna and Adam



Figure 9: Small group deliberative dialogue sessions held between City of Bunbury managerial / technical City Informants and Co-researchers

Preparing for deliberative dialogue

Before engaging in deliberative dialogue with City Informants, the Research Group spent time developing and 'road-testing' questions, giving members time to anticipate responses from City Informants and to consider how they might formulate further questions. This preparation time helped to increase Co-researcher confidence and led to what I would describe as 'robust dialogue' with City Informants. Each Co-researcher was also encouraged to share aspects of their personal stories, as a means of 'setting the scene' before launching into more formal dialogue. In many instances, this helped to create a more relaxed, intimate and grounded atmosphere to the dialogue that followed. It is interesting to note that storytelling went both ways, and on many occasions the City Informants shared their own stories and experiences of disability, such as caring for a loved one with a disability, or their experience of dealing with a temporary or permanent disability resulting from serious injury.

Facilitating deliberative dialogue

Boyko *et al*. (2012) observed that a skilled facilitator is necessary in deliberative dialogue to "enable structure and process, while encouraging mutual understanding and innovative thinking within the group" (p.7). They suggested that specific skills that a facilitator requires include keeping track of the conversation, pulling together different strands of the conversation and ensuring all participants have the opportunity to contribute. They added that is useful for a facilitator to have knowledge about the issue at hand and the policy context in order to interpret the discussion and manage the dynamics during the deliberations.

6.2.8 Method 3: Field journal

Description of method

Kendall Smith-Sullivan described how "researchers can use detailed journals or diaries to record and reflect their own behaviours, attitudes, feelings, and thought processes to provide a multilayered facet to their academic studies" (2008, p.4). My written field journal was useful for capturing and reflecting upon the many incidental and unplanned aspects of the research, such as threads of conversations with different people, the atmosphere of a meeting, or observed actions and behaviours that held some significance to the context of the study. It was also useful for linking pieces of information together into themes, and creating mind maps of processes and procedures related to the study focus. My position as PAR Facilitator embedded within the City of Bunbury was akin to an ethnographer seeking to understand a culture by living amongst its people and observing their political systems, cultural norms and social behaviours (see Harper *et al*., 2004). There were subtle cues everywhere about how decisions were being made, resources allocated, and policies enforced that had a direct bearing on the research topic. Capturing these observations in the field journal allowed me to reflect upon what I observed and to interpret its meaning in the context of the aims of the research study.

The field journal was also useful for conceptually linking different pieces of seemingly unrelated information together and applying theoretical constructs to identify critical themes. I found that I constantly used the field journal to draw together small pieces of information into bigger themes and then linked those themes to a broader theoretical framework, which helped me to see the research picture more clearly – to perceive distinct patterns through all of the 'noise' that surrounded me.

I was then able to take these insights back to the Research Group for validation and further discussion. The field journal was also useful for recording memos about how I related to the participants, any problems with the study, any personal or ethical dilemmas, future directions for the study, and general analysis of emergent themes.

6.3 Ethics and Risks

6.3.1 Ethical considerations and risks involving the Research Group

This section provides an overview of some of the ethical issues associated with conducting PAR with people with disabilities, and the strategies employed to manage them. Punch suggests that ethical

issues are likely to be more acute in qualitative research than quantitative research because it intrudes into people's lives more (Punch, 2013). The main areas of concern can be summarised as harm, consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality of data. In summary, researchers are expected to, as far as possible,

- do no harm to the participants (physical, financial or psychological);
- avoid deceiving participants about the true nature and purpose of the research;
- ensure that participants are fully informed and have provided explicit consent;
- protect the privacy of the participants; and
- introduce measures for maintaining the confidentiality of data collected (Punch, 2013, p.43)

6.3.2 Risk of harm or deception

The design and nature of the present study was not indicative of any risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm. However, the dialogical nature of participatory narrative inquiry and deliberative dialogue did suggest that there might be some risk of anxiety and discomfort for the participants in sharing personal stories with fellow Co-researchers. Another potential source of anxiety was the possibility of Co-researchers feeling intimidated about engaging in dialogue with people perceived to be more powerful, knowledgeable or articulate than them – particularly, for example, executive members of staff at the City of Bunbury. This was addressed by ensuring that dialogue meetings with executives were conducted as a full group rather than one-on-one, and by providing sensitive facilitation of the meetings. Encouraging and assisting Co-researchers to prepare research-related questions or comments beforehand also helped (Klocker, 2008).

It is interesting to note that in conventional research, ethics is a matter of mitigating negative impacts and upholding the principle of 'do no harm'. But Pain (2004) advocates that ethics should also be concerned with "the need to have positive impacts" (p.657). This argument reflects a perspective of academia as "a privileged location that affords intellectuals the possibility of various kinds of political action" and that academics therefore have an obligation to use their privilege to challenge oppression through research (Routledge, 1996, p.402) .

6.3.3 Consent

Before engaging in the research, each participant was asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 5). The consent form was presented in plain English, with pictures illustrating key points. I also verbally explained the consent form to each participant to ensure they understood what the commitment

involved, what to expect from the project, and what the options were if any problems arose. One of the key ethical issues pertinent to the project was gaining informed consent from those participants who identified as having learning difficulties (Ramcharan, 2006). The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009) is Australia's national guide to ethics in human research. It contains a chapter that provides guidance on conducting research with people with cognitive impairment, learning difficulty or mental illness. The Statement recognises that capacity for consent can be different for each individual and may fluctuate over time (particularly for people with a mental illness). It does not argue that people with cognitive impairments should not experience discomfort or burden as a result of participation in the research process, but that these must be "justified by the potential benefits of the research" (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009, p. 66). In fact, the document states that people with such impairments are "entitled to participate in research, and to do so for altruistic reasons" (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009, p. 66). The document recommends the involvement of an advocate or guardian in cases where capacity to consent fluctuates.

Paul Ramcharan (2006) identified an issue with the current system of regulation around people with cognitive impairment and consent to participate in research, suggesting it lacks an evidence base and tends to consider worst case abuse scenarios rather than what constitutes proportionality for different types of research. This can make it "difficult to discern those that require more careful scrutiny from those that do not" (p.184). The author also observed that there tends to be "little in the way of regulation during or after the research through which researchers are held accountable for their actions" (p.184).

Bell (1999) argued that obtaining informed consent requires more of the researcher than just asking a respondent to sign a protocol form. She stated that informed consent requires "careful preparation involving explanation and consultation before data collecting begins" (1999, p.38). Coons and Watson (2013) observed that for individuals with learning difficulty, "the capability to provide full and informed consent (is) a dilemma" (p.15). Many researchers, for example Dresser (1996), advocate the use of video content, graphics, vignettes, storybooks and other inventive methods of information disclosure to obtain consent. Most of the Co-researcher participants in the present study had lived experience of disability but did not have a cognitive impairment. Therefore the process of gaining consent for participation from these members was very similar to any other member of the public. But for those with learning difficulties, I considered Ramcharan's advice that the researcher turn to the vulnerable participant's 'circle of friends' (which may include relatives, friends, advocates and service providers), because:

> *The members of this circle are closest to the vulnerable person; they are the ones who love and who care most; collectively, and through discussion, they are the best judges of whether the proposed research would benefit the person or those they see as occupying a similar position; and, they are the people who will, because of their regular contact with the person, know if they are upset, worried or hurt because of the research or the actions of the researchers (Ramcharan, 2006, p.185).*

For this reason, I maintained regular contact with the parents of both individuals with learning difficulties, and involved their support workers as part of the Research Group.

Regarding meaningful participation, Kathy Boxall observed that in order to formulate their ideas, people with learning difficulties (or intellectual disability):

> *may need support from other people with learning difficulties, so that ideas can be developed collectively. They may also need help from advisers or supporters without learning difficulties. It may also be helpful for people with learning difficulties to have access to other people's research, ideas and theories about their lives and experiences (Boxall, 2002, p. 220).*

Eligibility for participation in the present study was written into the Expression of Interest form, which indicated that they '*must be eligible to join the City of Bunbury's Disability Access and Inclusion Committee'* and thus able to participate meaningfully in local government deliberations. This degree of ability was also taken as indicative of capacity to consent to participate in research but I nevertheless met individually with each person with learning difficulty and their paid support worker, if they had one, to discuss the consent form and ensure that they understood the research, what it was that they were consenting to, and that they could withdraw at any time.

It is also worth noting that, apart from the opportunity to tell their individual story, the research was not focussed on highly personal or private matters. Personal experiences may have informed discussion about public matters, but the research was not aimed at unearthing private and sensitive information from any participant, or 'observing' their behaviour in a given context. It was about participation in a group process of collecting and evaluating data about the barriers and facilitators to disability access and inclusion in Bunbury.

Some individual participants did experience difficulty participating in some research activities because of their physical, sensory or cognitive impairments, whereby their ability to share information, comprehend information or gather and analyse data was restricted. To encourage full

and meaningful participation in the process, careful thought was put into selecting data collection methods that were well suited to different ability levels. One example is how some Co-researchers used images and video for different purposes such as story-telling, or capturing examples of good and bad practice in disability access and inclusion and using this to contribute to the group discussions.

Two participants had learning difficulties. For one in particular, because of her communication difficulties, I relied on her assistant to facilitate her participation and interpret her thoughts and feelings about participating in various group activities, including the long meetings. At one point in the study, the participant wrote to me to say she would not be attending any more research meetings because she found them difficult to understand and tired easily. However, she wished to remain involved in any social events and stay connected with the research. I discussed with her the option of collecting photographs about some of the barriers she faced in the community and sending them to me, after which she became more engaged again, and even gave a presentation to the group about her findings (assisted by her support worker). In the end she attended meetings sporadically but remained engaged in the project.

6.3.4 Paid support workers

Paid support workers proved essential in facilitating the active and meaningful participation of participants with a disability, but their presence also presented some ethical concerns. There was the constant potential for paid support workers to speak 'for' their client, or to voice their own opinions rather than focus on what their client wished to say. This needed to be carefully managed as part of the facilitation process. The two support workers who attended regularly were accepted as Co-researchers in their own right, and made contributions to the research. They were constantly mindful of ensuring their clients were participating fully, and worked as partners in the process. However, at times participants were accompanied by a support worker unfamiliar to the Research Group, and this proved disruptive to the process when they attempted to become involved in the discussion in an outspoken manner rather than focusing on their client's participation needs. I managed this situation as best I could without causing awkwardness by redirecting the conversation or inviting others to respond, though occasionally it was necessary to take the support worker aside during a break and ask them to focus on facilitating their client's participation as priority.

Another ethical consideration related to the need for paid support could have arisen if the participant they were supporting could not afford to have a support person attend with them. This did happen on occasion for one participant with physical disabilities, but others in the group

provided the assistance required. However, it could have been more difficult for those with learning difficulties, in terms of the impact on their participation and even attendance at the group. The individuals that needed support managed this within their existing support arrangements, but a question that was considered was whether the research budget should have been used to pay for support if required. Some participants were reimbursed for travel costs, but not to assist with paying for support. According to Sheffield University's (n.d.) specialist research ethics guidance paper *Doing research with people with learning disabilities,* it is unlikely that an individual would receive funding from the government for personal support whilst participating in research. Thus if the research project does not reimburse the cost of employing a support worker, the individual would be out of pocket as a result of participating in the research. The paper suggests it is important therefore to build personal assistance costs into funding proposals. However, the present study did not build these costs in, and fortunately the participants were able to draw upon their usual supports.

6.3.5 Political risks

One of the risks I considered in connection with the study was the political nature of the context of local government. Local governments are inherently political organisations in which there is a diversity of views and opinions about what the organisation should be doing, and a constant competition for resources to support disparate aspirations. The participants were likely to be exposed to political tensions or conflicting points of view within the local government - for example between councillors, or between technical staff or executive staff members. Also, it was possible that some councillors or staff members were not going to be immediately sympathetic to the MARCIA cause, and may have believed it was taking time and resources away from other priorities. They may also have resisted providing information or taking action on matters of concern raised with them, tried to avoid contact with the research team members or even shown open hostility. There was a risk that the participants might have reacted strongly to perceived politics or resistance, and act in a manner that exacerbated tensions. Balcazar *et al* (1998) alluded to this:

> *One of the positive consequences of PAR is that all participants develop a more critical view of the world and a better understanding of the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities. This may lead community participants to criticize their relationship with the Research Group and/or sponsoring organisations… sponsoring organisations usually have a hard time appreciating the renewed wave of criticism. (Balcazar et al., 1998, p.7).*

As a project effectively sponsored by industry, it risked threatening its own funding source if the participants became overly-critical or antagonistic towards the funder (the City of Bunbury). It could be argued that a lack of independence would risk leaving the status quo unchallenged and unchanged by the study. Whilst the power remains with the City to decide if and how the research recommendations will be implemented, the purpose of this study was not to criticize past failings, but to focus on strategies that might inform a collaborative way forward. To counter the possibility of antagonism, I kept in close communication with the Co-researchers to ensure that they understood Council protocols and expectations of behaviour from members of the public involved in Council matters. I gave Co-researchers opportunities to debrief, reflect on and plan for their next course of action, taking into account all available options. I also took measures to raise their awareness of appropriate conduct and complaints mechanisms.

6.3.6 Ethical considerations and risks involving the City Informants

It was important to consider the possibility that some City Informants may have felt compelled by their employer to participate, and so it was made clear during the consent phase that they were under no compulsion to participate in the study. A message to this effect was communicated to the Executive Directors.

Another possibility was that the study risked attracting participation only from those City Informants who were already sympathetic to matters of disability access and inclusion, rather than those who did not consider it a priority. I managed this risk by booking appointments with prospective City Informants face-to-face to invite their participation, verbally explaining the intention of the research and what their involvement would entail, as well as providing a written invitation. I also provided information about the research at City of Bunbury staff events and in the staff newsletter.

There was a risk that City Informants may have been responsible for providing services directly or indirectly to any of the Co-researchers, and that if for some reason a disagreement or issue arose between a Co-researcher and an Informant (for example, if the Informant felt unfairly criticized by the Co-researcher), the Co-researcher may have been impacted by any denial, withdrawal or reduction in quality of services provided. Should such an issue have arisen I would have consulted my supervisor and discussed strategies with the individual concerned and/or group as whole to ensure the activities of the study did not exacerbate any such tensions. However, this scenario did not eventuate.

6.3.7 Winding up / exiting the PAR project

Frauenberger *et al*. (2015) discuss the importance of 'exiting ethics'. They observe that while building relationships with participants is often carefully planned, ending such relationships is usually not. This can be emotionally difficult when something that has become a valued part of people's lives, a group that they identify strongly with, suddenly comes to an end. They add that, beyond the emotional aspect, "participatory work may create real dependencies where researchers or practitioners have become an integral part of the change that the work has aimed to achieve" (Frauenberger *et al*., 2015, p.101). The risk was that participants would be left feeling unsupported, or that their work was incomplete, and feeling let down by a project that appeared unable to finish what it had started.

To address this issue, I invited the Community Development Coordinator to be involved in the study as much as possible, in anticipation that a positive working relationship might develop between the Community Development Officer and the Co-researchers as part of an ongoing community engagement process. Nonetheless, the 'end' of the research project was somewhat untidy, especially as not all of the Co-researchers wished to transition into the new engagement process created by the City of Bunbury.

6.4 Conclusion

Balcazar *et al*. (1998) note that

> *ultimate goal of the research endeavour is to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities… PAR facilitates achieving this objective because it encourages participants to critically reflect on their living conditions, it strengthens grass roots organizations, and develops the collective capacity of the participants to address their own needs (Balcazar et al., 1998, p.4).*

The growth in popularity of qualitative research methods like PAR has brought its own ethical challenges, particularly for those who have limited capacity for consent. But it has also been shown that in many cases where the principles and intentions underpinning the research are sound (as in, the research exists to primarily benefit the researched), and the process of data collection, analysis and dissemination are sensitively handled, there may be little reason for concern.

This chapter has provided an overview of the participants, the data collection methods used, and ethical considerations. Once everyone had consented to participate in the research, the Research

Group began to meet regularly and explore the scope of the research. The next chapter provides an insight into their discussions.

The following three chapters present key data collected from the Research Group meetings and the deliberative dialogue sessions with City Informants. Chapter 7 scopes the problem from the perspectives of people with lived experience of disability who participated as Co-researchers, Chapter 8 presents the perspectives of senior executives from the City of Bunbury, and Chapter 9 presents the perspectives of technical and managerial staff from the City.

CHAPTER 7

7. SCOPING THE PROBLEM

Before engaging in deliberative dialogue with City Informants, it was important the Research Group participants had time to get to know each other, and to explore the scope of the research. This phase involved listening to each other's stories, exploring the meaning of disability access and inclusion, and identifying some of the key factors impacting on access and inclusion in Bunbury. All meetings of the Research Group were audio-recorded and key parts of the discussion were transcribed after the meetings. This chapter provides a summary of discussions between the participants, organised into sub-themes. To facilitate discussion, the participants were invited to share their personal perspectives of what life can be like for people with disabilities in Bunbury, and what they felt helped or hindered their experiences of community. The participants were then invited to share their perceptions of the City of Bunbury's MARCIA (Most Accessible Regional City in Australia) Project and what they thought might be the challenges facing the City of Bunbury in achieving this aspiration. This phase of the project took place between February and June 2016, and was focused on refining the scope of the project and developing a plan for engaging City Informants in deliberative dialogue. This data was used to help refine the scope of the study and to identify some key points for investigation. The data collected was later incorporated into the Framework Analysis and helped address the research question by identifying (often through personal stories) what the Co-researchers experienced as barriers and facilitators to disability access and inclusion in the Bunbury community.

7.1 Exploring the issues

7.1.1 Life in Bunbury with a disability

The Co-researchers were asked to reflect on their experiences of living with disability in the Bunbury region, including positive and negative aspects of the physical and social landscapes. This section provides a descriptive summary of their perceptions.

The Co-researchers agreed that there are many positive aspects to living in Bunbury for people with disabilities. They cited a range of community-led programs for people with disabilities that provide opportunities for social participation in sport and leisure activities (such as iSports, Rotary Sail Into Life, Eat/Grow/Cook/Create, Can Dance and Disabled Surfing). They also recognised that some businesses have delivered initiatives to encourage social participation for people with disabilities

(such as Sensory Cinema and quiet hours at shopping centres for people with sensory needs). These initiatives have positively impacted on the lives of some of the participants:

> *In the summer holidays they did the sensory movies, which was awesome. I was over the moon. My daughter could run, throw popcorn, run amok, no-one cared, you didn't have to sit down, you knew you weren't bothering anyone. She went with her mates, they were able to run and squeal. At a regular screening, we can't go. None of us can take our kids. People would just stare and tell them to be quiet.*

The Co-researchers noted that community initiatives for people with a disability are frequently supported by corporate sponsorship and community fundraising efforts, such as a $10,000 grant awarded to iSports for sporting equipment by a local car dealership, as well as new clubrooms jointly constructed by a range of commercial and community supporters. This kind of generosity of spirit, it was noted, was not unusual to find in the Bunbury community. The Co-researchers also noted that positive stories about the achievements of people with disabilities, or those supporting them, feature regularly in the local media, which has helped to influence cultural attitudes towards disability.

However, according to the Co-researchers, the day-to-day experience of life with a disability in Bunbury was one of encountering barriers and limited opportunities, and in this respect, the community had not met the expectations of people with disabilities about what it means to live in an accessible city. Having a disability was still seen as defining people's lives in negative ways, and limiting their capabilities.

> *I don't want to let it define me, but my disability shapes so much of what I do and who I am. As I've been told a number of times, you're a lot more than your disability, and that's true. Sometimes it's hard to see past that myself. Usually, because I'm in a wheelchair, it's the first topic of conversation.*
>
> *Actually, feeling like you matter, like you've got something to add and contribute… it can be really easy as a disabled person on a disability pension to feel low about yourself.*

Having a disability was seen to limit a person's options and potential, not because of the disability itself, but because much of what happens in the community is not accessible to, or inclusive of, people with disabilities:

My son has fifty options, not three. My daughter (with autism) should have fifty options too.

The Co-researchers reported encountering physical barriers daily throughout the landscape of the city, and that these barriers created stress and anxiety, leading to people not wanting to go out into the community:

Just getting from A to B each day is enough to leave me exhausted. I have to constantly scan the ground in front of me for any slightly uneven surface, rock, twig or nut from a tree that might jam the front wheel of my chair causing me to fall forward, and analyse every gradient that might cause my chair to flip backwards. I don't get to choose which direction I take when pushing because footpaths are often unusable or don't exist at all and running the gauntlet with cars down the middle of a road is often the only way to get from A to B. Of course, it took a long time to adjust to the new norms in my life and there were plenty of days where the mental challenges were as big as the physical ones. Actually, one of the traps with disability is that you can become so focused on being as independent as possible and so focused on the day to day hurdles you face that you can forget to have a laugh along the way, and to occasionally stop and smell the roses.

Community attitudes to disability were considered to have improved, but many people still appeared to lack basic awareness of how to interact with people with disabilities or their carers:

Being in a wheelchair, you often tend to get ignored because you're very short, you're not visible. If I'm with somebody, say, a member of my family or a friend, they'll talk to my friend but not to me.

I find that people don't know what to do, what to say, they don't know whether to make eye contact or not. It's just that social awkwardness.

Some of the Co-researchers reported that people with disabilities in Bunbury can feel ignored, and left out of the consultation process when things are being designed for the community.

We want to see the disabled consulted in the design of products and services from the beginning.

Being heard… having a person actually listen to what you have to say, that's important.

The Co-researchers also cited a problem with lack of access to information about what is available to people with disabilities in the community:

> *The information is not there as to what is available. As a parent or carer, you have to suss it all out first – it turns into a research thing just to go out anywhere.*

In summary, the Co-researchers felt that although Bunbury has 'come a long way' in terms of support for attitudes towards people with disabilities, there were still too many physical and attitudinal barriers encountered on a daily basis for Bunbury to be considered an 'accessible city'.

7.1.2 Defining accessibility

The term 'accessible' is highly subjective and shaped by the interaction between an individual and their environment, as well as their expectations of what is 'reasonable access'. The wide gamut of disabilities (including the range and combinations of physical, sensory, social, and cognitive impairments) continues to challenge efforts to define accessibility, and by extension, what it means to become the most accessible regional city in Australia. It was important therefore that the group had time to fully explore their personal understandings of the concept of accessibility, and what they expected from an accessible city.

A key point that emerged from the discussions was that 'access' and 'inclusion' are intimately connected and can be seen as 'two sides of the same coin'. Ease of access facilitates social inclusion because inclusion is not possible without physical access or opportunities for participation. Indeed, as much as the group tried to separate physical access from social inclusion, the two always converged:

> *Whatever the barrier, emotional, social, physical, it all comes back to inclusion. Whatever the disability, it's all about how to get amongst it.*

Thus, an accessible city was considered to be one that promotes social inclusion by taking steps to remove barriers to participation, whether physical or attitudinal:

> *For me, inclusion is being able to do everything involved in a normal life with as few barriers as possible. That's school, work, family life, even just going down to the shop, community events, sports, all of those kinds of things. It's being normal. The social inclusion part of that is being able to be as independent as possible.*

Inclusion was seen to be at the heart of accessibility but not actually the same thing as accessibility, and some Co-researchers were keen to ensure that the research did not focus exclusively on physical access, but also on social inclusion.

> *People are always talking about infrastructure, schooling, housing, employment, you know. The little bit of research I've done, mainly on the non-verbal because they use their (communication) devices and stuff, the question 'What would you want?' in every age group, in every disability with every severity, the answer was 'inclusion'.*

A further point emphasised by the Co-researchers was that community attitudes and assumptions can profoundly shape the experiences of people with disabilities and can create social barriers through low expectations of their abilities.

> *It's just the assumption. Don't think that I'm going to limit myself because I'm in a wheelchair. But people see you in a wheelchair and think straight away, well, he's not going to want to do that. It's that mindset of putting people with disability in a box. I went skydiving recently. People think he's lost the use of 90% of his body he's not going to want to jump out of a plane. It's that limiting mindset. They need to see the ability, not the dis-ability.*

7.1.3 Examples of access and inclusion problems

The access problems in Bunbury identified by the Co-researchers included issues with an unsatisfactory pedestrian experience (including footpaths and walkability, lack of dignified entrance to buildings and amenities such as shops, restaurants and toilet spaces), and a lack of accessible public open space facilities (such as playground equipment, drink fountains, and beach access). Other issues related to inclusion were to do with lack of availability of information about inclusive facilities, programs and events in Bunbury, a lack of inclusive recreation options, and lack of inclusivity at public events. These were all identified as priority areas for improving access and inclusion in Bunbury, and are explored in more detail below.

Unsatisfactory pedestrian experience

The Co-researchers reported that the design of footpaths in general is problematic, as they often slope at angles that send wheelchair users veering into the gutters. This is ostensibly done for drainage purposes. For people who can't read, signage is often a problem because words are used instead of symbols. At public events, there is often nothing that a person using a wheelchair can

participate in (such as sideshow attractions, stalls and food vans). For people with hearing impairment, closed captions or audio description are not available when they visit the cinema. For vision impaired people, tactile indicators are often missing from crossing points, and the CBD sidewalks are cluttered with obstacles such as signs, planter boxes and service pillars, making navigation hazardous.

> *The street where I live there is not a footpath, so I walk on the road, and nearly get hit. I'd love to know who would be liable if I got hit by a car. The Shire? Coming from overseas, I never saw footpaths in a street that are only on one side. I think it's poor town planning.*

> *I was a carer for a lady the other day who had low vision and used a cane. The footpath even down that main street wasn't wide enough, and there were so many obstacles there that created havoc for us to walk down the street. It was bollards, shop signs, planter boxes, trees, and all sorts of things that made it so difficult. We walked from the museum down the main street and back again, and by the time we got back, I was exhausted. It highlighted just how difficult it was just for her to walk down the road, even with support.*

Bunbury's numerous uncontrolled[2] pedestrian crossings were considered hazardous, as were many of the kerb ramps. Walkability in the CBD was generally considered to be poor, and an unpleasant experience for those with a disability. Of particular concern was the perceived lack of continuous paths of safe and comfortable travel between destination spaces, such as Marlston Waterfront and the CBD, within the CBD, and between homes, public parks and shopping centres. This had an isolating effect for people who depend on connecting footpaths to reach their destination, and for some, made them not want to leave their home to go out into the community.

Lack of dignified access to premises and amenities

Some Co-researchers reported that they believed that the majority commercial premises in Bunbury could not be accessed in a dignified manner, defined as providing level thresholds and wide self-opening doors (Australian Network on Disability, 2016), which makes people dependent on others for assistance to open the main entrance door, or being forced to use a rear service entrance (see Figure 10). To confirm this suspicion, a small group of Co-researchers conducted a basic audit of

[2] An uncontrolled pedestrian crossing is one that is not controlled by pedestrian phase lights, and/or a zebra-crossing. Zebra crossings were removed from all City of Bunbury CBD roundabouts in the 1990s, however they have been reintroduced in the slipways of some of the newer intersections.

entrances to premises on Victoria Street (Bunbury's main street) and concluded that only 28% of premises provided dignified access, and that around 22% of premises (more than 1 in 5 retail outlets) could not be entered at all by people using a wheelchair due to the presence of a step or other physical barrier.



Figure 10: a photo of a City of Bunbury employee sitting in a wheelchair and entering a Bunbury restaurant through the rear service entrance, the only accessible entrance into the premises

The Co-researchers were of the opinion that, once inside, many premises lacked accessible features, for example, a local cinema did not provide appropriate seating options for people with wheelchairs to sit alongside family and friends, and did not provide audio description or subtitling facilities for people with sensory impairments.

> *I would like to be able to go to the movies and not have my husband describe what's going on. In New Zealand they are big on audio description. In the movie theatres they've got jacks where you can put in headphones and get an audio description.*
>
> *One of the worst dealings I've had in Bunbury is going to the cinema. Some of them, they have a box with a barrier wall put up for people to sit in wheelchairs. If I take my partner, she's got to sit on the other side of the wall, I feel like I'm in a cage like a bird. When we went last week, she's gone nah, I'm not sitting there and asked the guy to get a chair for her so she could sit next to me. He's like, you don't need a chair there's chairs there. She goes, I want a chair. So he brings in a plastic chair for her to sit on for two hours. They could at least have a comfortable chair so your partner can sit next to you and you can go to the movies together.*

Likewise, the Co-researchers noted that in their experience, only a handful of 'accessible' toilets around the city were fitted with electric door openers to make entrance easy or even possible. Instead, many were fitted with heavy door closers, making independent access extremely difficult, if not impossible.

> *You can have the most accessible cafes but a toilet is out of the question. I don't even go there.*

Lack of accessible public open space facilities

The Co-researchers felt that in general, Bunbury's public open spaces were lacking basic accessibility facilities, such as accessibly-designed picnic tables, drink fountains, play equipment, toilets and beach access.

> *When I'm at the picnic area with my family, you can't get close to the beach because of simple design changes that would make you feel much more included and make it flow. Really simple stuff, like making all the BARBEQUEs and picnic tables accessible as a starting point.*

However, near the end of the study, the Co-researchers noted that a recent foreshore development at Koombana Bay in Bunbury had delivered an excellent standard of accessibility with universally designed barbeques, picnic tables, drink fountains and shade shelters, as well as the provision of a Changing Places[3] facility, beach ramps, beach access matting, and two beach wheelchairs.

> *To me, the Koombana foreshore is a gem, that's going to be a real asset to Bunbury. Little things like having keys to the beach wheelchairs available right there at the kiosk so we don't have to go looking for a name and phone number, it's those little things that make life easy.*

A significant exception was the new Koombana playground, which failed to include features that would make it accessible to children with mobility issues (see section 7.3.3),

Lack of availability of information

The Co-researchers voiced a concern about the low rates of participation of people with disabilities in events, programs or initiatives in the city, even those that catered specifically to their needs. For example, a local trampoline centre once set up a weekly session for children with special needs, but it was abandoned due to low numbers. The South West Sport Centre held a gym program for people

[3] Changing Places are changerooms and toilet facilities designed to the highest specification of accessibility and include a hoist and adult change table. See https://changingplaces.org.au/

with disabilities, but after some months it shut down due to lack of interest. The Co-researchers felt that at least part of the problem was a lack of information getting out to people with disabilities. Another barriers was cost of participation.

Lack of inclusive recreation options

Some Co-researchers felt that part of the problem with recreation was that many people with disabilities preferred inclusive recreation options that everyone could attend (rather than only being able to choose from those programs catering specifically to people with disabilities). They felt that Bunbury had a good range of programs that cater just to people with disabilities, but that this didn't allow them to participate in mainstream activities and to be a part of the community. They felt that there were very few inclusive options available, and that there was a need for more awareness-raising programs to encourage clubs and groups to be more welcoming of people of all abilities.

> *We need not just groups for people with disabilities, we need normal inclusive groups, like at the Sports Centre and at the trampoline place. We need to raise awareness with businesses and the community, so you don't just have to go to the same things all the time. Like say the lawn bowls club down the road, ah yeah, we welcome people in wheelchairs, and teenagers....*

One Co-researcher expressed a desire to a see recreational settings where participation was open to everyone and interaction occurred between people in natural, normal ways, without disability becoming a focus.

> *We need the community to get involved 'unintentionally'*

Lack of inclusivity at public events

The Co-researchers felt more could be done to make major community events more inclusive. One Co-researcher struggled with a lack of consideration for children with autism, particularly those with a tendency to run away.

> *If they promoted the event (as Autism-friendly), with great things for the kids, you know, made a bit of a thing about it…*

Other Co-researchers agreed, believing that responsibility lay with event organisers to make their events more disability-friendly.

So that's where they (the event organisers) have got to be a bit more aware, to help you to be there with your daughter. It's not an isolated case. It's a safety thing as well as an inclusion thing.

Events can also be challenging from an access point of view, with many of the stallholders and vendors situated high up off the ground in trailers, a lack of accessible rides, and grassed surfaces which made navigation by wheelchair difficult. The Co-researchers felt that this was not an uncommon experience of attending major events in Bunbury.

You look at some of the places where they have events, you can't get wheelchairs into them.

They were of the opinion that, in general, event organisers needed to become more educated and aware of the diversity of needs and abilities of event-goers.

I'm surprised how little – and she was lovely – that events coordinator knew about autism. She said 'Oh, most people with Asperger's are really good at maths, aren't they?'.

7.1.4 Perspectives on the nature of the problem

The Co-researchers were encouraged to reflect on the questions and problems they had identified, and made the following observations.

Some Co-researchers wondered whether adequate consultation and research was being done to inform best practice for accessibility when designing infrastructure for the city.

They're trying to make the effort but it's like proper research hasn't gone into it. It's only half done.

At the shopping centre I go to, there's an electric door on the baby change room, but only a push door on the disabled toilet. I know they're trying, but, where's the consultation?

Are they doing their homework?

Some questioned whether there were adequate checks and balances in place to safeguard accessible outcomes.

If the Council is designing a public open space, do they have to show the drawings to the Access Committee?

What assurance do we have the Council is complying with the Australian Standards?

Why is there a breakdown in the design stage of new stuff? Because everything new should be perfect. Yes, old stuff needs work, but anything new should be spot on.

The Co-researchers suggested the need for a system of rating accessibility in public-user infrastructure.

They need to grade the toilet access and have a symbol that tells you, yes it's good access or not. Even for people who are sight impaired, something that tells you that it's got the ticks.

Some Co-researchers pointed to an apparent lack of consequences for not meeting community expectations of accessibility in the design process, as might occur in other areas such as occupational health and safety.

…if they don't meet OSH [Occupational Safety and Health] standards, any business or council will get taken to court by the government. They are very strict. It's all about safety, practicality and functionality. It should be the same for accessibility.

The Health Department checks restaurants and things. Why can't there be like an accessibility check?

They (businesses) should be audited, and if they're not up to scratch they should be closed until they are. That's the bottom line.

Some questioned the culture of public design, suggesting that designers had a tendency to make generalisations about people with disabilities, and assume dependency on support, rather than capacity for independence.

It makes me wonder, we talked about people being institutionalised and that mindset, is there still that mindset in the planning side of things. Because they seem to think that everyone with a disability has a carer with them, not that we would be independent people who function as an individual.

Others felt the issue was simply ‘out of sight, out of mind’ for many designers.

> *I think it’s just a lack of thought rather than thinking specifically one way.*

One suggestion was that perhaps the issue was a lack of exposure to disability on the part of designers.

> *I think a lot of people designing these things just haven't been exposed to disabilities in such a way that they know what problems we face and therefore how to address them properly.*
>
> *When I went to school there were no people with disabilities in the school. Now the kids are there, they’re in schools and it’s becoming more normalised.*

Some Co-researchers felt there was too much emphasis on wheelchair users, and that Bunbury lacked features to include people with other types of disabilities.

> *They always seem to focus on wheelchairs. There's other people with disabilities with other things that affect them. Like I think that Bunbury lacks things for people with vision impairment.*

Others expressed frustration at the apparent lack of progress towards universal design.

> *I was at the shops the other day and needed to use the bathroom area, and I had to ask someone walking past to open the door. Doors aren’t exactly new technology. We’ve had doors for thousands of years, and electric doors for decades. There should have been a push button or at least a sliding door.*

Some felt that designers needed to experience the product of their design from a disability perspective, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the problems.

> *We could encourage people who build things to actually try them from an accessibility point of view.*
>
> *It would be good to take people without disabilities into new things when they build them, to look at them and see what their perspective is.*

The Co-researchers emphasised a need for educating designers about the principles of universal design.

> *The point here is that if you design something well for people with disabilities, you're designing it better for everyone. Parents with prams, people who use walking frames, families, the elderly and so on. We're not talking about putting in special equipment, it's generally stuff that everybody will use, but it's been designed with all abilities in mind. There seems to be very little awareness (of universal design).*

There was general agreement that the leaders within the City of Bunbury needed to be engaged in dialogue about these matters so that the Co-researchers could develop a more in-depth understanding of the 'system' and where the problems might lay.

> *It would be good, when the new CEO begins, to get them to come to one of our meetings. Because they're the boss of it. And we'll be able to discuss with them what their plans are for access in the City.*

7.2 Using Collaborators

In order to expand the collective knowledge of the group about the issues they were investigating, three 'Collaborators' (independent experts with specific knowledge) were invited to attend Research Group meetings at different stages of the study. The three Collaborators and the knowledge they provided are outlined below.

The first Collaborator was Kathy Boxall, ECU Professor of Social Work with a specific interest in disability. Prof Boxall led the Co-researchers in a discussion about the social model of disability, and showed how the model can be used to reframe the 'problem' of disability as a social and political one, requiring solutions that focus on fixing barriers in society rather than trying to 'fix' the individual.

The second Collaborator was Mohamed Asar, a TAFE College lecturer in Technical Design and an experienced architect. Mohamed shared information about the lack of compulsory formal training in universal design for diploma students, a problem he is trying to address. He highlighted that it cannot be assumed that the people responsible for the design of physical infrastructure have been adequately trained in universal design as part of their formal education.

The third Collaborator was Samantha Jenkinson, Executive Director of disability advocacy organisation People with Disabilities WA, and a Councillor for a Perth-based local government. Samantha described how she set out to influence the 'system' from the inside as a Councillor, and

what she encountered in the process in terms of challenges and achievements. She also provided her perspectives on some of the systemic issues affecting disability access and inclusion in local government and how to advocate effectively for change.

The use of Collaborators proved to be an effective tool for knowledge expansion within the process of Participatory Action Research, giving the Co-researchers access to independent sources of information that could be used to reframe the problem, validate ideas and perspectives, and develop new lines of inquiry.

7.3 Focusing on design

7.3.1 Engagement and co-design

At the third Research Group meeting (see Figure 12), the Co-researchers engaged in an exercise where they were split into three groups and asked to come up with one word per group that summarised the Co-researcher discussions up to that point in the research process. The resulting three words were: *Access, Inclusion* and *Engagement* (see Figure 11).

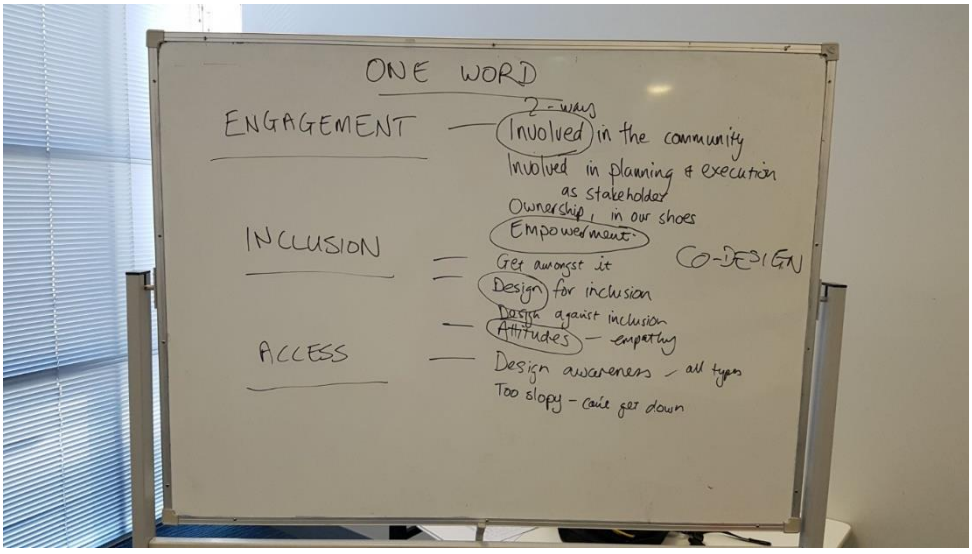


Figure 11: Photo of whiteboard notes from the third Research Group meeting



Figure 12: Photo of a Research Group meeting

When asked to expand on the meaning of each word, each group proceeded to link their word to design, and to explain their vision for what better design could look like. The 'Inclusion' group talked about how design can be either "for inclusion" or "against inclusion". They posited that design *for* inclusion would require more appropriate attitudes and an empathic approach on the part of the designers. The 'Access' sub-group concluded that designing for accessibility would require designers to possess greater technical awareness of how people with different types of disability would interact with their designs. The 'Engagement' sub-group suggested that engaging people with disabilities in "planning and execution as stakeholders", and "empowering" them to participate in the process, would result in a more accessible community. They emphasised that engagement in planning would need to be "two-way", and that the people responsible for planning would need to place themselves "in our shoes".

Finally, by the end of the third Research Group meeting, the Co-researchers had agreed that all the above concepts could be encapsulated in a single term: 'co-design'. In this one exercise, the Co-researchers had effectively expanded their personal stories and linked them into a broader narrative (Kurtz, 2014; Harper *et al*., 2004) that problematised the system of public design (linking the personal with the political – Hanish, 1970), and arrived at *co-design* as a potential key facilitator of better access and inclusion. This suggested to me that, if the MARCIA goal is to be fully realised, people with disabilities will need to become meaningfully engaged in the co-design of their City.

7.3.2 Linking MARCIA to public design

During the preparation phase of the study, as I was preparing the literature review for my research proposal and struggling with the enormity of the scope of the research, I chanced upon a certain image in the University library that brought a sudden moment of clarity for me. The image drew my attention to the idea that perhaps 'urban design' was a critical factor, if not *the* critical factor that warranted significant investigation in relation to Bunbury achieving MARCIA. The image, shown in

Figure 13 below, is a panoramic photograph of Bunbury taken in 1985, from a publication by the South West Development Authority called *Bunbury 2000: The Shape of Things to Come* (SWDA, 1985).



Figure 13: A photo of Bunbury taken in 1985 (source: SWDA, 1985)

Upon viewing the photo, I was amazed at how much development had occurred in Bunbury in the past 30 years. The City was barely recognisable when compared to 2015 (see Figure 14)



Figure 14: A photo of Bunbury taken in 2015

I reflected on the many access barriers that had been designed into the landscape in that 30-year span through conventional design practices, and how much anguish and frustration could have been avoided if the design had simply been executed better from an access point of view. There seemed to me to be no compelling reason why this couldn't have been easily achieved with a more sophisticated process of urban design. I then considered the many design elements not typically

encompassed in the term 'urban design' (which is normally associated with fixed or hard infrastructure), in particular the various soft infrastructure elements.

I realised that *all* infrastructure elements in a city like Bunbury have been produced through design, whether hard infrastructure (such as buildings and facilities) or soft infrastructure (such as services, programs, events and information systems). This observation is reflected by Gooding (2017) who observed that accessibility needs to be understood as referring not just to the physical disability context such as ramps and accessible toilets, but in its broadest sense as referring to any efforts that promote social inclusion through the systematic removal of barriers to full participation in society (see also CRPD, Article 5 in United Nations, 2006). I needed a new, more encompassing term to describe the design of both hard and soft infrastructure intended for use by the public – whether delivered by government or commercial entities, and began to use the term *public design*[4] in my field journal. I considered, for example, how things like libraries, cinemas and events are all products of public design and consist of both hard and soft elements, and how each element is deliberately designed to function the way it does by people who are generally paid to do so. I concluded that if it is their job to design public infrastructure for use by the general public, often using public money, then one could argue that they have a social and moral duty to incorporate the highest standards of universal access into their design work wherever possible.

To refer to the products resulting from public design I used the term *public infrastructure*[5], a term that could encompass any infrastructure intended for use by the public, regardless of whether it is for commercial purposes (such as a restaurant, retail store or office space) or civic purposes (such as a library, streetscape or recreation centre). I deduced that all public-user infrastructure results from a controlled process of planning and decision-making, meaning it would be possible to interrogate such a system to discover how and why some things are going 'wrong' in the planning and decision-making process and other things are going 'right'. Thinking about the MARCIA aspiration, I hypothesised that achieving MARCIA status would require a better understanding of the process of public design and any safeguards for disability access and inclusion. However, I realised that I possessed a very poor grasp of the public design process, and that the Co-researchers were likely to have even less of an understanding (I had at least worked in local government previously). Nor was I

[4] The only reference to the term *public design* that I could identify in the literature was a book by Christian Bason (2017) that used the term to refer to the application of design thinking and methodologies to promote innovation in public sector service delivery.

[5] The term public infrastructure is commonly understood to denote hard infrastructure that is owned and managed by public entities such as government departments. I have expanded this definition to include any hard or soft infrastructure, whether public or privately owned or managed, that is intended to be accessed by members of the public.

certain that the Co-researchers would consider the interrogation of public design to be a research priority for them. It was something I had in the back of my mind, but I needed to enter the PAR process with a mindset that was open to other ways of framing the problem.

As the early research meetings progressed the Co-researchers also began to problematise public design and to ask why things in the community were being designed in ways that did not consistently meet their expectations as people with disabilities and carers. They too began to wonder who was responsible and what needed to be done to change 'the system'. I shared with the group the image of Bunbury from 1985 and my thoughts about the link between public design and the MARCIA aspiration, which prompted further discussion and questioning in that regard. A critical realisation for me during this period was that if Bunbury was to have the greatest chance of transforming itself into the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia over the *next* thirty year period, the 'system' of public design would need a more inclusive approach to public design – a state in which all elements of the process would be geared towards safeguarding and promoting universal access within every design endeavour. As one Co-researcher remarked, "*it has to be a conscious decision to make design inclusive, or by default it will be exclusive*".

7.3.3 Recognising 'public design' as the problem

Another moment of clarity for the Research Group came about when Bunbury's multi-million dollar Koombana Bay foreshore redevelopment took place towards in the second half of 2017, and it was discovered that, despite most of the development being accessible by design, the newly installed main attraction – the children's playground – was not accessible to children with physical disabilities at all. A 10-year-old girl in a wheelchair was observed trying to access the playground and found she was unable to play on *any* of the equipment with her friends and siblings. This news regarding total inaccessibility of the main children's attraction at the long-awaited and much anticipated beachfront development caused consternation amongst the Co-researchers, who wanted to understand how, in a City committed to MARCIA, this could possibly have been allowed to happen (see figure 15).



Figure 15: The new Koombana Bay playground (left), a popular beachfront attraction, was not designed to be accessible to parents and children in wheelchairs (right) – a missed opportunity.

What exacerbated the situation was that the Research Group learned that the City of Bunbury had, only a few years earlier in 2012, constructed the region's first 'all-abilities' playground, co-designed by two parents of children with a disability together with the City's landscape architects. This playground was designed for all children of all abilities using universal design principles, so that it did not look or function differently to any other playground save for a few subtle design inclusions like a merry-go-round that was flush to the ground, a raised accessible sand play zone, a giant birds nest swing, strategic use of soft fall and a network of connecting footpaths. The playground and the process of design that led to it were intended to provide a benchmark for future playgrounds around the City to achieve universal design, but the learning from the original project was not transferred to the new playground design.

This example highlighted for the Co-researchers that there must be serious systemic problems in the process of public design that were creating barriers for people with disability in the community. It was obvious that the design contractors and/or the City of Bunbury had not engaged in consultation or co-design with people with disabilities or parents and caregivers, and so did not capture their design ideas and contributions. It was also clear that the design for the playground had somehow been authorised for construction without any appropriate checks and balances in place to safeguard universal design.

What was not clear to the Research Group was what those appropriate checks and balances might be, or why they were not in place, and why the City was not consulting people with disabilities or engaging them in co-design. Thus the Research Group began to focus their attention on the system

of public design in the City of Bunbury, and on identifying what the facilitators of universal design in public infrastructure might be. To do this, the Research Group needed to engage with City Informants, beginning with Executive staff members who would be able to provide the group with a 'big picture' explanation of how the system fit together, and where the 'room for improvements' might be.

7.4 Conclusion

By spending time defining terms like access and inclusion and developing an understanding of the 'problem' as being one of design, the Research Group wanted to further explore the links between access and inclusion and the process of public design in the City of Bunbury. It was surmised that if public infrastructure is not consciously and consistently designed to be universally accessible in the planning stages, then barriers are likely to be introduced. Co-design was identified by the Co-researchers to be one of the important facilitators of universal design in public infrastructure. However, the next step was to develop a better understanding of how the system of design that regulates and produces public infrastructure works. This required engaging City Informants in deliberative dialogue, beginning with senior executives. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

8. EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES

This chapter will outline what was learned from dialogue between the Co-researchers and three senior City Informants about their perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to disability access and inclusion in public design. The dialogue covered a wide range of topics including:

- the application and adequacy of compulsory standards regulating accessible design, such as the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010, and the Building Code of Australia (Australian Building Codes Board, 2016);
- issues around designing for compliance versus best practice;
- the tension between aspirations and cost;
- issues around involving people with disabilities in the design process;
- the idea of developing 'desirable criteria' or best practice benchmarks to guide future accessible design work;
- the need to educate private developers and design contractors;
- the need to increase staff training and awareness-raising about universal design;
- plans to audit existing buildings and facilities for accessibility, and associated challenges;
- the best approach to funding the removal of barriers; and
- the role of policy in supporting or limiting the realisation of disability access and inclusion.

These issues are systemic in nature, and dialogue was intended to educate both parties (Co-researchers and City Informants) with regards to expectations and limitations of the current system of public design within the City of Bunbury. The data collected from the Executive Informants was subjected to Framework Analysis, and used to help address the research question by identifying key systemic barriers and facilitators that could be further investigated with technical and managerial staff.

8.1 Key discussion points

The Research Group met with three City Informants holding senior leadership roles - the Acting CEO, Director of Works and Services, and Manager of Corporate Governance. The duration of each meeting was approximately 45 minutes. This section provides a summary of the key points that were established from the dialogue.

MARCIA

The Co-researchers were interested to know from the City Informants what progress they believed the City of Bunbury had made towards achieving MARCIA status.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Can I be frank and say that I think we started from a pretty low base. So, anything that we do is better than what we were doing. I accept that, from a regulatory perspective, our building surveyors and our town planners and our engineers have done what we need to do at a regulatory level. A regulatory level is not the same as a community acceptance level. There's always room for improvement.*

The Research Group discussed with the Informants the City's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, and acknowledged that the City had actually made considerable progress in terms of rectifying physical and attitudinal barriers. However, the Research Group were concerned with an apparent lack of focus on long-term systemic changes that would generate and support a culture of better practice in universal design, and embed safeguards for universal design into the system, in keeping with the MARCIA aspiration.

Australian design standards

The most prominent reference made was to the role of the existing Australian design standards regulating accessibility such as those covering access to premises, accessible parking, public transport and so forth – for example, the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010, and the Building Code of Australia (Australian Building Codes Board, 2016). They are referred to in this thesis as 'the Standards' (see Appendix 8 for a list of regulatory design standards and codes pertaining to accessible design). One City Informant explained that the City of Bunbury, like all local governments, is legally compelled to comply with the Standards, and these Standards are intended to produce a consistent minimum level of service.

> *CITY INFORMANT: When we design something, we design it to a set of standards, so it is consistent. There is legislation and we meet that requirement. It may not be up to everyone's expectations.*

The City Informant explained that local governments and commercial property owners are not compelled to upgrade existing facilities to meet any revisions in Australian Standards, except in certain circumstances.

> *CITY INFORMANT: If you build a building, and then the Standards change, there's no impetus on us to upgrade to meet the new standards, unless you do a major upgrade or redevelopment, in which case you have to meet the current standards of the day.*

The Co-researchers learned that existing buildings and facilities owned by the City of Bunbury are not routinely audited for compliance with the Standards.

> *CITY INFORMANT: We haven't looked backwards yet. This building here was built ten years ago. Does it meet the current Standards? We don't know.*

However, the City was in the process of training internal staff members from a range of different disciplines to conduct accessibility audits of buildings and facilities. This was being done in preference to using external auditors as it was considered to be a more sustainable approach.

> *CITY INFORMANT: We were going to get someone to do audits on our buildings, but we've decided to use the money to train up to ten Building and Engineering staff in how to conduct access audits on buildings and open spaces. That allows them to look at whether our existing assets meet current Standards, and also as we plan new ones, then we can take into account that information.*

Adequacy of compulsory Standards

The Co-researchers raised a concern about adequacy of the existing Standards in terms of meeting community expectations.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: My concern is, as a case study, the Ski Beach [a recent precinct development in Bunbury]… it's architecturally lovely, open spaces, but it's totally not accessible. So if that's the most recent major development in Bunbury, that says to me that the current Standards still don't meet disabled people's expectations.*

In addition, the Co-researchers questioned the currency of the Standards.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Some of those Standards might be 20 or 30 years old, from when people were institutionalised.*

This has been shown to be the case. See for example the document titled *Design for Dignity Guidelines* (Australian Network on Disability, 2015), which states that within the Australian Standard

AS1428.1 (Design for Access and Mobility) (Standards Australia, 2009), "the majority of measurements in the most critical areas are based on data from 1983" (p.9).

The Co-researchers expressed concern that the planned audits would simply result in meeting the minimum Standards, rather than best practice benchmarks for universal design.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: How is the training or the audits going to vary from the current Standards? Because if they're just re-learning the same Standards you're currently using, there is no change.*

Compliance culture

A City Informant explained that having the Standards in place has inadvertently created a culture of compliance with minimum specifications, rather than engendering best practice, and that there were few if any incentives to encourage Council or developers to go above and beyond the Standards.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The problem you've got is that there is no requirement for anyone to do anything over and above the Standards… the Standards would have to change. See that's the problem. If I'm a developer and I'm building an object, I'll build that object to meet whatever I have to meet. Will I do anything more? Not if it's going to cost me more money. My whole existence is about making money, so I'll do what I have to do to make money out of it. We (Council) can't force them to do above and beyond.*

The City Informant reinforced that Standards play an important role in guiding the City of Bunbury's design work for City-owned buildings and facilities, as they help the City to meet a well-defined specification, and to avoid being sued.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The reason we build to Standards is, to be blunt, if someone has an accident there, I can go back and say 'no, we built it to that Standard, the accident is not our fault'. We live in a litigious society, and part of it is I don't just go and build a road to what I think is a good thing. I build it to a set of standards because over many years, that's what's been developed and that's what says a road of that nature should be. And then I've got a defendable position if something happens out there as well. I'm not saying that's my driving force, but that's part of it.*

Another City Informant recognised the issue of compliance culture, and believed that the Council had some work to do to ensure that everyone in the organisation treated disability access and inclusion as a priority.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I'll be honest with you there is a bit of frustration that when we report on the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, not all of our staff are looking back at their areas of responsibility. They don't see it as part of normal business, they see it as something special that they should only focus on when someone kicks them in the backside. Whereas we are trying to make sure that they see it as normal business. Why wouldn't you? It's no different than mowing the lawn once a fortnight.*

Best practice

The Co-researchers pointed to examples of where other regional local governments appeared to be going 'above and beyond' the Standards and designing to best practice.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: I went to [another regional town] recently and they've done brilliant work up there. In (another regional city) at the new foreshore you can cross anywhere in the street. There are no kerbs.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: (Another regional city) is steaming ahead with everything (in disability access). Bunbury doesn't seem to have moved forward much. We're missing out.*

In response, the City Informant pointed to upgrades that have been happening around the City whereby better or best practice principles were being applied.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The Parks and Gardens crew for instance, when they're replacing BARBEQUEs now, they're using wheelchair friendly ones. So hopefully what you'll see, as we replace something with an accessible one, our staff will see, ok now we need a path there to get to those facilities, and so on….*

But added:

> *We're not ahead of the game. We're learning as we're going through.*

The Co-researchers later expressed concern that the use of the word 'hopefully' was perhaps indicative of a lack safeguards embedded within the design process to ensure that details such as

footpath connectivity between facilities – a design consideration not covered by the existing Standards – would be attended to as a matter of certainty.

Conscience vs cost

For new developments, exceeding the Standards (or applying best practice principles where Standards did not exist) appeared to be a matter of conscious decision-making, rather than an embedded design consideration.

> *CITY INFORMANT: At the City of Bunbury, we could make a conscious decision to say that when we do a development, we're going to do something above and beyond.*

Some Co-researchers questioned why the City of Bunbury didn't appear to be to be 'going above and beyond' as a matter of routine.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: How come other Cities are doing it? Are the Councillors paying above and beyond? Some of them are 10 years ahead. The ramps, the way it's designed for all people. How the parks in (another regional city) are designed so it's inclusive for everyone is amazing. So why have they said 'we're just going to meet the Standards', but they've then gone beyond that?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: That may be a decision that the Council has made… if we go above the Standard and spend more money, that's a social or conscience decision for someone to make.*

City Informants often made reference to cost as a barrier to upgrading existing buildings and facilities to meeting Standards and/or community expectations. Such costs appeared to exceed the City of Bunbury's financial capacity to deliver.

> *CITY INFORMANT: At the current funding rate, it's 200 years before we get a footpath down every street.*

The Co-researchers acknowledged the budget restrictions on Council, and that it was necessary to set priorities.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: I'm realistic about that, it is about priorities and of course there will be areas that are higher priorities than others. High use areas, public open spaces, spaces where people go to socialise would be higher priority to me.*

Consulting people with disabilities

The Co-researchers expressed concern that people with disabilities did not appear to be routinely included in the setting of priorities, or even to be consulted about major developments in Bunbury. They questioned whether there ought to be a step added to the planning and approvals process whereby developers would be required to consult with the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee (where projects meet certain criteria).

> *CO-RESEARCHER: With say [a developer] doing that design at the Ski Beach, is there a stage prior to it being approved, where people such as the Access Committee are able to provide some sort of input into it? Where they can say, yes this meets the Standards, but…*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: Possibly.*

One of the issues with consultation, it was noted, was that not all public design work is commissioned or controlled by the City of Bunbury. Much of it is done by third parties, including contract designers working for commercial developers and/or for State or Federal Government departments, which adds a layer of complexity to the system. However, the City of Bunbury still holds responsibility for processing development applications and checking that they comply with any applicable Standards. Plans are checked by Council for compliance with the minimum Australian Standards, with some exceptions allowed.

> *CITY INFORMANT: They do up a set of plans to the Standards, and we check and sign off. There are circumstances where you can't meet those Standards. So if I have a put a footpath up a hill, by rights I should have a 1:12 or 1:14 grade on it. I can't get that, there's no way.*

One City Informant suggested that the Council could possibly play a role in advising and encouraging private developers to consider options for exceeding the Standards during the formal Development Application process.

> *CITY INFORMANT: When we get a third party submitting something, we can look at that. While that might meet the Standard, we can at least make suggestions if we think they should go over and above.*

However, some Co-researchers felt that it was important that people with different types of disabilities were consulted in the process (rather than relying solely on the knowledge of internal

staff members) as they would be more likely to detect problems in a proposed development not covered by the Standards.

One City Informant explained that the City has a process for managing all development applications, called the Development Control Unit (DCU) – a multidisciplinary unit that checks all development applications against different compliance measures. However, it was explained that currently there were no triggers in the DCU process to refer a development application for consultation with people with disabilities, or to ensure that a technical expert for accessibility had reviewed the application.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The DCU staff are looking at (the development application) from what they know from a regulatory aspect, and now also from what they know from the training they've done through the (access) audit training. Is it perfect? No, but it's better than what we did. And the next level might be, how do we then bring people with disabilities either onto staff or (into the process) through a reference group to assess things.*

Consulting technical experts

The idea of having a technical officer on staff whose role it would be to assess plans and proposals for disability access and inclusion had previously been raised with one senior City Informant, who expressed support for the idea.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Do you think there's possibly an opportunity to create a role… specifically for access and inclusion? Someone that personally has a disability that sees hurdles on a daily basis who can help prioritise accessibility issues in Bunbury to fix ones that are currently there?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: It's certainly meritorious. We're no different to any other organisation with constraints on budgets… It's actually how we fit it in to our current structure. I think that we all know that people who have a disability are the best people to identify those hurdles.*

The Co-researchers learned that the City had not considered employing a technical officer for disability access and inclusion previously, but they did already employ a Community Development Officer with a portfolio in disability access and inclusion. This role was focussed more on overseeing progress against the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan than about providing technical advice and support to design staff, however, officers sometimes looked to this person for technical advice.

Another option that was discussed was to contract in technical support and advice on an as-needs basis, using consultants.

One of the concerns raised by the City Informants about co-design and consulting technical experts was the risk of holding up development approvals by introducing additional steps into an already tight process.

> *CITY INFORMANT: When we are dealing with private developers, they will not tolerate us holding their projects up for an extra period of time. We get kicked in the backside if it takes too long now to get a development approval done.*

However, it was considered a possibility if the process could be made more efficient in other areas.

> *CITY INFORMANT: If we can fine tune some of our other processes, we can create the gap to do that additional work without lengthening the process.*

Engaging the private sector

One Informant suggested that the City could consider working with private sector architects and designers to raise their awareness of best practice in accessible design, and to accept closer scrutiny of plans for accessibility.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I'm mindful of not creating a problem, but actually bringing the architects, especially the main architects around town, in for some of these discussions. Because they are the people that are talking directly with the owner or the developer as well… I think they will get it, but then they become a servant to their client at the same time.*

Thus it appeared that there was a need for the City to consider strategies for educating private developers to ensure that they will be accepting of suggestions for improving disability access made by their architects and designers, or by the City.

Developing desirable criteria

City Informants raised the issue of not knowing what they were expected to do in order to go 'over and above' the existing Standards, as presently there was a lack of definition or agreement about what this meant in practice.

> *CITY INFORMANT: There is no definition (of MARCIA), so when we talk about going over the Standards, what does that mean and how are we defining what*

we want over and above what the Standard level is?... We can't sit here and say 'we want 20% above the standard'. What does that mean?

One City Informant observed that the concept of 'over and above' lacked definition, and after some discussion the consensus was that a set of 'desirable criteria' ought to be developed to supplement the existing Australian Standards.

CITY INFORMANT: Over and above the Standard, what the City might say is, when we put an island in as a pedestrian crossing, we won't have a ramped island, we will build it at the grade of the road. There is no extra cost to us. We can define that and say very clearly that from now on, when we build pedestrian refuges, this is the way we're going to do it.

The Co-researchers queried whether the proposed desirable design criteria could be formulated with the input of people with disabilities, to ensure the criteria met their expectations.

CITY INFORMANT: I think that can happen, we probably just need to have a think about it… that may be a possibility as we move forward.

The Co-researchers felt that it was important for those involved in the development of any new design criteria to have some personal experience of what it is like to navigate the City from the perspective of a person with a disability (experiential learning).

CO-RESEARCHER: We can make up a little map for them to get around Bunbury in a wheelchair, or on a gopher, or with a walking frame, or with a cane. Then they can get a better perspective.

However, some Co-researchers expressed reservations about the efficacy of experiential learning, believing that it cannot supplant the direct input and perspectives of those with long-term lived experience of disability.

CO-RESEARCHER: I still have a question mark about those staff putting themselves in the shoes of those with disabilities. It's very different looking at it from the outside in, than being on the inside.

Engaging private developers

The Co-researchers asked if it would be possible for any desirable criteria (once developed) to be included as part of any tenders or design work contracted out by the City.

CITY INFORMANT: I think from our point of view, if we go out (to tender) for a design, we say we want the design done to Standards. If we had a MARCIA set of standards, we would supply that information to them, and then the expectation is that they would do the design to that level, because that's what we asked for. For our designs, even in-house, we can say this is what the expectation of the City of Bunbury is in terms of delivering this project. But we have to define what that is.

It was evident that City would not have the power to require private developers to comply with any desirable criteria adopted by the City.

CITY INFORMANT: What I can't do is get a third party to go and do that because I can't force them to.

However, it was suggested that the City could play a role in encouraging private developers to meet the desirable criteria.

CITY INFORMANT: We put one of our town planners, and a couple of building surveyors (through the access audit training) so that when they are dealing with, I don't know, ABC incorporated, and they are going to build a new building we can have a discussion about compliance with legislation, but we can also have a discussion about universal access and what I call 'better practice'. Because now legislation is the minimum standard.

However, to enact this, the new desirable criteria would need to be well defined.

CITY INFORMANT: Essentially we could almost come up with a standards book (containing Australian Standards and the new desirable criteria), and if someone was coming in to do a subdivision and part of that was a new park, we could say, look, according to our Public Open Space Strategy, that's a Level 3 park, here's what we expect to see in a Level 3 park, like picnic tables and things, and we would say, this is our standard design for an accessible picnic table.

Auditing

It was suggested that the proposed desirable criteria be developed prior to the implementation of the planned audits of City of Bunbury buildings and facilities.

CITY INFORMANT: If the audits are done according to the existing Standards, it's going to give you false assurance. It's like, 'yep, it's up to code', but someone in a wheelchair can't access it.

CITY INFORMANT: It may be that we develop the MARCIA standards, and then get the people to go back and audit against the MARCIA standards, as opposed to the current Standards..

One Co-researcher was concerned that the audits, if done internally, would not be undertaken in an unbiased manner.

CO-RESEARCHER: It's generally no good that people are auditing themselves or people they are close to. At a minimum, I would hope you would get staff from a different department to do it. Because if one of your staff in your area was writing up a report that, in effect, was going to be criticising your department, they might not feel comfortable in doing that.

CITY INFORMANT: We probably wouldn't send one person to do it, we would send at least two. And as you say, maybe two that aren't associated with the particular area. As I said, we're on the journey as well. I haven't got all the answers right now, but we're moving forward.

The Co-researchers expressed concern that the audits may not be followed up with rectification works to fix the problems identified. A City Informant responded in the following manner.

CITY INFORMANT: (Referring to one of the facilities that was expected to be audited by a newly trained staff member): So we'll audit, and there will obviously be some stuff that we can do that is low hanging fruit and we can deal with, but there are going to be other things that, unless we do a major redesign or rebuild, it won't be done. But I guess at least if we've identified it, we may be able to think about how we deal with those things.

Some Co-researchers felt it was more important to focus efforts and resources on ensuring that all *new* developments (or redevelopments) were meeting best practice, rather than trying to retrofit existing barriers.

CO-RESEARCHER: As someone with a disability, I wouldn't expect you to change all the old stuff, but as you upgrade and apply the new (desirable criteria), that would be brilliant. For me, it's more the new stuff and achieving inclusion there

which doesn't have to cost any more if you do it right the first time. To go back obviously costs money.

One City Informant agreed:

CITY INFORMANT: Everything will be retrofitted at some stage, there is always going to be a time when with infrastructure, its useful life is finished.

However, the Co-researchers were not unanimous about this, and some felt that existing barriers in Bunbury required more urgent attention, particularly as they impact on people's day to day lives.

CO-RESEARCHER: Moving forward, you want everything to be done right the first time around. But there are so many hurdles out there now, improvements for accessibility for people that will genuinely change their lives. So you need that funding set aside to make change to the environment we already live in, not a pie in the sky aspiration years ahead. There's some real hurdles there now.

Funding

The Co-researchers were interested to know how the Council funded improvements to disability access and inclusion. There was a distinction made between the approach of setting aside funds specifically earmarked to achieve better accessibility through targeted initiatives, versus the more universalist approach of incorporating funding for accessibility (and associated objectives) into each department's budget. The Co-researchers felt that both options were needed. Whilst the City of Bunbury had a budget for MARCIA and the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, one City Informant was of the opinion that all departments needed to take responsibility.

CITY INFORMANT: We do have that pool of funds sitting under MARCIA, however through the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, responsible officers are supposed to look at those areas and budget for them out of their own budgets.

The Co-researchers were informed that the Council had put aside funds in the budget for implementing MARCIA (a total of $50,000 per annum over three years in addition to a recurrent allocation of $20,000 per annum related to the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan) that was intended to be used for making improvements to existing buildings and facilities based on the priorities identified in the accessibility audits that staff members were going to undertake.

The Co-researchers asked if the City's Disability Advisory Committee would be consulted about how the MARCIA and Disability Access and Inclusion Plan funds were to be prioritised, and were informed

that the City was developing a process for such consultation to occur. The process would engage Committee members in evaluating the impact of different barriers in existing public infrastructure and following a process for prioritising expenditure for rectification work – a type of 'participatory budgeting'.

One Co-researcher queried whether staff were being provided with adequate resources to do the work required to achieve MARCIA status. The City Informant responded in the following manner:

> *CITY INFORMANT: We're not going to fix everything at once but I can guarantee that there are resources there to address these issues. It's actually making sure that we spend that money in the appropriate areas and that we do it once and we do it well. And I would rather do less and do it better than do more and have to go back and do the same thing again in a future budget.*

Policy

The Co-researchers were interested to understand what role policy played in regulating accessibility in the public design process. A distinction was made between Town Planning policies (which are rigid and regulatory in nature and generally determined by State or Federal Government bodies), and Council policies (which were considered to be more like guidelines).

> *CITY INFORMANT: You can use a Council policy as a guiding document but you can actually make a decision that varies from that policy. Town Planning policies are a bit more rigid, and they tend to stick to those a bit more closely. They're there for a reason.*

The Co-researchers were informed that the City of Bunbury has a policy for disability access and inclusion, and it is considered to be a guideline for action rather than regulatory in nature.

> *CITY INFORMANT: There's a policy there around access and inclusion, well really, it's just a series of statements around, you know, we'll look to use our best endeavours... I'm paraphrasing, of course... to do this, that and the other.*

The Co-researchers learned that all policies are regularly reviewed (every two years) by a committee made up of Councillors, and that policies can sometimes be amended based on feedback from the community.

> *CITY INFORMANT: If there is a guiding principle that we can adopt to help inform decision-making, then they (the Policy Committee) are happy to look at that.*

The Co-researchers were informed that Council policies are usually broad statements of position, and not prescriptive in nature. Some policies have corporate guidelines or strategies attached to guide implementation, for example, the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. In some instances, these are reviewed by separate committees.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I know the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan is a document that we pretty much leave to the Disability Access Committee to review and monitor and make those sorts of changes. One of the terms of reference for the Policy Committee is that any policies that are basically within the realm of another committee of Council... obviously the Access Committee being one... you guys are the ones with the expertise in those areas more so than the members on the Policy Committee.*

The Co-researchers expressed concern that the Council's policy for disability access and inclusion was perhaps not having the intended effect, in the sense that inaccessible infrastructure was still being created in Bunbury, and wondered if there were other Council policies that could be adjusted to align more with the MARCIA objective.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: One example might be that we want to see all major development approvals run past the Access Committee as a policy. How would we go about something like that?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: My suggestion would be that you raise it through the Access Committee. Things always have a bit more weight when they come from a committee of individuals versus any one individual.*

The Co-researchers were interested to understand what would happen if the Council endorsed a recommended change in policy but failed to implement it, perhaps due to a lack of commitment or accountability.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Well, that's the role of the CEO ultimately…. He would then go down to whoever is the director of that directorate, and it would be up to them to make sure that happens. I couldn't see it happening that it wouldn't be implemented as such. If it's down there on paper, if it's been adopted by Council, the Councillors are pretty good at taking the CEO to task when there's things that he's not doing, so he would just keep kicking down the line, I think.*

The Co-researchers questioned if there were any penalties or sanctions in place if staff members did not comply with a Council policy or strategy.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Your regulatory ones, your Town Planning ones might. But certainly Council policies don't. It's really a matter of accountability I suppose between the Council and the Administration to make sure that we're implementing policy as we should be.*

8.2 Research Group making sense of the 'system'

In order to process and analyse the data collected from the executive City Informants, the Research Group engaged in discussion about the key themes raised in each dialogue meeting. These discussions were recorded and applied to the Framework for analysis. A summary of the discussions are provided below. As explained earlier in Chapter 5 Framework Analysis is a process of data analysis in which the raw data is systematically coded and assigned to thematic nodes which, when combined with the literature, provides thick descriptive detail at each node (Herr & Anderson, 2012). The framework itself is constantly refined until the key themes and sub-themes become logically connected in a cause and effect manner, and can be analysed to produce useful findings (Parkinson *et al*., 2015). The information produced in the Research Group's reflective discussions below also helped the group to develop lines of inquiry to inform the next stage of engagement with City Informants functioning at a technical and managerial level. The key lines of inquiry have been highlighted in bold font.

The Co-researchers expressed a sense of satisfaction at having the opportunity to engage in dialogue with decision-makers at the City of Bunbury.

> *I think it's good for the people in authority and power to come on board and actually listen to a group of people like this speak, because then they really realise just how passionate the community is about making a difference in the world.*

The Co-researchers were interested to learn that two City Informants had relatives with disabilities, and they felt that this connection had enriched the dialogue.

> *You don't realise that there are people in the Council, staff that have got family or they know people with disabilities, which is good. They have a little bit of understanding of the challenges they go through.*

> *They wear two hats, don't they. They wear their professional hats, I guess, but their colleagues might not even know that they've got these other people in their lives. Because we are experiencing it, they can let their guard down and go, well… even for [a City Informant] to say I've got two family members, he didn't need to tell us that, but for him to feel it's relevant for us to understand where he's coming from too, he's not just coming in as someone official.*

The City Informants had iterated that MARCIA was still a journey and a work in progress, a sentiment reflected upon in the following manner:

> *The thing about the Council saying it wants Bunbury to be the Most Accessible Regional City, it's interesting that some people have taken that to mean the Council has declared Bunbury to be the Most Accessible Regional City. But they are not the same thing. It's simply an aspiration.*

It was evident to the Co-researchers that achieving MARCIA status would depend heavily upon the public design process and the quality of safeguards embedded within it to achieve accessible outcomes, as well as the culture of design that facilitated or impeded the goal of MARCIA within the City of Bunbury. The Co-researchers expressed scepticism about the current design culture and the apparent lack of systemic alignment between design practices and the MARCIA goal, and were eager to research this more.

> *I think the accessibility needs to be designed from the ground up. It can't just be an afterthought.*

Some felt that the problems lay in the design culture, and were interested to know how the City is trying to change the design culture.

> *I think at least half of it is just because they've always done it that way, and because they do it that way for the non-disabled.*

It was noted that design is not just about the physical aspects of public infrastructure, but that designing for participation is just as important, especially for things like public events. The Co-researchers were interested to know how the City was designing for participation of people with disabilities, for example in sport and recreation, information systems, libraries and events.

> *Participation is a big thing too. It's one thing to get there and get around but if you can't participate in the attractions then it's a bit pointless.*

The Co-researchers wished to know more about the training staff were receiving related to universal design and disability awareness.

> *There seems to be a bit of a hole in the resources that staff have in their training on universal design. It somehow is going amiss there.*

In addition to training, the Co-researchers were interested to know if staff members actually review the product of their design work from an accessibility point of view.

> *If it's accessible on paper doesn't mean it's accessible in real life… what we want is for people to experience a product of their own design from the point of view of a person with disability. So, if you're an engineer or planner, we want you to go on site and actually experience it for yourself, not in the office at your desk, but actually out there.*

The Co-researchers were interested to find out more about how the City currently engages people with disabilities in decision-making about public design, and what they plan to do in the future.

> *How can the Community Access Committee work with those trained in doing audits to improve existing hurdles that we are dealing with every day? There needs to be some kind of connection there so that we can utilise it…*

One Co-researcher felt that City employees, as public officers, were obliged to engage people with disabilities in the decision-making process about public design, and was interested to know what policies or procedures were in place to ensure consultation happened.

> *They work for the Council so they should be doing it for the people, not what they want to do.*

The Co-researchers showed considerable interest in the idea of developing best practice criteria for universal design to supplement the Australian Standards, and wanted to find out more about how staff members were currently applying Standards in their day to day work, as well as the use of benchmarks and checklists. Additionally, the Co-researchers wanted to know if it would be possible for the City to develop desirable criteria for accessibility, sometimes referred to as 'MARCIA standards', including indoor and outdoor spaces, events, information systems, sporting and recreation programs, streetscapes and other less visible systems such as the staff recruitment process.

One Co-researcher commented:

It would be good to see if the City could actually adopt (the desirable criteria) as formal written policy.

The Co-researchers were interested to find out more about the extent to which the City's policies and procedures reflected best practice, and whether staff members were researching best practice to inform accessibility and inclusion in their design work. One Co-researcher remarked:

I looked up the Equal Opportunity policy and that was reviewed in March this year. From what I can tell there were no changes, no amendments, no community members asked.

The Co-researchers were keen to better understand how existing barriers were being addressed by the City, and how the budget was being used to facilitate barrier removal. The general impression was that the budg*et al*location earmarked for MARCIA seemed inadequate for achieving the goal.

The budgets are always so low and disability access and inclusion is always one of the minors and not one of the majors…

The Co-researchers acknowledged that it was difficult to place a figure on what it would cost to rectify existing barriers, and recognised that it was a matter of setting priorities. They were thus interested in finding out more about how priorities were set in the Council for addressing disability access and inclusion, and the role that the City of Bunbury's Disability Advisory Committee played in this.

Twenty million dollars would be a start, but something realistic. Again, it comes back to the Community Access Committee highlighting issues and creating those changes for people on a daily basis. You know, having a priority list and starting from the top and working down I guess.

The above reflections took place over a number of Research Group meetings, and were useful for assisting the Research Group to develop a set of thematic questions to guide the next stage of inquiry.

In particular, the Research Group were interested in finding examples of how any safeguards for universal design may have become 'baked in' to the system through the adoption of explicit strategies, procedures and practices. The Research Group were conscious of the fact that unless such measures were embedded into the system (irrespective of the individuals who work within the system), then any progress made in the present could suffer regression in the future.

Rather than the questions being asked in a structured manner, they were woven into the dialogue and sometimes phrased in different ways. For example, where positive practices were identified, a question was often posed to the City Informant/s along the lines of: “If you were to leave the organisation tomorrow, what assurance do you have that the work you are doing now to improve disability access and inclusion outcomes will continue?”. Broader questions like these would often help to direct the conversation towards the more specific questions that the Research Group were interested in, without closing off possibilities of new lines of inquiry.

8.3 Conclusion

The opportunity to engage in dialogue with senior staff members of the City of Bunbury helped the Co-researchers to develop a broad overview of the many factors impacting on disability access and inclusion in the City. From these discussions a set of themes was developed to guide further inquiry with City Informants working at a technical and managerial level within the organisation, which is the focus of the next chapter. The Research Group proceeded to investigate the presence or absence of safeguards for accessibility in public design, with the intention of identifying areas for improvement and greater understanding of the potential change of corporate approach required to attain MARCIA status. By problematising the ‘corporate approach’ to public design, the Co-researchers were able to generate a set of questions that could be used as a basis for further inquiry and to inform a framework for translating the data into findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 9

9. TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter continues the process of inquiry through deliberative dialogue with Informants from the City of Bunbury started in Chapter 8. In this chapter, the Co-researchers are engaged in deliberative dialogue with City Informants working at a technical and managerial level in the City. A summary of this chapter appears in Appendix 6. Dialogue focuses on the operational and procedural factors affecting disability access and inclusion in the City's system of public design, with some links made to the City's MARCIA aspiration. The City Informants occupied technical and managerial roles related to:

- Public open space
- Buildings and facilities
- HR recruitment
- Staff training
- Community events
- Stakeholder engagement
- Sports and Leisure
- Libraries
- Customer services
- Community development
- Information services

For a full list of City Informants, please refer to section 6.2.7. In order to match Co-researchers to City Informants, the Co-researchers were asked to nominate a portfolio of potential interest to them, after which I arranged a meeting with the relevant City Informant/s. Deliberative dialogue with these City Informants was conducted mostly in a 2:1 or 2:2 format, involving one or two City Informants, a Co-researcher and myself as PAR Facilitator. One exception involved a larger group format. In this meeting, a group of eleven technical and managerial employees from the Building and Planning departments engaged in a hands-on activity – a wheelchair circuit of the CBD, guided by four Co-researchers. They took clipboards and cameras and recorded any accessibility barriers they noted along the way. This exercise was intended to raise awareness and to prompt more informed discussion (which it succeeded in doing). The dialogue then took place over lunch at a nearby café. All other meetings were held in offices at the City of Bunbury head office or at the South West Sports Centre. The data collected from the technical and managerial Informants was subjected to

Framework Analysis, and used to help address the research question by identifying issues with policies, practices or procedures, as well as opportunities for improvements to be made.

9.1 Setting the scene

9.1.1 Views about MARCIA

The Research Group wanted to know how City Informants perceived the City's MARCIA aspiration and its applicability to their work. The Research Group found that some City Informants showed a clear appreciation for the intent and values behind the MARCIA aspiration as a goal for the whole community.

> *CITY INFORMANT: MARCIA to me is about bringing a whole community together. You don't have to have a disability to be part of it… This is about the whole community.*

Some City Informants believed that the MARCIA aspiration was becoming ingrained as part of the culture of the City of Bunbury, and was being given priority.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Here it's very much at our forefront of thinking.*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: They are really thinking about this in the whole scheme of things now… because in the past a lot of people would have thought, well that's too expensive, that's too difficult, why should we. Whereas it's, no actually, why shouldn't we?*

There was evidence that MARCIA was impacting design decisions at a technical and managerial level.

> *CITY INFORMANT (referring to public barbeques due for replacement): I know about the MARCIA aspiration so I thought well what's the price difference between a standard barbeque and one that is more accessible. And the price difference to me was justifiable. So we just did it.*

Some felt obliged to exceed minimum design Standards and explore creative solutions to overcoming barriers.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Our current mantra is that those Standards must be exceeded at all times. So we don't want to meet the Standards, we want to exceed the Standards. Because that's the big thing about MARCIA.*

> *CITY INFORMANT: It's about the people, that's all. I mean, that's our 'why' in the City of Bunbury, it's about the people and the community so we need to look outside the square for solutions.*

However, others were not aware of how MARCIA was applicable to them, or what practical implications it had for their work.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The City has an aspiration to be true to MARCIA, but what does that mean? And at the moment, no one knows... what it means in terms of accessible buildings and accessible streets, spaces and other bits and pieces.*

Some City Informants perceived that the leadership of the organisation was genuinely committed to the MARCIA aspiration.

> *CITY INFORMANT: At the end of the day we've got an executive team that's really committed to providing a good outcome for the community.*

Others expressed doubts about the sincerity of the leadership's commitment to MARCIA.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Sometimes I feel like we're committed to something we're not really committed to.*

However, the majority of City Informants regarded MARCIA as a positive initiative that was supported by the leadership.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I suppose where we're trying to get to is to make sure that for the City of Bunbury as a whole, that it's not just an optional thing.*

9.1.2 Recognition of barriers

The Research Group wanted to know what people working at the City of Bunbury thought about the barriers to disability access and inclusion in the community. To promote informed dialogue, the Research Group arranged a wheelchair excursion of the CBD for members of the City of Bunbury's Building and Planning Departments, and thereafter held a meeting with those who took part.

> *CITY INFORMANT: What I think really shocked me today was how poorly we are letting the community down. We are the ones responsible for the door to the door, the door to the car. It's the public domain that is really poor.*

Some City Informants were surprised by the extent of the problem.

> *CITY INFORMANT: One thing that struck me was how so many places in Bunbury, the disability entrance isn't the same access point as the general public access. So you've got to come around the back, or somewhere else there's another access point and, just that, I guess that sense of, maintaining a sense of dignity with access to places.*

However, City Informants felt that in general staff members don't think about disability access very often in their work.

> *CITY INFORMANT: it's very rare that people think about access, unless they've got a family member with a disability or they're planning for a future disability perhaps.*

9.2 Technical and managerial perspectives in detail

Policies

The Research Group wanted to understand how the City's policy framework was supporting or hindering the realisation of universal design.

One City Informant drew attention to the idea that some policies could be worded more strongly in relation to universal design. In particular, the City Informant pointed to the Procurement policy.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: So you're saying that anybody in the organisation could follow the procurement policy and still miss accessibility in that process, because they will just go for the cheapest option.*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: Yes.*

The City Informant suggested that one strategy for controlling purchasing behaviour was to apply weightings for universal design to procurement decisions in order to make purchasers accountable for their purchasing decisions.

> *CITY INFORMANT: You've got to weigh up what it is you're actually looking for. So I know that for something that is going out to tender you can put weightings on things.*

Another City Informant suggested that the Events policy could incorporate a commitment to universal design of public events. For example, event organisers might then consider prioritising

options such as accessible stallholders by adding a weighting for accessible vendors and event attractions (such as accessible food vendors, sideshow stalls, performing stages and the like).

> *CITY INFORMANT: If you're putting out an expression of interest to these guys [stallholders and suppliers] you can put in accessibility criteria and put a weighting on that.*

One City Informant highlighted an issue with the City's Disability Access and Inclusion Policy, in that it was not sufficiently safeguarding best practice in accessible design, especially when dealing with the pressure of limited resources. The City Informant felt that at times facilities were being designed to minimum specifications in order to meet unrealistic cost expectations rather than best practice, and on one occasion found it necessary to advocate for a better outcome.

> *CITY INFORMANT [Referring to proposed accessible change rooms at the Sports Centre pools]: I know we're bound by Council policy when it comes to access and inclusion. And I'll give you an example: just recently in relation to the [proposed] new accessible change rooms and toilets, it was considered by the staff here and myself that really what [the City was] doing was building down to a price and not up to a standard that was acceptable. [My] belief was that if you're not going to build something that is supposed to be accessible to be accessible, then why are you building it? There's no point; so that's why I think we're going to bang the table a little bit. And therefore in the end we're [going] to get something, change rooms, that are actually suitable, not to the Changing Places standard but simple things like having electronic doors, and a hoist system to get a person from a wheelchair onto the change table or onto the toilet or out of the wheelchair.*

Plans and Strategies

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was integrating strategies and targets for universal design into strategic or operational plans and policies. Most City Informants referred to the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and Policy. However, the Co-researchers gained the impression that objectives contained in the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan were often not well translated into individual or team work plans and strategies so that they would be actioned. For example, the goal of developing an inclusive swim program at the Sports Centre had been part of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan since 2012. However, in 2017 the goal of an inclusive swim program was still being 'thought about' rather than 'actioned' or included in a work plan.

CO-RESEARCHER: So that person, that new swim instructor [wanting to run an inclusive swim class], did you discuss any specific strategy that she could use to actually get that happening?

CITY INFORMANT: Not at this stage. We did discuss that it would be one of the strategies that we would investigate further.

Benchmarks

The Research Group wanted to know if City staff were researching and documenting best practice benchmarks for universal design. In general, this did not appear to be the case. A number of City Informants identified the need for best practice benchmarks to inform future design work, (sometimes referred to as 'MARCIA standards').

CITY INFORMANT: The minimum specifications sometimes still just don't work. There is an opportunity possibly that we highlight, specify, show, have something that shows what the best practice should be... So we could have everything from, you know, entering into buildings... in terms of the positioning of lights, buttons and other bits and pieces, this is what you should do... You know, handles should be like this...

Some City Informants reported that there was also a demand for access to information about best practice benchmarks from the commercial sector, with owners and developers occasionally seeking advice from the City.

CITY INFORMANT: When someone comes in and says, I've got a lip on [the threshold of] my shop, how does that work? Those questions always come up. Or rather, the excuse always comes up. But the solution... And there's probably good solutions out there.

Specifying best practice benchmarks in City of Bunbury tenders was also considered a possibility.

CO-RESEARCHER: I suppose when you're putting things out to public tender, you can't require things necessarily more than the Standards....

CITY INFORMANT: You can, of course, you can specify whatever you want.

Developing best practice benchmarks that could be applied across similar design contexts was seen as an important step in the right direction.

CITY INFORMANT: That's where we need those standardized drawings that say 'this is what it should look like'. If you're installing a barbeque, this is what it should look like. This is the amount of concrete we need around the outside of it… you know… if it's a drink fountain, it should be, using those standards, this high from the ground, it should require no more than 19.5 newton metres of force to operate the push button. The push button should be big…

One Co-researcher recognised that without best practice benchmarks, it was difficult to achieve consistency in design and be making progress towards the MARCIA goal.

CITY INFORMANT: I think one thing that I've learnt from working at the City is, we're making the same mistakes over and over again, just in a different way. So what should the end outcome be?... To be seen to be doing the right thing in terms of accessibility, that's not what we're aiming for… we're trying to do the right thing.

One City Informant suggested that, rather than reinventing the wheel, the City consider developing universal design benchmarks based on existing best practice design benchmarks such as those specified in the Institute of Access Training Australia access audit training manual (IATA, 2018) for outdoor and indoor spaces.

CITY INFORMANT: Well a very simple way you could do it is, we recently had the access audits training course. As part of that there was a checklist of literally every component, whether it be an outdoor area or building area that has got all of your mandatory requirements, but also the best practice in that checklist. You could literally use that checklist as your guide and say this has to be designed to not only meet the mandatory but also those best practice outcomes. It's all there laid out for you, just design to that... And if you've got ticked off 75% of those best practice things then that's a win over what you would normally get.

(Note: whilst the IATA benchmarks relate to physical design elements of fixed spaces, there are many other documents in existence that specify universal design elements for a range of other applications that could be adapted to the needs of the City of Bunbury – such as events, services, programs, and facilities. However, they can be difficult to find).

Some felt that changes to the compulsory Standards were the more critical priority.

Checklists and accountability measures

The Research Group wanted to know if changes were being made to procedures to incorporate accessibility checklists, trigger points and accountability measures into the design process. Though there was some awareness of the need to do so, in general it did not appear that much progress in this area had been made.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I still think that to get MARCIA working it can't be people just thinking about it. People have actually got to be doing, and to get people doing, there needs to be those trigger points, those checklists, I can't do this until I've done that. Engineering have a project planning process, with all these different templates where once you get to this point you then you've got to look at this work procedure and then that work procedure.*

Incorporating accessibility and inclusion into existing checklists and procedures was not considered by some City Informants to be onerous.

> *CITY INFORMANT: [We] work off the events task list, so what we could do is implement these steps [for checking accessibility] into the task list. This has all of the different steps that we do from beginning to plan the event right through to the evaluations after the event.*

There was some awareness of the need to embed accountability measures for access and inclusion into policy and guidelines, in order to insulate the organisation from loss of corporate knowledge due to staff turnover.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: In your role, you've been able to actually be a bit of a champion for MARCIA in this sector of the organisation, which is excellent. You're starting to actually implement on the ground changes. It's really fantastic. If you leave, what happens?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: It all falls over. (Laughter)*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: It probably would. So what are you going to do or what can you do to bake into the system the changes that you're trying to make?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: It needs to be indoctrinated into our policy and guidelines.*

However, in general, it did not appear that checklists, guidelines and procedures were being updated to incorporate safeguards for accessibility and inclusion, as part of the MARCIA aspiration. For

example, it appeared that there was nothing in writing that would ensure that staff members would continue to receive current levels of disability awareness training as part of the induction program in five or ten years' time.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Do you see any scope in those guidelines to include anything that commits the organisation a little bit more solidly to MARCIA?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: No, because they're not really like that. The guidelines say that we're going to provide training and this is the procedure that you have to go through. … It doesn't state what type of training you're going get.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: You don't actually have a schedule of what training must be delivered?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: No, all I've got is I know when people's tickets expire.*

Technical support

The Research Group wanted to know if design staff were accessing technical support to help them achieve universal design. In general, it did not appear that staff were accessing technical support or that this was even an option.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: What you don't seem to have in Council at the moment is any expert person or technical officer who's looking at the plans purely from an accessible lens so that they are picking up on the continuity between this space and that space, any obstacles.*

The need for technical support was highlighted by one City Informant.

> *CITY INFORMANT: One of the things that did strike me is.. the devil in the detail. It's the finishing, you know, look at the plan and the plan looks right. But there's always those bits that seem to come in at the end of the project… all of that detail in terms of those fixtures and fittings, lips and all those things is not seen by anyone. It just doesn't form part of the plan. So how do you do that?*

Staff training

The Co-researchers wanted to know if design staff and contractors were accessing training in universal design. It was found that the City did provide general disability awareness training as part of the staff induction program, and was embarking on a program of training a group of staff

members in access auditing (one-off training). However, staff were generally not engaging in universal design training specific to their job role.

Some City Informants saw a need for more education of designers, developers and the public in general, in order to improve the quality of plans before they get to the approval stage.

> *CITY INFORMANT: I think a big part is just education of the general public, your mums and dads and developers and everybody out there. I don't know if it's marketing or news articles or something to make people more aware what part they can play in being a part of a solution to this problem.*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: I feel like if we all knew a bit more about it and at a general public level people would think about it more so it should all be triggered before it comes to Planning.*

The lack of context-specific design training was found to potentially be introducing barriers for some sectors of the community.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: What knowledge do you have about making events inclusive for people with autism?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: We've probably never catered for autism, we look more at the theming of the event.*

There was some discussion that perhaps greater exposure to people with disabilities would help staff to overcome misconceptions about disability and facilitate inclusion.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Sometimes it's just exposure as well. If they haven't got exposure to someone in their life or anything like that. Sometimes it's fear: oh, how do I behave, I don't want to offend, I could say something wrong.*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: A lot of times it's interaction. They don't know how to interact with that person but at the end of the day it's no different than interacting with anyone else.*

Some researchers felt that simulated training (simulating the experience of disability by spending time in a wheelchair or blindfolded, for example) was an important facilitator of accessible design.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: A way to raise awareness for disability is maybe for staff to experience, firstly, in a wheelchair, then different sensory disabilities.*

Although context-specific design training and exposure to people with disabilities were acknowledged as valuable tools for achieving more inclusively designed programs and facilities, it did not appear to have translated into actual training for staff members on the ground in most departments.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: You did say that staff training is part of the change in culture, so have you got anything in your training plan around access and inclusion?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: Nothing. Sorry, only the one, only the things that we've run through HR.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: So, you've got the standard training, but nothing specific to the [your programs] at the moment?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: Nothing at all.*

Cost and time were seen as major barriers to achieving higher levels of training for some sections of the organisation.

> *CITY INFORMANT: They have a casual pool at the sports centre. They only employ someone for about two hours a week for a gym class, and then to come to training, they have to employ them to come to training. So, it's added cost. And say I'm in Planning, and I've got twenty seven applications that have come in and they're all due tomorrow so to pull me away for three hours of [training] is something that I'm not keen to actually do.*

It was noted that some types of training were legislatively required for certain job roles (referred to as 'tickets'). However there did not appear to be any legislative requirements or 'tickets' for staff members to be mandatorily trained and accredited in universal design before engaging in public design. This appeared to be a critical need for the future. It was noted however that the City had substantially increased disability awareness and equal opportunity training for staff members across the board, and had included this training as part of every new officer's induction program.

Auditing and data collection

The Co-researchers wanted to know if the City was systematically collecting data about barriers to access and inclusion in its buildings, facilities, services, programs and events, that could be used to inform priorities for rectification. This did not appear to be the case, and nor did there appear to be a suitable database where the information could be captured.

CO-RESEARCHER: So at the moment there isn't any kind of data collection whatsoever about accessibility in the city?

CITY INFORMANT: We do it for some things, we can tell you where every drain is, every sump, every pipe. But at the moment [for accessibility] we're just seeing a big white space that's got no ticks and boxes.

Consultation and co-design

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was regularly consulting people with lived experience of disability and involving them as knowledge partners in the process. In general, this did not appear to be the case.

Some City Informants felt it was important that that the City be consulting people with disabilities.

CITY INFORMANT: When I used to be at [another government department], we used to come and present to the Access Committees and talk about some of the key access elements in a project and get feedback. Is that something that Engineering still occasionally does for the likes of the foreshore, or the library, or anything like? I would really push for that personally.

The Research Group inquired whether a commitment to and strategies for consultation of people with disabilities was included in the City's Engagement Strategy or similar document.

CO-RESEARCHER: What currently have you got in place to consult the community, especially those with a disability? Have you got any strategies to target that particular group?

CITY INFORMANT: Not at this point in time, however, our engagement strategy is very flexible so we can engage with different groups.

Some City Informants recognised that the City's Disability Advisory Committee could be used for consultation on projects, and were under the impression that this was occurring on regular basis.

And that's why we have a Disability Access Committee, is to help us with these things.

However, when queried further, it became clear that there was an assumption being made by City Informants that the City's Disability Advisory Committee was being consulted on a regular basis.

CO-RESEARCHER: Are you assuming that consultation with [the Disability Access Committee] happens as part of the process?

CITY INFORMANT: Yes...

CO-RESEARCHER: Are you involved in initiating that, and making sure that it happens?

CITY INFORMANT: No, I'm assuming that happens.

CO-RESEARCHER: Are you assuming that [the] consultation will be taken care of by the relevant officers?

CITY INFORMANT: Yeah, or consultants.

CO-RESEARCHER: So, you assume, but do you also ensure that...

CITY INFORMANT: We should be.

CO-RESEARCHER: So is there anything that you can point to at the moment that shows that as part of any engagement strategy, people with disabilities will definitely be consulted, and when and where that would happen?

CITY INFORMANT: My aim is that this will be included in our new community consultation policy, which will come out of our current review.

In general, there did not appear to be any demonstrable commitment amongst the City Informants interviewed to consulting people with disabilities or referring projects to the Disability Access Committee.

CO-RESEARCHER: What consultation do you do to inform [yourself] about accessibility?

CITY INFORMANT: Probably just what comes out of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and we use that as a guide to implement. There's certainly more that we could do.

One City Informant actually observed a general reluctance amongst staff to consult with people with disabilities on major projects, because of concerns about the possible impact on project cost and timeframe.

CITY INFORMANT: What I see a lot of is a perception that including consultation from a disability aspect people see as prohibitive. That's what you get from government.

CO-RESEARCHER: Prohibitive? In what respect?

CITY INFORMANT: It may bring about extra costs because of the design of something. So people suddenly start thinking money. Longer timeframes to create something, to get something happening. That's the perception… and once again it's a cultural thing as well.

One Co-researcher felt that the issue was that the City appeared to lack any kind of consultation framework, leading to a lack of accountability.

CO-RESEARCHER: There is no framework… I think with a framework it's better organised, it's also consistent. There's no consistency… there's no accountability.

Another suggested that people with disabilities ought to be involved in the development of a consultation framework to ensure it would appropriately consider the consultation needs of the disability community.

CO-RESEARCHER: So if [people with disabilities] have a hand in creating that framework and creating that policy, [they] can ensure that there are checks in there to say, yup, we've definitely done our homework, we've consulted people with disabilities, and not just people in wheelchairs, but we've actually consulted people with low vision, people with autism, and so on.

One Co-researcher felt that engagement of people with disabilities should also be part of a worker's job description.

CO-RESEARCHER: So is there anything in your job description that talks about engagement of people with disabilities?

CITY INFORMANT: No, not at all, your PDs [position descriptions] don't go down to that level.

One City Informant suggested the reason for not having a requirement to consult people with disabilities in a job description was because there was a lack of policy requiring it.

CITY INFORMANT: You can't base [the job description] on anything else because we don't have a policy on it. Very difficult to do that, so you can't base a PD on something that doesn't exist.

CO-RESEARCHER: So that lack of a policy is really a hole.

CITY INFORMANT: Absolutely, it's a massive hole.

Inspections

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was inspecting completed projects for compliance with accessibility Standards and/or any universal design benchmarks. In general, the City did not appear to have any rigorous system of checking compliance of its own buildings and facilities with the Australian Standards or universal design benchmarks, particularly design work completed by independent contractors.

The City did provide a copy of (or a link to) the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan as part of all contract documents, but did not appear to have mechanisms in place for checking if, for example, contractors or permit holders were complying with the City's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, or applying the information provided to them in the contract documentation about accessibility.

CO-RESEARCHER: Another thing that I noticed is a lot of time you guys have standards that are good but nobody checks post-construction to make sure that it has been done to that standard.

One reason for this appeared to be a lack of legislative requirement.

CITY INFORMANT: Builders used to have mandatory inspections at every stage and then they took that out of the Act. In Building there's no mandatory inspection.

The idea of 'road testing' recently completed work in order to identify accessibility barriers or to learn from mistakes was put forward.

CITY INFORMANT: I'd love to see our works staff keep a wheelchair in the back of a ute so when a job is finished they can pull the wheelchair out get on the thing and road test their work.

Reporting

The Research Group wanted to know if staff members were required to report any progress or outcomes in relation to disability access and inclusion. All departments were required to report on outcomes related to the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan to the Community Development Officer for Disability, and a summary report was prepared for the State Government annually. However, there did not appear to be any penalties for not achieving stated goals.

The HR department was also required to report to the Federal Government on outcomes related to Equal Employment Opportunity.

Resources

The Research Group wanted to know if the City had allocated any specific resources towards achieving better disability access and inclusion. It was found that the City had committed $100,000 per annum until 2020 as a 'MARCIA' fund to make improvements to the City's facilities and buildings (doubled in 2017/2018 from the previous financial year's commitment). No comment was made with regards to what the rationale was for determining this figure.

The MARCIA fund was earmarked as available for hard infrastructure only. Funds for achieving disability inclusion in City services and programs tended to be grant sourced, which created continuity issues because grants are time-limited, meaning staff move on or programs change emphasis.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: I believe you had a program going at your gym not too long ago and it went OK for a while and then it kind of fizzled out, or something wasn't running properly, or it wasn't running well somehow. Do you know anything about that?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: Yes, and we're actually looking at re-introducing that. What I found out, because obviously we want to know why it may have come to an end, fizzled out, it was mainly because the staff member involved, or a couple of staff members involved left.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: This is the thing isn't it, it kind of goes through cycles, somebody comes on board and they've got the idea and they run with it and then they leave and the whole thing kind of falls over.*

CITY INFORMANT: Yes. Look, I think that some, or most of the time, it's funding orientated. [We] run a program and then there's no thought put into: OK, well we've got all these people here now, what are we going to do to sustain it?

Accreditation

The Research Group noted an idea that the City could consider developing a system to rate or accredit facilities and services for accessibility.

CITY INFORMANT: Whether you buy a fridge or whether you were wanting to lease a building, you can look at an energy rating. So what about an accessibility rating? So you put in the information upfront and you say this is what best practice is. Then you've got a process that says ok, so if you want to get accredited you must do this.

One City Informant considered how the accreditation idea could be applied to the City of Bunbury's own buildings and facilities as a way of providing information and assurance to the public, and suggested this information could be provided in brochures or on a map.

CITY INFORMANT: So what if the City was able to say, here are the toilets that we certify are actually accessible… so if we start to create this map like we do in a normal mapping sense, then you can produce a brochure that provides the information to the public.

Regulatory controls

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was using its status as a regulator of public design and associated activities to educate designers and developers operating in the commercial sector about universal design. The City of Bunbury plays a role in regulating aspects of public design through a system of permits. For example, permits are required for property developments or for holding commercial events on public land (such as agricultural shows). This means the City regularly interfaces with the commercial sector. It was found that the City was not leveraging its status as a regulator to educate the commercial sector about universal design, but that there was potential to do so.

CITY INFORMANT: If anyone wants to hold an event in a public open space, they need to get a permit from us. So we're actually looking at our events process. I'm trying to include some of those checklists that will help people plan for an

> *[accessible] event… like have you thought about this, have you thought about those kinds of features for your event, and then reiterating it in their permit.*

One Co-researcher wondered if the permit system could place mandatory requirements on permit holders to comply with accessibility guidelines.

> *CITY INFORMANT: It's not in there at the moment but it's something I could consider for next year.*

One City Informant identified an opportunity to educate the public about accessibility by incorporating information into public workshops that the City runs from time to time, for example, about how to organise a public event.

> *CITY INFORMANT: We run a lot of workshops for community members on how to organise an event, so we do a lot of capacity building. Accessibility is definitely a topic that we could include.*

Incentives

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was providing incentives to commercial developers to achieve increased accessibility in new developments, or to retrofit existing buildings and facilities. This was not a current strategy for the City, although the option was considered feasible by some City Informants.

> *CITY INFORMANT: There's probably other things that other Councils have, like incentives where people meet certain design principles like [better accessibility]. They may give them a bit of a density bonus [or] reduced setbacks [or other] development incentives, should you meet certain requirements. It has to be in a policy of some kind.*

Another idea discussed was that the City could consider providing no-interest loans or matching funds to help commercial property owners to meet the cost of retrofitting existing buildings and facilities.

Working in partnership

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was working in partnership with other service providers to support inclusion for people with disabilities. It appeared that some partnerships had been developed in the past, but that currently this option was only being considered.

> *CITY INFORMANT: When I first started we had a multi-sports 'come and try' day where we could get people with access and inclusion needs to come in, and we needed people to help so we tied that into TAFE. It formed part of their course, 20-30 hours. We could look at tying in with organisations like that, like in the past.*

One exception to this was a current partnership developed with a disability employment provider to help achieve increased employment of people with disabilities in the City's workforce. This example is provided as a 'case study' in Chapter 10.

Information

The Research Group wanted to know if the City was providing information to the public about access and inclusion in Bunbury. There was some information provided (for example the wayfinding maps on signage around the CBD, and a printable accessible parking map). However, in general it appeared that availability of information specific to a residents or visitors with disabilities was extremely limited. For example, lack of information about the availability of accessible and inclusive programs and facilities at the Sports Centre was discussed.

> *CITY INFORMANT: (Referring to the recreation centre) One of the feelings that I get is that not a lot of people know what we can provide here so it's actually getting out and selling what is available here basically.*

Recognising and supporting MARCIA champions

The Research Group wanted to know if and how the City was recognising and supporting the work of internal advocates or 'champions' for MARCIA. The answer was unclear but it sparked conversation about how recognition might be given in the future as a way of positively influencing workplace culture. Suggestions included placing positive stories in the Executive update, the staff newsletter, the City Focus (an update published in a local newspaper) and the monthly CEO breakfast.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: [We're talking about] trying to engender a culture within the organisation that this stuff is important, because I think one of the things we're seeing is that there are real champions for MARCIA within the City.*

9.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a snapshot of the key lines of inquiry that emerged from dialogue with technical and managerial City Informants, particularly regarding an overarching theme

of accessibility in public design. Overall, the Research Group identified several opportunities for improvement to policies, procedures and practices that, if implemented, could help to create systemic alignment with the City's MARCIA goal and engage the wider community (particularly the commercial sector) as partners in the MARCIA journey. The next chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data that lays out the findings and recommendations using Framework Analysis.

CHAPTER 10

10. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides an explanation of how Framework Analysis was applied to the data to identify key themes and sub-themes, and outlines findings and recommendations for consideration by the City of Bunbury.

10.1 Framework analysis of data

Data analysis was conducted using the Framework method. As PAR Facilitator, I led the data analysis and involved the Co-researchers in group analysis wherever it was possible and expedient to do so. Predominantly, the Co-researchers were involved in the initial data analysis to identify overarching themes, before I conducted a more thorough academic analysis of the data. I took a combined approach to analysis, allowing themes to be developed both inductively from the accounts (experiences and views) of study participants and deductively from existing literature. Regular Research Group meetings facilitated our critical exploration of the dialogue with City Informants and identification of the key themes. Examples from the analysis will be used throughout the following discussion of the process to illustrate each step. The structure of this discussion is based on the work of Srivastava & Thomson (2009), and involves five steps: familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation.

Step 1: Familiarisation

Familiarisation is about becoming familiar with the data and sensitised to early themes. I transcribed all audio recordings myself, as soon as possible after they were recorded. However, given the length of the transcriptions, it was better for me to provide the Co-researchers with minutes of the meetings, containing summaries of the key points made. Preparing the minutes was in itself the first part of the process of summarising, analysing and decontextualising the data, as lengthy transcripts were distilled into key discussion points and grouped under key themes. I checked all transcripts for errors by listening again to the audio-recording and reading the transcripts simultaneously. I supplemented each transcript with notes made during and immediately after the meeting, for example noting background information and instances where views were given after the recorder was switched off.

To become familiar with the data set as a whole, I thoroughly read and re-read each transcript, and listened back to the audio-recorded discussions. I found this familiarisation process essential for keying into the more subtle messages that participants had contributed that I may have overlooked

in the meeting itself or in the minutes, and for contemplation of the connections between different pieces of information. I also recorded initial impressions in the footnotes of transcripts, for example where participants expressed exceptionally strong or contrasting views to others in the room. In one case, a City Informant expressed strongly that he and his team could not be expected to design City infrastructure over and above minimum Australian design standards if those 'desirable' standards were not documented somewhere and easily accessible. Contemplation of such statements led to the conclusion that best practice benchmarks for universal design were missing and needed to be developed and adopted – something that emerged as a central theme of the study. Familiarisation through re-reading and taking notes in this way also enabled me to navigate my way more easily around hundreds of pages of transcript later in the analysis.

Step 2: Identifying a thematic framework

A thematic framework is a logically structured framework containing key themes and sub-themes, that can be organised and reorganised as patterns in the data are identified. The thematic framework used for data analysis was developed initially from the literature review, and amended as the study progressed. The literature review had alerted me to key issues such as challenges of engaging people with disabilities in deliberative democracy, and concepts such as knowledge partnering and co-design. These concepts provided a broad framework from which preliminary data could be sorted and analysed. I introduced many of these concepts as discussion topics for Research Group meetings, which provided opportunities for consciousness-raising and deep discussion. The Co-researchers essentially educated each other through the process by sharing and combining their knowledges, and in the process they raised new lines of inquiry.

For example, during a discussion regarding why people with disabilities don't have a stronger voice in the design of the urban environment, a Co-researcher queried how it even was possible that major public infrastructure could be given a tick of approval without any consultation of people with disabilities being undertaken as a compulsory procedural requirement. This led the Research Group to develop a new line of inquiry around systemic safeguards in the City of Bunbury's policies and procedures for urban development – another central theme of the study. Such questions were then put to the City Informants, allowing further exploration. This detail was then incorporated into the thematic framework.

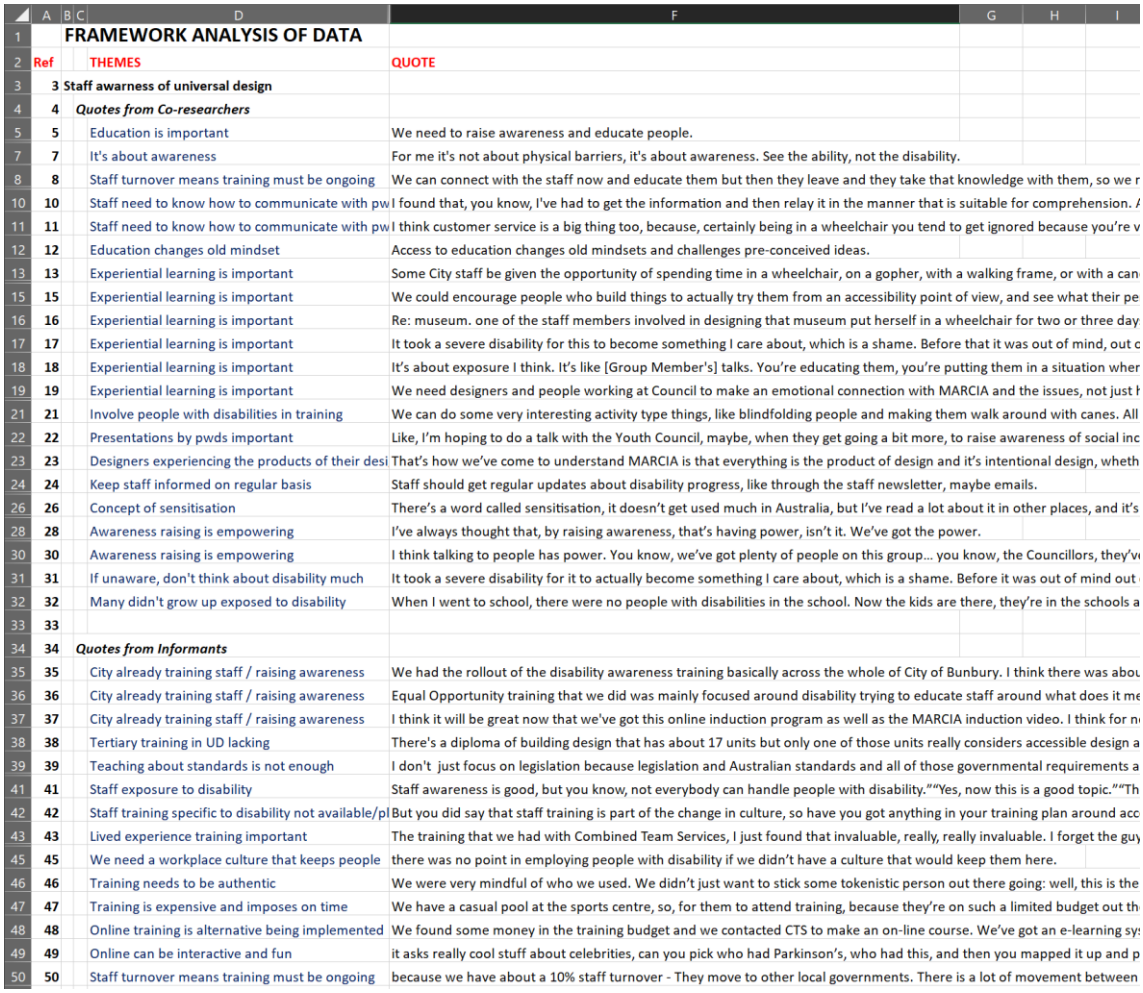
Step 3: Indexing

Indexing is the process of numerically annotating transcripts in order to identify linkages between data, which then inform the coding framework. The study produced a large amount of data that needed to be systematically indexed. Threads of information relating to each theme were diffused

throughout the data set, and needed to be decontextualised so that it could be sorted by theme according to the matrix. However, it was important to be able to trace each excerpt back to its original context, because context can add meaning. To achieve this, I assigned each excerpt a number that referenced which transcript the excerpt was lifted from.

Step 4: Charting

Charting is the process of sorting and grouping data into themes and sub-themes. To organise excerpts by theme, I developed a matrix using an excel spreadsheet into which I pasted lines of text in which a participant was making a point, or critiquing point related to the study topic (see Figure 17). The initial structure to this matrix was derived from the literature review (for example, around the concepts of co-design and universal design) and ordered into headings and sub-headings. I then placed excerpts from transcripts under those headings where they fitted comfortably, leaving aside any other excerpts for coding under new emergent themes. The pieces of transcript ranged from only a few words, to parts of sentences or whole paragraphs. I used the columns to the left of the matrix to place the headings and subheadings, and a brief summary of each excerpt. These were essentially the codes that linked different pieces of transcript together under the broader theme. I then sorted the column to group pieces of transcript making the same or similar points together. Where one point was a logical development of another, I placed them in sequential order in the matrix. I then used the columns to the right to record more detailed notes and ideas, for example questions to bear in mind as the analysis proceeded, and ideas for explanations or patterns in the data. Below, a sample of the coding matrix is presented. It shows excerpts related to ‘staff training’. The sample demonstrates how excerpts from different discussions about this topic were coded into themes and how important points with similar codes were clustered together (eg. the idea that staff members would benefit from engaging in experiential learning such as spending time in a wheelchair or blindfolded and using a cane came through strongly as sub-theme, and coded “experiential learning is important”).



Ref		THEMES	QUOTE
		FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF DATA	
3	3	**Staff awarness of universal design**	
4	4	***Quotes from Co-researchers***	
5	5	Education is important	We need to raise awareness and educate people.
7	7	It's about awareness	For me it's not about physical barriers, it's about awareness. See the ability, not the disability.
8	8	Staff turnover means training must be ongoing	We can connect with the staff now and educate them but then they leave and they take that knowledge with them, so we r
10	10	Staff need to know how to communicate with pw	I found that, you know, I've had to get the information and then relay it in the manner that is suitable for comprehension. A
11	11	Staff need to know how to communicate with pw	I think customer service is a big thing too, because, certainly being in a wheelchair you tend to get ignored because you're v
12	12	Education changes old mindset	Access to education changes old mindsets and challenges pre-conceived ideas.
13	13	Experiential learning is important	Some City staff be given the opportunity of spending time in a wheelchair, on a gopher, with a walking frame, or with a can
15	15	Experiential learning is important	We could encourage people who build things to actually try them from an accessibility point of view, and see what their pe
16	16	Experiential learning is important	Re: museum. one of the staff members involved in designing that museum put herself in a wheelchair for two or three day
17	17	Experiential learning is important	It took a severe disability for this to become something I care about, which is a shame. Before that it was out of mind, out c
18	18	Experiential learning is important	It's about exposure I think. It's like [Group Member's] talks. You're educating them, you're putting them in a situation wher
19	19	Experiential learning is important	We need designers and people working at Council to make an emotional connection with MARCIA and the issues, not just h
21	21	Involve people with disabilities in training	We can do some very interesting activity type things, like blindfolding people and making them walk around with canes. All
22	22	Presentations by pwds important	Like, I'm hoping to do a talk with the Youth Council, maybe, when they get going a bit more, to raise awareness of social inc
23	23	Designers experiencing the products of their desi	That's how we've come to understand MARCIA is that everything is the product of design and it's intentional design, wheth
24	24	Keep staff informed on regular basis	Staff should get regular updates about disability progress, like through the staff newsletter, maybe emails.
26	26	Concept of sensitisation	There's a word called sensitisation, it doesn't get used much in Australia, but I've read a lot about it in other places, and it's
28	28	Awareness raising is empowering	I've always thought that, by raising awareness, that's having power, isn't it. We've got the power.
30	30	Awareness raising is empowering	I think talking to people has power. You know, we've got plenty of people on this group... you know, the Councillors, they've
31	31	If unaware, don't think about disability much	It took a severe disability for it to actually become something I care about, which is a shame. Before it was out of mind out
32	32	Many didn't grow up exposed to disability	When I went to school, there were no people with disabilities in the school. Now the kids are there, they're in the schools a
33	33		
34	34	***Quotes from Informants***	
35	35	City already training staff / raising awareness	We had the rollout of the disability awareness training basically across the whole of City of Bunbury. I think there was abou
36	36	City already training staff / raising awareness	Equal Opportunity training that we did was mainly focused around disability trying to educate staff around what does it me
37	37	City already training staff / raising awareness	I think it will be great now that we've got this online induction program as well as the MARCIA induction video. I think for n
38	38	Tertiary training in UD lacking	There's a diploma of building design that has about 17 units but only one of those units really considers accessible design a
39	39	Teaching about standards is not enough	I don't just focus on legislation because legislation and Australian standards and all of those governmental requirements a
41	41	Staff exposure to disability	Staff awareness is good, but you know, not everybody can handle people with disability.""Yes, now this is a good topic.""Th
42	42	Staff training specific to disability not available/pl	But you did say that staff training is part of the change in culture, so have you got anything in your training plan around acc
43	43	Lived experience training important	The training that we had with Combined Team Services, I just found that invaluable, really, really invaluable. I forget the guy
45	45	We need a workplace culture that keeps people	there was no point in employing people with disability if we didn't have a culture that would keep them here.
46	46	Training needs to be authentic	We were very mindful of who we used. We didn't just want to stick some tokenistic person out there going: well, this is the
47	47	Training is expensive and imposes on time	We have a casual pool at the sports centre, so, for them to attend training, because they're on such a limited budget out th
48	48	Online training is alternative being implemented	We found some money in the training budget and we contacted CTS to make an on-line course. We've got an e-learning sy
49	49	Online can be interactive and fun	it asks really cool stuff about celebrities, can you pick who had Parkinson's, who had this, and then you mapped it up and p
50	50	Staff turnover means training must be ongoing	because we have about a 10% staff turnover - They move to other local governments. There is a lot of movement between

Figure 17: A snapshot of the Framework Analysis spreadsheet used in this study, showing how excerpts of transcripts were coded by theme and sub-theme.

Step 5: Mapping and interpretation

Mapping and interpretation involves spending time a constantly reviewing, reflecting and logically sorting the data. The design of the present study afforded the advantage of being able to constantly check back with the Co-researchers at Research Group meetings that the themes and sub-themes I was identifying in the data were indeed the key priorities, from their perspectives. This was further validated by the required task of developing a Research Report for Council (see Appendix 1), which helped focus us in our efforts to sort and interpret the data. The Co-researchers were given multiple opportunities to review and comment on the Research Report to ensure it did indeed reflect their thoughts and opinions about what they believed the City of Bunbury could be doing to address the identified problems. The analytical structure developed for that report is the same structure that was carried through for deeper analysis in this thesis.

At one point in the data analysis process, my supervisors reviewed the developing framework containing twelve major themes and suggested that I consider combining similar themes together to

arrive at between four to six major themes. They felt this would make it easier for the consumers of the study, particularly the City of Bunbury, to digest the findings and recommendations. The mental process of trying to combine themes forced me to contemplate what the central messages were that needed to be captured and conveyed from this study. What emerged from this process was a framework centred around five key facilitators of universal design in local government, which I present in Chapter 11 of this thesis as a model of *Universal Public Design*.

10.2 Key findings and recommendations

The study set out to answer the following question:

Research Question: What are the facilitators of disability access in the City of Bunbury?

The following section provides a summary of the key findings that emerged from a Framework Analysis of the data, and corresponding recommendations for consideration by the City of Bunbury. For a more detailed analysis of the findings and recommendations please refer to Appendix 7.

KEY FINDINGS
Through in-depth dialogue with City Informants, the Research Group found that a fundamental issue with accessibility in the development of public infrastructure within the City of Bunbury was a lack of consistency in the application of universal design principles. While on the one hand, many Informants demonstrated some awareness of the importance of disability access (and there was evidence of changes being made to achieve better access), universal design and co-design were not embedded within the policies and procedures of the organisation, or well supported by the design culture. Therefore, the organisation lacked alignment between its design culture and its MARCIA goal. An analysis of the dialogue with Informants revealed five key barriers to disability access in the City of Bunbury: **FINDING 1 – NEED FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN TRAINING**: The City would benefit from developing a strategy for the routine delivery of universal design training for all staff and design contractors.

FINDING 2 – NEED FOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT: The City would benefit from the provision of technical support by qualified experts to assist staff and contractors to achieve universal design in complex or specialised public design scenarios (such as special-purpose buildings, open spaces, events, recreation programs and public information systems).

FINDING 3 – NEED FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN BENCHMARKS: The City would benefit from systematically documenting and applying best practice benchmarks for universal design in all public design work ('above and beyond' minimum design regulations – also referred to as 'desirable criteria' for design), whether designed in-house or by contractors.

FINDING 4 – NEED FOR PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS: The City would benefit from the adoption of procedural safeguards for universal design, such as the development of enhanced policies, procedures, checklists and quality control mechanisms.

FINDING 5 – NEED FOR CO-DESIGN: The City would benefit from the regular engagement of people with lived experience of disability as partners in design.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research group found that the following strategies would facilitate the removal of barriers to access when implementing public infrastructure projects in the City of Bunbury:

RECOMMENDATION 1 – INTRODUCE UNIVERSAL DESIGN TRAINING: Train staff and contractors in how to universally design public infrastructure environments, including buildings, facilities, services, information systems and events. Training should also include a mix of technical training and general awareness of disability (including simulated experiences of disability that promote greater empathy).

RECOMMENDATION 2 – INTRODUCE TECHNICAL SUPPORT: Provide technical support for staff and contractors to achieve universal design. Access to technical support should be well resourced and triggers embedded within relevant design procedures. Technical support contractors could also play a role in 'signing off' on plans, as an additional safeguard.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – INTRODUCE UNIVERSAL DESIGN BENCHMARKS: Systematically research and document best practice benchmarks for universal design, and develop policies committing the organisation to complying with these benchmarks.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – INTRODUCE DESIGN SAFEGUARDS: Introduce procedural safeguards for universal design. These safeguards should work to ensure that no infrastructure intended for public use will receive approval to proceed without first satisfying stringent criteria related to universal design.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – INTRODUCE CO-DESIGN: Engage people with lived experience of disability in co-design. Strategies will need to be developed to trigger the engagement process and to
support it. The knowledge developed from co-design processes should be systematically documented as new best practice benchmarks.

A more detailed analysis of the above findings and recommendations can be found in Appendix 7, which includes other findings and recommendations related to the strategic removal of barriers within existing public infrastructure, and engagement of the corporate sector to promote universal design.

10.3 Case Study – City of Bunbury staff recruitment process

As discussed previously, public infrastructure is more than tangible buildings and facilities. Intangible services provided by the City of Bunbury are also the product of design, and therefore constitute public infrastructure. These can include recreation and cultural services, libraries, customer services, events and information systems. Another service not often thought about as being 'designed' is the City's recruitment process. However, the Research Group found that staff from the City's Human Resources department had consciously redesigned the recruitment process to remove access barriers for people with disabilities applying for jobs with the City, by applying many of the facilitative factors identified in the findings and recommendations above. As a result of the work done to improve the recruitment process, three people with disabilities have secured ongoing employment with the City, and the process is recounted here as a case study in what can be achieved through the application of universal design principles.

The first step was for the department to recognise that there was a problem with access to employment in City.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The biggest thing for us, as a department, is we identified that we weren't employing people with disabilities, and why? And it was a bit of a*

frustration for us: 'Why doesn't anyone want to?' and then we're like: 'OK, so how are we going to approach this; how are we going to make it different?'

One approach to barrier removal taken by HR was to become more educated about the barriers through inclusion training (recommendation 1).

CITY INFORMANT: So we did some training with Forrest Personnel as a department… in the training we learnt that [in recruiting people with disabilities] it's like asking a cheetah and a goldfish to run a marathon – who do you think is going to win, the cheetah or the goldfish?.. Everyone's not coming from the same place.

The department sought technical advice and support (recommendation 2) from Forrest Personnel, a Disability Employment Services (DES) provider, to learn how to remove barriers through job design and recruitment process design.

CITY INFORMANT: Everyone's different – we're dealing with people. We're dealing with people who have often dealt with trauma and those kinds of things so the DES providers are the ones who are skilled and qualified in that area to be able to assist the candidates, to be able to go: 'OK, you've got a skill gap here, we could do this, and these are the employees that could [fill that role].

The HR staff took the time to research best practice (recommendation 3) in other organisations to help identify and eliminate barriers in the recruitment process.

CITY INFORMANT: We now just ask 3 questions. Which is what Federal Government departments are doing.

CO-RESEARCHER: So you did a bit of homework there and saw what other people are doing?

CITY INFORMANT: Yes.

The department implemented new procedural mechanisms (recommendation 4) to advantage people with disabilities, such as the capability to split a full-time job vacancy into two part-time jobs thereby creating a role for someone with a disability - and the ability to circumvent the usual competitive recruitment process.

> *CITY INFORMANT: And sometimes that means not going out to market but going to your DES provider and going: 'We have this, how do you think we can [make it work], who have you got on your [books]?*

The HR staff sought feedback from people with disabilities they had employed about barriers they encountered during the standard recruitment process (recommendation 5 in part). One barrier that was the complexity of their medical questionnaire for new job applicants, which some applicants found confronting particularly around how to explain their disability and evoked fear about how the information might be used to their disadvantage.

> *CITY INFORMANT: At the start of the year my questionnaires were really long – they had heaps of medical questions in them. So one of our feedback points was that this is too complicated, this is too long. So we looked at some other models and now we basically summarise it in one question and then ask the workers' compensation question. I think we took 14 questions and made them into 3. Before, it came from a place of fear and risk aversion. In hindsight I suppose that's where it came from.*

Also, with technical support, the department audited their recruitment webpages to identify and remove any barriers to accessibility (recommendation 2).

> *I've gone through the recruitment site with the DES provider because I know that they're employment consultants.*

Guided by their Equal Opportunity Plan, the department decided to lead by example and be the first to employ a person with a disability through their partnership with Forrest Personnel.

> *I still sat at the end of that table going: 'Yes, this is great but how am I going to make everybody see?' And the big thing was that we need to lead by example. So that was about, OK, we'll get a person working in HR who has a disability. We will lead by example.*

Once the first recruitment was successful, other departments started to show interest, and a further two roles were created and earmarked for people with disabilities. The HR staff together with a disability employment services provider helped to prepare and educate their new colleagues (recommendation 1).

CITY INFORMANT: The Department is well and truly made aware of [any potential problems] in the beginning: this could happen, this is more than likely what will happen, if this happens we do this etc.

They documented some clear procedures and shared them with the supervisor so they knew what to do if the new recruit experienced difficulties at work as a result of their impairment (recommendation 4).

CITY INFORMANT: It's a full education process about the person, any potential issues or barriers they might have, who to talk to, who the contact person is. So when [an incident occurred] last week, it wasn't a big deal... everyone was fine and calm about it.

By taking appropriate steps to address problems in the planning stages, barriers to lasting employment were effectively removed.

CO-RESEARCHER: So, if the groundwork hadn't been done and [an incident] had happened, what do you think the outcome might have been?

CITY INFORMANT: Probably, they wouldn't have known what to do, and then you've got a staff member who's supervising them feeling uncomfortable and out of their depth and not knowing what to do and being completely blindsided; and then you've got an employee feeling guilty and probably alienated and then they're probably not going to want to come to work and then you've got all those barriers and as soon as they stop coming to work they build it up in their head and, boom, that grows into a big mushroom!

CO-RESEARCHER: So you managed to circumnavigate all of that by doing a bit of groundwork first.

CITY INFORMANT: Yes.

As a result of their work, the HR department reported three successful outcomes from the City of Bunbury's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, and from the City's Equal Opportunity Policy and Plan, which are important accountability mechanisms (recommendation 4).

CITY INFORMANT: We have an equal employment opportunity policy supported by a guideline and an equal employment opportunity plan which I know is a

Public Sector Commission requirement, and we take it very seriously, and we measure against it.

CO-RESEARCHER: OK, so you have to give an account against it? It's not just a plan sitting on a shelf?

CITY INFORMANT: No, I have to report on it every 12 months to the Public Sector Commission.

However, a requirement to report outcomes does not in itself guarantee positive outcomes. Regular and compulsory awareness training is also provided to ensure employees are aware of their obligations (recommendation 1). Staff training is critical to helping the team to understand their obligations and what is expected from them.

CO-RESEARCHER: [Every other local government] has to report to the Public Sector Commission, but they wouldn't all be getting the outcomes you're getting.

CITY INFORMANT: Probably not. We do have bi-annual EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] training. All of our recruitment panel members have to undergo compulsory EEO training and online recruitment best practice. It's also in our induction.

Whilst the EEO training is delivered online, HR recognised the importance of face-to-face training delivered by people with lived experience, which can help increase empathy and understanding (recommendation 1).

The other thing, obviously you can do training on-line or you can do training in person, but we had a person with a disability run some of those sessions. And he's been great.

Accountability for disability access and inclusion has been embedded in each person's position description in the Human Resources department (recommendations 2 and 3).

CO-RESEARCHER: So, if somebody new came into your job, would they know that that's something that they have to do [provide equal employment opportunities]?

CITY INFORMANT: It's in my position description.

CITY INFORMANT: It's in all our position descriptions. A knowledge of equal employment opportunity is an essential criteria in the template.

The requirements of the position description and the EEO policy are also reflected in a clear EEO plan with measurable goals. This provides alignment between policy, plans and practice (recommendation 4), and protects the organisation from loss of knowledge or momentum due to staff turnover.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Like you said, if we got up and left tomorrow, this kind of stuff is all in the pipeline, so you want to hope that if you removed us from the equation…it's all embedded.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: But do you have anything in writing about, I suppose, the stuff we were talking about earlier about looking at opportunities to create part-time positions and not necessarily putting every job out to the open market, things like that?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: It's in the EEO plan.*

The department's efforts to create inclusive employment opportunities were recognised when the City of Bunbury were the recipients of the *Lighthouse Award* received at a local government professionals forum held in Perth in August 2017. At this event, an HR team member was given the opportunity to share about the City of Bunbury's innovations in employment and progress towards the MARCIA aspiration with colleagues in the local government sector. Sharing stories of innovation can be an important facilitator of best practice.

> *CITY INFORMANT: The hardest part is, it's like a train, I suppose, and you've kind of got to get on board and it chugs along. I'm just hoping that local governments can get enough momentum. The thing is local governments are one of those funny places, it's like: 'what are you doing? What are you doing?' We do talk to other local governments but not about this stuff.*

When disability access and inclusion becomes embedded in the design culture, attitudes towards perceived barriers such as time and resource constraints can change.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Do you guys feel you are adequately resourced to do this stuff?*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: We make time, it's important.*
>
> *CITY INFORMANT: That's the thing, we've had to learn that there are so many important things that you need to make it happen.*

10.4 Conclusion

This chapter interrogated the data using Framework Analysis, and organised the data into key themes to extrapolate findings and recommendations. It also provided a case study illustrating how elements of the recommendations have already helped to improve the design of a key system used by the public – the City of Bunbury's recruitment process. The next chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and introduce the concept of a model of *Universal Public Design*.

CHAPTER 11

11. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings and recommendations identified in the previous chapter, and arranges the five key findings into a new model of '*Universal Public Design*' that can be applied to other contexts – including government and commercial design – thereby adding to the body of knowledge about Universal Design. The chapter also explores the implications of the findings for the City of Bunbury, and outlines the progress the City has already made towards implementing the findings. The chapter begins with a discussion of co-design, a key recommendation and component of *Universal Public Design*.

11.1 Co-design and local government

In my opinion, the recommendation with the most transformative potential resulting from the present study is that the co-design of public infrastructure with people with disabilities becomes embedded as sustainable and supported practice within local government. There are many factors that will likely work against co-design, including resources such as time and cost, and perhaps more critically, having the right skills, processes and supports in place to support co-design and maximise the chances of success. Local government design is already a noisy space, with many perspectives and agendas competing for priority and resources. Making room for more voices, particularly those 'hard to reach' voices, will require a deliberate and well-resourced strategy.

Hanckel *et al*. identified a fear amongst designers that attempts at co-design might risk blowout of project costs and timeframes, and emphasised the importance of competent facilitation to the success of co-design.

> *There is a real fear among councils if users are given a blank sheet of paper they will "go off reservation" and come back with ideas that will not be feasible to consider and develop further. To that end council teams start to apply the "dark arts" of managing expectations, risk mitigation and managing the political process to ensure containment before the process even achieves an outcome (Hanckel et al., 2016, p.18).*

The authors suggest that co-design should be an informed and guided process to ensure users generate ideas that will be feasible, and they see a growing role for community development workers with 'soft skills' in facilitating co-design.

The need for skilled facilitation to achieve co-design is supported by the work of Robyn Eversole in relation to 'knowledge partnering'. Eversole saw knowledge partnering as "a social process… in which different development actors (some of whom have technical or managerial skills) interact to produce (or resist) different kinds of change" (Eversole, 2012, p.133). The problem with social processes is that they occur in a context of unequal power relations. Eversole argued that:

> *…'disadvantaged' social actors are not puppets that can be controlled and changed from the top down. Nor, given their limited resources and influence, can they necessarily solve their problems from the bottom up. In the end, if the goal is to fight poverty and disadvantage, then some form of relationship building is required, linking disparate development actors in coordinated actions for change (Eversole, 2012, p.132).*

Eversole concludes that if development practice (like public design) is a social process, then those responsible for it (development practitioners) should not see themselves as the "sole architect of change", but rather its "catalyst" working with "a broad range of social actors" who constitute a "largely untapped resource" in a "complex social landscape" (2012, p.133). Eversole believes that it is not only community development workers, but rather all practitioners of development work, who "must have the skills to work with a broad range of social actors to build relationships and mobilise resources for change" (2012, p.133). Therefore staff will need to be trained not just in universal design, but also in how to engage end-users with disability in co-design.

Engaging in co-design will undoubtedly result in a cultural tension for local government leaders and practitioners, many of whom "continue to believe that expertise and authority are the best foundations for governing and managing and are reluctant to share their power" (Ryan, 2012, p.322). This approach to design is rooted in the paradigm of 'new public management' that has effectively "disempowered citizens by positioning them as individualised consumers at the end of a long supply chain" (Ryan, 2012, p.322). Being treated as a consumer at the end of the supply chain means citizens are not expected to participate in the design process, rather they are simply expected to consume the products of that process. In competitive design contexts (such as retail), the purchasing power of the consumer ultimately determines which products in the market offer the 'best' solutions for the consumer, and producers suffer loss if their products are uncompetitive. Local government public design is not competitively driven in this way. Thus, the drivers for co-design will necessarily be of moral substance, the meeting of an obligation to fulfil human rights. A moral imperative is undoubtedly less effective at driving corporate change than a financial imperative.

This is not the case for all public design, of course. Poor public design in the commercial sector can have very real financial consequences for the operators (such as the owners of a restaurant or private gymnasium). Furthermore, there are strong arguments to be made that as a result lack of accessibility, many in the commercial sector are 'missing out' on the disability dollar – the collective disposable income of Australians with disability, which in 2013 was estimated to be in the vicinity of $54 million (Pro Bono Australia, 2013), not including international visitors.

The shift towards a co-design paradigm may be anything but straightforward because "the issues here are numerous, sometimes dramatic, and the challenges enormous in making co-production mainstream and system-wide in appropriate policy arenas" Ryan, 2012, p.322). Ryan argued that…

> *New kinds of funding frameworks will be required to mainstream co-production together with the necessary flexibility and collaboration, as will appropriate systems, structures, incentives and workforce skills. New opportunities will be needed for testing co-production to enable the ongoing learning that is necessary for system adaptation – and for scaling them up as required (Ryan, 2012, p.322).*

It is very likely therefore that the City of Bunbury and other local governments will face significant challenges in developing the necessary culture, systems and resources needed to support a co-design process. Bjögvinsson *et al*., (2012) observed that in many workplaces, design conditions can hold back efforts to cultivate user participation in co-design, including top-down perspectives that hinder adaptation to changing conditions, the hierarchical structure of organisations that can diminish 'legitimate' participation, and rigid specifications of the design brief (Bjögvinsson *et al*., 2012, p.104). They observed that the professional 'language' of design can alienate non-professional stakeholders, and suggested that professional designers need to find creative ways to engage non-professional participants. Some of the more successful examples they cited were those that involved diverse methodologies including workshops, sketches, mock-ups, models, prototypes, role plays and design games – or what they called 'design-by-doing and 'design-by-playing' (Bjögvinsson *et al*., 2012, p.105). They noted that such measures can help to bind the disparate stakeholders together and facilitate an evolutionary design process.

There are printed resources available to local governments seeking to engage in co-design, such as the WACOSS Co-design Toolkit (WACOSS, 2017) developed in response to the *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy* (Government of Western Australia, 2018), which lays out a step by step process for achieving co-design in service planning. There are also a variety of Australian and international journal articles and publications about participatory design and co-design in existence,

many of which are referenced in this thesis. However, none of these publications are specific to the Australian local government context or provide particular insight to the unique challenges faced by this sector of government. Therefore I see a need for further research to determine the barriers to and facilitators of co-design at a local government level, and particularly co-design with people with disabilities.

Hanckel *et al*. (2016) saw the trend towards online engagement in local government as offering expanded opportunities for 'digital citizenship' and co-design using electronic platforms.

> *Any discussion of how the public sector reaches out to involve stakeholders and citizens to support its decision-making and delivery of services has to take into consideration the emergence of new technology, mainly through participative web and social media (Hanckel et al., 2016, p.10).*

However, the authors warned that "digital involvement limits opportunities to build mutual understanding in conflict prone co-design" (Hanckel *et al*., 2016, p.14). In my experience, collective negotiations about public spaces and services are always 'conflict prone', however I do acknowledge that online platforms can facilitate involvement in co-design possible for some people with disabilities, and therefore should be explored.

Leadership for co-design

Hunting *et al* (2017) suggest that leadership is crucial to achieving co-design, arguing that local governments should work to engage people with disabilities in ways that build their capacity for leadership and the transfer of design knowledge (Lee, 2008). The present study was in part a demonstration of what is possible when leadership and capacity is built over a period of time, reflected in the increased confidence of the Co-researchers to engage in deliberative dialogue with Informants from all levels of the City of Bunbury and, on occasion, to insist on co-design. One opportunity for stakeholder leadership in co-design occurred during the course of the study, in connection with Bunbury's proposed new Koombana pedestrian bridge (see figure 16). In this instance a co-design process resulted in a maximum gradient of 1:20 being applied rather than a planned 1:14 (1:14 is a far steeper gradient that would have made it difficult if not impossible for manual wheelchair users to traverse over the planned distance of the bridge). The initial preference for 1:14 was based on a particular interpretation of the Building Code which, the Co-researcher successfully argued, should not be applied to pedestrian bridges. The opportunity to challenge erroneous interpretations of Standards would never have presented without the strong will and leadership of the Co-researcher to advocate for co-design.

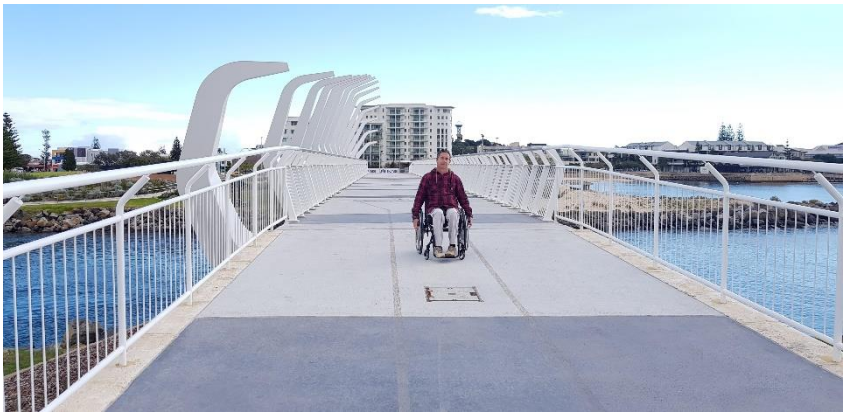


Figure 16: Co-researcher Paul on the new Koombana pedestrian bridge in Bunbury he helped co-design to ensure it was accessible to all users

Rappolt-Schlichtmann and Daley (2013) argued that,

> *from a universal design perspective, people with disabilities have a unique role to play in design because they are particularly vulnerable to inflexible, "one-size-fits-all" solutions; they represent the edge of variability within the population. When people with disabilities have difficulty in a designed environment, it is often a sign that others without disabilities are also having difficulty, though it may not be readily apparent (Rappolt-Schlichtmann & Daley, 2013, p.311).*

This is an important principle underpinning universal design – that improving ease of access for people with disabilities can improve access for everyone. Thus, achieving universal design is not a matter of catering to a minority group, but introducing innovations and improvements that everyone will benefit from.

Hunting *et al*. also contended that local governments need to show leadership from within, arguing that "strong leadership from executive staff and elected members promotes a culture where access and inclusion are prominent in decision-making" (2017, p.36). They suggested that strong internal leadership can help to embed disability access and inclusion, evidenced in changes to the organisation's policies, procedures and everyday practices. The authors suggest that "the starting point for many local governments is often strong advocacy from elected members [Councillors] with either a lived or personal experience of disability", that is then "supported by the executive" (Hunting *et al*., 2017, p.36). They also note that senior planning staff can be drivers of universal design, but are only effective if supported at an executive level. Leadership from within can therefore be considered an important facilitator of disability access and inclusion, because it creates the conditions needed for the requisite cultural shift to occur.

As an example of what can be achieved when local government demonstrates leadership in co-design, within the purview of the present study, the Co-researchers were invited by the City of Bunbury to participate in a project to design new accessible change facilities at the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre. The success of this project strongly demonstrated the benefits of co-design, resulting in the construction of separate accessible toilet facilities for audience members and an accessible change facility for performers with disabilities, with the latter being designed to integrate seamlessly with existing performer change facilities rather than being accessed separately. The end design looked very different and 'made more sense' compared to the first draft developed by a City engineer, which conventionally would have been assessed as 'compliant' and given approval to go ahead without requiring end-user consultation.

Challenges of local governments engaging people with disabilities in co-design

Ho *et al*. describe co-design as a process as "teasing out the genuine needs of those who are socially excluded" (Ho *et al*., 2011, p.95) through empathetic user participation, with a particular focus on how end-users will 'experience' and interact with public infrastructure, as opposed to focussing exclusively on whether individual elements of the design will comply with particular benchmarks. This calls for a level of empathy and an approach to design that recognises that if people with disabilities are to be included in the user group, this must mean changes in the methodology (Persson *et al*., 2014, p.509).

Engaging people with disabilities in co-design, particularly those with communication or comprehension difficulties, may prove to be challenging for local governments. Some authors such as Ho *et al*. (2011) argue that achieving co-design is "more about attitude change and less about practical information on how to conduct participatory design" (Ho *et al*., 2011, p.98). However, I believe that successful co-design with people with disabilities will demand more than simply an attitude adjustment. It will require skilled facilitation, a relationship-based approach, an awareness of how to listen effectively to people with diverse communication needs, and a willingness to share control over decision-making. It will require a culture of dialogue and discourse through which the organisation will "cultivate the emergence of values, develop the values and ground the values" that inform the design (Iversen, Halskov & Leong, 2012, p.88). It will also require a tolerance for debate and disagreement.

Sustainability of co-design in local government

Björgvinsson *et al*. (2012) observed that design is at times a political act, and that controversy rather than consensus ought to be expected as a natural part of the co-design process, which the authors see as "opening up new ways of thinking and behaving, [and] being ready for unexpected use"

(Björgvinsson *et al*., 2012, p.102). Frauenberger *et al*. (2015) suggested that the inherent complexities of contextual dependencies in co-design will lead to what is described as 'messy' processes, or as Sanders and Stappers (2008) called it, the 'fuzzy front end' of design. This makes it difficult to reconcile the practice of co-design with traditional science paradigms or epistemological frameworks, and will doubtlessly test the willingness of local governments to share their power in this manner (Frauenberger *et al*., 2015).

Fung and Wright (2001) spoke to the issue of power in co-design, suggesting that

> *perhaps the most serious potential weakness of these experiments is that they may pay insufficient attention to the fact that participants in these processes usually face each other from unequal positions of power. These inequalities can stem from material differences and the class backgrounds of participants, from the knowledge and information gulfs that separate experts from laypersons, or from personal capacities for deliberation and persuasion associated with educational and occupational advantages (Fung & Wright, 2001, p.33).*

For this reason, they observed that many participatory projects are likely to enjoy initial success, but may be difficult to sustain over the long term (Fung & Wright, 2001). My experience of conducting the present study taught me that the success of co-design will depend almost entirely upon the quality of the relationships that can be established and maintained by the process facilitator. The process facilitator must be able to engender trust and confidence, and be adept at knowledge translation (Boydell *et al*., 2017).

Clement and Besselaar (1993) found that many participatory design projects have been successful in facilitating the involvement of stakeholders, but very few projects they reviewed had translated into a self-sustained, local process of participation once the projects had ended.

> *In cases where projects have not embedded themselves well within their host organizations and where animators have left the scene, the attention to active user involvement has ended (Clement & Besselaar, 1993, p.35).*

They argued that a self-sustained process would require participants to become the 'animators' who take over the initiative and do something that is inspired by their experience of having been involved. Frauenberger *et al*. (2015) agreed, believing that the question of sustainability in the context of participatory design is "ultimately not a question of structures or politics, but one of

enabling and motivating participants and turning them into advocates" (Frauenberger *et al*., 2015, p.102).

One final and very poignant matter raised by Fung and Wright (2001) is made in relation to co-design as a form of deliberative democracy. The point relates to people with disabilities seeking to engage in activism:

> *deliberative democracy may disarm [disabled people and their associations] by obliging them to "behave responsibly" and discouraging radicalism and militancy. After all, deliberation requires reasonableness, and so commitment to deliberative processes might be thought to require abstinence from vigorous methods of challenging power [because] if the deliberative apparatuses become sites of genuine challenge to the power and privileges of dominant classes and elites – then this criticism predicts that the deliberative bodies would be dismantled (Fung & Wright, 2001, p.34).*

As the study developed and the Research Group became more conscious of instances of design processes in the City where accessibility had been overlooked, there were moments where some Co-researchers became indignant, even angered by what they witnessed – such as when the new Koombana playground was found not to have any wheelchair accessible features, or the plans for the Koombana pedestrian bridge were going to make it too steep and suggestions to lower the bridge were met with resistance. Some wanted to write emails or make phone calls in angry protest, and I did find myself feeling conflicted at times about my part in suggesting that, in the interest of preserving a working relationship with the Council, that the Co-researchers consider less confrontational and more measured courses of action. This was obviously critical to preserving the aims of the research itself, too. It highlighted for me how quickly dissatisfaction can escalate into protest (and indeed it should if other recourses have failed), but also how fragile the process of deliberative dialogue between a local government and marginalised people can be. It also highlighted the tricky role of the process facilitator who may find themselves defending the status quo and becoming part of the problem rather than the solution, perhaps even dealing with rapidly escalating tensions if they are not able to convincingly articulate the higher purpose of what is trying to be achieved.

I conclude this discussion about co-design with a quote from Bill Ryan (2012), who observed that…

> *the simple message from citizens collectively is that, in certain circumstances, more [co-design] is wanted. The task for practitioners and theorists is to accept the obligation and to work out how, when and where to do it (Ryan, 2012, p.321).*

Finding ways to make co-design work is going to be challenging for local governments like the City of Bunbury, but it is critical that the process is adequately resourced, supported and facilitated in order to give it the best chance of success. As Hanckel *et al*. observed: "while for some it may be risky the ultimate reward is council gets something that users want to use because it works" (2016, p.18).

11.2 Implications of findings for a model of universal design

The data collected through deliberative dialogue with City Informants uncovered a number of diverse areas of procedure and practice where improvements could be made to public design in order to achieve better disability access and inclusion outcomes. Section 10.2 identified five key findings and recommendations that were produced through a process of Framework Analysis. One of the factors informing this analysis was the need to communicate concise messages back to the City of Bunbury in the form of a research report. Through Framework Analysis of the data I had initially identified 13 themes, each with detailed analyses and recommendations. However, when my supervisors suggested that I consider clustering the data and recommendations around just four to six key themes for the purposes of the research report (to avoid overloading the intended audience of Councillors and executives with too much detail), I began to carefully consider what they might be. I compared the data collected with the themes encountered in the literature review. I then reflected on the practicality and feasibility of implementing each recommendation, and the degree of impact each might have on changing the *culture* of design within the City. After arriving at five key recommendations, I began to conceive of them as a model that could be implemented in other contexts (such as other local governments where similar design issues arise), and I referred to this as a model of *Universal Public Design*. Throughout the process of analysis that arrived at this model, I conferred with the Co-researchers to ensure they agreed with the logic I was applying to the data analysis.

11.2.1 Proposed model of Universal Public Design

As discussed, the key findings and recommendations made in this thesis can be synthesized into a model of *Universal Public Design*. Although *Universal Public Design* encompasses universal design, it is not the same thing. Universal design, also referred to as 'inclusive design' (Persson *et al*., 2014), typically denotes the outcome of design, or the design product. For example, the *Principles of*

Universal Design developed in the 1990s by Ron Mace (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2014; Mace *et al*., 1991) focus entirely on how the product functions. Building on Imrie's work, the model of *Universal Public Design* that I propose focusses attention away from the product and onto the *process* of design in relation to public infrastructure. It should, I suggest, incorporate five key elements (see Figure 17) aimed at embedding universal design into public design processes and procedures.

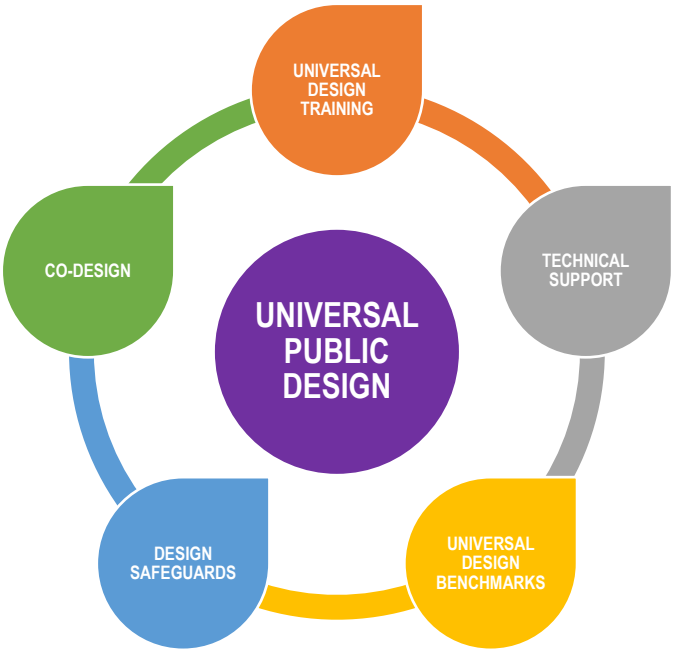


Figure 17: Proposed model of Universal Public Design incorporating five key elements

The five key elements of *Universal Public Design* as proposed are:

- UNIVERSAL DESIGN TRAINING: Ongoing training in universal design and disability awareness for all staff members and contractors engaged in public design.
- TECHNICAL SUPPORT: The provision of technical support for complex public design work.
- BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARKS: Documentation of clear benchmarks for universal design.
- DESIGN SAFEGUARDS: The incorporation of safeguards into the policies and procedures related to public design, including checklists and accountability mechanisms.
- CO-DESIGN Engagement of people with disabilities as design partners.

There is a synergy that exists between the individual elements of the *Universal Public Design* model and if any one element were to be overlooked or omitted from the process, the model would lose integrity. Although introducing just one or more of these elements into the design process may lead to improvements, it is the synergy of all five operating in tandem that is most

likely to produce a system of public design that reliably integrates universal design. It does not appear that the *Universal Public Design* model as described here has been articulated elsewhere in the literature, and is thus an original contribution to the field from this thesis. Yet, the individual components of the model are not original, and are well established facilitators of accessible design, supported by the current academic and grey literature (Sarmiento-Pelayo, 2015; Copeland, 2014; Ohlin *et al*., 1996; Australian Local Government Association, 2014, Dunston *et al*. 2009; United Nations, 2016; Wong, 2015).

11.2.2 Discussion about the application of *Universal Public Design*

How the status quo is problematic

Using Participatory Action Research, the present study established that a key barrier to achieving an accessible Bunbury community is that those responsible for public design have failed to consistently apply universal design at the planning stages of public infrastructure projects. The City of Bunbury appears to lack systemic measures such as staff training, technical support, universal design benchmarks, procedural safeguards necessary to achieve universal design, and lacks processes for engaging people with lived experience of disability as partners in co-design. Over decades, these systemic problems have inhibited universal access and inclusion in Bunbury's physical and social infrastructure.

A simple web search will reveal that there is a substantial and growing body of knowledge about the technical application of universal design to different contexts (such as how to design an accessible museum experience – see Rappolt-Schlichtmann & Daley, 2013). There are a plethora of studies, recommendations and technical specifications 'out there' dispersed amongst numerous publications, but what appears to be missing presently is a clear, concise framework that articulates what *systemic* changes local governments and other public design entities need to focus on to embed universal design into their design processes. Thus the intent behind the *Universal Public Design* model presented in this thesis is that local governments like the City of Bunbury can use the model to focus attention on 'fixing the system' of public design, by implementing the five key components (**training, technical support, universal design benchmarks, design safeguards and co-design**).

Knowledge sharing is paramount to the success of *Universal Public Design*. Australia's 537 local governments (ALGA, 2019) and their peak bodies could consider collaborating with each other in the development of benchmarks for universal design, the provision of staff training in universal design, and in developing a panel of preferred experts that can provide technical support for universal

design to local governments. The sharing of best practice in universal design and co-design between local governments is vital to engendering a culture that supports *Universal Public Design* across Australia, and this could be achieved through the hosting of forums and conferences, awards and competitions, and the development of a central website that captures best practice stories. The local government associations could certainly play a lead role in this respect.

Why not just fix the Standards?

Should local governments be expected to take responsibility for leading the way towards more accessible communities? Not every City Informant we spoke to in the study agreed with the idea of local governments needing to take responsibility for fixing the problems associated with inaccessible public design. Some felt that local government should only be expected to meet compulsory design Standards and regulations, and that if these are insufficient, then attention ought to be directed towards fixing them at a federal level rather than pushing for systemic changes at a local level. The difficulty with this view is that it reflects a simplistic understanding of public design, which is a complex endeavour that any system of standards is unlikely to fully account for. Compulsory standards are an important part of the solution, but are considered a 'minimum starting point' rather than a total solution (Jackson, 2018; Australian Local Government Association, 2016; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013) as they are open to misinterpretation, and tend to specify minimum expectations, rather than what might be considered 'ideal' for achieving universal design in a given context. For example, the minimum width specified for an elevator under the Building Code of Australia is just 1100mm, narrow, but acceptable in very tight spaces or low-traffic applications. A more acceptable elevator design allows circulation space for a large electric wheelchair to perform a 180 degree turn, with the bonus that the extra space actually makes the elevator more useful in other ways.

For illustrative purposes, the Bunbury central library was constructed in 2009 and included a public lift that complied with the minimum specified Standards, but that was soon found to be impractical for users of electric wheelchairs who could not turn around once inside, and now have to perform a difficult manoeuvre to reverse through the narrow doors. A co-design process and/or systematic review by a technical support officer in the planning stages would likely have detected this issue and recommended a more universally accessible elevator size – adding a little more to the cost but returning a better result for the community in the long term. Thus, Standards do play an important role in regulating minimum expectations but cannot replace a more rigorous, multi-factorial process of *Universal Public Design*.

What if the status quo were to remain unchanged?

If the status quo were to remain in Bunbury, it is likely that progress towards the MARCIA aspiration would be slow, inconsistent and hampered by continual errors and oversights. Plans would continue to receive approval to proceed without necessary checks and balances for universal design, introducing further barriers into the urban landscape. A clear example of this is the Koombana Playground story featured as a case study earlier in this thesis. The only mechanisms in the existing system that provided any safeguarding for accessible design were the Standards, the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan and Policy, the Equal Opportunity Plan and Policy, and the City's Disability Advisory Committee. While these were important safeguards, they were impotent in aligning the design culture of the organisation with the City's MARCIA aspiration. For example, there were no procedural trigger points to ensure that the Disability Advisory Committee would be consulted regarding the Koombana playground. The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan was not well integrated into the work plans and procedures of all departments, meaning it was too easy to ignore or pay lip service to. Staff lacked the required competencies and technical support to achieve universal design, and there were no endorsed universal design benchmarks for playgrounds beyond the minimum Australian Design Standards.

Design contractors were provided with copies of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, but were not supported to understand what the implications were for their design work, or evaluated in terms of their performance against it. Furthermore, the Disability Advisory Committee members were not treated as valued partners in the design process. And finally, even though individual champions for disability access and inclusion working within the City had made progress (for example, with the Big Swamp All-Abilities Playground), that progress was too easily lost when staff members left their positions, most likely because of a failure to embed their knowledge through systematic improvements to policies, procedures, benchmarks and plans. This can result in a problem of corporate amnesia and gives the public the impression of progress being 'two steps forward, one step back'.

11.3 Promoting *Universal Public Design* in the commercial sector

Increasingly, the public is looking to local government for leadership to help address complex social issues by working collaboratively with other sectors of the community (Ryan, Hastings, Lawrie, & Grant, 2015, p. ii). It is important to recognise that many of the problems of inaccessibility in public infrastructure originate in the commercial sector, and that local governments like the City of Bunbury are legislatively powerless to change this. They cannot force commercial designers to apply

universal design or anything above minimum regulatory requirements. However local governments can use their position as civic leaders, development regulators and purchasers of goods and services to encourage the commercial sector to adopt universal design. Local governments are extremely influential in the activities of the commercial sector and they also possess substantial purchasing power that can be leveraged to increase the standards of public design by creating new 'norms' of supply. For example, Bunbury is currently committed to installing only universally designed barbeques, drink fountains and picnic tables in public areas as 'standard', a policy which if replicated across other local governments, could see a drop in demand for inaccessible models that may render them obsolete and eventually cause them to disappear from the urban landscape.

Local governments intersect frequently with the commercial sector in a regulatory and development capacity, and also in a purchasing capacity, such as when tendering out projects. Permits must often be obtained from the City of Bunbury by commercial operators to develop or modify buildings and facilities (such as retail shops, restaurants, accommodation, carparks, signage and street frontages), or to hold a commercial event on public land. These intersection points may provide City of Bunbury officers with legitimate opportunities to engage commercial designers and developers to educate and expect improvements in relation to universal design.

Local governments can also support the commercial sector to apply universal design in other ways, such as making best practice design benchmarks publicly available, and offering training and technical support to commercial designers (such as training in how to design accessible retail spaces). A key partnering strategy to consider will be facilitating co-design between commercial sector designers and people with disabilities. This would be a major step forward in the creation of accessible and inclusive communities, but will require significant resourcing and support. What may be even more difficult to achieve is seeking to place mandatory requirements on commercial entities to meet best practice benchmarks for , and incorporating this as part of the local government development approvals system, and/or events permit system. Without legislative support, the move is likely to be resisted because of perceptions of added cost or time. However, it is still worth exploring the possibilities.

11.4 Research impact – the 'action' component

A defining element of PAR as a research methodology is the requirement for the research to lead to action for change within the immediate context (Kidd & Kral, 2005). As a result, change is discussed, negotiated, and implemented even while the research is under way. Thus I can report that the City

of Bunbury has implemented a number of changes within 12 months since the completion of the data collection phase in February 2018, and some highlights are outlined in the following table and aligned with the recommendations from the present study.

TABLE 8: RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY OF BUNBURY, AND ACTIONS TAKEN		
Recommendation	**Actions implemented by the City**	**Status**
Recommendation 1: **Universal Design Training**	The City provided training to eleven staff members in how to audit buildings and facilities according to universal design specifications, and has engaged a contractor to train recreation staff members in inclusive recreation design strategies.	Implemented, with an informal commitment to continue training staff members in universal design. No changes to policies or procedures evident at this stage.
Recommendation 2: **Technical support**	The City reports that it is working with the Western Australian Local Government Association to develop a panel of preferred technical experts that can be contracted to provide support to staff members and contractors to achieve universal design.	No firm commitments at this stage.
Recommendation 3: **Universal Design Benchmarks**	The City has developed a set of universal design benchmarks for indoor and outdoor spaces, based on Institute of Access Training Australia (IATA) benchmarks as a starting point. These will be applied to all new developments.	Endorsed, but yet to be committed to through a formal policy. Benchmarks for public events, programs, services, streetscapes and other public design scenarios have yet to be developed.

Recommendation 4: **Design safeguards**	The City has developed and endorsed a co-design procedure that outlines criteria and triggers for co-design that staff members will be expected to comply with.	Endorsed, but yet to be embedded in workflows and checklists. The procedure applies only to physical infrastructure developments at this point.
Recommendation 5: **Co-design**	The City has developed and endorsed a co-design procedure for physical infrastructure developments, and is in the process of recruiting suitable community representatives to sit as co-design panel members. This process will be facilitated by the Community Development Officer for Disability Access and Inclusion.	Endorsed, and the advice of a co-design consultant is being actively sought.

The above table demonstrates the potency of the particular combination of industry engagement and Participatory Action Research that this project has entailed. Conducting research in a manner that facilitates dialogue between marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, and powerful groups such as local governments can and does lead to practical and tangible results within the immediate context.

11.5 Study's connection to the City of Bunbury's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

From the outset, the present study was not about producing another or better Disability Access and Inclusion Plan for the City of Bunbury. The City of Bunbury already has in place a comprehensive Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (see Appendix 2), based on a template released by the Disability Services Commission (WA), which includes strategic goals around improving access to services, events, buildings, facilities, information, consultation, and employment, as well as a newly added goal around accessibility in commercial sector buildings and services that was added in 2017.

However the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan does not (nor was it ever expected to) interrogate the culture, policies and processes of the organisation itself. It was therefore important that our research did not attempt to replicate the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan or the processes by which it was developed (such as consulting multiple community stakeholders), but instead focus attention on the 'behind the scenes' factors that were impacting upon access and inclusion outcomes within the City, particularly in the area of public design. However there is alignment between the recommendations contained in this report and the City's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, and these alignments are detailed in the Research Report presented to Council (See Appendix 1). The recommendations from this study are not intended to replace or supersede the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, but rather to complement it.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the research, and proposed a model of *Universal Public Design*, of which a core component is the co-design of public infrastructure with people with disabilities. The model is the 'transferable learning' from this study that can be used by other local governments and commercial organisations to transform their public design systems and processes. This chapter also identified the impact that the research has already had on the system of public design at the City of Bunbury, in keeping with the action research principle of the study's methodology. The next chapter presents some reflections on the challenges and triumphs of facilitating a PAR study, and some reflections on the experience of participating in the study from the Co-researcher point of view.

CHAPTER 12

12. REFLECTIONS

This chapter presents a reflection and critical discussion about the experience of engaging Co-researchers and City Informants in Participatory Action Research. It uses written and verbal reflections from the Co-researchers to build a picture of what they viewed as the benefits and challenges of participating in the process, and what they learnt from it. I also provide some reflection about the complexities and rewards of facilitating the process, and using PAR to catalyse change. The chapter then reflects on participant conceptions of power and empowerment, and the central role of champions in paving the way for changes to policy and resource allocation.

12.1 Co-researcher experience of participation

The section uses Balcazar *et al*.'s (1998) four *general principles* and four *challenges* of conducting Participatory Action Research with people with disabilities (pp.2-10) as a guide, and evaluates the present study in the light of each principle and challenge. The principles and challenges were developed from an extensive review of PAR literature by Selener (1997) and adapted by Balcazar *et al*. (1998) to make them explicitly relevant to PAR with people with disabilities.

Principle 1: Individuals with disabilities themselves articulate the problem and participate directly in the process of defining, analysing, and solving it.

According to Balcazar *et al*. (1998, p.2), PAR with people with disabilities entails active involvement in all aspects of defining, analysing and addressing the research problem, thereby increasing community benefit, relevance, social validity and acceptance by stakeholders.

The present study provided a structure and means by which people with lived experience of disability could become involved in a process of inquiry, positioned not as subjects of research but as Co-researchers. The process involved regular Research Group meetings in which participants were able to collectively evaluate the barriers they faced, engage in deliberative dialogue with Informants from their local government, and analyse the data to develop a set of findings and recommendations. The process was carefully facilitated to provide a collaborative, engaging and supportive research environment in which every participant was encouraged to contribute, as reflected in the following statement:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: So I joined MARCIA, the Participatory Action Research group. We are a group of people who are passionate about access and inclusion. We*

> *combine our professions, knowledge, skills and know-how into the team. Our ideas are diverse and broad, ranging from engineering and design in public spaces, education and training, youth and sport awareness, and many more. We have an abundance of questions, opinions, ideas, debates and laughs. Our common goal is creating access and inclusion in Bunbury.*

People can become empowered through involvement in PAR. Empowerment is a highly subjective, even contested term and is difficult to measure. It is perhaps problematic in that it suggests that power is 'bestowed', rather than attained, by individuals who can make their own decisions to increase their power (Stone & Priestly, 1996). However, if we define empowerment as a change in social relations with people who hold power, in particular between citizens and holders of civic power such as local government (Ciulla, 1998, p.331), then I would argue that the Co-researchers were empowered by the process. The change in social relations resulted from a process of deliberative dialogue and knowledge partnering that increased understanding, awareness and empathy in both parties, and began with face to face engagement:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Our group looked at inclusiveness, understanding, barriers, empathy. Engagement brings these all together.*

This in turn increased the likelihood that the City of Bunbury would implement the recommendations put to them, and the likelihood that the participants with disabilities would engage in future co-design efforts. There are strong links here to a central theme of the literature review – that participation builds relationship, and relationships build power to influence and control decisions. Even within the data collection timeframe, the City began to implement changes to systems, procedures and funding allocations in response to dialogue with the Co-researchers. Some of the work that was catalysed is only now coming to fruition one year later, such as the implementation of a co-design procedure, new benchmarks for universal design, and increased staff training in universal design. This reflects a fundamental change in the relationship between those who create and implement policy, and those who experience its effects.

Principle 2: Direct involvement of people with disabilities in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of their social reality.

Balcazar *et al*. (1998) suggest that, by sharing objective and subjective aspects of their experience, participants of PAR can provide more holistic, contextual and accurate interpretations of their social realities.

The opportunity for Co-researchers to regularly spend time engaged in deep discussion with each other and in dialogue with City Informants provided a forum for validating individual perceptions of barriers in the community, and for developing collective narratives about the nature of those barriers as resulting from limitations in the systems and policies that regulate public design (social model of disability), rather than from personal limitations (individual model of disability). This concept is reflected in an excerpt from one Co-researcher's speech to the City of Bunbury elected members when the Research Report (see Appendix 1) was presented for adoption in June 2018:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: It is often not being in a wheelchair or having a disability that makes people feel disabled, it is often poor design that disables people by building in barriers instead of removing them, leading to a loss of independence and ultimately social isolation, because sometimes it's just easier to stay at home. My lived experience as a wheelchair user in Bunbury is that Australian Standards fall short of the expectations of people with disabilities and what they want to achieve. People of all abilities deserve equal access to their built environment but to achieve this council will need to move away from the mindset of meeting minimum Australian Standards and strive to create a culture of accepting nothing less than best practice. This is why I am strongly in favour of Council endorsing the MARCIA report.*

This quote reflects the degree to which the Co-researcher participants successfully developed a 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 2005) of their social reality, and reframed their personal lived experiences as matters of social policy (the problem of a compliance mentality in public design, rather than a commitment to universal design). Such analysis helped move the discussion from individual experience to collective experience, and resulted in a rationale for changes to policy and procedure – as reflected in the findings and recommendations contained in this thesis.

Principle 3: The process of participatory research can increase awareness among individuals with disabilities about their own resources and strengths.

Balcazar *et al*. (1998) argued that the empowerment orientation of PAR can support participants with disabilities to develop competencies that increase their personal effectiveness as advocates and leaders.

About three months into the research process, the Research Group engaged in an exercise where we spent time reflecting on the strengths that we each saw in each other, and capturing them in a Powerpoint document. For example, the words used to describe one participant were…

passionate, eager to learn, good communicator and advocate, focused on educating others about inclusion, always thinking beyond physical barriers, insightful.

Another participant was described as

former auditor, grammar nazi, logical, confident dealing with business and government people, articulate, good with words, community arts, computer gaming

This was a powerful exercise that not only built confidence and affirmed skills and abilities, but also strengthened group cohesion. It gave the group an increased sense of power as the collective potential to influence decision-makers and the wider community became more apparent. Some in the group began to write letters to influential people. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by a participant and her support worker to the Mayor of Bunbury:

CO-RESEARCHER: At present due to the nature of uneven pavers, structural designs, angles of the footpath cambers, obstacles and high steps/steep ramps into shops and inadequate ACROD street parking, I do most of my shopping in shopping complexes as they generally meet all my needs. These concerns do not just affect myself but wheelchair users, elderly, vision impaired, parents with prams and the general community.

The author went on to articulate a vision for a more accessible CBD area and proposing a Pedestrian Zone in the CBD of Bunbury:

CO-RESEARCHER: A proposal I have for consideration would be to develop an accessible Pedestrian Zone that runs between Paisley Square to Victoria St, along Stephen St. Ideally this area would be closed off to traffic, and there would be no curbing, minimal slope to cater for water run-off, and if paving was used they would be well maintained, and no steps into the surrounding shops. This space could be activated using weekend market stalls, street furniture (and more clothes shops!) and would be popular with buskers and performance artists.

The Research Group discussions were often rich with insight and diversity of perspectives and opinions. For example, one participant Co-researcher with a learning difficulty made the following observation:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: People with intellectual disability pay rates too. What should they expect in return? The Council hasn't spoken to people with intellectual disability. Not many turned up to the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan consultation. Service providers are purporting to represent the voices of people with disability. Do they do it well? Sometimes, sometimes not.*

This emergent voice of advocacy for people with learning difficulty could, with nurturing, become a powerful influence on social policy around self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties, and certainly made an impression on those involved in the present study. In particular, as the concept of co-design begins to infuse Council planning, I hope to see strong representation of the voice of people with learning difficulties influencing the design of programs and services, such as cultural and recreational services.

The following excerpt from a speech written for a conference by a Co-researcher also reflects an increased awareness amongst group members of the central role they as people with disabilities could play in achieving inclusion through co-design.

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Our research on the MARCIA project is showing that although universal design is becoming a more commonly used term, it is still often an optional extra. I feel the real challenge to creating change will be working out how to implement co-design into the design process, where people with disabilities being an integral part of the design process becomes the norm. People with disabilities have the lived experience and knowledge of what makes a space truly inclusive and therefore their input should be integral in the initial design stages. This is also much more economical as it ensures design is inclusive at the outset, rather than having to modify design after construction. So why isn't co-design the norm? Are we living in the past, where Quadriplegics only had a five-year life expectancy and people with certain disabilities were institutionalised? People with Quadriplegia and other disabilities now live a full life and deserve the right to an inclusive one.*

As we can see, engagement in action research and collective inquiry provided a platform for individual experiences and perspectives to find articulation not just as problems but also as practical solutions (like co-design) that make sense in the context (public design). This ability to articulate problems and their solutions within the immediate context greatly increased the influence of the Co-researchers, meeting the goals of Principle 3.

Principle 4: The ultimate goal of the research endeavour is to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Balcazar *et al*. (1998) contend that PAR can improve quality of life because it encourages participants to critically reflect on their living conditions, and strengthens individual and collective capacity to address their own needs. The action dimension differentiates PAR from traditional research, and the efficacy of PAR ought to be assessed in terms of the changes that result from the process (Balcazar *et al*., 1998). However, the impact of PAR on quality of life for participants is very difficult to define or measure within the limited time frame of the study.

The expectation of a better quality of life that might come from implementing the recommendations was articulated by a Co-researcher in the following manner:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: Now that I have experienced the day to day hardships that people living with a disability battle through I realise that they, more than anyone, deserve public open spaces to be designed with the thought of how they will be able to interact with the space at the forefront of the design process, because they deserve more than anyone to be able to interact, to have a laugh along the way and to occasionally stop and smell the roses.*

Another Co-researcher expressed hope that, one day in the future when life is better as a result of improved policies, that the work this group did to influence changes would be remembered:

> *I hope that from our research, they will change some of the City's current rules - policies - they may have not looked through the eyes of people with disabilities, and how we think things should be done. I hope when they look back at what we are doing now, they will remember that there was a group that got these things passed.*

The sense of optimism for the future that exudes from these quotes reflects a confidence that the research process would, eventually, lead to an improved quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Bunbury. One Co-researcher concluded a forum presentation with the following words:

> *My goal for MARCIA is to achieve a better understanding of disability across all sectors from Councils to communities – not just written policy, not just the plan, procedure and act, not just the written word – but the true meaning and the value of inclusion. And for the disability community to have a better understanding of what councils and providers are doing, and to have a voice, and*

including themselves in decision making processes, and being heard. MARCIA is an opportunity to achieve this. When we do we will all be at ease to ask... debate... create.... inclusion on a grand scale.

These words place *inclusion* at the centre of improving quality of life for people with disabilities. Any changes flowing from this research would need to, ultimately, enhance inclusion through the changing of mindsets and culture, not just the written word, if the present study was to be judged as 'useful' or 'successful'.

12.2 Challenges faced in conducting PAR

Challenge 1: Gaining entry and developing participatory relationships.

According to Balcazar *et al*. (1998), the initial steps in participatory research must involve developing working relationships with the participants, in order to establish trust and a collaborative working relationship, and to develop a shared vision and values. The authors suggested that identity differences between the PAR Facilitator and the participants (e.g. race, class, disability, age, and/or gender), perceived and actual power differences (e.g. who controls the funds?), lack of pre-existing community ties (e.g. the researcher is unknown to community members), and an overly directive approach (e.g., a researcher who ironically demands collaboration) could all present challenges in gaining trust and participation. (Balcazar *et al*., 1998).

'Gaining entry' was not really an issue I faced in setting up the study as I was already well known in the Bunbury disability community from my previous work roles. However, I only had an existing relationship with two of the City Informants and therefore had to establish trust and a collaborative working relationship with the others. To do this, I would meet with individual Co-researchers between meetings for a coffee or an informal chat and used this time to explore the vision for the research. I found this time to be most valuable, and I think making time for informal interaction is a critical strategy for success of PAR project like this. Relationships that remain constrained to formal settings such as a work or research meeting do not tend to engender the trust and collaborative spirit that should infuse PAR. This is especially the case for those who tend to remain quiet in meetings. They will often share their thoughts and test their ideas over a coffee, but not in a larger group setting. Having spent that time one-on-one to explore with them their thoughts and ideas, I found I was able then to invite their contribution to group discussions at the appropriate times.

A potential point of difference between me as PAR Facilitator and the rest of the Research Group was my status as a 'non-disabled' person. This did not appear to present any issues though there

may of course have been issues of which I was not made aware. There were others in the group who did not have disabilities but who were parents or carers. Soltis-Jarrett (1997) discusses the value of facilitator self-disclosure in participatory research, as a tool for building shared meaning and power. I chose to share my experiences of having had a family member affected by disability, which may have provided some reassurance. Interestingly, many participants commented on how much they appreciated learning about each other's disabilities, and how nuanced the differences were in terms of how disability affected people's lives. Some lamented the fact that there were not more opportunities for people with disabilities in Bunbury to get to know each other socially and support each other. Also, the realisation that many of the City Informants we spoke to had experience with disability, either personally or in their immediate family, challenged assumptions that those working in Council had little or no understanding of disability. Rather, it became evident that the issue was more about whether they were using this knowledge to bring about change to policy and procedure, which in general was not the case. Again, this highlighted the need for people with disabilities to be directly engaged in deliberations and decisions that affect them rather than relying on others to represent their interests.

Power differences in the relationships between myself and the Co-researchers were unavoidable. There were many aspects of the research process that I needed to retain control over, such as the timeframe, research question, topics for discussion and so forth. I retained control over these process elements in order to provide structure to the research, but shared control over the direction of the dialogue. Apart from a set of broad topics, I often had no idea what would emerge conceptually from Research Group discussions, or for that matter, from the dialogue with City Informants. I simply facilitated the process, drawing out and connecting key points that related to our research focus, and occasionally adding my own perspectives to the discussion. The participants were free to take the discussion in any direction they chose, leading to many new lines of inquiry that I had not anticipated. In this respect, the research process was engaging and dynamic and, as far as I am aware, there was never a sense that any one individual (myself included) was trying to direct or control the conversation. That's not to say that individual members of the Research Group did perhaps not feel able to voice their views at different times.

However, one Co-researcher with learning difficulties did decide to leave the group for a time, expressing frustration that she was unable to understand much of the discussion. PAR is supposed to empower participants by sharing control over the research process, which should include the pace and level of language used in discussion. However, at that point in the study, the process was failing to empower this Co-researcher. Early meetings had moved more slowly and involved more group

activities and story-telling. However, later meetings relied more on group discussion, and often moved at a fast pace while covering increasingly complex and abstract ideas, with little regulation on my part of the tone or pace of the complexity of language being used by the group. While this suited my communication style,I did not fully appreciate the isolating effect this approach was having on this group member, until she announced her intention to withdraw from the research. Coons and Watson exhort the PAR Facilitator to "be aware of how their own communication styles… can affect a participant's response" and to remember that "flexibility is required to ensure maximum involvement for those whose language abilities are less articulate" (2013, p.23). The authors suggest having questions and activities prepared that are tailored to the strengths of the individual participant. Fortunately I was able to suggest that the Co-researcher begin to take photos of things in the community that she found were either barriers or examples of good practice, and share this information back to the group as discussion points. The Co-researcher responded well to this idea and became more engaged in the study again.

Challenge 2: Relinquishing control of the research endeavour.

According to Balcazar *et al*. (1998), the issue of control is the most significant obstacle to the wider adoption of participatory research. They observe that there is a commonly held opinion that relinquishing control is equivalent to relinquishing the research enterprise itself, and that although social relevance is very important in disability research, methodological rigor is of equal importance because one without the other is meaningless (Balcazar *et al*., 1998). On the other hand, Cornwall and Jewkes observe that "control over the research is rarely devolved completely onto the 'community'; nor do 'communities' always want it" (1998, p.1672).

These issues were addressed in the literature review, in that PAR is not about conducting controlled experiments in order to discover an objective truth about the matter under investigation. Rather, validity and rigour are derived from the ability to ground the findings in the subjective yet authentic experiences, reflections and perspectives of the participants. Their opinions of the issues, priorities and potential solutions, when analysed and synthesised, can be useful for shaping policy and are inherently valid. Such a process of inquiry is collaborative in nature, and therefore control over some elements of the research was shared rather than relinquished. In my field journal I reflected on the process in the following manner:

> *Fortunately for me, I'm reading other people's research that says PAR is messy. You're working with people, you're working with systems, you're working with communities... there's no neat process by which you can do that. This sort of research is about relationships, it's about people, and it's about influence and*

> *power. There's no linear equation, not that I've read anyway, as to how you can actually influence people, have power, be empowered as a group of people who experience disability. So I guess this is uncharted territory, finding our way through the murky systems. And each on our own personal journeys– trying to see how they fit together with the bigger journey that all of us are on as a group.*

Bickenbach (2014) reflects on the messiness of applying idealised concepts (such as PAR) to the real world of political negotiation in the following manner:

> *The move from the crystalline purity of concepts to the messy, concrete world of political negotiation may seem like a bit of a let-down; but it should also feel like liberation. Dilemmas and paradoxes tend only to flourish in artificial contexts. At the same time, despite their concreteness and reality, negotiated settlements over the details of policies and programmes are not only unpredictable but also they are, unfortunately, easily manipulated (Bickenbach, 2014, p.1326).*

Bickenbach (2014) has revealed here a dilemma that must surely face all researchers, in that no matter how 'rigorous' the methodology and 'valid' the findings, the application of the research to a given context or policy is a negotiated process that can be manipulated. In other words, some 'control' over research is always relinquished.

Perhaps the key reflexive issue I grappled with was knowing how much control over the research process to share, given that I was the one expected to produce a thesis and a research report for the City of Bunbury within set timeframes. PAR is incredibly time-consuming and it is difficult to achieve consensus over a particular course of action or a particular interpretation of the data. I also needed to respect and account for the expectations of each Co-researcher. Their capacity to engage in the project in terms of their time and ability was highly variable as were their expectations of what the project might achieve and their role within it. I was conscious throughout of the fact that I needed to focus on achieving outcomes that were probably of lesser importance to the Co-researchers than other aspects of the project. Yet for me, these outcomes were critical and demanded a systematic approach to analysis of the data collected. This meant at times that I felt less able to share control over the direction of the research than I might otherwise have wished. While the Co-researchers participated in the analysis of the data, I ultimately retained control of the academic analysis and how the data was presented in the report to Council and in this thesis.

The notion of PAR being a collaborative endeavour is at odds with the way doctoral research is expected to be conducted. The "culture of dissertations demands an individual demonstration of

competence" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p.xv), and the academic expectation for theses is sole-authorship (Klocker, 2008, p.44). PAR demands a commitment to seeing a project through to the action stage, and cannot be treated as 'linear products with a finite ending' (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.xv). Furthermore, doctoral PAR students may feel a need to justify the PAR approach to their assessors because many academics are unimpressed by the practical (rather than the theoretical) knowledge that often results from research processes (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Klocker, 2008).

In the present study this dilemma called for constant negotiation on timeframes and expectations between myself, my supervisors, and the Co-researchers. Such compromise can lead one to question whether this study represents genuine PAR, but as Natasha Klocker noted in her PhD thesis, in reality, research outcomes "remain filtered through the [student] researcher's perspective but the extent of the filtration maybe lessened via PAR" (Klocker, 2008, p.43). Likewise, experienced PAR practitioner and advocate Alice McIntyre (2008) observed that,

> *given the diversity of perspectives, the variety of methods, the different research approaches, the wide range of objectives, and the underlying principles that underscore PAR, it appears unreasonable to think that there will ever be a fully realised PAR project (McIntyre, 2008, p.xvii)*

Challenge 3: Duration of the PAR process

According to Balcazar *et al*. (1998), participatory research typically takes several years to be completed, which can become an issue for many academics who may be required to work to strict timeframes. The authors also recognised that duration may also be an issue from the participant perspective, as in most cases, people want immediate change.

From the outset of the present study, I informed participants that involvement was going to place substantial demands on their time. This did not appear to deter the regular attendance of participants at Research Group meetings and meetings with City Informants. Many meetings lasted up to three hours in duration, and this occurred over a twelve month period. Some reflections about the time commitment were as follows:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: It's always so full on, our meetings. In a good way though. Totally positive. We talk about so many ideas and approaches.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: You need to make the time, it takes a bit to warm up.*

> *CO-RESEARCHER: It's good to have the time to actually talk it through. Otherwise I think people feel it's rushed and you don't get time to really… well, some people might walk away not having said anything, and might feel they haven't contributed.*

I was very conscious of the time commitment involved given the participants were essentially unpaid volunteers (apart from the paid support workers), and I expected some participants to drop out of the project. However, to my surprise, all participants remained actively engaged throughout the duration of project.

> *PAR FACILITATOR: I always feel such a sense of relief when we're starting a meeting and everyone's round the table. I keep thinking surely people are going to start dropping out because that's normally what would happen in a project like this. People get busy, things happen and then they have to withdraw. But you guys just keep turning up, so we must be doing something right.*
>
> *CO-RESEARCHER: You're buying the right biscuits! [laughter]*

The research did end somewhat abruptly, and the Research Group did not continue meeting independently. It felt like the research ended prematurely and it would have been beneficial to continue the process through to the point of implementation of the findings and beyond. However, this was not possible within the remit of a PhD research project. As discussed earlier, the exit strategy was for the City of Bunbury's Community Development Officer to continue a level of engagement with those who were willing to remain involved, and three of the Co-researchers have engaged with the City's Disability Access Committee and/or Reference Group. One other has gone on to undertake leadership training, and another regularly engages in public speaking promoting social inclusion.

Challenge 4: Unintended consequences of participatory research.

Balcazar *et al*. (1998) observed that one of the positive consequences of PAR is that participants develop a more critical view of the world and a better understanding of the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities. However, they warn this may lead participants to criticize their relationship with the organisation they are researching, and even their relationship with the academic researcher. The authors frame this as a desirable outcome because it allows participants to become equal partners and to own the research process, observing that "people typically criticize what is better known to them (e.g., the services they do or do not receive) before criticizing other aspects of their community, state, or national policy" (Balcazar *et al*., 1998, p.7).

Well-directed and informed criticism can amount to effective systemic advocacy. At one stage in the research process, the Research Group discussed different forms of systemic advocacy (Pearson, 2009). Participants were able to identify a number of avenues for systemic action available to them, including making complaints, writing to councillors or government ministers, contacting the media, organising protests, lodging a complaint under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Australia)*, and even taking class action. One Co-researcher observed:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: I think systemic advocacy needs to be tackled systematically. By that I mean you need a planned, coordinated effort. I don't think you can just have a bunch of individuals deciding to do what not, because you're coming up against very settled practices and procedures, and potentially a lot of people who will not be sympathetic to your cause. So it needs to be done as a coordinated effort.*

PAR provided the structure of deliberative dialogue that gave focus and context to the Co-researchers' criticisms of the system. In a research context, criticisms were perhaps less likely to be taken as negative or unfounded, and more likely to be seen as constructive. Indeed some of the harshest criticisms of the system came from the City Informants themselves, allowing the Research Group to develop a deeper understanding of design culture of the organisation and opportunities for systemic improvement. Also, an organisation that demonstrates sincerity about wanting to make changes to reduce barriers is less likely to attract criticism, and may even engender good will, as evidenced in the following quote:

> *CO-RESEARCHER: As someone who experiences disability every day of my life, I applaud the City of Bunbury on their initiative in adopting the MARCIA concept. Bunbury is striving to improve and integrate that which is essential in breaking down the barriers that disabled people experience. My own mantra is "small steps lead to bigger ones" and I feel privileged to walk side by side with such a progressive city council.*

The City of Bunbury was a financial sponsor of the present study, and had expectations about what the research would achieve that I felt I needed to manage. At different times in the process I did not feel like we were 'on the same page' in terms of expectations. In some respects, this was a by-product of the selected methodology. It seemed to me that there was an expectation that I as researcher would go about engaging the wider community to find out what more the City needed to be doing in terms of its present approach to disability access and inclusion in order to satisfy the

community's expectations – and produce a kind of 'enhanced DAIP'. It also seemed that I was expected to provide some clarity around what criteria might be used for the City becoming recognised as Australia's most accessible regional city. I felt my role was at times confused with that of a 'consultant'.

> *CITY INFORMANT: We're waiting for your PhD to tell us that. You are the consultant, you're going to have had two years talking about this, you should be in a position to tell us how. Council is chomping at the bit. We're ready and waiting, tell us what to do and we can go and drive the agenda and you guys can come and present or whatever it is. We could duplicate what you're doing and go and talk to a bunch of people, but you're already doing it so the value of the work you've done over two years is what we need. We just need to be able to convert it into the tangible.*

There was some expectation that the research would recommend some changes to policies or guidelines, and also provide a rationale for increased funding in some areas to achieve certain tangible outcomes for the community, such as a streetscape renewal or upgrades to certain buildings and facilities that had somehow been missed or underemphasised in previous Disability Access and Inclusion Plan consultations.

> *CITY INFORMANT: Policy changes are easy, we have a Policy Committee. If you tell us where those changes need to be, we'll write the report, go through to Council and there can be a turnaround in four weeks. You tell us what the changes need to be with the case around it. And with anything internal, any corporate guidelines around how we go about things as staff, can be done – the Executive meets once a week- so it can be done in a week. If you gave me a list of things that need to be updated in our corporate guidelines, I'd have the whole suite of them on Exec agenda the next week and they'd all be signed off.*

What perhaps wasn't expected by the City executives was that the Research Group would seek to examine so intensively the internal culture, systems and roles pertaining to public design at the City of Bunbury, and thus to produce a set of findings and recommendations that, if implemented, would fundamentally change the City's approach to public design and to engagement of people with disabilities in the design process. Despite the challenges of managing expectations, Council adopted all the recommendations in the final report and some recommendations have already been implemented (see Chapter 13).

12.3 Critical appraisal of PAR

This section seeks to add to the critical debate about the authenticity and effectiveness of PAR, using what was learnt from the present study. The literature about PAR reveals that PAR theorists and practitioners are perennially concerned with authenticity, in particular the authenticity of methods and outcomes. The measures of authenticity are that the methods ought to be genuinely democratic (Handley, 2001), and the outcomes ought to be genuinely emancipatory (Alston & Bowles, 2014), resulting in personal and/or systemic change within the immediate context. What appears to work against authenticity is conflicting expectations and agendas – of the researcher, of their academy and sponsors, of the people working with the systems PAR seeks to change, and of the participants themselves. These expectations and agendas result in compromise, leading to some of the criticisms Anderson (2017) has observed about recent PAR literature. These include:

- PAR being "co-opted into the growing… audit culture" of organisations that emphasise "outcomes over inputs and processes" (p.428).
- Anti-foundational scholars being suspicious of claims of PAR 'empowering' others, without "falling into some form of well-intended, humanist colonizing of the other's 'voice' or 'experience'" (p.428).
- PAR becoming "cheerful and sanitized advertisements" for what is considered by critics as being "domesticated versions of PAR" (p.428).
- PAR being at risk of "contortions" when "taking up questions regarding the underlying structures and support mechanisms that maintain the status quo" (p.429).

As presented earlier in this thesis, I believe it is useful to distinguish between *evaluative* PAR and *emancipatory* PAR. In evaluative PAR, participants are usually employees within the systems that need to be changed. They are not typically in a position to radically alter the structures they work within, and are therefore likely to engage only in 'fine-tuning' the current system through evaluative improvements to policies and practices. Some forms of evaluative PAR might also engage a client group, such as teachers leading a PAR study that engages school students in how best to introduce a new rubbish recycling program into their school (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). There is little 'emancipation' involved, which is probably what has led to the criticism of PAR being co-opted into a growing audit culture.

Emancipatory PAR on the other hand, is concerned with people in an 'oppressed state' (Haegele, 2016) and their involvement in a process designed to empower them through knowledge creation and collective action. If their voices are used by researchers in ways that do not effectively challenge the status quo within their immediate context, then the criticism of colonisation of voices by well-

intended humanist researchers holds true. If on the other hand, those within the system are unwilling to heed the voices of the participants and make meaningful changes, that might cause disillusionment and cause PAR practitioners to question the effectiveness of their methods.

One option, as I and many other PAR researchers have attempted to do, is to try and engage *both* the people experiencing oppression and the people working within the system in a process of collaborative self-reflection. I did not position the people within the system as 'co-researchers' but as 'Informants', whereas on reflection, I feel it would have been immensely beneficial to the study to engage those within the system as 'co-researchers' as well. That would have allowed more time and structure for critical self-reflection, but it would also have taken much more time and energy to achieve. Furthermore, those 'outside' the system (the Co-researchers) may have felt that my interests were divided, or their voices overshadowed. I believe they saw me as 'one of them', even though they knew that I had worked previously in the City of Bunbury.

As discussed earlier, the expectation of research sponsors, the City of Bunbury, was initially along the lines of 'go and find out what the people want us to do to make Bunbury accessible, and report back to us'. There was not an expectation that people working within the system would become engaged in deliberative dialogue to the extent they were. The system was not seen as structurally problematic, l*et al*one oppressive. This made me reflect on where this agenda originated from. It came from the academy. It was the University that established the PhD research scholarship agreement with the City of Bunbury, and shaped the focus and initial scope of the study as being about the City's MARCIA aspiration – including the term "potential change of corporate approach" inserted in the agreement. Based on social model principles, the University problematised the system and its corporate approach further by encouraging the use of PAR methodology. So, while academies might place limitations on PAR research that students or practitioners find restrictive, they are also important initiators and facilitators of PAR research and industry engagement. They can create trusted partnerships with industry that allow genuine and independent research to occur in a manner that industry itself would rarely consider – emancipatory PAR – so that the "underlying structures and support mechanisms that maintain the status quo" (Anderson, 2017, p.429) can be critically examined by those working within the system, together with those whose lives are most affected by its policies and practices.

12.4 Limitations and areas for improvement

On reflection, there were a number of limitations and areas for improvement in this study. Firstly, the study did not systematically engage with stakeholders beyond the City of Bunbury, as originally

envisaged. To do so would not have been feasible due to time and logistical constraints. Thus, the study did not engage the commercial sector to better understand their perspectives or the challenges they face in achieving universal design; for example, the pressure on commercial designers to keep costs down. The study also did not engage the commercial sector to see what they might find useful in terms of support and guidance from the City of Bunbury. This would be worthy of further investigation.

Further, this study did not engage with people with disabilities outside the Research Group. Again, this would not have been feasible with the time and resources available. However, the Research Group participants brought a wealth of experience across a range of impairment types, and I believe that the closed format ultimately encouraged much deeper analytical discussion than would have been achieved through wider consultation. From my experience of having participated in many disability consultation sessions involving community and local government, community consultation tends to centre on the same immediate problems with neighbourhood access rather than to question the systems and policies that created the problems in the first place. Information about how the 'system' works and how decisions are made is often impervious to the public, and therefore is not often questioned in any meaningful way. Or if it is, the people doing the consultation may find it easier to disregard the feedback than to apply critical feedback in ways that significantly change policy and practice. The deeper, more focused engagement approach of the present study was I believe more effective at translating personal concerns into meaningful and coherent feedback. Indeed, the dialogical approach meant that, by the Co-researchers first listening deeply to the system, the system began to listen more deeply to them, and systemic changes to the City's approach to public design are already being implemented. Listening deeply to the system helped inform and those who participated to hold meaningful, insightful dialogue, and to develop impactful recommendations grounded in the immediate research context.

A third limitation of this study was that it did not examine a cross-section of local governments in order to compare design conditions. Instead I have extrapolated relevance to other local governments on the basis of assumptions that the barriers and challenges they face are similar in nature. Reports containing case studies and examples of work happening in other local governments to improve disability access and inclusion (for example, Australian Local Government Association, 2016; Hunting *et al*, 2017; Ohlin, 1996) suggest that many local governments are working towards better access and inclusion for their communities. However, I have not seen a case study where any one local government is driving change across all the strategies identified in the *Universal Public Design* model, and often the case studies do not examine or explain the systemic facilitators behind

the progress being made. There is more research that needs to be done to better understand the systemic factors in local governments that are driving progress in disability access and inclusion.

Validity of methodology

Participatory Action Research is sometimes challenged in terms of validity, however PAR is not intended to produce definitive answers to research questions. Rather it is about developing a process of inquiry that equips participants to take informed action within the immediate context. The sheer number of variables in this project and degree of subjective interpretation of data will mean that any further research efforts are likely to produce further findings that that were overlooked by the present study, or to organise the information in a different manner. However, the findings and recommendations contained in this study were validated in three ways (a form of triangulation – see Dick, 1999). They were:

- developed in conjunction with the Co-researchers - people with lived experience of disability;
- endorsed by the City of Bunbury for implementation; and
- consistent with findings from other related studies and reports (see for example Hunting *et al*., 2017; United Nations, 2016; Municipal Association of Victoria [MAV], 2011).

Thus it would appear that the criteria for validity as articulated by proponents of PAR (Huxham & Eden, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2012; Kitchin, 2000; Fals Borda, 1999) have been met by the present study.

Transferability

One of the commonly cited limitations of PAR is that the findings are context-specific and not easily generalisable (Kidd & Kral, 2005). However, local governments in Australia tend to function very similarly to each other and the findings from this study are intended to be applicable to other contexts. As Hanckel *et al*. observe,

> *Local governments are known for learning from one another and adopting and adapting what works in one council area to another. Therefore, the practices of councils are keenly observed across the local government sector (Hanckel et al., 2016, p.5).*

However, the engagement aspects of the study may need to be recreated in order to successfully translate the methods and/or findings to other local government contexts. Furthermore, engagement is not an exact science, and those involved in any future PAR studies that may seek to emulate the current study will likely bring entirely different perspectives to the table adding to the overall pool of knowledge about how local governments can achieve increased levels of disability access and inclusion.

Scope

A major limitation of this study is that the formal aspects of data collection primarily focussed on the role of local government (or rather, one local government) in public design. Local governments are one of many contributors to public design, and much public design (perhaps even the majority) originates in the private/commercial sector. Further research is needed to examine in more detail the role of private entities in public design, such as architectural and drafting firms, commercial event organisers, retailers and private developers.

Other scope limitations include not collecting quantitative data about the current state of accessibility in Bunbury for comparative purpose (or providing a framework for collecting and interpreting such data), and not providing a list of access priorities in Bunbury in need of attention. These two aspects were perhaps expected by some stakeholders as outcomes of the research, however early on in the study, the Research Group took a decision to focus on systemic barriers, rather than existing physical or social barriers to access and inclusion.

12.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored different elements of involving people with lived experience of disability as Co-researchers, and some of the factors that made it a positive experience. It also presented a critical appraisal of the PAR process. The final chapter concludes the study with a reflection on the implications and limitations of the research, situating it in the context of similar research recently published.

CHAPTER 13

13. CONCLUSION

This chapter will conclude the thesis by situating the study more clearly within the historical and contemporary context, and by reviewing the implications and significance of the findings. Potential consumers of the research will also be identified.

13.1 Situating the study

This study set out to investigate the facilitators of disability access in the City of Bunbury and found many examples of positive practice, but also significant problems with the current system of planning and approval of public infrastructure from an accessibility point of view. In particular, the system lacked safeguards to consistently identify and eliminate access barriers in the design stages of new public infrastructure, meaning plans and designs received approval without, for example, proper consultation with people with lived experience of disability as a key end-user group. This approach to design has worked against the City of Bunbury's goal of becoming the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia.

The literature review in this thesis revealed how, historically, discriminatory attitudes to disability in Australia resulted in disaffiliation – the physical and cultural segregation of people with disabilities away from society and the structures of public decision-making (Davis, 2013; Castel, 1998; Silver, 2007). Even though the era of segregation and institutions has largely ended, those responsible for urban development have been permitted to continue developing forms of inaccessible public infrastructure virtually unchallenged, leaving people with disabilities feeling 'shut out' of society (Fisher & Purcal, 2017; National People With Disabilities and Carer Council, 2009; Jackson, 2018; Davy *et al*. 2018; Fruend, 2001; Kitchin, 1998). The emergence of the disability rights movement and the social model of disability began to reshape society's attitudes to disability, articulating a new understanding of disability as something caused more by society's oppressive attitudes and practices than by individual experiences of impairment (Fruend, 2001; Silver, 2007; Oliver, 2013). Scholars argued that people with impairments were being 'disabled by design', and that those responsible for design of public environments were morally obliged to cater for all abilities in their work (Bennett, 2002). The universalist movement reframed ability as a spectrum and redefined impairment not as an aberration but as normal and expected part of the human lifespan (Zola, 1989; Green, 2011; Bickenbach, 2014). Proponents of disability rights supported this view, arguing that disability access and inclusion was a matter of fulfilling universal human rights (Mittler, 2015; Mladenov, 2013; Harpur, 2011). The United Nations began to call upon governments to proactively remove barriers to

participation in society through more accessible public design (United Nations, 2016a), and the Council of Australian Governments has developed a National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 that reflects this goal (Department of Social Services, 2011b).

However, progress towards the goal of accessible and inclusive communities in the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 has recently been criticised as unacceptably slow (Community Affairs References Committee, 2017). An evaluation of the Strategy identified the strategic role local governments can play as leaders and facilitators of access and inclusion at the neighbourhood scale. Local governments are now increasingly recognised as strategic drivers of change at the regional level because of their visibility, regulatory responsibilities and capacity to develop local-level partnerships that increase social capital (Webb *et al*, 2018; United Nations, 2017; Dollery & Worthington, 2000). One example of local-level partnerships is the engagement of people with disabilities as partners in public design. However, ineffectual mechanisms used by local governments for engaging 'hard to reach' communities (like people with disabilities) have hampered progress in this area (Brackertz & Meredyth, 2008; Brackertz *et al*., 2005), prompting calls for deeper, more deliberative methods of engagement and 'knowledge partnering' (Eversole, 2014). Co-design is an example of knowledge partnering in practice.

Finally, the literature review identified calls for a new disability research agenda focussed on issues of social justice, equity and citizenship, and concerned with removing material and ideological barriers to participation (Barton, 2005; Oliver, 1990; Imrie & Thomas, 2008; Harpur, 2011). Proponents of a new disability research agenda have also called on people with disabilities to engage in participatory and activist forms of research to counter the relatively passive position people with disabilities have held in conventional research, and have called on the academy to facilitate this (Oliver, 2002; Imrie & Thomas, 2008; Llewellyn, 2014).

This context imbues the present study with significance. It was established by Edith Cowan University in partnership with industry partner the City of Bunbury. Part of the motivation for the City of Bunbury to support the study arose from its recent history of deeper engagement with its Disability Advisory Committee members, resulting in a new shared vision: to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (City of Bunbury, 2014). The study's Participatory Action Research methodology was designed to position people with lived experience of disability as collaborators and co-researchers, actively engaged in a process of inquiring, sharing and influencing. I used my position as PhD student (with industry experience) and as lead researcher to facilitate collective inquiry in which we engaged City Informants in deliberative dialogue about the system of public design, to better understand the facilitators of accessible design. Framework Analysis was

applied to interpret the data set and develop findings and recommendations for embedding universal design into the system of planning and approval for public infrastructure in the City of Bunbury.

As a Research Group, we found that the key problem was that new public infrastructure in Bunbury was given approval and implemented without regard for universal design, and often without consultation with people with disabilities, even though the City of Bunbury has had an active Disability Advisory Committee for more than a decade. This has resulted in barriers being introduced into the urban landscape of Bunbury by design, rather than eliminated. Upon further investigation and analysis of the data, five public design issues emerged. In particular, it was found that staff members and design contractors were unlikely to have:

- received adequate *training* in universal design
- accessed specialised *technical support* for universal design
- documented or referred to best practice *benchmarks* for universal design
- used checklists and procedural *safeguards* for universal design
- consulted with people with lived experience of disability or engaged them as design partners using *co-design*

Based on this information, a set of recommendations were developed for consideration by the City of Bunbury. The five key recommendations are that the City of Bunbury:

- provides *training* in universal design to staff and contractors
- provides access to specialised *technical support* for universal design
- documents and applies best practice *benchmarks* for universal design
- introduces procedural *safeguards* to ensure universal design has been consistently applied (including stronger policies, procedures and checklists)
- facilitates engagement of people with disabilities as partners in *co-design*

These recommendations were identified in this study as key facilitators of universal design in public design, and have been formulated into a model of *Universal Public Design* for the benefit of other local governments and public design contexts including government and commercial design work. It is envisaged that the recommendations will provide a road-map for the City of Bunbury to achieve recognition as the *Most Accessible Regional City in Australia* (MARCIA).

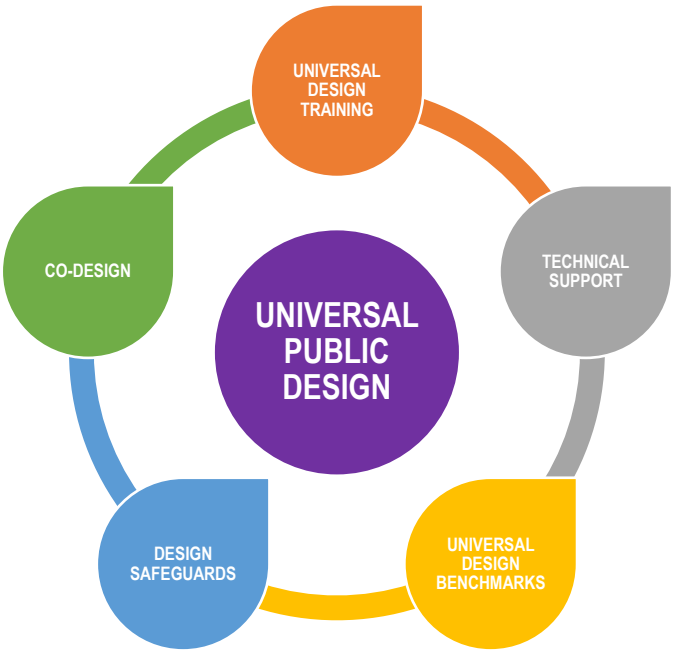


Figure 18: Proposed model of Universal Public Design incorporating five key elements

Other recommendations for accelerating the removal of barriers within existing infrastructure were also identified, such as setting of specific and measurable targets for barrier removal, and engaging the commercial sector to foster greater awareness of universal design (see Appendix 7). It is also hoped that the City of Bunbury will continue to co-design with those who participated as Co-researchers in this study, and that the Co-researchers will have been sufficiently empowered by the PAR process to continue advocating for greater accessibility in their city.

13.2 Significance of findings

The present study is significant at a number of levels. Firstly, its methodology answers recent calls for more engaged, participative and empowering forms of disability research (Llewellyn, 2014; Mellifont, 2016; Barton, 2005). The study positioned people with lived experience of disability as co-researchers, co-actors and co-producers of knowledge, with power to influence the research scope, data collection strategy, and analysis and dissemination of findings. The study was designed around social model principles that situate the 'problem' of disability access within the systems and attitudes of society. It facilitated deep and deliberative forms of dialogue between citizens and government in which, together, they challenged misconceptions, questioned norms and practices, identified areas in need of improvement, and acted for change.

Secondly, the study is significant because it was impactful and brought about genuine change in the culture, systems and practices that shape accessible design within the City of Bunbury. Of note are

the recent adoption by the City of Bunbury of best practice standards for universal design that will apply to all new public works, and the establishment of a 'co-design panel' with associated policy and procedures.

Thirdly, the development of a model of *Universal Public Design* is significant because, prior to this study, the facilitators of universal design in public design were opaque. The model provides a framework for local governments to make the systemic changes needed to *consistently* deliver accessible public infrastructure for their customers and end-users – the wider community. The framework also encompasses the role that local governments can play in supporting and incentivising the commercial sector to adopt universal design. If more local governments adopt the model of Universal Public Design described in this thesis, the effect could be transformative – and at the very least, will help to speed up progress in a direction that many local governments are already moving.

There are socio-political links to the United Nations' *New Urban Agenda* that lend international significance to the study. The United Nations views urbanisation as a global opportunity to systematically remove barriers to community participation through accessible and sustainable development, and views local governments as key actors in achieving this goal. This study adds to the global discussion about the strategic role local governments can play in collaborating with people with disabilities to achieve accessible urban environments, thereby promoting social inclusion. It also speaks to the Australian Government's National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the recent emphasis on local governments as key leaders in the national goal of developing accessible and inclusive communities.

A fifth point is that the study may hold significance for PAR academics and practitioners as a successful example of a PAR project that facilitated productive engagement between people experiencing oppression, and those in a position of power and control over public resources. It adds to the existing body of knowledge about PAR facilitation, particularly involving people with disabilities, and is rare in that the focus of the study was not about eliciting participants' experiences of disability-specific policies, services or support systems, but about their experiences as users of public infrastructure, and as activists for change.

Finally, the study will hold significance for the University as it evaluates the success of a strategy designed to increase the impact of research endeavours by situating PhD projects within co-funding industry partners. My assessment is that it is a highly effective strategy. As an experienced industry professional, the PhD student is more likely to understand the research context, and bring to the

study existing professional relationships with key decision-makers within their industry who may 'buy-in' to the study and potentially adopt any recommendations that result from it. Reed *et al*. (2014) argue that the extent to which new information generated through research becomes embodied in policy or practice is often more dependent upon the quality of the relationships that researchers have with policy makers and practitioners in their professional context, than it is upon the quality of the research itself (Reed *et al*., 2014, p.342).

13.3 Implications of research

The present study sought to answer the question:

Research Question: What are the facilitators of disability access in the City of Bunbury?

In essence, the answer to the research question is that the current system and culture of public design is problematic, and the City of Bunbury needs to consider how it can embed safeguards for universal design into its policies and processes, using the *Universal Public Design* framework (as defined in Chapter 11), as well as adopting a strategic approach to removing existing barriers. Both of these strategies will involve partnerships – firstly with people with disabilities as partners in co-design, and secondly with the commercial sector. *Universal Public Design* has the potential to transform Bunbury's public infrastructure incrementally by ensuring that every new or redeveloped building, facility, program, service or event has been inclusively designed from the outset by staff members who are trained in universal design, supported by technical experts, equipped with best-practice benchmarks, prompted by procedural safeguards, and engaged in co-design. For the City of Bunbury, as public administrators, this will represent a seismic shift in corporate approach away from *control over* public design towards *facilitation* of public design (King *et al*., 1998), with people with disabilities collaborating as part of the design team.

To succeed, this will require not only a shift in corporate approach but also a shift in culture, led by 'change agents' within the organisation. King *et al*. observed that individuals acting as change agents within administrative organisations such as local government need to be overtly supported in the process:

> *It is essential that schools of public administration, as well as those in leadership positions in agencies, create environments within which these change agents can be*

> *successful. Such an environment requires appropriate levels of resources and changes in job descriptions for administrators (King et al., 1998 p.325).*

The Research Group were pleased to find that there were already a number of 'champions' for disability access and inclusion working within the City of Bunbury who were (quietly) introducing changes in their practice in order to align the City with its MARCIA aspiration. Supporting these change agents to increase their influence over the design culture of the organisation is essential to achieving the requisite change of corporate approach.

Perhaps the greatest challenge I foresee is how successful the City will be in engaging people with disabilities in co-design, and the City's commitment to sticking with the process even when difficulties or tensions inevitably arise. Involving end-users with disabilities as effectively part of the design team will require strategy, resources, training, and careful facilitation, and is liable to be fraught with difficulty, especially if conflict arises. However, the potential benefits to public design are immense, and so a solid commitment to the MARCIA vision and the cultural shift it entails will be critical to the success of co-design. Over time, successful examples of co-design will hopefully motivate more City employees to consider themselves as facilitators rather than controllers of design, and agents of change within their work roles and responsibilities. As Ryan (2012) suggests:

> *Professionals employed in service delivery should moderate their directive, expert role. Instead they should aim to be the facilitator and enabler of outcomes in a process of joint action in which their clients are active agents, trusted to make the right choice for themselves, their families and neighbourhoods – to become do-ers, not the done-to (Ryan 2012, p.317).*

A key underlying message in this study is that people with disabilities want to be meaningfully involved in the design of their environments, and can add significant value to the outcome if embraced into the public design process. However, achieving this will require leadership from the top to support a culture that values deeper levels of citizen engagement and sharing of power over decision-making. Leaders are important catalysts for change, as reflected even in the actions of a small group of Councillors in the City of Bunbury who championed the adoption of the MARCIA vision and pushed for increased resources to help achieve it.

Without support at a leadership level, it is difficult for change agents within an organisation to be effective, especially if they face pressure from within to maintain the status quo, or to prioritise efficiency over quality of outcome. When the message from the leadership is clear, consistent and supportive, those working within the system will align their priorities with that of the leadership, and

change will happen more expediently. The adoption by Council of the Research Report's recommendations (see Appendix 1) has provided a clear message again from the leadership about what priorities need to be attended to in order to align the City's design culture, policies and practices with its MARCIA vision. Council now has a roadmap for achieving this vision, grounded in the nexus of the lived experience of its citizens and the technical knowledge of its employees.

13.4 Research consumers

The research has at least five possible consumer groups:

- **Academia**: This study contributes to a growing body of literature about barriers and facilitators of disability access and inclusion in community settings. Some academics may be interested in the experience of engaging people with lived experience of disability in PAR, or the processes of knowledge partnering. Others may be interested in the focus on universal design and its application to urban development. Some may be interested in the model of *Universal Public Design* that resulted from this research, how it was developed and what its application might be in other contexts.

- **Local government (and other tiers of government)**: Local government and other tiers of government in Australia are currently very active in the space of disability access and inclusion. They may be interested in how this study facilitated the participation of people with disabilities, and the idea of co-designing infrastructure with people with disabilities. They may also be interested in the recommendations from the research connected with improving the design culture, systems, policies, procedures and practices associated with the act of public design.

- **Commercial sector**: Much of the work of public design and the delivery of public infrastructure is carried out by the commercial sector. People working in this sector may wish to increase their understanding of the impact of their design work on end-user groups within the community, and seek to improve the design process.

- **Community sector**: The community sector is responsible for providing a wide range of public-user infrastructure including facilities, services and events. People working in this sector may be interested in how to make their infrastructure more responsive to the needs of people with disabilities.

- **People with lived experience of disability and disability advocates**: People with disabilities, their supporters and advocates may be interested to learn about how this study brought together a group of people with lived experience of disability and provided them with the tools and structure to conduct research into the facilitators of disability access in their local area, and how they used this knowledge to become advocates for eliminating barriers to access and inclusion.

13.5 Conclusion

Local governments such as the City of Bunbury play a critical role as initiators and regulators of public design, and are entrusted by their communities to produce infrastructure that is accessible to all. The development of accessible urban environments is considered by the United Nations to be a matter of protecting human rights, and local governments can no longer afford to ignore or pay lip service to universal design. Doing so will only serve to reinforce negative cultural stereotypes and send signals that people with disabilities are not valued, welcomed or of equal worth. It will perpetuate and compound their social isolation and segregation, rather than promoting their inclusion in society. Although people working for local government may be aware of this and fully supportive in principle, they may not understand *how* to achieve universal design in their work. Most likely they will not have been adequately trained in universal design or provided with technical support to implement it. They may never have had access to well-documented best practice benchmarks for universal design, or policies and procedural checks and balances that safeguard best practice. Also, people working in local government may be unlikely to consider engaging people with disabilities as partners in design, or to know where to start. Taking measures to address these systemic problems, and fostering a new design culture through leadership and support, has the potential to transform urban spaces and make public infrastructure accessible for generations to come.

Twenty-three years ago, Ohlin *et al*. (1996) observed that in order to create more accessible communities, local governments in Australia would need to develop better negotiation and communication skills, learn to listen to and involve community members, and learn to look with new eyes at old problems. They advocated that local governments approach disability access and inclusion as a "design challenge" that "takes the whole community in a new direction" (Ohlin, *et al*., 1996, p.4). The present study affirms this advice, and has provided a model of *Universal Public Design* with five key facilitators of universal design in public infrastructure. Of particular importance will be the engagement of people with lived experience of disability as valued partners in co-design,

and the embedding of systemic safeguards to ensure designs for public infrastructure do not receive approval to proceed unless they have been subjected to stringent checks and balances. Over time, these requirements will need to be applied to commercial developments and even private housing developments if a truly accessible community is to be realised.

The participatory nature of the present study, and the lessons learned from the process, may help shine a light on some of the ways in which local governments can invite citizens with disability to participate as part of the design team, while being supported, respected, recognised and celebrated in the process. With the right approach, they will bring a depth of insight, experience and expertise that will be invaluable in achieving best practice, universally designed public infrastructure for the benefit of the whole community.

It was an exciting privilege for me as a researcher to facilitate a process of research that achieved the "opening up of questions and possibilities" in order to "empower a multiplicity of voices" to envision "emerging landscapes of design" (Bjogvinsson *et al*., 2012, p.109), and I am grateful for the support of the City of Bunbury, Edith Cowan University, and in particular, the participants who gave generously of their time, energy and intellect to make an immense contribution to this study. I look forward to continuing to play an active part alongside them in supporting the City of Bunbury's vision to become the MOST ACCESSIBLE REGIONAL CITY IN AUSTRALIA.

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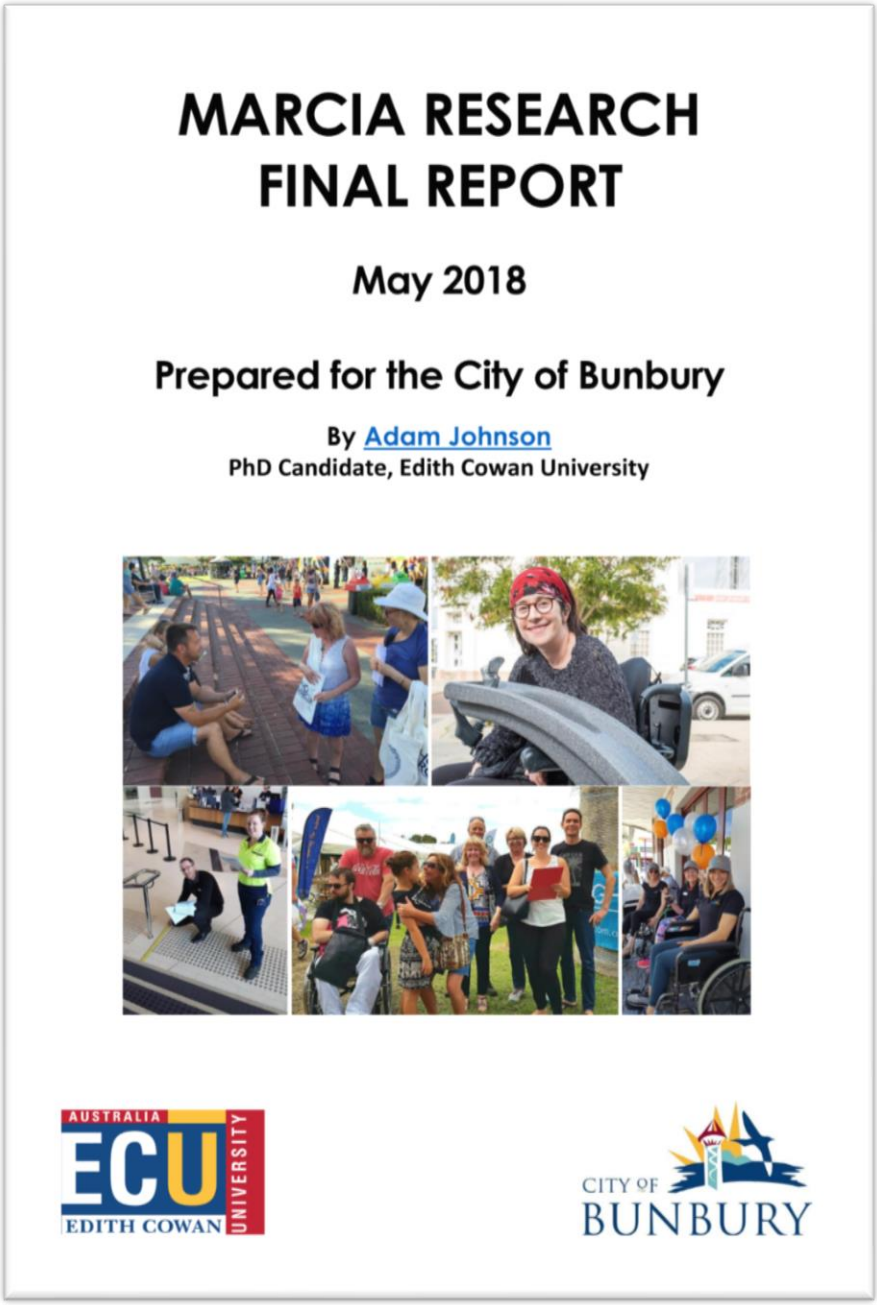
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: MARCIA Research Report

This report was prepared for the City of Bunbury in May 2018, and unanimously endorsed by the full Council in June 2018. The report presented key findings and recommendations from the present research project. The report is too large to append, and a copy can be found at https://universalpublicdesign.weebly.com/thesis.html



Appendix 2: City of Bunbury Disability Access & Inclusion Plan (DAIP) and Policy.

The recommendations contained within this thesis correlate to aspects of the City of Bunbury's current Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, the full copy of which can be found on the City's website or at https://universalpublicdesign.weebly.com/thesis.html



Appendix 3: Sample narrative video

This video was made by a TAFE college media student Gordon Jeffrey featuring Co-researcher Josef Bandera telling his story. As discussed in the Data Collection Methods chapter, using creative research tools such as 'photovoice' and narrative videos can increase meaningful participation in the process of Participatory Narrative Inquiry.

The video can be accessed here: https://youtu.be/4Ifu7v04IEs



Appendix 4: Sample transcripts (de-identified)

SAMPLE 1

RESEARCH GROUP MEETING WITH A COLLABORATOR (INDUSTRY EXPERT), A COUNCILLOR WITH DISABILITY FROM ANOTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Collaborator: It's important to note that it's actually a political process that gets us to the minimum standards. It's not just a business policy. The Australian Standards get reviewed every 5 years.

Co-researcher: Council has a system for auditing assets. I'm wondering whether it has a little box that gets ticked for audit of accessibility.

Co-researcher: Those are the sorts of systemic changes that we want to see happen, but to know what they need to be, we need to understand how the system works. Otherwise we don't know where the blind spots are.

Co-researcher: The question will be, the person who is doing the audit, are they trained up audit to Australian Standards, or above and beyond, or what's functional…

Co-researcher: IATA have produced a thick workbook where the current Australian design standards are in normal font, and then in italics they've put a whole lot desirable standards. So they have actually articulated those standards.

Collaborator: Maybe they need to be redone into a more useable format.

Co-researcher: Yes, and perhaps we need a policy that commits Council to them.

Collaborator: With something like that (capturing best practice standards), if you're trying to sell best practice, if the disability lobby is strong enough, then we will get the Standards changed to the best practice one. So you're just really pre-empting what might happen in a few years' time anyway.

Collaborator: There was a Senate inquiry at the Federal level on accessible communities because there's to be this overarching policy called the National Disability Strategy, which is meant to be about the Federal and State Governments all working on trying to address issues of access and inclusion across six key areas. The overarching aspirational goals are fantastic.

Co-researcher: What would it take to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia. That became the million dollar question. And speaking of a million dollars, the question was posed to the Access Committee, if you had a million dollars, what we you do with it? And we really struggled to

answer the question. I think what that told us was that actually it's not so much the money as it is about the culture of the organisation.

Collaborator: My experience of how useful a DAIP is and how good it is at being actioned is dependent a lot on the staff and if you've got champions in Council. Some of the older Councillors whose eyesight was starting to fail were actually really useful in pushing the agenda on colour contrast and large size fonts in all of the City's information that is given out. Access and inclusion includes so many areas, finding out who are your champions that might be there in different areas to push those different aspects of which might be in your DAIPs.

Co-researcher: It's all about good customer service.

Collaborator: You have to have Councillors on board because they set the parameters of what an enhanced policy will look like.

Collaborator: As a Councillor at City of Stirling, I encouraged Council to adopt a strategic goal around tree canopy. A bit like your MARCIA one, by 2020, the City of Stirling will have 18% canopy cover. Now there had been all of these little projects and programs to try and address tree loss, but it wasn't making a difference. By setting a strategic goal and a target, the flow-on effect has snowballed beyond… because Councillors love that aspirational goal stuff, it's great. 'Yeah, I'm supportive of Bunbury being the MARCIA'. Once you've got that in place, that actually means that anything that comes up that's around how to get that to happen, you've got the impetus needed to meet that goal.

Collaborator: It's so important to have the officers and Councillors on side. You're not just setting a goal, you're actively trying to say how you're reaching that goal, and any policies and programs you're putting in place are actually about reaching that goal.

Co-researcher: The Dept of Transport developed a 220 page document of accessibility guidelines. How do you simplify it so the staff will use it, so that it's not just another headache for them, but it's simply go here, check on that, yep alright, we're in the ballpark, move forward.

Collaborator: You've got to move it from the DAIP to the actual things which make Council run.

END OF SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

SAMPLE 2

RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

A: Some further research that will need to be done in the future is to look at the impact that any training has on the work of the staff, in particular, the design element of their work. Plus any impact it has on policy.

Co-researcher: : How do you measure the long term effect of training?

Co-researcher: The long term effect is difficult to measure because people leave. So people might come so far, and then move on. And that's why I think improving policy and induction training, things like that, are so important. We spoke to HR and they're doing an excel spreadsheet of all the training staff have had, and one of them will be access and inclusion training. We hope that this training will become mandatory.

Co-researcher: Is that something they would address every year? Because we know ourselves from being in the workplace that you do your training, and once it's done it's done and you never revisit it, and sometimes it's forgotten about in the future. Is there something that could be ongoing like every year, like a refresher course?

Co-researcher: The training could be delivered to a team and be very context specific. Let's say it's Parks and Gardens, and you took them out to one of their designs that they've recently built, like Ski Beach or whatever, so they actually experience that design from the point of view of a person with a disability. So it's not just generic training, it's very specific to their role. So whoever does the website, you get them to try and navigate that website blindfolded or something like that, and see how they go.

Co-researcher: I was helping a lady the other day who had low vision and used a cane. The footpath even down that main street wasn't wide enough, and there were so many obstacles there that created havoc for us to walk down the street. It was bollards, shop signs, planter boxes, trees, and all sorts of things that made it so difficult. We walked from the museum down the main street and back again, and by the time we got back, I was exhausted and because she toppling forward all of the time but we were trying to manoeuvre everything on the pathway, my back was killing me when got back. It highlighted just how difficult that was just for her to walk down the road, even with support.

Co-researcher These toilets pictured at the Scout Hall were renovated in the last few months. I know it's a private building, but it's accessed by the public. And there's no disabled toilets there. Even though it's the Scouts policy to provide for people of all abilities – we looked it up.

Co-reearcher: so they didn't have the quality control in place to make sure that those toilets, when they were designed for renovation, were going to be physically accessible. Someone in the organisation would have had to approve that. And that's a good example of what happens in local government. We've got a policy that's not always followed. If you don't even have the policy, then it's very difficult to… it's easier as a citizen to point out, hey you guys have a policy and you're not following your policy, than if there isn't a policy and then you're just saying hey, you should have done it because it's a human right. It's important to have that policy. It doesn't always mean that it happens, but at least when it's there you can bring it to their attention and say hey, you're not following your own policy.

CDO: This goes beyond policy, this is legislation. I think this is a City of Bunbury building that we lease out.

Co-researdher: Our meeting with HR highlighted the fact that there are champions for MARCIA beavering away in their sections of the organisation, and it would be good to know how could these people be recognised more, because it is behind the scenes. The departments are so segregated, doing their own thing under their own banners…

Co-researcher: Perhaps that's something we could do at the end of this, highlight all of the positive things that we've found are happening along the way. The things that are making a huge impact.

Facilitator: What is it called, affirmative action, where you're not trying to create that system for everybody, but you're trying to adapt the system a bit for certain groups of people.

Co-researcher: It's the same for when you're teaching at school. You can't expect the students to meld around your way of teaching. If they're not getting it, they're not getting it. So therefore you have to adjust what you do to deliver your package so that person can be successful, and can move forward. So it's about not saying this is my job, and this is the way it's always been and it's set in concrete, we're not going to change it. It's like, ok, there's a real need for community out there for these people that can't access what we have currently, how can we change and manipulate it to suit the needs of what these people require.

END OF SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

SAMPLE 3

DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE WITH A CITY INFORMANT:

CITY INFORMANT: For me, basic human rights are pretty important. If one person is entitled to something then there's no reason why the next person shouldn't be, so I think it's just about being fair. For example the new barbeque at Pelican Point. I know about the MARCIA aspiration so I thought well what's the price difference between a standard barbeque and one that is more accessible. And the price difference to me was justifiable. So we just did it.

Co-researcher: was there much?

CITY INFORMANT: No. and plus, it was a stainless barbeque instead of a brick surround which would have required extra labour, easy to clean. That wasn't the reasoning behind picking it. But I looked at some other accessible barbeque designs and they were a little bit too… I guess when things have been designed for a single purpose, you know, I'd find that offensive that you do a special barbeque for me, no, it's a barbeque that everyone can use and it should look like that. So that's why I went for this design here, because it still looks like a barbeque, instead of, you know, all the extra signage all over it, you know, here, come here, in lights and neon.

Co-researcher: One of my pet dislikes is the picnic tables along the back beach. [Co-researcher describes preferred picnic table designs, discussion about this].

Co-researcher: It's unnecessarily obvious, isn't it, when they're trying to do this, rather than just subtly building it in.

Co-researcher: Sometimes having the ACROD sign can mean people who go there might think, 'oh hang on, is there anyone around, oh yes, right, we'll go and use that one' and leave the ACROD free. Yeah, it's a hard one… maybe a less offensive sign, 'be mindful of wheelchair users at this location'.

CITY INFORMANT: Or if there's more than one barbeque at one area then either they are all or they're not, you know. Luckily we're not in a position where we've got multiple barbeques at one site, so as we replace them, they will be accessible.

Co-researcher: Like ski beach or the bird park.

CITY INFORMANT: I did provide the documentation about the accessible barbeque to the wildlife park but they are a self-managed facility. I'm not sure where they got with it.

Co-researcher: I guess it's ok with the regular barbeque I can get by as long as I've got a path to get to the barbeque, and a wide enough area.

Co-researcher: Yes but that's you [name], there are others that couldn't do that.

CITY INFORMANT: Yeah that's exactly it

Co-researcher: Each barbeque is slightly differently designed but I suppose where we're trying to get to is to make sure that the City of Bunbury as a whole, including the wildlife park, that it's not just an optional thing.

CITY INFORMANT: Yes, that's where we need those standardized drawings that say 'this is what it should look like'. If you're installing a barbeque, this is what it should look like. This is the amount of concrete we need around the outside of it… you know… if it's a drink fountain, it should be, using those standards, this high from the ground, it should require no more than 19.5 newton metres of force to operate the push button. The push button should be big…

Discussion about the new accessible drink fountain installed nearby. [City Informant] selected the design.

CITY INFORMANT: We were a bit torn with that one. That drink fountain cost $1500 vs $3500, so it was accessible, but…

Co-researcher: It's the first time I've been able to get under one properly. The one in Busselton is good but there wasn't much room to get right under it to get in close.

CITY INFORMANT: And that's another thing. We can go to the WALGA preferred suppliers and say we want an accessible drink fountain, but you've got accessible, and then you've got accessible for people that with assistance dogs. Should they have the dog bowl? Should the bowls be cleaned out regularly, otherwise you're going to make the assistance dogs sick if they drink green water.

Discussion about different designs. [City Informant] is thinking of designing her own, and that could be the standard going forward.

Co-researcher: I don't think that as an outcome from this process that we would be looking to get to that.

CITY INFORMANT: To that extreme, yes

Co-researcher: I think what we're looking for is to say ok, let's identify those parameters, and even say these are the essential ones and these are the desirable ones, and then once we've got that, if there really isn't one off the shelf that fits the description, we could send that description off to the manufacturers and say 'look, this is our new specification. Can you look to make something like this, and here's our reasons why', you know.

Co-researcher: best practice, until something better comes along.

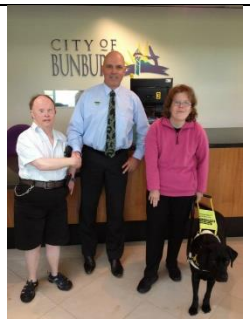
CITY INFORMANT: Exactly. I think one thing that I've learnt from working at the City is, we're making the same mistakes over and over again, just in a different way. So what should the end outcome be? And I think that's where we do actually need to get users involved, because, you know, for you that drink fountain is ok, but it doesn't actually comply because the circulation space… it's got that busking sign next door to it blocking access. So for somebody who maybe on one side is less able and they're going to try and come at the drink fountain from a different direction, are they then going to have to pivot around to get themselves in a position where they can actually use it.

CITY INFORMANT: So technically it doesn't actually comply. Because it's not dignified and equitable access if you're trying to approach it from that side of the drink fountain. And I guess that's where to be seen to be doing the right thing in terms of accessibility, that's not what we're aiming for… we're trying to do the right thing. I know that we copped a bit of flack for the barbeque because we hadn't put the path in yet. That was a timing issue, but I thought you know, it's amazing there are people who saw that and went ooh, ok, that's not right. There are even members in the community who have common sense. We'd always planned to put the path in because it would be silly not to, but then again, we put drink fountains in that are accessible and we don't have paths to them.

END OF SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

Appendix 5: Sample consent form

MARCIA RESEARCH PROJECT **Information and Consent Form for Research Group Participants**	
	This form is about how you can get involved in research that will help Bunbury to become the Most Accessible Regional City in Australia (MARCIA). It provides important information to help you decide if you want to take part, and what will be involved if you do.
	Adam Johnson is a PhD student with the Edith Cowan University in Bunbury. He is doing research on how Bunbury can become more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.
	Professor Kathy Boxall works for Edith Cowan University, and is Adam's supervisor.
	As a person with a disability (or a carer) you have expert knowledge about some of the barriers to access

	and inclusion in Bunbury, which is valuable and important to us. You may already be involved in the Community Access Committee at the City of Bunbury, or be trying to help the community to become more disability-friendly in other ways.
	If you decide to join the Research Group, we will be meeting regularly at a venue to be confirmed. The Research Group will meet as a full group no more than 15 times in an 18 month period (maximum of 2 hours duration per meeting). Also, you may be invited to participate in data collection activities (maximum of 6 additional meetings of 1.5 hours duration). You will not be required to attend more research-related meetings or activities than you feel comfortable committing to.
	There are many things that the City of Bunbury looks after as a Council that affects community access and inclusion, such as parking, public toilets, footpaths, bus stops and playgrounds. They also run public services like the Sports Centre, the Art Gallery, Public Libraries and much more. The City says it wants to get better at making sure everything is accessible, and that people with disabilities feel included in all aspects of the community.
	The City of Bunbury also wants to encourage local businesses such as cafés and retail shops to become more accessible, and offer better quality customer service to people with disabilities.
	We want to find out how people who work for Council, and business owners, can develop a better

	understanding of accessible design and inclusive services, and give it higher priority. We think that this might happen most effectively through face-to-face discussion with people who have a lived experience of disability, and by taking part in activities that help them to see the world through your eyes.
	This type of research is called Participatory Action Research. 'Participatory' means everyone in the Research Group plays an active role in a team. 'Action' means that we want to take action to try and improve the current situation. 'Research' means we want to understand the situation better by speaking to people and gathering relevant information.
	The research will go through different stages. At first we will spend time consulting with other people with disabilities to get a better understanding of the barriers to access and inclusion in Bunbury.
	Then we will decide who from the council or the business community we want to be a part of the research and awareness raising activities. The process will involve conducting interviews with them, having discussions about how accessible design and inclusive attitudes can improve the community for all, and conducting activities that build greater awareness (for example, spending a day in a wheelchair). These people will be referred to as 'MARCIA Partners'. You will also have the opportunity to find out more about their roles and how they impact on disability access and inclusion in the community.

	As a Research Group member, you will be invited to help in the research process. You will have the opportunity to contribute by sharing your perspectives, interviewing others about disability access and inclusion, analysing the data, conducting awareness-raising activities, participating in group discussions, and sharing the findings with others who are interested in the results of our research. You will be offered training in how to conduct the research interviews, which will involve audio recordings and transcripts. My role as the research facilitator will be to offer training in how to conduct research interviews, to support you in carrying out the interviews, analysing data etc., and to be present at all interviews for guidance and assistance as required. Additional training will be sourced from others with relevant skills, eg. teaching staff at ECU.
	You don't have to know anything about research to be involved. Adam will support you, and we will ask for help from others if we need it. You will also be offered training in how to do basic research, such as interview skills, and how to give presentations.
	As we move through the research journey, Adam will keep notes and occasionally conduct interviews with the Research Group members. This is for the research paper he needs to write for the University. If there is anything you don’t want recorded, or if you want your name to be kept anonymous, please tell Adam. Adam will also audio record the interviews and discussions that you are a part of, to help him remember what was said, and also for gathering direct quotes for his thesis. The audio information will not be shared with anyone else and will be destroyed after he has finished writing down the relevant information.

	Adam may also ask your permission to take your photograph, but will use a separate consent form for this. Photographs may be used as part of a story (such as a blog post) or for Adam's thesis, but will only be used with your permission. Your name and anything you have said as part of the research process will be kept anonymous.
	You need to be aware that being involved in this research will take some time. The Research Group will meet often, and the project will run for 18 months. It is important that you have the time to commit to this research project. You are welcome to attend all sessions or only some, it's up to you. Also, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason if it no longer suits you. If you withdraw from the research, you can choose if some or all of the information you have contributed remains within the study, or if you want your information withdrawn.
	There is a small risk that you may feel uncomfortable at different times in the research process, such as interviewing other people or sharing aspects of your personal story. You will be provided with training and support to undertake any activity that the Research Group decides upon, such as how to interview others. If you at any time feel unsure about what is expected of you, or there is something you don't wish to do, please speak to Adam about it. Whilst at times you may feel out of your comfort zone, you will not be pressured in any way to do any activity that you don't wish to participate in. As a Research Group member it is important that you feel happy with how things are going and supported at

	all times. If at any time you have a concern, you can speak to Adam or Kathy about it. Alternatively, you can contact an independent person by calling the ECU Research Ethics Officer on 6304 2170 or email research.ethics@ecu.edu.au If you have any questions about the research, please speak to Adam.
	If you want to take part in this research, sign this consent form and return it to Adam at your earliest convenience. YOUR NAME ..... Signature ..... Date ..... If you want to, you can change your mind again after you have signed – at any time.
	LEAD RESEARCHER: ADAM JOHNSON You can phone Adam on [redacted] Or email adamj@our.ecu.edu.au SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR KATHY BOXALL You can phone Kathy on [redacted] Or email k.boxall@ecu.edu.au **You can keep a copy of this document, and Adam will keep one too.**

Appendix 6: Summary of technical and managerial perspectives

Line of Inquiry:	Reflects participant views about:	It was found that:
Views about MARCIA	The City's MARCIA aspiration.	Some City Informants identified more strongly with the City of Bunbury's MARCIA project than others. Some understood the implications of the MARCIA project for their work where others did not. Some City Informants saw the MARCIA project as having an impact on the City's design culture and decision-making. Some saw the City's leadership as strongly committed to MARCIA, where others disagreed.
Design focus	The concept of viewing public design as a potential barrier and facilitator of increased access and inclusion	Many City Informants recognised the need to identify and eliminate barriers at the design phase, rather than dealing with it as an afterthought.
Policies	The concept of introducing or improving policies to enhance the City's commitment to universal design	The City's Disability Access and Inclusion Policy was considered by some to be too open to interpretation and not binding enough. Suggestion for improving the City's Purchasing policy to require the purchase goods and services on the basis of universal design (as well as cost or quality). Suggestion for improving the City's Events policy to require the selection of accessible stallholders and event attractions where possible.

Plans & Strategies	The concept of integrating strategies and targets for universal design into strategic plans	The City has a reasonably comprehensive DAIP. However, there were issues with translating objectives into individual or team work plans and strategies. There appeared to be few specific targets set for access and inclusion (for example, increasing percentage of City-owned buildings featuring dignified access to premises, or numbers of people with disabilities attending leisure programs).
Benchmarks	The concept of documenting best practice benchmarks for universal design	The need for introducing best practice benchmarks for universal design to clarify design expectations was raised on a few occasions. Suggestion to use existing benchmarks from accessibility audit training by IATA Suggestion to provide copies of the benchmarks to contractors and developers, or include them in tender documentation as a requirement. Staff did not appear to be compelled in any way to document or use best practice benchmarks for universal design, making it difficult to achieve consistent design outcomes
Checklists & Procedures	The concept of embedding best practice benchmarks, trigger points and accountability measures into the design process	The need to incorporate more prompts and checks for universal design into various organisational procedures was raised. However, there was little evidence of this occurring in any systematic manner. Rather, progress depended on the knowledge and commitment of individual staff members.

		Staff turn-over rate averaged 10% p.a., meaning that undocumented knowledge was likely to be lost over time, and past mistakes repeated.
Technical support	The concept of designers of public infrastructure accessing technical support to achieve universal design	The value of technical support was not well recognised, and there was little evidence of City Informants accessing technical support from qualified sources to assist in achieving universal design in their work.
Staff Training	The concept of increasing competency in universal design through staff training	Issues with a general lack of staff competency in universal design were identified. Many design contexts are specialised and require specific training to achieve universal design. Eg. Library vs public event. Training that involves simulated learning (eg. spending time in a wheelchair or blindfolded), exposure to people with disabilities (such as playing basketball together), or presentations by people with disabilities were considered important complements to technical training, increasing empathy and awareness. Costs and staff time associated with training were identified as major disincentives. universal design training was not considered a prerequisite to engaging in public design, unlike other duties that require 'tickets' – such as occupational safety. Such training needs were given first priority.
Auditing and data collection	The concept of systematically collecting data about barriers to access and inclusion	There appeared to be little evidence of systematic auditing to identify barriers in public infrastructure. There did not appear to be a suitable database to store audit data in a manner that could be collated.

Consultation & co-design	The concept of consulting people with lived experience of disability to improve accessibility in public design, and involving them as knowledge partners in the process	Levels of consultation with people with disabilities about public design appeared to be very low. Many were aware of the City's Disability Advisory Committee, but tended not to refer projects for consultation. There did not appear to be any policy or procedural requirements to consult with the City's Disability Advisory Committee, or related trigger points in procedures. One City Informant observed a general reluctance to consult because of concerns about increased costs and timeframe. No consultation framework, with specific strategies for consulting people with disabilities. The concept of co-design was not raised by any City Informant and did not appear to be a priority.
Inspections	The concept of inspecting completed work for compliance with Standards and best practice benchmarks	The City did not appear to check accessibility of new works completed internally or by contractors, on a consistent basis. Legislation previously in existence requiring mandatory progress inspections of new public buildings had apparently been removed, reducing the possibility to detecting accessibility barriers during construction. For public events, Information about accessible events was included in event permit paperwork, but public events were not checked for accessibility.
Reporting	The concept of reporting on progress towards specific goals	All departments were required to report on outcomes in the DAIP, which is fed to the State Government.

	to do with access and inclusion, for accountability purposes	However, there did not appear to be any penalties for not achieving stated goals. The HR department was also required to report to the Federal Government on outcomes related to Equal Employment Opportunity.
Resources	The concept of providing required resources to address barriers to access and inclusion	The City committed $100,000 per annum for access improvements to City-owned facilities and buildings until 2020. No comment was made with regards to the sufficiency of this amount by City Informants. Some Co-researchers believed the amount to be out of proportion to the scale of physical barriers found in the community, but could not determine a rationale for what a suitable amount would be.
Accreditation	The concept of accrediting facilities and businesses for accessibility	Idea of accreditation as a possible means of encouraging businesses and Council to increase accessibility in order to gain accreditation. Information about accessibility ratings could also be provided to the public.
Regulatory controls	The idea of leveraging the City of Bunbury's status as a regulator of public design activities to increase accessibility in the commercial sector	The City of Bunbury's role as a regulator was seen as an opportunity to educate the commercial sector by providing universal design information, education and support during the permit application process. Idea to introduce additional requirements for universal design as a condition of permits issued for development work and for public events. However, these may prove difficult to enforce.
Incentives	The idea of providing incentives to commercial developers	Idea of incentives, such as Council providing concessions to developers in return for meeting certain accessibility benchmarks in excess of the Standards.

	for achieving increased accessibility in new developments, and by retrofitting existing buildings and facilities	Idea to provide no-interest loans or grants to help meet the cost of retrofitting existing buildings and facilities.
Working in partnership	The idea of partnering with other organisations to help facilitate inclusive participation	Idea of partnering with other organisations such as tertiary colleges (TAFE) and disability service providers as a means of facilitating participation of people with disabilities in leisure programs and events run by the City of Bunbury.
Information	The concept of providing information about access and inclusion in Bunbury.	Some felt a lack of awareness in the community about programs and facilities available to people with disabilities. It was suggested that the City do more to promote the MARCIA message to the community, and its achievements in removing barriers. It was suggested the City recognise internal champions for MARCIA and share information about their work internally.

Appendix 7: Detailed analysis of findings

The following table was developed in order to provide a more detailed analysis of the recommendations contained in this thesis. The table contains the following elements:

- DEFINITION: Contains a definition of each theme is to provide clarity.
- PRINCIPLES: Identifies principles that inform the problem statement
- PROBLEM STATEMENT: Contains a problem statement for each theme that outlines the potential causes of the issues related to each theme.
- ASSESSMENT: Contains a summary of issues identified with the current status quo, as observed in the data.
- FINDINGS: Breaks down the evidence into categories to assist with analysis of the status quo, in particular, current levels of alignment between policy and practice related to the City of Bunbury's MARCIA aspiration. Six 'P' categories are used to analyse:
    - Alignment with *Policies* (the presence or absence of policy safeguards)
    - Alignment with *Procedures* (the presence or absence of procedural safeguards)
    - Alignment with *Practices* (the effectiveness of decision-making)
    - Alignment with *Plans* (the development of specific strategies)
    - Alignment with *Priorities* (the setting of specific and achievable targets)
    - Alignment with *Provisions* (of resources including funding and staff time)
- RECOMMENDATIONS: The broad recommendations are broken down into specifics (using the same analytical categories), and suggestions for achieving greater alignment between policy and practice are provided.
- BENEFITS: Details the potential benefits of implementing the recommendations.
- BARRIERS TO IMPLEMETATION: Identifies the potential barriers to implementation.

THEME 1: BENCHMARKING UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Definition:

Universal design refers to the practice of designing for all users and abilities. In terms of hard infrastructure, the application of universal design is about achieving the greatest physical access possible, and in terms of soft infrastructure universal design is about achieving maximum participation (social inclusion). Benchmarking universal design refers to the systematic research and documentation of best practice benchmarks into resources that can be easily accessed, interpreted and shared.

Problem Statement:

- Current Australian Standards are insufficient to achieve universal design in that they do not account for many potential barriers in the complexity of public design.
- In some fields of design (such as public events) compulsory Standards do not exist, meaning designers and organisers must apply their own judgement.
- Different researchers and organisations have documented best practice design criteria, but they can be difficult to locate and apply.
- If staff members do not have easy access to best practice design criteria, or they do not undertake the necessary research to develop and document best practice design criteria, barriers may be designed in to public infrastructure inadvertently.
- Failure to apply best practice can reflect a 'compliance' culture of design, in which designers are only concerned with meeting minimum specified Australian Standards.
- If best practice is not documented as it is realised, corporate knowledge atrophy may result from staff turnover or lack of continuity.

Assessment:

The Research Group found that:

- Some individual staff members at the City of Bunbury had researched and applied best practice benchmarks for universal design to their work, for example, the design of the Bunbury Museum. However, these have tended to be one-off projects.

- There appeared to be little evidence of current documenting of better or best practice in a manner that could be applied again in future projects.
- The suggestion was made that the City of Bunbury should develop 'MARCIA standards', or best practice benchmarks that could be applied to different internal design scenarios, specified in tenders, and shared with contractors and developers.
- There was limited evidence of best practice measures being incorporated into existing work procedures and checklists (for example in the design of the staff recruitment procedure), but overall, this could be greatly improved.
- Some staff, such as in the Public Open Space area, were applying universal design and starting to install items such as accessible barbeques, drink fountains and picnic tables, however, an apparent lack of documentation of these specifications left the system vulnerable to regression.
- Design work was often tendered out to commercial designers. The DAIP was included in the tender documentation but without any compliance specifications or checking mechanisms in place to guarantee a universally designed outcome. The concept of 'accessible' was left largely open to the interpretation of contractors.
- There was limited evidence of staff members engaging in research to discover best practice benchmarks in universal design and social inclusion, so as to incorporate these into existing plans and procedures.
- Though the DAIP identified priority areas and strategies for increasing disability access and inclusion, there were few specific targets set to assess progress against these strategies. The target of developing best practice benchmarks was not identified in the DAIP.
- Provision of funding and staff time to research and develop best practice benchmarks in different work areas was not identified.

Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*

Policies	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Plans**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Current Disability Access and Inclusion Policy is comprehensive but commits to making	Limited evidence of benchmarking for universal design was identified in current procedures or	There was some evidence of universal design being implemented in practice within a	The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan contains strategy 2.3.2: *Approach peak bodies in local governments*	Minimal targets around achieving consistent benchmarking of best practice in universal	No resources were identified as specifically earmarked for the research and development of best

staff and contractors aware of *legislative* and *regulatory* requirements only, rather than universal design. The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan includes strategy 2.2.3: *Develop policy that all new major projects to be designed in line with best practice / universal design principles*	benchmarking documents. Some benchmarking documents (referred to as 'Levels of Service') had been developed but not implemented (eg. for the design of footpaths). Supplying the DAIP to contractors was probably not meaningful in terms of outcomes.	limited range of projects (eg. Public Open Space facilities, and public events), but with minimal evidence of adequate research and benchmarking of best practice.	*and disability sector to develop a set of best practice standards for access and inclusion.* This Implementation Plan also contains a number of benchmarks for universal design (for example, related to public open spaces and events), but not in a detailed or cohesive manner.	design were identified in any plans or strategies. One example was Strategy 3.1.1, for the City's website to *become W3C accredited.* However, this will not guarantee that the website will remain W3C compliant in the future if, for example, the website is redesigned by a new contractor.	practice benchmarks for universal design.
Recommendations*: The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					
Policies	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Plans**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Including in the proposed new policy a commitment to benchmarking best	Researching and developing best practice benchmarks for universal design (MARCIA standards) to	Encouraging directors and managers to draw staff members' attention to best practice benchmarks	Working with peak bodies to develop and publish best practice benchmarks for universal design that	Developing specific targets for the development and implementation of best	Allocating resources including staff time and/or funding for the research and

practice in universal design.	incorporate into existing work procedures and templates. Ensuring these benchmarks are regularly reviewed and updated, and learnings from new projects are added. Ensure benchmarks are included in any tenders.	adopted by the City, and check for compliance. Ensuring that benchmarking documents are easy to locate and to interpret (eg. incorporate drawings and examples, not just text-based descriptions). .	can be shared across all local governments. Plan to develop a benchmarking database that can be accessed by all staff members and contractors.	practice benchmarks for universal design.	development of best practice benchmarks for universal design across a range of work portfolios, and any costs associated with publishing and distributing these benchmarks.

Benefits of Implementation

- The research and application of best practice benchmarks for universal design to all public design, including hard and soft infrastructure, leading to effective barrier removal and increased social inclusion, and greater customer satisfaction.
- Clarity for staff and contractors about what going 'over and above' minimum Australian Standards actually means.
- Regular review and updating of benchmarks to incorporate learning from new projects.
- Greater consistency of design and protection from corporate amnesia due to staff turnover (because benchmarks are clearly documented, not in people's memory).
- Cost savings from 'getting it right' the first time around.

Potential Barriers to Implementation

- Time and resources required to research and document best practice benchmarks for universal design.
- Deciding upon the merit of having separately documented benchmarks for universal design versus incorporating them into existing planning and project management systems.
- Competing standards and benchmarks, for example, flood mitigation standards.
- Potential lack of interest or investment from peak bodies such as WALGA.

THEME 2: TRAIN STAFF FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Definition:

Training staff refers to the formal provision of education in universal design to achieve optimum physical access and social participation, as well as efforts to foster positive attitudes and increased levels of empathy towards the needs of people with disabilities.

Problem Statement:

- All staff members and contractors involved in public design endeavours should have an awareness of the functional impact of disability, and a degree of technical competency in achieving universal design. Staff involved in service delivery and customer services should also possess an awareness of how to relate to people with different disabilities and how to include them in activities and events on offer.
- A lack of awareness about the functional impact of disability can lead to low empathy and impetus to address barriers.
- Low levels of competency in universal design can result in barriers becoming incorporated into new or redeveloped public infrastructure, rather designed out.
- Lack of training in customer service and social inclusion can result in the systemic exclusion of people with disabilities from the services, programs and events provided by the City.
- A lack of formal training in universal design as part of tertiary education in design and other disciplines can result in an assumption that staff members possess greater competency than they really do.

Assessment:

- The City of Bunbury has recently invested in disability awareness training for more than 90% of staff members, and also technical training in universal design (in the form of access auditing) for ten staff members from different departments. However, these are one-off in nature, and there are no guarantees that this type of training will continue in the future.
- The incorporation of disability awareness training into the staff induction package was very positive, but the City lacked policy or accountability measures that would ensure this content will be refreshed and retained in future. It also appeared that the package lacked technical competency training for universal design.

- Experiential awareness-raising (engaging in activities that simulate the experience of impairment) were not identified, and appeared to be missing from the current training on offer.
- A requirement for certain staff to receive universal design training related to specific work roles (for example, events, streetscapes, buildings, information systems, buildings and public open spaces) was not identified, and this type of training did not appear to be easily accessible.
- A requirement for certain staff to receive customer service and social inclusion training related to specific work roles (for example libraries, events and recreation) was not identified, and this type of training did not appear to be easily accessible.
- Targets for ensuring certain staff members engaged in education and training did not appear to be in place, with the exception of ensuring that 100% of staff members participated in one-off disability awareness training and completed the online training modules.
- There did not appear to be any resources specifically earmarked for universal design training or disability awareness-raising beyond the induction training provided.
- The system for recording training requirements did not appear to track universal design or disability awareness training, however, this was being considered for inclusion in a new tracking system that was being developed by the Human Resources department.
- Councillors did not appear to receive any consistent training in disability awareness, possibly impeding Council's ability to make informed decisions about appropriate resource allocation.

Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*

Policies	**Plans**	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Equal Opportunity Council Policy commits Council to fair and equitable treatment when accessing	DAIP Training strategy? Equal Opportunity Management Plan.	Pending inclusion in proposed staff training database.	Induction package – SCORM One-off access audit training delivered 2017.	No specific targets around levels of staff training were identified.	Limited to general training budget. Must be considered priority.

services and facilities, and in employment.			One-off disability awareness training delivered 2017.	The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan contained Strategy 4.1.4: Conduct *regular* awareness raising activities such as a Rebound WA Wheelchair Challenge day for City staff to raise awareness; and Strategy 4.1.1: Provide *ongoing* Disability Awareness Training to frontline staff. Other references to staff training for universal design were present but one-off in nature.	DAIP funds could be used but are not earmarked for training. One-off grants have been used to effect.
Recommendations*: The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					
Policies	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Plans**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**

Introduce policy committing COB to providing training to relevant staff in universal design for access and inclusion.	Update Equal Opportunity Management Plan to include mandatory universal design training requirements.	Include tracking for universal design training in staff training database. Develop disability awareness training package for Councillors.	Conduct an audit of staff training needs in relation to universal design and social inclusion specific to role types. Source and deliver needed training.	Prioritise universal design and social inclusion training needs. Set specific targets for staff competency levels.	Increase the staff training budget and quarantine funds specifically to increase staff competency in universal design and social inclusion.
Benefits	• Increased staff awareness of diversity in ability amongst end-users of buildings, facilities, services, events, and information systems. • Increased staff competency in applying universal design • Increased staff competency to include people with disabilities in programs and events, and provide appropriate customer service. • Greater certainty of planning and resourcing for staff training in universal design, disability awareness and social inclusion in the future.				
Potential Barriers to Implementation	• Meeting the cost of increased staff training. • Staff or management resistance due to time pressures or not valuing or prioritising such training. • A lack of policy measures may lead to regression in the long-term. • A lack of tracking and accountability measures may lead to a 'scattergun' approach rather than targeted training measures. • A lack of auditing current training needs but lead to misdirected training and wasted resources.				

	• A lack of additional resources or quarantining funding for competency training may lead to other training priorities taking precedence.

THEME 3: PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Definition:

Technical support refers to the provision of qualified technical assistance to achieve universal design and social inclusion when staff members engage in public design.

Problem Statement:

- Achieving universal design and social inclusion in the design and delivery of public infrastructure often requires substantial technical knowledge and experience.
- Staff members responsible for public design cannot be assumed to possess such knowledge or experience.
- Many designs are specialised and one-off developments and the technical experience may be lacking, especially in regional areas.
- Staff members 'don't know what they don't know' and may not be asking the right questions or detecting potential barriers in their designs.
- In the absence of technical support, staff members may tend to use their discretion or try to access support in other ways (such as from colleagues or supervisors, or from the internet), resulting in unpredictable outcomes.
- Australian Standards and best practice design criteria are often open to interpretation, and without guidance, the wrong interpretation may be applied leading to barriers.

Assessment:

It appeared to the Research Group that:

- staff members involved in the design of buildings, facilities, services, events and information systems were generally not accessing technical support from qualified sources to assist them achieve best practice in universal design and social inclusion;
- technical support was not readily available to staff members;
- the resources needed to pay for technical support were not readily available;

• staff members and contractors were not required through policy or procedure to access technical support.					
Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*					
Policies	**Plans**	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
No reference in any City policy to accessing technical support for achieving universal design or social inclusion.	DAIP – no reference to accessing technical support.	No reference.	Staff are generally not accessing independent technical support. Relying on colleagues and web searches.	None identified.	DAIP Officer (no requirement to have technical qualifications or experience in universal design or social inclusion)
Recommendations*:* *The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					
Policies	**Plans**	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Introduce a policy requiring significant public infrastructure developments to be reviewed and/or signed off by a technical expert.	Incorporate technical support into the DAIP and other work plans.	Conduct an audit of current work procedures and checklists, and incorporate triggers for technical support. Ensure that significant public infrastructure projects have been 'signed off' as having	Ensure staff are accessing technical support for universal design and social inclusion wherever practicable.	Set targets for number of technical support hours accessed in a year by staff members.	Implement a fund specifically to facilitate staff accessing technical support from third parties and/or employ an in-house technical officer. Work with WALGA to develop a panel of preferred providers of technical support.

		been reviewed by a technical officer.			
Benefits	• Elimination of barriers at the design phase leading to more accessible buildings, facilities and information systems, and more inclusive services, programs and events. • Clarity of processes for accessing technical support. • Sufficient resources available to access technical support in a timely manner. • In-situ education of staff members about how to effectively identify and remove barriers at the design phase. • In-situ education of staff members about how to correctly interpret Australian Standards and best practice benchmarks. • The option of employing a technical support officer in-house will mean the officer can become part of the team and can work to build awareness and competency over time. The option of contracting in technical support gives access to a broader field of expertise. Both options ought to be considered.				
Cautions & Barriers to Implementation	• Technical support should not supplant the involvement of people with disabilities in co-design. Interpreting Standards and benchmarks is not the same as understanding how the different elements will interact to create a seamless, inclusive experience. • Without policy support, a technical officer in-house may be too easily ignored by other staff members. • Without procedural cues, staff members may not realise that technical support is available to them. • Without resources in place (including funding and easy access to technical support), staff members may not find they are able to access technical support, even if the policies and procedures support this). • Technical support will need to be highly responsive and comprehensive.				

THEME 4: EMBEDDING SAFEGUARDS FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Definition:

Safeguarding universal design refers to the embedding of procedural safeguards into the planning and approval processes of public infrastructure to ensure that due diligence has been conducted in relation to universal design, such as checklist items and compliance assessments.

Problem:

- When procedural safeguards for universal design and social inclusion are not incorporated into the process of public design, designers are far less likely to apply best practice benchmarks, access technical support, or engage in co-design, potentially resulting in the incorporation of barriers.
- When designs are signed off without comprehensive compliance inspections for access and inclusion, potential barriers may go undetected.

Assessment:

It appeared to the Research Group that:

- Overall, there were very few safeguards for universal design embedded within the City of Bunbury's procedures and checklists for the design of public infrastructure.
- The Development Approvals process did not appear to contain any triggers for obtaining technical advice or the input of people with disabilities (co-design).
- The City of Bunbury did not appear to consistently subject its own development plans to the Development Approvals process applied to commercial developments, meaning the checks and balances of the process could be too easily overlooked.
- Checklists for public events did not appear to contain many items related to universal design and the successful inclusion of event-goers with disabilities.
- There was no indication on the City of Bunbury website that it complied with W3C specifications or other benchmarks for accessibility, or evidence of a procedural requirement for it to do so.

• The City's Purchasing Policy did not require purchasing staff to demonstrate that the item or service being purchased was selected on the basis of universal design, alongside other purchasing considerations such as quality and value for money.					
Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*					
Policies	**Plans**	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
The Disability Access and Inclusion Policy made no reference to any requirement to introduce safeguards for universal design. The Purchasing Policy lacked any requirement to demonstrate universal design features of an item or service being purchased.	The DAIP 2017-2022 made no specific reference to improving safeguards for universal design, such as improved checklists and accountability. mechanisms.	The Development Applications procedure ensures proposals comply with mandatory Standards only. The Development Applications process and other processes appeared to contain few checks and controls for universal design, and few, if any, trigger points for consultation and co-design. The City appeared to lack a cohesive project	The City reconfigured the Disability Access Committee into two committees – a formal and informal. The formal now has compulsory representation from the CEO and all department directors. This is an important accountability mechanism. In practice, some departments such as Events do consider accessibility, but not in	The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan contained a key target, 4.3.3: Build accountability for access and inclusion within each City business plan and performance review processes. Also, 5.3.1: Continually review website, submission forms, CRM system and any other improvements made to complaints system on an annual basis and	No additional resources were identified for introducing safeguards for universal design into the system of public design. However, much of this work could be incorporated into existing work roles, with some facilitation support.

		management package into which controls could be introduced.	any predictable, documented manner (such as incorporating benchmarks into checklists). Nor did there appear to be accountability checks in place to ensure compliance.	make corrections or improvements when needed.	
Recommendations*: The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					
Policies	**Plans**	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Updating the Disability Access and Inclusion Policy to include a commitment to embedding safeguards for universal design into systems and processes for public design. Updating the Purchasing Policy to	Updating the DAIP 2017-2022 to include strategies for embedding safeguards for universal design into development processes and systems, in particular the processes governing development applications, public	Introducing trigger points, checklist items and other safeguards for universal design into public design processes, especially the Development Application process. Implementing a comprehensive project management system,	Ensuring staff and contractors are proactive in developing process controls such as checklist items and planning procedures. Introducing accountability mechanisms, eg. adding responsibility for achieving high	Developing a clear work schedule to ensure each business plan has received due attention and appropriate changes have been made. Conducting an independent review of all business plans and performance review	Allocating the necessary resources required to identify and implement greater process controls for universal design.

include a requirement for purchasers to demonstrate accessible design features of the item or service being purchased, with preference given to more accessible products and services.	open spaces, streetscapes, websites, events, recreation programs, and libraries.	into which process controls for universal design can be introduced. Conducting a review of all City planning processes and checklists to identify opportunities for introducing greater process controls for universal design.	standards of disability access and inclusion within job descriptions and performance reviews.	processes for accountability measures around disability access and inclusion.	
Benefits	• Greater consistency in the application of universal design principles. • Greater accountability for universal design internally and to the public. • Greater alignment between the City's procedures and its MARCIA aspiration. • Embedded prompts to remind staff members to consult with people with disabilities and to use technical support.				
Cautions & Barriers to Implementation	• Reluctance from staff members or lack of understanding of the work required. • Requires commitment and support from leadership. • Current lack of a comprehensive electronic project management system. • Time and resource constraints				

THEME 5: ENGAGING IN CO-DESIGN

Definition

Co-design (in the present context) refers to the practice of involving people with lived experience of disability in the process of public design, in order to develop design features that meet a wider range of needs. It is a deeper form of engagement in the process than regular consultation.

Problem

- Public design tends to occur in isolation of end-users.
- There may be an assumption that staff members and contractors possess sufficient knowledge about their field of design to achieve universal design, without the need to engage end-users in co-design.
- When City staff and contractors fail to involve people with disabilities in co-design, they are likely to overlook a range of practical measures that could make public infrastructure more accessible or inclusive.
- Co-design is not something most designers are used to. It may require a shift in the design culture to become accepted as the norm.
- Co-design usually requires skilled facilitation and clear processes for success.

Co-design may require providing knowledge development opportunities for the participants, and reimbursement for their time and expenses.

Assessment

It appeared to the Research Group that…

- The City did not appear to have clear policies, processes or expectations around co-design.
- Co-design appeared to be the exception, rather than the norm, for major projects.
- There did not appear to be any member of staff trained in how to facilitate co-design.
- There appeared to be many potential barriers that could work against co-design, in particular, time pressures, the conventional culture of design, and finding people with disabilities willing and able to participate in the process potentially over a long period of time.

Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*

Policies	Procedures	Practices	Plans	Priorities	Provisions
The Disability Access and Inclusion Policy did not refer to co-design or engagement of people with disabilities.	There did not appear to be any evidence of procedural triggers or recommendations for engaging in co-design, or even for referring projects to the City's Disability Advisory Committee for consultation and advice. If a staff member or contractor wished to engage in co-design, there did not appear to be a clear procedure describing how to initiate co-design, and what to expect.	There was no report of deliberate engagement for co-design having occurred in the previous 5 years. In some instances, opportunities for co-design appeared to be actively avoided. However, some co-designed projects had occurred in the past, for example, the Big Swamp Accessible Playground.	The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan contains strategy 2.2.4: *Initiate consultative process to co-design accessibility features with users to ensure practicality and useability of designs.* However, only this only applies to departments responsible for physical infrastructure. The City's Engagement Strategy 2018-2022 does not include any specific measures or strategies for engaging people with disabilities in co-design.	There did not appear to be any specific targets in place for achieving certain levels of co-design.	There did not appear to be a budg*et al*located specifically for the purposes of co-design.
Recommendations*: The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					

Policies	Procedures	Practices	Plans	Priorities	Provisions
Including a commitment to co-design in the Disability Access and Inclusion Policy.	Identifying key opportunities for co-design and introducing procedural cues for initiating co-design. Developing a set of clear procedures for initiating co-design, and outlining what to expect for staff members and contractors.	Raising staff and contractor awareness of the benefits of co-design, and how and when to initiate it. Upskilling the DAIP Officer in how to facilitate co-design. Strategically engaging a group of people with disabilities willing to participate in co-design. Promote successful examples of co-design within the organisation and community. Use technology such as social media and Smart Cities platform to engage a wider	Broadening responsibility for co-design to other portfolios, for example events, recreation and customer services. Including specific measures and strategies for co-design in the City's Engagement Strategy 2018-2022, and/or any associated work plan.	Setting specific targets for a desirable number of co-designed projects over the next 5 years. Partnering with a university or other research body to conduct research into experiences of co-design in the City of Bunbury.	Allocate resources to facilitate co-design, including meeting attendance costs, and a reimbursement for time involved.

		audience in aspects of co-design.			
Benefits	• With the right process and support, people with lived experience of disability can enhance the accessibility of public design for all users. • Co-design could be considered cost-effective in terms of return on investment • Co-design can help build empathy and understanding of the need for universal design in the minds of staff and contractors.				
Cautions & Barriers to Implementation	• Skilled facilitation and 'knowledge translation' (Susawad, 2007; Boydell *et al*., 2017) is critical to the success of co-design. If an appropriately skilled facilitator is not available, the process may fail. • Successful co-design requires support from the leadership. Without leadership support, co-design is less likely to be taken seriously and staff members are less likely to be made accountable for engaging in co-design. • Co-design takes time, and the planning process may need extra time so that the process is not too rushed. One suggestion was to commence the consultation phase in the preceding financial year for projects that have already received approval or are highly likely to. • Co-design relies upon a diverse pool of people with disabilities who are willing to engage in the process. It costs them time and energy to be involved, and they may want to be supported, educated, acknowledged and, preferably, recompensed. Without these measures in place, the process may stall. • Staff members need to approach co-design with a genuine desire to learn, a democratic attitude, and a willingness to explore the various aspects of the proposed design in terms of impact on disability. Without these qualities, the process may be perceived as insincere and people with disabilities may withdraw their involvement.				

THEME 6: REMOVING EXISTING BARRIERS

Definition

Existing barriers refers to physical and social barriers to access and inclusion in found in the community that have resulted from conventional public design shortcomings. They are everywhere, and though many may be removed over time through the application of universal design to new infrastructure, some existing barriers require more immediate attention, as they are restricting daily life for people with disabilities.

Problem

- The rate at which existing barriers are being removed, and the manner in which they are prioritised for resources, may not match the expectations of the community.
- Some people with disabilities would like to be more involved in decision-making around which barriers require attention as priority.
- Barrier removal can be very expensive, especially physical barriers found in buildings and streetscapes. Finding sufficient resources to meet community expectations can be challenging.
- Existing premises are not required by law to comply with the current Australian Standards until such time as the building undergoes major renovations or repurposing, meaning that, without local leadership, lack of action on removing barriers can extend to decades.
- Identifying barriers to access and inclusion requires systematic auditing according to best practice benchmarks and Australian Standards. Trained staff or contractors may not be readily available to conduct this work.
- The data produced by past audits tends to be easily forgotten, especially where there is no system for managing that data.
- Many barriers to participation are intangible, and result from poor design of systems and services, lack of awareness, or discriminatory attitudes to people with disabilities. For example, a competitive recruitment process will disadvantage many people with disabilities and make it almost impossible for them to gain employment with the City.

Inclusion may require not just passive design features, but also active design features, such as the development of programs and services designed to include people with disabilities in mainstream cultural and recreational activities, or in public consultation.

Assessment

It appeared to the Research Group that…

- The City has shown a commitment to barrier removal through the allocation of funding (through to 2020) for removing physical barriers identified in City-owned buildings and facilities, and an increase in funding for Bunbury's footpath network.
- The City had developed in 2017 a detailed DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan that identified many key barriers, both physical and systemic that will be addressed over a five-year period, but the emphasis was primarily on removing physical barriers rather than a more balanced approach to removing social barriers to participation in City services, programs and events.
- The City was in the process of training staff in how to conduct audits for accessibility, but did not appear to have any clear plan or information management system for the audit data.

Findings: *The findings are laid out in the following columns…*

Policies	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Plans**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
The City of Bunbury's Disability Access and Inclusion Policy states that *all members of the community, regardless of ability, have the right to an inclusive environment that eliminates barriers and supports our diverse community,* and that the City shall *plan for*	There did not appear to be a consistent approach to barrier removal contained within the City's many procedures for public design.	In practice, the City seemed to conduct audits of existing physical infrastructure (City-owned buildings and facilities) in a haphazard and inconsistent manner. There did not appear to be a central repository to capture audit data	The DAIP 2017-2022 Implementation Plan already contains numerous goals to do with barrier removal. There is also a goal to conduct audits of buildings and facilities to identify barriers for removal, as follows: *2.1: Review City of Bunbury existing*	The City did not appear to have a clear structure or timeframe for assessing priorities for barrier removal identified in any audits, or a system for prioritising which buildings, services, facilities, events, etc ought to be audited and remedied first.	The City allocated $50,000 per annum in the 2017 and 2018 budget, increased to $100,000 per annum in the 2019 budget for the purposes of physical upgrades to buildings and facilities according to priorities identified by audits.

and deliver access and inclusion to the community through the staged implementation and regular review of a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan.		There did not appear to be a process in place for prioritising barrier removal. There did not appear to be audits or reviews conducted to ascertain systemic barriers to social inclusion. It appeared that audits did not always result in improvements being made.	*buildings and facilities an upgrade where possible to improve accessibility and inclusivity.* The Implementation Plan does not contain strategies for auditing or reviewing the inclusion aspects of City programs, events and services, such as in events, recreation, libraries or youth services.	However, the DAIP Officer was trialling a system of collaborative priority setting (with people with disabilities) at the time of the research.	The footpath budget was effectively doubled in the 2019 budget, with the express intention of increasing accessibility.
Recommendations*: The Research Group recommends that the City of Bunbury considers:*					
Policies	**Procedures**	**Practices**	**Plans**	**Priorities**	**Provisions**
Conducting an independent review of all City policies for alignment with the goal of removing	Developing procedures for the ongoing auditing of buildings, facilities and information systems	Developing a clear process for identifying and prioritising existing barriers, both physical and systemic.	Including strategies for conducting audits for social inclusion in City programs, events and services.	Developing a system for collaboratively setting priorities for barrier removal using the data gathered from	Making sufficient resources available for a comprehensive program of audits, in terms of staff time and

barriers to access and inclusion, for example, ensuring the Purchasing Policy preferencing universally designed products and services.	for physical barrier removal. Developing procedures for the regular auditing of events, programs, services and systems for social barrier removal.	Exploring the capacity of social media and 'Smart Cities' technology to engage people with disabilities in the prioritising of barriers to be addressed. Developing clear feedback and accountability mechanisms to inform the community of the work done to remove barriers.		audits of public infrastructure. Ensuring timeframes are applied to all identified priorities, and that effective accountability mechanisms exist.	funding where required for independent audits. Providing funding for social barrier removal through targeted strategies to achieve inclusion of people with disabilities in City programs, events and services.
Benefits	• Greater effectiveness and efficiency in barrier identification and removal. • Greater accountability in barrier removal. • Better systems for capturing data from audits, setting priorities and allocating resources. • Increased community satisfaction. • Greater social inclusion in the life of the community.				
Cautions & Barriers to Implementation	• Removing physical and social barriers to access and inclusion can be expensive. If adequate resources are not made available, then progress may too slow to meet community expectations.				

	• Identifying priorities for barrier removal can be a complex decision-making process. If people with disabilities are not involved, resources may be directed to projects that are not considered a priority by the community. • The use of technology such as social media to identify barriers and priorities for rectification should complement but not replace face-to-face engagement. • The process for identifying barriers should ideally involve people with lived experience in the full gamut of functional disabilities, rather than just wheelchair users or sight-impaired.

Appendix 8: List of Australian regulatory design codes and standards for disability access

Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010, which includes:

AS 1428.1-2009 Design for access and mobility-General requirements for access - New building work

AS 1428.1-2009 Amd 2:2017 Design for access and mobility, Part 1: General requirements for access

AS 1428.1-2009 AMDT 1 Design for access and mobility-General requirements for access - New building work

AS 1428.2-1992 Design for access and mobility - Enhanced and additional requirements - Buildings and facilities

AS 1428.2-1992 Rec:2015 Design for access and mobility - Enhanced and additional requirements - Buildings and facilities

AS 1428.4.2:2018 Design for access and mobility, Part 4.2: Means to assist the orientation of people with vision impairment - Wayfinding signs

AS 1428.5-2010 Design for access and mobility-Communication for people who are deaf or hearing impaired

AS 1428.5-2010 Rec:2016 Design for access and mobility - Part 5: Communication for people who are deaf or hearing impaired

AS/NZS 1428.4.1:2009 Design for access and mobility - Means to assist the orientation of people with vision impairment - Tactile ground surface indicators

AS/NZS 1428.4.1:2009 AMDT 1 Design for access and mobility

AS/NZS 2890.6-2009 Off-street parking for people with disabilities

AS/NZS 2890.6-2009 sets the minimum requirements for accessible car parking spaces in Australia and New Zealand and replaces the previous reference (Appendix C of AS2890-1-1993).

END OF THESIS