Foreshore and associated plantings are integral in defining the distinctive character of Lorne, a Great Ocean Road town in Victoria, Australia, as perceived by the residents (image with permission from Elahna Green, 2003).

LANDSCAPE
REVIEW

Assessing the character of Australian coastal towns through the eyes of the residents

RAY GREEN

Since the 1990s, many smaller coastal settlements in Australia, particularly near major metropolitan areas, have experienced accelerated growth associated with an influx of tourists and permanent or temporary migrants. Unfortunately, this attraction to the coast and the development that often accompanies it have resulted in environmental changes that threaten the qualities that made these destinations attractive in the first place. In some coastal settlements, changes have been rapid and dramatic, eliciting impassioned complaints from local community members about the 'character' of their towns and/or individual neighbourhoods being degraded. This paper reports on a methodological approach for assessing the contributions of landscape features to the distinctive character of selected coastal 'sea change' towns as residents perceive it. The findings of studies undertaken in nine Australian coastal towns illustrate the importance of natural environments, heritage buildings and socially vibrant public spaces to their character. They enhance understanding of how people living in these settings experience environmental change and its impacts on their sense of place. Practically, the findings have guided local planning schemes aimed at protecting landscape features important to a town's character. They can also inform landscape and architectural design actions to optimally 'fit' into the existing character of coastal towns.

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Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, smaller coastal settlements in Australia have witnessed dramatic changes associated with tourism and the 'sea change phenomenon', where affluent urbanites move to coastal areas seeking a relaxed lifestyle in scenic and natural surroundings (Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts, 2022; Burnley & Murphy, 2004; Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2020). Consequently, these places have experienced various types of environmental changes and at different rates and scales. A major catalyst in the transformation of the character of these places has been the replacement of heritage and smaller traditional buildings with out-of-scale, McMansion-type developments perceived to be 'out of character'. As part of this process, natural environments have been destroyed due to overdevelopment, buildings being inappropriately sited, planning regulations not adequately protecting natural environments and many ill-conceived landscape design actions. Residents in communities where these changes are most apparent often complain that the valued 'character' of their town and/or individual neighbourhood is being lost or degraded due to changes in the landscape. Such changes threaten the unique constellation of landscape features that have traditionally defined the distinctive character of many Australian coastal towns, which in many places is increasingly being replaced by one of global uniformity in the built environment and degraded natural environments. The overarching aim of the studies featured in this paper is to prevent changes that negatively impact the landscape features contributing to the unique character of such towns and to conserve them for the future.

Visitors and new residents to these sea change destinations are often attracted to them precisely because these places possess an appealing feel, ambience and atmosphere; in other words, they have distinctive character. Residents frequently identify the most destructive changes as environmental changes wrought by development and its negative

impacts on cultural heritage features and natural environments, along with changes to popular social spaces. Many of these communities rely on tourism for economic survival and use their distinctive character as a main selling point. The loss or degradation of this character can reduce tourist numbers and associated commercial activity. Preserving features in the landscape that define the character of these towns is one way of ensuring their long-term sustainability, both environmentally and commercially.

Assessing the character of sea change towns

In a report entitled *Meeting the Sea Change Challenge*, Gurran, Squires and Blakely (2005) point out, 'Local character or "sense of place" in smaller coastal communities is being overwhelmed by the scale and pace of new residential and tourism development' (p 7). They note there is 'a lack of effective planning tools to preserve and enhance the attributes of a place that are important to residents' (ibid). In response to this need, I designed a methodological approach for systematically assessing people's responses to landscape features they perceive to either support or detract from a town's character. Over a 10-year period, from 1995 to 2005, I implemented this methodology in nine Australian coastal sea-change towns: Byron Bay in New South Wales, Airlie Beach in central Queensland and seven towns along Victoria's Great Ocean Road. The findings of these studies revealed the importance of conserving natural environments, heritage buildings and socially vibrant public spaces as key defining elements of the character of the coastal towns studied.

These types of character assessments are typically undertaken by planning and design experts (for example, landscape architects and urban planners) whose role is to employ their expert judgement to identify features in the landscape associated with the character of the places under investigation. The aim is to determine which features warrant protection and which might be more adaptable to some extent. The problem with these expert-based character assessments is that the findings often contradict how members of the public construe and use their local environments. Experts are more likely to base their assessments on styles and forms, particularly regarding buildings. In contrast, the lay public tend to base their appraisals more on associational and functional aspects (Hubbard, 1996). The methodology reported in this paper starkly contrasts with the expert-based approach as it relies on community participation in assessing the importance of certain features in the landscape. In Laurajane Smith's (2006) insightful book *Uses of Heritage*, she discusses heritage values as associated not only with physical objects and places but also with the experiences of ordinary people and the significance they give those places and features.

Expert-based approaches are more likely to ignore the emotional bonds, or place attachments, people may have established with certain places and their features. These bonds tend to develop over time as people become increasingly familiar with their everyday surroundings. They can be instrumental in shaping how people experience the character of places. Expert-based assessments typically rely on information from objective sources, reports, photographs, maps and the like, with little or no long-term relationship with the assessed places. In contrast, the approach reported in this paper is more likely to respect assessments based on the perceptions of residents, who are likely to be much more familiar with their local environments and may have established deep emotional bonds with certain places and place features, which are integral to their sense of place. When these *place attachments* (Low and Altman, 1992) are threatened or disrupted due to environmental changes, it can threaten people's sense of continuity and belonging to those places (Brown and Perkins, 1992). Such disruptions can sometimes have profound psychological consequences for individuals who feel their sense of belonging, security and *place identity* (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983) has been threatened. The experts are typically outsiders who do not experience the same sense of belonging and attachment to the places they are assessing as do residents who are insiders. As Relph (1976) suggests in his seminal book *Place and Placelessness*, conflicts can develop

between the place experiences of 'insiders' (for example, the user public) and 'outsiders' (for example, experts).

In my studies, the outsiders were the planners and environmental designers typically engaged in assessing town character. The research focus, however, was on the local communities as insiders. They were involved in all stages of the research process, from identifying landscape features salient to their perceptions of local place character, to helping to determine how and from which vantage points these features should be photographically documented, to evaluating the *degree* to which the places and features in photographs were perceived to be compatible, or not, with the character of the towns under investigation. The assumption here is that members of the user public are the true experts when assessing such an inherently experiential phenomenon as a town's character. The residents are also more likely to be sensitive to changes in their local environment that impact its character. This participatory action research approach (Baldwin, 2012) contrasts with expert-based approaches typically used to conduct character assessment studies because involving the public helps to produce findings that truly reflect the perceptions and concerns of the studied communities.

A few earlier studies employed participatory approaches to explore how residents of small coastal towns perceive their towns and the features in the landscape important in conveying their distinctive characters. Hester (1985, 1990), for example, undertook an interesting study in the small coastal town of Manteo, North Carolina. He identified environmental features integral to the town's 'sacred structure' as perceived by the residents, which he defined as the complex of significant places and social patterns to which the residents had become emotionally attached. The study initially used a community questionnaire to survey residents about the features in the local landscape they felt emotionally attached to and wanted to be preserved in the face of the town's rapid growth. It then used behavioural mapping to identify the activity patterns of the townspeople. Combining these two sets of data revealed 'a powerful social mosaic [that] explained not only how space related to the social patterns, but also how people had invested cultural memory in certain parts of the landscape' (ibid, p 6).

Likewise, a study by Palmer (1983) in the coastal town of Dennis, Massachusetts aimed to explore the town's 'special image' as perceived by the residents. First, a projective mapping method was used to identify salient elements of the local landscape that residents perceived to be important to the town's image. After that, the study used a photo-sorting method to assess the importance of different landscape features in conveying the town's 'special image' from the respondents' perspective.

Both Hester and Palmer used the results in formulating planning controls to guide the future development of each town in ways that protected important character-defining features while limiting those features and associated characteristics that were perceived to detract from the character of these towns.

In another early study, which was not set in a coastal environment, my colleagues and I explored the 'sense of place' of residents of the towns of Mount Macedon and Macedon in the Australian state of Victoria in the aftermath of the 1983 'Ash Wednesday' bushfires (Green, Barclay and McCarthy, 1985). The fires caused extensive environmental damage to these towns and surrounding landscapes and resulted in the deaths of some residents. This study used visitor-employed photography and a range of photo rating, ranking and sorting methods to identify environmental features the residents perceived to be important to their sense of place and that might be selectively maintained, restored or enhanced to help re-establish the unique sense of place of each town and create a framework of valued landscape features the residents were cognitively familiar with to help them adapt psychologically to the post-fire environment.

For the studies reported in this paper, I developed and used a research methodology to involve the residents of nine coastal sea-change communities, in three Australian states, in assessing the character of their town and identifying the features in the landscape they perceived to be integral in conveying that character. In many instances, these features

were threatened due to development associated with tourism and the inward migration of so-called 'sea changers'. The nine towns studied were:

1. Byron Bay, New South Wales
2. Airlie Beach, Queensland
3. Torquay, Victoria
4. Anglesea, Victoria
5. Aireys Inlet, Victoria
6. Lorne, Victoria
7. Apollo Bay, Victoria
8. Port Campbell, Victoria
9. Port Fairy, Victoria.

The methodology I developed for these studies is comprised of various methods derived primarily from environmental psychology (Daniel, 2001). It combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods that I used to systematically identify features in the landscape that residents perceived to be compatible or incompatible with the town's character, and to what degree. Methods producing comparable results were initially used for identifying such landscape features based on residents' perceptions. The Byron Bay study used open-ended questions in a mail questionnaire; in Airlie Beach, face-to-face interviews were used; and for the study of the seven towns along the Great Ocean Road a projective mapping technique administered through mail questionnaires was used in each town. The features identified through these methods were then photographed, and these photographs were used as stimuli to have samples of residents evaluate the *degree* to which the depicted features contributed to or detracted from their town's character. Community photo-rating workshops were used in Byron Bay and the Great Ocean Road towns, while a Photo Q-sort method was used in Airlie Beach for this purpose. (For details about these methods, see Green, 2000b, 2005, 2010.)

Byron Bay, New South Wales

The first study explored how residents of the coastal town of Byron Bay in New South Wales perceived that town's distinctive character and the changes that were degrading that character. Byron Bay is unique in that it is located at Australia's most easterly point of land. At the time of the study (the mid-1990s), the town was experiencing various environmental and social changes driven mainly by tourism and 'sea changers', typically wealthier urbanites relocating there to escape the larger cities. The study aimed, first, to identify the aggregate of landscape features the community thought imbued the town with its distinctive and desirable character. Its second aim was to link specific landscape features with connotative meanings the user public associated with that character.

The study first involved content analysis of 1,880 letters of complaint sent to the local council concerning a proposal to build a Club Med resort in the town. This proposal had drawn widespread opposition, with many community members believing it would diminish the town's character. A mail survey was then sent to a random sample of a quarter of the town's residents and received a 50% (n=318) response rate. The questionnaire asked the respondents to identify those landscape features they felt most strongly defined the town's 'character' and those features and associated characteristics they perceived to be incompatible with that character. Subsequently, two community photo-rating workshops were held at a community hall, drawing a total of 55 participants. At each workshop, 56 photographs of the most frequently mentioned features identified in the mail survey were projected on a screen and participants were asked to rate each one as it appeared. Ratings drew on a battery of semantic differential scales, constructed using words derived from content analysis of open-ended data in the form of the 'Club Med letters' (Green, 2000a) and responses to open-ended questions in the mail survey, which revealed various connotative meanings people associated with the depicted landscape features (Green, 1999).

Figure 1. Palm Grove, a patch of rainforest near Byron Bay's main beach, was rated highly 'in character' (image by author, 1995).

Figure 2. Mountains over Byron Bay, viewed from the town, were perceived to be an integral element of the town's character (image by author, 1995).

The quantitative data derived from the community photo-rating workshops were subjected to a range of multivariate statistical analyses, including Multidimensional Scaling and Multiple Discriminate Function analyses, to link individual landscape features with profiles of connotative meanings. 'Perceptual maps' generated from these analyses graphically illustrated how the community conceptualises the town's character as conveyed by the depicted landscape features.

Natural features, including areas of specific types of vegetation (figure 1), distinctive geological features (figure 2) and wildlife (for example, dolphins), were strongly associated with the town's character. Heritage buildings, including the Byron Bay lighthouse, the

historic railroad station master's house, the post office (figure 3) and other historic buildings, were also strongly associated with the town's character. Various social behaviour settings where groups gathered, such as the weekly outdoor market (figure 4) and certain local pubs, were likewise linked to the town's distinctive and appealing character. The respondents most frequently associated the town's character with being 'beautiful', 'natural', 'distinctive', 'pleasant', 'stimulating' and 'interesting'. Features identified as being 'out of character' include a new shopping arcade, a bland-looking supermarket building, a large, recently constructed housing estate (figure 5), a brick clock tower in the town's centre (figure 6) and other newer structures. Respondents most frequently associated them with being 'boring', 'ugly' and 'ordinary'.

Figure 3. Byron Bay's historic post office building was perceived to be strongly 'in-character' (image by author, 1995).

Figure 4. Byron Bay's outdoor weekly market was perceived to be a strongly character-defining feature of the town (image by author, 1995).

Figure 5. Newly constructed residential housing estate in Byron Bay was perceived to be strongly 'out of character' (image by author, 1995).

Figure 6. The clock tower in the centre of Byron Bay was perceived to be 'out of character' (image by author, 1995).

Airlie Beach, central Queensland

The Airlie Beach study was undertaken to assist the Whitsunday Regional Council in developing a development control plan (DCP) for this small, tourism-intensive, tropical coastal town in Queensland. The primary aim of the DCP was to protect and build on desirable aspects of the town's character as both residents and tourists perceived them. Airlie Beach is located where the Great Barrier Reef comes closest to the mainland and has exquisite views of the sea and nearby Whitsunday Islands – features that make it an attractive destination for tourists and sea change migrants. The planners wanted to understand how the local community and tourists perceived the town's character and what features in the landscape they felt were most responsible for conveying desirable aspects of that character. They would use this information in developing design controls aimed at retaining those features and scenic attributes associated with desirable aspects of the town's distinctive character and prevent those that would detract from it.

The study collected data using various methods to identify those landscape features most strongly associated with supporting or detracting from the town's character (Green, 2000b). In initial face-to-face interviews (n=105), the respondents, both residents and tourists, were asked to describe the character of Airlie Beach as if they were trying to describe it to someone who had never been there before and identify both what they considered to be the positive aspects of the town's character and those elements they associated with loss of that character.

Next, another group of interview respondents (n=60) was asked to indicate seven views on a simple map of the town that best illustrated the range of different landscapes associated with the town's character. They were also asked to indicate where they would photograph these views. The scenes and landscape features that respondents most frequently indicated on the projective maps were then photographed, resulting in 56 photographs.

The photographs based on the respondents' perceptions were combined with photographs of other features the local planners wanted to test because they thought those features might be important to the town's character. Collectively, this set of photographs depicted a wide range of features salient to the town's character, including certain buildings and their associated styles of architecture, signage (figure 7), landscape treatments and plant materials (figure 8), roadside engineering treatments, scenic views of the sea and the nearby islands, among other features.

These photographs were then used as stimuli for Photo Q-sort interviews with a smaller sample of residents (n=21). Their task was to sort the photographs into seven piles, with the number of photographs in each pile prescribed to reflect a normal distribution (three photographs to be placed in piles 1 and 7, seven in piles 2 and 6, eleven in piles 3 and 5 and fourteen in pile 4) as originally used by Pitt and Zube (1987). The first pile represented the landscape features, views and places residents thought were most important in defining the town's character. In contrast, the last pile represented the features and places they perceived to detract from the town's character. The intermediate piles represent gradations between these two poles.

The results revealed how certain landscape features were associated with physical attributes and meanings that collectively conveyed the town's character. While respondents did use 'commercial', 'touristy' and 'changing' in relation to that character, they also described it as having a 'small coastal town feel'. They perceived it as being a 'relaxed', 'pleasant', 'beautiful' and 'friendly' place, qualities that the residents and tourists overwhelmingly wanted to be preserved. To many respondents, the town and the surrounding landscape were a 'tropical paradise'. Reinforcing this image were tropical vegetation at the foreshore and on the surrounding vegetated hillsides, and views over the sea and of the offshore Whitsunday Islands (figure 8), which respondents rated as strongly defining positive aspects of the town's character.

Socially, Airlie Beach was described as a 'party town', an image reinforced by its many bars and nightclubs that mostly young backpacker tourists frequented. However, the diversity of people from different cultures living in and visiting the town was seen as a

positive social aspect of the town's character. In contrast, certain built features were perceived as being 'ugly', with construction and architectural design of 'poor quality' and inappropriate signage (figure 7). Among other features singled out as distracting from the town's character were a lack of high-quality landscape treatments, and views of unsightly parking lots at the foreshore, utility poles and wires. As noted, these findings were used to guide the formulation of a development control plan for Airlie Beach that aimed to protect existing features in the landscape that support desirable attributes of the town's character and discourage those features and attributes perceived to detract from that character.

Figure 7. Bars and various forms of architecture and signage lining Airlie Beach's main street were perceived to detract from desirable aspects of the town's character (image by author, 2000).

Figure 8. Airlie Beach's foreshore and associated landscape features were strongly associated with the town's character (image by author, 2000).

Coastal towns along Victoria's Great Ocean Road

Studies using a similar methodology to that used for the studies discussed above were conducted in seven towns along Victoria's Great Ocean Road (Green, 2010). The Great Ocean Road starts an hour-and-a-half's drive west of Melbourne at the town of Torquay and proceeds along the coast, weaving its way through the small towns of Anglesea, Aireys Inlet, Lorne, Apollo Bay, Port Campbell and (technically beyond the Great Ocean Road) Port Fairy. These towns had experienced various environmental and social changes due to tourism development and population growth, which residents saw as responsible for eroding the distinctive characters of these towns.

These studies began by mailing residents in each town (n=1,344 across all seven towns) a questionnaire that included open and closed questions and a projective map task. The projective mapping exercise asked the respondents to imagine that they would be taking photographs of local landscape features they felt were important in defining the town's character and to indicate the vantage points from which those photographs would be taken on a map included in the questionnaire. They were also asked to indicate those features they thought most detracted from their town's character and locate them on another map. Photographs were then taken of the landscape features respondents most frequently identified as compatible or incompatible with their town's character. This resulted in a set of between 68 and 109 photographs for each town.

These sets of photographs were used as stimuli in photo-rating community workshops (n=324 in total) conducted in each town. Here participants were asked to rate the features in the projected photographs on seven-point bipolar rating scales to measure the degree of perceived 'compatibility' with town character, from strongly compatible (1) to strongly incompatible (7). They also rated those features on three other scales that measure the degree of perceived 'beauty' (beautiful–ugly), 'distinctiveness' (distinctive–ordinary) and 'naturalness' (natural–artificial), which are dimensions of meaning that were found to be highly correlated with perceptions of town character in the Byron Bay study (Green, 1999). Simple mean and standard deviation values were aggregated across the respondent samples for each town, as measures to reflect the degree to which individual features contributed or not to a town's character. In Aireys Inlet, Lorne and Apollo Bay, further data sets were collected using the Photo Q-sort method, which were subjected to Multidimensional Scaling Analysis to produce 'perceptual maps' illustrating the structure of the community's collective image of the character of each of these three towns.

Figure 9. Historic lighthouse keepers house in Aireys Inlet was rated as strongly 'in character' (image with permission from Elahna Green, 2003).

Across all seven towns, respondents identified and evaluated similar features as being salient to the character of their town. Natural features and views of natural environments were consistently the most strongly associated with their town's character. Respondents also perceived some older houses and heritage buildings (figure 9), including vernacular 'beach shacks' (figure 10), along with a few contemporary buildings sited within established indigenous vegetation (figure 11), as highly compatible with the character of their town.

Figure 10. 'Beach shack' in Aireys Inlet was rated strongly 'in character' (image with permission from Elahna Green, 2003).

Figure 11. Contemporary art gallery building in Aireys Inlet was rated strongly 'in character' (image with permission from Elahna Green, 2003).

The photographs used as stimuli in the photo-rating workshops, along with the corresponding mean and standard deviation values associated with each photograph, were shown to smaller groups of residents (n=10 to 12 per town) in a series of focus groups in Torquay, Anglesea and Aireys Inlet. The participants were then asked what they thought were key physical attributes associated with each feature that may have led the respondents in the photo-rating workshops to rate it as either strongly 'in character' or strongly 'out of character'.

The results revealed that built features perceived to be strongly 'in character' were often those screened by vegetation, particularly indigenous vegetation; were relatively small in height and mass; and were often associated with warm, earthy, muted and natural-looking colours and other attributes that made them appear to blend in with their surroundings. In contrast, those elements perceived to be most 'out of character' tended to be newer structures that were seen as too large and 'out of scale'. This perception arose most often for buildings that were visible above the tree canopy or lacked sufficient screening from vegetation (especially indigenous vegetation) and that were visually obvious from roads and open public spaces. Some structures were identified as possessing a hotch-potch of materials, colours and architectural design characteristics that prompted the perception that they were 'out of character' (figure 12). The results were, however, remarkably similar in terms of the types of features associated with the character of the towns studied. This allowed a typology of character-defining landscape features to be defined that can be useful for guiding planning and design actions in similar places that aim to protect aspects of their distinctive and desirable characters. Identifying the physical attributes associated with the in-character and out-of-character features can also inform the design of new buildings and landscapes to better fit into the character of a town and places within it where they are to be sited.

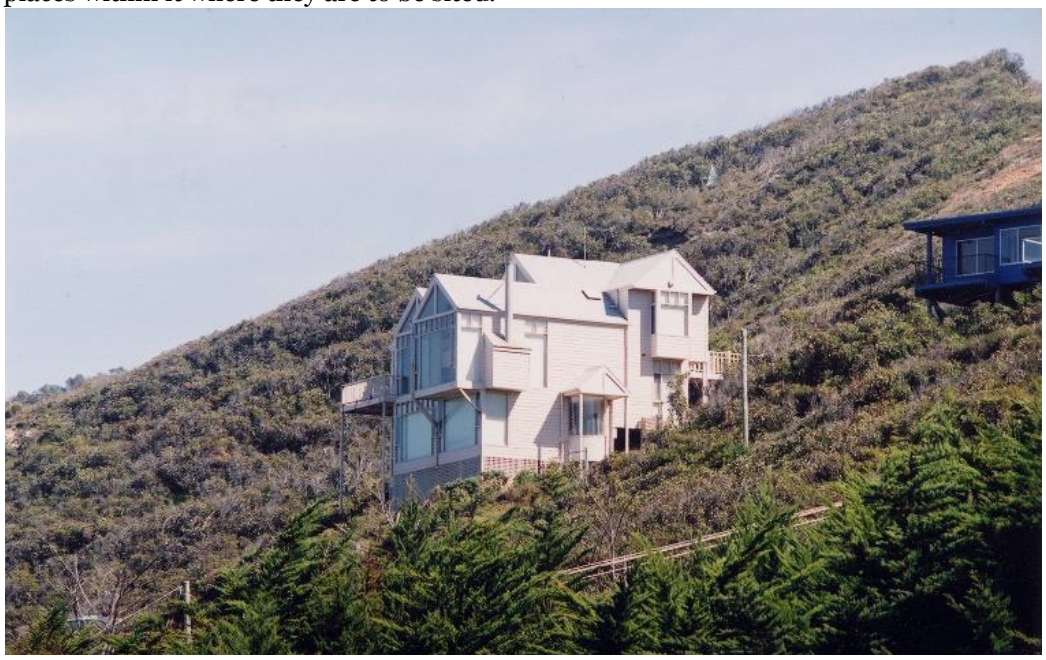


Figure 12. McMansion-type house was rated strongly 'out of character' in Aireys Inlet (image with permission from Elahna Green, 2003).

Applications

The methodological approach discussed in this paper was designed to assess how people living in Australian coastal sea-change communities perceive their town's distinctive character and the changes they feel are responsible for eroding that character. The beauty of this approach is that it gives a voice to the local communities in assessing what features in the landscape they feel are important to protect and those that should be removed or discouraged in the future. Basing urban and landscape planning and design actions on the

findings of these types of studies is far better than relying on the judgements of outsider experts. Many of the features identified as being salient to the character of the towns in these studies would be amenable to planning and design control. It follows that this information would be useful in guiding the formulation of local planning schemes and 'character legislations' aimed at protecting such features, just as the study findings informed the development control plan for Airlie Beach. I have also successfully used this methodology to conduct studies in coastal settlements in other countries that are similarly experiencing environmental changes that threaten their distinctive and appealing characters, demonstrating that this methodology is transferable to other geographic contexts. One example is my study in Ban Chaweng, a coastal town on Koh Samui island, Thailand, where intensive tourism and associated development were rapidly eroding the town's distinctive character as the residents perceived it (Green, 2005).

Since these studies were undertaken 20 or more years ago, environmental changes have, in some instances, further degraded the character of these settlements. During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, many people relocated to coastal towns to escape the cities, resulting in new environmental changes that are likely to have impacted the character of these places. CoreLogic (2021), Australia's largest provider of property data, produced a report stating that 'Thousands of Australians are leaving the city behind and relocating to the country or coastal towns. Internal migration to regional New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland is the highest it has been in ten years.' This underscores the need to protect the distinctive character that many of these towns possess. A better understanding of how environmental changes might impact people's perceptions of the character of these sea change towns will be crucial as this valuable yet intangible resource is often overlooked in the planning and design of these coastal destinations.

The tourism that many Australian coastal communities rely on for economic survival virtually stopped during the pandemic. However, it has since bounced back in many of these towns. Preserving the unique character of these places into the future will be important if they are to maintain their distinctive character as their main tourist attraction. That task has to entail protecting their natural landscapes and heritage-based features that collectively convey that distinctive character and appealing sense of place. Those towns perceived to still 'have a lot of character' will likely remain attractive destinations. In contrast, those whose character is perceived to have been lost or degraded are likely to fall out of favour, leading to negative social, cultural and economic consequences for their local communities.

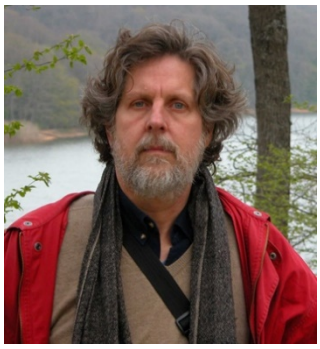
The environmental impacts of climate change, and the actions implemented by governments to confront them, have also accelerated since the studies reported here were undertaken (Gibbs, 2019). These more recent changes have negatively impacted the character of some of the towns studied (Green, 2008). For example, in Lorne, a historical timber pier that residents had identified as a significant character-defining feature in the mid-2000s has since been demolished, and a much larger, shiny metal pier has been built in its place (taller than the original one to better adapt to future sea-level rise). Would this new pier be perceived as highly compatible with the town's character, as the older one had been?

The methodology of my studies provides a useful tool for gathering evidence in formulating and amending local planning schemes aimed at controlling landscape changes to protect the character of the types of towns discussed in this paper. The idea behind this work is to consciously shape future changes in the landscape to make them as sympathetic as possible to the character of the places of concern (see, for example, Galway and Mceldowney, 2006). Further, rather than treating features and associated attributes salient to a town's character as objects frozen in time, the idea is to think creatively about how those attributes and features might be used to inform the design of new landscapes and architectural interventions that have the best chance of being perceived as strongly 'in character' in the future.

Changes in the natural and cultural landscape features salient to the character of the towns in my studies will have happened since I undertook them. More recently, other

studies have been conducted in similar coastal sea-change towns (for example, de Jong, Fuller and Beynon, 2017), which, although they used different methods, came to similar conclusions as those from my own research. However, questions arise as to how the specific towns studied more than 20 years ago have changed and whether the same study today would produce the same results. Are the values of both new and longer-term residents the same now as they were then? Questions as to what caused the environmental changes that degraded the character of these towns in the first place also need to be addressed. Did these changes result from particular planning or design actions, natural processes, changes attributable to climate change, or other forces of change? What planning, design and environmental management strategies could be implemented to control and manage these types of changes to avoid negative impacts on the character of these sea change towns while encouraging changes that would result in positive outcomes in the future? These questions could be answered by revisiting the towns that were the focus of the original studies and replicating them to compare the results from then with now.

About the author



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