Bendigo Hospital therapeutic garden from above (with permission from Mark Laririt, 2019).

LANDSCAPE REVIEW

Interpreting value: Bendigo Hospital Case Study

BRIDGET KEANE, PETER GRANT AND CLAIRE MARTIN

Landscape measurement approaches offer important ways to determine and disseminate project performance. However, varied conceptions of performance highlight subtle differences in underlying values and expectations. By providing a multi-perspective, structured reflection on the Bendigo Hospital Case Study across the collaborators – practitioner, student and academic – this paper opens a space for discussion that allows comparison, overlap and divergent positions to emerge. Aligned themes of 'methodology', 'complexity' and 'timing' provide a common ground for discussion. Collectively, we offer insights and suggestions to contribute towards the future development of landscape performance studies.

Introduction

Landscape projects are diverse in scale, type and impact. Each project can perform many functions and result in a range of benefits across dimensions within and beyond site boundaries. This complexity is seen as fundamental to the profession of landscape architecture. Yet the integrative nature of design does not always lend itself to easy categorisation or clear articulation of the benefits for specific audiences. An evident need exists for rigorous and replicable processes to evaluate the performance of landscape architectural projects that can be of use to the profession, individual practices, clients and the wider community, particularly in the context of climate crisis. Although this type of analysis is important, the caveat is that it does not operate in isolation. Instead, this analysis could be understood in parallel to other means of discussing and disseminating project ideas and design approaches.

The US-based Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) initiated the Case Study Investigation (CSI) Program in 2010. Since then, the Program has acted as a primary conduit for the development of approaches to performance measures in landscape architecture. The funding and support available through the case study framework enable the evaluation of landscape architecture projects, measuring distinct types of performance. The aims and outcomes of the CSI Program are manifold – to inform future practice, create precedent, serve as a training module, and develop collaborations across academia and practice (Landscape Architecture Foundation, 2024a). Responses to it include reflection from academic researchers (Canfield and Yang, 2014), surveying the field and identifying 'major players' (Yang, 2019) and outlining barriers and enablers (Chen, Bowring and Davis, 2021).

All of these responses provide important knowledge about the value of the CSI Program and its approach. As an alternative tactic, this paper uses a reflective practice framework to discuss and compare emerging insights across the researcher–student–practitioner team working on a Case Study Investigation of Bendigo Hospital. It offers an extended reading of the case study process from the inside, with the aim of broadening the ways of discussing an individual case to reflect on the importance of and potential for the CSI Program.

The brief for the AU$630 million Bendigo Hospital project was to deliver world-class health care facilities across a 13-hectare precinct. Located in regional Victoria, Australia, the project aimed to draw on a strong place-based response and engagement process to deliver tangible social, environmental and cultural benefits for patients, staff, visitors and the broader community. Outcomes include a walkable precinct that successfully connects

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retained heritage buildings with new hospital buildings, through legible and equitable access, inviting green through-site links and a high-quality, vibrant public realm, with 46 balconies, green roofs, roof decks, and courtyards. In addition, it has a water-sensitive urban design, structural soils and a significant increase in biodiversity, habitat and urban forest, and celebrates Dja Dja Wurrung and local Chinese culture.

Undertaking the case study revealed diverse value sets among the practitioner, academic and student researchers along with other stakeholders. The constitution of these overlaps and divergences offers a space for thinking about where interests, capabilities and expertise intersect and what barriers exist within performance evaluation of landscape projects. The cardinal question of values arose in multiple contexts and moments along the project timeline and is closely related to any evaluation of performance. Landscape architecture is commonly understood as an integrative or holistic practice that holds values around the 'aesthetic, the social and ecological' (Thompson, 1999, p 7). Yet even values that look similar or shared may differ in their external or internal points of reference or accepted forms of evidence.

The three kinds of values Thompson identified overlap partly with the performance measures outlined in the benefit categories of the CSI Program. In this way, performance assessment is already aligned to underlying values and is constrained by the type of benefits the CSI Program explicitly works to – the social environmental and economic benefits. These are then aligned to project aims, and are further narrowed by identifying what is measurable in the project and what is possible within the timeframe.

Approach

To work across these values and intersections, we offer a structured reflection across three perspectives, one from each collaborator – practitioner, student and academic. This approach is situated within a reflective research approach where the 'doing' of the work itself is a form of research and can make a contribution to disciplinary knowledge, with the understanding that the act of transforming implicit into explicit knowledge requires translation through inter-related processes of situating, reflecting and projecting. It involves paying 'attention to the system of knowing-in-practice and to reflection-in-action itself' (Schön, 2017, p 282).

Each position is reflected and discussed through the inter-related themes of methodology, complexity and timing. The themes give agency to each perspective as a process of collective meaning-making. Each was generated through a discussion of the recurring factors that influenced the success of the case study for all three collaborators and together these themes were deployed as a framework. This approach enabled the collaborators to 'record and respond to intuitive instincts about how to progress their practice as they engage with new challenges generated by research' (Candy, 2019, p 241). The themes of methodology, complexity and timing operate as a form of classification to 'produce new knowledge by sorting and structuring data into a system of organization, using typical properties, patterns, behaviors, or themes' (Deming and Swaffield, 2011, p 126).

The three themes emerged from the process of the case study as well as through reflection on the findings. The following are select examples from the findings of the case study that ground the reflective themes in case study outcomes (Keane and Grant, 2022).

- **Methodology.** While we undertook a mixed-methods approach to the case study as a whole, each benefit had its own specific method. For example, observation of the therapeutic garden revealed it offered space for a range of activities, with seven activity types noted over six observation periods across two weeks in July. This finding emphasised the importance of using a combination of approaches.
- **Complexity.** Findings on the social impact of the project revealed the complexity of the case study as it operated in complicated private–public and demographic contexts. One workaround we found was to analyse publicly available documents. In this way, we could register that the project had economic benefits such as creating

4.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs to maintain the hospital landscape. In addition, we could demonstrate an increase in presentations by Indigenous patients and a subsequent increase in Indigenous liaison staff from 0.8 to 3 FTE.

- **Timing.** One of the environmental benefits we found in the case study was that the project saved 54 million litres of potable water from 2018 to 2021 by using harvested rainwater for irrigation and some building systems. This finding emphasised the impact of timing in the study because both lower-than-average rainfall and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the reduced water use.

The first purpose of this multivalent approach to reflection is to acknowledge and communicate the various positions of the team members and their unique interpretations of the case study research and outcomes. A second purpose is to identify areas of both alignment and difference, rather than to synthesise and foreshadow a single view. As component parts, these different positions offer insight into the values that underpin each one and the skill set that each team member enables or shares. In this work, we aim to surface and discuss common values and divergent skill sets and to consider how understanding their qualities could enable a more intentional deployment – suggesting potentials for future case studies at the nexus of landscape architectural practice and research.

Practitioner perspective

Methodology – partnerships and accountability

From a practitioner perspective, post-occupancy evaluation is sometimes a requirement and often an activity we undertake ourselves. The Bendigo Hospital project was evaluated in other ways, including by the Office of the Victorian Government Architects, through a wellbeing research project and by WorkSafe. However, the opportunity to partner with RMIT University collaborators, and for them to undertake this kind of formal post-occupancy evaluation, was valuable – in part, because these collaborators were not involved in the design, and the client did not employ them to undertake the research.

But although that independence is valuable, it is also distancing. Because the research is retrospective, as designers we were not able to use this research evaluation methodology and academic perspective in a more generative, collaborative way to inform the design process and the design itself. So, while the practitioner may respond to a design brief and to user or contextual requirements and may set the project aims from an evidence-based design approach, the lack of a formal early engagement in defining targeted benefits limits the ability to communicate some of the potential value of the design.

As the design progresses through the various design development and documentation stages, such an evaluation framework could be useful to minimise value engineering and maintain design integrity. Similarly, if the intent to embed this type of research had been considered earlier, more baseline data could have ben collated at the start of the project to help to demonstrate benefit uplift more clearly.

As a result of our involvement in this project as well as profession-wide project requirements to achieve various certification standards (for example, Green Star and WELL Building Standard) or to elect to use performance indicator tools (for example, the Pathfinder or Green Factor tool), we are incorporating evaluation benefit frameworks into our process. Where possible, we also base them on the performance series topics and sustainable features.

Complexity – performance and intention

To measure performance, you need a clearly articulated intent to measure against. Moreover, that design intent needs to be communicated to all parties across the life of the project. The governance structures of projects do not always support the communication of that intent over time and across complex stakeholder groups. Moreover, seldom is that intent communicated directly to all users.

How could a more embedded research methodology support a more iterative and incremental approach to enshrine and assess landscape performance to help educate users – whether they are staff, patients or visitors – on the true value of the landscape? How might the research methodology also better reflect the complexity of projects, in particular the interdependencies of disciplines that are involved in correlating good outcomes with good briefs and integrated design teams?

While we see a growing evidence base for the benefits of landscape and green infrastructure, many barriers remain in place and are seldom the focus of research or evaluation. Complex projects like Bendigo Hospital face barriers from inception through to procurement, use and ongoing operation. Developing a methodology that identifies these barriers could help inform projective solutions to overcoming them. When as practitioners we evaluate our designs, we evaluate not just what was built but what could have been. To realise the potential of this research in the context of climate change, alongside our successes we need to start to share our failures and to understand both the benefits and at times the disbenefits of built environment design. Developing new tools and methods for overcoming barriers and preventing adverse outcomes that we can share at scale and at speed would be invaluable.

Timing – a governance condition

Governance matters because the living dimension of living infrastructure establishes over time and, like all infrastructure, it needs management and maintenance. It matters because it can enshrine the rights and responsibilities of both users and owners beyond contractual relationships. Time was a major determining factor for the case study in that it limited engagement and access, which had a reductive impact on findings. Research programmes need to factor in the capacity for more time for complex projects with complex cohorts.

The timing of research – so that it occurs many years after a design was conceived – re-contextualises project goals and ambitions. As a consequence, what may have once been perceived to be ambitious, over five years later may have become business as usual. As construction costs escalate, we are seeing a retreat from more ambitious targets at the exact time we need to be meeting and exceeding those targets. So any cost analysis needs to capture that value. The best way to communicate a correlation between quality, sustainability features and costs would be to align budgets to landscape scope and to provide a 'per metre square' budget. Ideally the Landscape Performance Series website would also incorporate some sort of inflation calculator and currency converter.

Reflection – a landscape value proposition

Evidence-based design is now more important than ever before because of climate change – as we work together to design transitions in urban and infrastructural systems to address the risks to lives, livelihoods and the ecosystems that we are part of. Central to this evidence base is the notion of landscape performance. We now regularly draw on the metrics and indicators from the landscape performance guide to inform the development of green cover or infrastructure strategies and targets, whether the purpose is to use it for design guidance or to inform planning recommendations, to deliver improved social, environmental, cultural or economic benefits, or to interrogate comparative value of interventions particularly in relation to urban heat, water use and energy performance.

Instead of being behind an academic publisher pay wall, the Landscape Performance Series case studies are readily accessible to practitioners, which is essential to communicate the value of design and specifically of landscape architecture to other built environment professionals, prospective clients and collaborators. This research supports a move away from western concepts of health that are preoccupied by pathogenesis – an understanding of what leads to the development of disease – and towards salutogenic landscape approaches that include the causal factors we know help to achieve wellness, or optimal health. The findings highlight the indicators of sustainable development, and the changes that we need to make in design and construction methods and material selection.

These sustainable features are many of the determinants of the adaptive capacity of our cities. Further, they foreground the need to not simply mitigate adverse outcomes and impacts, but to regenerate landscapes so that they make positive contributions to their ecosystems and their social, cultural and economic contexts.

A summary of potentials emerge from a practitioner perspective.

- The CSI Program could be prospectively designed or operate in parallel to project timelines.
- Barriers could be integrated into research approach and contribute to findings.
- Capacity for more time for complex projects with complex cohorts could be factored in.

Student perspective

Methodology – transferability

Undertaking a landscape performance review through the CSI Program as a student facilitates professional development in a range of areas. The LAF team actively manages the project's structure, providing guidance and regular feedback on the research team's work. Although the student does work closely with the LAF team and supervisors within the structure of the project, there is also a largely self-driven component that pushes the student to develop the skills needed to undertake post-occupancy research. From a student perspective, finding the correct balance between working independently and the regular check-ins with the academic supervisor and LAF coordinator is key to the development of these skills, which are one of the most valuable outcomes of taking part in the project.

When entering the workforce, many students experience a disconnect between university education and real-world practice as they encounter differences between conceptually motivated university projects and the realities of delivering real-world landscape projects on time and under budget. Arguably, this is a broad phenomenon not limited to landscape architecture. Participating in the CSI Program, however, allows landscape architecture students to develop practical skills and a transferrable methodology that private practice is increasingly recognising for its importance and value.

While many students who enter the workforce may be experts in Adobe Suite or Lumion, they are often only adding to a skills base already present in the workplace. Equipping students with the ability to undertake post-occupancy assessments with a clear methodology responds to a knowledge gap in the industry and provides one way of introducing and disseminating these essential skills within the landscape industry. While this is already known to be a broader goal of the project, it is one area with the potential for further opportunities.

Complexity – creative opportunities

Another key part of the project is that it promotes the development of novel approaches to measuring landscape benefits, allowing students to pursue specific areas of interest. Certainly the structure of the CSI Program could also be perceived as pushing teams towards more straightforward and established approaches to measuring these benefits. Examples of such approaches include measuring the areas of hard surface to calculate potential stormwater capture, and recording the number of trees retained on site to calculate embedded carbon. However, the way landscape benefits are measured should be closely related to the type and complexity of the focus project.

In the case of Bendigo Hospital, a range of important environmental concerns drove aspects of the design, which should not be discounted. Because Bendigo Hospital is a public health facility, measuring the environmental benefits seemed disconnected from the project's true goals so the areas that became the focus of our research were socially and health oriented. Through this lens, rather than using clear and established measurement techniques the research team was challenged to consider how to gather meaningful data that would provide insight into whether the project met these goals.

From a student perspective, the development of these measurements that related to the complex nature of the outcomes gave the most room to be creative and was one of the more interesting and challenging aspects in the project. For example, like many connections between landscape and social outcomes, demonstrating the relationship between the increased presentation of Indigenous patients and the construction of a specialised Indigenous services courtyard is extremely nuanced and complex.

When considering these kinds of social outcomes, we found that an effective approach was to draw on anecdotal evidence to complement measurements or statistical data, which reinforced the direct connection. Measuring such outcomes required unique approaches for each individual benefit. The Program offers an opportunity to push teams towards developing new methodologies and approaches, rather than reinforcing existing ones.

Timing – experimentation

While interrogating new methodologies for measuring benefits was a highlight, the timing of the project became a limitation. During the later stages of the project, it was necessary to discard several key lines of interest because we simply ran out of time. Two linked factors contributed to this difficulty. First, navigating the hospital management structure and the public–private partnership was complex. Second, the timelines that operate in settings like universities and hospitals differed from that of the LAF case study project.

Even with a range of helpful contacts within the hospital, the complexity of navigating the hospital management structure (which was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic at the time) made it difficult for the research team to have any interactions with hospital staff or patients during the span of the project. While there was the potential for these opportunities to occur, more time would have been required to make them happen. For example, the research team had initially planned to undertake a staff survey to understand wellbeing among both staff and patients. We had intended to use the results of this survey in conjunction with publicly accessible health data to highlight a link between the landscape and specific health and wellbeing outcomes for staff and patients. Without the evidence of the experience of staff and patients, however, it was difficult to directly link the landscape interventions to the specific positive health outcomes we knew existed, and these lines of enquiry had to be discarded.

On reflection, undertaking this type of research over a relatively short period was overly optimistic. The combination of the strict CSI Program timeline and the limitations in hospital resources meant conducting any survey was always going to be challenging. Finding a balance between the more established measurement techniques and more experimental measurements is important. To address this issue, the CSI Program might provide flexible timelines that better support longer research periods and facilitate alternative methodologies.

From a student perspective, key areas that could be a focus in the future are to:

- introduce post-occupancy research skills into the landscape architecture industry more broadly through students with these skills entering the workforce
- develop new and innovative approaches to measuring landscape benefits, rather than repeating existing methodologies
- explore how varying timelines could be more specifically implemented on different project types and for diverse research types.

Academic perspective

Methodology – multiple modes

From an academic perspective, the CSI Program provided a solid foundation of support for performance evaluation research. The LAF's clear sequencing, established processes, feedback loops and exemplars operated as a carefully scaffolded research framework. This approach aligns with the stated aims of the Program as a training mechanism for academics, students and practice and reflects a traditional research process and approach.

Conducting this type of research in an institution that champions design research generated an interesting interface and some friction between institutional norms and the CSI Program. Design research processes of finding the right questions to ask, starting in the middle, and developing and discussing spatial knowledge and performance were somewhat put to the side in this project. At the same time, the experience opens a potential line of enquiry for this type of research to be inflected by institutional or research norms and encourage multivalent understandings of qualitative and quantitative value. For example, research foregrounding spatial intelligence could offer alternative means of evaluation and discernment of performance. By considering and expanding discipline-specific approaches (namely, design research, graphical analysis and spatial analysis), the design approach in the project itself could engender or imply related forms of performance measurement. This design-integrated approach could also address a known barrier revealed in a recent 'pulse check' by the LAF (Landscape Architecture Foundation, 2024b) that indicated, among other issues, that designer discomfort with framing landscape architecture via quantitative metrics reduces uptake of case study approaches.

Complexity – research processes

The project context was of multiple stakeholders across private and government domains. Because of this complexity, the study had to be navigated in real time against tight time constraints and the accessibility (or at times inaccessibility) of stakeholders. A private entity was the interface between the research team and the hospital and, while it was highly facilitative, the arrangement resulted in an additional layer of communication and negotiation. It is also important to note that the LAF as a funding body for the research is a key element of success, providing further verification and weight to the outcomes that enabled negotiation with stakeholders. This indicates a potential for longer-term collaborations and the opportunity to establish performance measures from the perspective of different stakeholders with varied value positions.

Ethics processes were completed within the university and were also required by the Bendigo Hospital research team through similar but distinct processes and timelines. Though technically the therapeutic garden was a 'public' space, many different users in various capacities operated there. Observational studies found that patient transport and patient carers extended into the garden and the space acted as an auxiliary to the hospital buildings. This was an interesting finding, but ethical limits on interacting with patients directed the research approach towards other types of investigation in the space.

The impact of COVID-19 in terms of 'survey fatigue' and the limited availability of hospital staff were further considerations, as was the issue of cultural burden on Indigenous staff. It was also important to consider if the inherent research methodology is appropriate for a diverse range of cultural groups. Stephenson (2008, 2010) offers models for incorporating cultural values and for thinking through Indigenous viewpoints. Views that may not accept or be easily captured by western models of analysis could then be a more fundamental underpinning in future studies. Combined, these issues precipitated a shift in research mode to one of 'detective work' that identified publicly available data or information to establish links that could demonstrate social landscape benefits.

Timing – aligned to performance

The CSI Program was timed to work with United States institutional and university timeframes. Working to this timing was not difficult and the CSI team provided guidance and support for it. However, it did open the question of timing and an opportunity to consider variations to the training that the Program provided. In 2024 the first round of CSI projects supported by the Landscape Foundation of Australia will be investigated. As an Australasian variant, this Program will allow for differences in institutional and student study timeframes that are more aligned with the southern hemisphere. It could also support the evaluation of regional and rural projects, as often metropolitan sites are prioritised due to their accessibility.

There is further potential to expand on the approach by considering timing (duration, location and reoccurrence) as a critical design element of the study. This would involve informing and designing the whole study in relation to what is being measured rather than having a non-arbitrary, but perhaps not revelatory limit. In this way each project or landscape would have its own research timeframe that is appropriate for seeing when benefits become visible and thus measurable.

In summary, three potentials that emerged from the Program from an academic perspective are to:

- increase the scope for design-research or other integrated methods
- widen the range of stakeholder perspectives and conceptions of performance to identify a greater variety of benefits
- consider time as a primary organising device for research, within the project and in accordance with other timelines that are related to what is being measured.

Conclusions

Table 1 presents a matrix of the three reflections across the themes that we have considered, revealing subtle differences in orientations and experiences of the CSI Program. Both overlaps and divergences are observable. The practitioner emphasised integration of case study processes in project and deliverable phases; the student saw the Program as a driver for a research trajectory to transition from study into practice; and the academic focused on research approaches.

Table 1. Comparison of thematic reflections from three different perspectives

Theme	Practitioner	Student	Academic
Methodology	Retrospective nature of the CSI Program means that opportunities are missed.	Post-occupancy research skills can be introduced into the landscape architecture industry more broadly via students entering the workforce.	Potential exists to increase scope for design-research or other integrated methods.
Complexity	Barriers could be integrated into research approach and contribute to findings.	Develop new and innovative approaches to measuring landscape benefits, rather than repeating existing methodologies.	Widen the range of stakeholder perspectives and conceptions of performance to identify a greater variety of benefits.
Timing	The research programme needs to factor in capacity for more time for complex projects with complex cohorts.	Explore how varying timelines could be more specifically implemented on different project types and for diverse research types.	Consider time as a primary organising device for research, within the project and in accordance with other timelines that are related to what is being measured.

From all three perspectives, the case study approach and experience were largely beneficial and the team's reflections overall focused on potential modifications. In a collective set of conclusions, a summary of insights has been developed related to each theme to propose the future development of case study research in landscape architecture.

1. **Methodology.** Embed simultaneous or responsive research processes into project lifecycles to improve methodologies and offer opportunities beyond the life of the project.
2. **Complexity.** Research known barriers and incorporate them into the case study design from the outset. As a starting point, Chen and colleagues (2021) identified the two key barriers to evaluation as funding and the potential for negative evaluations, and suggested 'supportive mechanisms' to address these limitations.

3. **Timing.** Foreground time as a crucial element to research design. Addressing timing in relation to landscape processes, project partners and living lifecycles will improve the veracity and type of benefits evaluated.

Some further insights surfaced through the reflection process.

- Having a student on the team as an intermediary situated in both academic and practice realms, sometimes simultaneously, is of benefit and provides further research insights.
- Educational institutions can act as multipliers for the Program through internships or by embedding researchers in practice.
- Evaluation has the potential to be reflexive and embedded in design and delivery processes.
- Using a reflective practice research approach allows for multiple perspectives and offers a model to refine insights from collaborative projects.

These suggestions are the collective outcome of a live collaboration enabled through writing this paper. They offer some ideas for developing ways to recognise, understand, assess and communicate the multifaceted values of landscape architectural projects within case study research approaches.

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