
YOUTH AFFAIRS

Reshaping the focus on young people and public space

The beach, mall, amusement parlours and shopping centres are public spaces regularly used by young people. But the presence of youth and the activities they engage in whilst using public space has generated considerable debate specifically directed towards youth behaviour. Subsequently various publications have responded by highlighting the importance for many youth to create space of their own, identified issues relating to social and economic exclusion, stereotypical notions of youth behaviour and discussed the often conflictual relationship between young people and authorities such as the police and security guards.

Hanging Out — Negotiating Young People's Use of Public Space recognises these issues but highlights the debate from a youth crime prevention perspective. Based on the full report, the summary volume commissioned by National Crime Prevention (formerly known as the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime) has proposed a strategic framework for youth crime prevention designed to inform the development and management of public space. Essentially this encourages the adoption of a strategic approach to youth crime issues with regard to public space.

Nine key elements are provided in this framework which were developed by consultants on the basis of research into the social changes affecting young people, consultations with youth and interviews with key decision makers. Some of the elements cover the recognition of youth needs with respect to accessing and using public space and the need for facilities and services provided for young people to be 'youth friendly'. Planning and development strategies should include young people through consultation, and specific training courses for police and private security to reduce confrontational interactions with young people would ensure the proper management of public space.

The volume covers the social context which shapes young people's

use of public space and the various ways in which different groups of young people use space. Interviews with rural youth, older users of public spaces and architects, planners and designers are also included.



Consideration of the broader social changes shaping young people's use of public space is thought to be important for effective youth crime prevention strategies. The social status of young people and their need to be noticed by peers and the wider community is considered but more emphasis is placed on specific aspects of youth crime and how these directly relate to the way young people use public space. These considerations mainly refer to youth visibility in public places such as shopping centres and their own neighbourhoods which inevitably leads to easy detection if they are to commit an offence. This section also deals with government intervention approaches for dealing with young people and conflicts which arise from the use of public space. While three major types of intervention are outlined, the developmental and accommodating approach are favoured because these offer a more 'youth friendly' perspective on youth crime prevention. The coercive approach is questioned based on the effectiveness of such interventions as youth curfews.

The need to explore developmental and accommodating approaches to youth crime prevention is also shown to be suggested by young people themselves. Consultations which have occurred across Australia have found

many youth are aware of the issues relating to their use of public space, of the need for facilities which are 'youth friendly' and the desire to have a say in how public spaces are used.

Interviews conducted in Mildura, Victoria and in Darwin and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory found youth shared similar perspectives on many issues related to their use of public space. Young people spoke of the spaces they used, ways of dealing with boredom, safety issues, racial stereotypes and relationships with police and security — the latter featuring prominently in the response given by indigenous youth. For the purpose of the interviews young people were categorised as rural youth and indigenous youth.

Interviews with older users of public space were also undertaken in the Mildura region and the Northern Territory and indicated concern about the language young people use and behaviour thought to be anti-social. Interviews conducted with architects, planners and designers represented a cross-section of the planning and development industry in Australia and focused on the degree to which these individuals understood young people's use of public space and the associated issues.

While highlighting established issues regarding young people and public space, the summary volume does reshape the focus of the debate from the perspective of youth crime prevention. Also contained in the volume are selected quotes from young people, architect and planners from the public and private sector and also security guards. No quotes from police, however, have been included.

For further information on the methodology of research used, full details of the interviews conducted and final conclusions made, reference to the full report is required.

Copies of the summary report can be obtained from Dominic Rogers, National Crime Prevention, fax 02 6273 0913.