

EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN URBAN PARK MANAGEMENT

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At the outset I want to spend a few minutes developing the theme of this paper.

During the 1960s I was fortunate enough to be a member of a New Zealand International Sporting team visiting an East African Country. Being interested in my profession I enquired as to what was available to see and hear in the way of Parks and Park Management. To my delight I was invited along to the annual meeting of the East African Park Directors. At this meeting an amusing incident occurred. The meeting was being asked to authorise the engagement of an ecologist. One old-style and slightly deaf member objected on the grounds that it was unnecessary and unwise, to let an ecologist into the park; on finding himself unsupported he conceded that it might be acceptable but pressed for the introduction of a pair, in the hope that they might breed. This type of thinking is also prevalent on Park Boards, Administrations, Local Government Council throughout Australia, Adelaide being no exception. There are plenty of local examples to illustrate a bewildering lack of knowledge and Education in the field of Park Management.

(Incidentally, there is a sequel to the story of the ecologist - a young married Ecologist was duly recruited and not many months later the Park Director sent the trustee a telegram with the joyful news "Ecologists have bred.")

Australia is now I believe 'reaping the whirlwind' of an educational programme emphasising academic attainment instead of more vocationally oriented programmes following a broad general education. In this respect Australia is in a similar situation to that which prevailed in American Education some few years ago. The educational merry-go-round of the B.S., M.S., Ph.D. syndrome which led to a glut of academics without jobs.

From what educational background does or should the urban park manager come? Ideally he will have a broad educational background in school followed by a vocationally oriented post-secondary or tertiary education in Amenity Horticulture or Parks and Recreation Administration emphasising plant knowledge - a rare bird in Australia, but in Britain, New Zealand and the U.S.A. a fairly common one.

It has become apparent to me, the necessity for a policy of structuring careers in the fields of Amenity Horticulture, Parks, Park Management, not only in South Australia but Australia wide. Taking an example; Prior to 1971, there was not a single chair of Horticulture or Department of Horticulture in any four year degree granting institution in the entire country. That state of affairs, has at least been improved with the establishment of the chair of Horticulture at Sydney University in 1971. Since then, some little progress has been made in the other states and latterly in South Australia at the technological and technical levels: but overall, progress has been slow, response spasmodic and with no apparent pre-determined policy. In Australia the fields of Amenity Horticulture, and Parks and Recreation administration have never been well catered for educationally.

As a New Zealander I pose a very relevant question. Why has Australia alone, of all the highly developed countries, missed out in this way and why does it hold such an all embracing discipline as Horticulture in such low academic esteem? While New Zealand is able to sustain degrees in Horticulture courses in Environmental Horticulture, Parks and

Recreation in two Universities (Massey and Lincoln) and have large numbers of Horticultural students throughout the country studying full-time or part-time for their degree or National Diploma of Horticulture, all of which are able to be absorbed into the workforce. It is also worth noting that some Scandinavian countries, Norway in particular, offers greater educational facilities for the young Horticulturist than does Australia. The type of Horticultural, Parks and Recreational Education that has evolved in New Zealand has been very successful, because the two major agricultural faculties in the country have strong Horticulture Departments, where courses are available from a Certificate to a Ph.D. Add to this a vibrant National Diploma of Horticulture run by the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture and you have a very healthy environment in which this type of education flourishes. The first educative requirement is perhaps to define more precisely for the public and particularly for the legislators what Amenity Horticulture, Parks and Recreation means. It is Amenity Horticulture (i.e. commercial Horticulture for Parks Urban and National and Botanic Gardens) which forms the core or basis for Urban Park Management, such a course needs to expose the student to and contain the fundamentals of Landscape Construction and Design, Plant Propagation, Nursery Management, Arboriculture, Turf Culture, Parks and Amenities, Park Administration and Management.

The need now in Australia is really urgent; a crash programme is called for. With the ever growing interest in environmental planting and with the rapid land development spreading out from cities along the coasts - the increasing call for Parks, and Public Open Space Development will continue. The Amenity Horticulturist and Park Manager have a vital role to play in the long-term development and management of the landscape

At this juncture let me pose two more relevant questions:

1. In terms of Recreational impact what would be the effect upon Adelaide's Urban Park system if there was an energy crisis tomorrow?
2. At the present rate of development what will be Adelaide's requirement for Public Open Space development by the year 2000? and Where will it come from?

Courses in Amenity Horticulture, Parks and Recreation administration are of recent origin. In Australia, the attitude and argument has been in the past "it is all a question of relative values" - Put another way, these subjects have not been large scale earners of dollars, and as a result, that has not been enough to justify them being subjects in their own right in any University. It is no wonder then that in these fields very little has been done. As a result, what value are you to put on the Australian environment? Where are these people? Not just the putters in of plants and the mowers of grass - important though these people are - but the person who can plan, organise, evaluate and maintain, who can commission and work with the landscape architect; who knows his plants and understands them; who is a plantsman and understands the technique of growing from propagation to maturity. A person who can apply new technology to old problems and at the same time has been trained in management to run an efficient City Parks Department, or large scale Urban Park. These people are found amongst the young people in most countries and there is no reason why this should not be the case in Australia. They are, however, most unlikely to be amongst those who would normally be looking towards agriculture or its immediately related sciences or technologies. They need to be separately recruited and motivated and they do not arise in significant numbers from final year electives in common-core courses.

Publicity must be directed towards careers advisors, schools and parents. Having publicised the opportunities, one must have the courses in which to direct these youngsters.

There is one great advantage in being the last of the developed countries to introduce comprehensive courses in Amenity Horticulture and Park Management. At least you can look round, examine the successful centres, their courses and avoid the many mistakes and failures - that are only too obvious for those who want to look. There is always a danger when starting a new field of education to be over enthusiastic with the result that courses proliferate and fragment making it difficult to maintain numbers and justify adequate staff and facilities. Whilst appreciating the geographic and political problems that arise in the planning of Amenity type education in Australia, two basic factors must be faced.

1. There are not adequate numbers of suitably trained and experienced staff in Australia - it is not the easiest of tasks to get suitable people from abroad.
2. Scarce resources of trained man-power and expensive practical facilities need to be concentrated - not scattered - at least until the whole thing is off the ground. Such courses must build up status and this is not done by a fragmented course structure.

There is always an inherent danger in Parks Administration Courses divorced from contact with other Horticultural specialisms in that they can easily become sterile. Administration is one of the easiest courses to design (though not necessarily to teach) and relatively easy to staff. Such courses can easily become inadequate in plant knowledge. Whatever administrators may say to the contrary there is a need to have plantsmen in high administrative posts to ensure the best environmental results. To the keen, aspiring individual there are several avenues he may take.

The first level is the training and education given in courses at the basic and advanced Certificate level either full-time or part-time conducted by Colleges of Further Education or Tertiary Institutions.

This level will include the craftsmen who in this day and age, must also be technicians. These people will form the basic labour force in the city Parks and Garden Department and because of high wages, they must be competent. Surprisingly, few employers in either the public or the private sector pay sufficient attention to 'on the job training' of young employees or really take time to get them motivated. It isn't enough to send them to a day or evening class, and let them pick up their knowledge from the fellows they are working with. The ideal is a training scheme, both at College and on the job, coupled with a wage structure and a clear chance for the exceptional student to advance beyond the craft level. Because of vast distances to travel in Australia, a short introductory residential course is a good method of motivating young people, where they are told about the career, its prospects, educational opportunities; it is both an orientation and a stimulation. This form of training introduction has been accepted and found successful, for all new entrants into the Parks and Playing Fields Service in England and Wales.

The second level or tier of education is that of Technician, Supervisor Manager - a type of Junior Management. The type of course includes the post certificate, Associate Diploma, Diploma range. It is at this level I believe the Parks movement in Australia needs an immediate

injection. The Associate Diploma course needs very careful planning. It should not be a watered down version of an Applied Science Diploma, or Degree Course. There is always the risk if the two courses are offered - at the same institution, the lower one becomes regarded as second best and the students as academic "misfits or chuck-outs". But the Associate Diploma Course if properly designed can give young people every bit as good a career in Park Management as the graduate. In fact, on leaving College, he may well be of more immediate value than the graduate.

Training in this course must include realistic practical experience. How can this best be obtained? There are three avenues:

1. By a year's practical experience in Nursery or Parks Department prior to the commencement of the course. This is often a salutary and maturing experience and in many ways, produces a better student. Is it too much to ask of young people these days? Not if the experience is clearly built into the overall educational and training pattern with the young employee being encouraged and stimulated and being assured of some on-the-job practical instruction.
2. A method whereby a further period of practical employment, interspersed during college training, which is loosely integrated with the course. This is the sandwich course system which has been so successive in the Agricultural and Horticultural fields in the United Kingdom and in Technical Education in New Zealand. At Associate Diploma level the sandwich period is best at a full year, during which time the student remains under the tutorial guidance of the College. In the final year, the student is mature enough to undertake training in responsibility.
3. By contact with and exposure to a teaching department that has good practical facilities where certain techniques can be demonstrated and taught realistically. This is vital from the motivation view point, not only for student but staff as well. Technological teaching needs close liaison and a two-way dialogue between staff, the industry or profession, with the college being the centre of interest. By doing this, the course should produce people who are eminently suited to the profession, or industry in which they are seeking employment - there need be no "education gap".

Courses at this third level must have an identity and independence of their own from the beginning. I find it difficult to see quite where the three year Diploma fits in between the Associate Diploma (if improved) and the Degree. There may well be a place for the Diplomat in the field of Natural Resource Management, but they may find themselves in competition with graduates. In my experience in Australia from what I have seen, the demand at the moment in the Parks field is for the more technically oriented Associate Diplomat. Whether this maturing experience is given to the student or not, the course itself must be planned in close collaboration with the professions and industries which it will serve. This means administration, man management and business methods must play a prominent part in the syllabus.

Quote: "Four year college courses in Horticulture do not in themselves prepare students to enter business as a full-fledged nurseryman" - Quotes the American Nurseryman.

The obvious answer is 'why not?' If all the resources of modern

education and technology cannot produce such a person in three or four years of intensive effort - something is very wrong. Are we still dominated, by the traditional idea that everyone undergoing a University Degree course is a potential Ph.D. and destined for a career in research? Should we not consider first the individual needs of students in two, three, four years' time and secondly, the needs and demands of the community by consulting with those outside the academic field who can help us make such a judgement? Is there much creative thought given to syllabus structure or are we satisfied with a traditional approach? In any course designed to produce people for the area of Park Management, cross fertilization with other disciplines is important. Take the example of Landscape Architecture. The facilities of a good Horticultural Department are of enormous help in the training of Landscape Architects. It is perhaps the easiest of the environmental disciplines to set up and, as a consequence, have mushroomed up with gay abandon around the world: frequently with little thought being given to any real involvement of the students to living plant material with quite obvious results from the finished products from some of the landscape schools. There is no doubt about the huge potential for growth and development in the areas of Park Management and Amenity Horticulture. Factors in support of this potential are:

- (a) An increasing awareness in recent years by Australians of the environment surrounding them;
- (b) A trend towards shorter working hours; and more leisure time;
- (c) An increasing demand for recreational and leisure facilities;
- (d) A desire to get out and travel more.

With 80-85% of Australia's population now living an urban life, with its growing pollution, noise, traffic congestion and other forms of strain, its impersonality and divorcement from daily contact with the soil; no wonder a yearning exists in hundreds of thousands of people to 'seek nature' through some form of outdoor recreation: with a growing demand for more public open space in Adelaide, increased pressure from developers for building, and a pending energy crisis. The period now to the year 2000 will be a critical one for Adelaide and indeed Australia. As a result, I believe Education must and will play a significant role in the Park Management.

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A D D E N D U M

Listed below are examples (in no set order) of subjects considered suitable for inclusion in a two year Associate Diploma Course in Urban Park Management or Parks and Recreation. The course being based on the sandwich course system.

FIRST YEAR SUBJECTS:

EXAMPLES

Landscape Technology I
Landscape Design I
Management I
Soils
Parks and Garden Administration I
Nursery and Flower Production
Landscape Technology II
Landscape Design II
Landscape Studios
Management II

SECOND YEAR SUBJECTS:

EXAMPLES

Sociology
Principles of Planning
Taxonomy
Turf Culture
Public Amenities
Landscape History
Recreative Studies
Engineering
Sociology of Recreation
Plant and Machinery
Parks and Garden Administration II
Ecology
Natural Resource Management
Special Topic
Case Studies