The social value of public spaces in mixed-use high-rise buildings

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ABSTRACT

A growing consensus recognises the impact of the built environment on creating thriving communities, particularly as societies face significant social challenges, including increasing population densification and diversification. This raises important questions about how buildings and neighbourhoods play a role in improving people's lives; and the inherent social value of good building design. A social values framework is used to explore a unique Australian case study: U City in the City of Adelaide, an extreme mixed-use, high-rise building hosting retirement living, disability accommodation, services for some of the communities' most vulnerable groups, commercial tenants, café/retail outlets and corporate conference facilities. Three public spaces in U City are examined for their role in fostering positive emotions and a sense of belonging among diverse groups of residents, workers and casual users. Qualitative data are gathered from regular focus groups, surveys, observations and innovative resident audits of building spaces. The focus here is on results showing that public spaces in U City are key to fostering 'community'—expressed in ways that are dynamic, evolving and inclusive—where the successful generation of community is as much about championing the actors involved as it is about the provision and design of building spaces.

PRACTICE RELEVANCE

What social outcomes can the creation of quality spaces for 'public good' provide? What social value can be placed on incorporating non-hierarchical, dynamic and flexible public spaces into high-rise building design, and what impact does it have on the appeal and functionality of the building? This case study reveals that the design and operation of public places can bring diverse groups of users together by providing opportunities for

interaction, engagement, expression and community-building. This study supports improved design/project briefings and promotes new market opportunities for innovative, regenerative vertical urban villages that incorporate flexible, engaging public spaces for community to thrive. Providing end-user benefits for a more diverse community than is typically seen in traditional architectural brief formulation, U City showcases the versatility that can be incorporated into building design to create highly functional, multipurpose, socially engaging and highly valued collective spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation is one of the most significant global trends shaping the built environment in the twenty-first century, with most of the world's population expected to be living in cities by 2035 (UN-Habitat 2020). In lieu of 'urban sprawl' (associated with unsustainable environmental and infrastructure demands) there is now a trend in some cities for increasingly dense, high-rise buildings and precincts. Accompanying an increase in high-rise dwellings is the re-emergence of an associated typology: 'mixed-use' and, to a lesser degree (but not less significant), 'extreme mixed-use' settings, where planned developments incorporate some combination of residential, retail, office and social elements to create a work–live–play environment (McDonald 2008). These evolving urban spaces must meet the needs of diverse population groups as well as usual business and commercial activities (Frantzeskaki 2016; Coles *et al.* 2018). This requires serious consideration of how best to create spaces that enable thriving neighbourhoods and communities (Samuel 2023; Coles *et al.* 2018; Blokland 2017).

Space matters to our everyday lives and personal interactions and it is inherent to human existence (Tuan 1977). Spaces for human activity are not passive places but rather active environments that influence, and in turn, are influenced by, the interaction of people (Gehl 2010). As such, where a person lives or works is more than merely a backdrop to their daily life. The design of that space is an important influencing element of *how* that life is lived and experienced; influencing our behaviour, our sense of wellbeing and our identity (Peace *et al.* 2006; Gehl 2010).

There is growing consensus of the impact of architecture and design on wellbeing and placemaking and that buildings themselves have inherent social value in the way they influence social connectedness, healthier lifestyles, a sense of belonging and positive emotions (Samuel & Hatleskog 2020; Social Value Portal 2019). Architects, planners and developers are challenged to demonstrate how wellbeing can be supported and/or enhanced through the planning and design of the urban built environment (Tonkiss 2013; Montgomery 2013). Social value is an emerging lens through which to examine architecture, urban planning and development while seeking to understand how we can build for long-term wellbeing, a sense of belonging and stronger, more resilient communities (Samuel 2023; Samuel & Hatleskog 2020; Coles *et al.* 2018).

The present paper is based on a three-year research project, 'Determining the Social Value of Extreme, Mixed-Use Urban Developments'. This project uses Samuel's (2020) Social Values Framework to investigate mixed-use vertical communities in the Australian urban context using a unique extreme mixed-use, high-rise building: U City, in the City of Adelaide, South Australia. The aims of the overall project are as follows:

- To establish how extreme mixed-use building design impacts user behaviours, perceptions and practice of placemaking, and wellbeing.

- To establish how U City performs in terms of indoor environmental quality, energy consumption and water use.

- To establish how building performance intersects with user behaviours and wellbeing.

- To develop a social values metrics relevant for the Australian building, planning and development industries.

This paper focuses on the first of these aims, in particular the role of planned public spaces in mixed-use, high-rise developments. Using data from surveys, focus groups, participant audits and researcher observations, three unique public spaces are examined. The paper showcases the versatility that can be incorporated into building design to create highly functional, multipurpose, socially engaging and highly valued collective spaces.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 COMMUNITY

When considering inner urban, mixed-use buildings that include residential spaces, such as U City, the focus is very much on placemaking and community (spaces of belonging for residents and people working in the building). Defining community is a very subjective process, and increasingly the idea of community as merely a place-based notion has been contested, with increased attention on 'communities of interest', particularly with the advent of advanced communication technologies and a rise in individualisation (Bauman 2001). Variables such as gender, culture, language, levels of mobility, location of kinship ties, levels of social interaction and spatial disparities (where people shop, work or access services) influence individual perceptions of community and belonging, particularly when considering placed-based communities (Delanty 2003; Hopper 2003).

2.2 WELLBEING AND URBAN PLACES

Urban living has a range of implications for wellbeing and community-building. Positively, people can live closer to their work, education, services and/or entertainment opportunities while reducing travel time and private transport usage. Paradoxically, perceived loss of neighbourhood character and increased isolation are strongly associated with urban living (Corcoran & Marshall 2017); with studies showing that high-density living can result in decreased contact with neighbours or social support systems, a reduced 'sense of community' (Williams 2005) and a higher prevalence of mental health issues (Evans *et al.* 2003; Gifford 2007). Research on several high-density living projects in London has found:

> it is the interaction between density, design, build quality, location and people that creates a sense of place, and, the greater the density, the more important it is to get the other factors right.
>
> (Blanc *et al.* 2020: 7)

Thus, a shift away from the traditional village, town or suburban model of living raises a need to ask how the design of emerging high-density urban 'lifestyles' can positively impact our sense of community and neighbourhood, contributing to both collective and individual placemaking, belonging and wellbeing.

The New Economics Foundation's (NEF) report *Five Ways to Wellbeing* (Aked *et al.* 2011) describes wellbeing as having two main functions: feeling good and functioning well. This includes not only parameters of happiness, contentment, enjoyment and engagement, but also having a sense of autonomy, control and purpose. Aked *et al.* (2011) developed a set of evidence-based actions that can improve personal wellbeing: opportunities to *connect* with others; environments that enable individuals to *be active*; opportunities to *take notice or reflect*; creating chances to *keep learning*; and finding ways to *give* to others and the community.

In more recent years, the literature on the built environment, particularly in relation to social value, has recognised wellbeing as a key element of good design, as seen in the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 (UK Public General Acts 2012), RIBA's (2019) *Sustainable Outcomes Guide* and RIBA's *Social Value Toolkit* (SVT) (Samuel 2020). The Social Value Act of 2012 has a clear directive aimed at encouraging design innovation to improve social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the built environment. RIBA's SVT was established to inform the design and viability of new developments, with a framework of five core dimensions that includes 'wellbeing generated by design'.

Samuel (2023) explores the relationship between housing, the built environment and wellbeing, placing a particular emphasis on housing and the built environment as influences of physical health, self-actualisation and community identity. Samuel highlights the need for design and the planning of urban spaces to include quality spaces that foster and enable social interactions (such as community centres, community gardens, cafes, *etc.*). Amenities for social interaction between neighbours are seen as particularly important in high-density locations.

2.3 FROM DIVERSE NEIGHBOURHOODS TO MIXED-USE BUILDINGS

In the most fundamental sense, mixed-use is the concept of mixing a variety of (ideally, mutually supporting) land uses in close proximity. Typical of many historical villages and habitats, the revival of mixed-use was first seriously considered by Jacobs in her seminal *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) where she argues for the importance of a diversity of uses in city neighbourhoods. Increased interest in the mixed-use urban form has also come about because of growing environmental concerns and the detrimental effects of 'urban sprawl' (Grant 2002).

Definitions of mixed-use development are diverse and varied (Coupland 1997; Rowley 1996). One of the most widely referenced definitions of mixed-use comes from the US Urban Land Institute (Schwanke 2003), which suggests mixed-use has three important factors: (1) three or more significant revenue-producing uses that are mutually supporting; (2) significant physical and functional integration of project components; and (3) development in conformance with a coherent plan. The UK definition (Planning Portal 2009) describes mixed-use developments a little more simply as the provision of a mix of complementary uses, such as residential, community and leisure uses, on a site or within a particular area. The Property Council of Australia defines mixed-use as a:

> single building or site accommodating three or more uses such as residential, hotel, commercial, industrial, entertainment, education, medical or recreation.
>
> (McDonald 2008: 26)

Some scholars (Holl *et al.* 2014) have used the term 'hybrid building' to describe a higher level of integration that goes beyond simply having a range of facilities, users or outlets on-site; there is also a catalyst for integration across users and spaces within the building. Holl *et al.* (2014: 12) note the potential of hybrid buildings to 'become localised "social condensers" for new communities'.

The increasing support for mixed-use development is viewed by many (perhaps misguidedly) as an automatic or easy solution for good urban form (Rowley 1996), particularly as a key strategy to limit the adverse effects of urban sprawl (Grant 2002; Frank 1994). Supporters of mixed-use maintain that city precincts or mixed-use developments will become more viable, attractive, sustainable and safer places in which to live and work (Frank 1994; Coupland 1997). There is, however, little evidence to support these arguments. More work needs to be done, post-occupancy, to shore up these social value claims of mixed-use developments.

3. THE U CITY CASE STUDY

U City (an extreme mixed-use development) is located in the central business district of Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia. South Australia has a population of over 1.7 million, with more than 75% of the population (1.3 million) living in the metropolitan area. Despite being a small city, Adelaide's population density ranks second in Australia, just after Melbourne, at 404 people/km^2 due to its compact planning.

Designed by world renowned global architecture firm Woods Bagot P/L, the 19-storey U City was completed in 2019. U City operates as a carbon neutral, 6-Star-rated building (according to the Australian Green Building Council) and was awarded the 2020 'Good Design Australia' award in the category of Social Impact (Good Design Australia 2020) (Figure 1). U City is located in a diverse neighbourhood of cultural, entertainment and business activities.

The U City building was envisioned and developed by Uniting Communities (UC). UC, a not-for-profit service provider established in 1864 in South Australia, provides a broad range of community services for vulnerable and disenfranchised population groups. The brief for U City was to create a 'vertical village' housing UC's head office and many of its services, but also as a place where all UC clients would feel they belonged. At the same time the building was expected to generate an income through commercial tenancies and 'high end' retirement accommodation. For a full breakdown of the building's uses, see Figure 2.

Figure 1: U City, Adelaide: exterior.

Source: Trevor Mein. Reproduced with the permission of Uniting Communities (UC).
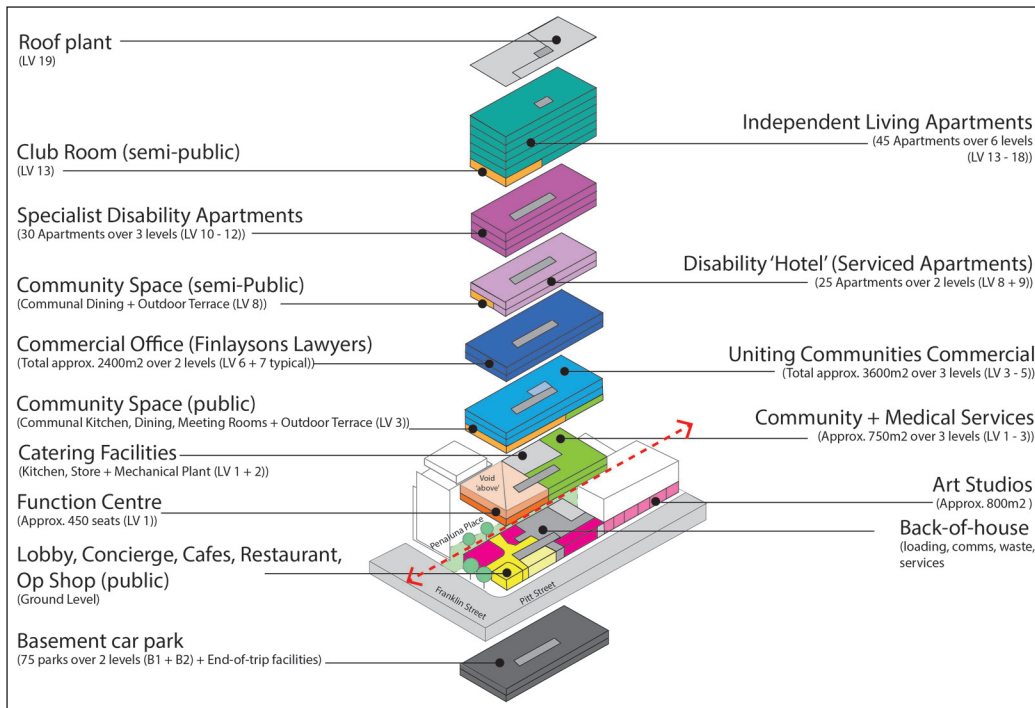
Figure 2: U City functions: exploded axonometric.

Source: Katie Miller.

What makes this building unique is its extreme mixed-use architectural typology—a blend of public and private functions, diverse user groups with a broad consideration to local community, and broader neighbourhood needs (economic, social, environmental and cultural). Responding to the contemporary urban condition, it has been planned and concept designed with a unique 'mix' of functions (civic, culture, education, health, living, retail, *etc.*) brought together under one roof. It is Australia's only example of an extreme mixed-use development and, to date, one of very few built in the world. U City aspires to be a socially sustainable building that improves the wellbeing of residents and users, making it an ideal case study through which to explore the social value of architecture.

4. DATA AND METHODS

4.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research uses a case study methodological approach as defined by Priya (2021), who, building on the work of Yin (2009, 2014), asserts the case study is not simply a method of data collection. A case study methodology 'involves a detailed study of the concerned unit of analysis within its natural setting' (Priya 2021: 95) and generally uses several techniques for data collection, and the unit of analysis of the case study can range from an individual to an organisation.

The overall project collects both quantitative and qualitative data from, and about, different user groups and about the physical performance of the building itself, a strategy common for case study research when trying to cover the case from many different angles (Priya 2021; Yin 2009, 2014). Triangulation of data is used to overcome biases from any single data-collection method, a well-recognised and longstanding approach to study social phenomena (Denzin 1970, 1989; Bryman 2008).

Figure 3 shows the participant groups and data-collection tools used in the overall project. Intensive users of U City, residents and workers, were invited to participate in several different forms of data collection, with some taking part in one, some or all the data-collection activities shown in the green section of Figure 3. The items contained within the red circle of Figure 3 indicate the data sources synthesised and explored in this paper.
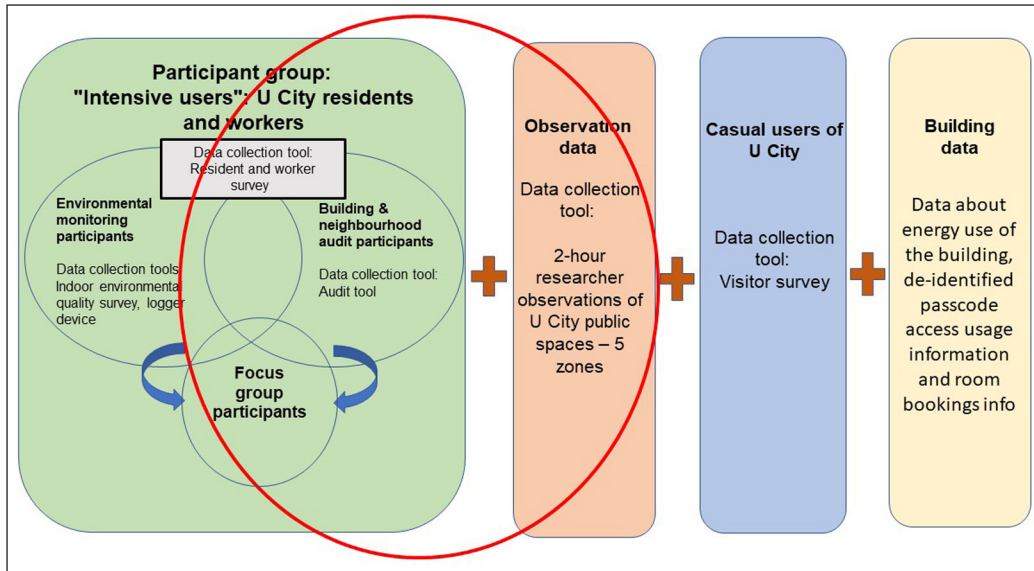
The following SVT indicators (Samuel 2020) were used in building observations, user surveys, audits and focus groups to frame much of the data collection on wellbeing:

- *Positive emotions* (a sense of belonging, feeling pride in where I live/work, feeling safe, sense of purpose).

- *Connecting* (*e.g.* people look out for each other, opportunities to interact, sense of social responsibility for this place).

- *Freedom and flexibility* (autonomy, control about what I do and how I live my life or express myself, choices in life).

- *Participation* (meaningful activities, purpose in life, opportunities to engage).

The research design involves inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thus, some themes, *i.e.* those related to the SVT and the selected public spaces explored in this paper, were predetermined, and qualitative data were mined for content fitting these themes. Additional themes (*e.g.* 'mixed-use building', 'barriers to engagement' or 'community-building') were generated through interaction with the data (Priya 2021: 106). Cross-thematic analyses of all qualitative data were conducted by the research team in MS Excel.

4.2 DATA-COLLECTION TOOLS

While data collection for this project is ongoing until the end of 2023, this paper examines data from building observations, resident and occupant surveys, participant building audits and focus groups at the mid-point of data collection (July 2022–March 2023) as it relates to three selected public spaces in U City:

- The ground-floor lobby space

- Inbari Ku

- U City art studio

4.2.1 Focus groups

Focus groups are held monthly in a public space within U City, covering themes from the SVT and other topics relevant to user experience at U City. Each focus group lasts about 60–90 minutes, with at least 12 focus groups to be conducted over the life of the project. Focus group data are audio-recorded and then transcribed for thematic analysis. This paper includes analysis of data from the first three focus groups, with the following topics:

- *Your U City 'journey'.* Why you chose U City as a place to live or work, and what the transition has been like? (*n* = 7 participants, residents and staff).

- *What makes U City community?* How do you feel about U City as a place to live or work? (*n* = 15 participants, residents and staff).

- *Accessibility of U City and participation in U City's design.* What spaces in U City do you use? Can you access and adapt spaces to meet your needs? Have you provided input into the design of U City or its programmes? (*n* = 12 participants, residents and staff).

4.2.2 Building and neighbourhood audits

The purpose of participant-generated audits is to proactively collect 'real time' data about building and neighbourhood use and perceptions (where they are, who they are with, how long they plan to be there and how they feel about different physical attributes of the space they are auditing). Audits generate quantitative and qualitative data, including optional photographs.

At the time of writing (July 2023), a total of *n* = 50 audits have been completed about spaces within U City; of these *n* = 14 audits were completed about the ground floor lobby area, *n* = 6 audits about the art studio and *n* = 2 audits about level 3 Inbari Ku. Only qualitative information from audit surveys about these spaces was included in the analysis for this paper.

4.2.3 Worker and resident survey

The U City worker and resident survey collects background demographic information about respondents, experiences, perceptions and usage of U City building spaces, and a series of qualitative open-ended questions at the end of each series of questions related to each of the four SVT themes. Survey data for this paper include *n* = 34 responses, made up of 50% U City staff/50% U City residents, 49% female respondents and representation across all five-year age groups from 18 to 85, with 41% aged 65 or over.

4.2.4 Researcher observations

Data from researcher observations are used in this paper to describe the identified spaces, their uses, layout and any key characteristics as triangulated data in conjunction with participant data from focus groups, audits and surveys. Observations of public spaces are two hours in duration, with information recorded at 30-minute intervals throughout the two-hour observation window on the following themes:

- People's use of the space (including numbers, flow of movement, any engagement with art/seating/soft and hard surfaces, and activities in the space).

- Composition of people using the space.

- What is the 'vibe' of the place/people using the space (including levels of interaction, noise and activity).

Researchers also record contextual information including time of day and weather conditions, and have the option to upload photos of the space during the observation period.

A total of *n* = 20 observations of the lobby space areas and *n* = 13 observations of the level-3 Inbari Ku space were included in the analysis for this paper. The art studio is not included as one of the regular observation zones for the study because its use is more programme based rather than a free-flow public space and it is located outside of the new build. However, researchers have experienced activities taking place in the art studio, explored descriptions of activities through focus groups and surveys, and have observed studio activities taking place in different public spaces at U City.

5. RESULTS

The following section provides a description of three selected public spaces in U City. These three spaces were selected for their unique nature within the building: they are non-commercial, publicly accessible spaces. For each space, relevant data were included to show how these spaces are used and perceived by the study participants. Examples of different forms of community-building are discussed, along with factors about the design and use of the space that encourage interaction and connection.

5.1 GROUND FLOOR LOBBY

The ground floor lobby is the first point of contact when entering U City through the main entrance. This large space is open and accessible to the public, U City visitors, residents and staff. This area houses a concierge desk staffed 24/7, lounge and table seating area, public artwork, retail shop (Goodwill charity store), a restaurant and a café, a throughfare to the building stairwell, lift bank, public toilets and 'back of house' facilities (Figure 4). The lobby space is an activated, light-filled, double-height space with street frontage. It has a very open, 'soft' corporate feel, with lots of public artwork to add colour, personalisation and interest.

Figure 4: Architectural plan of U City: ground level, highlighting the main lobby space.

Source: Woods Bagot. Reproduced with the permission of Uniting Communities (UC).
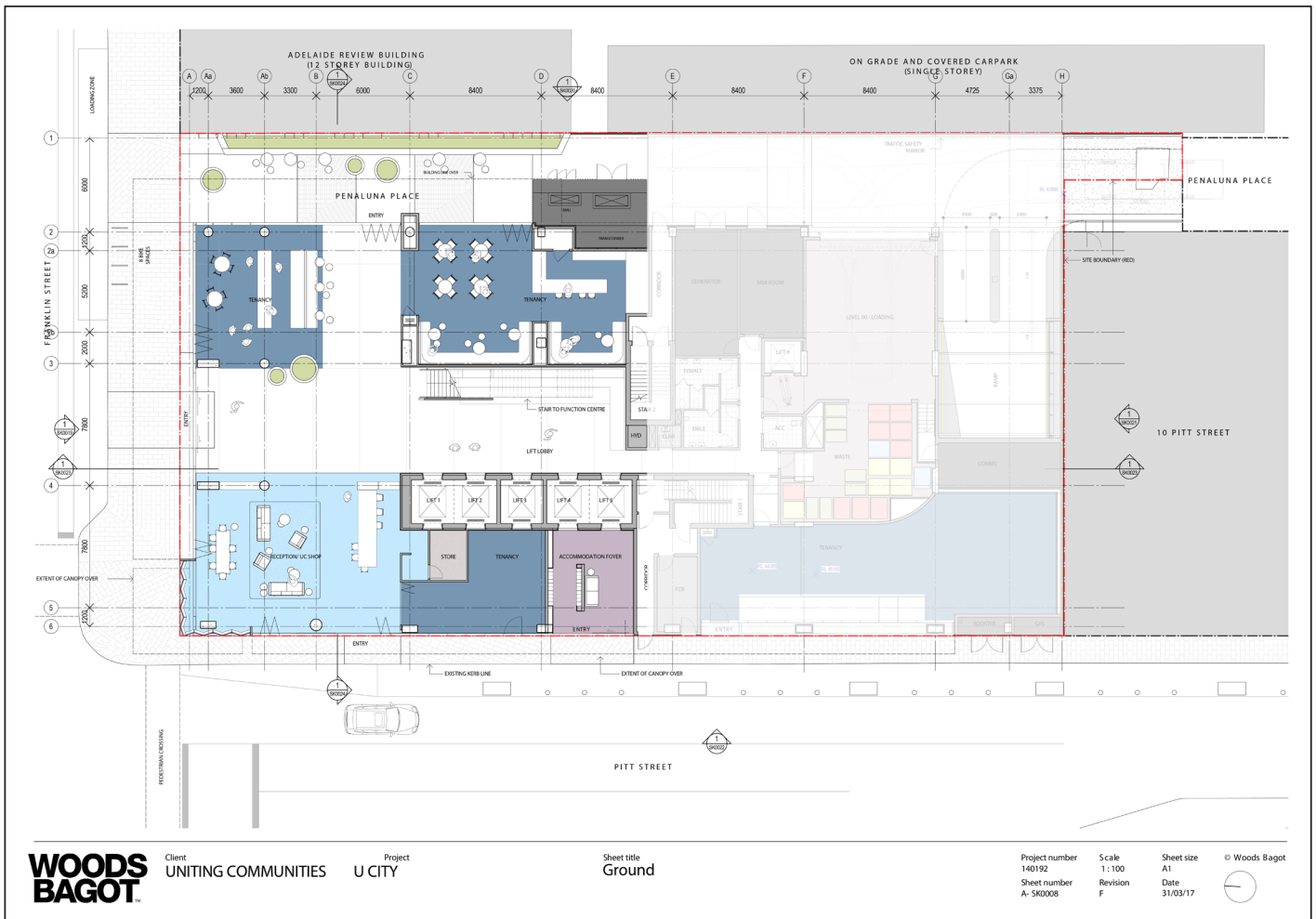
Observation data show that the lobby space is a key community space in the building. It is sometimes a transitory space, for visitors, residents and staff to pass through to get where they are going, but many other uses of this space have also been observed by the research team and noted by participants in focus groups and audits. For example, the artist-in-residence leads an 'open to everyone' art session every Friday morning here (Figure 5). Public community events are also hosted here, and the tables are often rearranged to allow the restaurant seating to spill over into the open space.

Figure 5: U City lobby featuring the concierge (background) and lounge/dining area hosting a Friday morning art group session (foreground).
Source: Helen Barrie.

At an individual level, the open seating arrangements in the lobby provide a comfortable space in which to sit independently and observe or meet with others. This aligns with the research findings of Blanc *et al.* (2020: 81) who noted: 'Having somewhere pleasant to sit means people might linger, helping to animate the space.' The authors also concluded that users should pass through these spaces as a regular part of their day to ensure common spaces within high-density developments are used and 'feel welcoming', and that in many cases it is best that amenities be open to the public rather than reserved for residents only. Participants at U City commented on their positive impressions of the lobby space in terms of both the design and 'feel' of the space:

> helpful, friendly concierges, good cooperation from Luigi's [restaurant] to service people in the general foyer area, good natural light, comfortable seating to meet different needs, attractive and interesting art decoration and [Lego] model of this unique community building, great mix of community and visitors in this space and good mix of ages.
>
> (U City resident)

> I think the foyer is one of the real strengths of this building and community […] such a lively place, there is so much colour and art.
>
> (U City resident)

The concierge staff are seen as having a pivotal role in the creation of community both in the lobby space and across the entirety of the U City building. U City workers and residents are often observed having extended chats with the concierge staff, adding to the welcoming feel of the space and a sense that building users are part of a broader, building-wide community.

The flexible nature of the lobby space allows it to accommodate and be used by people for a range of purposes. The space manages a fine balance between corporate transitory space and a comfortable, 'homely' space for informal interactions to occur, which promotes positive emotions and a sense of wellbeing from residents, workers and casual users. Residents talked about the lobby space as being somewhere you 'always see someone you know and could stop to chat', while staff talk about the lobby as a place they enjoy 'saying hello' to concierge, residents and others as a nice part of their day.

> It's a place that a lot of us will rock up, you know, mid-morning and will always run into other neighbours to say hello. So, I just wanted to sort of give that very positive feedback about the thought that went behind the design of our foyer.
>
> (U City resident)

Importantly, users of the lobby space showcase the diversity of U City users and residents—people with disability, older people, people with pets, disenfranchised service users, lawyers (building tenants), casual users from nearby corporate offices, and UC staff and management are all visible and confident users of this space—enhancing and showcasing the rich fabric of the U City community.

5.2 'INBARI KU'

Inbari Ku means 'meeting place' in the local Indigenous language of the Kaurna people. The space has a meeting room at one end that can be opened up for larger events; a large outdoor terrace that runs across the front of the building with flexible casual seating; a fully functioning kitchen; flexible indoor seating areas; and screens (for events or presentations) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Architectural plan of U City: level 3, highlighting the Inbari Ku space.

Source: Woods Bagot. Reproduced with the permission of Uniting Communities (UC).
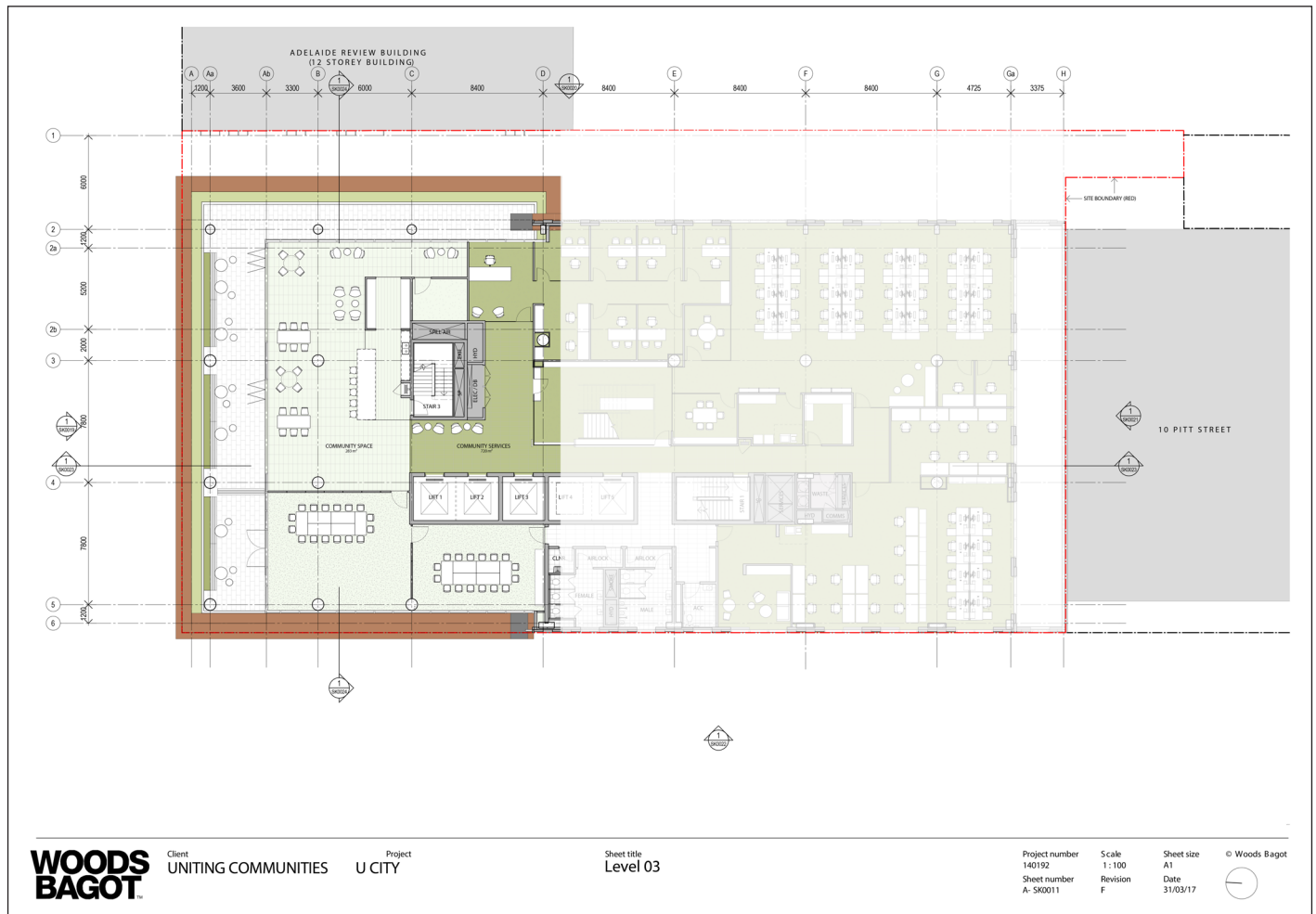
This space is offered as a 'general purpose' space for staff, residents and casual users of U City. It is used as a waiting space for people attending appointments in the building; a meeting and training space for staff; a kitchen space for staff, volunteers and small groups of service users (*e.g.* the drug and alcohol programmes cook and eat a communal lunch every Friday); casual users from the street; and is booked for larger UC and tenant functions. The space is used for combined U City community events, but overwhelmingly it is a casual space for general day-to-day use (Figure 7) and reflects a sense of ownership and pride amongst its myriad users, aligning with Jacobs & Lees' (2013) discussions around 'defensible space', where poor architectural design was considered to create opportunities for criminal activity with good urban design that provided residents with patches of 'territory' over which they felt some ownership and sense of responsibility, and that enabled them to be agents in ensuring their own security.

Figure 7: Inbari Ku on typical mid-weekday.
Source: Helen Barrie.

The public availability of this space allows different people and groups to interact and build connections, share, strengthen relationships and, potentially, build community. Comments from those who have used the space indicate people's appreciation for this space and its design:

> Pleasant colouring, interesting artwork including outside the windows on the balcony, good lighting, and facilities. I also enjoy the shared use of the space by workers, residents, visitors, and the survey team.
>
> (U City resident)

Observation data show ample evidence of a connection between individuals and across different groups occurring in this space; however, the potential for better utilisation of this space was identified. It was acknowledged through focus groups that while more use of this space had been intentioned, the advent of COVID-19 and the ensuing restrictions on public gatherings altered activity. Wider promotion of this space to groups at U City, such as the retirement village community or disability housing residents, would likely encourage renewed interactions between groups within this space.

> I think this space has greater potential for mixed-use (not just large, one-off events, but smaller, regular activity). One example might be [to] bring your own [lunch] on a certain day of the week to catch up with or introduce yourself to other residents, including people from disability accommodation and workers.
>
> (U City resident)

5.3 U CITY ARTS STUDIO

Public artwork and the value of communication, expression and belonging through art, literature and craft has been an important consideration throughout U City's development. As such, an artist-in-residence has been employed and a dedicated art space provided at U City to promote this ethos and to run regular art projects and events with UC programme users, residents and the public.

Although originally planned to be on the first floor of the new development; the entire ground floor of the previous UC head office, an older co-located building in Pitt Street, has been handed over to art facilities and programmes (Figure 8). The space includes a large studio for group art activities, a craft/hobby room (embroidery, knitting, *etc.*), a men's shed/workshop, several smaller studio spaces for artists-in-residence (writers, painters, sculptors, jewellery makers), and a gallery space. A series of large windows facing the street showcase the changing art displays.

I was delighted to see what had been achieved [...] these unoccupied offices had been cleaned up, lighting improved, and being used by artists of different sorts for creative work—different individuals had occupied each office space and were using a different medium—a hive of activity [...] a room with a natural light was being used as a 'teaching' space for a group to attend. [...] A great achievement [...] making life more meaningful for many.

<div style="text-align: right">(U City resident)</div>

Figure 8: U City art studio.
Source: Katie Miller.

As the U City art studio is not a part of the new construction, it provides a good point of contrast to the other spaces discussed, with some observed accessibility, safety and aesthetic differences in the quality of this space. For example, as one resident commented:

It is a well-worn building with aged heating/cooling systems, is not maintained or cleaned like the new U City building and has 'make do' furniture. A properly set up arts facility in a new building would be clearly much more comfortable and fit for purpose.

<div style="text-align: right">(U City resident)</div>

This space and the associated programmes provide an example of a space at U City with a more explicit focus on a shared interest—art—helping to build a sense of community amongst participants from diverse backgrounds. As such it can be seen as both a neighbourhood-based community (for residents, workers and members of the public) and also a community of interest, drawing diverse groups together through a common interest.

The service I work with has been engaged with the U City artist-in-residence to support an art-based project we've hosted with the community. Members of the building and UC have attended these sessions, creating a lovely inter-generational interaction and involvement for the project.

<div style="text-align: right">(UC staff member)</div>

The U City art studio runs a range of activities, in both the studio and other areas of the U City building. The art studio community is also responsible for some of the public art found throughout

the UC building and office spaces (Figure 9). Comments from participants show the U City art studio and programmes are of very high value to those who use them. The artist-in-residence is seen by U City residents and staff as instrumental in creating a sense of engagement and, indeed, community amongst users of these programmes, and for U City as a whole. This has been achieved by providing an inviting atmosphere, interactive tools and displays, and openness to a variety of activities.

> 'C' [artist-in-residence] has made this a welcoming creative space with lots of tools available. She keeps the window displays interesting and changing which really creates dynamic and public interest.
>
> (U City resident)

> The artist residence is an amazing person and inspires me to do art and extend my skills.
>
> (U City resident)

Residents want assurance that a dedicated art space and programme will be included and expanded on in the next UC building development, emphasising that this has become a valued asset to their community. However, the fact that the art studio is not accessible and visible from the main lobby area in U City is seen as a disadvantage for both an awareness of, and accessibility to, the space. As also concluded by Blanc *et al.* (2020), this underlines the importance of the physical design and location of public spaces in enabling them to be accessible to allow for community-building. As noted by a study participant:

> I have enjoyed observing some of the community-building activities conducted by [artist-in-residence] with her different art workshops each week, however due to her studio being physically located outside the U City building, it still feels somewhat disconnected.
>
> (UC staff member)

The art studio is an example of the refurbishment of a previously corporate space for a community purpose—where the design of the space itself is not key to its success but rather it is a community champion who has developed a thriving and engaging community space.

Figure 9: Community art initiatives in the U City lobby.
Source: Katie Miller.

5.4 SOCIAL VALUE THEMES RELATED TO WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING

The above results explored selected public spaces at U City to consider how they are used and what opportunities they present for encouraging a positive sense of wellbeing and community. Tying the experiences and perceptions of U City users to the specific spaces within the building they are using and valuing regularly is seen as important because, as stated by Samuel (2023: 76):

> social value was a fairly meaningless term without knowing where the social value
> actually happens [...] we need to know with some accuracy what is happening where.

However, understanding of how U City residents and users feel about the building, and the U City community as a whole, is also important. U City was designed to add 'social value' to the lives of people who use it, and the data below support this aim at the broader 'whole of building' level.

The U City resident and worker survey (*n* = 34) relating to the identified social values theme of 'positive emotions', found a large proportion of respondents 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statements: 'I feel safe in this building' (85%), 'I feel a sense of pride about this building' (82%), 'I feel a sense of belonging in the U City building' (80%) and 'the design of the U City building lifts my spirits' (76%). Additionally, 60% of respondents strongly agree and 28% agree that 'U City is a good place to live or work'. These factors form a critical foundation for building strong communities and promoting wellbeing.

Comments in response to survey questions show that while the design of U City is considered important, other factors such as the activities in which people take part, and social networks that exist outside of U City, also play an important role in promoting a sense of individual belonging and wellbeing.

> Belonging doesn't come from physical design only. It's the people who create the
> belonging [...].
>
> (U City resident)

> The building is fantastic but that alone wouldn't keep me here if who I worked with was
> hard to be around.
>
> (UC staff member)

Participant comments also highlight the design aspects of U City that foster the social value of positive emotions:

> The city location, floor to ceiling windows for natural lighting, greater intra-service
> connection, communal kitchen facilities on each floor, many meeting rooms to select
> from, and I have made new and wonderful friendships with colleagues that I otherwise
> wouldn't have had contact with, if we hadn't moved into U City.
>
> (UC staff member)

Another area identified in the SVT where architecture can add social value is in 'connecting people and the environment in appropriate ways' (Samuel 2020: 6). As highlighted in the above quotation and emphasised in the survey, over 90% of survey respondents strongly agree/agree with the following statements about U City: 'I have opportunities to interact with people regularly in the U City building' and 'people look out for each other here'. A high proportion of respondents also agree that they feel a sense of social responsibility for where they work or live at U City. These results show that survey respondents feel a strong sense of connection with others at U City.

The U City resident and worker survey also asked questions under RIBA's (Samuel 2020) SVT themes of 'freedom and flexibility' and 'participation (in design)'. Perceptions of building residents and workers on things such as the ability to access and adapt spaces in a suitable way, and having input into how spaces are used, are important because they underpin creating comfortable, accessible spaces for people to gather, and relevant reasons to do so. They also foster autonomy and a stronger sense of placemaking. Some of the items of relevance to these theme areas are: 'I have opportunities to use or experience a variety of spaces in this building' (67% respondents

strongly agree/agree to this statement at U City) and 'I am able to adapt my space to meet my needs' (76% strongly agree/agree to this statement at U City). However, in the participation theme, only 36% strongly agree/agree with the statement: 'I feel I have a say in decisions about design/facilities/events at U City'. Clearly this is an area where more work needs to be done.

6. DISCUSSION

This paper has explored how the presence of three public spaces included in U City's design have enabled interaction amongst diverse users, for a variety of purposes and with a range of positive outcomes for wellbeing and for fostering a sense of community. This highlights the need to value public, shared spaces as key components of the design brief or masterplan for buildings and precincts (Samuel 2023).

6.1 BUILDING DESIGN AS AN ENABLER OF COMMUNITY

The U City case study is classified as an 'extreme mixed-use' building based on its diverse range of services, amenities, spaces and tenants. Because there is not widespread integration across all users and tenants within the building, it does not meet the definition of a 'hybrid building' as posited by Holl *et al.* (2014: 13) who state:

> there was a distinct difference between the hybrid building and mixed-use, in that the individual programs relate to one another and begin to share intensities.

However, the results presented in this paper show that there is some sense of related activities and shared intensities in this mixed-use case study. For example, some programmes and spaces in the building interact with different user groups within U City, either directly (*e.g.* co-location of accommodation for people with disability and disability services), but also more indirectly with things such as cultural, social or art programmes available to residents, workers, service users and the general public. In other words, there are both opportunities *and* physical spaces made available for different users of the building to interact and engage with each other and foster shared intensities. Simply having physical proximity to others and/or the availability of quality shared public spaces in a development do not encourage a sense of community. Rather, these factors provide the basic 'infrastructure' that may allow community-building to occur.

It is also important to consider that every individual has different levels of desire to be part of a community, including those in mixed-use shared spaces. Blanc *et al.*'s (2020: 6) study on high-density housing projects, for example, found that:

> a number of respondents…said emphatically that they had no interest in being part of a community based on where they lived—their social networks were located elsewhere […].

This sentiment was observed by researchers and emphasised by participants in this study, too.

It is also important to acknowledge that other public spaces in the U City building are serving two purposes: generating income and adding social value for building users. For example, Luigi's restaurant/café and the Pitt Street café at U City are highly valued by building users and are frequently cited as places to interact with both other U City residents or occupants and outside visitors. Additionally, there are some semi-public spaces (such as the Retirement Village clubhouse) that are not open to everyone, but which provide lots of active, self-driven community-building opportunities for those with access.

People need flexible spaces, both within the home and at the neighbourhood level (Samuel 2023: 88–91). Shared spaces can empower people in positive ways: by creating a strong sense of belonging and placemaking; offering opportunities for intergenerational and intercultural socialisation; reducing isolation (and therefore potentially feelings of loneliness); providing a collective sense of purpose; and opportunities for giving, reciprocal care and assistance. These are all important facets of wellbeing (Aked *et al.* 2011) and were evidenced in the U City case study data.

6.2 COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS AS ENABLERS OF COMMUNITY

Provision and design of shared spaces is clearly one component of supporting the development of community and a sense of belonging (Samuel 2023). But 'community' and opportunities to socialise with others also requires these spaces to be activated—people create community and belonging through their activities (Aked *et al.* 2011; Delanty 2003).

In some instances, activation can happen quite passively, as with the third-floor Inbari Ku space in U City, where provision of a large flexible space with casual seating, a functional kitchen and an outdoor space to enjoy fresh air ensure the space is considered suitable and accessible for both 'organic' and planned activities. Similarly, the lobby space will always be used as people wait for their appointment or arrange to meet someone. This suggests the design of these spaces is passively influencing opportunities for social interactions.

However, these spaces achieve a higher level of activation through UC supporting the drive and creativity of community champions. For example, encouraging programme managers to use the Inbari Ku space for activities, running a U City speaker programme, programme launches and public events such as the R U OK or International Women's Day lunches ensure the space is experienced and associated with lively, inclusive community activities.

Similarly, the employment of an artist-in-residence has ensured that the corporate image of the lobby space is regularly 'disrupted' with community members making art. The artist-in-residence in U City has also created an 'outward facing' connection to passing street traffic for the community arts programme through the large shop front windows in the studio. This allows for anyone to walk in and join the U City community, but it also allows for U City residents and regular users to become a part of something creative and social that is 'bigger' than just U City.

On a larger scale, UC could also be seen a 'community champion' and integral to U City's successes. The proactive decision to include communal, free-to-use and accessible spaces as part of the building design, some of which could have been otherwise assigned as office, retail or accommodation space to generate income, highlights the emphasis on social value and community-building by UC as both the developer and also the main occupant of the building. There are many examples (Holl *et al.* 2014; Blanc *et al.* 2020) where the architects' visions of mixed-use developments are:

> being used to market new developments by harnessing images of metropolitan life, highlighting diversity of experiences, programmes and people. While sadly there are countless examples where these images are no more than that, glossy advertisements […].
>
> (Holl *et al.* 2014: 16)

The U City case study is unique in that it was designed and funded by a not-for-profit organisation with an ethos, vision and leadership that played a significant role in why the building was developed and designed the way it was, with inclusivity and access for diverse population groups a key priority. With UC head office located on-site there is ongoing and regular monitoring and assessment of how the building is functioning by those who have a vested interest in its success. It is questionable if the same result could be achieved by a commercial developer of a mixed-use space.

6.3 WHAT COULD BE DONE BETTER?

The research has identified areas where improvements could be made to increase the extent to which semi-public and public spaces at U City are used to enhance a sense of wellbeing and community amongst users.

One of the key hurdles that underpins better use of, and access to, public spaces and events at U City is communication across different types of building users. Communication tends to be siloed within the different sectors, partly because each of these user groups is managed separately, with no single source for whole-of-building information. A building-wide newsletter or mailing list

would be beneficial in ensuring all building users have access to information about public spaces and events within the building, enabling more interaction across different user groups.

As mentioned, the impact of the COVID pandemic cannot be ignored as a hinderance to the use of public and semi-public spaces throughout the U City building, having stymied some development of sense of community across diverse U City user groups. The initial 2019 momentum in creating a sense of shared community across the building in the Inbari Ku and Lobby spaces has been acknowledged and now needs renewed enthusiasm to re-create a whole-of-building community.

The desire for more built-for-purpose semi-public spaces at U City has been mentioned by users as spaces that would enhance their experience of living or working at U City. The two most frequently cited on this wish list are a fully equipped gym (a temporary, modestly equipped gym is currently on-site) and a roof garden. The roof garden was a consideration in the initial building design but was not realised due to the space being used for solar panels and rainwater collection. There is a paucity of green space in and around U City that is noted by residents and workers alike as a significant shortcoming.

6.4 RESEARCH AS AN ENABLER OF COMMUNITY

This three-year research project has an impact on the building of community in U City. The project relies heavily on residents, workers and casual users of the building as active data collectors and reviewers. It allows U City users to place a critical lens over their building and their own wellbeing. Few other people experience this opportunity. This leads to Samuel's (2023: 77–78) point about the balance between active and passive data and the need for communities to have the knowledge and power to understand and contest, if necessary, the data i.e. being collected about them. This research project is collecting data via multiple sources over an 18-month period allowing for a deep reflection of the social performance of the building and the influence of its design on wellbeing and placemaking; and that reflection alone may improve a sense of purpose, belonging and wellbeing.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper considered the impact of architecture and design on placemaking and the social value of public spaces in the design of mixed-use, high-rise developments such as the case study of U City in the City of Adelaide. Clearly for U City the design plays an important role in facilitating connection and community but also of significant importance is the willingness of the people who work and occupy the building to create a positive inclusive environment.

The research shows that for high-rise buildings to foster a sense of community among users, particularly mixed-use buildings, it is vital that shared, communal spaces are provided in different locations and configurations and at different scales throughout the building. Of equal importance is the activation of these spaces.

Planners, architects, developers and researchers should acknowledge that buildings are not just about beautiful, innovative designs and/or maximising monetary returns on investment—buildings are also about people's needs, particularly their social needs. Building design influences how we live our lives, who we engage with and how we feel. Personal identity is as much about where we are as it is about the activities and the people we engage with. Good design accompanied by active placemaking measures (the ethos, resources and management) can enable not only pleasant spaces but also better, healthier, more supportive interactions within those spaces that allow communities to thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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HB created the outline and conceptual focus for this article, contributing to writing and editing the paper, and coordinating all activity associated with its submission. KMcD was responsible for collating, cleaning and analysing the data, writing up the separate public space case studies, and writing and editing the paper. KM created the figures, assisted in the literature review, referencing and writing the first draft. DF contributed to the conceptualisation of the paper and its editing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY

As this project is ongoing until 2024, no data are currently available, but all data will be publicly shared once the project is finalised.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All data-collection methods, questionnaires, participant information sheets and recruitment strategies were approved by the University of South Australia's ethics committee (approval number 204505) in 2022, before any engagement with the research participants began. As a part of this approval, it was stipulated that no participants were to be individually identifiable in any way. All participants gave their informed consent to participate before taking part in any form of data collection.

FUNDING

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