

2008

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## Publication details

Postprint of: Laing, JH, Wegner, A, Moore, S & Weiler, B 2008, 'Identifying success factors behind partnerships for managing recreation and tourism in urban fringe parks', *Annals of Leisure Research*, vol. 11, no. 1/2, pp. 101-122.

Published version available from:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2008.9686788>

CITE AS: Laing, J. H., Wegner, A., Moore, S. and B. Weiler (forthcoming). 'Identifying Success Factors Behind Partnerships for Managing Recreation and Tourism in Urban Fringe Parks.' *Annals of Leisure Research*. Accepted for publication.

## **Identifying Success Factors Behind Partnerships for Managing Recreation and Tourism in Urban Fringe Parks**

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### **Abstract**

Research has found that urban fringe parks are particularly sensitive to population growth and rising demands for recreation and tourism. High visitor levels, a more sophisticated and demanding visitor, and park budgetary pressures have demanded a rethink of management approaches, including the benefits of partnerships. This paper describes two current partnerships in Australia where the managers of urban fringe parks and other government agencies, the tourism industry, and community groups share management responsibility. The study was informed by theoretical perspectives from sociology and environmental management, particularly social capital, environmental dispute resolution, and institutional analysis and development. Qualitative data regarding the success factors of these partnerships revealed that, for both partnerships, important features were support and leadership provided by the park agency, a commitment to power sharing and the willingness to adapt to changing conditions. These findings may have broader relevance for managing urban fringe parks elsewhere and may also be worthwhile pursuing in protected area partnerships beyond the urban fringe context in Australia and internationally.

## **Introduction, Definitions of Key Concepts and Overview of Theoretical Context**

Urban sprawl is increasingly an issue in the planning and management of many cities and their hinterlands, with the latter including what have been variously termed *peri-urban* (Allen, 2003; Arnberger and Brandenburg, 2007), *near-urban* (DNRE, 1996) or *urban fringe* parks (Ramp *et al.*, 2006). Australia has an unusually high incidence of protected areas abutting metropolitan areas and, with estimates of annual growth in visitation of 16% to 17%, compared to just 4% for remote protected areas (DRE, 1996), this preference for nature-based recreation and tourism close to home appears to be a growing one. Park agencies are therefore under increasing pressure to accommodate growth in visitor numbers, whilst maintaining sustainability outcomes. To date however, there has been limited research on urban fringe parks and the management challenges they present, despite their increasing importance within the protected area system.

This paper aims to address this gap, particularly focusing on the use of partnerships as a management tool for these parks and the factors that contribute to partnership success. Prior to reporting on an empirical study of two urban fringe park partnerships, the paper defines some key concepts of the research and outlines why a focus on urban fringe parks is both timely and significant. Importantly, this first section concludes with an overview of three theoretical areas that have informed the study. The paper then outlines the methods and context of the two case studies, presents the findings, and discusses these in relation to the broader literature.

We begin our clarification and definitions of terms with the concept of an ‘urban fringe park’. Terms like ‘peri-urban’ or ‘urban fringe’ are often used without being clearly or consistently defined or they are used interchangeably (Weaver and Lawton, 2001: 439), which might be attributed in part to the fluidity of the urban-rural dynamic. ‘An increasing proportion of the population in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia reside in areas that do not clearly fit into neat categories of “urban” or “rural”’ (Weaver and Lawton, 2001: 439). The blurriness inherent in the ‘urban-rural fringe’ is also noted by Weaver (2005: 23), who describes it as ‘a transitional zone between space that is more clearly urban and space that is more clearly rural’. This definition echoes that of the ‘wildland-urban interface’ (Davis, 1990; Ewert, 1993a; Rollins *et al.*, 1998; Duryea and Vince, 2005), which Ewert (1993b: 6) suggests represents ‘an area of transition between two communities (urban and wildlands)’ and can be characterised as one of three types of interfaces:

Classic interface situations can be seen in many of the National, state and regional parks and forests where subdivisions and other development have grown to the very borders of the parks or forest .... In an intermix situation, developments such as homes or other structures are scattered through the wildland area .... In the isolated interface, wildland are essentially surrounded by development.

For the purposes of this paper, we use the term ‘urban fringe park’ to refer to classic interface situations, *i.e. parks, reserves or protected areas located in areas or regions where urban development occurs along the borders or adjacent to these parks.*

It is also important to define what we mean by the term ‘community’. For the purposes of an urban fringe park, ‘community’ can be viewed broadly, based on the definition put forward by Azarya (1996: 114) as both a *collective social unit*, in the sense of ‘a group sharing a defined physical space or geographical area such as a neighbourhood, city, village or hamlet’ or a term given to a *social relationship*, being ‘a group sharing common traits, a sense of belonging and/or maintaining social ties and interactions which shape it into a distinctive social entity’. Urban fringe parks may have a local resident population who might be characterised as the local community, but may also *build* community amongst an otherwise disparate group of visitors who feel a sense of ownership or special feeling of connectedness with respect to the park. The park may act as a backdrop for spending time with family and friends and the association with these social events also helps to shape and develop a bond or emotional connection with nature and potential ‘constituencies for conservation’ (Berkes, 2004: 628).

Urban fringe parks face challenges due to their proximity to residential areas and other communities, as well as their popularity for recreation and leisure. They have to accommodate a variety of activities (Weaver, 2005) for a diverse population, as well as meeting conservation objectives, and may be subject to high visitation rates and issues of crowding in peak periods (Heywood, 1993; Arnberger and Brandenburg, 2007). There are a number of reasons for interest in the management of urban fringe parks by Australian federal and state governments and parks agencies. Firstly, Australia has a long history of parks being juxtaposed with urban centres and cities. For example, Royal National Park, Australia’s first national park and the second oldest national park in the world (Brown, 2001), sits adjacent to the southern parts of Australia’s largest city, Sydney, and provides ‘recreation to 1.25 million visitors per year and residence to over 2000 people’ (Ramp *et al.*, 2006: 349). Sydney is also bounded to the north by Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Similarly, in Western Australia,

Yanchep National Park, its oldest park, sits on the northern boundary of the rapidly expanding city of Perth. Three marine parks also abut Perth – Swan Estuary, Marmion and Shoalwater Islands. Weaver and Lawton (2004: 288) observe that all major Australian cities with populations over 1 million ‘are proximate to extensive areas of protected forests and mountains’.

Secondly, urban fringe parks play a key role in community health and urban liveability, as illustrated by the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* campaign by several Australian parks agencies, with its aim of raising awareness of the physical, mental and social wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature. For example, eight urban fringe parks, including Rockingham Lakes Regional Park, one of the case studies in this paper, have been established by the Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation (WA DEC), and reserved for conservation, recreation and landscape values. A central objective has been providing people with mostly free, healthy and accessible recreational activities (DEC, 2006). These parks are a particular focus of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program in that State. It might be argued that these parks help to shape our culture, including ‘attitudes, beliefs, values and norms’ (Johnson, 1995: 68) about the value of nature, as well as providing an entrée to nature for the community.

Thirdly, there is recognition of the economic effects of increased usage of these parks. The proximity of the population to these protected areas and consequent higher levels of activity in urban fringe parks, combined with increased pressures on budgets to achieve a wide range of management outcomes (Eagles, 2002) has stretched the resources of parks agencies, demanding a rethink of their management approaches. Allied to this, park visitors are becoming more diverse in their needs and expectations and perhaps more demanding, given not only greater cultural diversity within the community (Heywood, 1993; Gobster, 2002) but also a more experienced and sophisticated clientele who demand more from their park experiences (Eagles *et al.*, 2002) and may feel a sense of ownership over their ‘local’ park.

Partnerships have increasingly been advocated by governments, not only in protected area management (Buckley and Sommer, 2001; Eagles *et al.*, 2002; De Lacy *et al.*, 2002; Miller and Hobbs, 2002; Monroe, 2005) but in fields as diverse as health, social service delivery, and education (Hall, 1999). The desired outcomes include cost reductions for government, improvements in the efficiency of service delivery, and reducing conflict through engaging stakeholders. For urban fringe parks, partnerships can result in economic

benefits and enhanced 'stewardship' by local communities, with the latter encouraged to support conservation goals and appreciate nature (Miller and Hobbs, 2002). There may also be other social benefits attributed to greater participation in park planning and management (Stein, 2005), such as a heightened sense of community wellbeing and connectedness. Thus, a partnership approach to urban fringe park management may offer a number of advantages, and positive outcomes such as participation of community members and other stakeholders (including the tourism industry), less conflict/more harmonious relationships, conservation benefits and economic benefits (Buckley and Sommer, 2001; Eagles *et al.*, 2002; De Lacy *et al.*, 2002).

In a recently completed review of research on partnerships between protected area managers and tourism interests, Laing *et al.* (in press: 4), building on the earlier work of Bramwell and Lane (2000), defined partnerships as:

*'Regular, cross-sectoral interactions over an extended period of time between parties, based on at least some agreed rules or norms, intended to address a common issue or to achieve a specific policy goal or goals, which cannot be solved by the partners individually, and involving pooling and sharing of appreciations or resources, mutual influence, accountability, commitment, participation, trust and respect and transparency'.*

This review identified a wealth of case study research on protected area tourism partnerships but very limited use of theoretical perspectives. When theory has been used, a single perspective is most common, usually grounded in tourism, protected area management or economics. This may be due in part to the fact that Brinkerhoff (2002) has identified tourism partnerships in protected areas as an evolving research area, in need of some fresh theoretical perspective. The study from which this paper is derived therefore sought to ground its research efforts in multiple theoretical perspectives, to provide a more thorough examination of the factors that affect the success or otherwise of a partnership and to avoid reinventing the wheel. The use and combination of multiple theories has value in that it makes it possible to build on the strengths of each theory and minimise the weaknesses (a form of triangulation) and is necessary due to the fact that no single theoretical perspective appeared to cover all the likely partnership success factors based on a search of the literature. These theories were used to inform our understanding of partnership success in an area of research which has been largely atheoretical to date. While our research may ultimately contribute to refining current theory, theory-building is not the aim or focus of this paper. Rather, we draw on the theory to

inform an analysis of two Australian urban fringe parks, in order to identify success factors in these partnerships. The urban fringe context has received little research attention to date and, given its growing importance and potential for conflict, it provides a useful research opportunity that may well provide insights into protected area tourism partnerships more generally.

For the purposes of this paper, success has been defined by members of a nation-wide government and industry group acting in an advisory capacity to the project team. Useful insights into the factors or features affecting partnership success are provided in the literature and in particular by three key theoretical perspectives: social capital, environmental dispute resolution, and institutional analysis and development. Collectively, these perspectives help explain how and why partners interact, and what influences these interactions. *Social capital* examines the way social networks operate (Jones, 2005). It can help explore the relationships between partners and the influence of these on outcomes. *Environmental dispute resolution* centres on the resolution of disputes or conflict (Bingham, 1986). Much of the associated theorising and empirical work is of direct relevance to partnerships, with a similar emphasis on relationships over time. The *institutional analysis and development* framework relies on the use and analysis of rules or administrative processes to address problems associated with the use of ‘common pool resources’ (Imperial, 1999). Given the place of agreements and relationships over time (‘rules’) in successful partnerships, as well as parks often being identified as common pool resources, this third perspective is also valuable for its potential explanatory power. The aim is to better understand protected area-tourism partnerships and the factors that contribute to their success, through explicitly using this theory as a starting point for empirical investigation.

Based on our review of literature, factors or features potentially affecting the success of a partnership can be categorised, after Bingham (1986) and more recently Laing *et al.* (in press) as partner-related, process-related or context-related. *Partner-related factors* are the characteristics of the partners, such as leadership and openness to change, while *process-related factors* relate to the running or operation of the partnership, such as levels of commitment and trust. *Context-related factors* deal with the partnership background including adequacy of organisational support, legal framework and administrative arrangements.

All these factors or features are potentially relevant to partnerships associated with urban fringe parks. Of particular interest are process-related factors (features of working together) such as trust, open communication, and having the means of dealing with conflict

(Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Leach and Pelkey, 2001; De Lacy *et al.*, 2002). For urban fringe parks, there is high potential for conflict, referred to above, given that the park may be close enough to people ‘to be part of “their territory”’ (Monroe, 2005: 123), whether local residents, urban visitors or private developers/planners. Also potentially of critical importance to these parks are the contextual factors associated with any partnerships, for example, having adequate resources to support the partnership (Imperial, 2005). For urban fringe park partnerships, given that there are likely to be numerous stakeholders, it makes sense that sufficient time and resources are needed for multi-party discussions.

To summarise, the theoretical perspectives of social capital, environmental dispute resolution and institutional analysis and development are used in this paper to drive the analysis of two partnerships involving Australian urban fringe protected areas. These theories informed the identification of potential success factors, categorised as process-related, partner-related and context-related, which in turn informed the development of both the questionnaire and the interview questions used in this research. The case studies reported in this paper are (1) the Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment, a multi-million dollar venture in south-eastern Australia adjacent to Port Phillip Marine Park and (2) Rockingham Lakes Regional Park, located on the southern metropolitan boundary of the city of Perth in south-western Australia, with a long history of community involvement in park management.

## **Methods**

A case study approach (Yin, 2003) drove the research to enable exploration and description of the potentially complex array of factors potentially influencing the success of these partnerships. Each of the two cases has analytic value both as a single case and as a contributor to cross-case comparison (Yin, 2003). The search for patterns across cases is described by Yin (2003) as explanation building, which aims to describe the causal links associated with phenomena, but which originates within and continues to be guided by existing theoretical perspectives. Two urban fringe parks were chosen, where the protected area managing agency had confirmed the existence of a multi-party partnership including members from the agency and tourism/recreation interests. Both case study locales epitomise places where the ‘urban-rural fringe [has become] an increasingly important venue for an array of tourism-related activities’ (Weaver, 2005: 23). They were also selected as examples of successful partnerships by the industry reference group as mentioned earlier.



Previous empirical studies, and particularly a number that were informed by three key theoretical perspectives, were used in designing a self-completed questionnaire which was administered to representatives of each of the partner organisations in the two case studies. Questionnaire responses were used as a starting point for face-to-face interviews with these representatives, who were asked to respond from an individual rather than organisational point of view, based on their own perceptions of the success factors behind the partnership with which they were involved. This paper draws primarily on the interview responses and, as such, the results analysed in this paper are *qualitative*, exploring in detail potential factors or features of successful partnerships. Documentation associated with each park, such as reports and meeting notes, also contributed to the analysis.

The questionnaire asked representatives of partner organisations to comment on features of the partners themselves ('partner-related factors'), the way the partners worked together ('process-related factors') and the working environment of the partnership ('context-related factors'). The representatives were asked if the feature is present (broken down into a series of sub-items), whether there is a downward or upward trend in this presence (or no change), and its importance to partnership success, using a 5-point rating scale from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'. Examples of the items used include the presence of leadership by at least one of the parties as a partner-related factor, the regularity of meetings between partners as a process-related factor and the existence of a written agreement developed by the partners as a context-related factor. There were twelve items relating to partner-related factors, twenty items relating to process-related factors and twelve items relating to context-related factors.

Each item was drawn from the theoretical perspectives referred to above, with several items about leadership, for example, based primarily on the institutional analysis and development framework, an item on trust between partners based on a number of theories, including social capital theory, items about power distribution and power sharing based on theories such as environmental dispute resolution and social capital theory and an item on conflict minimisation based on the three main theoretical perspectives – social capital theory, environmental dispute resolution and the institutional analysis and development framework.

Interview questions were used to drill down into the questionnaire responses as well as to explore new avenues. Participants were asked during the interviews to identify the one or two most important partner-related factors, process-related factors and context-related factors for their partnership and then explain why each was the most important and what enabled it to

be present (or absent). Some participants chose to identify the three most important features while others only chose one.

Purposive and snowball sampling were used to locate and select participants (Neuman, 2000). Participants were purposefully selected to access representatives of the partner organizations who were perceived to be rich sources of information on the topic of interest (Babbie, 2001; Neuman, 2000, Patton, 1990). In the current study, this meant that participants had both a good working knowledge and a significant role to play in the partnership concerned. Initial contacts in both case studies were provided by the relevant park agency. Once the study had commenced, snowball sampling, where one participant provided the name(s) of other potential participants, was used to extend the research coverage. Snowball sampling is regarded as appropriate when the comprehensiveness of research depends on fully investigating a network of activity (Neuman, 2000), as was the case with these urban fringe parks. The partners and their representatives included in this study are detailed in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The following analysis focuses on those features of the partnership that participants identified as ‘extremely important’ in their questionnaire responses and then subsequently identified in follow-up interviews as being of the greatest importance. The interview results have therefore been used to elucidate the factors or features and associated influences behind successful partnerships. Although the number of interviews conducted is small, for each case they collectively capture the diversity of partners – government, non-government and in the case of the Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment, commercial business interests.

## **Case Studies**

The first case study is located in Queenscliff, a small heritage town near the entrance to Port Phillip Bay and about 103 kilometres or an hour and a half’s drive from the CBD of Melbourne, the capital of Victoria. The town was originally a fishing village. During the nineteenth century, Queenscliff became an ‘elite resort’ for Melbourne society (Frost, 2004). It began to decline after the Second World War, although a number of villas and Victorian era resort hotels still open their doors to visitors. The town’s location, on an isthmus, has contributed to its lack of development. Many of its residents have grown up in the town or have moved there in recent years as part of the ‘sea change’ phenomenon (Burnley and Murphy, 2004). Most are educated and articulate and unafraid to voice their opinions on the

future of ‘their’ town and what they perceive as unwelcome change. An anti-harbour development group, the Queenscliff Harbour Forum, has been established (Ketchell, 2004).

The focus of this case study is the Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment, which incorporates expanding and deepening the harbour to allow for larger boats, accommodating over 150 extra berths, building access roads to the ferry and additional car parking, and developing a retail precinct. Queenscliff Harbour is adjacent to Swan Bay in Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park and the proposed cutting will allow water through to the park (Parks Victoria, private communication). Port Phillip Heads Marine Park is described as ‘the jewel of the bay’ (Parks Victoria, 2003) and covers six areas – Swan Bay, Mud Islands, Pope’s Eye, Point Lonsdale, Point Nepean and Portsea Hole. The Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment project is a public/private partnership, part funded by the State Government and managed by Parks Victoria (who have responsibility for managing national parks and other parklands across the state of Victoria). The developer, Queenscliff Harbour Pty Ltd, will eventually lease and operate the harbour upon completion. The Borough of Queenscliff, as the local municipality providing planning approval, is also a partner in the project.

The second case study is based on Rockingham Lakes Regional Park, located in Western Australia (WA), within the City of Rockingham and approximately 40-50 minutes drive or 45 km south of Perth, the state capital. The Park includes a number of lakes – Lakes Richmond, Walyungup, and Coo loongup – as well as coastal stretches (Cape Peron), a scientific park, and the Paganoni Woodlands. Values of the Park include prehistoric thrombolites and ephemeral lakes, as well as woodlands and wetlands (DEC, 2007). Recreation and tourism activities and associated facilities include boardwalks, walking trails and underwater snorkel adventures.

Rockingham Lakes Regional Park is jointly managed by WA DEC and the City of Rockingham. Management advice is provided by an advisory committee, established in 1999, with the chair appointed by the Minister for the Environment. Members include representatives from the City of Rockingham council, WA DEC, volunteer community groups, businesses, and recreational groups. This case study looks at the partnership between WA DEC and the advisory committee.

## Results

For both partnerships, the results suggest a diverse array of factors – of the partners, of working together and of the working environment – as being of importance to participants (Table 2) in terms of contributing to the success of the partnership. With respect to *features of the partners*, the interest of participants coalesced around three main sets of concerns – support and leadership being provided by the protected area (park) agency, issues of power and participation, and the willingness by partners to adapt to change.

In the Queenscliff partnership, a key feature was leadership, expressed as the importance of the parks agency facilitating and nurturing the partnership across different levels of government and with different departments. Support for the partnership from senior agency staff was flagged as an important contribution. Leadership by the private developer, through appointing project managers who had the skills needed to deal with all stakeholders, particularly the community, was also noted as important. For the Rockingham partnership, support by WA DEC and the local council for the advisory committee meetings was acknowledged as being a key element of the partnership.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The distribution of power was also identified as important in both case studies. In the Queenscliff case, power distribution was identified through both the questionnaires and subsequent interviews, while in the Rockingham case, it was mentioned in interviews when participants discussed the features of working together (such as ‘equal opportunity for everyone to contribute at meetings’ – see Table 2). In the Queenscliff case, participants noted that there was an equal balance of power, with the parks agency wanting to ‘work as equals’ and being frank about issues, which were put on the table for discussion, rather than whitewashing them or playing ‘a game of chess’. They invited the municipality to help select the developer, so that stakeholders were part of the process, rather than having a ‘them and us’ mentality.

The relationship between partners and the lead agency in the Queenscliff case was described as ‘empowering’, having ‘a genuine effect on the process’ and ‘ownership’ of the project. The power balance was assisted by having an agreement in place (MOU), which clarified processes, as well as regular meetings that facilitated participation and communication. Willingness to adapt to changing situations was another feature flagged as

important within both partnerships, although it was noted that adaptation needed adequate time to occur.

For the *features of working together*, there was some commonality in responses within each partnership, similar to the features of the partners reported and discussed above, but there were also differences between the cases (Table 2). Being treated as ‘an equal’ was important for the Rockingham partnership. This interest was expressed both as an ‘equal opportunity for everyone to contribute at meetings’ and access to information (‘sufficient information available’). Equal opportunity was described in terms of seeing ‘democracy at work’. Efforts by the chair of the advisory committee to invite and encourage all committee members to put forward their ideas and suggestions was regarded as particularly important in the Rockingham case. Achieving a balance of power and maintaining open communication (and therefore access to information) were aligned with this feature of ‘equal opportunity’.

A central interest in the Queenscliff case was dealing with conflict. Conflict management was essential given the number of issues ‘bubbling up’ within the harbour precinct. Some were highly political, such as the impact of the development on local residents or fishermen. Participants returned to a concern with communication in discussing conflict, saying that open communication helped the process and dealing with conflict. For example, the lead agency prepared questions and answers to help keep stakeholders informed about issues and endeavoured to try and anticipate likely matters of tension. Efforts were also made to stop ‘rumours and things taken out of context’ through news bulletins. The developer similarly was concerned with minimising conflict by keeping dialogue open and trading off issues, so that the partners ended up with a ‘win-win situation’. Communication was also linked to building trust as well as managing conflict, with trust built between the lead agency and residents, and between the lead agency, the municipality and the developer.

For the last group of features relating to *the working environment*, like the previous two groups of features (features of partners and of working together), there were differences between the two cases. Participants representing both partnerships did, however, flag ‘adequate organisational support for the partnership’ as important (Table 2). This support included dedicated resources, including staff, in the Queenscliff case study. At Rockingham Lakes Regional Park, the organisational support provided by WA DEC enabled the partnership to achieve its goals and objectives. The supportive culture of the agency regarding tourism and partnerships was also acknowledged as important in this regard.

Shared accountability was also identified as critical to the success of the Rockingham partnership. This feature was evident in that members of the advisory committee were invited to provide input to the management plan for the Regional Park and open communication made this possible. For the Queenscliff case study, the other important feature of the working environment (in addition to organisational support), was the existence of a written agreement. Such an agreement provided certainty for partners, gave the project a clear focus and set parameters. Certainty was identified as being particularly important for the private sector partner i.e. adequate duration of the agreement to allow for financial returns.

The flow-on effect for conflict resolution was also noted in the Queenscliff case. The presence of a written agreement, as well as legislation, meant that a number of potentially contentious issues became 'a given' and thus time was not wasted going over them. It allowed the municipality to 'hold the line' when under pressure from community interests, as the agreement was 'fairly black and white' about what was up for negotiation. It gave the partners confidence in a set of 'clear, shared expectations' or goals through an agreed framework present from the outset. Interestingly, participants referred to the ability to divert from the strict written agreement where necessary as a success factor. This flexibility was required to demonstrate, and was necessarily based on, trust.

## **Discussion**

For both partnerships, support and leadership by the agency, organisational support for the partnership, power sharing and a willingness to adapt were identified as present and important. Leadership from a lead agency has been similarly identified as important in a number of previous studies, for example in participatory environmental planning (Beierle and Konisky, 2000) and environmental dispute resolution (Bingham, 1986). The findings in this paper mirror those of Beierle and Konisky (2000, pg. 599), who suggest that 'the quality of communication between participants and an agency, commitment and even the quality of the internal participatory process are all affected by agency decisions and support'. Such agencies must also provide organisational support through supplying technical expertise or information (Leach and Pelkey, 2001). These authors also note the importance of providing the opportunity for other stakeholders, particularly local community members, to be able to bring their knowledge to the partnership. In the Rockingham partnership, this opportunity was described as 'participation by all partners encouraged' and 'equal opportunity for everyone to contribute at meetings'. Leach and Pelkey (2001) identify the importance of agency staff

support and participation, as well as local, bottom-up leadership in successful watershed management partnerships, as consistent with the institutional analysis and development framework. The case studies explored in this paper seem to suggest that this framework has some resonance for urban fringe park partnerships. Bingham (1986) also notes that direct involvement of decision makers, including public agencies, is a factor that may affect the likelihood of success of environmental dispute resolution, which may support the use of this theoretical perspective in understanding partnership success.

For urban fringe parks, such leadership is however challenging, given the multiple stakeholders, often including major commercial interests (as in the case of the Queenscliff case study) and the associated spectre of potentially unmanageable conflict. In some ways this task is made easier through understanding the power relationships within these partnerships. Because the lead agencies – Parks Victoria for Queenscliff and WA DEC for Rockingham – are responsible for managing the urban fringe park on which the partnership is based, and this is a legislated mandate, they have a certain, relatively well-known power base. Roberts and Simpson (1999: 328) noted that ‘Successful partnerships are based on a legitimacy of power where the authority of a particular partner is accepted by all other groups’. Acceptance has been linked to providing opportunities for consultation and participation (De Araujo and Bramwell, 2002). Such acceptance and opportunities typified both partnerships. Social capital theory may be a useful starting point in informing our understanding of power imbalances within a partnership structure. Macbeth, Carson and Northcote (2004: 515) refer to social capital, along with political capital as ‘forms of power’ and advocate partnerships ‘between different levels of government and local communities’ as a way to empower and take account of local interests.

There is still an onus, however, on these lead agencies to ‘share’ power in a way that will enable meaningful contributions and partnering by the other parties involved (Ross *et al.*, 2002). In both these cases these agencies were able to do so. For this study’s participants, evidence of power sharing included joint decision making, open communication, and information sharing (Leach and Pelkey, 2001; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). Part of this power sharing, mentioned previously, was providing equal access to information – for developers, local government and community members – as well as respecting and including community knowledge (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Buckley and Somner, 2001; Leach and Pelkey, 2001). Imperial (2005) refers to the exchange of information as helping to build trust, which Leach and Pelkey (2001: 383) note is consistent with the institutional analysis and

development framework, with the provision of enough information so that agreements can be reached which ‘benefit all sides’.

Although there were some features in common between the two cases, others were identified as important in one case but not so in the other. Conflict management and having a written agreement were both important to the Queenscliff partnership, while shared accountability was important for the Rockingham partnership. The conflict associated with the Queenscliff redevelopment may have been a motivating factor in establishing the partnership (Gray, 1996). Being able to manage, but not necessarily resolve conflict, has been identified as a critical success factor for environmental management and associated pursuits (Crowfoot and Wondolleck, 1990; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000) and may suggest the usefulness of environmental dispute resolution theory in this context. A Queenscliff participant commented that having a written agreement reduced conflict, a reflection supported by the institutional analysis and development framework with its emphasis on well-defined processes or ‘rules’ (Imperial, 1999; Leach and Pelkey, 2001). Such a framework would acknowledge a written agreement as providing much-needed rules or structure to guide partnering activities.

The importance attributed to conflict management in the Queenscliff partnership has immediate relevance to most urban fringe parks. Conflict is likely in these places, given multiple stakeholders and growing commercial interests in protected areas, particularly if visitor numbers and the potential customer base for commercial tourism enterprises in these parks continue to grow. This conflict may also be fuelled by local community members’ attachments to ‘place’ and to their territory (Monroe, 2005). Conflict should not be assumed to be negative, as it can contribute to the flexibility identified by Leach and Pelkey (2001) as being critical for the successful working of partnerships. Flexibility is also coupled with adaptability, mentioned as critical in both cases outlined in this paper. The institutional analysis and development framework considers adaptability to change, as do social capital theory (Macbeth, Carson and Northcote, 2004) and environmental dispute resolution theory, although legislation has resulted in the latter becoming more prescriptive in recent years (Smith, 2006).

Although trust was mentioned by a couple of participants, it did not dominate the data gathered as did other factors such as leadership and participation. This is an unexpected finding, given the centrality of trust in social capital and related discussions and praxis about collaborative enterprises. It may well be that the difficulties encountered in describing and



assessing trust, given its intangibility and dynamism (Schuett *et al.*, 2001), may have limited this discussion. On a number of occasions in the interviews, however, participants did mention how trust underpinned other features such as open communication, commitment and addressing problems as they occur. The importance attached to shared accountability in the Rockingham partnership may also rest on concerns with trust and commitment. It therefore appears that trust should be explored further as a factor in successful urban fringe partnerships. Social capital theory may be particularly useful in this context, given that it is an important, and, some would argue, an essential dimension of some forms of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

The wildland-urban interface in Australia, as in many parts of the world, is an expanding phenomenon and has become increasingly important as a space for recreation and tourism for many individuals. Its 'unique attributes' such as ease of access, a 'broader spectrum of demands' for use by visitors, the emphasis on recreation and its social function (Ewert, 1993b) necessitate dedicated managerial as well as research attention (Ewert *et al.*, 1993; Ewert, 1993b) to ensure that these resources remain available to future generations. Research into urban fringe parks at this interface is therefore of high interest from both a current and long-term perspective.

High visitation, the trend towards a more sophisticated and demanding visitor, and park budgetary pressures have demanded a rethink of management of these parks, including the benefits of partnerships in this context. The aim of this paper has been to examine success factors behind these partnerships based on two case studies of urban fringe parks. Theory has been used to inform our understanding of what makes a successful protected area tourism partnership, with an emphasis on three theoretical frameworks – social capital theory, environmental dispute resolution theory and the institutional analysis and development framework. These theories appear to have made a considerable contribution to the research and future studies might wish to take this further, developing and testing a theoretical framework which draws from these three perspectives.

The two case studies covered in this paper offer insight into the diversity of factors that might influence the success of partnerships associated with tourism and recreation in urban fringe areas. The Queenscliff Harbour redevelopment partnership has strong industry

partners and focuses on a major commercial tourism and recreation undertaking with associated strong local community sentiments. In contrast, the Rockingham Lakes Regional Park partnership hinges on a locally constituted advisory committee with strong community representation, charged with providing advice on the Park's management. There are tourism interests involved in this partnership but they are not pivotal to the Park's future.

For both parks, the support and leadership of the park management agency (in both partnerships they were the lead agency) was critical, as was paying attention to power and meaningful efforts towards power sharing. Being adaptable also appeared to be a very important partnership success factor. Other partnership features, such as conflict management, the presence of a written agreement, and trust, were important to one partnership but not the other.

As such, the implications of these results for urban fringe park partnerships are twofold. First, attention to the features common to both would appear to be critical for successful partnerships associated with these parks.

Second, the need for attention to other additional features influencing the success or otherwise of these urban fringe park partnerships requires consideration of the characteristics and location of the urban fringe park, the issues around which the partnership has coalesced, and the motivations and interests of potential partners and other stakeholders. The findings suggest that if there are strong commercial interests and potential for community conflict (e.g. the Queenscliff case study), then attention may need to be paid to managing conflict and developing trust, beginning with securing a written agreement between partners. Facilitating adaptability also seems critical (Leach and Pelkey, 2001). If there is an urban fringe park with strong, diverse local community territoriality (Munroe, 2005), then shared accountability and encouragement of participation may be important factors. Underpinning and supporting achievement of most of these features is open communication (Mohr and Spekman, 1994).

Urban fringe park partnerships provide a window for viewing tourism-protected area partnerships more generally. Ewert (1993b: 8) for example suggests that the factors impacting on the wildland-urban interface may also influence more remote protected areas in years to come: 'From this perspective, the wildland-urban interface presents a set of challenges that will be representative of many future wildland management settings'. They are a particularly useful point of study because they reflect the growing pressures on protected areas, through increased visitor numbers, declining resources for management, and ongoing concerns about protecting the biodiversity and landscape appeal that led to these areas being

established as parks in the first place. The common lessons reported here – the need for leadership, providing sufficient resources to support the partnership, continued genuine efforts at power sharing, and ensuring adaptability – are very likely applicable to partnerships elsewhere. Nurturing of these features may well be important for the successful management of recreation and tourism in protected areas worldwide.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research was funded by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (Gold Coast, Australia). Contributions by Annita Allman, Glen Croy, Diane Lee, Michael Lockwood, Jim Macbeth, and Sharron Pfueller to the broader project, of which this paper forms a part, are acknowledged.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Partners from Queenscliff Harbour Redevelopment and Rockingham Lakes Regional Park partnerships

<b>Case study</b>	<b>Partner organisation</b>	<b>Partner Representative Interviewed (Participant)</b>
Queenscliff Harbour Redevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks Victoria</li> <li>• Borough of Queenscliff</li> <li>• Queenscliff Harbour Pty Ltd</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager involved in the project</li> <li>• Officer involved in project planning</li> <li>• Board member</li> </ul>
Rockingham Lakes Regional Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Environment and Conservation (Western Australia)</li> <li>• City of Rockingham</li> <li>• Friends of Rockingham Lakes Regional Park group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager</li> <li>• Advisory committee member/ councillor</li> <li>• Advisory committee member/ volunteer</li> </ul>



Table 2. Factors identified in the case studies as important to the success of the partnership

<i>Features of partners</i>	<b>QHR*</b>	<b>RLRP*</b>
Effective leadership	<b>**</b>	
Support provided by protected area agency		<b>***</b>
Decision makers directly involved in the partnership		<b>*</b>
Empathy between partners encouraged	<b>*</b>	
Willingness by partners to adapt to changing situations	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>
Power equally distributed between partners	<b>*</b>	
Efforts towards power sharing made within the partnership	<b>*</b>	
Participation by all partners encouraged	<b>*</b>	<b>***</b>
<i>Features of working together</i>	<b>QHR*</b>	<b>RLRP*</b>
Equal opportunity for everyone to contribute at meetings		<b>**</b>
Conflict managed as it arises	<b>*</b>	
Open communication between partners	<b>**</b>	
Trust between partners	<b>**</b>	
Sufficient information available		<b>***</b>
Time-efficient process	<b>*</b>	
Cost-effective process	<b>*</b>	
<i>Features of the working environment</i>	<b>QHR*</b>	<b>RLRP*</b>
Written agreement developed by the partners	<b>***</b>	
Adequate financial support for the partnership	<b>**</b>	
Adequate organisational support for the partnership	<b>*</b>	<b>***</b>
Shared accountability for decision-making		<b>**</b>
Shared accountability for actions		<b>**</b>
Current legislation supports tourism in protected areas	<b>*</b>	
Potential risks associated with the partnership have been addressed	<b>*</b>	

\* QHR – Queenscliff Harbour Redevelopment partnership; RLRP – Rockingham Lakes Regional Park partnership. \* – Number of participants who mentioned the feature.