

Article

Enhancing Place Attachment Through Developing Public Open Places: A Cross-Cultural Study in Gold Coast, Australia

Marzieh Ghasemieshkaftaki ^{1,*}, Karine Dupre ², Jennifer Campbell ³ and Ruwan Fernando ¹

¹ School of Engineering and Built Environment, Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD 4222, Australia; r.fernando@griffith.edu.au

² College of Architecture, Arts and Design, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA; kdupre@vt.edu

³ School of Engineering and Built Environment, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia; jennifer.campbell@griffith.edu.au

* Correspondence: marzieh.ghasemieshkaftaki@griffithuni.edu.au

Abstract: Urban studies research has increasingly focused on placemaking and place attachment in public open places. While several studies have explored how immigrants interact with these places, this study investigates how cultural differences affect immigrants' place attachment, providing a deeper understanding of inclusive urban design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 students from India, Iran, China, and Australia, in Southport, a preferred neighborhood for immigrants on the Gold Coast, Australia. NVivo software was used to analyze the data and extract themes. The findings highlighted that, despite universal factors such as natural environments and social opportunities, cultural factors are crucial in shaping individuals' experiences.

Keywords: public places; immigrants; culture; placemaking; place attachment



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1. Introduction

In recent years, some scholars in urban studies and sociology [1,2] have focused on the concept of place attachment, particularly concerning immigrants' experiences in their new communities. Immigrants often encounter numerous challenges when adapting to unfamiliar environments, including language barriers, cultural differences, and social exclusion. The concept of place attachment, which involves a positive, effective, and meaningful connection between an individual and a specific place [3,4], is crucial for immigrants, as it significantly influences their adaptation, integration, and well-being in host countries [5–7]. According to [8,9], the bond between individuals and places highlights the multifaceted and complex nature of defining place attachment. For this study, building on the literature review [9–13], we considered place attachment as the emotional, social, and cognitive (thought, knowledge, and belief) bond between people and a place.

Moreover, culture plays a vital role in shaping place attachment [14–16], which is not confined to urban environments. For instance, [17] found that cultural factors significantly influence placemaking and place attachment among rural immigrants in Australia, particularly those relocating to urban areas. Their research findings highlight the consideration of culture in exploring how individuals attach to places. It also brings to attention a larger gap, as follows: the cultural diversity of international immigrants in Australia did not receive similar attention in research.

Concurrently, there is ample evidence that public open places play important roles in shaping and enhancing place attachment [18–21]. According to [22–24], public open places, which are inclusive, accessible, safe, and comfortable, serve as vital platforms for

social interactions, community engagement, and cultural exchange. Research on social sustainability [25] emphasizes the significance of public spaces in bringing people together, fostering a sense of belonging, and building strong social cohesion. At the core of this process is sociability, the essential quality of public places, which is achieved when a place becomes a favorite gathering spot where people interact naturally and comfortably with friends, neighbors, and strangers [26]. By fostering meaningful social connections, these places contribute to the placemaking process and improve a sense of attachment among people.

Most of the studies related to public open places and place attachment have neglected the experiences of immigrants. While a few scholars, such as [27,28], have made initial efforts to explore how immigrants perceive and interact with public places, they have not considered the cultural differences between immigrants. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative research on the process of shaping place attachment in public places between non-immigrants and immigrants from different cultural backgrounds. To address these gaps, this study investigates both non-immigrants and immigrants from different cultural backgrounds in order to understand how public open places influence place attachment. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How do non-immigrants and immigrants from different cultural backgrounds perceive and interact with public open places?
2. What are the key challenges and desired improvements identified by immigrants and non-immigrants regarding public open places, and how can urban designers and policymakers resolve these issues to enhance the sense of place attachment?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area and Respondents

This research was conducted in 2024 in the Gold Coast, a multicultural city in Australia with almost 31% foreign-born residents [29]. Despite some research on place attachment on the Gold Coast [30,31], no prior studies have focused on immigrants' attachment to public open places.

This report is the second phase of a larger study focusing on international students and public open places on the Gold Coast. In the initial phase of this study [32], Southport, a district of the Gold Coast, was identified as one of the neighborhoods with the most preferred public open places. Consequently, Southport was selected for this phase, focusing on the most preferred public open places (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The study area: Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets.

International students in Australia were recruited for two reasons. Firstly, student immigrants represented the largest group of immigrants, with 283,000 arrivals in 2022–23 [33].

Secondly, international students encounter a new culture and an unfamiliar educational environment [34], so fostering place attachment becomes crucial to their adaptation. Furthermore, the Gold Coast has two large universities and several colleges, so selecting immigrant students in this city is meaningful.

To investigate cultural differences in place attachment, this study selected nationalities using two criteria, as follows: representativeness of the Australian context and research team convenience. Reference [35] reports that the largest groups of international students emigrate from China (27%) and India (16%). Consequently, Indian and Chinese students were selected. Although Iranian students make up only 0.4% of international students in Australia, their inclusion was facilitated by the Iranian background of one of the authors. The cultural familiarity with Iranians enhances data gathering and evaluation precision [36]. However, such familiarity can introduce bias [37,38]. To mitigate this bias and compare immigrants with locals, Australian students were also included.

2.2. Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were combined with simulated walking videos of the study area, as approved by Griffith University's Human Ethics Committee (GU Ref No: 2022/872).

Data saturation is a key principle that guides sample size in qualitative research, which occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data [39–41]. For selecting an appropriate sample size, we considered literature suggestions and data saturation. According to the literature [42,43], a sample size of 5–25 participants in qualitative studies is sufficient to ensure the depth and comprehensiveness of data. Based on this recommendation, this study interviewed a minimum of five participants from each of the four nationalities until data saturation was reached [41,44]. This approach facilitated a balanced understanding of place attachment across different nationalities.

Reference [39] mentioned that qualitative research needs an explanation of how data saturation was achieved. We assessed data saturation at two stages, during interviews and through the analysis process. Firstly, as interviews progressed, data redundancy and sufficient details to answer research questions were identified after three interviews with Iranian, Indian, and Australian participants. Therefore, we proceeded to interview five participants from each of these three nationalities. For Chinese participants, while data repetition was understood after three interviews, fewer details emerged. Therefore, for Chinese immigrants, instead of five participants, six were included.

Second, saturation was identified during the data analysis process. While interviews were in progress, we completed transcriptions and coding at the same time. By the third transcription for each nationality, the analysis indicated consistent patterns in codes and themes, revealing that no new themes were emerging.

Each interview was conducted individually and face-to-face, lasting 30–60 min. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection due to their sensitivity to social realities and ability to understand participants' profound experiences, perspectives, and feelings [45]. Additionally, this method is structured enough to address specific topics related to this study while allowing flexibility for participants to introduce new insights and meanings relevant to the research focus [46].

The interview questions (see Appendix A) align with the research aims, informed by the existing literature and theories related to placemaking and place attachment [15,47]. According to [13,48], these theories consider both tangible elements and intangible values of places, which contribute to place attachment. To address tangible elements, we included questions about routines and activities, the facilities, services, appearance and design, and specific elements and features of the place [48]. For intangible values, we divided the questions into categories focusing on emotions and feelings [9,11], social experiences [49,50],

and memories [28]. The interview questions in Appendix A were organized under headings corresponding to the aforementioned theoretical components, illustrating how the framework guided question development while providing flexibility in the semi-structured interview process.

Moreover, we clearly defined place dependence and place attachment using simple language and examples to help interviewees describe their experiences related to these concepts. From the previous phase of our study, we discovered that recognizing cultural and universal preferences is crucial for improving urban planning and creating inclusive public places. Therefore, we included questions addressing cultural preferences, universal activities, cultural conflicts, and alignments in the study area. Unstructured questions also emerged based on the interviewees' responses.

After asking general introductory questions, we played recorded walking videos to introduce the study area. Walking videos are beneficial because they help interviewees to visually recall the area, providing a realistic context for their responses [13,51]. We used an eye-level camera while walking through the study area on a weekday from 3 to 4 pm, ensuring consistent weather conditions throughout all recordings.

2.3. Data Analysis

Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed for analysis. We followed the procedures presented in Figure 2 for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the data. To reduce personal bias and ensure consistency, the data analysis followed an iterative process described by [52]. During the process, each author reviewed initial codes and identified themes. Then, based on the multiple discussions among the authors, the themes were refined, and discrepancies were resolved until an agreement was achieved.

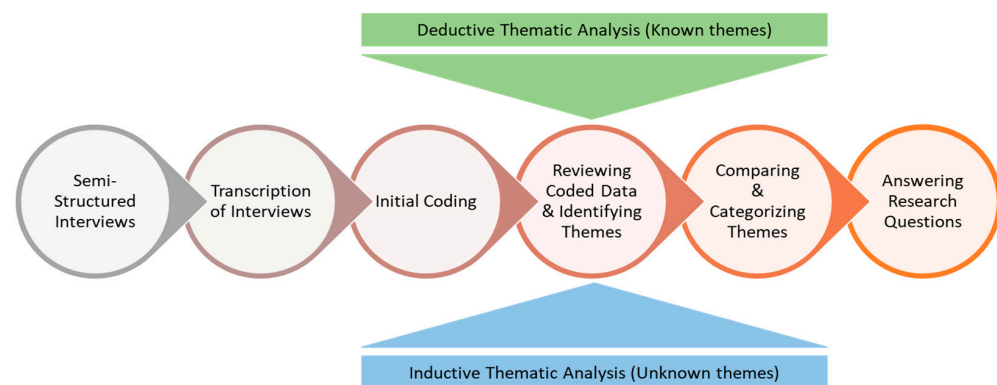


Figure 2. Applied thematic analysis steps in the study.

2.3.1. Initial Coding (Coding the Data)

Interview transcripts were coded using NVivo (2020, R1) software, a tool for qualitative data analysis [53]. We initially employed descriptive coding to assign codes to segments of the interview transcripts that captured the primary topics discussed by the participants [54]. Some parts of the transcripts received multiple descriptive codes. Structured coding [54] was also applied based on the interview questions, which allowed us to systematically analyze responses and identify patterns related to research aims.

2.3.2. Reviewing Coded Data and Identifying Themes

After completing the initial coding, we organized and clustered related codes into broader themes to answer the research questions. Both deductive and inductive thematic analyses were employed for a comprehensive approach [55]. According to [56,57], deductive thematic analysis uses pre-existing theories or frameworks to guide coding and theme

development, whereas inductive thematic analysis uses data to determine themes without preconceived categories.

The first aim was to understand participants' interactions with public places. To achieve this, we employed a deductive thematic analysis to categorize and analyze descriptive codes, based on the placemaking model from the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) [58] (Figure 3). This model was chosen because the main attributes of the model are consistently identified in the literature for evaluating public place qualities [23,24,59]. The PPS model presented three rings, as follows: the inner ring with key place attributes, the middle ring with intangible qualities, and the outer ring with measurable data. We focused on four inner ring attributes as the main themes for deductive analysis. However, we intentionally avoided focusing on the model's middle and outer rings to extract new sub-themes based on inductive thematic analysis rather than confining our analysis to known categories.

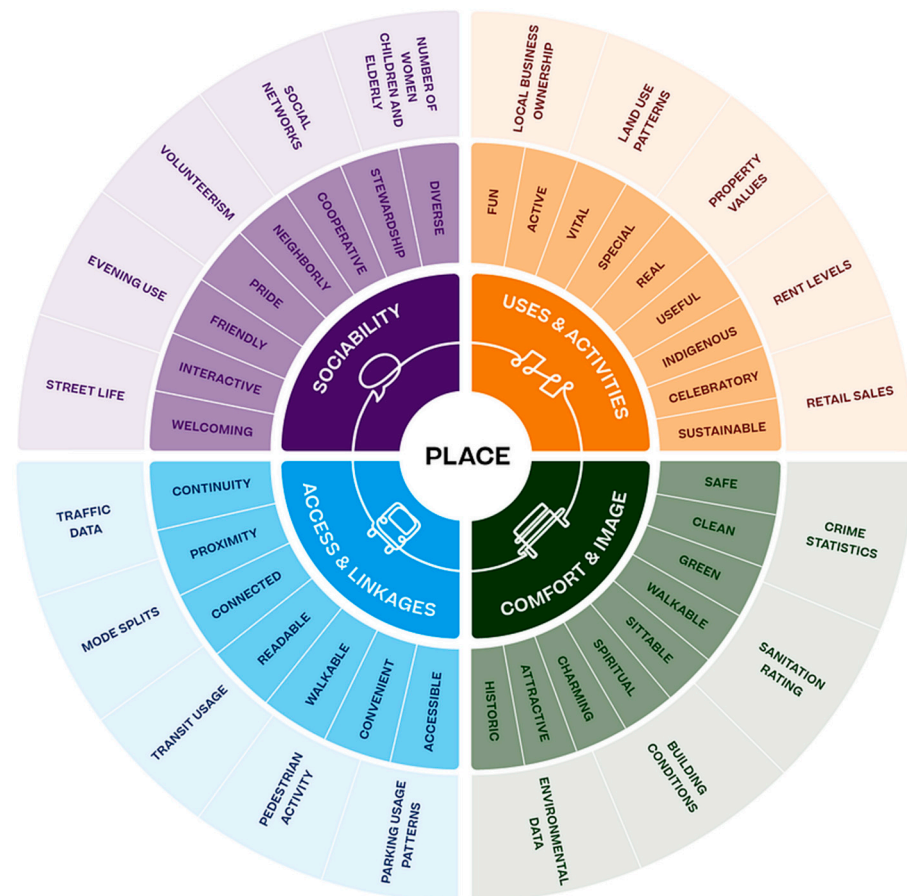


Figure 3. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) model to evaluate placemaking [58].

As we categorized descriptive codes into four main themes, inductive sub-themes were identified from the data in each category. Some sub-themes were consistent with both intangible qualities and measurable data of the PPS model, while others did not fit neatly into these categories, as they were derived directly from the data. We applied the same process to extract the participants' challenges and desires for the development of public places.

In this research, interview transcripts were reviewed, and descriptive and structured codes were applied to identify relevant themes in the participants' place attachments. We extracted specific reasons for place attachment and analyzed how these reasons correlated with the participants' responses to other interview questions. This analysis helps to uncover how place attachment is shaped. We also categorized and reviewed the structural codes

based on the interview questions related to universal activities, cultural alignments, and conflicts in the study area to extract themes about cultural and universal preferences.

2.3.3. Comparing and Categorizing Themes

The themes were then separated based on locations, such as Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets, and compared between different cultures. Broadwater Parklands, a developed green space and waterside park, and the surrounding built-up streets, including the shopping center Australia Fair, were separately evaluated due to their distinct types of public places. This comparative analysis highlighted contextual differences and similarities in the participants' experiences and perceptions of these places.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of Respondents

We interviewed twenty-one participants, including five Australians, five Iranians, five Indians, and six Chinese participants (Table 1). Six Chinese participants were included to achieve data saturation and a comprehensive range of insights. The average age of the participants was 31, ranging from 25 to 41 years. There was a slight majority of female respondents (57%). The average length of residency was approximately 57 months.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

Nationalities	Age	Gender	Length of Residency in the Gold Coast (Month)	Marital Status
Chinese	30	Female	21	Single
	32	Female	77	Single
	26	Female	21	Single
	27	Nonbinary	72	Single
	25	Female	35	Single
	27	Female	28	Single
Indians	30	Male	24	Single
	28	Male	52	Single
	41	Female	62	Married with Children
	28	Male	18	Single
	25	Female	8	Single
Iranians	35	Male	27	Married
	37	Female	5	Single
	32	Female	50	Married
	33	Female	6	Single
	35	Male	31	Married
Australians	33	Female	204	Single
	31	Female	12	Married
	39	Male	194	Married with Children
	25	Male	120	Single
	30	Male	144	Single

3.2. Perceptions and Interactions with Public Open Places

Table 2 presents the extracted themes and sub-themes from the participants' perceptions and interactions in Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets. The numbers beside each sub-theme indicate the number of participants who referred to it, providing a quantitative measure of its prevalence.

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes from participants’ perceptions and interactions in the study area.

	Broadwater Parklands	Surrounding Streets
Sociability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gathering and socializing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Events 18 - Walking with friends/family 7 - Gathering with friends/family 6 - Celebrating birthday party 4 - Barbecue with friends/family 4 - Sharing food with others 1 ● People diversity +Positive 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Different cultures” 10 - “Different ages” 4 - “Inclusive” 3 - Different physical abilities 1 - “Different genders” 1 -Negative 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Dominated by local people” 2 - No “seniors” 2 - “Kids oriented” 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gathering and socializing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gathering with friends/family in restaurants/cafes 9 - Walking with friends/family 2 - Going to the Australia Fair (shopping center) with friends/family 1 ● People diversity +Positive 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Different cultures” 5 - “Different ages” 1 - “Different genders” 1 -Negative 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dominated by Chinese 2
Uses and Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptions about facilities and services +Positive 20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Playground and water park 15 - Barbecue areas 7 - Benches and sitting areas 7 - Toilets 5 - Grass field 3 - Shading and shelter 1 -Negative 14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Playground and water park 8 - Shading and shelter 5 - Benches and sitting areas 5 - Barbecue areas 4 - Toilets 3 - Restaurants and cafe 2 ● Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walking 11 - Watching views 10 - Sitting 8 - Playing (playground) 6 - Barbecue 5 - Eating out 3 - Cycling 2 - Feeding birds 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceptions about facilities and services +Positive 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shops and commercial establishments and offerings 14 - Restaurants and cafes 9 - Shading 1 -Negative 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shops and commercial establishments and offerings 8 - Restaurants and cafes 4 ● Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shopping 11 - Eating out 11 - Going to gym 3 - Walking 1
Comfort and Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Image of the natural environment +Positive 21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beach and views 19 - Green areas and views 9 ● Image of the built-up environment +Positive 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Large” and “big” park with “huge” spaces 6 - Pathways 2 - “Well-designed”, “well-maintained”, and “redeveloped” 2 - Lighting design at night 1 - “Flexible set-up” 1 -Negative 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Old” and “outdated” playground 4 - Too large 2 - Old “decorations” 1 ● Sense of safety and security +Positive 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel safe in the park 3 - Feel safe because of “families” and “children” 3 - Feel safe at night 2 -Negative 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unsafe for children (e.g., “sharp objects in the playground”) 2 - “Gas tank for barbecue and lack of safety” 1 - Unsafe because of “addicts” 1 ● Feel relaxed/calm/less stressed 11 ● Feel happy and enjoy 9 ● Feel comfortable 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Image of the built-up environment +Positive 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well-maintained and redeveloped area 2 - Well-designed facade of Australia Fair 1 -Negative 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Old area, facades, and Australia Fair 5 - “Highway separates park and streets” 3 ● Sense of safety and security +Positive 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel safe at night 1 -Negative 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feel unsafe because of “homeless”, “junkies”, and “drunks” 8 - Feel unsafe as a general perception 2 - Feel unsafe at night 1 ● Feel comfortable 2

Table 2. Cont.

	Broadwater Parklands	Surrounding Streets
Accessibility and Linkage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible 6 • Not accessible 1 • Convenient transportation 10 • Not convenient transportation 1 • Proximity to home/university 9 • No proximity to home 2 • Parking +Positive 3 -Negative 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible 7 • No traffic 2 • Convenient transportation 15 • Not convenient transportation 2 • Proximity to home/university 8 • No proximity to home 3 • Parking +Positive 3 -Negative 2

Two main themes in the ‘sociability’ category are gathering and socializing and people diversity. Broadwater Parklands is predominantly used for events and walking with friends or families, while the surrounding streets are mainly used for socializing in restaurants and cafes. Broadwater Parklands appears to be a more versatile and popular destination for various social activities. Broadwater Parklands is perceived as more inclusive and culturally diverse than the surrounding streets. Many participants noted Broadwater Parklands’ inclusivity and its presence of different cultures and age groups. However, both locations are perceived as dominated by a specific group, which can impact how welcoming these places feel. In Broadwater Parklands, the respondents underlined the absence of seniors, as follows: “I seldom see many senior people around that area. Um I’m not sure if it’s because of the lack of facilities for senior people”.

Two main themes for ‘uses and activities’ were described as follows: perceptions about facilities and services and activities. Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets received a mix of positive and negative perceptions. The playground and water park, barbecue areas, benches, and sitting areas at Broadwater Parklands were appreciated. However, the same facilities also received negative feedback from the participants, indicating room for improvement. For example, one interviewee mentioned the following: “I think this area needs more shadings near the beach because of the sun and rainy days”. The surrounding streets are well known for their shops and commercial establishments, along with restaurants and cafes, but these also received criticism, especially the shops and commercial offerings. One participant expressed concern as follows: “I don’t think it’s the best. What the owner can provide, like what it’s sold, there is just not enough. Not enough brands, maybe. Yeah, not enough anything. Not enough food, not enough brand, not enough anything”.

Broadwater Parklands is primarily used by participants for recreational and sports activities, such as walking, playing, cycling, and activities related to nature, such as watching views. In contrast, the surrounding streets are primarily used for shopping and dining activities, reflecting their role as a service-oriented area.

The responses about ‘comfort and image’ reveal distinct perceptions of Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets. Broadwater Parklands is highly praised for its natural environment and the views of the beach and green areas. Its built-up environment also received positive feedback, although some participants noted negative elements, such as an old playground and outdated decorations. The park is generally perceived as safe, due to the presence of families and children, despite some concerns about specific safety issues. The participants frequently mentioned feeling relaxed, happy, and comfortable in Broadwater Parklands. In contrast, the surrounding streets received mixed reviews. While some appreciated the well-maintained areas and the facade of the shopping center, others criticized the old facades and the highway that separates Broadwater Parklands from the streets. Safety perceptions were notably negative, and the participants repeatedly

expressed concerns about “homeless people, junkies, and drunks”. Only a few participants felt comfortable in the surrounding streets.

Both areas were generally considered accessible in terms of ‘accessibility and linkage.’ The participants found transportation convenient for both locations, although the surrounding streets received slightly more positive responses. The proximity of Broadwater Parklands to the participants’ homes and the university was mentioned somewhat more than the surrounding streets. Comparisons of parking perceptions revealed that Broadwater Parklands received more negative feedback compared to the surrounding streets.

Figure 4 presents the percentage of positive and negative perceptions for themes, highlighting differences between Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets. It shows the participants’ sentiments, including favorable experiences and negative feedback. The chart indicates a pattern of mixed satisfaction across different themes, particularly for facilities and services, the built-up environment, and parking areas. For example, facilities and services in Broadwater Parklands received 95.2% positive feedback but also 66.6% negative perceptions; in addition, in the surrounding streets, they had 76.2% positive feedback and 47.6% negative responses. This shows that, while there are positive sentiments, there is still a clear need for improvements. The most significant concern in the surrounding streets is safety and security, with 54.4% of participants expressing negative perceptions and experiences. In Broadwater Parklands, the main concerns are facilities and services, followed by the image of the built environment.

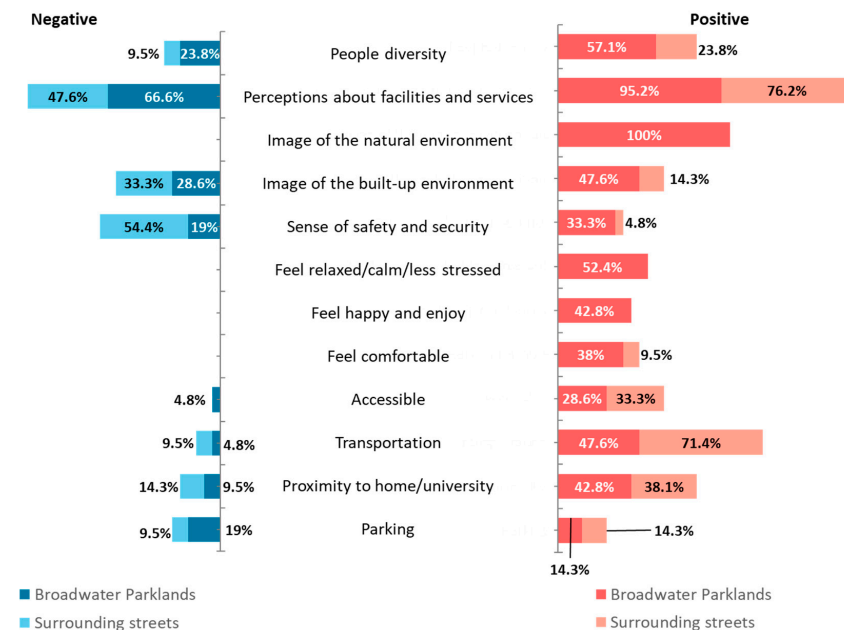


Figure 4. Participants’ positive and negative sentiments of Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets.

3.3. Challenges and Desired Improvements for Public Open Places

Table 3 presents the participants’ challenges and desires for improving the study area, specifically focusing on sociability, uses and activities, comfort and image, and accessibility. Eight participants highlighted the need for more “multicultural events” or “night events” in Broadwater Parklands. No suggestions were mentioned for improving sociability in the surrounding streets. However, this lack of feedback does not indicate that these streets are socially perfect. It may suggest that the participants focused more on the issues in Broadwater Parklands and overlooked opportunities to improve sociability in the streets. The participants emphasized the need for enhanced facilities and services in both locations, reflecting a broader desire for improved infrastructure.

Table 3. Participants’ challenges and desires for improving the study area.

	Broadwater Parklands	Surrounding Streets
Sociability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering and socializing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More “multicultural events” or “night events” 8 	
Uses and Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions about facilities and services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More “shading”, “shelters”, and “covered sitting areas” for “rainy”, “windy”, and “sunny” days 7 - Install “new playground facilities” for both younger and older children 4 - Additional “barbecue facilities” 3 - More available toilets at night and toilets during events 3 - Pest control for “mice” 1 - Add “street food” 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions about facilities and services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More “diverse brands and foods” 3 - Improve service affordability 1 - Develop “galleries and museums” 1 - Offer “social services” 1
Comfort and Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image of the natural environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Preserve green areas” and add diverse trees 2 • Image of the built-up environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Add more “sculptures”, “statues”, and “signboards” 5 - Enhancements to decorative elements such as “Christmas decorations”, “lighting at night”, and “colorful design” 3 - “Update the outdated design” 1 - Improve shared walking path with “bike path” 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image of the built-up environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update “outdated and old Australia Fair and buildings” 5 - “Connect the streets and Broadwater Parklands” 2 - Add more signboards 2 • Sense of safety and security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No more “homeless”, “junkies”, and “drunk” 3
Accessibility and Linkage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “More parking” 4 - Control crowdedness 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “More parking” 2 - Control crowdedness 1

Several aspirations for enhancing comfort and image were suggested. In Broadwater Parklands, the participants emphasized “preserving green areas” and adding diverse trees. The participants expressed a desire to improve the built-up environment by adding “sculptures”, “statues”, “signboards”, and enhancements to decorative elements, such as “Christmas decorations”, “lighting at night”, and “colorful design”. The participants highlighted the need to “update the outdated design” and improve shared walking paths. Perceptions regarding the surrounding streets focused on built environment issues, criticizing the outdated appearance of the shopping center and nearby buildings. The participants also emphasized improving the connectivity between the streets and Broadwater Parklands. Moreover, safety and security concerns were prevalent, with a strong desire among the participants to mitigate related challenges.

The participants expressed their aspirations to enhance accessibility and manage crowdedness in Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets. There is a clear need for additional parking facilities in both areas to address current shortages. Managing crowdedness is also a concern, with suggestions to implement measures that ensure a less-congested experience for visitors.

3.4. Reasons for Place Attachment

Figure 5 provides insights into the reasons for place attachment among Iranians, Indians, Chinese, and Australians in these places. Overall, the participants cited more reasons for attachment to Broadwater Parklands than the surrounding streets. Notably, three participants, including one Indian, one Iranian, and one Chinese, mentioned that they are not attached to the study area.

Distinct patterns were identified for each cultural group and their attachment. The Indian participants show a greater attachment to Broadwater Parklands, particularly for socializing and enjoying nature. The Chinese participants have similar reasons for attachment to Broadwater Parklands, but they are particularly attached to the surrounding streets

because of Chinatown and other Chinese cultural elements. Iranians demonstrate an equal attachment to both Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets, valuing these areas for socializing, nature, comfort, and accessibility. The Australian participants show a strong attachment to Broadwater Parklands, driven by socializing and gathering with friends and families. Familiarity with the area further enhances their attachment to these public places. In particular, some Australian participants are attached to and proud of the study area’s cultural diversity.

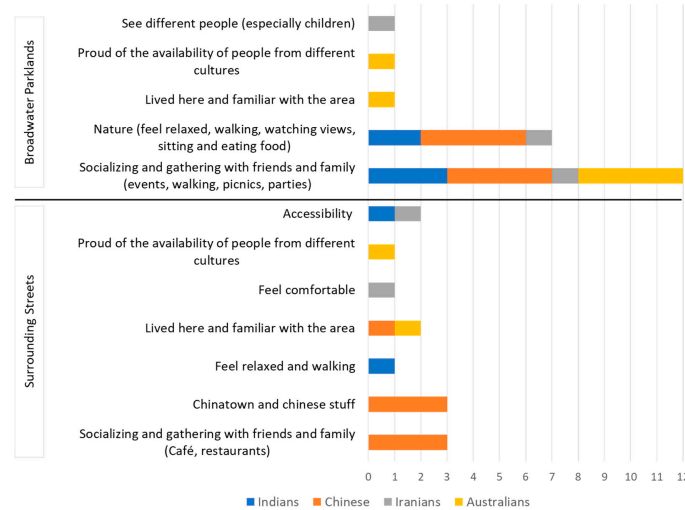


Figure 5. Reasons for place attachment among different cultural groups.

To understand how place attachment is shaped, we analyzed the reasons participants cited for their attachment. We cross-referenced these reasons with their responses to other interview questions to identify common themes. Figure 6 shows the number of participants who mentioned each reason according to this study.

Figure 6 illustrates how tangible factors, such as routines, activities, facilities, and design features, interact with intangible elements like memories, feelings, and cultural alignment to create and foster a sense of place attachment. This place attachment is manifested through a deep liking for the place and a sense of missing it when away. This analysis uncovers the multifaceted nature of place attachment and how it depends on both physical attributes and personal experiences.

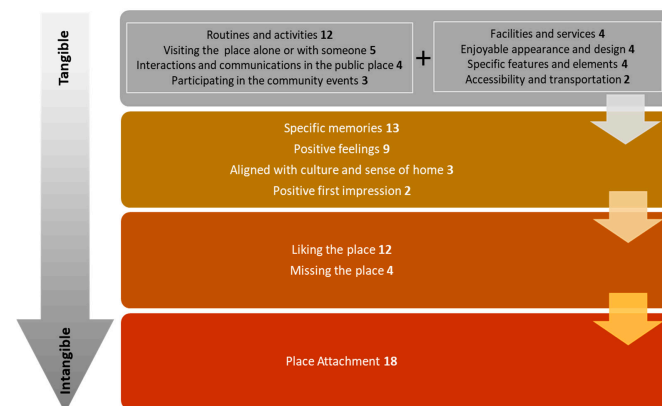


Figure 6. Process of shaping place attachment among participants.

3.5. Universal Activities and Cultural Preferences

We asked participants about the universal activities and experiences in Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets. Universal activities can be enjoyed by many people,

regardless of their culture or demographic. The participants identified various universal activities in Broadwater Parklands, including gathering and socializing with families and friends, barbecuing, feeling relaxed, walking, playing volleyball and cricket, swimming, children playing, and dog walking. Among these activities, gathering and socializing with families and friends were identified as the most frequently mentioned, underscoring the park’s role as a social hub. In contrast, the surrounding streets were only noted by one participant for their Asian stores in the shopping center, suggesting a limited range of universally appealing activities compared to the park.

Table 4 reveals cultural differences regarding the question, “Do you think your culture prefers this place or other places?” The Indian respondents predominantly preferred the study area due to its accessibility, facilities, Indian events, and restaurants. The Chinese respondents mainly appreciated the area for Chinatown and the availability of Chinese cultural elements. The Iranian respondents were divided in their preferences. Some valued the study area because of barbecues and sitting areas for gathering, while others preferred more crowded or other places. In contrast, Australians predominantly did not prefer the study area, rather they prefer untouched and natural places with beaches, sands, and trees, particularly in the southern Gold Coast, showing their desire for less-developed areas.

Table 4. Cultural preferences and the study area.

Do you Think your Culture Prefers this Place to Other Places? Why?				
Nationalities	Yes	No	Not Sure	Reasons/Number of Participants
Australians		4	1	Untouched and more natural places/4
Indians	5			Facilities/2 Indian events/2 Indian restaurants/1 Accessibility/1
Chinese	5			Chinatown and Chinese cultural elements/4 Free public place and good for families with children/1 Good for families with children/1
		1		Other places/1
Iranians	2			Barbecues and sitting areas for gathering/2
		2		Other places/1 More crowded areas/1
			1	It depends on the house’s location/1

4. Discussion

4.1. Place Attachment and Cultural Differences

Our results on place attachment as a combination of tangible and intangible factors resonate with the person–process–place (PPP) model [15] and the space–place theory [47]. Although fundamental principles of place attachment are consistent across cultural groups, the specific tangible elements in public places that foster intangible experiences and attachment can vary significantly due to cultural preferences.

For example, the Iranian participants prefer using barbecue facilities for gatherings, which strengthens their attachment through shared memories. Conversely, the Chinese and Indian participants prioritize gathering and dining in cultural restaurants, followed by leisurely walks in public places to relax and build their attachment. Additionally, the Indian participants are interested in attending events, particularly Indian cultural events. These diverse uses illustrate the importance of culturally specific activities in enhancing place attachment by reinforcing cultural identity.

This study highlights the challenge of designing public places that accommodate a culturally diverse population. While considering cultural differences is crucial for improving place attachment [13,14,16], balancing various preferences is complex. The literature

suggests that mixed land use in public places enhances social and cultural interactions by offering activities to meet different cultural needs [60,61]. Moreover, incorporating informality and adaptability provides different cultural practices, making public places more inclusive and socially engaging [62]. References [63,64] argue that public places with informal boundaries and adaptability to social activities, such as street vending and gatherings, enhance social inclusion and a sense of comfort due to their less-regulated nature [65].

Our results on reasons for place attachment are consistent with the existing literature, emphasizing the appeal of natural environments [66–68] and opportunities for socializing [50,69,70]. This study also contributes new insights into culturally specific place attachments, such as the strong attachment of Chinese participants to Chinatown or Indians to Indian festivals, which highlight the role of cultural landmarks in enhancing place attachment, as supported by [71,72]. These patterns suggest that, while natural environments and social opportunities are universally significant, culture-specific elements play a crucial role in shaping immigrants' place attachment.

To discuss these findings within urban design and place attachment theories, it is crucial to consider both fixed and flexible factors in placemaking. Fixed factors, such as natural settings and social interaction opportunities, consistently foster positive experiences. However, for immigrants, flexible factors like cultural landmarks become particularly important, aligning with the 'fixity-flow' framework [73]. This framework critiques the traditional "sedentarist" perspective that emphasizes fixity while overlooking the complex ways people move physically and virtually [74]. The mobilities turn in social sciences provides a perspective on place attachment, emphasizing the interplay between fixity and movement [73,75,76]. This viewpoint underlines that immigrants often connect to multiple places, with their place attachment being shaped by both mobility and the desire for stability. Recognizing both fixed and dynamic aspects helps urban planners to design public places that meet the needs of mobile populations, thereby enhancing community integration and social cohesion.

4.2. Practical Recommendations and Enhancing Place Attachment

This study identifies several practical strategies to enhance place attachment among non-immigrants and immigrants.

The first includes increasing the frequency and diversity of multicultural events, especially at night, to foster inclusivity and social interactions. This aligns with [23,24,77], who advocate for safe and comfortable urban areas that support night activities. Implementing these strategies requires advanced lighting technologies and culturally sensitive programming to ensure broad community engagement [78,79]. Moreover, policymakers play a crucial role in facilitating diverse and accessible events by addressing challenges such as transportation, noise management, litter control, and crime prevention [80,81]. By focusing on these factors, public places can become more vibrant and welcoming.

The second set of recommendations emphasizes a holistic approach to improving public places' facilities and services, as identified by participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Key areas for enhancement include incorporating climate-responsive features, providing facilities for all demographics, and offering a greater variety of commercial options. These improvements address universal needs such as the comfort and usability of public places in different weather conditions [59,82,83]. Similarly, the participants request inclusive playgrounds with more facilities for broader age ranges. These insights are consistent with universal design principles, as outlined by [84], understanding the target population's demographic characteristics to anticipate their needs. Urban designers, by considering these principles, can create environments that accommodate a wide range of

users and foster inclusivity. However, this study also highlights an unresolved issue, as follows: How can urban designers anticipate and adapt to the evolving needs of increasingly diverse and dynamic communities in the face of rapid societal and environmental changes? While current design strategies effectively address immediate concerns, such as climate-responsive features and inclusive facilities [85,86], future research is needed to explore how urban spaces can remain resilient and adaptable to long-term shifts.

Third, enhancing the image of public places is essential for improving place attachment among diverse cultural groups. The participants highlighted the natural environment as a key reason for their place attachment, particularly emphasizing the importance of preserving green spaces and introducing a variety of trees. This shared appreciation among non-immigrants and immigrants indicates a universal preference. Consequently, [87] mentioned that urban designers must prioritize green planning and natural environments over building planning.

The fourth recommendation involves improving the built-up image by adding sculptures and signs and updating outdated designs to enhance the urban areas' aesthetic value, likeability, user engagement, and place attachment [24,88,89]. However, in diverse immigrant communities, implementing these enhancements can be challenging due to different aesthetic values and cultural preferences in urban design [90]. For example, [6] noted that many senior Chinese residents in the Gold Coast, Australia, could not read English signs and boards in public places. Urban designers can use multilingual signs and universally recognized symbols to overcome these challenges and provide accessibility and inclusivity for all cultural groups.

4.3. Discussing Methods

Our study combined walking videos with semi-structured interviews to explore factors influencing place attachment. The videos helped the participants to recall the study area visually [13,51] and identify specific features contributing to their attachment. The findings indicate that urban designers can use visual-based methods to identify common elements that foster place attachment across diverse cultural groups and create more appealing and inclusive public places.

This study supports [15,91], highlighting the importance of understanding human values in designing meaningful places. Combining walking videos with semi-structured interviews, we identified participants' aesthetic, environmental, emotional, and social experiences and values related to public places. This method helps urban designers and policymakers to recognize participants' values and cultural connections, leading to more human-centered public places.

Our methodology also has limitations. Although walking videos are useful, they might lead participants to focus on specific aspects of public places, potentially introducing bias. Additionally, semi-structured interviews may not capture all different experiences or how place attachment changes over time. A more comprehensive approach is needed in order to understand place attachment's dynamic and multifaceted nature.

4.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that must be considered. Firstly, the research is limited to Broadwater Parklands and the surrounding streets, which may not represent other urban areas. As a result, the findings might not be generalized to different places with other cultural or environmental contexts. To enhance the generalizability, future research could expand the geographic scope to include multiple urban areas in various cities. This approach would facilitate comparisons and offer a more comprehensive understanding of public place design across diverse settings.

Several studies [9,14,92,93] have emphasized the influence of age, gender, and culture on place attachment. This study mainly focused on the impact of cultural differences on place attachment; however, age was indirectly considered, as all participants were university students within a specific age range of 25 to 41 years, with more than half of them being between 25 and 30 years of age. This study also included a diverse representation of gender identities. The specific age range of university students in this study limits the generalizability of the findings across different age groups. Future research should investigate how immigrants' and non-immigrants' age and gender identities, beyond the university student demographic, affect place attachment in urban public places. Such studies could include different age groups and further investigate gender-specific experiences and perceptions to provide more comprehensive insights into the factors influencing immigrants' and non-immigrants' place attachment.

Another limitation is the subjectivity of the participants' perceptions, which may be influenced by personal experiences, biases, or temporary conditions, affecting the reliability of the findings. Future studies can include a larger sample size and a diverse range of cultural backgrounds to capture broader perceptions and reduce any impact of individual bias.

Additionally, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of specific design interventions in public places. Using case studies or experimental designs may provide valuable insights into how particular changes impact place attachment across different cultural contexts. This approach would help overcome the limitations of this study and offer a deeper understanding of how design interventions influence participants' experiences.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research reveals that different cultural groups prioritize different tangible elements in public places, affecting their intangible experiences and attachments. Considering these diverse cultural needs in urban design is crucial to enhance inclusivity. By integrating mixed land use and adaptable public places, urban planners can create appropriate environments for the diverse needs of mobile populations. Through this approach, public places resonate with the cultural identities of all users, promoting community integration and social cohesion.

This study also highlights universal preferences influencing place attachment among non-immigrants and immigrants. By addressing universal preferences, public places can become more inviting and foster a stronger place attachment across diverse communities.

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Appendix A

Appendix A.1. General Questions

I look forward to speaking with you today. Before we start, can you please tell me more about yourself? For example, when did you move to the Gold Coast, and how long have you been in Australia?

- Did you move to Australia alone or with someone?
If “with someone”, more questions will be asked about that someone.
- Can you please share your first impressions when you arrived in Australia?

Appendix A.2. Introduce the Topic

- And now, we will start with my research topic. Have you ever heard of the place attachment concept?
If yes, how could you describe it to me?
If no, I will describe place attachment in simple words (e.g., place attachment encompasses the feelings of belonging, identity, and rootedness that individuals associate with a specific place. Various factors, such as memories, experiences, or cultural ties, can influence this).

Appendix A.3. Introduce the Study Area and Share Movies

- Could you tell me the top three things you like about the Gold Coast?
- Which place(s) do you like the best on the Gold Coast? Why?
- In this study, I specifically look at Southport. Why do you know this area?
- Which part(s) of Southport are you more interested in? Why?
- I can show you which part of Southport I am specifically interested in. I am playing some related movies. Feel free to share any thoughts that come to your mind during the movies. Your insights are valuable, and I am here to listen.

Appendix A.4. Questions About the Study Area and Main Topic

- I would like to hear more about the place I showed you on the map in Southport. When was the last time you visited this place? Could you describe to me where you went? And what did you do?
Activities not about the park: By the way, do you know the park, and do you like it? Why?
Activities about the park: Great you were there. What do you like in this park compared to others?

Appendix A.4.1. Tangible Elements

- Do you have any routines or activities there?
If yes, which one? And do you think this place is the best one for this activity?
If no, that is fine, but you know a bit about Southport, right?
- What do you think about this place’s facilities?
- What do you think about this place’s services?
- What do you think about the shopping centers?
- What do you think about transportation?
- Do you enjoy the overall appearance and design of the environment? Why?
- Are there specific features or elements of the place that stand out to you?
- Have you ever encountered any challenges in this area?
- Do you feel comfortable in this place? Why? What things/aspects/features in this place make you feel comfortable?

Appendix A.4.2. Connection and Attachment

- Do you know what the differences are between feeling connected to a place and feeling attached to a place?
If yes, could you please describe it to me?
If not, that is no problem. I can describe it with an example. I used to go to Griffith University regularly for work and research, so I am connected to this place. However, I do not particularly like Griffith University. This means I am connected to this place, not attached to it.
- Overall, do you feel somehow connected to Southport? Why?
- Have you ever experienced any changes or developments in this place over time? How did those changes impact your connection to the space?
- Overall, do you feel somehow attached to Southport? Why?
- What do you think is missing in this place? Do you think considering what is currently missing in this place will increase your attachment to this place?
- What do you think is a universal experience in this place?
- Do you think (Indians, Australians, Chinese, or Iranians) prefer this place or other places?
If yes, why?
If no, which places do you think they prefer and why?

Appendix A.4.3. Intangible Elements (Emotions and Feelings)

- And now I want to know more about your feelings about this place. When you are there, how do you feel most of the time?
- Do your emotions and feelings about this place change over time? Why?
- Do you miss this place when you have not been there for a long time? Why?

Appendix A.4.4. Intangible Elements (Memories and Familiarity)

- Thank you for sharing. Now, I would like to know a bit more about your memories and the familiarity you have with this place.
- Can you share any specific memories you have had in this place since you arrived?
- What made it special for you? Why?
- Can you recall your first impression of this place when you visited it for the first time?
- Do you think, over time, this first impression has changed?

Appendix A.4.5. Intangible Elements (Social Experiences)

- Thank you for sharing this. Now, I would like to shift our focus a bit and explore your social experiences and bonding within this place.
- Could you share any specific aspects of this place that align or conflict with your culture?
- Thinking about the times you have spent at this place, have you often visited this place with others, like friends or family?
If “visiting alone”, do you prefer to visit other places with your family or friends?
What kind of places?
- Do you think this place is welcoming for immigrants? Why?
- What could be done to make it more welcoming for immigrants?
- Have you ever participated in community events or group activities organized within this place?
If yes, tell me more about the event.

- Would you like to participate in more events like this in Southport?
If no, would you like to participate in a social event in Southport? Or other places in the Gold Coast?
- Can you share any interactions or communication you have had with others in Southport?
- What do you think about the diversity of people in this place?
- Can you say if you feel emotionally attached, socially attached, both, or neither to this place?

Appendix A.5. Asking for Additional Information if Participants Would Like to Add

- Is there anything that you want to share? Or is there anything you find relevant that I have not asked?

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