



## ARTICLE

# Vision Versus Reality: Testing Methods to Study Public Space Design and Pedestrian Experience in Logan Central

Kali Marnane <sup>1\*</sup>, Maram Shaweesh <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Architecture, Planning and Design, The University of Queensland, Brisbane Queensland 4067, Australia*

<sup>2</sup>*Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane Queensland 4068, Australia*

## ABSTRACT

Logan is a rapidly growing, mid-sized city in Queensland, Australia, often characterized by low-density suburban development, car dependency, and persistent socio-economic disadvantage. Logan Central, identified as the civic and cultural heart of the city, faces compounded challenges related to disconnected pedestrian infrastructure, fragmented public spaces, and negative public perception. This paper reports on a preliminary public space–public life study conducted in August 2022 across five locations in Logan Central. The study aimed to test the applicability of observational and participatory methods in revealing how public space is occupied, navigated, and experienced. Guided by a critical urban framework grounded in the right to the city, spatial justice, the politics of mobility, and everyday urbanism, the study demonstrates how lived experiences of space—particularly those of young people and small business owners—offer powerful insights into inclusion, access, and urban vibrancy. Two key opportunities emerged: the catalytic role of local businesses and events in activating space, and the untapped potential of young pedestrians in shaping public life. These findings challenge dominant deficit narratives and show how a micro-scale, people-centered approach can support more equitable planning and design. The study is intended as a methodological pilot to inform future longitudinal research, teaching, and planning efforts, offering a scalable approach to tracking spatial justice and pedestrian experience over time in Logan and comparable suburban contexts.

**Keywords:** Public Space; Urban Design; Public Life; Mixed Methods; Pedestrian Experience; Logan; Australia

### \*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Kali Marnane, School of Architecture, Planning and Design, The University of Queensland, Brisbane Queensland 4067, Australia;  
Email: [k.marnane@uq.edu.au](mailto:k.marnane@uq.edu.au)

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# 1. Introduction

The suburb of Logan Central in the City of Logan on Aboriginal land of the Yagara and Yugambeh language groups is identified as a Major Regional Activity Centre<sup>[1]</sup>. The essence of urban centres, as Henry Shaftoe explains, are places where people can be convivial, sociable, and festive<sup>[2]</sup>. Jan Gehl argues that seeing, hearing, and interacting with other people in the public realm is one of the most important attractions in city life that draws people out, holds their attention and contributes towards prosperity and liveability for residents<sup>[3]</sup>. Importantly, the development of this public life requires a public realm that invites people to actively participate in the creation and occupation of public space, with important implications for democracy and reflecting culture<sup>[4]</sup>. As a Major Regional Activity Centre, Logan Central is positioned as a future strategic civic and cultural heart supported by “fine grain pedestrian and cycle networks that link key activity generators”<sup>[1]</sup>. Streets, and the pedestrian experience along them, are critical in developing and symbolising this objective<sup>[5]</sup>. Logan Central is, however, facing several challenges in achieving a convivial public realm.

Logan is one of the most rapidly growing and low-density cities in southeast Queensland<sup>[6]</sup>. Like other cities across Australia and the USA in particular, Logan faces significant challenges including suburban sprawl, car dependency and high car use, impacts of climate change, and peak oil vulnerability that are not extensively addressed in the design or retrofit of suburbs<sup>[7]</sup>. Similar spatial inequalities and sprawling suburbanisation as those seen in Logan Central are found in Western Sydney (Australia) suburbs such as Mount Druitt or Blacktown<sup>[8]</sup>, Toronto (Canada) suburbs of Scarborough and New York<sup>[9,10]</sup>, and Phoenix (USA) suburbs of South Phoenix and Maryvale<sup>[11–13]</sup>. The negative health, environmental, and economic outcomes associated with sedentary lifestyles, the over-reliance on cars for transportation, and the desire to achieve economic and environmental sustainability have increased the public interest in urban active travel<sup>[14–17]</sup>. In response, the encouragement of pedestrian activity has become a central objective in contemporary urban design discourse and practice<sup>[18]</sup>. It is important to recognize, however, that pedestrians are not limited to able-bodied adults. Following

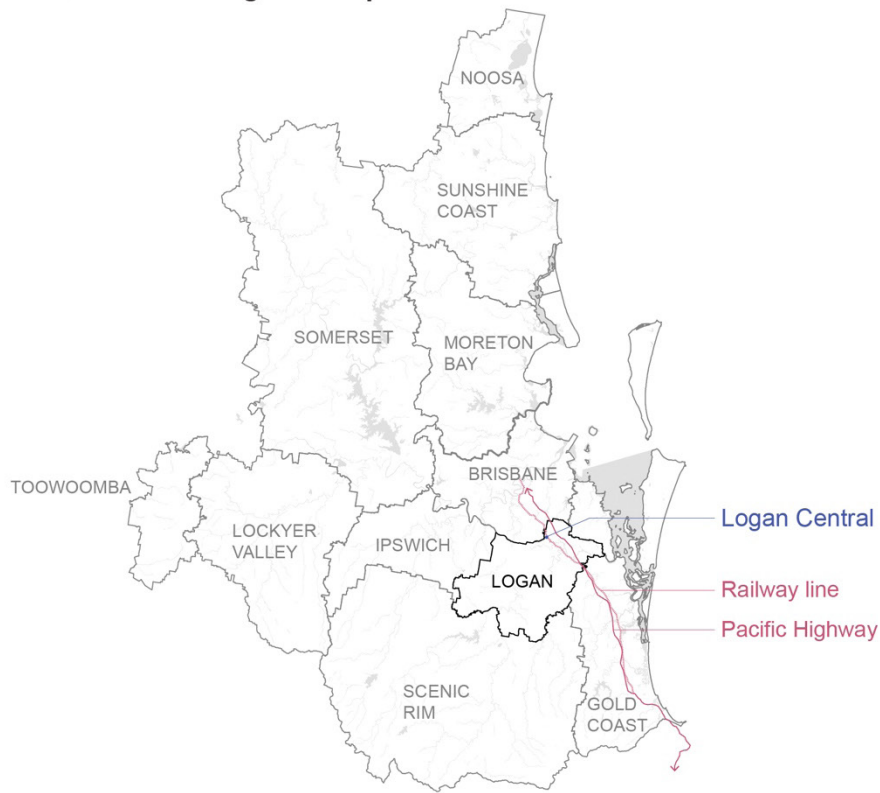
Lo and Stafford and Baldwin<sup>[19,20]</sup>, we define pedestrians as people moving without the use of a motor vehicle, including children, young people, and those using wheelchairs and walking aids.

In this paper we aim to test the applicability of observational and participatory methods in revealing how public space is occupied, navigated, and experienced. We reflect on results from a public space-public life study undertaken in August 2022 that sought to understand the barriers against and opportunities for convivial pedestrian experiences in Logan Central. Following this introduction, we outline the historical context and reality of life in Logan to foreground Logan Central’s aspirations. Section 3 describes our methodology, including the theoretical framework and methods deployed to study public life. Results are discussed in Section 4, highlighting three themes and key recommendations on how the public realm can facilitate Logan Central’s community, corporate, and planning vision. The conclusion in Section 5 finds that this method would be useful to meet Logan Central’s vision of an equitable and thriving heart, as part of a longitudinal study including residents as key data collectors.

# 2. Historical Context of Logan Central

In 2021, Logan had a population of 345,098 representing 217 different cultural backgrounds distributed at a low density of 356.4 persons per square kilometre<sup>[21]</sup>. The area witnessed substantial growth during the 1960s, with significant investment in social housing, and was declared as a city in 1978<sup>[22]</sup>. Historically, affordability attracted migrants and young families to Logan, as houses and land were significantly cheaper than in Brisbane and affordable and social housing options were available<sup>[23,24]</sup>. In more recent times, as housing affordability challenges have grown, social housing has been allocated not to working class families as originally intended, but to people with the most complex needs. This has caused a concentration of residents in central Logan suburbs with high needs in social housing not fit-for-purpose<sup>[25]</sup>. In 1979, Logan City Council built its chambers in Woodridge, later renaming the area as Logan Central in August 1986—the new administrative centre of the city (see location plan in **Figure 1**)<sup>[22]</sup>. Logan Central is one of the most disadvantaged suburbs within Logan and houses a high concentration of residents includ-

## South-East Queensland Regional Map



Not-to-scale

**Figure 1.** Location of Logan Central in South-East Queensland, Australia.

ing unemployed, migrants, young people, social housing tenants, and migrants settling in Australia on refugee and humanitarian visas <sup>[23]</sup>. The Pacific Highway completion in 1985 promoted further growth in the city that was now connected to neighbouring cities of Brisbane and the Gold Coast. However, the highway is a known social divider with the area east towards the coast being considered better off than the west <sup>[26]</sup>.

Poor planning decisions have been identified as major contributors to the concentration of disadvantaged populations in Logan <sup>[24]</sup>. Limited availability of social housing across the state of Queensland, a lack of housing diversity (including a mismatch between social housing tenants' needs and dwellings available), poor quality housing, widespread unaffordability of housing, and overcrowding (larger migrant and multigenerational families living in 2- and 3-bedroom homes) increase housing stress and risk of homelessness in Logan <sup>[25]</sup>. Planning decisions have spa-

tialised inequality, embedding disadvantage into the urban fabric and limiting access to opportunities and amenities. Drawing on David Harvey's *Right to the City*, we can understand these processes as a denial of residents' rights to shape and access urban life on equal terms <sup>[27]</sup>. The planning system, rather than neutral, emerges as a mechanism through which exclusion is reinforced—manifesting in spatial disconnection, underinvestment, and a lack of participatory planning. As in other marginalised areas such as Western Sydney, Logan is often framed through deficit discourses that obscure the richness and resilience of lived experience <sup>[26]</sup>. These representations contribute to symbolic marginalisation, further distancing Logan residents from dominant urban narratives and decision-making processes.

The stigma attached to Logan—its reputation as a “dumping ground” for Queensland's unwanted population, and the persistence of the ‘bogan’ stereotype (Australian slang for an unrefined, unsophisticated, or working class

person)—reinforce spatial and social boundaries<sup>[23]</sup>. Negative characterisations mask the structural causes of inequality and frame disadvantage as a cultural failing rather than a planning and policy issue. Viewed through Edward Soja's and Peter Marcuse's concepts of *Spatial Justice*<sup>[28,29]</sup>, we see how social inequities are materialised in the built environment: poor transport infrastructure, limited service provision, and fragmented urban connectivity do not arise by accident, but through historical and ongoing planning choices. The 2010 *State of Our Community* report identified significant barriers to employment in Logan, including mental health challenges, housing insecurity, and inadequate transport—all of which intersect to restrict residents' mobility and access to resources<sup>[30]</sup>. These conditions reflect not just disadvantage, but spatial injustice: the uneven distribution of life chances across the urban landscape.

Logan's transport challenges are indicative of deeper power dynamics around movement and accessibility. Applying Mimi Sheller and John Urry's *Mobilities Paradigm*<sup>[31]</sup>, we see that where private car ownership is required to navigate a dispersed urban landscape, those without such access experience a form of spatial immobility—cut off from jobs, services, and civic life. This immobility is not only physical but political, limiting participation in the shaping of place. Simultaneously, drawing from Margaret Crawford and John Leighton Chase's theory of *Everyday Urbanism*<sup>[32]</sup>, it is crucial to acknowledge the informal, grassroots efforts through which residents activate space despite these barriers—through small businesses, cultural events, or local networks of care. These everyday practices offer counter-narratives to dominant representations and demonstrate the agency and creativity present within Logan's communities, even in the face of systemic spatial marginalisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered housing dynamics in Logan Central, exacerbating existing inequalities. Between April 2020 and March 2025, the median house price in Logan Central surged from \$287,000 to \$657,000, marking a 19.5% increase in the past year alone<sup>[33]</sup>. This rapid appreciation transformed a historically affordable area into a hotspot for speculative investment, intensifying housing insecurity for long-term residents. The influx of buyers, particularly from interstate regions seeking more spacious and affordable living conditions

during lockdowns, contributed to this price escalation<sup>[34]</sup>. From a spatial justice perspective, this trend underscores how market-driven housing policies can displace vulnerable populations, undermining their right to remain in their communities. Moreover, the pandemic's economic fallout disproportionately affected low-income households, many of whom faced job losses and reduced working hours, further limiting their housing options. The convergence of rising property values and economic hardship highlights the need for equitable urban planning strategies that prioritize affordable housing and protect residents' rights to the city.

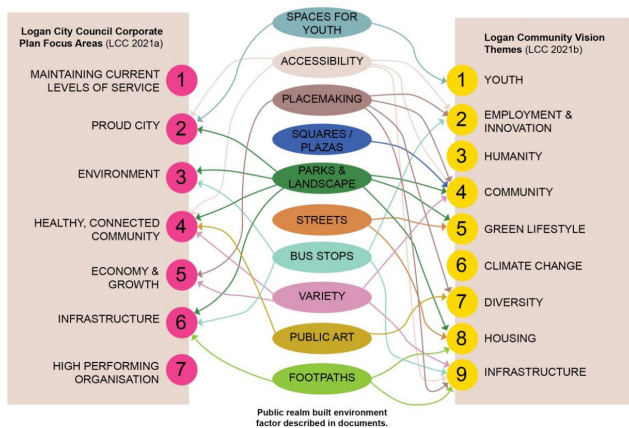
## 2.1. Aspirations for Logan

Logan City Council (LCC) has set a long-term goal to achieve social and economic sustainability with a vision for “a green city full of pride, opportunity and culture” guided between 2021 and 2026 by the Corporate Plan<sup>[35]</sup>. Every local government in Queensland is required to prepare a 5-year corporate plan under the *Local Government Act 2009*; however, it is unique for the corporate plan to be developed from a rigorous community visioning process. A 10-month consultation period over 2020–2021 collected insights from a diverse range of community members who aspire to a city described in the *Logan Community Vision* thus: “Logan is a thriving, forward-thinking community, building a smart future by embracing innovation, diversity and equality for all. No matter where you're from, you're welcome in Logan”<sup>[36]</sup>. Both the *Logan Community Vision* and *Corporate Plan* indicate the significance of the built environment in supporting health and well-being, social and cultural life, and economic development. **Figure 2** identifies the physical public realm elements in both documents. As the Corporate Plan is delivered, we are interested in the role of the built environment in facilitating pedestrian experience according to the vision. This paper explores the current physical limitations of Logan's built environment, and opportunities for public spaces to support Logan Central's aspirations.

The Community Vision and Corporate Plan require a variety of spaces that are accessible and inclusive for all abilities, ages and cultures including dedicated spaces for young people. They also suggest provision for public art, place making and events to activate the public realm. However, the documents do not provide clear direction on how



to achieve these aspirations on the ground. For example, LCC maintains more than 2,340 km of sealed roads, yet the corporate plan does not articulate their role in creating a vibrant cultural and civic heart<sup>[35]</sup>. We argue that making links between community aspirations, the corporate plan, physical qualities of public space, and observing pedestrian experience on the ground enables an understanding of what elements are functioning well, or not, and thus identifying opportunities and challenges for Logan Central to achieve its vision. As one of the most disadvantaged suburbs within Logan, improving the pedestrian experience of public spaces will be a much-needed change towards improving the everyday lives of Logan Central's residents and visitors.



**Figure 2.** Analysis of Physical Public Realm Factors Described in the Logan City Council Corporate Plan and Logan Community Vision.

### 3. Methodology

To critically engage with the lived realities of Logan Central's public spaces, this study is grounded in a multi-dimensional theoretical framework. Drawing on David Harvey's *Right to the City*<sup>[27]</sup>, we conceptualise public space not merely as a site of circulation but as a contested arena of access, inclusion, and urban belonging. This lens compels us to interrogate who has the power to shape and occupy space in Logan Central, and how spatial decisions either facilitate or deny that right. Simultaneously, we consider Edward Soja's and Peter Marcuse's articulation of *Spatial Justice*<sup>[37]</sup>, which deepens our understanding of the structural inequities that materialise in the urban form—such as unequal distribution of amenities, poor access to

transport, and the uneven quality of public space.

Our approach also incorporates the *Mobilities Paradigm* as developed by John Urry and Mimi Sheller<sup>[31]</sup>. This perspective shifts the analysis from static spatial conditions to the politics of movement—how individuals navigate and are constrained by infrastructures, particularly in car-dominated environments like Logan. Here, pedestrian immobility and the fragmentation of transport networks become symptomatic of broader forms of exclusion and spatial privilege. Finally, we draw on Margaret Crawford and John Chase's theory of *Everyday Urbanism* to understand the micro-scale, often informal uses of space—such as small businesses, temporary stalls, or grassroots placemaking—that reveal alternative logics of urban life and adaptation often overlooked in formal planning discourse<sup>[32]</sup>.

Guided by these frameworks, we employ empirical tools developed by public space theorists since the 1960s to document and analyse pedestrian experience in Logan Central and its contribution to the city's social and economic rhythms. We reference foundational works including Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, William H. Whyte's *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, and Jan Gehl's *Life Between Buildings*<sup>[3,38–40]</sup>. Gehl's method of public space-public life analysis—consolidated with Birgitte Svarre in *How to Study Public Life*—offers a robust structure for studying the interface between space and behaviour<sup>[41]</sup>. In this study, we adapt Gehl and Svarre's methodology using Australian company Inhabit Place's 'place audit' tool, a digital application that captures hourly data on public life and spatial use, revealing patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and informal adaptation<sup>[42]</sup>.

This paper documents the findings from a public space-public life study using Inhabit Place software in August 2022. Data were collected on Friday August 12 and Saturday August 13, with some additional data collected on Sunday August 14 and Saturday August 20 due to rain on the first Saturday afternoon. Paper surveys were deployed in lieu of the Inhabit Place digital survey to ensure appropriate and ethical consent for anonymous, personal data collection. Data were collected by 22 Master of Architecture and Master of Urban Design and Development students (hereafter referred to as 'observers') enrolled at The University of Queensland as part of an urban design

coursework studio and were supervised by Course Coordinator Dr Kali Marnane and Studio Advisor Dr Maram Shaweesh, who co-author this paper.

### 3.1. Methods

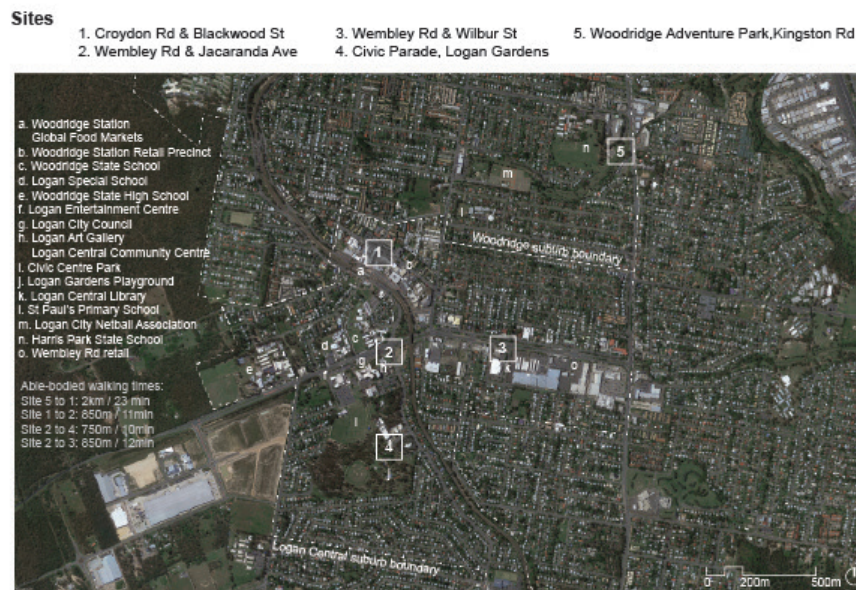
Prior to public life data collection, each site was analysed in terms of facade activation, ground surface quality, and public infrastructure (including street lighting, rubbish bins, seating, etc.). Two observers were allocated one site and two four-hour shifts across the weekend. Upon arrival, observers applied posters to their site to inform passers-by of the research taking place and were encouraged to answer questions from the public before, during, or after their shift if they felt safe to do so. Opening the Inhabit Place application on phones or tablets with internet connection, observers collected data from alternating place metrics each hour for the duration of their shift as prompted by the application. The supervisors checked on observers at each location in rotation every hour and were available by phone at any time. Place metrics included:

- ‘Movement’ to count the number of pedestrians, their mode of travel and perceived demographic passing across a nominated count line to understand how many people use this site in comparison to others across time;
- ‘Patterns of Movement’ drawing pedestrian lines

of movement across a plan of the site to understand how and where pedestrians desire to move;

- ‘Time in Place’ to document the activity, time spent in place and perceived demographic of pedestrians spending time on site to understand site activation;
- ‘Surveys’ were paper based and capture anonymous demographic data to understand how often participants visit the site and their impressions and experience of it;
- ‘Photo Journal’ to document the site and any important details with notes and a date/time stamp;
- ‘Notes’ allowed for observations that do not fit within the other metrics to be documented.

Sites were selected based on proximity to pedestrian infrastructure (such as the train station, bus stops, park, library, and schools) in Logan Central and part of Woodridge considering former suburb boundaries. Observers were trained to categorise demographics of people observed in the public realm during in-class lectures, however it was noted that accurate categorisation of age/background/etc. was not as important as observer *perception*, as the focus of observations was about visual cues in the public realm. Accurate demographics were captured in the survey data as participants could note their identities themselves. Due to the number of observers available to collect data, five sites were studied, as shown in **Figure 3**.



**Figure 3.** Location Map of Sites Documented in This Paper.

Collected data were provided by Inhabit Place as raw excel spreadsheets and in compiled Inhabit Place reports. Raw data were analysed by the authors and compared by site, time of day, and against spatial quality to understand patterns and trends of how pedestrians use and experience street spaces in Logan Central in connection with spatial qualities. This data was compared with aspirations for Logan Central to determine how the existing built environment facilitates (or does not facilitate) the vision.

### 3.2. Limitations

As a preliminary study there are important limitations to this dataset. Reduced site coverage, due to a limited number of observers, means that the data collected may not fully represent the diversity of experiences within Logan Central, particularly in more marginalized or less accessible areas. Inconsistent weather conditions also impacted the reliability of observational rhythms, potentially leading to gaps in understanding public life at different times or under varied circumstances. Moreover, the low uptake of community surveys means that the data is not a generalisable sample, and may not capture the voices of those who are most affected by spatial exclusions. However, we see this as an important start in an under-represented area of research that future, longitudinal, studies can build upon for planning informed by research evidence, as outlined in the conclusion.

## 4. Discussion

Both the Logan Community Vision and the Corporate Plan acknowledge the role of the built environment to meet local community aspirations and develop a strategic civic and cultural heart where pedestrians can move about their neighbourhood to services, facilities, and transport safely and effortlessly. However, almost no targets are articulated regarding pedestrian experience in the Corporate Plan. As a result, individual sites are currently the focus of Council's enhancement programs, despite the move to active transport requiring improved connectivity of pedestrian and cycling facilities and a reduced reliance on cars. As we saw in the introduction, Logan Central is experiencing an uneven distribution of life chances across the urban landscape. How can the built environment help to address these

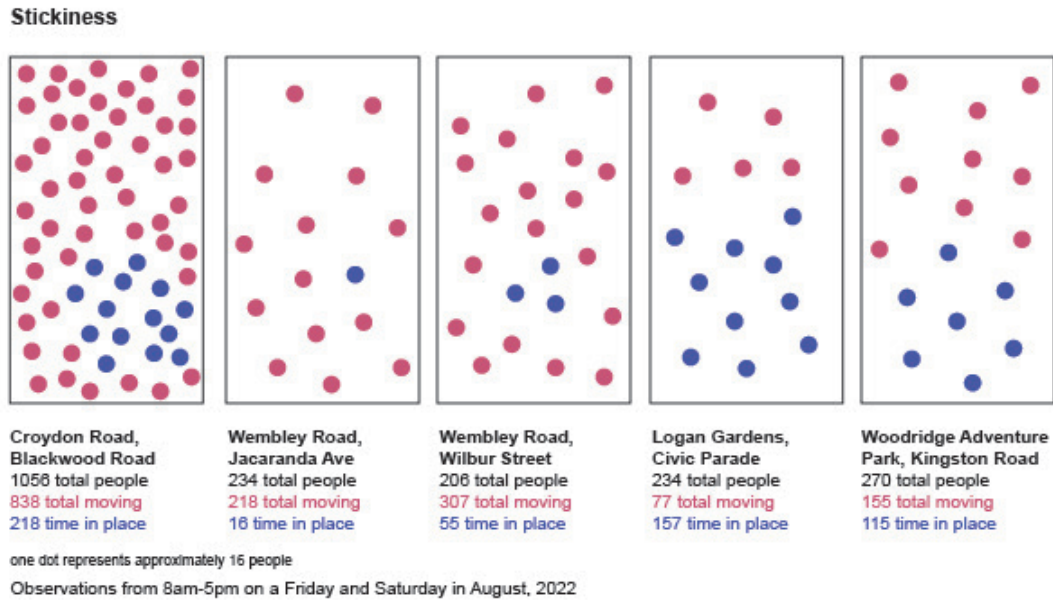
challenges and move towards the vision of Logan Central as a welcoming, thriving, and forward-thinking place? The following discussion centres on three major themes arising from the results of our preliminary study on pedestrian experience—the opportunities presented by small business and youth, and the challenges presented by long walking distances—culminating in findings detailing opportunities for public life and space in Logan.

### 4.1. Public Life Is Generated by Private Businesses

Small business activity found in the Woodridge Station Retail Precinct, Global Food Markets, and the now-closed Charcoal Chicken restaurant on Wembley Road are the key generators of street life, activity, identity, and vibrancy in observed sites. **Figure 4** shows the proportion of people staying compared to people moving at each site, with Croydon Road and Blackwood Road in the Woodridge Station Retail Precinct vastly out-performing others in terms of liveliness. The precinct consists of a combination of retail, public administration, community services, residential buildings including public housing, and diverse food offerings<sup>[43]</sup>. The built environment of the areas attracting more people feature narrow tenancies with active facades interspersed with murals on passive facades. This rhythm generates a human scale and vibrant, although rundown, public realm. Active tenancies are open to the street, with outdoor seating, footpath displays, and goods for sale spilling into the public arena under awnings that provide shelter from rain and sun (see **Figure 5**).

Local businesses are predominantly entrepreneurial migrant activities which, across Australia, are largely established out of necessity due to limited English language skills or workforce discrimination<sup>[44]</sup>. Migrant entrepreneurship contributes to economic advancement in Logan by drawing visitors from nearby areas and offering employment opportunities to locals struggling to enter the workforce<sup>[45]</sup>. For example, one fruit barn is known among the Arab community in Brisbane and Ipswich for being one of very few shops that stock Lebanese zucchini, a central ingredient for several Middle Eastern dishes. Safety is enhanced by these businesses because of 'eyes on the street' and the presence of 'capable guardians' who may deter potential offenders<sup>[39,46]</sup>. Support for local businesses is a





**Figure 4.** Comparison of Sites' Stickiness—The Proportion of People Staying to People Moving.



**Figure 5.** Photograph of Local Businesses with Active Frontages Allowing People to Sit and Eat Their Lunch.

key priority in both the Community Vision and Corporate Plan <sup>[35,36]</sup>. Public space improvements can bring more people onto the street and into businesses but should carefully consider the social and economic impact of gentrification, which has already been documented in Logan in the form

of housing displacement <sup>[47,48]</sup>. While gentrification can revitalise neighbourhood economies and social organisation, it poses a high risk of displacement <sup>[49]</sup>, particularly if chain stores take the place of existing businesses catering to low-income residents and ethnic and racial minorities <sup>[50]</sup>.

#### 4.2. Distances Between Sites of Interest Are Too Far Without Motorised Help

With priority placed on transport by car, city morphology distributes streets and land use in ways that disperse people, while air-conditioned cars and shopping centres separate people from visceral experiences of place. Great distances on narrow footpaths between sites of interest are exacerbated by the straight, unprotected, and dull experience along them. **Figure 6** depicts the dull and marginalized pedestrian environment of Wembley Road. Travelling by scooter, bike, or wheelchair is dangerous on narrow footpaths and public transport is expensive and inconvenient, as evidenced by the average recorded wait time of 30 minutes observed between buses or the train schedule <sup>[51]</sup>. People and activity are prohibited from assembling because very little of the significant road space is dedicated to pedestrians and sites of interest are too far from one another. Key pedestrian attractors are beyond typical seeing distance of 20–100 metres or walking dis-



tance of 400–500 metres, which are considerably less for children, elderly and people living with a disability<sup>[3]</sup>. This has negative impacts on pedestrian legibility, community cohesion, environmental pollution, and economic activity. Logan Gardens, for example, is a public space that visitors enjoy and facilitates social connection and lingering but cannot be seen from major streets or other sites of activity. Visitors must already know this site exists and travel there for one exclusive use, rather than being drawn there when passing by. Data collected in Logan Central reflects a broader trend across the Logan region of minimal active transport use for commuting. While the *Way2Go: Connecting Logan* transport report notes that this low usage may weaken the case for investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, it also suggests that well-designed infrastructure has the potential to encourage participation—particularly given that 77% of Logan residents are already physically active<sup>[52]</sup>.



**Figure 6.** Photograph of Wembley Road and Jacaranda Avenue Intersection.

### 4.3. It Is Particularly Difficult for Young People to Get Around

Logan Central’s public realm is not designed for young pedestrians, despite youth being the first priority of the Community Vision and six schools being located in Logan Central and Woodridge. During fieldwork, young people were observed walking to and from school along Croydon Road but are not invited to stop and stay. Young people congregated at local food outlets in the Woodridge Station Retail Precinct, sitting on café furniture, kerbs, and on the ground. Walking through Logan Gardens, adoles-

cents appropriated exercise equipment adjacent to the main footpath to hang out on, in the absence of interesting furniture for them. **Figure 7**, for example, shows how one high-school student has appropriated a tree stump in a neglected garden to use as a seat as they wait on Croydon Road.



**Figure 7.** High School Student Uses Tree Stump as a Seat on Croydon Road Near Woodridge Central Station.

Public space is profoundly important for young people to play, socialise, and become members of society as they are at an important developmental stage that influences long-term physical and mental health<sup>[2]</sup>. The presence of young people in public space is, however, often seen as problematic. Young people are provided out-of-the-way spaces such as Woodridge Adventure Park (which feels distinctly dangerous, situated away from any adjacent public life), or moved on from occupying public spaces, indicating that they do not belong. Young people, like other groups, need to be designed *in* to public space. The Community Vision highlights the additional need for “culturally specific support and facilities for children and young adults”<sup>[36]</sup>. Across Logan, Karina Pont and colleagues have documented that, unsurprisingly, supportive built environments result in higher participation in active travel for children, highlighting the significance of reducing parents’ worries about their children’s safety in encouraging their use of the public realm<sup>[53]</sup>. Physical safety is reduced for young pedestrians as they are isolated and small in comparison to the scale of public spaces and speed of traffic. The train line and Wembley Road create significant pedes-

trian barriers that divide Logan Central into four distinct quadrants. Pedestrians are provided only 4–8% of space along Wembley Road in comparison to space for vehicles making it difficult to see activity on either side of heavy traffic, noise, and pollution.

#### 4.4. Can Pedestrian Activity Support a Civic and Cultural Heart?

In summary, our preliminary study finds three key themes currently shaping Logan Central’s public realm. First, the vibrancy of public life emerging from small businesses and informal street activity underscores how everyday economic practices assert a grassroots right to the

city, often despite formal planning. Second, the excessive distances between key destinations—exacerbated by car-oriented infrastructure—reflect systemic mobility injustice, where those without access to vehicles are excluded from full participation in urban life. Third, young people’s limited presence in public space points to a failure of spatial justice, where both design and policy have neglected their needs, voices, and rhythms of movement. Together, these insights call for planning and design responses that are not only spatial and infrastructural but also social, incremental, and grounded in lived experience. **Table 1** proposes short-, medium-, and long-term actions to move toward a more inclusive, connected, and just Logan Central.

**Table 1.** Recommendations.

Timeframe	Type	Recommendations
<b>Short-term</b> (Tactical)	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test pedestrian and cycle routes that connect across Logan Central by trialing temporary street closures for pedestrian and cycle connectivity.</li> <li>• Trial pop-up pedestrian zones near schools, markets, and civic centers and test adjacencies that stimulate public life.</li> <li>• Co-design regular temporary events with local youth, Elders, and community groups.</li> </ul>
	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install temporary seating, shade structures, and planter boxes on key pedestrian routes.</li> <li>• Commission street art, murals, and ground-plane designs by local artists, including First Nations artists, to reflect diversity, culture and stories of place.</li> <li>• Use paint, bollards, and greenery to calm traffic around schools, daycares, and libraries.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium-term</b> (Policy)	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed engagement with Traditional Owners and local First Nations communities in all public realm projects and integrate cultural overlays into precinct planning.</li> <li>• Introduce zoning incentives for high- and medium-density, mixed-use developments adjacent to parks and public transit nodes.</li> <li>• Require active street frontages and pedestrian-oriented design in new developments.</li> <li>• Incentivize small businesses and support local food trucks, ensuring equity for existing vulnerable populations in the context of public realm upgrades and gentrification.</li> </ul>
	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a street hierarchy with traffic calming on slower streets (after tactical testing) including raised pedestrian crossings, narrower lanes, trees, parklets, shared streets.</li> <li>• Incorporate storytelling elements into infrastructure (e.g. pavements, walls, furniture, bus stops) to honor connection to Country and stories of diverse Logan residents.</li> <li>• Develop small, well-located gathering spaces to support intergenerational engagement to connect and extend key pedestrian routes.</li> </ul>
<b>Long-term</b> (Structural)	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a precinct-wide pedestrian-first masterplan that links civic, cultural, education, retail, and transit destinations through walkable, green mobility corridors tested through tactical trials.</li> <li>• Densify housing near parks and civic infrastructure to support passive surveillance, local activity, and sustainable transport requiring best practice design principles.</li> <li>• Embed First Nations-led frameworks and governance structures in planning processes.</li> <li>• Promote long-term partnerships with community organizations and local businesses for place stewardship and safety.</li> </ul>
	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widen footpaths and improve microclimatic comfort using shading, water-sensitive urban design, and seating along key pedestrian routes.</li> <li>• Establish continuous green corridors connecting Logan Gardens, Wembley Road, and Woodridge Station that support pedestrian and cycle access.</li> <li>• Retrofit car parks into mixed-use, publicly-accessible spaces with housing and civic uses, such as the Library car park for youth-centred outdoor gathering, learning, and play.</li> <li>• Prioritise Country-centred design principles, including planting of native species, natural water flow, material choice guided by Traditional Owners, and spaces for ceremony, reflection, and cultural expression.</li> <li>• Lead design excellence in social housing developments that explore the ‘missing middle’. This could be achieved through design competitions.</li> </ul>

Logan City Council has delivered public spaces – such as Logan Gardens – and temporary activations – such as the Global Food Markets – that were positively received and experienced by participants in the study. However, our findings show that transforming Logan Central into a vibrant social and cultural centre requires consideration of *connected* pedestrian experiences for diverse user groups visibly connected *within* walk/wheel/push/ride-able distances. To overcome Logan Central’s urban sprawl and fragmented layout, LCC could implement low-cost, high-impact tactical interventions that connect key destinations and pilot pedestrian-priority corridors with mixed-modal transport hubs to get pedestrians further. Limited funding could be addressed through phased upgrades, state/federal grants, and partnerships with local stakeholders, while demonstrating value through temporary installations. To work around uncooperative private landowners, LCC could incentivise improvements, support ‘meanwhile uses,’ and engage them in co-design processes that build shared ownership. Aligning these efforts with existing community priorities and strategic plans ensures internal support and long-term impact.

Streets currently make up a large portion of Logan Central’s public space and predominantly cater for cars. There is an abundance of evidence on the benefits of (and challenges associated with) reclaiming streets for pedestrians such as safe and active travel for all ages<sup>[54]</sup>, children and elders’ mental and physical health<sup>[55,56]</sup>, community resilience and wellbeing<sup>[5]</sup>, green infrastructure and wildlife corridors<sup>[57]</sup>, and are central to visions of sustainable futures of city systems<sup>[58]</sup>. Further, there is much evidence to suggest that inward focused shopping malls, like those along Wembley Road, can be part of this future if integrated into the street network<sup>[59]</sup>. In terms of opportunity, the co-location of schools and day-care centres opposite civic and community buildings suggests a supportive public realm could weave experiences and uses together to mix people within the precinct. Projects such as Project C3Places in Europe and Growing Up Boulder in the USA demonstrate that integrating young people into the design of public spaces helps to achieve resilient and inclusive urban environments<sup>[60,61]</sup>.

Transit-oriented developments have been successful in reducing car dependency in other Australian cities but

required city-wide public transport upgrades and attitude change as well as improvement of pedestrian spaces<sup>[62]</sup>. Linking to the Woodridge Station precinct (food and community services hub) and Wembley Road retail precinct (retail, food, library, medical services) via mobility corridors could, Diti Bhattacharya and Kaya Barry suggest, prioritise pedestrians by better supporting the joys of distraction and unanticipated changes in pace and direction common to pedestrian experience<sup>[63]</sup>. This echoes a 1990s aim for Logan Central to develop a fine-grain network of streets and outdoor spaces supporting pedestrian and cycle access around public transport facilities with integrated and compact community facilities and employment generating activities<sup>[22]</sup>. These corridors could be punctuated by mixed-modal transportation hubs that integrate pedestrian, cycling, and public transport facilities to bridge identified connectivity gaps.

A major challenge that hinders pedestrian experience is perception of safety, which influences the degree to which people use or avoid public spaces<sup>[64]</sup>. Despite this, much planning proceeds with little consideration of evidence-based environmental criminology<sup>[65]</sup>, such as the importance of gender-sensitive perspectives into lighting and urban design<sup>[66]</sup>. A study by Bill Merrilees and colleagues on the link between city branding and social inclusiveness in Logan found that safety concerns are particularly important among the most disadvantaged residents, which was echoed in our study<sup>[67]</sup>. Julia Koschinsky and Emily Talen explain that improving the built environment without considering the socio-cultural context does not result in positive impact if social disadvantage is present in a neighbourhood<sup>[68]</sup>. As Logan Central is identified as an area that concentrates disadvantaged populations, addressing physical space in conjunction with social and economic disadvantage is critical to improve pedestrian experience.

While the potential to reclaim Logan Central’s streets for pedestrian use is evident, spatial interventions alone are insufficient to transform the public realm. A just and inclusive urban future requires attention not only to the form of space but to the systems of access, power, and participation that shape it. Public space must be understood as a lived and contested terrain—where rights to movement, visibility, and belonging are constantly negotiated. As highlighted in the Community Vision and Corporate Plan, improve-

ments to the built environment must be integrated with social supports such as employment opportunities, youth engagement, and services that nurture a sense of place and connection. These are essential in addressing the layered inequities that define experiences of safety, mobility, and inclusion. Perceptions of safety on the street, for example, are experienced differently in various spatial, temporal, and geographical contexts, and by different individuals and groups <sup>[5,69,70]</sup>.

The everyday ways people move through, adapt to, and reimagine public space—particularly in car-dominated suburbs—reveal alternative logics of urban life that formal planning often overlooks. Future research should continue to document these lived mobilities and their spatial conditions through public space-public life studies and in-depth engagement across Logan’s diverse neighbourhoods. Of particular importance are the experiences of young pedestrians and the ways pedestrian infrastructure intersects with social sustainability, cultural identity, and environmental justice. A city that centres everyday life, collective memory, and diverse rhythms of use will move closer to realising the right to the city for all. We also note that addressing the challenges posed by car dependency, urban sprawl, and spatial inequality—both in Logan and in similarly structured cities—is a complex and enduring task, requiring ongoing, multifaceted efforts rather than a singular or final solution.

## 5. Conclusions

This study presents a preliminary but instructive exploration of public space and life in Logan Central—a complex and often overlooked suburban centre with considerable latent potential for urban revitalisation. Conducted as a pilot, the research was designed to test and adapt observational and participatory methods to better understand how public spaces are lived, navigated, and informally reimaged by everyday users. Positioned at the intersection of critical urban theory and grounded fieldwork, the study foregrounds questions of access, equity, mobility, and informality, offering planners and designers a more situated and dynamic view of the public realm. Rather than relying on static or top-down design principles, this approach supports a shift toward responsive, inclusive planning practices that reflect the lived experiences

of diverse communities. While limited in scope, the study demonstrates the value of these methods in revealing spatial injustices and identifying opportunities for more pedestrian-friendly, socially vibrant, and culturally resonant urban environments that are unique to the place studied. It also lays the groundwork for future longitudinal research and community co-design initiatives that can deepen understanding and inform more equitable transformations of Logan and similar suburban contexts.

Central to this potential are small and local businesses, as well as temporary events like the Global Food Markets, which are already effective in activating public space and reflect the unique culture of Logan. These elements embody the Right to the City, which insists on a public space that is accessible and responsive to all citizens, fostering a sense of belonging and participation. Furthermore, precincts that offer a mix of uses tend to be more vibrant, feel safer, and attract longer stays—qualities that support both spatial justice and inclusive urbanism. As we argue, designing public spaces that support local businesses and encourage a broad diversity of users to remain in these spaces aligns with spatial justice principles, as it ensures that the benefits of public life are equitably distributed, rather than concentrated in private spaces or accessible only to certain groups.

Ultimately, successful public spaces are those where people linger, as demonstrated in the work of Henry Shaf-toe <sup>[2]</sup>. Logan Central’s streets and parks offer large areas of underutilized public space that, if redesigned to prioritize pedestrians and green infrastructure, could connect key destinations, increase vibrancy, and encourage more diverse interactions. Youth, identified as a key strength in the Logan Community Vision, represents an untapped resource for enriching public life. By incorporating youth perspectives into public space design, rather than limiting these opportunities to private or institutional settings, we can transform public spaces into vibrant destinations that reflect the dynamism and diversity of Logan’s population. This aligns with the mobilities paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of people’s movement and access to spaces, and the everyday urbanism lens, which highlights the significance of informal and participatory urban practices. Engaging youth in this process not only enhances public life but also fosters long-term education, and social



and economic growth.

The challenges faced by Logan Central are not unique; they are shared by many car-dominated suburban cities around the world. Public space is dynamic and shaped by a range of factors, including gender, age, economic status, and cultural background, all of which influence how places are used and perceived. As such, it is essential to continue studying public space and its users from multiple perspectives, ensuring that urban planning and design reflect the diverse needs of the community. Future studies should be co-designed with community for residents to be actively involved in the planning, data, collection, and analysis processes. This would ensure the research more accurately reflects the lived realities of those who are often excluded from formal urban planning decisions, such as young people. Such strategies would not only improve the representativeness of the data but also foster a more participatory approach to urban research and opportunity for employment that aligns with the vision of more inclusive planning and urban design. The community visioning process undertaken by LCC has been a commendable step toward articulating the priorities for the Corporate Plan, and if future public spending includes investments in pedestrian-friendly interventions, Logan Central's vision could indeed become a reality.

## Author Contributions

Marnane and Shaweesh conceived the study and were responsible for research design, data collection, and data analysis. Marnane was responsible for data interpretation and images. The first draft of the manuscript was written by both Marnane and Shaweesh. Both authors edited, read, and approved the final manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

This project complies with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, current

revision) and associated regulations of The University of Queensland. All participant details are anonymised. Ethics approval to conduct this research project was obtained by The University of Queensland's EAIT LNR approval committee in June 2022, project number 2022/HE000779.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

Data is unavailable due to privacy.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the study.

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