

Using walk-along interviews to understand psychological and site-based influences on outdoor fitness equipment use

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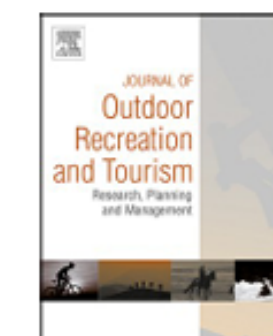
Outdoor Fitness Equipment



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Research Article

Understanding outdoor fitness equipment in South Australia: Insights from council employees and an environmental audit

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Barriers to Use

Despite widespread investment, community use is often lower than expected

- ~2-5% of park visitors observed using outdoor gym equipment
(Cranney et al., 2016; Leavy et al., 2022)

Surveys and interviews have identified common barriers, including:

People



Places



Promotions



Knowledge Gaps & Aim

Most outdoor gym research has:

- ✓ Relied on methods conducted *away from the site*
- ✓ Focused on utilization rates, rather than users' lived experiences while *physically present at the site*
- ✓ Not explicitly examined through a behavioural framework



To use walk-along interviews to understand how capability, opportunity, and motivation influence outdoor gym use

Participants & Walk-Along Methodology

Who walked with us?

👥 17 community members

🚶 Current OFE users

🎂 35–84 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 66$ years)

♀ 10 women | ♂ 6 men | 🏳️‍🔞 1 non-binary

📍 Recruited across multiple OFE sites in South Australia



Theme 1: Equipment that works for everyone

Reflects participants' sentiments about specific equipment, site design, and accessibility for people of all abilities and backgrounds.

*If I was designing it, first thing I'd put in is a bike because **everyone understands an exercise bike.***
(Trevor)

*With this aerobic cycle, **the seat heights not adjustable.** (...) **It's really not good for everyone.** (...) If you're really short, you won't be able to reach it, or if you're really tall, your knees will be up to your elbows.* (Kylie)

*I don't use [the box jump] to jump, I just use it for stepping up and stepping down. A physio told me to step up to something (...) but **this is a little bit high.*** (Rodney)

I don't want to hurt myself so having a good surface is important. Grass or wood chips, sometimes you worry there's glass or something hidden there. (Linda)

Theme 2: Settings that engage the community

The site and surrounding environment played a significant psychological role in initial and ongoing use, particularly around safety, comfort, and motivation.

*It is a thoroughfare. There're people coming and going all the time. I find **I feel quite safe.** (Claire)*

*Probably the most important thing, being Australia, **it's got no shade cover.** Like a small little shade cover (...) to both protect it from pummelling rain and terrible heat. (Tracey)*

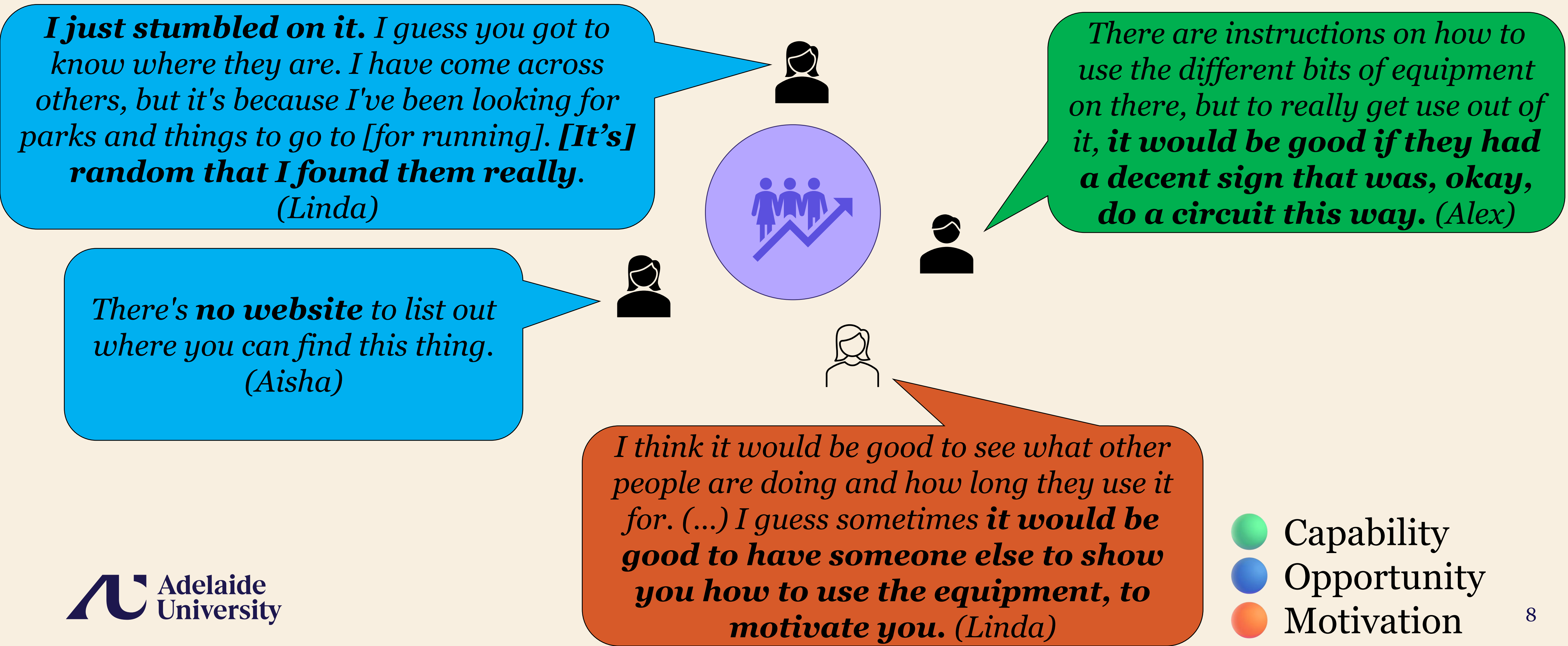
*I think that we all tend to be a little self-conscious about, you know, whether we're doing it wrong. **Am I doing this right? Is somebody going to criticise me? Am I in somebody's way?** (Claire)*

*There's the community centre there, it's got everything around here, the playground, picnic tables, (...) **you couldn't get much better community spot than this.** (Kylie)*

***I've got grandkids,** so I can (...) let the 11-year-old (...) climb around up there [on the playground] and do all those things, while **I can sit here and do 20 minutes on an exercise bike.** (Trevor)*

Theme 3: From installation to activation

Reflects participants' perspectives on strategies for effectively activating outdoor fitness equipment sites to maximise community use.



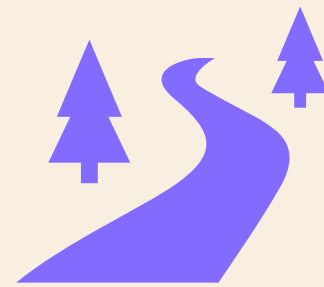
Discussion

Outdoor gym use influenced by an interaction of equipment design, site characteristics, and activation strategies



Accessibility and adjustability related to perceptions of usability

Safety and confidence important for sustained use



Socially connected, multifunctional locations increased attractiveness

Environmental features (shade, co-location with playgrounds) enhanced opportunities for engagement



Awareness remains a challenge

People want guidance on equipment use, structured workouts, and opportunities to learn from others

Practical Implications



Capability = clear instructions, demonstrations, beginner-friendly circuits, peer leaders

Opportunity = Adjustable equipment, accessible surfaces, shade, co-location with community destinations

Motivation = Group sessions, opportunities for observational learning



Questions?