

Post-fire communities: collective landscapes

Project leads: Professor Martin Bryant, Professor Penny Allan and James Melsom, UTS Landscape Architecture; UTS Landscape Architecture students.

External partners: Rosedale residents, the Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Rural Fire Service and Eurobodalla Shire Council.

1. Summary of impact

When an out-of-control bushfire devastated the NSW coastal town of Rosedale in 2019, landscape architecture offered opportunities for the town's recovery. A project led by UTS Landscape Architecture academics Professor Martin Bryant, Professor Penny Allan and James Melsom drew together the people of Rosedale, the Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Rural Fire Service, Eurobodalla Shire Council and UTS students to reimagine Rosedale's future.

The work included explorations of Aboriginal fire practices, a series of student-generated landscape solutions to prepare the town for the threat of future fires, interviews with residents about the rebuilding process, and an award-winning film, *Living with Fire*. A UTS Social Impact Grant is funding the development of Resilient Coastal Communities, a website that will house these project outputs.

2. The problem

As climate change continues to accelerate, Australia faces a significant and growing bushfire threat: since the late 1980s, the average area burnt by bushfires has grown by 800 per cent. For residents of rural and regional towns situated in bushfire zones, learning to live with the ever-present risk of bushfire is a growing challenge. Landscape architecture offers unique perspectives into the interplay between humans and the

landscapes that surround them, providing new opportunities to manage bushfire risk without the destruction of essential natural systems.

3. Beneficiaries

The work describes a series of future actions designed to build community and environmental resilience in Rosedale in the face of ongoing bushfire risk. The website resources offer ideas and provocations for a town in which human residents are deeply connected to the natural landscape, rather than being in opposition to it. The project also holds important lessons for people in other regional and rural towns around Australia who face increasing risks of catastrophic fires as a result of the climate crisis.

4. Approach to impact

The project was comprised of four key elements:

1. **Aboriginal fire management:** Members of the local Yuin community conducted a smoking ceremony on the beach and shared stories with the project team and Rosedale residents about traditional Aboriginal fire practices. These insights grounded the Rosedale project in local cultural knowledge that has been protecting Australia's landscapes for 60,000 years.
2. **Landscape architecture studio:** UTS Landscape Architecture students travelled to the South Coast to generate landscape-led solutions that would make Rosedale more resilient to future fires. The resulting outputs included a 'hydro commons' scheme that uses existing creek lines to embed moisture in large swathes of land around the waterways, new access routes that could help people make their way to the beach more quickly in the event of another fire, and a field guide that teaches people about the local bushland and ecosystems.
3. **Resident interviews and *Living with Fire* film:** Extensive interviews with Rosedale residents became the foundation for *Living with Fire*, a film by Professor Penny Allan and James Melsom about the post-fire rehabilitation of the Rosedale community. *Living with Fire* was one of three films that formed the winning entry for the 2022 AILA National Landscape Architecture Award for Excellence in Research, Policy and Communications.

4. **Resilient Coastal Communities website:** A UTS Social Impact Grant is now funding the development of a website called Resilient Coastal Communities that will house all the project outputs and capture Rosedale's story and future directions. The website will act as an information hub not only for Rosedale residents but for other regional and rural communities facing the threat of natural disasters. It is intended to drive conversations, grant applications and community engagement opportunities that will contribute to future coastal resilience.

5. What has changed as a result of this work?

Collectively, the project findings are shaping the way forward for a community still dealing with the aftermath of a devastating fire. To date, Rosedale residents have identified three pieces of work to progress into the future: the student-led hydro commons scheme and field guide and Aboriginal-led 'cool burns' that acknowledge the need to live with fire. These outputs, which benefit the community both in the context of fire disasters and in everyday life, advocate for greater interaction between humans and the environment rather than the destruction of natural landscapes.

6. What has helped you accomplish this work?

The project showcased the ways in which landscape architects can apply their skills to grassroots projects, delivering value that reflects the wants and needs of a very specific group of community stakeholders. These outcomes were made possible by the generosity and collaboration of the broader Rosedale, Yuin and Eurobodalla Shire communities whose members were willing to share their experiences and to describe their aspirations for Rosedale's future.

7. Challenges

COVID-19 lockdowns and severe flooding across significant swathes of NSW contributed to ongoing delays in the community engagement process. As a result, the launch of the Resilient Coastal Communities website has been delayed until 2023.