



# The agenda setting power of news media in framing the future role of tourism in protected areas



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Historical formulation of tourism in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.
- Leximancer software to identify themes in community responses to Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust Masterplan.
- Visualized stakeholder network presents a clear network of each stakeholder's perceived position in the debate.
- Placement of newspaper framing of tourism in an urban protected area sustainability context.

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## ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper examines the agenda-setting and framing role of news media in the ongoing development of the Draft Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust Master Plan. The paper will argue that the publication of the Masterplan and ensuing public commentary has drawn into stark focus future challenges in juxtaposing the frames of public use, commercial tourism and scientific/cultural values in the sustainable management of protected areas. Agenda setting and framing theory provides the theoretical foundation for the paper. Guided by critical discourse analysis, the analysis of the paper is supported through the use of Leximancer and Gephi software for visually illustrating the relationship between different framing perspectives. This paper contributes to a fresh understanding of the complex nature of the sustainable management of protected areas in urban spaces.

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## 1. Introduction

For more than two hundred years botanical gardens including the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew (United Kingdom), the Cairo based Orman Gardens (Egypt), Bartram's Garden in the United States and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney have been seen by some as the epitome of a nation's cultural attainment. Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, which are the subject of the present paper were developed initially in 1816 by Governor Macquarie as part of the so called Governor's Domain (Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2015). Protected by a gubernatorial proclamation from the excesses of the colony's early convict population and from

the use of the land for the grazing and feeding of cattle of any kind; the gardens were to be reserved for the use of that respectable class of inhabitant for innocent recreational purposes (Endersby, 2000).

Since their inception botanical gardens over the world have played an important role in colonial expansion (Brockway, 1979; Ginn, 2009), horticulture and conservation (Avery, 1957; Desmond, 1998; Maunder, Lyte, Dransfield, & Baker, 2001; Waylen, 2006) and medical research (Heywood, 1991). The focus of the present paper is with their use as a site for tourism and recreation (see Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2008; Connell, 2004; 2005 for previous coverage of botanic gardens based tourism in the Journal of Tourism Management). Globally, botanic gardens and arboretums have been estimated to attract more than 250 million visitors per year (Ballantyne et al., 2008). It is this earning potential that has made tourism an important player in the debate over the interplay of neoliberalist and natural resource discourses in protected area management (Darcy, 1995).

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Tourism interests have played an important role in defining the future of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens during the development process for the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust (hereafter RBGDT) Masterplan. The Masterplan was designed “to ensure the exceptional heritage, scientific and cultural aspects of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney and Domain are maintained or enhanced for public enjoyment, education and recreation. It also emphasises the Royal Botanic Garden’s core values of horticulture and science” (Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2016, p. np). For all of its potential benefit, however, on June 10 2016 an article was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter SMH) under the banner headline “Win for Sydneysiders as Royal Botanic Garden Masterplan shelved on its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday” (Dumas, 2016).

The focus of the present paper is to develop a further understanding of the effect that media (the third estate) has on the setting of agendas and framing the management of complex protected area locales, which tourism is often an important component.<sup>1</sup> Through the use of Leximancer and Gephi software and co-stakeholder network analysis we will examine four exemplar articles from the SMH, which were published in 2014 shortly after the RBGDT Masterplan process began. In addition to representing a cross section of different types of newspaper reporting on this particular issue (opinion piece, news piece etc.), the sample articles also encapsulate the framing of a number of disparate and influential stakeholder groups in the debates. Framing occurs through new media comments that accompany the traditional online newspaper articles. Leximancer and Gephi software are used to graphically illustrate the links between the framing (and framer) of the article(s) and ensuing community commentary that was evidenced on the SMH. In the next section we will consider theoretical issues surrounding the notions of strategic planning, agenda setting and the role of the media in framing protected area debates, which will serve as a precursor to a detailed discussion of the site, our methodological approach and our empirical results.

## 2. Tourism planning and the role of the media in agenda setting and framing in contested protected area locales

Rational comprehensive approaches to decision making are premised on the idea that policy makers will make decisions on the basis of due consideration of all possible courses of action and all available information. As Dredge (1999) has noted, rational comprehensive approaches to planning have long been seen as a strategic management ideal and have for many years influenced the planning of tourism destination regions. Rational comprehensive planning approaches follow a ten step basic structure from settling on terms of reference, and determination of planning approaches to monitoring/evaluating and feedback. Since their inception, however, there has been a realization that the innate complexity of rational comprehensive approaches make it challenging to operationalise (see for example Hostovsky, 2006). Innes (1996) has written on the way in which processes of consensus building can assist with the operationalization of the rational comprehensive. Consensus building she notes is premised on notions of a “collective search for common ground”, the power of subjective knowledge and active stakeholder engagement (Innes, 1996, p. 463).

In the present paper we will consider the role of the media as

facilitators of consensus building in heterogeneous protected areas. McCombs (1997) has written on the ways in which the media is able to promote consensus in communities through their ability to ensure the salience of particular issues and frame our perspective on aspects of those issues that deserve ongoing community attention. For example, writing on the interplay of national media organizations and environmental protests over the proposed damming of the Tasmanian Franklin River (Australia) in the early 1980s (see also Brookes, 2001; Law, 2001; Sewell, Dearden, & Dumbrell, 1989), Hutchins and Lester (2006) identify an emerging disconnect between the motivations of news media and protestors over the cause of the conflict. Whilst initially showing tacit support for the positions of environmentalists taking part in the Franklin River Blockade (see Law, 2001 for a history of the Franklin River Campaign); news media were identified as being increasingly unsympathetic to what the media viewed as the stage-managed actions of environmental campaign groups and the apparent hijacking of the media’s attempt to manage the flow of information around an important national resource management issues (Hutchins & Lester, 2006).

The ability of news services to function as agenda setters requires the moderation of objects, attributes and frames (McCombs, 2005). Together these three concepts of objects, attributes and frames encapsulate the central building blocks of the theory of agenda setting in the media that was begun more than four decades ago in McCombs and Shaw’s influential study of voter intentions for the 1968 US Presidential Election (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The essential premise of the theory of agenda setting is to understand how “the popular agenda of the media affects society and attempts to explain why mass media has gained so much power over the thoughts of people everywhere” (Adams, Harf, & Ford, 2014, p. 2). Since its inception a number of works have been published which have tracked the evolving theoretical and application of agenda setting concepts (e.g. McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; D. H.; Weaver, 2007). At the time of writing there has only been limited uptake of agenda setting principles in tourism (e.g. Hall, 2003; de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002).

Objects represent the basic building blocks of agenda setting scholarship, representing topics of investigation (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Agenda setting scholarship has tended to view objects in terms of the political sphere through examinations of political candidates and related public policy issues. However, more and more the scope of agenda setting scholarship has expanded to grapple with a range of socially constructed “wicked problems”<sup>2</sup> (see McComas & Shanahan, 1999; Pralle, 2009). Tourism is not immune to these issues, with Hall et al. (2015, p. 5) identifying that sustainability is a “wicked or meta – policy problem that has led to new institutional arrangements and policy settings at international, national and local levels”. Botanic gardens of the type discussed in the paper exist in a complex urban environment, frequented by a range of stakeholders including recreational visitors with different issues, motivations and concerns (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Connell, 2005). The partially industrialised nature of the tourism system have been described by Hall (1999, p. 276) as a “meta problem which represent highly interconnected planning and policy messes”.

Such messes manifest themselves in attributes, which form the second core component of agenda setting scholarship. Attributes refer to the various characteristics and traits that stakeholders can use to describe an object (McCombs, 2005). Denzin illustrated the

<sup>1</sup> For context it should be noted that the original aim of this project was to examine the various formal public submissions made to the RBGDT as part of the Masterplan process. When the Masterplan process was delayed by reasons internal to the RBGDT we then made the decision to shift our focus to consider the agenda setting power of news media, drawing on documents that were already in the public domain.

<sup>2</sup> A wicked problem can be defined as those types of social problems that cannot be definitively described and for which there is no universally agreed perfect solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

manner in which an attribute can evolve over the lifespan of a protected area (Denzin, 2005, 2007, 2008). Taking Yellowstone National Park as his backdrop he demonstrated how concern for Native American Indians has progressed through stages of apathy, to forceful removal and dislocation, and finally reintegration into the mindset of the wider American population as efforts were made to rediscover the complex histories of native populations and reintegrate them into the marketing and management of protected area environments. The methodology that Denzin (2008) employed recognises that words and images have a power to express to their reader the various fault lines that exist in heterogeneous protected area environments.

If we consider for the moment the environment of Sydney of which the Royal Botanic Gardens are an integral part; McManus (2015, pp. 350–351) observes that “nature is presented [variously] as the setting for Sydney’s grandeur, a basis for prosperity and something vulnerable that means the most valuable parts of nature must be conserved”. While the attributes that can be used to describe an object such as nature are therefore endless, McCombs (2005) has observed that there are certain dominant perspectives or frames that tend to predominate in discussions of objects in agenda setting debates. Within the news media Pan and Kosicki (1993) note that every news story has a theme that serves as a central organizing idea. Meanings underpin themes and it is through the imparting of meanings to an audience that a writer has the ability to draw attention to certain ideas and simultaneously restrict access to perspectives that fall outside of their particular frame of reference (McCombs, 2005). While the news media therefore have considerable power to influence public perception in a range of tourism management contexts (see Hall, 2002); equally the public itself has the ability to variously reject or accept the media’s position. McCombs (2005) has referred to this as second level agenda setting.

Simpson et al. (2014) have identified that the growth of online media over the last decade has encouraged previously passive consumers to become involved in the development, generation and dissemination of new material. Whilst sometimes lacking the characteristics of rationality and critical deliberation that may be said to characterize mainstream news media (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009), online comments have none the less proven valuable for many readers as a mechanism for validating their own personal perspectives on complex policy issues and as a means to gauge the nature of current community perception. Weaver (2010) has noted that so called traditional media has the tendency to cover over societal complexities and afford greater attention to the values and discourses of society’s more dominant members (incl. politicians). The effect of this is that whilst media in a top down environment might correctly identify objects, the attributes of a situation are often better conceptualized in a horizontal media setting. Writing on the interplay of culture and power Engelstad (2009, p. 218) notes that message formation needs to balance the interplay of message clarity with a deep appeal to the value positions of their readership, “mobilizing their well-established frames of interpretation”. Framing theory in media has been a well-established theoretical and analytical framework (Scheufele, 1999). In particular it recognises the importance of inputs (e.g. organisational pressures, ideologies, or other elites), the process of frame building (e.g. the Masterplan), outcomes (e.g. media frames) and the audience frames (e.g. reaction to the media frames, attitudes, behaviours). Framing theory has had limited use within tourism (exceptions include Mason & Wright, 2011; Ugla & Olausson, 2013; Waterton & Watson, 2013).

In the next section we will focus on illustrating how the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens has evolved over the last century, at various

time acquiring different conservation and utilitarian management focuses. It is against this historical background that we will then examine the agenda-setting role of the media in response to the current RBGDT Masterplan (2014, April).

### 3. Research context: Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens

The Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens is located on a 30-ha site in the heart of the Sydney Central Business District. Originally declared a botanic garden by Governor Macquarie in 1816; the gardens have a history dating back to the earliest days of European settlement when they served as a private reserve for the governors of New South Wales. Before this the gardens formed part of the ancestral home of the first Australians, the Cadigal people of the Eora Nation. Since 1980 the RBGDT have managed the gardens, a statutory authority established under the provisions of the *Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Park Trust Act 1980*.<sup>3</sup> For readers interested in the history of the site we would direct them to a number of excellent works already in publication (see Endersby, 2000; Gilbert, 1986). In the present section, rather than seeking to provide a chronological history of the gardens we wish to instead focus on their contested history.

Botanic gardens have been defined as “institutions holding documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display and education” (Botanic Gardens Conservation International, ND). As with other classes of protected areas this identifies botanic gardens primarily as a site for conservation, with the neoliberalist concerns of the tourism industry a more peripheral planning consideration. Since antiquity, however, human kind has identified a range of spiritual, physiological and other benefits from engaging actively with garden environments (Benfield, 2013). The Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens of 1816 should thus be seen historically as part of the broader evolution of humankind’s interest in the study of the natural world, an interest which peaked in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the development of Gardens such as Kew became exemplars not only of scientific endeavour, but also of European colonial expansion (Brockway, 1979; Desmond, 1998; Ginn, 2009; Grove, 1996). In the early years of the Gardens many iconic directors of the ilk of Richard Cunningham, Charles Moore, Allan Cunningham and Sir William Macarthur undertook a range of initiatives designed to simultaneously improve the scientific credentials of the gardens, whilst simultaneously improving public access. In the 1830s Allan Cunningham was said to approve of access to the park for the elite, if for no other reason than it helped on public use grounds to justify the considerable cost of works associated with the park’s creation and upkeep. In the late nineteenth century such works under Charles Moore included land reclamation projects in Farm Cove and the creation of sea walls that are now an iconic part of the tourism vista of the area.

Ken Boundy (Chair of the RBGDT, and ex CEO of Tourism Australia) recently noted that if “Elizabeth Macquarie<sup>4</sup> were to sit on her favourite chair today on Mrs Macquarie’s Point ... and look back to the city through the garden, I’m sure she would be filled with pride and a sense of possibility” (Boundy, 2015). Within these words lays the idea that in addition to their scientific, recreation and other responsibilities, perhaps the principal role of gardens is to serve as a representation of a city or nation’s cultural achievement. The former curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens’ Allan

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/rbgadta1980364/](http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/rbgadta1980364/).

<sup>4</sup> The wife of Governor Macquarie who is immortalized in the landscape of the Sydney Domain precinct as the namesake of a stone chair and access road on Mrs. Macquarie’s Point on the north eastern side of the Botanic Gardens Precinct.

Cunningham once noted that the “primary object to be kept in view in conducting such an establishment [the creation of the gardens] ... is to render it valuable to the colony” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 283).

The work of Mwebaze and Bennett (2012) has sought to map tourist valuations of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens site using standard contingent valuation and travel cost methodologies. The tourists in Mwebaze and Bennett's study, as with other gardens throughout the world will place different values on the environment. Ballantyne et al. (2008) identifies such values as including: the use of gardens as a site for recreation playing games and social interaction; the opportunity the gardens provide for general relaxation and their general spiritual and restorative potential. Whether it is Mrs Macquarie's Chair, Pyramid Glass House, the Lower Garden Pond or the now sadly destroyed Garden Palace created for the first Australian International Exhibition; the Royal Botanic Gardens have had or continue to have a range of attractions and infrastructure that have proven attractive to visitors.

In 2014 3.6 million people visited the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, accounting for 15% of all international visitors to Australia (Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2015). During the 2000 Sydney Olympics it was estimated that over 100,000 people a day used the gardens to watch events including the triathlon or take part in the range of free interpretive and passive recreation activities on offer over the two week games period (Benfield, 2013). The Sydney Olympic Games offered the RBGDT the opportunity to market Australian culture to the world. One of the main faces of this culture is the formal recognition of the traditional gardening practices of the traditional Aboriginal inhabitants of the area as portrayed in the Aboriginal garden entitled *Cadi Jam Ora*, which was established in 1999.

Since 1994 there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of the Royal Botanic Gardens as a site not just for recreation but also for tourism to raise revenue to offset the public cost of on-going management of the site (Darcy, 1995). Over the ensuing twenty years there has been a growing commercialization of the gardens through exclusive use for payment for activities such as parking, weddings, corporate events, outdoor cinema, and for major tourism events (e.g. New Year's Eve fireworks). Today new tourism futures are planned for the site. The establishment in 2014 of the Botanic Gardens and Centennial Parklands authority was predicated on the goal to provide a world leading botanic gardens and parklands, espousing aspirations to make a positive contribution to the life of people who visit it, whilst protecting the national and cultural heritage of the area etc. (Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2015). The Draft RBGDT Master plan, which was similarly commenced in 2014 represented, in the eyes of its proponents, an opportunity to ensure the site's future.

The RBGDT Masterplan proposed a radical revision of the way people engage with the “lungs of the city” (Boundy, 2015). Aspects of the plan included: the development of new science and education facilities, enhancement of visitor access routes and recreation facilities including at the iconic Mrs Macquarie's Chair, the development of a hotel on the site of the current Domain Car park and the establishment of new ferry and train transport nodes to aid visitor access. Whilst there was an overt focus on the sustainability of the site in many of the draft master-plan documents, as we will show in the following sections the plan have also been a subject to concerted opposition from certain stakeholder groups. Such opposition is not surprising when one considers the inherent wickedness and complexity in the management of protected areas. Christensen Jr. (2012) has identified that successful leadership in contested environments involves the ability to merge a clear vision and road map for the future with the pragmatic ability to reconcile competing value propositions of other stakeholders. Much as Simpson et al. (2014, p. 269) argued in an organisational context

when they suggested that organisational compassion “requires a degree of tolerance of ambiguity and complexity and less commitment to the idea that compassion, per se, as seen through the eyes of the beholder, is an unequivocally good thing”; so too must land management agencies be conscious of the network of power relations that exist amongst stakeholder groups in a contested protected area environment.

#### 4. Research design

This paper examines the agenda-setting and framing role of news media in the ongoing development of the Draft Sydney RBGDT Master Plan. The sustainable management of Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney has laid the groundwork for our analysis of contemporary stakeholder discourses. We have employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the objects, attributes and frames presented in the media articles and social media commentary on the announcement of the RBGS Masterplan and the surrounding social context. CDA represents an ideal methodological lens for the present study on account of the fact that it begins, as we have previously discussed with a perception of the socially constructed nature of society (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Throughout their respective academic and popular histories different commentators have developed texts that have attempted to frame the debate according to their own ontological and epistemological positions. Hannam and Knox (2005, p. 23) note that discourse analysis treats texts very much as “mediated cultural products, which are part of wider systems of knowledge”. Imbued with power relations between the author and reader CDA methodologies have been employed in a variety of tourism contexts in recent years (Mellinger, 1994; Nilsen & Ellingsen, 2015; Paraskevas, Altinay, McLean, & Cooper, 2013; Santos, Belhassen, & Caton, 2008; Sigala, 2011; Small & Harris, 2014; Williamson, Tregidga, Harris, & Keen, 2009).

##### 4.1. Data selection

Fairclough (1992) has noted that CDA begins with the identification of a corpus of news texts. In the present exploratory paper the authors have chosen to focus on four exemplar articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter SMH) (see Table 1). These articles form part of a larger body of fifteen news stories that were published nationwide on the Masterplan process in the days immediately following the release of the draft community consultation document in April 2014.

The four news article cases that have been chosen for this exploratory study are all drawn from the SMH. Founded in 1831, the SMH is the oldest continuously published newspaper in Australia and has a daily readership of 525,000 (Roy Morgan Research, 2015). The RBGDT identified the SMH as the news source that led the coverage of the Daft Master Plan in the weeks following its release (Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2014). Articles from the SMH in this period were identified by the RBGDT as focusing on the appropriateness or not of development and the sustainability merits of the proposal.

From Table 1 it can be observed that the selection of exemplar cases includes a combination of news pieces, along with columns/opinion pieces from key stakeholders including the Former Prime minister of Australia the Right Honorable Paul Keating. Newspapers, Farbotko (2005) notes function as an arena for discursive interaction where opinion columns, letters to the editor and more recently online reader comments afford the opportunity for active engagement by readers. In this way they serve as an ideal mechanism for exploring the ability of the author to frame particular agendas through the use of mapping tools like Leximancer, which

**Table 1**  
Profile of four-newspaper article in Sydney Morning Herald.

Title	Date	Author	Nature of the newspaper	Number of newspaper comments
Paul Keating attacks Sydney Botanic Garden	April 6	Sean Nicholls (Journalist)	News article	52
Royal Botanic Gardens Master plan: a vision not so splendid	April 9	Paul Keating (former Australian Prime Minister)	Column/Opinion piece	113
Why the Botanic Gardens and Domain need a plan for the future	April 9	Ken Morrison (Chief executive of the Tourism and Transport Forum)	Column/Opinion piece	36
Five-star 150 rooms hotel blooms in radical Botanic Gardens and Domain revamp	April 10	Tim Barlass (Journalist)	News article	87

can be used to understand the impact of the central message of the article on subsequent reader sentiment. The selection of different types of media pieces including opinion columns in the sample has been done deliberately to magnify the effects of different frames on the issues under investigation.

In examining agenda setting through objects and attributes, the research design recognises that the focus of this study is on the frames presented in the media stories and new media comments. Entman (1993, p. 52 in D. Weaver, 2007, p. 143) argues that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Scheufele (1999) provides a 4 stage process for understanding the frames of interpretation: inputs in this case the organisational pressures, ideologies, and other internal and external stakeholders; the process of frame building in this case the Masterplan process; outcomes are the media stories presented; and the audience frames that can be interpreted through their reaction to the media frames by their attitudes and behaviours in the new media commentary.

While we are not claiming generalizability, either with respect to the content of articles or the ensuing reader commentary, it is worth reflecting on who the readership of the SMH is. Farbotko (2005) has identified the readership of the SMH as being predominantly white-collar professionals, and the framing of the paper’s coverage of environmental management issues to often being done in a way that appeals to its largely urban geographical epicentre. In a bid to further understand this process in the context of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, online reader generated comments were treated in this project essentially as public-domain media content, which was then linked with media pieces to capture the full scope of discourse between the framers and the recipients of each news study. The length of the reader comments ranged from a few words to a length of more 200 words.

#### 4.2. Analysis of the text

Qualitative software Leximancer 4.0 was used to perform the first level of text analysis where the key themes from the articles were investigated. Leximancer is a qualitative analysis (e.g. content analysis) tool based on Bayesian statistical theory that is increasingly employed by tourism researchers (Cheng, Edwards, Darcy, & Redfern, 2016; Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Pabel & Pearce, 2015; Scott & Smith, 2005; Sun, Zhang, & Ryan, 2015; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015; Wu, Wall, & Pearce, 2014). By aggregating fragmented pieces of evidence, the whole document could be envisioned through a holistic manner (Watson, Smith, & Watter, 2005). Leximancer transforms “lexical co-occurrence information from natural language into semantic patterns in an unsupervised manner” using “two stages of extraction – semantic and relational”

(Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 262). As such, it helps to reduce the preconception biases embedded in manual text analysis techniques (Randhawa, Wilden, & Hohberger, 2016; Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

For qualitative research this increases the trustworthiness of the analysis and reported findings. In a discussion of the distinction between manufactured and naturalistic data, Silverman (2007) draws on the ideas of Kozinets in arguing that the “analysis of existing online community conversations and other internet discourse combines options that are both naturalistic and unobtrusive” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 56 in Silverman, 2007, p. 33). In the present paper we have sought to treat reader comments on the four news stories as naturally occurring data provided by readers who have registered on the SMH website. They are not comments that are provided in the context of a question posed by a researcher but are instead, in the main, the candid reflections of a reader on the articles they have read, their understanding of issues at hand; and reflections that a reader might not always feel comfortable to mention unless behind the veil of anonymity that is afforded by the internet (see Simpson et al., 2014).

In Leximancer, the output is a heat map, where importance of a theme is indicated by the brightness of the label and circle (Leximancer, 2011). Concepts that semantically have strong relationships are also mapped closely together (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011; Rooney, 2005; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Absence of a concept is an indication that “important concepts fail to occur sufficiently frequently within the text to be identified and associated with other concepts” (Liesch, Håkanson, McGaughey, Middleton, & Cretchley, 2011, p. 25). Reader comments in the subsequent sections are provided as they appear in the newspaper articles and are not edited for typographical and/or grammatical errors.

As Small and Harris (2014) note, CDA involves consideration of the processes by which the various media forms under consideration are produced, distributed and consumed. This is then followed by attention being given to the “interpretation of the ideologies supporting the discursive practice” (2014, p. 31). To capture the complex relationship between different stakeholders, a co-stakeholder analysis was performed. The idea of co-stakeholder analysis comes from co-word/author analysis in bibliometric methods (Callon, Courtial, & Laville, 1991). That is, we use the co-occurrence of stakeholders in each reader’ comments to establish relationships between stakeholders by constructing a relationship strength measure (He, 1999). If two stakeholders co-occur more frequently in readers’ comments, they are closely related. To perform co-stakeholder analysis, a range of key stakeholders in reader ‘comments were first identified by one of the researchers and then a comparison between other researchers was conducted to ensure the stakeholders identified capture the meanings they represent. In the second stage a co-stakeholder network analysis was performed using Gephi. Gephi is a network analysis and

visualization software that offers a high level of interactive and responsive visualization that is suitable for various types of networks (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009). The various relationships between these stakeholders are presented through a visualized network. The connections between the stakeholders are based on 1) the normalized weight of the stakeholder co-occurrence in readers' comments, 2) the distances between any stakeholders through normalized strength score and 3) the size of the bubble reflecting the number of times the stakeholders mentioned in a single comment.

## 5. Findings and discussion

### 5.1. Analysis of the texts

Fig. 1 shows the concept map that was the foundation for exploring reader comments from the four newspaper articles. The connectivity rate for all frames was higher than 10% as stipulated in undertaking Leximancer analysis (see Smith & Humphreys, 2006). In Leximancer, connectivity rate describes the internal items in the frames being mentioned together with a proportion and indicates the importance of the frames from 10% to 100% (see Smith & Humphreys, 2006; Tseng et al., 2015). Fig. 1 illustrates a number of important issues for the present study.

The most important frame (red bubble – online version) is the *public interest*, which includes the use of the public space, land and

facilities in the city. At the time of writing the City of Sydney council has released a *Draft Central Sydney Planning Strategy* (City of Sydney, 2016). The plan, which called for the development of increased high-rise development to facilitate greater commercial opportunities for the City of Sydney also prioritized the importance of the preservation of access to public spaces with specific reference to the Royal Botanic Gardens. Next attention was given to the level of consideration afforded by readers to the specifics of the garden itself and the RBGDT Masterplan. While not surprising given the nature of the media pieces in the sample, the references to the historical development of the urban environment and nearby developments at Barangaroo showed evidence of a willingness of readers to position the management of the gardens and by implication tourism in the wider and evolving geographical and socio cultural context of the urban environment (see Hayllar, Griffin, & Edwards, 2010).

When these frames are disaggregated to the level of individual reader comments (see Table 2 for a representative selection) it becomes apparent that readers were concerned with two separate but related issues. The first relates to the issue of who should benefit from the Masterplan proposal. Chiesura (2004) has identified city livability to be connected to the provision of sufficient amounts of green space per inhabitant. Tourism is well positioned to capitalize on any increased public amenity; however, as the comments PI 2 and G1 & 2 (see Table 2) show there is considerable skepticism regarding the capacity of tourism interests to be

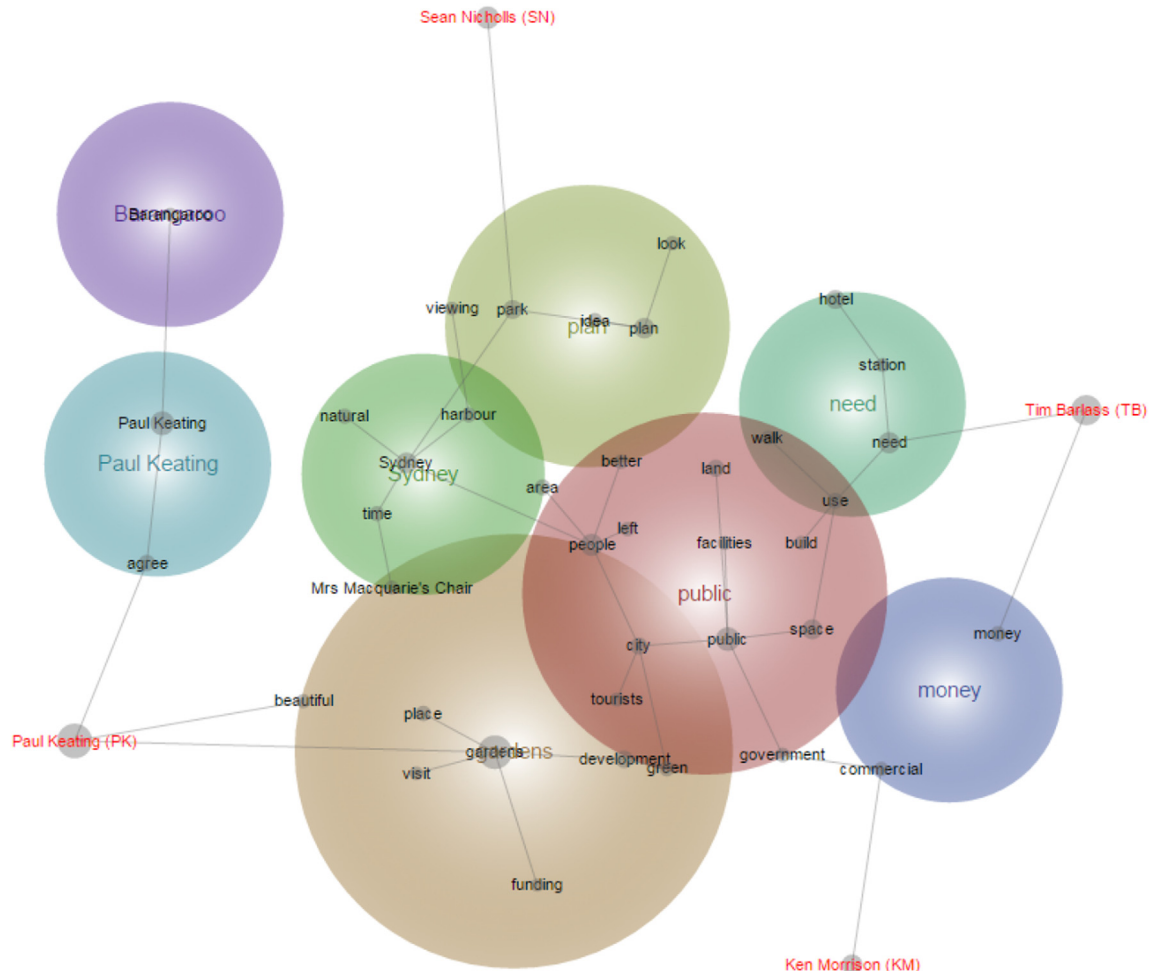


Fig. 1. Conceptual map of reader comments.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2**  
Newspaper and new media frames.

Frames (Themes)	Representative Comments
Public Interest	<p>PI 1) Most people believe that the needs of <i>Sydney</i> and tourists are already being extremely well served by the existing gardens and parkland that have sustained the city and that plonking (sic) a whole lot of structures in and around it contribute nothing and degrade to its intrinsic value and experience. It is better known as development creep.</p> <p>PI 2) When I watched the fly over I was left wondering where the botanic gardens and all this 'green space' actually was. In true <i>Sydney</i> style, this is yet another jaw droppingly ludicrous funnelling of public money into an unnecessary, poorly planned project that achieves nothing, does little to enhance public amenity, but rather destroys yet another of the very few open public spaces left in the city region.</p>
Garden	<p>G1) Was this <i>Ken Morrison</i> and his <i>Tourism</i> and <i>Transport Forum</i> also in favour of the <i>Helipad</i> on <i>Sydney Harbour</i> wouldn't surprise me! There should be no additional structures built on or around the <i>Botanic Gardens</i> for the purpose of expanding the "experience" or for entertainment</p> <p>G 2) <i>If pre-European</i> settlement vistas are what he wants, why doesn't he call for the demolition of all existing buildings in the <i>Gardens</i> and the ripping up of all the landscaping?</p>
Plan	<p>P 1) To those agreeing with <i>Keating</i>, have you actually read the draft concept and plan or just gone off of his emotive, misleading and factually incorrect opinion?</p> <p>P 2) I think that the master plan fails to integrate the domain to the botanic garden by not addressing the major planning issue of the road canyon dividing the precincts I would love to see a mesh supporting bridges over that expressway supporting pedestrian bridges and specimen potted trees so the gardens are integrated <i>East</i> from the library to the <i>Art Gallery</i>. As well there are still no bar- bbq amenities within the park and covered picnic rotundas</p>
Sydney as a whole	<p>SW 1) Every time I visit <i>London</i>, construction is taking place in <i>Hyde Park</i> and other parks, because <i>London</i> has to modernise, as much as it preserves its past. <i>Sydney</i> has to move forward, by creating new icons and tourist facilities, and the suggestions put forward so far will move us forward into a new realm of tourism opportunity</p> <p>SW 2) I may no longer live in <i>Sydney</i> but as an <i>Australian</i> I have enjoyed many visits to 'The <i>Gardens</i>' and believed that this historic place was securely protected for all time. Until now that I learn that the <i>Vandals</i> are at the door</p>
The need and potential need	<p>N 1) Those public services that haven't been already privatized are infected with a corporate mindset like the art gallery. State forests handed to mining companies to destroy, public land for hotel chains, public housing to be sold off</p> <p>N 2) The cafe and the 'shell' address inferior existing experiences. Most others are in the Domain/at the perimeters, particularly the hotel which will replace an eyesore and rejuvenate a 'nothing' precinct.</p>
Proposed development as an economic generator (Money)	<p>PD 1) <i>Ken Morrison</i> condemns himself when he speaks of "the visitor economy". Ah yes, the economy: everything is an ASSET to be sold or exploited; making money is the single sole objective of everything that we do; and our work on <i>Earth</i> will not be complete until we have turned every single square inch of <i>Australia</i> into theme parks, shopping malls, entertainment venues, visitor centres and cavernous drinking halls.</p> <p>PD 2) The captains of industry and their spruikers are only too keen to foist their money making schemes on the long suffering public, and then go home to <i>Mosman</i> and <i>Vaucluse</i> and <i>Palm Beach</i> where they lobby just as vociferously to protect their own neighborhoods and public spaces from commercialization and encroachment. Let them build on the <i>Botanic Gardens</i> after they've built on <i>Middle Head</i>.</p>
Preservation of the park	<p>PP 1) This should not go ahead. It is a huge development for such a beautiful and universally loved location in our internationally admired city and it could never be undone.</p> <p>PP 2) A beautiful green landscape sloping down to the beautiful harbour but it is proposed to spoil it with eateries at both ends. For god's sake, a 'viewing platform' at <i>Mrs. Macquarie's Chair</i>?</p>
Paul Keating's history	<p>K 1) So, when and where did <i>Paul Keating</i> get his credentials as an urban, town and horticultural planner? It's amazing that he still feels he has the only and right opinion on these matters, which is reflective of his time as <i>Prime Minister</i> as well.</p> <p>K 2) <i>Keating</i> once again demonstrating he is suffering from attention deprivation, and will write or say anything necessary in order to get some media exposure - if it is on a topic he knows nothing about, has no expertise in, and about which his opinion is totally irrelevant. Why are former politicians (still sucking at the public teat I might add!)</p>
The facts regarding Barangaroo	<p>B 1) It is the antithesis of what is proposed at <i>Barangaroo</i> which according to the government is "naturalistic"</p> <p>B 2) The destruction of the <i>Barangaroo</i> master plan gifted public land to bankers and casino bosses. Oh but we got a faux natural headland built upon a car park which redresses the theft of Aboriginal land</p>

involved in the provision of such assets in a way that moves beyond narrow neoliberal self-interest. While commentators e.g. SW 1 (Table 2) accept that there is a need to modernise to make Sydney competitive in a tourism sense on the world stage, other comments highlighted the potential irreversibility of proposed changes (e.g. PP1 and PP2 – Table 2). Such commentary is evident of wider debates playing out in the urban planning of Sydney. *McManus* (2015, p. 352) has noted that the release of the new metropolitan planning strategy for Sydney in 2014 was characterized by the presence of potentially contradictory goals of: a "sustainable and resilient city that protects the natural environment and has a balanced approach to the use of land and resources" and the creation of a "competitive economy with world class services and transport". Later in the paper we will return to the issue of sustainability and ask whether it is possible, in the context of their socially constructed evolution to remove tourism from the gardens and still achieve a sustainable environment.

Some commentators framed references to Sydney's past as a mechanism to justify opposition to the proposal (e.g. G2 – Table 2). In seeking to link current debates over the sustainable

management of the RBGDT to larger historical issues, the commentators are in effect asking 'whose responsibility is it to ensure the sustainable management of the park?' As SW 2 (Table 2) noted:

I may no longer live in *Sydney* but as an *Australian* I have enjoyed many visits to 'The *Gardens*' and believed that this historic place was securely protected for all time. Until now that I learn that the *Vandals* are at the door

If the RBGDT is indeed the property of all Australians, as the former Australian Paul Keating also suggested when he characterized it as "the nearest thing to a sacred site in Sydney – held sacred by the non-Aboriginal community as well as the Aboriginal community" (*Nicholls, 2014*), then there is evidence in the community commentary of a problem with its operationalization at the local level. Within the community commentary was evidence of considerable apathy of the right of former politicians to continue to offer views on the management of the site (K1 and K2 – Table 2), along with concern over the NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) mentality of other Sydney residents who were viewed as being happy to

promote development, so long as it was not in their immediate home environment (PD 2 – Table 2).

In addition to the identification of key frames in the community commentary we have also investigated the relative primacy afforded to the views of different stakeholders. Thirteen stakeholders were identified (see Table 3).

When the primacy afforded to the stakeholders as objects is mapped as a visualized network using Gephi one is provided with an indication not only of the limits of stakeholder influence, but also of the challenges such stakeholder conceptualizations present for an industry like tourism. As has been previously noted the relative thickness of the lines (see Fig. 2) is an understanding of the co-occurrence of the reference to those stakeholders. On the one hand, as we have already indicated the physical locale of the RBGDT is a 30-ha site on the southern shores Sydney harbour. The bounded nature of the site makes it perhaps not surprising that within the stakeholder network all of the commercial, policy and other interests that one would expect in a study of protected areas tourism are present. Also evident is something of an urban political ecology mindset where readers have not sought to separate society from nature (Troy, 2014) but rather have viewed nature being an intrinsic and active player in the development of the site. Other cultural stakeholders including the Opera House, Opera Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Victoria Lodge were viewed as more marginalized even though they are closely located. To understand why we need to finish by examining the discursive practice surrounding the development of the articles, as well as the socio-cultural context in which they are situated.

## 5.2. Discursive practice

Understanding the social contextual issues of how newspaper articles and readers' comments are created as frames distributed and consumed fall into Fairclough model's second dimension (Fairclough, 1992). *Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust* (2014) put the Draft Masterplan out for public comment as part of the organisational and environmental planning processes that form part of frame creation in April 2014. The initial release was preceded by two media releases entitled *Secure Future for Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney* and *Have Your Say on the Draft Masterplan for the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney and Domain*. Spence and Simmons (2006) have written on the media release both as a mechanism for informing people what an organisation is undertaking, as well as mobilizing the target audience to respond to the issue in question. Whilst the media releases achieved their initial objective of encouraging community debate over aspects of the Masterplan proposal, the *Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust* (2014) was critical of the breadth of coverage in much of the ensuing media frames on issues relating to the scientific values, mainstream

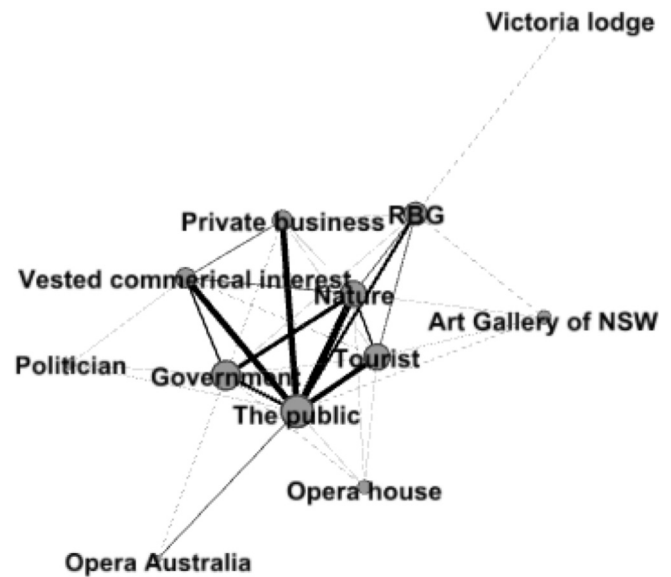


Fig. 2. Visualized network of stakeholders.

recreational uses and broader management objectives of the Masterplan.

The relationship between the articles and the ensuing community based frames through their behaviour of commentary can be characterized as the relationship between vertical and horizontal media. By engaging both sources, newspapers create the potential to convey and shape the public's views (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). An important caveat on this ability, however, is that the ability of an agenda setter to influence community frames is also sometimes dictated by the level of need that can be observed in the community for orientation (Ragas & Roberts, 2009). An interesting perspective on this was provided by Reinmuth (2014) who applauded the consultative nature of the RBGDT Masterplan process in comparison to other major development processes in Sydney, whilst also observing that whilst stakeholders including Paul Keating had the right to comment on the development process, all care should be taken to avoid a situation where "the concerns of a contentious citizenry [were left disorganized and disheveled – via the utilization of decision making processes designed specifically to exclude them" (Reinmuth, 2014). This commentary in itself is recognition of the relative power of some to influence the agenda over others.

An appraisal of much of the qualitative community frames from readers in the four study articles evidences a high level of surety amongst many of the respondents over the salient characteristics

**Table 3**  
Royal botanic garden stakeholders.

Stakeholders	Description
Nature	Nature setting of the park
The public	Community and residents
Private business	Private business sector
Government	State and federal government and local councils
Vested commercial interest	People with a commercial interest in the RBG
The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust (RBG)	The RBG management agency
Tourists	Visitors to RBG and Sydney
The Art Gallery of New South Wales	A public gallery in Sydney next to Royal Botanic garden
The Opera House	The Sydney tourist icon next to Royal Botanic garden
Victoria Lodge	A building inside Botanic garden
Politicians	Australian politicians (such as former prime minister – Paul Keating)
Opera Australia	The main opera company in Australia



that they perceived for the sustainable management of the site. Engagement of community members in the online forums seemingly did little to alter perspectives amongst online respondents and meld individuals to common community frames. To the contrary, from our interpretation, reader reaction remained broadly divided on utilitarian (e.g. Table 2 N2) and conservation lines (see Table 2 PI 2) and did not change their position in response to the online collaborative process. The level of apathy that is evident towards a number of the Masterplan initiatives in Table 2 stands in contrast to the results of survey work commissioned by the RBGDT<sup>5</sup> who identified that 24% of respondents felt that the establishment of new viewing platforms and amenities at Mrs. Macquarie's Chair would likely make the biggest positive difference to peoples' experience of the gardens.

Dodd and Jones (2010) have argued that botanic gardens need to redefine their position in society if they want to become powerful advocates for positions on issues affecting society. To achieve a new social contract, Dodd and Jones (2010) argue they must engage critically with their own purpose, and once identified communicate that purpose throughout all of their internal organisational processes. At the same time, however, there is recognition that every garden is different and care must be taken in determining how best to communicate the value in the capabilities of botanic gardens to society. The report notes "the traditional work of the botanic garden, as a place for research and education must not be lost" (Dodd & Jones, 2010, p. 8). Previous scholarship has identified educational outcomes to be one of the principal attractions of botanic gardens tourism (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Benfield, 2004; He & Chen, 2012). With this in mind, the final section of the paper will consider the socio cultural context that surrounds the discourse in the canvassed articles, and to ask can tourism be a part of the site's sustainable future?

### 5.3. Socio-cultural practices – benefits, responsibilities and practices

At the beginning of this paper we referred to an article from the SMH where the reasons for delaying work on the Masterplan were discussed (see Dumas, 2016). The online version of this article on the SMH website was presented with an accompanying short video entitled, "The botanist who has grown with the garden". In this video long serving botanist Barbara Briggs who has been associated with the gardens for 57 years seeks to highlight certain views on sustainability. These views articulated the need for long term planning and the gradual adoption of changes in management practices in response to scientific advancement and the evolution of the surrounding communities. The timelessness of the sentiments expressed by Barbra Briggs are an interesting juxtaposition to the ideas in the broader article where Dumas (2016, n.p) describes the role of tourism in emotive language, for example "the radical proposal for a five star Botanical Hotel". The article ends with a quote from the current executive director of the RBGDT who seeks to indirectly downplay the likelihood of future development on the site; "It is truly remarkable that for 200 years this beautiful site on the harbour has remained untouched, the greatest legacy we could leave is that we leave it untouched for another 200 years plus" (Ellis cited in Dumas, 2016).

The purpose of the present discussion is not to offer suggestions as to what the future of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens should or

shouldn't be, as these questions will be answered in the course of ongoing community deliberations and policy discussions in the next few years. Instead, we wish to ask what role tourism interests may have in the ongoing sustainable management of the site? The contested nature of community debate over the sustainable future of urban botanic gardens, as demonstrated in earlier empirical results in this paper, forms part of a larger debate over urban renewal and space regeneration in our major cities (Matsuoka & Kaplan, 2008). Many urban spaces including parks are under pressure to provide economic value to the city as part of broader neoliberal planning agendas. Within Sydney there is, at the time of writing evidence of considerable urban re-development around projects including Barangaroo. Searle (2013) has described the redevelopment of Barangaroo as a "recourse to globalization and economic development discourses in particular, underpinned by neoliberalist and new public management doctrines".

Neoliberalism is a topic that has long sat uneasily with discussions on the sustainable management of protected areas (Darcy & Wearing, 2009; Fletcher, 2010). In botanical gardens the idea of an ongoing role for tourism is often seen as unpalatable on account of the perceived fallacy of thinking that it is possible to reconcile the growth and conservation objectives of sustainability through the presence of an industry that is to many the quintessential example of global capitalism. Whilst understandable, such viewpoints ignore a reality that protected areas have, since their inception in the national parks movement of North America in the late nineteenth century existed on the basis of human need. While needs can be expressed in a variety of forms and obviously include traditional scientific discovery roles; human needs also extend to the perceived right of the wider population to access sites characterized by high quality examples of gardening and botany, and to grow their own knowledge of these processes (Garrod, Pickering, & Willis, 1993).

Alvarez and Rogers (2006) have suggested that sustainability is perhaps best seen not as a fixed state, but rather as a discourse where actors will seek to control the agenda for change and development. In one of the few studies to tackle the issue of sustainability as it relates to garden tourism, Benfield (2001) defined sustainability around traditional measures such as carrying capacity. Such analysis is useful for addressing practical issues around the management of resources made available to tourists and their movement in the garden space. However, it does little to shed light on the way that stakeholders will form ontological perspectives on whether the very presence of tourists is acceptable within a sustainable botanic garden landscape. These feelings are accentuated by stakeholders in global cities with increasing pressure on natural resources and open space as a counter to increasingly high-density living. Drawing on an idea from Alvarez and Rogers (2006) we argue that focusing on the discourse of sustainability encourages different stakeholders to critically reflect on the idea that their own definition of sustainability need not be fixed; rather perspectives on sustainability will evolve as a result of our experience with others. Agenda setters we suggest have an important role to play in such deliberations.

Groth and Corijn (2005) have demonstrated the potential role for what they define as 'informal actors' to influence the agendas of urban planners and politicians through the development of in-determinant space. In-determinant spaces they note are lived, they are the bound up in the ideal that "the contradictions that constitute urban life are nurtured" (Groth & Corijn, 2005, p. 521). The arguments expressed in the four articles examined in this paper have in different ways sought to draw attention to the value of these places as cultural and natural resources (Matsuoka & Kaplan, 2008). Many public spaces such as the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens are characterized by the complex interplay of stakeholder

<sup>5</sup> Survey responses were received from 685 members of the community in response to an online survey instrument, which ran from 6 April to 31 May 2014 (Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Keating – Former Prime minister of Australia.

meanings. As we have demonstrated in this paper in the context of a history of the gardens, as well as through reference to the broader development of global protected areas, utilitarian interests will always play a role in the development and subsequent use of garden spaces. The fundamental quandary for planners is that the unique experiences offered to garden visitors is the product of its natural and cultural history, and the social communities that are attached to them (Gobster, 2001). These are not mutually exclusive constructs. It is only through engagement with the past that we are able to interpret the present. Equally, however, current community expectations cannot be bound to historical precedence. As Sassen (1996 in Groth & Corijn, 2005, p. 504) notes the urban realm “is no longer marked by more or less homogenous life patterns and spatial practices, but by a pronounced plurality and fragmentation in terms of lifestyles, by tensions arising from the co-existence of multiple and contested identities and by new mechanisms of exclusion and polarization as the ‘local’ corollaries of an increasing global interconnectedness and the neoliberal re-orientation of the economic sphere”.

## 6. Conclusion

Using critical discourse analysis, this paper has examined the agenda-setting and framing role of news media in the ongoing development of the Draft RBGDT Master Plan. The Sydney gardens, which we have discussed, are characteristic of the wicked and socially constructed nature of many tourism-operating environments. Public sector master planning of the type described in this paper is a formal legislative process. Once enacted the plan is subject to a range of external influences (including from the media third estate). In the present case we have sought to shed light on the influence of such alternative frames, and in particular on the ability of the media to frame discussions in the community on the role of tourism and other land uses in the public planning process.

From a theoretical perspective, this paper contributes to a fresh understanding of the role of the media as agenda setters in the tourism literature by connecting the concepts of objects, attributes and frames under the umbrella of agenda-setting theory. Through the examination of the news media and its associated news media comments, the paper has also added empirical evidence to the “critical turn” of sustainable tourism in urban protected areas by highlighting the various roles the media play in the management of contested tourism locales. Ateljevic, Pritchard, and Morgan (2007, pp. 1–2) have argued that the “critical turn is heralded as a quiet revolution in tourism enquiry, which seeks to challenge the field’s dominant discourses and inspire a series of critical dialogues, conversations and entanglements into the nature of power, discourses and representations in tourism”. In increasingly heterogeneous tourism localities we have sought to demonstrate the important role that the media will play in directing public debate and thus often management decisions over the coming years.

Methodologically, this paper contributes to exiting literature on the innovation of using a computer-assisted CDA to aggregate fragmented information into a cohesive visual representation. The use of automated text mining software Leximancer not only helps objectively identify key frames (themes) but also visually presents the relationship between them. The visualized stakeholder network presents a clear network of each stakeholder’s perceived position in the protected area debate. Subsequently, this network helps stakeholders to effectively position themselves in the debate and identify future opportunities for engagement. For the public, it is easy to detect who (stakeholders) has been left out and marginalized in the debate. As such, the innovation of this approach adds to the body of knowledge of critical discourse analysis in enhancing the power of soft science (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015)

as well as the visual analytics method (Cheng & Edwards, 2015; Cheng, 2016) in tourism by utilizing advanced computer-assisted techniques to effectively address data’s messiness.

Future research opportunities exist to understand the process whereby protected area agenda setters make decisions to select objects, attributes and frames in other contexts. While this paper has largely focused on frame creation in news media, opportunities exist to examine agenda setting through objects and attributes more fully prior to public obligation process. Opportunities also exist to broaden the research focus on framing, through not seeing framing solely as a process of drawing the reader’s attention to specific concerns on an issue. Drawing on the work Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) amongst others, attention is needed on the ways in which agenda setters may use mechanisms including story, artifact and contrasts to create a frame perspectives on heterogeneous and historically defined protected areas. Lastly, further research that examines social media coverage (e.g. follow-up local Facebook group) and perhaps a further comparison with the findings of this study will yield additional insights, as today social media no longer presents a specific readership as opposed to newspapers.

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