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Recent developments in Australian place-based courts for Indigenous users

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The development of Australian
place-based courts to respond
Indigenous peoples needs &
engage First Nations
worldviews

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Introduction



- This paper examines place-based courts at Port Augusta and Kununurra.
- These courts respond to Indigenous meaning through being sited in appropriate locations, designed in culturally sensitive ways and the incorporation of significant signs and symbols

Introduction



- Indigenous people are grossly overrepresented in the Australian criminal justice system.
- There have been a number of initiatives to make courts more culturally inclusive and appropriate.
- These initiatives intend to
 - Decrease number of Aboriginal people incarcerated
 - Reduce offending and recidivism
 - Increase people attending court
 - Increase participation of Aboriginal people
 - Provide greater support for victims

Port Augusta Court Complex



Port Augusta is the gateway to the outback and an important transient point and settlement area for European Australians and meeting place for Indigenous Australia.

Alongside the permanent Aboriginal population of Port Augusta of people from over twenty different language groups, there is a fluctuating population of Aboriginal peoples from the north and west of South Australia and beyond.

Port Augusta Court Complex

Many Aboriginal people accessing services in Port Augusta have English as their third or fourth language and may be living traditionally oriented lifestyles in their home communities.



Port Augusta Court Complex



- The design of a new court complex for the region needed to take into account the complexities and importance of the place, the need to service a large number of matters across a wide range of jurisdictions and the socio-spatial needs of different client groups and organizations.
- With many of the users identifying with Aboriginal cultures, there was an opportunity to move beyond traditional court architecture to integrating the traditions and needs of various Aboriginal peoples into the design.

Port Augusta Court Complex

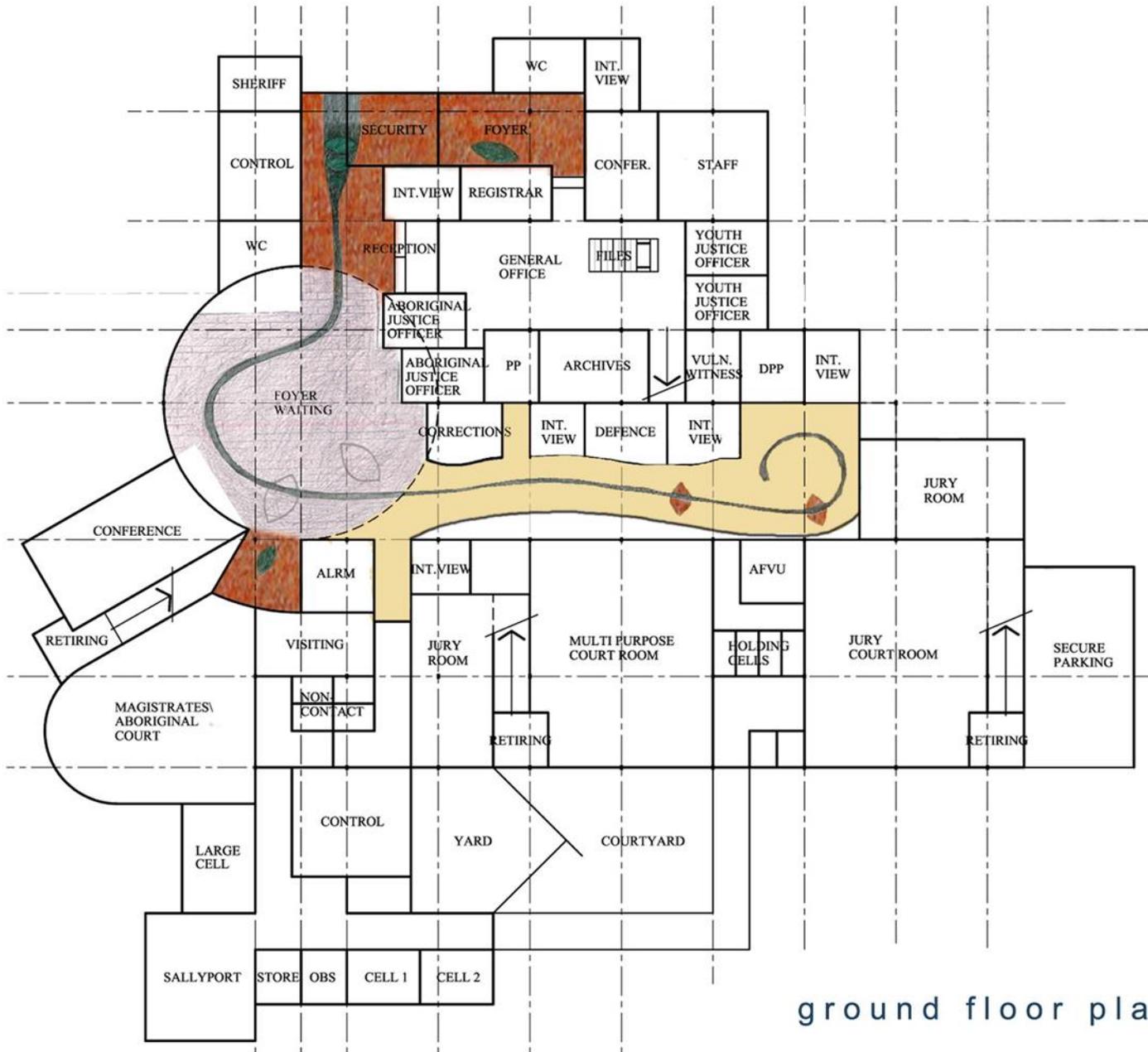


Conceptual drawing of movement through the court buildings. The presence of Arkurra, the Spirit Serpent of the Flinders Ranges Dreaming, acts as a wayfinding mechanism to lead people to the main entrance. Secondary paths lead to an outdoor shelter.

Port Augusta Court Complex



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ground floor plan

Port Augusta Court Complex

The double-height circular foyer is lit by diffused natural light.

The simply etched wooden panels around the perimeter of the foyer illustrate pre-European life including significant historical events of the Port Augusta region.



Port Augusta Court Complex

Expansive views of the Flinders Ranges and the gulf seen from the foyer, forging a strong relationship between inside and the natural landscape.



Port Augusta Court Complex

The Magistrates' Court is also used as an Aboriginal Sentencing or Conferencing Court.

The organic shape of this court reflects the shape of the roundtable used in the Aboriginal Court.



Port Augusta Court Complex



Elevational view of the courts complex.

Port Augusta Court Complex

The outdoor shelter is a multifunctional shade structure that can be used as an outdoor court



Kununurra Courthouse



- Kununurra is located at the eastern extremity of the Kimberley Region, 3,200 kilometres north east of Perth.
- The town has a population of 7,775 people increasing threefold during the dry season.
- Over half of the population identify as being of Aboriginal descent who are predominately Miriuwung and Gajerrong people.
- The population of Kununurra has grown significantly in the last five years and forecast to double in size in the next decade.

Kununurra Courthouse



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Kununurra Courthouse



- 1. PUBLIC REGISTRY
- 2. FOYER
- 3. MAGISTRATE COURTROOM
- 4. COURTYARD
- 5. PARKING
- 6. JURY COURTROOM
- 7. INTERVIEW ROOM

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Kununurra Courthouse

The courthouse is a two-storey building is steel and concrete framed, constructed with a mixture of pre-cast concrete panels, stone and metal cladding with a metal roof.

The design of the roof mirrors the outline of the distant ranges and creates a sense of space in the interior areas.

Materials including natural timbers are also used throughout the building to connect with external stonework interspersed with glass panels.



Kununurra Courthouse

Efforts have been made to create a less formal court environment where Aboriginal people are more comfortable.



Kununurra Courthouse

Waiting areas within the Kununurra Courthouse are laid out informally to allow people to wait individually, in small family groups or larger groups.



Kununurra Courthouse

An Aboriginal Reference Group was established early in the design process to communicate the views of the Aboriginal community to the design team. Members gave input on various aspects of the design of the building, landscape architecture and public art.

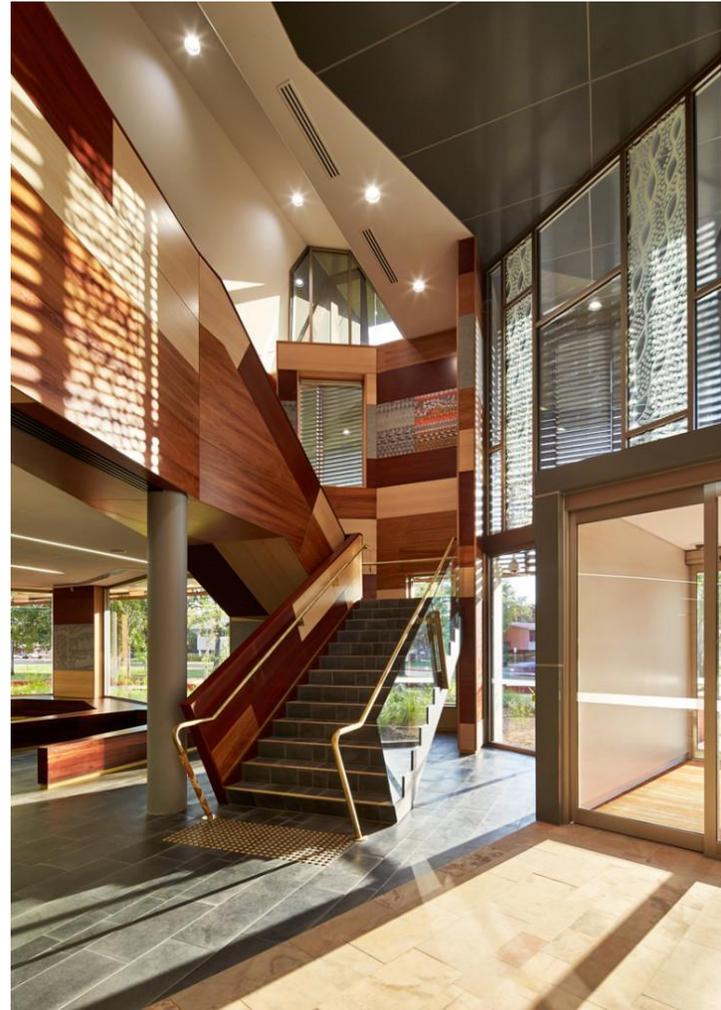
As a result of this collaboration, the design, colours and material finishes were chosen to reflect Indigenous socio-spatial needs, local cultures and surrounding landscape.



Kununurra Courthouse



The buildings are oriented to maximise natural light and people are afforded views to the distant ranges and the horizon.



Kununurra Courthouse

Screens provide privacy to people who are waiting to diffuse potential conflict between users.

A secure external courtyard is provided to allow people to wait outside before entering a court room.



Kununurra Courthouse



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Design Guidelines

- Recognise that the Indigenous users will be diverse and contain people from a number of distinct language groups with varying needs.
- Allow visual and aural surveillance of local and broader external environment.
- Avoidance relations and gender separation and privacy to be considered in organisation and placement of ablutions and other areas including access and egress to public areas and amenities.
- The embodiment of cultural identity should be included if appropriate and take into account of language groups, and consultation with custodians of cultural knowledge must occur.

Design Guidelines

- Different kin/language groups generally wish to gather as distinct social groups. It is important that the design allows opportunities for people to socialise in pre-existing social/family groups and there should be sufficient separation to dissuade mixing between social groups and the design should allow visual separation and some acoustic privacy.
- Consider the use of external private spaces for Indigenous users experiencing shame and/or in need of stress relief.
- Particular regard should be paid to the significant impact that being 'out of country' may have upon some Aboriginal users.

Design Guidelines

- The architectural scale and forms, and choice of materials and finishes should be informed by Indigenous users.
- All spaces should allow Indigenous users an acceptable degree of personal control over their immediate environment with regard to natural ventilation, views, temperature, illumination and privacy.
- Different kin/language groups generally wish to gather as distinct social groups.
- Consider the use of external private spaces for Indigenous users experiencing shame and/or in need of stress relief.
- Particular regard should be paid to the significant impact that being 'out of country' may have upon some Aboriginal users.

Design Guidelines

- Consider incorporating a series of way-finding mechanisms for visitors from the external to the internal environments.
- Internal layout, circulation and links between major spaces need to be easily read for way finding and orientation.
- Blind corridors are best avoided. Include external spaces when developing relationship diagrams.
- Provide continuous internal spaces with distinct thresholds and clear visual links.
- Consider users with children, elderly family members, those with mobility impairment, etc.

Design Guidelines

- Consider having discrete sheltered waiting areas for visitors outside where people can gather and have some visual and auditory privacy.
- Consider incorporating a grassed area with shady trees if possible.
- Consider having a safe place for children to run around outside the centre. Having to closely supervise children in public places due to inappropriately designed environments can be highly stressful.

Overview

- While location and design plays an important element in reinscribing a sense of place, there needs to be inter-connectedness with Indigenous laws, relationships and ceremonies in the justice process.
- Aboriginal courts at Port Augusta and Kunnurra are embryonic features of this connection that need to be progress for Indigenous offender, victim and community well-being and healing to take place in otherwise state-centred justice venues.

Thank you



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