

Disability Activism and Institutional Heritage: Planning, Remembrance and Rights

This study explores how planning and redevelopment can recognise disability institutional heritage, support truth-telling, and include people with disability in shaping more inclusive futures. Drawing on the Peat Island case (NSW) and research with people with intellectual disability, it highlights the need for reparative and accessible planning practices.

Why the study:

- Former institutions are often redeveloped without acknowledging past harm.
- These sites carry deep meaning for people with disability and their families.
- Inclusive planning offers opportunities for justice, memory, and repair.
- The study explores how redevelopment can support disability rights and recognition.



What we did:

- Analysed the Peat Island redevelopment planning process and associated disability activism.
- Conducted focus groups with people with intellectual disability on remembering institutions.
- Investigated how institutional history is represented in planning and heritage processes.

What we found:

- Disability history is often excluded or erased in redevelopment.
- People with disability want these histories remembered – as places of harm and resistance.
- Planning processes lacked accessible formats and meaningful consultation.
- Inclusive, trauma-informed engagement is essential for ethical redevelopment.

What this means:

- Urban planning must recognise disability institutional heritage as a social and cultural issue.
- Redevelopment should centre lived experience and support memorialisation.
- Inclusive planning can contribute to redress, education, and more equitable futures.