

I am a Geographer...



Tarryn Harding

Parks and Recreation Consultant, Xyst Australia

Growing up, I loved the outdoors, whether it be surfing, hiking or bike riding. This passion led me to study VCE Geography while at school and then I completed a Bachelor of Sport and Recreation at Monash University, Melbourne.

When I graduated, I worked in local government as a Recreation Planner. My role involved the planning, delivery and operation of sport and leisure assets, such as parks, pools, playgrounds, sporting reserves and trails. Recently, I have switched to the private sector. In my current role as a Parks and Recreation Consultant, I provide expert advice relating to parks, sport and recreation to government organisations, predominantly local councils. This can range from developing strategies and policies, undertaking master planning, surveying park users, undertaking audits and performance assessments, asset management and developing best practice operation standards. Essentially, we aim to activate people and places and encourage communities to become healthier by being connected to sport and the outdoors.

Being able to draw upon my geographical skills and knowledge is crucial to my role. While planning and out in the field, ground-truthing a new project, for example a mountain-bike trail to build, I need to interpret and analyse a lot of geographical data. Not just landform data, such as spatial data and maps, topography, flora and fauna and flood zones, but also population data such as local demographics and economic benefits. We need to ensure that what we are planning and building for communities meets their needs, are sustainable and can be used for many generations to come.

A key aspect of my job is strategic planning where I'm responsible for analysing and developing strategies and policies that relate to open space and affect how communities use and engage with council-provided recreation assets. Studying Geography introduced me to a range of social, environmental, cultural, health and economic issues, and really helped me grasp the concept of analysing policies and how these have flow-on effects for years to come. Depending on the project, I can work with many other Geography-related positions, such as heritage and biodiversity specialists, traffic advisors and GIS mapping specialists.

Having geographical knowledge and skills is vital in this field of work. While recreation planning is a very niche industry, there are other aspects and forms of planning, such as town and urban planning or transport or environmental planning, that geographers would excel in.

**Tarryn has recently been selected for the judging panel of the 2021 Parks and Leisure Awards of Excellence.*