

Introducing the 'tee' change – marketing, management and planning implications

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INTRODUCING THE 'TEE' CHANGE – MARKETING, MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

Mobility, housing and population movements have long been a concern of planners, demographers and geographers alike. More recently, focus has turned to the phenomenon known as the 'sea' and/or 'tree change' with various studies voicing concern about the implications involved in these types of movement to coastal and regional locations, as well as for the nation as a whole (Gurran et al. 2005; Murphy 2002; Stokes 2008; Walmsley 2003). Of equal concern, but currently under-researched, is the increasing growth of residential golf course developments as an alternate option for retirees, empty –nesters, or simply those seeking resort-style living arrangements. This type of development represents another aspect of exclusive residential development occurring not only on suburban fringes, but also in coastal and hinterland locations. Through a review of current literature, this paper considers the forces driving this type of development. It also questions whether there are any benefits to be gained by allowing these types of developments to go ahead and considers what implications might exist for future management and planning practice.

The Tee Change

At first glance, the decision to make a 'tee' change, a move to a residential golf course community, might appear to be fairly simple, in reality though, it involves a series of complex decisions. These decisions in effect determine the type of experience one gains by moving to this type of estate. The estates are usually master-planned, and thus the onus is on the new resident to decide whether they would be content to share the estate's associated facilities (usually club house, pool, gym, possibly tennis courts) with the public, or whether a level of exclusivity is required, thereby limiting access to private members or residents only. As these decisions are also deemed to be most important in terms of golf course design more generally, this has led to a spatial bifurcation in design between the golf course community that is gated and usually affluent, thereby excluding the general public, and the golf course that is residential, but also open to the public and tourists alike (Atkinson 2006). The implications of these decisions are discussed further elsewhere in this paper.

While the tee change as a phenomenon is relatively young in Australia as in the United States (US), since the 1990s, there has been an increasing trend to incorporate golf courses as central features of residential estate design. In the US, there are currently over 2000 residential golf

course communities in operation housing approximately 3.7 million Americans or 15 per cent of all golfers and more communities of this nature are planned and in construction (Compton 2000). In Australia, while residential golf course numbers are nothing like those in the US, there are, however, well over 100 golf courses with residential development now in operation, and many more at various stages of development and construction (Berg 2008a, See Figure 1). These account on average for four per cent of all new housing. Berg (2008a:417) notes that “with some 25,000 blocks built or master-planned since 1999, and with another 40 to 50 courses currently proposed, an estimated 30,000 more homes will be created” in the near future.

The appeal of golf course communities, however, is not only confined to golfers. McElyea et al. first noted in 1991(p.15) that “only approximately one-third of those who purchase houses in these developments play golf regularly”. Compton (2000:193) confirms this noting that “for the majority of home buyers, the appeal is the open space and the park-like ambience that golf courses provide”. Reinforcing this further, Stephen Head Managing Director of the Links Group, responsible for the development of ‘Sanctuary Lakes’ and the ‘Sandhurst Club’ in Victoria is quoted as saying that “the Tee change is being 70 per cent driven by people who do not play golf but who want to live in a high quality privately maintained environment” (Head in Smith 2004:1). Dugas (1997:1B) supports this by noting that “golf is a way to dress up real estate” and that the golf course tends to “elevate the image of the community and frankly, people are attracted to image”.

Marketing this life-style change, however, still requires a great deal of work on the part of advertisers and developers alike who not only have to construct and communicate an image where a commodified version of ‘nature’ is being packaged and sold, but also a philosophy that encourages people to believe that a community is also being established, a ‘life-style’ being created that they can own and be a part of (Wood 2002). Thus even when advertisers and developers speak of the ‘natural’ environment’, they are usually talking about what they have ‘constructed’ around nature and about it, capturing its beauty for clients and potential investors to look at through the windows of their new houses and apartments. In this sense, nature becomes objectified, something out there that can be bought and sold for economic gain, something assigned value or not, depending on how its purpose is measured. Golf courses by their very design try to convey the idea of a ‘natural’ setting when in reality, everything about the setting has been thoroughly planned and the associated lakes and wetlands – man made.

Obviously the extent to which nature is privatized or not through these means depends upon whether the golf course is a gated community or not. The more exclusivity is stressed, the more unique and aesthetically pleasing the constructed nature must be. Richard Rosen (2005:6) president of the US Urban Land Institute confirms this by noting that people are willing to pay for what they believe will improve the quality of life in their communities, "thus golf courses with their artificially constructed lakes and park-like appearance complete with manicured lawns and flowerbeds, are becoming part of this new, desired topography of space, urban and otherwise". What is effectively being sold is a perception of 'paradise', a place that is safe and clean and appeals to those who see their happiness situated in secure, picturesque –type places (See: Gwyther 2005, Low 2003).

Marketing and Selling Golf Course Real Estate

Berg (2007:2) suggests that those who are moving to golf course communities are in fact "those priced out of the 'ocean-view' market [who] have, however, opted for the next best thing in taking advantage of the country's real estate 'tree-change' – a looser community focus where prospects for capital growth rely more heavily on lifestyle attributes; a description which now best categorises most, if not all, of the country's new golf-course developments". While the benefits of security, packaged club houses, health and leisure amenities and so on all provide a highly desirable solution for some purchasers, the fact remains that not all residential golf communities are actually located in traditional tree or hinterland locations. Many are in fact, located on urban fringes such as 'Macquarie Links' on the edge of suburban Ingleburn in Sydney which advertises itself as "a rare opportunity to live in full security in a prestige gated estate, 20 minutes from Sydney airport" (Advertisement Sun–Herald 2008). The estate advertising also boasts that "life doesn't get any better than this" and that the course is "the preferred golf location for the discerning golfer and business elite of Sydney" (Macquarie Links 2009- <http://www.macquarielinksgolfclub.com.au/>). Developed by Monarch Investments, Macquarie links is the sister estate to the operation's other master-planned residential golf property in Muswellbrook (Eastbrook Links Estate) which currently has 1300 lots under development.

Supporters of these types of suburban estates, such as demographer Bernard Salt (2005:1), suggest that compared to a sea or tree change, "...there is a compelling logic behind golf course residential estates from a market viewpoint. Here is an opportunity for aging boomers to remain in the city, to maintain social and work linkages, to downsize out of that rambling

suburban dwelling, and to achieve what many are now calling 'a portfolio lifestyle': leisure, work, family and social interests all blended within a locale that could not be as easily achieved from a remote beach or hill cabin". He suggests further that "...many city-based baby boomers who have the financial capacity, will increasingly want to live in urban areas where there is plenty of space, a maintained environment, a range of passive sporting and leisure activities, and some form of formal security" (Salt 2005:1). Security associated with making the move to these estates tends to be in two forms, first, security from financial risk and second, perceived protection from 'outsiders' who can include everyone from the poor, the coloured, single parents, to generally anyone who is considered to be 'undesirable'.

It is precisely because of this rejection of 'others' that gated communities (golf course and other types) have been accused of being nothing more than insulated enclaves of the rich and privileged who 'bunker' themselves down 'behind the gates' to pursue happiness by only admitting like-minded, affluent individuals to their society (Aalbers 2003; Atkinson 2006; Blakely & Snyder 1999; Low 2003). While it is worth noting that not all golf course communities are gated and exclusionary, they are in fact increasing in number around the globe as communities become more paranoid of, and prejudiced towards, one another. Kunstler in Degregorio (2006:3) goes so far as to say that "...calling these places 'communities' is rarely accurate", when in reality they are "little more than monocultures of a small income demographic". Despite these types of criticism, more of these exclusive communities are on the rise and can be found today in limited numbers in China, Indonesia, Lebanon and Russia (specifically Moscow). Obviously, the majority at present are located in Europe and the US, though as stated previously, they are also on the rise in Australia, often under the guise of golf course estates which now are garnering the support and endorsement of big professional names in the sport such as Craig Parry and Greg Norman.

Australian Examples

Craig Parry is the draw card at 'Kooindah Waters- Residential Golf Resort' near Wyong on the NSW Central coast. Comprising of 252 residences and a luxury resort and day spa, Kooindah Waters is the latest project by Master builders Clarendon Homes. Parry designed the course and apparently, when he's not on the PGA circuit, he coaches at the club. Greg Norman, who in 1987 established the 'Greg Norman Golf Course Design centre' in both Florida and in Sydney, has now opened in total over 61 courses world-wide and has an additional 60 projects in various stages of development. Norman's latest developments are gated golf estates in Mexico and

while these might cater to the rich, the PGA has added one of these new courses to its professional schedule. It is hoped that this will have a flow-on effect for the local economy.

Despite all the hype attached to 'big name' golf courses, ungated golf communities are also still on the rise in Australia particularly as new holiday destinations both on the coast and in the hinterland taking advantage of both the sea and tree change populations and those who want to indulge in what the British refer to as a 'mini-break'. 'Magenta Shores' is Mirvac's latest creation at Tuggerah on the NSW central coast not far from Terrigal and Avoca. It is selling itself as a place of "resort living" where you can "rediscover living" (suggesting that whatever you were doing before, was definitely *not* living)! It is here, according to its publicity, that amidst a "spectacular lifestyle setting of beaches, lakes, golf course and bush land, you can truly find out what life is about and live!" (Kurosawa 2007:1).

As well as offering 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments in its 'Quay West' resort, it also has the usual amenities of pool, day spa, sauna, gymnasium, restaurant, and country club, plus the added advantage of a five-star hotel. The same sort of operation can be found at 'Pacific Dunes' at Port Stephens and at 'Tallwoods' at Halliday's Point on the mid NSW coast, a convenient 5 minute drive from Black Head Beach and 20 minutes from Forster/Tuncurry. It should be noted, however, that many of these sorts of resort communities are now also being targeted as the latest refinement of the 'timeshare' concept, which originated in Europe in the 1960s. This idea is being resurrected as another marketing ploy to attract those who cannot afford to buy into these types of schemes, yet still aspire to one day.

Developers are also targeting purchasers of second and third homes (particularly in the US) as part of the latest investment scheme where golf course housing is marketed as the product of choice for individuals who have the economic means, but do not wish to be burdened with having to reside in, or care for, multiple homes. A key distinguishing feature here is that they are in fact real estate investments to be rented out long-term, rather than simply a purchase of time. Unlike a time-share arrangement, these properties represent something more tangible that can be sold off at a later date, or at a moment's notice.

As a result, according to the US Urban Land Institute (2006) today's sophisticated buyers for these markets expect to see "...architectural authenticity and experience a significant 'wow' factor with their resort home purchase". With the increasing range of communities competing for lot and unit sales, "only those projects whose people and service levels meet the expectations

of the high end buyer will be able to maintain their premiums and momentum in the marketplace” (US ULI 2006). While residential golf courses obviously contribute to this potential supply of housing, they also can be utilised to supply far more than this in terms of planning. Golf courses can also actively contribute to the creation of green spaces or ‘greenways’ as they are referred to in the United States. They may also be used to provide much needed wildlife habitats for species. Given that urban consolidation remains a major planning policy both here in Australia and overseas, the need for more green spaces and wildlife corridors will only continue to increase over time (Searle 2004).

Land capacity, Cost and creating Green spaces

The acreage required for a viable real estate development that includes a golf course varies, but Crompton (2000:193) suggests that “...about 400 acres (half golf, half residential)” is the minimum size. This ratio becomes marginal, however, when one considers that some developments also offer an array of other recreational amenities such as jogging paths, bike tracks, swimming pools, gymnasiums and tennis courts. Obviously, the larger the project, the more opportunities exist for developers to spread the cost through offering a greater number of residential lots for sale. Importantly as Crompton and Havitz (1998) note though, “...golf and real estate are very different businesses and most developers have no desire to be in the business of operating a golf course”. As such, it is common in Australia for the “landowners/developers to arrange for course construction, and then to market the lots directly or via sales agents. Management of the course is often (but not always) delegated to specialist course managers” (Berg *pers Comm* 2008b.) Increasingly, however, there is movement towards the developer managing the course as well as is the case with the ‘Links Group’. In the US, there are some examples where developers have constructed a golf course then donated it to a local parks agency or a not-for-profit community housing association to operate (Crompton 2000). This sort of philanthropic venture is rare in Australia.

Gathering momentum in the US, however, is the ‘Greenways for America’ movement, which seeks to provide and open up more green spaces for public recreational use (Little 1995). An example of how this can be achieved using golf courses may be seen through the ‘Woodlands Project’ in California. The Woodlands project is building its first public golf course (Monarch Dunes) right next to the town centre, so that it is designed to flow into—not be isolated from—the rest of the community. Based on a similar design and setting as the St. Andrews golf course in Scotland, the Monarch Dunes course will include 1,320 homes, two 18-hole courses and one

nine-hole course, a business park, a 500-room hotel, riding and hiking trails, a shopping centre, and a 12-acre park (Cleveland 2005). It is expected to be the biggest mixed-use development of its kind in the state. As expected, however, managing such a large site, will need careful planning.

Compton (2000:195) notes that “the linkage between golf courses and parks has been accentuated in recent years by newer courses accepting greater responsibility for protecting the natural environment”. Recently, there has also been a growing acknowledgement of the damage that golf courses can inflict and an increased recognition that rather than creating and contributing to these problems, golf course developers should in fact be providing part of the solution. Potential environmental problems associated with golf course developments include: loss of habitat (such as wetlands) and loss of native species; water depletion; chemical contamination of soil, surface water, ground water, and living organisms; excessive runoff and soil erosion (see Cohn 2008, Terman 1997). As Terman (1997) suggests, however, it is only recently that ecologists have focused their attention on the conservation potential of human dominated and managed landscapes such as golf courses.

Given the fact that golf course development is continuing to gather pace, there is no doubt that a need for more stringently controlled development in both the US and Australia persists. Studies by Warnken et al. (2001:694) concerning golf course development on Queensland’s Gold Coast for example, note that while “...EIA is often demanded for golf developments near open water bodies, formal impact assessment studies [are] discretionary under [local] planning legislation ...and, therefore, rarely requested”. Confirming this lax approach to the environment where tourism and recreational activities coexist, the OECD as early as the 1980s, noted that “tourism has a history for ignorance and dislike towards planning and development restrictions” (OECD 2002).

Despite this, supporters of golf course development suggest that golf courses can actually be used to enhance the environmental quality of an area. Tietge (1992:442) suggests that the golf course today is “... a complex ecosystem which is capable of supporting a great variety of natural wildlife” and that “golf course managers now realize that environmental consciousness on their courses is crucial for the well-being of water resources, humans and wildlife alike”. As such, golf courses have become important multiple land use environments in urban, suburban and hinterland landscapes.

Incorporating Good Environmental Planning and Governance

Warnken et al. (2001) have noted that "...it is in the interest of any local community, and their elected officials to demand effective local planning policies, better assessment, and more public scrutiny for generally, controversial developments such as golf course and golf resorts". While this is undoubtedly true, it must also be stated that if properly planned and managed, golf courses have the potential to perform positive environmental functions. Just as Tietge (1992) has outlined that golf courses can help to restore native vegetation types—hardwood forests, wetlands and preserve habitats for wildlife, Smith (2004) and others have noted that golf courses today may also be used successfully as a means for restoring degraded sites such as quarries and other industrial and brown fields areas.

Smith (2004:) notes further that "...golf course residential projects provide green wedges" in suburban areas and rural areas enriching the environment in a number of ways including:

- *by housing rich and diverse ecology,

- * by hosting ecosystems such as wetlands which provide a valuable resource in terms of an education facility for the general community and habitats that sustain many varieties of migratory birds, native animals, fish, insects and plant life, and

- *by establishing extensive vegetation including significant tree planting which also provides a carbon sink for the environment.

Most importantly, the establishment and management of these environmental green space habitats and wildlife corridors can be funded privately. Through contributions of Tee Changers who pay council rates plus contribute around \$1,600 annually to a residents' management fund in places like Victoria for example (Smith 2004), these payments can be utilised to ensure appropriate management occurs and is on-going. The importance of this may be seen through examples such as the 'Sandhurst Club' and its other associated club, the 'Sanctuary Lakes Resort', both at the forefront in Victoria for rehabilitating old brownfields sites and turning them into lush golf courses. Sanctuary Lakes Resort for example was one of the worst degraded sites in Australia and it has been turned from a salt laden wasteland at Point Cook on the edge of the Port Phillip Bay into an award winning, master planned community and environmental showcase, with a major increase in bird life and restoration of vegetation.

Given the fact that water scarcity throughout Australia is also an ongoing concern, there have been calls for the use of alternative water supplies for irrigation of golf courses. In response to

this and as part of its Metropolitan Water Plan, the NSW Government has introduced the 'Water Saving Fund' which seeks to ensure that water is used in an economical and sustainable manner. In 2006/2007, the NSW Water Saving Fund contributed over \$ 5 million in funding to water recycling projects at the Beverley Park Golf Course, Cammeray Golf Club, Cumberland Country Golf Club, Lane Cove Golf Course, Manly Golf Course, Northbridge Golf Club, Pennant Hills Golf Course, and Roseville Golf club in Sydney, many of which are investigating using storm water supplies and run-off to irrigate their greens (NSW DEUS 2007; Schwecke, & Davies 2007).

In terms of individual projects, the 'Sandhurst Club' at Skye is Victoria's first and only major broad scale residential water recycling project. It is privately funded and provides a practical example of how water conservation can be built into a project's infrastructure. For these reasons, the development recently received 'the Green Smart Award' from the Housing Institute of Australia. GreenSmart is a voluntary practical approach to building that focuses on educating builders, designers, product manufacturers and consumers about the benefits of environmentally responsible housing.

The major environmental initiatives implemented at the Sandhurst Club which led to its GreenSmart Estate accreditation include:

- The use of recycled grey water on the golf course and public parks as well as residential gardens and toilet flushing;
- The establishment of wetlands to treat water run off;
- The creation of recreation paths to discourage use of vehicles;
- The protection of existing red gum trees;
- The extensive planting of new trees and shrubs that are appropriate to the local environment; and
- The installation of solar powered public lighting.

While in some respects, these initiatives might seem obvious ones for smart environmental planners intent on best practice, there still remain many developers in the market who only give a cursory nod to the issue of sustainability. The Sandhurst Club and others like it, provide a model with which to showcase how sustainable planning practices can provide a better future for communities and the environment as a whole.

Golf course developments of this calibre also provide an example of what Blank (2007:2) refers to as “Responsible Property Investing” or RPI, which is serving as a catalyst in mobilising the real estate industry to assume responsibility for improving the environment. Blank suggests (2007:2) further that “RPI reflects the same accountability premise and standards as ‘Socially Responsible Investing’; it argues that an investor can ‘do well’ while ‘doing good’ by embracing social and environmental concerns as well as economic returns”. Under this premise, residential golf course developers employing RPI would continue to focus on ways to continuously improve the in-place, existing environment, not just the newly constructed one, while receiving market rates of return on invested capital. This would also have a spin-off effect for the natural environment as a whole. As Hodgkison et al (2007:323) note, “while species-specific studies are required to identify the ecological role played by habitats on golf courses and the potential for long-term viability”, the results of 40 sites surveyed for increased fauna levels on golf courses in south-east Queensland, confirm that “suburban golf courses can have local conservation value” particularly for threatened species.

Concluding Comments

Residential golf course development is a constantly evolving industry both here in Australia and overseas. While consumers continue to expect new and creative amenities, golf courses remain a growing component of many communities and resorts. As such, the successful integration of golf and real estate requires careful planning; a thorough understanding of the economics of golf course development; proper design, marketing, and management; and better development of green spaces. Without a doubt, golf as a sport favoured by many both here in Australia and overseas, will continue to be something which greatly influences development and land-use potential.

In both suburban and hinterland locations, new golf course development in greenfields areas can be viewed as contributing to smart growth efforts through open space preservation, environmental enhancement, and protection of habitat. Clearly, it adds to the mix of land uses. As Richard Rosan (2005:8) the president of the US Urban Land Institute cautions, however, “in today’s world of changing demographics, changing consumer lifestyles, and changing land use patterns, golf should rarely—if ever—be positioned as the focal point of the community. Golf works best if it is developed and marketed as an additional desirable dimension of the community. The inclusion of golf courses should be based on demand for golf, not as a way to

enhance real estate values". Martinez (2002:162) confirms this by noting poignantly that "...golf [courses] should enhance the land, not detract from it...and if a golf course [is to] make sense economically, physically, and politically, we must look at the land not only through the golfer's eyes but also through those of the future resident, the merchant, the golf course operator, the passer-by, the guest, the surrounding community and the politician". Thus whether a project is driven by residential, tourism or other development forces, there is a need to ensure that there is a balance between all the proposed uses, anthropocentric and environmental.

Ultimately, there is no question that the most successful golf course communities are—and will continue to be—the communities that have golf courses as *one* of many recreational facilities in a community no matter where they are located. Ideally, these communities would be ungated and ones that are focused on cultural, educational *and* recreational programs and facilities that bring people together, rather than force them apart. Overall, however, people will continue to move to places and stay in places that give them a sense of belonging—a sense of togetherness—a sense of community. Golf courses are not necessarily the cause of this newest migration trend, but there is no doubt that they will continue to be part of that movement in the future. After all, the best amenity any community can offer is a high quality of life for all. As Tietge (1992: 442) notes, "as natural and agricultural lands disappear under parking lots and urban industrial development, golf courses will assume an increasingly important role".

In terms of their potential to provide increased habitat and wildlife corridors for fauna, while the golf industry is making genuine attempts to improve its environmental management standards, as Hodgkinson et al (2009:323) note "it is important to ensure those efforts target the needs of regionally threatened species". To do this effectively, legislation may be required to ensure that ecological criteria is incorporated into all new golfing developments. Overall, however, golf courses generally do create valuable green spaces particularly in urban areas. They are in part, responsible for enhancing real estate values in many urban and non-urban locations and as such, the Tee-Change phenomenon may be seen to represent a new hybrid type of development which seeks to take advantage of both sea and tree changers, but does not rely solely on them for its success. The Tee change therefore, is both an urban and regional process that will continue to influence population movements at all scales in Australia and elsewhere for many years to come.

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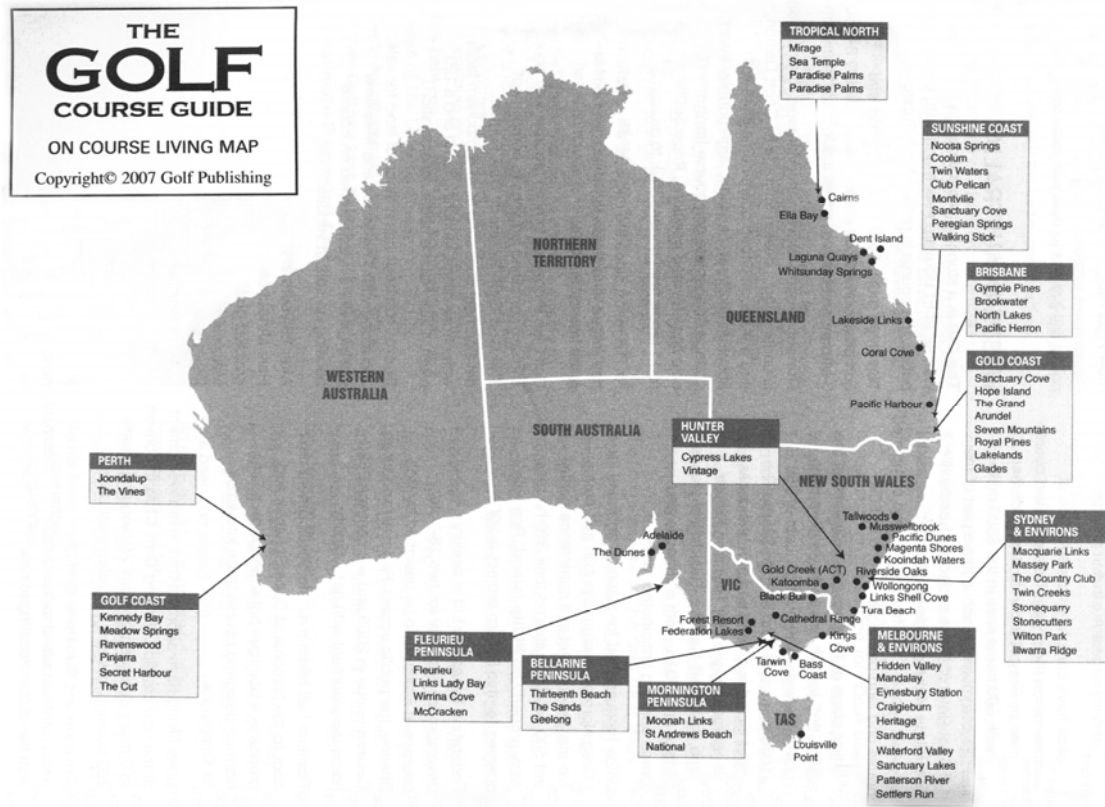
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Figure 1



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