



ART, GOVERNANCE AND THE TURN INTO COMMUNITY: PUTTING ART AT THE HEART OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract: *Researchers in the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University were asked to conduct research on the Generations Project because we had completed earlier research on community arts and wellbeing across four diverse Victorian communities for VicHealth, resulting in a report titled **Creating Community** (Mulligan et al 2006). While we had a much smaller budget for this research we appointed a dedicated researcher to follow the projects over more than three years. Research methods included a very wide range of semi-structured interviews, a survey of Council staff, the collection of stories related to the projects and ethnographic fieldnotes. The huge effort that went into setting up the national project has created an ideal opportunity to compare experiences across the five diverse LGAs and the research confirms that community cultural development practices can definitely improve the effectiveness of local government in a changing and complex world. We follow writers such as Zygmunt Bauman and Nikolas Rose in saying that there is need for a ‘turn to community’ in thinking about effective local governance.*

Keywords: *Generations project, community cultural development, local government*

Research Purpose

Those who initiated the national Generations Project stressed that it was not just ‘another community cultural development project’ and nor was it aimed at validating this field of work (see, for example, an interview with Anne Dunn conducted by Pia Smith in 2006). Rather the purpose was to convince local government in Australia that community art or community cultural development (CCD) work could help them to achieve some of their strategic aims. Put another way, the aim was to explore what it would take to embed CCD within the practice of local governance. What we hope to demonstrate today is that local government has an increasing need in the contemporary world to embrace CCD and that this should provide more opportunities for CCD practitioners. However, if this is a marriage made in heaven, it is not an easy one to consummate here on earth.

A huge investment of time and money has gone into the national project since it was first initiated in 2004 and so research was essential to capture and disseminate key learnings. The project was initiated before the abolition of the Community Cultural Development Board at the Australia Council and it was suspended for a period of time before the Community Partnerships (CP) program was established. It is well suited to inform the development of the CP program and to inform the work of state

arts funding agencies in their desire to work directly with local government and other agencies. The timely initiative by CDN should pay dividends for all these funding agencies.

A large number of artists, cultural development practitioners and social development planners have been involved in the five local projects and it is important that they get clear and rigorous feedback on what has been achieved in relation to the national project aims. The outcomes will be of interest to a wide range of cultural development and community development practitioners and both social and physical planners.

The community arts and cultural development sector has grown enormously in Australia over the last two decades in particular (see, for example, Mills 2006) but it rarely gets a chance to think of itself as a sector and so this project also allows us to confirm the existence of a vibrant and politically engaged community art sector in Australia.

The hard work that went into the project design has created an invaluable opportunity to compare parallel experiences across five diverse local government authorities (LGAs), ranging from the growing city of Geelong and its hinterlands to the sprawling shire of the Charters Towers regional council. The research has been able to look at a spectrum of experience that will have ramifications for a very wide range of LGAs across Australia. Furthermore, it is rare to get an opportunity to research a development over a period of more than three years. Longitudinal research is missing in this field and while this is not yet longitudinal it is heading in that direction. An investment in longitudinal research would be valuable.

As researchers we need to point out that we were operating under a very tight budget in conducting the research on the Generations Project and this put significant constraints on what we could do (as discussed under Research Methodology). This was partly offset by the fact that the researchers have completed similar research in the past (see below) and have a strong understanding of the community arts or the community cultural development sector in Australia. Hopefully, the research outcomes will help to demonstrate the need to continue investing in research which can help us understand a field of practice that is growing in importance in the contemporary world yet which continues to be poorly understood and undervalued by Australian society and governments.

We were invited to undertake the research because of a large and well-funded project we undertook for VicHealth on community art and cultural development across four diverse local communities, which resulted in the publication of the report titled *Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts, and Wellbeing within and Across Local Communities* (Mulligan et al 2006). This current project extends on that project, particularly in regard to conceptual development and we see the two reports as being companions.

Note that we also undertook a small but fascinating study for Regional Arts Victoria on their program to place Regional Arts Development Officers in regions across the state and this study showed a surprisingly strong interest in arts development on the part of LGAs in the regions (Mulligan and Smith 2008).

Note that some of the local Generations projects have not yet been completed and we still have a few interviews to complete. Our aim now is to complete a detailed report for the Australia Council, participating LGAs, and the Cultural Development Network by the end of the year, which will include specific recommendations based on our findings. Hopefully a version of that report can be circulated more widely next year and we will publish some papers in relevant journals.

This paper can provide a glimpse of what the longer report will cover and we hope it will whet your appetite for reading that report. We would appreciate feedback on this article because that can be taken into account as we complete the report.

Key Research Questions

1. What can be learnt from the Generations Project about what it takes to encourage LGAs to place more strategic importance on cultural development as a praxis across the diverse sectors and operations of council?
2. What can be learnt from the Generations Project about forging more effective partnerships between artists, arts organisations, community groups and LGAs?
3. What can be learnt from the Generations Project about ways in which arts-based projects and initiatives can enhance the capacity of LGAs to engage with their communities across diverse areas of council work and responsibility?

Key Findings

1. The constant creation of inclusive communities has become a core 'means of government' in the contemporary world and this is especially the case for local government. In the conditions of global flux, a lack of attention to the building of inclusive communities will lead to a rise in social tensions and conflict.
2. 'Creative engagement with complex local communities' describes the challenge better than flat terms such as 'increasing civic participation'.
3. In the era of 'network government' LGAs must enhance their capacity to work with individuals and organisations that have very different assumptions and ways of working (i.e. different cultures).
4. Creative projects that can capture and celebrate a diversity of stories related to life in communities will build a more inclusive sense of community identity and also allow for many more voices to be heard.
5. Artistic projects can only shift perceptions and attitudes in a meaningful way if they have a 'wow factor' related to an inspirational artistic vision and/or the clever crafting of diverse and well-targeted activities.
6. For ambitious or multifaceted projects that involve a range of artists, the role of Creative or Artistic Director is critical and the role should be filled as soon as project aims have been clarified.
7. Australia now has an extraordinary artistic resource in terms of local artists, visiting artists and new technologies. However, this puts even more emphasis on the need to make skilful use of such resources and to understand the array of skills that effective CCD practitioners need to acquire.
8. LGAs should ensure they retain a capacity to carry through effective and ambitious community art projects by: documenting experiences; ensuring skill development for relevant staff; employing staff with relevant skills and experience; and writing a commitment to such work into strategic documents with

associated key performance indicators (KPIs).

9. LGAs should constantly evaluate their community cultural development work to ensure improved performance and organisational learning, but such evaluation must be based on a good understanding of creative processes and the use of a range of empathetic evaluation tools.

10. The Generations Project was artificially constructed (eg: choice of issues), however, the leadership 'buy-in', significant time for creative development, and national framing and co-ordination have ensured that it has created a very valuable education resource which should be disseminated widely.

Research Methodology

Our research centre developed a multi-method research methodology for the VicHealth project between 2003 and 2006 (which we have also called a 'community engaged research methodology', see Mulligan and Nadarajah, 2008). This involved a combination of random and targeted surveys; long semi-structured interviews/'strategic conversations'; response interviews; the collection and analysis of relevant stories; use of a photo narrative technique; and reflections on fieldworker notes and observations.

A much smaller budget for this project meant that we could not employ the same array of methods, and most of the funding went into the employment of a dedicated fieldworker who could gain a good understanding of the local projects over an extended period of time. Methodologies always need to be 'customised' according to both research needs and resource constraints.

This time our methodology has relied heavily on 'strategic conversations', response interviews, participant interviews and fieldworker notes and observations. We have also conducted a targeted survey of LGA staff and have collected some stories that are yet to be analysed. Periodic debriefings between Pia and Martin have been a key feature of our research process as we tried to 'download' accumulating observations and reflections.

Over a wide range of projects we now believe we have developed considerable skill in the use of semi-structured interviews and we end up with many hundreds of pages of transcripts to read and analyse. Wherever possible we try to 'triangulate' this method by using some complementary methods, such as surveys or narrative research. However, rigour has been more important than spreading our efforts too thinly.

In our research methodology an ongoing review of a wide range of relevant literature is not only used to set the context for the research but to create and refine the conceptual framework used to interrogate the data. In our Globalism Research Centre we have been reviewing a wide range of relevant literature over a long period (six years) and across a wide range of research projects (see below). As a result the conceptual framework for this study is stronger than it was for the VicHealth study. Some points in our Key Findings relate more to our reading of the literature than to what emerges purely from local experience.

There have been high expectations of what the research on the Generations Project will reveal and such expectations need to be tempered by an understanding of the constraints mentioned above. However, the project has been able to build on earlier research and it benefits from the growing clarity of our conceptual framework. Other work we are doing in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India

on local and regional community development in the context of globalisation also informs this project. We bring a certain kind of expertise to this research.

From the Literature: a Framework for Analysing Experience

Governments are trying to meet new, more complex, demands using tools and levers which have changed little in half a century or more.

Tom Bentley (2001)

...community is not simply the territory of government but a means of government....

Nikolas Rose (2008)

Tom Bentley (2001) and many others have discussed the emergence in recent decades of a 'democratic deficit' in the 'developed world'; citing a declining interest in voting and in participating in formal political processes (as in joining political parties). According to Bentley (2001) 'Our current political institutions are not up to the job.'

Haus and Heinelt (2005) have argued that it is not a crisis of democracy but a crisis of government, with the challenge being greatest for local government. The book edited by Haus, Heinelt and Stewart (2005) discusses notions such as 'network government' or 'multi-actor government' at the local level but the authors add that there is a big gap between rhetoric and practice in regard to such notions.

Between 1996 and 2003 the Demos Foundation (UK) developed the notion of the 'adaptive state' to suggest ways in which governments could become more flexible and creative in a world of 'new opportunities, challenges and threats'. A contribution to this literature by Barry Quirk (2005) suggested that local government could become the most adaptive tier of government by developing a stronger 'moral purpose' and putting an emphasis on 'strategic partnerships'.

A very useful contribution to the Demos Foundation literature was a paper developed by the State Services Authority of Victoria in association with Demos researchers titled *Towards Agile Government* (2008) in which the concept of an 'Agility Cycle' for public administration was developed. Of course Demos Foundation UK was closely associated with the Labour Governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Tom Bentley is now in the office of our own Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard. In an address given in Melbourne in 2007, Bentley insisted that the 'Blair revolution' had left some important legacies even if many hoped-for changes had fallen well short of the mark. Clearly, however, the crisis of government has not been resolved in the UK.

A problem with the Blair government reforms was that they were largely based on an assumption that what works in the corporate world should work in regard to building stronger communities (e.g. the nurturing of 'social entrepreneurs') and the policy initiatives were narrowly focused on labour market participation rather than a much broader sweep of wellbeing indicators.

Nikolas Rose, in an essay titled *The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government* (2008), has offered a much more penetrating insight into the ongoing failings of government in the context of globalised social relationships. In a truly globalised world, Rose suggests, people are less concerned about the obligation

between citizen and society as mediated by the state, but rather they are focusing on wider ranging relations of allegiance and responsibility in which each subject becomes located in a 'variety of heterogeneous and overlapping networks of personal concern and investment' (p. 87).

Rose suggests that the 'idea of community' has come to replace the obligation to the social because community is seen as an 'antidote or even cure to the ills that the social had not been able to address' (p. 89). According to Rose this opens up possibilities for community to become an instrument of government but it also means that governments have to address their subjects as 'moral individual[s] with bonds of obligation and responsibilities' (p. 91).

'The vocabulary of community also implicates a psychology of identification,' Rose continued, and the challenge for government is that 'community is not simply the territory of government, but a means of government: its ties, bonds, forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encourage, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalised in the hope of producing consequences that are desirable for all and for each' (p. 93).

Rose echoes sentiments expressed by Zygmunt Bauman (2003) when he said that a growing desire for community reflects a deeper desire to feel safe in a world of great flux and uncertainty. Between them, Rose and Bauman explain why there has been a 'turn to community' in recent decades, against the expectations of most sociologists. Others (e.g. Brenner, 2009) have talked about a 'rescaling of the state' which tends to shift the emphasis from the national to the local and the global and, consequently, relationships between the local and the global.

Our review of the literature on the separate but overlapping emergence of community arts and community development practices in Australia, UK and North America suggests that the 'professionalisation' of community development practice has meant that there are now two orientations (sometimes conceived as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' or otherwise as welfare versus empowerment). Community cultural development has emerged more in the tradition of empowerment and political action for social equity.

In her important book on community development in Australia, Susan Kenny (2007) also notes that the rise of the 'neoliberal state' (conceived by others as the shrinking of the nation-state) has put much greater emphasis on partnerships between state agencies and civil society organisations. Gerard Delanty (2003) has been responsible for a very important rethinking of the nature of community in the contemporary world. Community is not a social structure, he emphasized, but rather an 'open-ended system of communication about belonging' (p. 187). In this sense community only exists if it is 'wilfully constructed', yet it has become more relevant in today's world because 'on the one side the fragmentation of society has provoked a worldwide search for community, and on the other ... cultural developments and global forms of communication have facilitated the construction of community' (p. 193).

Delanty (2003) notes that 'Community exerts itself as a powerful idea of belonging in every age' and yet from the Ancient Greeks we have inherited a conception of community that has an interesting ambiguity embedded within it because it refers to both 'locality and particularness' and also to a sense of belonging to a 'universal community in which all human beings participate'. In other words, the term has a local and global concept embedded within it.

Delanty's conception of community (which has much in common with the ideas expressed by Nikolas Rose) concurs with our findings in the *Creating Community*

report written for VicHealth (Mulligan et al, 2006). As well as understanding that community is a sense of belonging that must be constantly and willfully constructed, our report highlighted the importance of community celebrations which give people an opportunity to avow the importance of community in the contemporary world and also activities (such as community choirs) which can give people a more 'visceral' sense of being community.

In 1999, an organisation calling itself 'Americans for the Arts' published a seminal work titled *Animating Democracy: the Artistic Imagination as a Force in Civic Dialogue*. This has stimulated a wide range of projects and a website in which people share their experiences with the praxis advocated in *Animating Democracy*. While many of the projects are admirable it seems that the goal rarely goes beyond dialogue for dialogue's sake. This doesn't really address the question of governance.

In the UK the emphasis on 'social inclusion' has posed questions about the role of the arts in fostering a broader sense of social inclusion and this became a focus for practice and research in the city of Liverpool around the time it was declared the European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Within community cultural development, there seems to have been growing interest in storytelling. There have been many papers in recent years focusing on projects that have featured the collection of stories within communities. As we noted in the *Creating Community* report, Richard Sennett has noted (2006) that the growing fragmentation of social life has meant that people have a more fragmented sense of their own life narratives and so they might focus on their own stories in order to 'make their experiences cohere' and to get a sense of 'narrative movement' in their lives.

As French philosopher Giles Deleuze has suggested, we might turn to creative expression to rise above individual experience by a 'virtual creating' which, in turn, 'individuates' the experience (Hallward 2006). According to Chris Lawn (2006), German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer had an even more explicit interest in artistic expression because for him art is 'not an innocent diversion or amusement but a crucial point of access to fundamental truths about the world and what it is to be human' (p. 87). According to Lawn (p. 93), Gadamer suggested that art can 'captivate' and 'intrigue' us all because we seek to understand ourselves in it and it 'draws us into its world, however seemingly remote and distant that world at first appears'.

If the creation of community is about finding moral purpose and a more secure sense of belonging in an uncertain world then it is easy to see why this should be a central aim of government in general and local government in particular. Creating community seems a more relevant and interesting way to 'animate democracy' in the contemporary world than to agonise about a need to enhance 'civic participation' or 'civic engagement'.

The focus on the constant creation of community suggests that a revitalized way of thinking about community development should be a strategic aim of local government. On the other hand, a failure to attend to the constant creation of an inclusive sense of belonging to community in the contemporary world can easily lead to a rise in social tension and conflict. As Nikolas Rose suggested, only community can be an effective antidote to the fragmentation of society.

Council Staff Perceptions

1. Relatively small numbers and some variation in regard to sampling make this survey indicative only. The number of completed surveys ranged from 33 in Wangaratta and Charters Towers, to 45 in Latrobe, to 86 in Geelong. Liverpool did not implement the survey. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions.
2. There will be a separate chapter on this survey in the written report. The following makes a few interesting points and comparisons:

While a strong majority of respondents said that art and culture is of 'great importance' to the strategic objectives of their council (from 62% in Geelong to 73% in Wangaratta) the number of respondents who said they knew about the local Generations project ranged from 40% Latrobe, 58% Charters Towers, 58% Geelong, to 73% Wangaratta. Those who said they did not know about the Generations Project were not able to answer the remaining questions.

The numbers of respondents actively participating in the projects were not significant although in Geelong participation included: membership of a reference or advisory group (63%); attendance at events (63%); and participation in activities (47%).

When asked which departments of council had been most involved in the project, respondents nominated Arts and Culture (from 88% to 100%). This was followed by Media and Communications (50% to 65%). Involvement by Community Development ranged from 24% in Latrobe to 58% in Geelong, to 63% in Wangaratta, to 69% in Charters Towers. Environment and Sustainability was highly ranked in both Latrobe and Geelong but involvement by Planning and Infrastructure across the four LGAs ranged from 15% (Geelong) to 38% (Charters Towers).

In terms of the impact the project had on the determination of council to address the social issue nominated for the local project, those saying 'very positive' ranged from 36% in Latrobe, to 46% in Geelong, to 67% in Wangaratta to 72% in Charters Towers. In Latrobe 43% of respondents thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on community engagement but less impact in other areas.

In Charters Towers, a high 86% thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on community engagement and 79% thought it had suggested some ways to improve Council's community engagement strategies. Also in Charters Towers 72% of respondents thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on Council's capacity to develop external partnerships and 64% thought it had suggested some ways for improving strategic planning in Council. Note, however, that only 14 respondents answered these questions.

In Geelong 70% (out of 46 who answered the latter questions) thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on community engagement, yet only 39% thought it had suggested new strategies for community engagement. Similarly, 63% thought the project had an impact on strategic planning but only 21% thought it had suggested new ways to improve strategic planning. 63% of respondents in Geelong thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on the capacity of Council to develop external partnerships.

The pattern is similar in Wangaratta where a very high 92% of respondents (out of 24 who answered these questions) thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on community engagement and yet this shrunk to 46% when asked if it had improved Council's community engagement strategies. 67% thought it had made a 'very positive' impact on Council's strategic planning but only 29% thought it suggested ways to improve strategic planning. 67% thought the project had a 'very positive' impact on Council's capacity to develop external partnerships.

3. These results partly reflect the complexity of the issues selected but they also reflect the artistic 'wow factor' that we will discuss later. The significant gap between the perceived impact of the projects in Geelong and Wangaratta and the 'legacy' in terms of new ways of thinking about community engagement and strategic planning could mean that more work needs to be done to explain how and why the projects had a 'very positive' impact.

4. It is important to note that results of 21-46% regarding new ways of doing community engagement and strategic planning may still be considered significant although we need to stress that the number people participating in the survey was fairly low.

Question 1 — Strategic Positioning of Community Cultural Development

Despite initial 'buy-in' and clarity regarding the purpose of the national project, it proved very difficult to avoid a marginalisation of the local projects within Council structures and processes.

Difficulties included: the pre-existing positioning of arts and culture in council structures and lines of responsibility; major organisational uncertainty and change (especially for Liverpool and Charters Towers); changes of key personnel (especially for Latrobe and Wangaratta); and a conceptual separation of community arts and community development in most cases.

There tend to be two distinct orientations within the practice of community development in Australia—a welfare orientation and a more radical approach to the causes of 'social exclusion'. Community cultural development tends to support the second orientation and it poses questions about what social inclusion might mean.

Despite a slow start Geelong achieved most in terms of integrating the project across Council (including participation by elected Councillors). This may have reflected earlier work to shift the organisation's culture and processes. A clever, relatively low-key, strategy was used in Wangaratta to 'surround' sceptical Council leadership and staff with the evidence of what can be achieved. By contrast, senior leadership 'buy-in' was not in doubt in Latrobe but the local project was slow to develop creative momentum.

The selected social issues undoubtedly reflected community need and concern but in some cases there was a lack of clarity about the responsibility and opportunities for an LGA in regard to the selected issue. Perhaps more could have been done—especially in Liverpool, Latrobe, and Charters Towers—to clarify the possibilities for local government in regard to the issue and to think about strategic partnerships (eg: the Department of Education for the project in Liverpool).

The experience suggests that there needs to be a creative 'wow factor'—such as an ambitious peak event in Geelong, a series of well-targeted creative projects in Wangaratta, or the innovative use of relevant media in Liverpool—to ensure that the

projects are really noticed. However, the 'character of wow' needs to emerge from local creative processes that will be discussed in under Question 2.

Overall, this project demonstrates that there are now some extraordinary artistic resources available across Australia for people and organisations interested in community art; from local artists to visiting artists and art companies, to new technologies that can facilitate creative expression. However, this probably puts even more importance on developing the skill and experience to make good use of such resources. The role of Creative Director will be discussed under Question 2.

A physical separation of Art and Culture units within LGA structures has some advantages in regard to profile and community access. However, this puts more emphasis on the need to have at least one champion for the Arts and Culture unit—among program managers or elected Councillors who have the ear of senior Council leaders.

It is tempting but dangerous to rely heavily on individuals—such as Su McLennan (Charters Towers), Maz McGann (Wangaratta) or Khaled Sabsabi (Liverpool). Efforts should be made to: build teams (even if this slows progress); document experience; ensure that interested people are mentored in the role; and employ new staff who already have skills and experience with community cultural development.

An important skill that needs to be nurtured is how to build on single projects or small beginnings to amplify their impact, without compromising the successful initiative. Many people spoke of the difficulty of evaluating the outcomes of artistic projects. This requires: a proper understanding of creative processes; a knowledge of the wide range of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools that can be used; and an understanding that the outcomes can be subtle (even unconscious) and 'slow burning'. This will be discussed further in the research report.

At state and national levels there should be clear professional development opportunities for CCD workers in the local government sector. The Generations Project was artificially constructed—e.g. the selection of issues to be addressed—when the aim was to demonstrate that artistic ways of engaging with communities can enhance the core business and strategic performance of LGAs.

However, the constructed project (eg: senior leadership 'buy-in', substantial creative development time, and national framing and co-ordination) mean that a rich educational resource has been created, particularly in regard to the opportunity to compare diverse local experiences and challenges. To honour the efforts and commitments made by so many people documentation of the experiences should be widely disseminated and discussed.

Question 2—Partnerships

Even when LGAs are convinced of the value of community cultural development, there is still a large 'cultural gap' between the ways in which artists normally work and the ways in which LGAs must work to ensure their accountability. This is not a 'natural fit' and the partnership requires empathy and patience on both sides to work.

LGAs taking on complex artistic projects that will involve a range of partnerships need to set up efficient and responsive project management and community

liaison structures as early as possible. However, care must be taken to avoid pre-emptive constraints on what might emerge from subsequent community engagement and the development of 'creative spaces' that will involve key project artists—a mistake that Charters Towers came to acknowledge.

There is probably a richer resource of local artists than people working in community cultural development might think. Early and repeated attention needs to be given to the roles that local artists can play in regard to multifaceted projects. Local knowledge of artists and arts networks is essential for knowing how to approach them and some busy and successful artists may need to be head-hunted. Most local artists will want some creative freedom and clarity with regards to their contract and terms of employment.

In all the Generations projects, 'outside' artists have been employed to good effect and the experience suggests that it is often necessary to look beyond local artists to find people with appropriate skills and experience. Outside artists need to be employed early enough to play a creative leadership role in regard to the project(s) they are involved in. They also need some creative freedom and clarity regarding overall project aims and what is expected of them.

The role of Creative Director for ambitious and complex projects requires significant skill and experience in community cultural development and artistic practice. Positive experiences in Geelong and Wangaratta suggest that it is a role that can be played by an outsider working in close collaboration with local project leaders. The contribution made by an effective Creative Director may not be highly visible and this can lead to an undervaluing of the role.

Decisions regarding the appointment of a Creative Director need to be made as soon as there is clarity about the project aims and local project administration and well before consultation with the community about possible project activities has been completed. Experienced community arts practitioners will bring their own ways of engaging with people and communities in order to gather and develop information and ideas. They should be given adequate time for a creative development phase in which initial ideas can be worked up into something more creative and engaging. The emphasis on strategic local partnerships in Wangaratta turned the Heritage Festival into an ongoing project that improved working relationships between the partner organisations.

Physical spaces that help to inspire rather than deter creative activity are often undervalued and the accessible art space opened up in Charters Towers as a result of the Generations Project shows that such spaces can attract people who would otherwise not interact with each other. Local government facilities are often not appropriate as creative spaces.

In the era of 'network government' LGAs need to constantly consider strategic partnerships with local, regional and even national agencies which can have overlapping interests and responsibilities. Projects in Charters Towers, Latrobe, and Liverpool, in particular, were clearly 'larger than local', and rather belated efforts were made to develop strategic partnerships that could link the projects with wider possibilities. This needs earlier attention.

The concept of 'network government' implies a very big shift for LGAs that have previously seen themselves as the local authority. Community development and community cultural development workers have always been obliged to hone their skills in building partnerships and networks and these skills should be more highly valued by LGAs.

At different phases projects may be artist-led, community-led or organisationally led and a successful partnership requires a shared understanding of phases in the

development of a creative project.

The Generations Project consciously aimed to build more collaborative partnerships between participating funding agencies and the project leaders and CCD practitioners. This probably worked best for Arts Victoria and their reflections will be discussed in the research report.

Question 3 — Community Engagement

LGA interviewees confirmed a need to develop non-conventional ways to consult communities on issues and/or proposals. Need to move beyond the 'squeaky wheel syndrome' and predictable presentation and reaction processes.

Storytelling and artistic expression of community can give a much richer representation of community than narrow and rather ritualised processes of consultation that involve few people and do not foster dialogue.

The presentation of neglected stories and the artistic expressions of local experience can provide spaces in which more voices will be heard—as all the local projects demonstrated to varying extents.

It follows that people who have been involved in creating an artistic expression of life within a complex local community are likely to feel more informed in speaking about the needs and interests of that community in consultations with LGAs and there was evidence of this happening in Geelong in particular.

Artistic expressions of life within complex local communities can shift the emphasis away from the provision of services for the needy to an appreciation of social and cultural diversity which, in turn, can create a more inclusive 'sense of community', as seen in the Wangaratta, Geelong and Liverpool projects in particular.

If a key role for local government in an age of systemic global uncertainty is to constantly create a dynamic and inclusive sense of community then the importance of projects like those developed in the overall Generations Project is obvious.

Creative projects aimed at enriching a sense of community identity—drawing on the neglected heritage of that community as well as current understandings—can not only affirm the value of social and cultural diversity but also allow for an avowal of the importance of community in an uncertain world.

Our study suggests that terms such as 'civic participation' or 'civic engagement' are too abstract and passive to refer to what is involved in the constant renewal of inclusive community identities. LGA engagement with communities can be much more interesting than a formal process of consultation and can focus on the constant creation of community.

Community art projects can sometimes breach chronic social divides by drawing people into creative collaborations—as with Arabic and indigenous youth in Liverpool, indigenous and non-indigenous people in Charters Towers, and old and young people in Wangaratta. This creates possibilities for breaking down prejudices and for building trust but such possibilities will soon vanish without follow-up attention.

Interviews with Council staff in Geelong, Wangaratta, and Charters Towers have suggested that exposure to the Generations projects has helped them feel that they

belong to community by dint of their work as much as their residence.

In Geelong a number of council staff suggested that the Generations project had enhanced their perception that the council organisation itself is a form of community that needs attention if it is to be inclusive and supportive of diversity.

There was a wide range of approaches taken in setting up reference or advisory groups or processes for community input and these will be discussed in the written report. It is probably best to think of a multi-layered approach and to think of different needs at different stages of project development but is also important to avoid cumbersome structures.

Residents participating in a range of local Generations projects expressed surprise that their Council had initiated such projects and some said that this had reduced their rather negative views of the Council's roles and responsiveness. Some Council staff hoped that residents participating in the Generations project would rethink what they considered to be ill-informed negative perceptions of Council.

The local Generations projects tackled big and entrenched social concerns and it would be unreasonable to expect major outcomes in a relatively short period of time. At best the projects might be judged in terms of their capacity to make subtle shifts in perception that could provide openings for dialogue and further creative collaborations. The success of the local Generations projects should also be measured in terms of their capacity to make a difference where more conventional 'interventions' have not succeeded. However, the success of new openings cannot be measured in the short term and they might disappear quickly without follow-up activity. Creating more inclusive communities cannot be seen as a short-term project.

Plan for the Written Report

Art, Governance and the Turn to Community: Bringing art to the heart of local government

1. Introducing the Generations Project
2. Research Aims and Methodology
3. Introducing the Case Studies
4. From the Literature: Setting the framework
 - Growing challenges for local government
 - Local government and the turn to community
 - Art, community and governance
 - Art practice in community settings
 - The art of place-making
 - Dangers in instrumentalising the arts
5. Results of the Council staff survey
6. Responding to the Research Questions
7. Creating Partnerships across Cultural Differences
8. Embedding Creative Processes in Organisational Memory
9. Understanding the Capacity of Socially Engaged Art
10. Art and Place
11. The Evidence for Meaningful Practice
12. Recommendations for Project Sponsors
13. Bibliography

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