



*social inclusion
and cultural diversity*

7. Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity

Barriers to social inclusion can be based on gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, mental health or disability. Many governments' policies address these issues of diversity and exclusion/inclusion. The case studies are:

Merrima

A State Government's Department of Commerce has established a specialist Aboriginal design group working on public buildings in rural communities, which aims to include Indigenous perspectives in decisions about new infrastructure.

Deloraine Craft Fair

A Tasmanian community successfully tackled divisions based on differences of ideology and cultural background by establishing a Craft Fair that now rates as the biggest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Project with a Thousand Outcomes

This initiative of the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women seeks to include diverse communities from across Australia.

Healthy communities are characterised by a high level of discussion between members of the community, strong relationships and strong communication patterns. Other characteristics are acceptance and valuing of different points of view within the community, or acceptance of controversy. Acceptance of controversy means that people can disagree but still respect each other. In communities that accept controversy:

There is a depersonalisation of politics. Ordinary citizens are more likely to run for public office, and feel able to implement countermeasures to resolve community issues without being crucified. (Flora, 2000)

In the review of case studies of effective efforts to revitalise rural communities (Kenyon and Black, 2001) the loss of social cohesion and community participation was identified as a consequence of reduced economic status and changing demographics. The studies also identified that:

For many Indigenous Australian residents of small towns, income levels, health standards, employment rates, and civic participation continue to remain unacceptably low, and a source of continual frustration and challenge. Cross-cultural tensions remain a strong and unresolved reality in many small towns. (Kenyon and Black, 2001)

Other case studies referred to the tensions brought about by the influx of new residents into rural villages and the 'clash of cultures' when 'alternative lifestyles', often with a commitment to the natural environment, came up against the 'establishment' in the town. Other dichotomies between 'artists' and 'labourers', 'workers' and 'recipients' also emerged. These divisions are not exclusive to rural villages and can be seen in cities as the 'gentrification' of inner city suburbs leads to a similar influx of new residents with different skills and, often, different values.

Community cultural development processes can help engender new skills, new confidence, new friendships and social opportunities, cooperation towards achievement, involvement in consultation and local democracy, affirmation of identity, a stronger commitment to place and cross-cultural links—all means of fighting social exclusion. Community cultural development achieves this partly by building individual and community competence, but more importantly by building belief in the possibility of positive change.

The case studies explore:

- how barriers to inclusion are addressed by community cultural development projects
- the way community cultural development affirms identity and values diversity through the use of participatory arts processes
- how cross-cultural links and cohesion around particular social and environmental goals are achieved in diverse communities using community cultural development
- the impact of community cultural development projects and programs on government policy regarding social cohesion.



Above and right: Wilcannia Multi-purpose Health Centre. Photos: Brett Boardman.

Merrima

The Merrima Aboriginal Design Unit is a multi-award winning architectural practice providing culturally appropriate design services to Aboriginal communities. As part of the Government Architects group in the NSW Department of Commerce, Merrima has designed hospitals, educational facilities, housing, cultural centres, exhibitions and public art.

Three of Merrima's projects are now briefly outlined in a precis of information provided by Merrima and by Alison Joy Page, a Tharawal woman from La Perouse, who is a designer working for the organisation.

Girrawaa

The Girrawaa Creative Work Centre was the first project that Merrima undertook. The idea to create an Art Centre outside the grounds of Bathurst Jail for Aboriginal men to sell paintings and artefacts was developed as a positive response to Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. To generate ideas for the design of the building, a design competition among the inmates was held. The winner, Don, interpreted the local totem of the Wiradjuri people (Bathurst) in a plan where the displays would be in the head, the workshop in the body and the amenities in the tail. There were also strong landscaping ideas, which are derivative of the men's Bora Rings, the larger at the front of the building and the smaller, more private ring at the rear.

Wilcannia Health Service

The Wilcannia Health Service is a project which showcases Merrima's philosophical approach to process. The Wilcannia Community Working Party managed the capital development of the project and guided the design team through seven options for the new hospital. The option chosen required the refurbishment of existing heritage buildings and the construction of the new residential accommodation with related services adjacent. Indigenous training and employment has been maximised on the project, most notably in the locally manufactured stabilised earth bricks used in the new building works. The Darling River has spiritual and

Merrima

Just as the discovery of culture is a journey, not a destination, Aboriginal architecture should be a 'process' and not just a 'product'. When designing for communities, Merrima believes in a holistic approach whereby there is maximum community involvement in the design, construction and management of the project. As each community has a unique cultural identity, it is essential that an inclusive process of consultation, design workshops and community meetings are undertaken to ensure community ownership.

Merrima Aboriginal Design Unit (2003)

The representation of cultural totems in a building can strengthen the sense of cultural pride as you are not only generating a unique adaptation of a western technology, but it can be a powerful communication tool for a community to not only express their presence but to also reveal the stories that tell of this land and its creation.

Alison Joy Page, Merrima Designer

cultural significance for the local Aboriginal (Barkinji) people, therefore the building developed from the conceptual idea that it will belong to both land and water. Walls and roofs become skins and fins of a water creature.

With considered planning, we can affect cultural pride and self esteem through an appropriate process of consultation, exploring cultural identity, addressing social justice issues and maximising employment and training opportunities. It is about creating an authentic response where the process becomes more important than the product.

Alison Joy Page, Merrima Designer

Outcomes

In summary, Merrima uses participatory and inclusive processes to achieve the following outcomes:

- functional buildings and spaces that relate to the priorities and cultures of their communities
- the engagement of community members in design processes, thereby ensuring inclusion of Indigenous perspectives
- a sense of cultural pride expressed through public buildings which 'contain' the stories and other heritage of the community
- linkages to other sectors of the community which create bridges between diverse groups
- a successful process which educates government agencies to the benefits of culturally specific and participatory design.

Oak Valley

Note: We have already described aspects of this project in Community Strengthening, beginning on page 74. Here the focus is on the process of designing an art room.

The Oak Valley community in South Australia is the most remote Aboriginal community in Australia. Situated near Maralinga where the British Nuclear Tests were carried out, the community, who had been previously nomadic, built houses and a shop at the place now called Oak Valley. There are between 50 and 150 people who live in Oak Valley and there are around 20 houses. Alison Page was asked to consult with the community to create an art centre in a disused shed adjoining the women's centre. With \$50,000 and 12–15 people of all ages from the community, a centre was created with a narrative of animals and waterholes around the perimeter of the room and a large painting by Mandy Queamer of Oak Valley covering the floor. The room is used for the creation of paintings, not previously done, which are now selling in art galleries in Adelaide.

For further information

Key publications:

Merrima Aboriginal Design Unit (2003), *Portfolio of project descriptions*, NSW Department of Public Works and Services.

Page, Alison Joy (2000), 'Gurung Gunya' [New Dwelling], *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Deloraine Craft Fair

Deloraine is a small township in north-west Tasmania, which has achieved well recognised outcomes in a range of community and economic developments. Such successes are consistent with outcomes we have considered in the Rural Revitalisation section, beginning on page 62.

Here, the resolution of conflict through community cultural development is the focus of our example. In the 1970s in Deloraine the influx of 'alternative lifestyles' created conflict with 'loggers and woodchippers', and further divisions arose between 'alternatives' and 'establishment' and between 'the labourers' and 'the artists', and 'the workers' and 'the recipients' (Kenyon and Black, 2001).

The response to such divisions, within a package of measures designed to revitalise the town, was to introduce the annual Tasmanian Craft Fair in 1981. It began with 30 stallholders, and has grown to involve over 200 craftspeople at 15 venues attracting over 30,000 patrons. It is the recipient of many tourism awards and stimulates over \$1 million into the local economy (Kenyon and Black, 2001). From the Craft Fair initiative a number of highly regarded community cultural development projects have evolved, for example the Yarns project in the mid-1990s. Behind this project was the desire to resolve community differences through participatory art.

In their review of small town renewal strategies, Kenyon and Black present a wide range of successful outcomes of the Deloraine Craft Fair. These include the presence of a strong sense of belief, expectation and optimism, a tolerance of difference, the ability to network, a strong focus and high value placed on young men and women, enhanced leadership role of local government and a new sense of celebration and fun (Kenyon and Black, 2001). The Deloraine Craft Fair is a further reminder of the value of long-term initiatives in building trust and social cohesion through traditions of celebration within diverse communities.

For further information

Website:

www.deloraine.tco.asn.au

Key publications:

Kenyon, Peter and Black, Alan (eds) (2001), *Small Town Renewal Overview and Case Studies*, Deloraine Case Study, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Deloraine Craft Fair: what does it achieve?

In terms of social inclusion, Kenyon and Black point to a tolerance of difference, arguing that Deloraine is very tolerant of newcomers (Kenyon and Black, 2001).

There is now a camaraderie and admiration of individual skills and a celebration of differences and a willingness to co-exist. All of these people have retained their distinctive culture, they have adopted a broad self-educational attitude and there is an air of tolerance in the community that is not common in the world. (McBain, in Kenyon and Black, 2001)

The Project with a Thousand Outcomes

Note: This case study should be read in conjunction with the Atherton Tablelands example (see page 72). Described there are some of the long range outcomes emanating from the Far North Queensland elements of this project.

In 1997 the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women initiated a far-reaching project involving two regions—Gippsland in Victoria and Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland—under the banner of ‘Uniting our Rural Communities’. The Foundation is an independent philanthropic network that aims to improve the participation of rural and agricultural women in many arenas of decision-making. Having in mind the needs for economic wellbeing of rural towns and leadership skills among rural women, the program set out to be inclusive of the great range of diversity that characterises rural communities.

Such were the multiple implications of the program, that it has become known as ‘The Project with a Thousand Outcomes’. It emphasises the importance of community cultural development in promoting networking and finding common ground between communities which are geographically diverse, as well as having their own internal divisions.

Onko Kingma has described the project as follows:

The individual projects began as explorations of ‘things of meaning’ for each community. From this the type of artwork and the process emerged.

Val Lang, founding director of FAAW

The project was organised by the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women (FAAW) based in Victoria, to help provide Australian rural women with transferable skills which would enhance their lives and confidence, and in turn benefit their communities. By focusing on arts projects, women were able to develop life, management and networking skills, working together in a non-

threatening way to produce an artwork. The project involved: workshops on business, leadership and communication skills; development of the artistic activities and processes; a final workshop and celebration day which validated the women’s accomplishments. The importance of accessibility and encouragement was recognised and child minding, location and refreshments were all part of the planning.

Each project ended on a high, giving participants energy, making all things possible, through connections, inspiration and transferable skills.

Val Lang, founding director of FAAW

New skills were put into practice as the women decided on a project, an artist(s) and the practical issues to be considered in implementing their ideas. In Queensland the Milla Milla group made a life size fibreglass sculpture of a cow family while at Herberton the women produced a community

seat. Also in Queensland, the Mt Garnet group decided on a bus shelter, in Malanda a mosaic while the Yungaburra women worked on a tapestry. In Victoria, the Maffra group made a table and seats for the town and seats for the outlying areas while the Orbust group created mosaic paths and carved wooden animals in civic settings. Also in Victoria, Omeo women produced a documentary exploring the past, present and future while women at Bairnsdale developed and staged the ‘Snakes and Ladders’ Roadshow.

An exhibition of the artwork developed through and following this project was part of the ‘Salute from Australia’ at the Second International Women in Agriculture Conference in the United States in 1998. The title ‘Moving the Posts’, illustrated the diversity and achievement of contemporary Australians involved in all aspects of agriculture.

While all participants learned new practical and artistic skills, possibly the most important has been networking and developing new relationships. As a direct result of the project some women have commenced higher education and many found the confidence to return to the workforce. Others have started their own small businesses, sent off literary works to publishers and formed cooperatives. Women in the project areas have demonstrated a new confidence in tackling community issues. (Kingma, 2002)

For further information

Website:

www.faaaw.org.au

Key publications:

Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women, *Directions Newsletter*.

This quarterly newsletter has been posted on the FAAW website since 1998. See also earlier editions (Autumn and Summer 1997) which give descriptions of the project.

Kingma, Onko (2002) *Enabling Communities Through the Arts: Case studies from the Community Cultural Development Fund of the Australia Council*, Australia Council.

Summary of outcomes

- Objectives of the host organisation’s leadership program for rural women are well served by this networking project.
- This includes enhancement of management and economic skills alongside experience with community cultural activity.
- The type of leadership developed is collaborative and inclusive, well suited to ‘flat’ networking and management structures.
- In individual communities, projects provide a rallying point for people of diverse backgrounds.
- Across regional and state boundaries, project participants reach new understandings of strategies applied elsewhere for community strengthening.
- Individual women have made new careers and taken on leadership positions.