



Brotherhood
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

*Social inclusion and place
based disadvantage:*

*What we have already done that is
valuable for the future*

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The social inclusion and place based disadvantage workshop was held on the 13th of June 2008 at the Metropole Conference Centre in Fitzroy, Victoria, under the auspices of the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Research & Policy Centre and the Victorian Government's Department of Planning & Community Development. It was hosted by Paul Smyth, facilitated by Allison McClelland, and coordinated by Kristine Philipp. These proceedings are aimed at fostering, informing and stimulating public reflection, discussion, debate, research, and policy initiatives to address one of the central challenges facing contemporary Australian governments, industries and communities.

The following papers were presented at the workshop:

Associate Professor Scott Baum – Making space for social inclusion.

Dr Zoë Morrison – Place, social inclusion and 'cultural justice': reflections on the British experience – a place-based social exclusion policy case study

Professor Paul Smyth – Social inclusion down under

Professor Ruth Fincher – Issues of scale: a place-based view of social inclusion centred on redistribution, recognition and encounter

Mr Damian Ferrie – Social inclusion and place-based disadvantage: what we have already done that is valuable for the future

Dr Tim Reddel – Reframing governance and service delivery by 'place and partnership': some ideas and lessons from Queensland

Professor William Mitchell – A return to full employment is a precondition for social inclusion

Dr Jo Barraket – Social inclusion, employment and social enterprise

Mr Tom Bentleigh – Places and mainstream services

Professor John Wiseman – Strengthening social inclusion through place based action to improve mainstream services

Professor Bill Randolph – Locating social exclusion: the case of Sydney

Dr Kathy Arthurson – Urban regeneration, scale and balancing social mix

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The views expressed in the proceedings, including this paper, do not necessarily reflect any official position of the publishers. We expect and support the further development of these ideas and their subsequent publication in journal or book form.

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Introduction

Social inclusion is a useful concept for government. It can embrace the major causes of poverty along with the everyday needs of communities in a way that terms such as social capital or disadvantage cannot. It provides a framework for targeting disadvantaged population groups and communities while having a role in facilitating opportunities to help all places be supportive and safe. In this way, government can play a universal and targeted role in creating social inclusion.

There are many possible definitions of social inclusion and its corollary social exclusion. One simple definition is: a socially inclusive society is one where all people and communities are given the opportunities to participate fully in political, cultural, civic and economic life. Social inclusion policies facilitate access to employment, education, housing and democratic processes. They facilitate characteristics that create health and wellbeing for individuals within the context of a supportive community.

In their ability to address the multiple causes of disadvantage concentrated in a particular community, place based approaches are central to tackling social exclusion.

Social inclusion in Victoria

Government has been involved in implementing place based approaches in Victoria for at least 10 years.

Launched in 2002, **Neighbourhood Renewal** was the State Government's first place based program focused on disadvantaged communities across the State. It is situated in the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services and is an eight year initiative that is now being implemented in 19 projects across Victoria.

Neighbourhood Renewal is:

- Lifting employment and learning opportunities and expanding local economies
- Enhancing housing and the physical environment
- Improving personal safety and reducing crime
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Improving government responsiveness.

Neighbourhood Renewal is characterised by:

- a focus on a definable geographic community that is experiencing disadvantage
- local governance actively involving residents and other key stakeholders in decision making
- addressing a range of issues within a particular geographic area rather than a single issue
- joining-up commitments to reduce disadvantage
- developing an action plan for the community
- implementing tangible initiatives to alleviate disadvantage within the community.

Neighbourhood Renewal targets places with concentrations of public housing. It is an intensive approach best suited to communities with populations of between 1,000-5,000 people. Atherton Gardens high rise in Fitzroy and Broadmeadows to Melbourne's North are two areas included in Neighbourhood Renewal.

Within two years, 10 of the current 19 Neighbourhood Renewal projects will complete their eight year program. Within three years, 15 projects will be completed.

Key outcomes for Neighbourhood Renewal include:

- 50% resident participation in decision-making

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- significant improvements in civic participation and community pride
 - over 4,600 jobs created
 - 33 social enterprises established (generating over 130 jobs pa.)
 - 6,500 house improvements with over 2000 energy efficiency retrofits (connected to employment programs)
 - public housing acceptance of offers increased by 9.6% from 2001– 02 to 2006–07
 - creation of 23 community hubs
 - 80 community infrastructure projects completed, e.11 IT hubs, nine community gardens and 30 parks revitalised
 - a 27.3% reduction in reported crimes against property from 2001-02 to 2006-07
 - over a two year period residents reported a 14% improvement in their health.

Based on the success of Neighbourhood Renewal, it was felt that other areas could benefit from this type of approach.

The **Community Building Initiative** was established in 2006 to address disadvantage in declining small rural towns. CBI has 19 projects involving over 100 small towns.

Rather than a large-scale partnership or governance structure, CBI utilises a simplified version of the intensive, place based approach outlined above. All CBI sites hold a 'Community Opportunity Workshop' to identify local action priorities. One-hundred people have attended a single workshop, sometimes in communities with as few as 400 people.

CBI is only in its second year of implementation but is already generating results, such as:

- over 4,000 people attended 62 Community Opportunity Workshops.
- Fourteen workshops attracted 25-30% of the town.
- To date the CBI projects have secured over \$4.1 million in funds towards the achievement of community priority projects.
- A \$2 Million partnership has been established with the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

Community Renewal was launched in 2006 to address disadvantage in urban areas that are in danger of being left behind. These are places such as Laverton and older parts of Craigieburn in the interface suburbs next to corridors experiencing rapid growth. These are areas that have not hit rock bottom. Community Renewal helps prevent these areas from declining further in relation to their surrounding suburbs.

For example, in the Community Renewal area of Laverton, there is significant change. The RAAF has owned much of the housing in the area. It has now reduced the scale of its commitment to its base in Laverton. Former concrete public properties sold to private owners are difficult to repair and are becoming rundown and unattractive. Most of the housing is affordable but this means there is a relatively homogenous social-economic mix. The local secondary college is performing poorly and there are low levels of attendance at the local kindergarten.

There are also many opportunities in Laverton. There is a strong community identity, an enthusiastic local government, a considerable amount of vacant land, the secondary college is situated in the centre of the community, undeveloped strip shopping, a number of major industries situated in nearby suburbs and strong commitment from local service providers and community leaders to working differently.

In working with government, local people services and businesses, we can take stock of the issues and opportunities, identify priorities and broker consensus-based investment.

Community Renewal is only in its second year of implementation. Three sites are nearing the completion of their set-up while the remaining five are in the very early stages of development. Progress to date in each Community Renewal site is positive. Early results include:

- at least 50% resident participation in governance.
- 2,600 people have participated in approximately 35 community events.
- Over 35 people have gained employment via Workforce Participation Partnerships focusing on the highly disadvantaged.
- Four sites are in the process of developing enterprises.
- There has been over 6,000 hours of volunteer contribution.
- Two community hubs are in progress.
- Approximately \$3 million in external funding has been leveraged.
- Local street scapes and community facilities have been improved in some sites.

A Fairer Victoria

First launched in 2005, *A Fairer Victoria* is the policy context for social inclusion in Victoria. It is now in its fourth edition and the four current priority areas are:

- *Getting the best start* - Early years support for children and families most at risk
- *Improving education and helping people into work* - Reducing educational inequality, supporting young people at risk and reducing barriers to workforce participation
- *Improving health and wellbeing* - Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing
- *Developing liveable communities*.

The Department for Planning and Community Development (DPCD) is the lead department for the development of *A Fairer Victoria*.

DPCD is a new department. The old Department for Victorian Communities has been joined with planning to create DPCD. This provides the department with a unique opportunity to take a leading role in the social inclusion agenda via the goal of developing liveable communities.

The Community Development Group, DPCD, employs land use and urban planning mechanisms alongside community planning, to work with communities to plan for their future, coordinate investment strategies and integrate government processes. Consistent with *A Fairer Victoria*, the Community Development Group works within a universal framework and targets areas and issues of particular significance.

The Community Development Group's role is to assist communities to be actively involved in planning for their future, and to create new ways of investing to respond to community priorities.

Participation in community activity is the underlying principle to achieve strong and engaged communities. We promote diverse and increased levels of participation in volunteering, sport and recreation, education and training, civic and cultural life. Whilst much of our focus is in local neighbourhoods we also focus on suburbs, regions and projects of state significance.

A **community development approach** to land use and urban planning ensures that the capacity of communities is engaged throughout the planning process through to the delivery of infrastructure. Diverse and early community engagement with land use planning processes helps to set the scene for more well planned and well timed facilities and services.

Governance structures provide opportunities for communities to establish local priorities and to take action to get things done. Regional and local governance arrangements together with strengthened leadership provide investment opportunities to achieve community outcomes in

a planned and timely way. A Fairer Victoria and Melbourne 2030 provide the priorities for integrated planning and whole of government responses.

Investment builds the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations to leverage opportunities for increased outcomes on the ground. We use a range of collaborative partnerships to facilitate government, private, philanthropic and local resources to invest into local communities. Our role as a broker provides the opportunity for government to be responsive to community need.

Strategies for **sustainability** ensure that communities continue to grow and increase their social and economic prosperity whilst they improve the built and natural environment. We are working with community organisations to ensure their long term strength and viability continues to provide networks and partnerships across Victoria. The capability of individual community members is enhanced through access to training and education.

What works

The place based approach has been developed and refined for nearly 10 years in Victoria. In this time, we have an idea of what works in relation to place and an understanding of the different type of place based approaches and the contexts in which they are most appropriate. We also have a better understanding of the challenges ahead and the areas that require further work.

- **Governance**

The most successful place-based projects are those that have robust and collaborative governance arrangements, and active resident leadership charged with leading input into community planning.

Active local governance assumes extensive community engagement to ensure that all people have an opportunity to participate, including the most marginalised.

- **Funding**

To meet community priorities and create social inclusion, funding needs to be more responsive and flexible. This has meant linking funding from different program areas through competitive grant applications.

- **Local government**

Local governments are crucial players in any place-based partnership, and it is necessary to engage them in a systemic, timely and collaborative fashion.

- **Scale**

The scale of a partnership should be appropriate to the policy challenges to be addressed. Regional planning is best tackled by regional partnerships. An intensive, multi-issue, place-based approach is best suited to small geographic areas of approximately 7,000 people.

- **Brokered solutions not competitive grants**

A brokered solution is one where partners agree on the nature, purpose and objectives of a project. Funding is then able to be flexibly allocated to the project from a number of sources. While beneficial in many circumstances, in others the competitive tender model of grant allocation is at odds with this approach.

- **Long term**

Research suggests long-term funding (approximately 10 years) is required for areas experiencing extreme disadvantage.

The future of place

The new national agenda for social inclusion offers us an opportunity to think about the new ways in which the place based approach plays a role in reducing exclusion.

Responses to complex social problems increasingly demand complex, knowledge-intensive collaboration between government departments, agencies, business and the community. The traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical model of government is not very good at coordinating these types of knowledge intensive activities.

Instead, these complex problems are better dealt with through forms of governance based on mutual trust, collaboration, devolution of power and de-centralisation of decision-making. Often this means that skilled workers gather stakeholders and interested community members around the table to shape the future of their community.

Guided by principles of participation, local governance, strategic investment and sustainability, high risk areas require the focus of government.

A place based approach can be utilised in different geographic contexts and in areas with different needs. In these different contexts and for different policy drivers a slightly different approach is needed.

Scale is a very important issue when considering place based approaches. An intensive, highly consultative approach is best suited to small areas with populations of about 7,000. Large suburbs or regions require an urban planning approach but can still include active consultation with local people and key stakeholders, a partnership appropriate to the size of the area and joined-up investment that responds flexibly to action priorities for the area.

Growth is another significant issue facing communities. In Victoria, growth is concentrated around five metropolitan areas, regional cities and numerous towns and coastal areas. To achieve well planned and engaged communities, we must work with local councils, the Commonwealth Government, developers and communities to prepare for growth. Ensuring that land use decisions are about people means thinking about infrastructure, services and social needs early in the planning and engagement process.

Place based approaches could be applied utilising local governance, action planning and joined-up investment to prevent them becoming the highly excluded areas of the future. These communities can become more resilient and able to address their future needs as they work together to plan for increased economic and social participation.

Challenges

The community development and place-based approaches face a number of challenges. With limited budget, flexible responses from all levels of government are required to address the needs of rapidly growing suburbs (both green field and established) and regional areas, older suburbs being left behind, declining rural towns and extremely disadvantaged communities. Many of these communities will be placed under further and new types of stress in response to climate change and future economic restructuring. To prioritise and meet the needs of these communities is a major undertaking.

The State Government has made administrative changes to improve the way government funds communities. This has included the alignment of departmental boundaries, and the establishment of *Regional Management Forums* to provide 'regional leadership and local flexibility in responding to local needs. Forums comprise State Government departments as

well as local government. Grant reform – making grants more flexible and easily accessed by communities – has started and is an ongoing process.

Strategic Partnerships have been established in Frankston, Braybrook, Caroline Springs and Whittlesea.

The major challenge is to have these type of forums and community plans direct and drive government funding rather than existing funding programs being artificially forced together through multiple, competitive application processes.

While relevant structures may now be in place, it will take some time to develop the potential of this type of approach, as the skills and behaviours required are markedly different to those required in a hierarchical, rules-based system.

A significant cultural change – in State Government, local government, and even in the community – will be necessary before we can see the true potential of a flexible, collaborative, place based approach being used to reduce social exclusion.