CREATIVE ARTS AS A CATALYST
FOR COMMUNITY
PARTICIPATION IN
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Forest Glimpses
Ink and colour on rice paper
Andrew Lo

CHERYLE YIN-LO
Student No: 16411890
2013
Stories are of the Land (2007)
Acrylic on canvas
Darug artist Leanne Tobin

The marks of our Ancestors were minimal: the marks on a scar tree, the footholds of the hunters and the ghosts of a past time.

From Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains exhibition
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

I acknowledge the Darug, Gundungurra, Wanaruah, Wiradjuri, Darkinjung and Tharawal Nations as the Traditional Owners of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

*Smoking Ceremony (2010)*

*Opening of ‘Seasons Greetings’ exhibition at Blackheath.*

*Darug artist Chris Tobin (left) and Mitchell Chatfield (Gamilaroi) playing didgeridoo (right)*

*Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

To all these individuals who supported the development of my

Doctorate Portfolio

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participated and provided information for this research project.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTIFICATION

The work presented in this Doctorate of Cultural Research Portfolio is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted the material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or another institution.

Signature

Cheryle Yin-Lo

April 2013
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACMI - The Australian Centre for the Moving Image
BMWHI – Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute
BMCC – Blue Mountains City Council
ccd – community cultural development
CCDNSW - Community Cultural Development NSW
DECCW – Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (NSW)
DCR - Doctorate of Cultural Research
GBMWHA – Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area
GIS- Geographic Information Systems
IAP2-International Association of Public Participation
ICS- Institute of Culture and Society
ICUN- International Union For Conservation of Nature
IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NPWS – NSW National Parks and Wildlife
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR- Participatory Action Research
PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal
NCC- The Nature Conservation Council
UNEP – United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UWS -University of Western Sydney
WCCD – World Commission on Culture and Development
CREATIVE ARTS AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

This research was undertaken as a workplace based Doctorate of Cultural Research (DCR) in partnership with the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS), University of Western Sydney (UWS) and with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) between 2007 and 2010.

This Doctorate Portfolio contains an overarching statement, four reports and articles relating to projects, visuals and online material as part of the submission as outlined below. This portfolio can also be viewed on CD with hyperlinks to relevant websites.

Blue Gum Forest: After the bushfire
Photograph by ecologist, Wyn Jones
The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt.

In such a climate, it is ever more necessary to cultivate human creativity, for individuals, communities and societies can adapt to the new and transform their reality only through creative imagination and initiative.

The notion of creativity itself must be more broadly used, not just to refer to a new artistic object or form but to problem solving in every imaginable field.

Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate

Quote from World Commission on Culture and Development Report, 1995
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*Telling stories from the human perspective approach has proven to be more powerful in shifting attitudes, perceptions and connecting with others in the community and sharing their values.*

United Nations Environmental Planning Forum on Sustainability, 2002

*Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project (2006)*

*The first pilot project with local multicultural residents from Argentina and from Ecuador collaborating on a mural after observations from interpretive walks in the bush with Aboriginal guides and artists. Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo*
Background

This Doctorate of Cultural Research (DCR) portfolio is presented as a workplace based research project and reflects my personal views, interpretations and perspectives. It was undertaken during 2007–2010 in my role as the Community Engagement Coordinator with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) in Katoomba, New South Wales and in partnership with the Institute of Culture and Society (ICS), University of Western Sydney in Australia.

This research project is also part of and within the context of Professor Bob Hodge’s Australian Research Council (ARC) Grant: Putting Humanities to Work in a Chaotic World: Dynamic Interdisciplinarity and Community Engagement. This research focuses on issues concerning the human and natural ecosystems within the local geographic context of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA) where this region received UNESCO World Heritage Listing in 2000¹. The candidate also attended the Sharing World Heritage Forum in Paris in 2007 supported by the University of Western Sydney.

It is increasingly acknowledged that government models of decision making need to better account for a broader range of knowledge, beyond the scientific and technical knowledge (O’Riordan, 2002). The complexity of contemporary governance of natural resources demands little short of a paradigm shift in decision making processes. This includes finding more effective means to incorporate community knowledge from a range of sources and exploring more participatory approaches that can resolve fundamental differences in people’s values.

The investigation of the application of Mode 2 knowledge production to address this issue is explored throughout the portfolio. Mode 2 knowledge production as described by Gibbons (1994) is a new form of knowledge production which was context-driven, problem-focused and an interdisciplinary approach.

This involves multidisciplinary teams coming together for short periods of time to work together on specific problems in the real world. The analysis in this Portfolio of Mode 2 knowledge production is extremely relevant for applying in current environmental problem solving today.

**Overview - Portfolio Summary**

The portfolio raises issues of vital importance to environmental decision makers and policymakers, and professionals in the cultural sector. It investigates the important role that creative based arts can play as a catalyst for community participation in environmental stewardship. In particular, emphasising the integrative relationship between understanding human based values and people’s connection to environmental issues (Bushell, 2001).

Environmental stewardship encourages people to be custodians of the land and to care about the way they use and interact with the environment for current and future generations. In this respect, it involves elements and principles of community development and is based on practices and a set of values that addresses to improve community wellbeing and build communities based on social justice, equality and mutual respect. This research can assist in understanding what are the drivers of community participation.

Community cultural development (ccd) is an extension of community development incorporating culture in its broadest sense promotes participation in artistic and cultural expression as a means to explore common community concerns and issues.

The portfolio raises discussion about the challenges with current traditional practices of community engagement and environmental communication and provides inspiration to alternative approaches of creative community engagement to stimulate community dialogue. This portfolio also illustrates the important role of individual and collective visions and aspirations and how they can be materialised through cultural production (Carter, 2004) using community cultural development processes working with artists and local communities in developing their sense of place and identity. By examining issues of the value of community knowledge through creative arts based approaches in combined knowledge making using informal and formal sources for cultural research, new methods and opportunities are revealed for
its application in an environmental context and the role of technology and various modes of communication technologies and social media.

As a result through engagement with creative based arts processes and various new approaches it can stimulate community participation that can lead to active citizenship by local communities to inform environmental decisionmaking.

Through stimulating local communities’ active participation and understanding in creative arts projects it can further lead to stronger commitment to environmental issues. This can be very empowering for local communities on a transformative level on many levels and the impacts when shared in the public domain.

This is timely as current environmental research is moving towards a more a systems based approach to conservation (Merson et al 2012) and the recognition that nature is dynamic and so is the relationship with human activities and the environment. This systems based approach combined with methods of a landscape based conservation approach (Merson et al 2012) which accommodates the diverse perspectives and multiple levels of interpretations and connections with the land will inevitably bring new understandings for communities and organisations.

The main key point is the ability for environmental organisations through a new attitude and approach to contemporary governance of natural resources and their use can be responsive to the changing factors and listening to the voices and needs of society and the community. This can be achieved by an adaptive governance\(^2\) approach in reviewing systems, processes and organizational change to improve the effectiveness of environmental communication and future environmental problem solving.

**Introduction to the Portfolio**

In developing an integrated framework for this Portfolio it needed to accommodate the organic and fluid nature of interdisciplinary research. Since this research is based on creating new links and multiple perspectives and narratives in approaching complex environmental issues and problem solving it draws across material from a number of different sources, disciplines and sectors.

The portfolio will investigate and raise discussion about the four key themes that emerged and underpin the ideas and interrelated concepts of this research project which are: *community engagement and communication; cultural production* (Bourdieu, 1984); *new knowledge making*; and *adaptive governance*.

For the submission for the Doctorate of Cultural Research this portfolio opens with an Overarching Statement provides an overview of the background and key questions central to this research project. The portfolio also comprises of information about the design and methodologies used in the community based arts projects that were also undertaken. This is documented through reports, articles and support material. Reports are presented as written and an on-line exhibition format with web links and power point presentations.

Firstly, the **Overarching Statement** commences with the background to establishing the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI). In particular in developing it as a new interdisciplinary research model. It outlines the issues and challenges during its formative period in its attempts to working towards collaborative research and combined knowledge making.

As part of this formative period it will also discuss the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute’s vision to establish an arts based position. The Overarching Statement discusses the integration of the professional role of a cultural worker based within the scientific research context.
As a core team member of the organization, the position’s role was to work with The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute’s researchers and partner organizations. This was an important role to act as the catalyst to bridge the information gap between scientific research and information and explore the community’s role and relationship in future environmental decision making.

The Overarching Statement also includes personal reflections and discusses the professional journey of the role of Community Engagement Coordinator (Community Cultural Development) within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute between 2006-2011. It provides insights to the potential of new methodologies and approaches to improving communication strategies and community awareness about environmental issues and to bring organizations and communities working more collaboratively.

Section Two of the Portfolio is a report about World Heritage Stewardship in a Changing Climate (Report 1) which provides an overview of the World Heritage context on an international and local level. It also outlines important current issues and concerns for research for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area. It presents different perspectives and the challenges of community engagement and participation in environmental stewardship (See Appendix 1 for community quotes).

Section Three of the Portfolio is an article titled Creativity and Environmental Stewardship in New Knowledge making (Article 1). It examines community cultural development (ccd) practice and its emergent role in its application to environment-focussed arts projects on a local, national and international level and is further illustrated with examples. (See Appendix 2 powerpoint for overview of creative projects)
Section Three also provides discussion about incorporating this approach on a local level and its potential sustainability in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Its emphasis is on community cultural development (ccd) practice. This approach utilises creative arts as a communication vehicle for local communities working with professional artists through skills and information exchange. This research project also discusses the role of art in its various applications to stimulate creative thinking, latent creativity and creative expression and illustrates how these skills are critical to building community capacity in problem solving and the transferral of knowledge about environmental issues.

Section Four-Branching Out: Stories of the Blue Mountains comprises of three articles (Articles 2, 3 and 4), an on-line exhibition and support material of a powerpoint presentation (See Appendix 3). This documented material illustrate some of the benefits and outcomes in engaging communities. This is particularly demonstrated in the detailed study of the processes in the development of the on-line exhibition, Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains. Its emphasis is on community engagement in building community skills and social capacity building by sharing and creating combined knowledge through working in a collaborative approach.

Therefore, my interest has been to continue an ongoing experimental approach to my own professional practice in developing exhibitions and develop the use of a community curatorium model.

This community curatorium model allows the design, research, development and presentation of on-line exhibition in a more participatory process and in a non-physical gallery context. This particular research project and its processes is used to also illustrate the important practice of creative based arts in Australia and overseas in an environmental context in stimulating people’s latent creativity.
It highlights the importance of community-based arts practice combined with the particular process of community cultural development can be a catalyst to build community’s capacities to develop creative skills and thinking, creative problem solving, provide social networking and experience working with professional artists and other community members as a method of combined knowledge making.

Section Five on Bushfire Storytelling comprises of two reports titled *Burning Memories* (Report 2a), and *Christmas Has Changed Forever* (Report 2b), discusses storytelling as a form of creative expression to stimulate collective community stories and as a way to engage communities to record diverse perspectives about bushfire experiences past and present.

As a result it provides discussion about the importance of this storytelling form and its importance as a valuable source of information and cultural material to understand the complexities of bushfire and human behaviour and action.

*Burning Memories* (Report 2a) provides an overview of some of the current approaches and applications of communication technologies and social media used by environmental agencies to facilitate community stories and experiences. It outlines the issues of community attitudes and relationships in slowly addressing the importance of the tensions and challenges of recording situated knowledge of people’s bushfire experiences. It also includes excerpts from by residents of the Blue Mountains (See Appendix 4) as further support material.

These transcripts and accounts raise issues about the politics and controversy in the power of the knowledge that is generated from these personal and community experiences. It provides discussion about how this knowledge can inform environmental management and taken into account for future planning and action.

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*Changed Forever (Report 2b)* provides a record of community accounts and lived experiences by residents in the Blue Mountains. These accounts were documented in the Bushfire Storytelling Project undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and convened by the Community Engagement Coordinator and facilitated by John Hockney, a local storyteller and writer between 2007-2009. It provides community insights for environmental agencies to integrate community knowledge in better understanding the attitudes, behavior and actions of local communities.

In Section Six, *Lawson Public Art and Sustainability* is demonstrated through a detailed case study of Lawson, a village of the Blue Mountains and its town’s re-development due to major infrastructural changes of the construction of the four lane highway.

The first report, *The Value of Public Art in Environmental Stewardship* (Report 3a) outlines national and international perspectives on the important role of public art to explore community’s individual and collective identities and sense of place and ownership and its application to addressing environmental issues.

The second report, *Reconstructing Place* (Report 3b) and powerpoint (Appendix 5) outline the methodology, implementation and record of public art consultations undertaken with the Lawson community by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute’s Community Engagement Coordinator. It provides an insight to a specific geographic study of the essential role of place and identity of the Lawson community and its relationship with Blue Mountains City Council. This project also illustrates the complexity of power structures and how this impacts on different players' agendas for decision making. It particularly looks at issues of the town’s revitalization and community ownership in joint problemsolving and decisionmaking. It also provides discussion about the importance of community participation and using the imagination for visioning a future.

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Section Seven of the Portfolio and the final section, *Navigating Towards Common Ground* (See Report 4) and powerpoint presentation (See Appendix 6 and 7) concludes the portfolio with key findings about the way environmental decisions are made on an individual, community and organisational level, and stresses the role of joint responsibility in combined knowledge making and environmental decisionmaking in collaborative approaches. This section also provides insights and approaches to a growing positive trend to increased community participation and integrated approach to environmental problem solving.

It investigates the issues between communities and organisations and the 'mindset' required to respond more effectively to systemic processes and procedural changes. In the conclusion, recommendations are made to increase and acknowledge the role of community knowledge and respect for the power of community participation in combined knowledge making by environmental agencies. This section makes recommendations to develop more reciprocal relationships and community partnerships in joint responsibilities and environmental stewardship. This is by the review of perceptions, attitudes and processes to adapt to meet current and changing needs of local communities aspirations for the future and their community wellbeing.

*References* and support material have also been sourced and are included which bring together a range of material in different communication formats from digital on-line reports, social media, podcasts, websites and powerpoint presentations.
Background to Organisation

The Organisation-The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI)

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) was initiated by two independent scientific researchers. Environmental scientist, Dr. John Merson and biologist, Dr. Rosalie Chapple established it 2004 as a not for profit organisation.

The organisation’s objectives are to identify, initiate and coordinate cross-disciplinary research to inform policy and management; and to build collaboration between the range of stakeholders concerned with the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA). The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) activities are guided by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Adopting these principles, The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) works to foster greater knowledge, understanding and conservation of the natural values and beauty of this extraordinary area, just sixty kilometres west of Sydney.

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) has been working in collaboration with different partners and organisations responsible for environmental management. This included independent scientific researchers, three Australian universities, local council and state environmental government agencies. These partners and organisations’ role was not only in financial support but working together to broker to facilitate research and community engagement. This was supporting exploring new ways to collaborate in conservation and management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

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4 Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute website [www.bmwhi.org.au](http://www.bmwhi.org.au). Accessed 2 February 2008. The original partner organisations were University of New South Wales, Sydney University, University of Western Sydney, Blue Mountains City Council, National Parks and Wildlife Sydney Catchment Authority, Australian Museum and Royal Botanic Gardens.
Overview of the Creative Projects in the portfolio

This diagram below provides an overview of the interrelationship of the creative arts based projects undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) during 2007-2011 as part of the research for this Doctorate.

These projects were undertaken specifically in the Blue Mountains region. They were designed, implemented and documented to illustrate the distinct differences in utilising community cultural development (ccd) processes as a methodology, alongside traditional communication methods of cultural research, environmental communication and community engagement.

Integration of these projects in the Doctorate portfolio
Designed by Cheryle Yin-Lo

The projects demonstrate that the different use of creative arts practice for various contexts and issues across the diverse target groups in the community can be beneficial in drawing different sources of information.
The creative portfolio comprises of a virtual mixed media exhibition, visual documentation through various visual media (photography, drawings, video) and stories (both visual and written text).

The outcomes of the projects in the Portfolio represent in a range of modalities of communication and different art forms used as catalysts for creating new dialogue and communication strategies to engage communities.

This reflects current times in the way different people communicate and engage with environmental issues and integrating these various art forms with the changes in technological applications. This approach and basic framework provided with its inherent principles and processes could be adapted and tailored for other World Heritage areas and geographical localities in the future, whilst taking into account contextual and specific factors and community dynamics.
The Community Cultural Development position

In 2005, a position was created of a Community Cultural Development Worker (later position title changed to Community Engagement Coordinator) within The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute as a core team member working across the small operated organisation. Then research, arts and education and public programs commenced. This inaugural position was funded by the Australia Council for the Arts from 2005-2006 and funding from Arts NSW from 2007-2008 with support of this Doctorate research project by an Australian Research Grant from the Institute of Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney from 2007-2011.

This new role in the organisation explored the design and implementation of creative arts based projects and combining scientific research and information resulting in innovative methods of cultural research and community engagement and participation.

One example that illustrates the role of this position and the potential of collaboration and knowledge making in problem solving was the partnership between The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) working with Blue Mountains City Council Strategic Planning staff in 2007. Playing a key role in assisting Blue Mountains City Council, The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) acted as an intermediatry supporting the community to articulate their concerns working towards resolving community issues and increasing community understanding about the complex nature of the development.

As part of the core team The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI), the author of this Doctorate worked on the community engagement strategies (using art and non-art approaches) in collaboration with consultant, Sandy Booth designing and convening these workshops. This resulted in the development of the Mid Mountains Collaborative Framework\(^5\) (BMWHI, 2007). This also led to the implementation of the Collaborative Community Government Framework (See \(http://www.bmwhi.org.au/what/projects/midmntscollab.html\)) and establishment of the Mid Mountains Sustainability Reference Group by Blue Mountains City Council to encourage greater community participation and improving processes for communication and illustrates the potential role of community in decisionmaking of local issues.

Methodology

This research project examines more people inclusive approaches to research in the environmental context. A mixed methodology approach drawing aspects from various research methods from interdisciplinary sources has been used. Participatory action based research experiential and evidence based approaches were also used in particular aspects of all the creative projects projects undertaken in this Portfolio. Other methods included internet and desktop research, primary and secondary research, observation and written and verbal feedback from participants in creative arts based projects de-briefings and in the project evaluation stage was also undertaken.

This research portfolio has also been developed using critical and personal reflections informed by key principles and theoretical background to practice led research (Smith and Dean 2009) and community cultural development (ccd) practice.

My active involvement in establishing a professional network in promoting arts and the environment in NSW also highlighted the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration across sectors. Especially focusing on community cultural development practice and its application in an environmental context.

As part of my involvement in this professional group it became evident understanding of the different sectors with their frameworks, practice, methodologies and approaches, timeframes and work cultures had to be established and was vitally necessary. This led to undertaking an audit of the skills base and expertise within the cross sectoral group and to explore the collaborative potential of the group. As a group we needed to establish a common group vision, identify and prioritise issues and set goals and objectives to increase awareness and community engagement of environmental issues across all levels of the community.

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6 CCDNSW (Community Cultural Development NSW-now defunct.) convened an incubator group of cultural workers, environment and cultural planners, artists and academics to establish and promote the interrelationship with the arts and environment. It also aimed to work collaboratively to audit cultural activity in this area and provide support for best practice, evaluation and documentation.
Community cultural development (ccd)

As a result of this professional development network on arts & environment mentioned and its potential, a greater understanding reinforced the need that a more integrated approach was necessary. This led me to design creative arts projects based on methodologies and principles of community cultural development (ccd) practice with a cross sectoral approach with my work at the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute.

Some of the key principles in the professional practice of community cultural development (ccd) is the nurturing of community led and directed ideas. Through the many layers and benefits that emerge from this process, it encourages short and long term skills and outcomes. It also creates a catalyst for skills and information exchange. Other skills developed through community based arts projects have led to the opportunity to work with skilled professional artists and cultural facilitators who play a key role in increasing community capacity building.

Other outcomes that are generated are increased community networking and building trust between communities and organisations encouraging collaboration. As professional artists work collaboratively with communities exploring artistic and creative expression, they act as cultural facilitators to assist communities to communicate their ideas. These artists often work with community members in projects who have little or no engagement or participation in creative arts.

Utilising different forms of creative arts\(^7\) when working with communities, artists and organisations in artistic and cultural expression, the local community’s sense of place can be explored through community cultural development (ccd) processes.

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\(^7\)Definition: Creative Arts can be described as a diverse range of human activities which includes visual and performing and multimedia (as defined by the author of the Doctorate).
Encouraging latent creativity, the creative process and creative thinking in projects through this community cultural development approach formed an important part in understanding the way organisations can engage communities and nurture environmental stewardship differently.

The point of difference using community cultural development processes is that it is intertwined with creating a greater sense of ownership, connecting place and identity for current and future generations in environmental stewardship (Carr 2002). It shows how community cultural development processes can lead to new knowledge making while opening up alternative forms of communication that can begin to provide a catalyst for ongoing dialogue between communities and institutions (i.e. government and non-government organisations and agencies).

Community involvement with creative arts has always provided a vehicle for creative expression reflecting contemporary views and attitudes. There are many examples of contemporary artists creatively responding to the state of environment (Meade 2008, Artlink 2005). This has also included political activist groups and community groups involved in the environmental movement using arts as a tool for socio-cultural means since the 1960’s and 1970’s (Gablik 1992, Kastner and Wallis, 1998) to voice their views.

Creative based arts approaches provide the opportunity for experiential experiences, to develop different social and emotional connections, access points and perspectives by involving a diverse range of people of different interests and ages, from different geographical, cultural and social backgrounds. Through a more dynamic, immersive and interactive dialogue it draws upon and stimulates the sharing of people’s diverse perspectives.
This approach also creates strong social networks which value different experiences, skills and knowledge bases. It revealed the potential for building new relationships, opportunities for collaboration in the development of new resources and funding and new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

This framework explores people’s values and identity through encouraging arts and cultural expression, supported by skills exchange and knowledge transfer between local communities working with professional artists. This allows the opportunity for communities to develop their conceptual and creative thinking, and provides skills that assist them to better manage and determine their own cultural production. Using a variety of different art media such as visual arts through exhibitions (both physical and virtual), drawing, art workshops, visual journals, photography and video, storytelling (oral, written and digital) and creative writing, allows for different people’s interest, arouses different senses and creates different access points.

The different forms of communication and cultural expression used in these projects can attract people in the community with and without art skills, as well as different skill bases and interests. This highlights the important role that professional artists play in facilitating new ways of seeing and responding to the world through their creative process and meaning making. In addition, and as a result, people with non-arts backgrounds are stimulated through projects into using creative thinking, and discovering and exploring their latent creativity through an experiential and transformative experience.

Visual methodologies, manually or through technology, provide a new way of relating and connecting ideas and people and their values. Visual journals, and oral and visual storytelling can be powerful media, on both individual and organisational levels, and can become important resources when combined with other knowledge bases and scientific methodologies of research.

*Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship*
However, in contemporary times the means of cultural expression and production have changed. As artists turn to social media and technology to advocate environmental concerns. It is rarer to find examples of those that dynamically involve communities, artists and organisations or agencies in collaborative art or knowledge making. The nexus between the arts and environment required me to draw upon resources, references and overseas models across different sectors, taking an interdisciplinary approach to create a new way of working in articulating my professional and cultural practice.

There are some interesting examples that are starting to respond to this change and have provided inspiration to my professional and cultural practice. Some of these innovative models demonstrating the nexus between environment and the arts and communities have been identified such as IASKA www.iaska.com.au(Australia), Green Museum in the USA (www.greenmuseum.org)and Proboscis www.proboscis.org.au (UK) and Banff Art Centre (http://www.banffcentre.ca/) in Canada.

**Practice led research**

The projects undertaken looked at the role of creative arts outcomes for cultural research, and in practice led research as an important area of inquiry in its own right (Smith and Dean, 2009).

Practice led research has been described by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, UK (2003):

> ...is a distinctive feature of research activity in the creative and performing arts. As with other research conducted by arts and humanities researchers, it involves the identification
of research questions and problems, but the research methods, contexts and outputs then involve a significant focus on creative practice... through this practice it can illuminate, bring about new knowledge and understanding that are not text based...

As a result, outcomes of this research project various modalities and different art forms using verbal and non verbal means to access and engage communities. This research looks at the relationships and explores how we can create a more innovative approach to the cycle of knowledge, communication and different modes of cultural production that is continually needed to more effectively inform policy and decision making in this Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage region.

This research project and the combination of examining the interrelationship between creative arts and scientific and environmental knowledge as cultural research is an emergent practice. Nevertheless, these models illustrate that new ways are being explored and filter across the nexus of arts and environment practice and research.
Evaluation Approach

These creative arts experiences for individuals in local communities can result in and transformative experiences and lead to lifelong learning producing both tangible and intangible outcomes within and outside of the actual project timeframe. The evaluative process was undertaken at three key stages—prior to the commencement of the project, during and post-project completion. A range of mixed methodologies were used including written surveys for participants, visual journals, group discussions, participatory action research (PAR) and through observations during workshops and through community feedback from project de-briefings.

A pilot course offered by CCDNSW which I attended in Evaluating Community Cultural Development Projects further highlighted the various methods that can be used at different stages if projects and provided resources but also highlighted the complexity in evaluating these kinds of projects.

Overall the complexities of both the practice and evaluative components of the use of creative arts and community based arts within an environmental context has been fragmented in project documentation and undervalued by both cultural and environmental sectors. Templates developed by VicHealth have been utilised in some of the creative projects in the portfolio (See Appendix 8 & 9) for evaluating community wellbeing and the benefits of participation in the arts. Evaluation also included documenting some of the intangible and tangible outcomes of the results of these projects. One of the complex issues is that often other intangible outcomes of the project may take place after a project has been completed. Many anecdotal stories from a local level have also been reported back in informal ways that demonstrated that through emotional connection and immersive and experiential experiences it can transform a community participant by being involved in one project.

9 An Evaluation Guide for Community Arts Practitioners prepared by Effective Change for Arts Victoria, 2002; Darebin City Council; City of Whittlesea and VicHealth. See www.vichealth.vic.gov.au. Sample tool template 4.1 from VicHealth (see details above in footnote) was used with participants in my first partnership project, Nature Through Fresh Eyes in 2006 VicHealth’s sample tool 4.3 was also used as a guide for project planning and evaluation.
Geographical and environmental context

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

The geographical area of the Blue Mountains is located only sixty kilometres from Sydney. The rapid urban sprawl creates tensions between different players to the management and joint responsibilities of this area. Whilst the local population of approximately 60,000 people spread along a single ridge of twenty eight towns and village the region is faces major infrastructural development. In the Blue Mountains, local communities are challenged by global factors that are predicted to increasingly impact on a local level which is a fluid environment of social, political and economic changes.

Key environmental issues facing this region, currently and in the future, include the increasing dryness and vulnerabilities to bushfires. This is due to predicted increasing climate change and global warming factors. This inevitably, impacts on natural and human ecosystems and people’s choices and lifestyles in natural, semi-rural and urban contexts in this region which raises many questions. This research raises the question of what value is community knowledge given by scientists, researchers and environmental agencies in the consideration of issues that shape and impact on people’s everyday lives. This research also explores how communities connect to build resilience to and with stand adverse conditions and natural disasters and future change in the Blue Mountains region.

Blue Mountains City Council as one of the key organisations responsible for the environmental management of the region has developed an important Draft Infrastructure Strategy (2005). This Strategy was developed for Council, community and external agencies to provide a set of principles, priorities and actions that will allow Council to take leadership in positioning the Blue Mountains for a sustainable future (Draft Infrastructure Strategy p3).

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The aspirations of this Blue Mountains City Council Strategy (2005) states that infrastructure can mean many things to different people.

Infrastructure must contribute to and support cultural and economic outcomes as well as protecting the ecosystems and unique quality and character of the Mountains.... ’(p6)

As it also states this Draft Infrastructure Strategy which was developed to identify priorities and infrastructure needs to enable the Blue Mountains to realise its 25 year Vision. This vision was developed and adopted by Council in a document titled ‘Towards a More Sustainable Blue Mountains- A Map for Action 2000-2025’ (2005) following extensive community consultation. The management of the ‘triple bottom line’ Council states is that their planning and actions must contribute equally to outcomes to social, economic and environmental benefits (p3). With this intention however, it inevitably highlights the difficulty in the implementation of this vision and the planning required and the high level of complexity that exists at local, State and Federal on a political level.

One of the factors is due to the fragmentation and the lack of integration of policies and legislation across Australia in environmental management (State of the Environment Report, 2011). This intertwining relationship of the ‘triple bottom line’ factors and their impact on each other affect the type and quality of community engagement, community expectations and relationships with environmental management agencies.

This issue has caused some tensions between the local communities and Blue Mountains City Council (Blue Mountains Gazette, 2005). The tension between balancing the human factors with environmental management change has been challenged by local communities who constantly raise the issue with Council and who perceive the challenges threatening community wellbeing and community aspirations.
Overview- Lawson Town Re-development

An example of one of the major infrastructural changes in this World Heritage region is the development and work on the construction of a four lane highway through the Blue Mountains currently in progress to creating a transport corridor to the west which will take a number of years.

As a result, the village of Lawson has undergone redevelopment and with building of a new town centre. This immense change has resulted in uncertainty, destabilisation and disruption to the daily lives of the local communities and businesses both on a physical and emotional level. This is one of the current aspects of the complex relationships that results in this context of change. Strong community engagement between organizations and institutions becomes critical as new approaches and dialogue can be created for a new understanding of local community values and attitudes.

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
OVERARCHING STATEMENT

The portfolio will examine four key themes that emerged throughout this research project which are: community engagement and communication; cultural production (Bourdieu, 1984); new knowledge making; and adaptive governance and their interrelationship. These key themes identified shape the framework for this portfolio and emerged out of the research. They were used as a way to understand better the interrelationship of ideas and find synergies between the humanities and natural sciences. It crosses the divide to navigate through perceived and real barriers in understanding different knowledge bases, showing how they can be used in the future to inform environmental issues.

This understanding of the interrelationship of these themes provided new ways of combining multiple methods and modalities of knowledge and approaches to cultural production with local communities. It is vital to recognize both technical and scientific information research and human based values with social and cultural research that can inform solutions to environmental issues. Both approaches need to co-exist and are interrelated. In this portfolio new forms of research and practice are revealed and can be developed so that this synergy can work more together towards social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

The focus on identifying alternative strategies to address communication problems was reinforced in 2008 when I was asked to help review the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute’s strategic plans. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by Dr. Rosalie Chapple, co-founder of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute with the partner organisations in 2008 who were environmental decision makers and policy makers of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. These interviews highlighted the need for better coordination and information sharing, in collating and disseminating it, and to identify shared research objectives.

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These interviews also showed that the independent role of a non-government organization like the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute had an important role to play as a facilitator and broker for environmental information and communication and collaboration between all clients and stakeholders, including communities.

The survey results also identified that there were problems such as the lack of knowledge informing policy and low levels of integration and collaboration between partner organisations and the many stakeholders. This is a common issue in an era of knowledge production and management across different sectors. Organisations are slowly establishing strategies and processes making transitions out of their information silos to more integrated models and interdisciplinary teams of working collaboratively. Basing on improving the organisational system based on people, process and technology if scientific and educational organizations move to more sustainable practices and approaches (Nodine, 2003). The facilitation in brokering to apply information and knowledge especially from a community perspective to environmental management processes is always an ongoing challenge and not straightforward.

**Knowledge Building**

There is enormous future potential for nurturing environmental stewardship in this growing era of the knowledge economy (Drucker 1969). Especially in placing more attention and focus on in addressing contemporary environmental issues on a local and global level but is a perplexing issue.

Drucker (2001) stated:

`the next society will be a knowledge society. Knowledge will be its key resource, knowledge workers will be in the dominant group in its workforce`.

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As he continues to explain there are three main characteristics which will be critical in this change. One of these is borderlessness because knowledge travels even more effortlessly than money, secondly -upward mobility and thirdly , the ‘potential for failure as well as success’ as anyone can acquire the means of production, i.e the knowledge required for the job.

As a consequence throughout this portfolio I will highlight the key issues and implications of these factors, from both a local and global perspective, that are driving international agendas on creativity and invention and underpinning innovation in our society today (Metris Report, 2009).

A Holistic Approach

In investigating this research topic it became evident to me that to address current environmental problems it was important to take a more holistic approach (Yencken 2000; Mills et al. 2004). As creativity is an essential feature in holistic thinking Ealey (2002) it positions the critical role of creative based arts projects can play in environmental problem solving in current times.

As problem solving of environmental issues is intertwined with social, cultural and economic factors it requires a multi pronged and cross sectoral and cross cultural approach now and in the future. The research project highlights the need to seek strategies and processes that lead to combined knowledge making that includes the value of community knowledge. This is dependent on who is generating the information and how this knowledge is shared and used and what messages are communicated, especially on a public level. The emphasis to draw upon different sources and knowledge bases becomes vital and will be discussed in more detail in the portfolio.
**Defining the term `environment’**

In this research, I have defined the ‘environment’ from a more holistic view of humans and our interrelationship with both built and natural environs, including how people relate and move around in that space.

It is not confined only to the natural environment but applied to: *the surroundings and combination of external physical conditions that affect and influence growth, development, and survival of living organisms or the complex of social and cultural conditions affecting the nature of an individual or community*.

According to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) section 528 (2012) defines the term environment to include *`ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities, the natural and physical resources and the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas including the social, economic and cultural aspects*.

On a national and international level, The Burra Charter (1999) is also an important policy which takes into account environmental stewardship and the ethics of cultural significance in relation to World Heritage issues. This policy reinforces the importance of custodianship of the environment and the definition of the environment to be interpreted as the natural environment, built and cultural heritage.

In this context, cultural heritage also includes the built heritage and in recent reviews of the Burra Charter has also now included moveable and intangible cultural heritage e.g. songs, and stories. This review also took into account multiple narratives and cultural interpretations with a more inclusive approach to Indigenous perspectives.

Critical dialogue in an article by Australian academic, Professor Noel Gough (2002) discusses the approach to thinking globally in environmental education with particular reference to popular assumptions about the universal applicability of Western science.

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Despite the transnational character of many environmental issues as he points out, it demands that people ‘think globally’. He argues that the contribution to Western science to understanding and resolving environmental problems might be enhanced by seeing it as one among many local knowledge traditions. Gough (2002) states:

*The production of a global knowledge economy’ in/for environmental education can then be understood as creating transnational ‘spaces’ in which local knowledge traditions can be performed together, rather than creating a ‘common market’ in which representations of local knowledge must be translated into (for exchange) for the terms of an universal discourse’.*

In this process, the strengthening of communication and relationships between people and organisations especially on a local level and nurturing individuals and communities in environmental stewardship is critical (Carr 2002). This is part of an integrated approach to create more dynamic dialogue and to engage on an emotional level for individuals, communities and organisations.

In the Blue Mountains World Heritage context the opportunity had been created to collaborate with different partners (organisations and institutions) to share and integrate different knowledge bases and incorporate cultural research through the community based arts projects. It was an important step to use community cultural development processes as a vehicle that could lead towards the shared vision of environmental stewardship. What is essential is for organisations to adopt is an attitude of openness to instill a sense of trust amongst different stakeholders. This is an exciting beginning for development of new models of working together through collaborative learning, and understanding of similar or differing perspectives, agendas or priorities.
Reflections of the Journey of the Community Cultural Development Worker

Like any adventure or journey, at the beginning the opportunities and pathways seemed endless and the destination point seemed far away on the horizon. But the position of cultural worker with The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute has definitely taken me out of my comfort zone in a positive way. Having to learn and apply new skills, knowledge and information and transfer my skills in a new context, I felt as if I was reinventing myself.

It was with this entrée into the scientific world of environmental research in a World Heritage context that I have gradually unravelled and am still unravelling the language barriers to translate specialised technical language and acronyms. I am slowly demystifying scientific thinking and methodologies which originally appeared a completely foreign language and culture. They were so different to my own theoretical and philosophical frameworks and practical experiences in the methodologies used in cultural research and approaches to problem solving. Creative expression through the arts was the path by which to explore community perspectives and experiences and put that forward as part of the mix of information gathering.

I reflected on how contributing to people’s understanding in the place where I live had become a personal and professional vision. However, through my own journey in this position I have also learnt about the complex issues that this community is facing on an environmental and management level: a realisation that solutions to problems are multilayered and not necessarily achieved in a short time frame.

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This particular scar tree is known to be carved by members of the local Darug people in the Blue Mountains and is a symbol of marking key events in the community and creating sense of place and identity.

As a resident I reflected on my own understanding of local environmental issues, and being a refugee from Sydney’s inner west I questioned my own sense of responsibility and connection to place and identity on emotional, cultural, spiritual and physical level.

However, in my imagination I started conjuring up ideas about the way that creative arts based projects and research could open up new ways of seeing and experiencing the world. This opportunity to experiment with different
approaches seemed exciting – a real professional challenge with very few reference points. That was the attraction that got my adrenalin pumping.

Over the last twenty years of my working life as an artist and cultural worker in Australia and overseas there have been many transitions, experiences and cultural insights. Every new situation builds on previous experiences on both emotional and physical levels. As humans we draw upon inner resources, build on our skills and transfer information to one another while applying our knowledge to new contexts that help us to respond and adapt to different factors and situations.

As a result, I started to question what led to the creative solutions behind the establishment of the organisation, and why was it important and necessary for these approaches to combine and coexist? Where did creative thinking lead when an environmental scientist and a biologist combined their knowledge? They conceived a vision for a different model from what currently existed – an entity to address a new way for environmental issues and conservation management in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA). In 2004, the seeds were finally planted for the beginnings of a new life form, pumping with ideas, aspirations and passion, connections.
The Organic Process and Metamorphosis of the Organisation

I visualised the organisation in this environment, with this dynamics as with the metaphor of this photograph. The heat is increasing and the atmosphere and energy levels are rapidly shifting both locally and globally. Around this connected `powerball'\textsuperscript{12} it constantly faces moving forces in the atmosphere. This image expresses the intensity which turns this uncertainty into the complexity of contemporary governance in environmental management, in particular to natural resource management and urban development in a World Heritage area, which poses even more critical and urgent issues to address.

\textsuperscript{12}The powerball refers to the network of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and its partners organisations as a powerful network to influence change for environmental policy and decisionmaking in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area.
The Blue Mountains World Institute as an independent entity has enormous potential for creating and negotiating new dialogues, ideas and approaches through this creative based arts approach, which can explore more pluralistic, personal and collective narratives. It provides a more flexible framework and approach, using non-formal learning contexts (Flowers 2004) and different modes of learning and communication for individuals and communities.

Great insights come from navigating through new territory, investigating the way that creative arts can make a difference and what knowledge it can reveal. However, issues of communication had both internal and external aspects that needed addressing within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and its partner organisations\(^\text{13}\) and between communities. It was still a unique situation to be in – that of a cultural worker working within a scientific research organization context. The opportunity to work with local communities and scientists to explore environmental issues seemed a revolutionary idea. It was an exciting new challenge but a daunting task, to bring different people, organisations, knowledge bases, agendas and cultures together and find practical applications.

\(\text{13}\)The network of BMWHI partner organisations that work jointly with, and which includes, the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, and which comprises local council, universities and environmental agencies. The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute’s partner organisations are Blue Mountains City Council, National Parks and Wildlife (DECC), University of Western Sydney, University of Sydney, University of NSW, University of Technology, Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority and Sydney Catchment Authority.
As Dr. Rosalie Chapple, Co-founder and current Executive Director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute stated:

*When we established the organisation we wanted it to be something different from the traditional models and approaches to research on environmental management. It has been important to explore the potential to combine arts and cultural expression to look at environmental issues and problem solving.*

This foresight and basic premise suggested that artistic and cultural expression could potentially provide a creative space for communities to explore people’s values, and negotiate their understanding of the world and their relationship to it. This focus became a critical philosophical stance to investigate within the organisation by applying community cultural development principles and practice. Dr. Chapple was insisting that this approach had inherent qualities that made it distinct from more traditional approaches to research.

It has become evident how important it is to establish creative based arts and cultural research as another form of knowledge base to draw upon in shaping people’s perceptions and attitudes on environmental issues, to inform environmental policy and decision making. It also has the capacity to generate other forms of social networks, information, knowledge and skills, where communities work with professional artists to complement scientific research outcomes.

14Personal conversation with Dr. Rosalie Chapple, biologist and Co-founder and Executive Director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, in August 2010.
In looking at the emergence of the organisation where I work I would like to use an analogy I have developed to help me visualise how things have been shaped and nurtured:

The living organism (the organisation) could not breathe alone and without linking to the other forces of power and energy (i.e. communities and partner organisations). The fertile soil was laid for its foundations.

Now after the first five years of life the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute it has evolved as a responsive and dynamic organisation, making new links to people, places, ideas and sources of energy and knowledge. As I visualise it:

It has now connected to existing information nodes making its way along to jointly identify research gaps. It has risen from the surface with one of its main functions and roles as one of the key knowledge brokers changing the existing landscape.

A node was also grafted on to its main stem – that of the cultural broker. But it has grown at a different pace and culture.

These synergistic relationships of all the nodes are slowly being intertwined and have now resulted in re-energising the ‘lungs of the Sydney basin’.

However, it is an ongoing life system that needs to respond to constantly changing, unpredictable factors. This has moved the ‘shared vision’ of

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15 I have been in the role of the cultural broker as an intermediary and facilitator in my capacity as Community Engagement Coordinator/ Community Cultural Development since 2005 in BMWHI, integrating this program into research and community engagement projects with scientific and environmental research.
working towards joint responsibility to environmental stewardship with a greater sense of creativity and new knowledge making that can build the organisational and community capacity and resilience we are seeking to secure in our region’s future.

**The complexity of communicating environmental issues**

Current communication methods used for environmental advocacy or education, such as written information brochures, reach only a low level of engagement with people and this has an effect on the lack of human behavioural change. This factor also contributes to the lack of integration and barriers to integrated policy, planning and implementation (Ross, 2008). It is important to understand the multiple levels in which different people have associations and meanings to the environment and their connection to it.

The Environment and Ethnic Communities in 2004 survey and report (Department of Environment and Conservation NSW, 2005) reinforces this point. In this report findings indicated especially in the case of residents who speak languages other than English prefer to access information in their own language or in a bilingual fliers. In this report more than eight of ten respondents from the selected ethnic communities rate environmental groups, scientists or technical experts, other members of the community and schools as reliable sources of information about environmental issues. These responses suggest that informal word of mouth sources and expertise are valued.

Another point is on the reliance on the printed fliers and brochures for public education distributed by environmental agencies. In ethnic communities surveyed, their main source of environmental information are newspapers and television. In terms of personal behaviour this report also states that people were more likely to participate in local environmental issues. But their primary reason for adopting or changing behaviour was to save money and out of a concern for the environment or a sense of civic responsibility or as a result of environmental regulations. However, there was a lack of knowledge by these respondents about how to participate ‘in environmentally friendly behaviour’ and lack of awareness of environmental impacts of a given
activity is also significant barrier to behavioural uptake.

Most readers are passively engaged in processing the information that is often distributed by environmental agencies, groups and organisations. Often it is considered didactic in nature. When issues based and single in focus, this information usually comes from an ‘authoritative’ voice and tells people what to think rather than assisting them to develop their own ideas, values, actions and behaviours.

As academic, Michaelides (2006) states that: controversies emerge on environmental issues quite often the views and intention of different groups are pursued in a dogmatic way and not on logical deductions based on relevant factual data. This approach he observes creates intense confrontations and public divide. He describes environmental education appear as a process useful to ‘restoration of rationalism’ to the discussions related to environmental issues.

However, he concludes that it is more effective if the teaching is aimed at achieving ‘not the inculcation of preconstructed ideas, but to the development of critical and creative thinking for the process of relevant factual data’.

Local environmental groups seek new ways of lobbying and advocating rather than the traditional letter writing campaigns, and have started to explore visual and creative expression to increase their public profile on specific environmental issues.

In response to these key themes and issues the articles and reports in the Portfolio present different creative arts based approaches that involved diverse target groups in the community accommodating various contexts. These will be discussed in more detail in the various sections of the Portfolio.

The main aim of the discussion in the Portfolio is to look at how this might enable creative arts to be better used, and applied to other World Heritage areas in Australia, and stimulate the process of finding new models and approaches to engage communities.

The need to improve communication pathways was reinforced when I reviewed the current situation. Often little accessible information is distributed by, or readily available from institutions or agencies for the community, residents and tourists about the World Heritage values. Educational materials, brochures and information sheets often primarily focus on single specific issues and scientific and technical information. They
usually lack a holistic perspective on the complex, interrelated nature of environmental issues between people, flora and fauna and the broader cultural landscape. Material is mainly located in tourist information centres.

More creative thinking and planning of distribution and access points of information through every day community and retail outlets would help residents gain greater awareness to nurture and promote environmental stewardship. Much information that is being shared is being initiated by local community action or environmental groups, who have recognised the need to stimulate 'active environmental citizenship and stewardship' and have been successful in stimulating community awareness and action. It is crucial that this information can be combined to give a more comprehensive understanding to work towards solutions and understanding.

**The role of the 'translator' in a scientific research context**

This challenge for myself as a cultural worker in the 21st century required me to be more multi-skilled than before. The knowledge I needed to work in an environmental context was a task of lifelong learning in many knowledge bases. This was a stimulating dynamic in the workplace but also problematic in reconciling the layered issues and tensions that exist with this learning and communication. This is important in the way that people perceive problems and issues that need to be understood, interrelated and transmitted.

When I first entered the world of science, I wandered along the path of an unfamiliar culture, language and meanings, where `communities’ for scientists often mean ecological communities, not human communities I was used to relating to. This was quite unfamiliar to me and required a shift and change in mindset. With the challenge of creating a portfolio utilising creative arts to explore environmental issues I had to learn more about the scientific and technical language so often used in research in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute.
I needed new more effective methods, both physical and virtual, to explore how to disseminate scientific research and information about specific environmental issues in this region to the public. This however was not possible until I had researched and networked with diverse groups and individuals in the local Blue Mountains community. I had to identify the best way for local communities to engage, and if they wanted to engage in this environmental dialogue, to see where the opportunities were. This meant understanding the drivers of community dynamics, influencers and barriers to engagement and participation.

This important point of influence in creating active environmental citizenship by local communities through the way information and knowledge is developed, transmitted and generated. This is explored by stimulating creative thinking, unleashing latent creativity, and including artists in their art making and creative processes.

Equally important has been the focus on increasing community participation in addressing local development issues, not only in a natural/bush context but also at the interface between urban, industrial and agricultural environments, and ecosystem management in the Blue Mountains region.

This continuing role of increasing awareness and understanding of this complex interrelationship between community, management and policy makers perspectives has been important in addressing project designs and their outcomes. As environmental research and current issues have arisen within the organisation, I have been constantly searching for new pathways for learning and information exchange.

As in nature these can be created through a range of access points that allow energy to flow in and out. Keeping information moving through different people, spaces, places and cultures is a balancing act.
However issues about who has the knowledge of certain issues and what kind of knowledge and how it is valued are important. Creating more participatory processes in creative arts based projects for cultural expression and for visual and narrative storytelling are valuable methods for communities. Possible solutions to complex local environmental issues that impact on communities depend on bridging information and communication gaps, leading to better understanding through different communication methods.

The human resources investment and time required to increase the organisational and community understanding of the layers of complexity and the many factors to be considered. Otherwise it can be made difficult to resolve environmental solutions in a short time frame. Through a dynamic web of combined knowledge a communication loop is created to address the need for joint understanding in environmental problem solving. This flow should be continuous, so that the flow of knowledge and life continues unimpeded.

In bringing critical environmental problem solving processes with communities and different stakeholders together navigating towards common ground is possible. This however, has to be on the understanding that the purpose is not always to come to community consensus on issues but to understand different and more complex perspectives and experiences on issues by different stakeholders, so that management decisions can be informed by this approach.

**Who’s telling the story, to whom, and how is it told?**

The idea of nurturing environmental stewardship for current and future generations is mostly applied to children, or Indigenous communities as custodians in ‘caring for country’ (Natural Resource Management 2008-2013) and looking after the environment. This principle needs a much broader application and interpretation, so that it includes a wide representation of non-Indigenous community perspectives and participation.

In this portfolio my concern was predominantly with local environmental issues, to gain the participation of communities and residents in the Blue
Mountains region, overcoming the common lack of inclusiveness of social and cultural diversity. My starting point was to understand local context rather than focus on tourist perceptions or historical European perspective, values and interpretations.

Whilst there is sometimes an uneasy relationship between local communities and tourism activities, this nexus is critically important. Encouraging a strong sense of place and identity can have potential for stimulating and sustaining environmental stewardship more broadly across the community. If the first priority is local ownership of environmental issues and decision making and community wellbeing, this will undoubtedly translate into a more attractive destination for tourists, and for current and potential residents.

**My reflections on community participation**

However, at different points of my journey, opportunities have been created to work with a range of individuals, diverse community groups and community organisations which were ready to take on the challenge of new experiences. I witnessed this and was rewarded by the excitement of people being actively involved in past and recent creative arts projects with

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute. The community’s enthusiasm to be involved in future projects showed the transformative nature of this approach. The scale of knowledge and attitudinal changes generated from their participation cannot be understated.

More simply, the process ‘unlocked’ the barriers between people, and brought out issues emotionally that had meaning and relevance to the community and their everyday lives, helping to understand the drivers of community participation or non participation.

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16These comments were expressed in an evaluation survey I used with participants in my first pilot partnership project, *Nature Through Fresh Eyes* in 2006. This survey was developed by VicHealth. This project involved working over six months with multicultural residents to break down social isolation in the Blue Mountains with bush walks and art workshops.
It is an important role for artists to bring people together and to facilitate and locate different points of access for diverse communities to stimulate ideas and challenge perceptions of the world. In this portfolio I will examine the issues, risks and challenges that people face as a society or organisation and do they have the skills and ability to respond. What mechanisms and processes are in place for people and organisations to be open to new ways and approaches in environmental problem solving of real world problems (Refer to Section 7 Navigating Towards common Ground).

On a local level, understanding human values and building community resilience has been vital. This is particularly so in the area of engaging people to understand their relationship to the issues of new research generated on climate change and global warming, and preserving local natural ecosystems. The impact of this international trend has raised complex questions about authority, power and credibility of knowledge.

In my current work role I saw my responsibility as a broker, facilitator and translator of knowledge. This meant working with people and organisations as an intermediary player. Understanding complex issues such as bushfire management in our backyard and in this region (Refer to Section 5 Bushfire Storytelling Project) and living in a World Heritage area has many dimensions and responsibilities for communities and institutions. As a result, understanding the dynamic interrelationship of the human and nature and acting effectively on needs of community involvement and the dialogue between local communities, environmental managers and decision makers means the possibilities of working more closely together.
The benefits of engaging communities & creating a learning environment

Many global conferences and charters since the UN Conference on the Environment, Stockholm in 1972 have clearly identified the need to foster meaningful community participation and learning, as prerequisites to plan how to sustain the human and natural environments (Flowers 2001).

Australia’s National Action Plan 2000 explicitly recognises that environmental education is not confined to formal schooling but a whole range of non-formal educational settings advocating, ‘energising the community to act responsibly’ in social action, workplace and community settings’ (Flowers 2001). As Clover (1998) argues ‘environmental educators should support adults in active, critical and creative engagement’.

Taking account of this bigger picture landscape I address the identified lack of research in the area of informal learning, particularly with adults (Flowers 2001). This has led to my focus on adult participation in experiential projects. With this in consideration in mind I was interested to research how this applied locally to creative arts and community based arts projects engaging communities around environmental issues.

It is important to nurture children ¹⁷ and the next generation in environmental stewardship, and much has been documented in this area, it does not fall within the scope of this research.

¹⁷ One local example is Earth Journeys, an eco-cultural project based in the Blue Mountains which delivered a holistic and experiential approach in the bush working with primary schools bridging the gap between scientists and artists in an educational learning context through workshops and interpretive walks and promoting environmental stewardship.
Also United Nations have released a number of publications and reports about projects children and environmental education.
This point was reinforced by UNESCO at the World Summit in Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, that:

\[ \text{it would be unwise to wait for the present generation of school and college students to grow up and begin applying what they are learning. It is today’s adults who are the primary voters, consumers, workers, teachers, scientists and parents.} \]

As Slattery (2000) points out, adults are significant players in ‘communities, groups and locations and are able to enthuse and organise and possess the necessary awareness upon which to base political action and to influence and educate others’.

More importantly, this shift in perspective is essential in moving towards a more integrated research approach. It reflects the interrelationship that is necessary to creates the link and catalyst between environmental stewardship and environmental decision making currently in the future. In particular, when applied in an environmental problem solving and real world problem context, it can make a significant contribution to build relationships between communities and institutions, despite the unequal relationships that may exist at times.
North Katoomba view by a local Korean resident.

Acrylic and watercolour on canvas.

From the exhibition Nature Through Fresh Eyes (2006)

**Shifting Perspectives**

These attitudinal shifts involve institutional and social dimensions that raise a number of questions about the scope for adaptability for transition and change. As part of this transition, questions of how these processes may be developed and managed arise. In this context I emphasize the importance of seeing how communities, institutions and agencies can better value each other’s knowledge and experience through the role of creative arts in combined knowledge production.

This is becoming more critical where adaptability for both organisations and people is becoming more dependent on their interconnectedness for
environmental problem solving, as this draws upon inner human resources through individual and organisational capacity building. In building community resilience, new skills and knowledge are needed to cope with rapidly changing internal and external factors in our environment.

**Opening new pathways to communication**

Using creative arts to develop alternative, innovative communication methods and strategies to involve people in community participation activities in environmental issues (Depoe 2004) can generate many layers of interpretation, understanding and information which produce new knowledge. This raises the issue of how the creative arts can be used as a catalyst for better communication in a public interface on environmental issues, which can then assist in the challenges of making scientific information accessible.

In the current state of international dialogue around the diverse opinions about environmental decision making processes and their effectiveness, it is timely to be pioneering in a field of practice, but this makes it vulnerable to criticism as a work in progress. This research explored the ways that environmental problem solving can be enhanced by community participation. What is even more challenging with its inherent complexities is that a multi-prong approach is needed. One current trend is to frame these issues in a sustainability context (social, environmental and economic) set against the fabric of local communities and places, noting the information flows that can be drawn on to address all these elements.
Towards a future vision: Discovering new pathways and technologies

In the 21st century in a globalised world organisations are faced with a range of tools, resources and technologies for different modalities of communication and distribution of information, cultural production and knowledge making. As stated by Heiman et al. (2004) this process as to create value, collaborators may have to adopt a variety of practices to facilitate knowledge transfer and examines the dilemma based on a knowledge-based framework. He links two knowledge-based attributes of collaboration—knowledge tacitness and problem-solving complexity—to the use of knowledge management practices.

This is essential for interdisciplinary research to truly take place. It does however require collaborators, in this case partner organisations, to surrender to a position in which they are open to new information, new ways of working and other views and methods of research and forms of knowledge. It requires unconventional thinking about how to approach problems and their solutions, and reveal new meaning in objects and texts (Repko 2008).

Some solutions came through the use and development of new technologies E.g. software introduced by scientists and National Parks staff provided new ways to visually map research, with specialised data to inform new solutions for future scenarios of impacts from factors of climate change. GPS mapped ten years of fire regimes in the area, tracking noxious weed problems and seed dispersion of plants. The ability of this technology to share information highlights the richness of combined knowledge and collaborative learning.

Organisations who safeguard about who can access this information and knowledge may limit their capacity in the future.
Conclusion

Building creative communities for the future

Seeking new approaches and language for creative communication on environmental issues is vital. The role of arts and ecology in working with local communities and artists to imagine and interpret the world with multiple perspectives and narratives is gradually growing in Australia and internationally. There are encouraging signs of a return to the importance of storytelling and sharing stories, and fresh connections to nature and the land for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in various formats of distribution.

People can adapt and to take the opportunity to share these experiences, whether physically or virtually, for lifelong learning and future problem solving for the environment, which affects all humans as being part of our ecosystems. However, there is no neat package that can be sold easily within or outside of the organisation of environmental management or decisionmakers to the general public. One size does not fit all. Lateral and creative thinking needs to be applied to how best to connect and nurture environmental stewardship for a range of different levels and approaches of community participation.

Diversity as a key to survival

Diversity and difference are part of the complexity of our everyday living. This is the dynamic that is the key to our survival – not only in the human world, but in the natural world. Maintaining the balance between these imperatives will always be a juggling act needed to respond and adapt to current forces and issues in a rapidly changing world.
New physical communities were created through new configurations of individuals in the community, brought together by creative based projects described in this portfolio. New virtual communities have been extended through exploring social media and virtual networks and by using social blogs.

Technology as used in the case of creative projects created new pathways for communities and communication. Digital storytelling and web based online exhibitions to share stories, text and images from diverse perspectives become prime vehicles for widening the access to, and encouraging the participatory processes of, a broader audience on environmental issues, and at the same time shifting power bases of knowledge sharing.

Whilst the aim of this portfolio is to present my four projects it is also important to acknowledge the environmental activism of local community groups\(^\text{17}\) who use creative arts in a fun way to engage communities about serious issues. Through song and performance these groups share environmental messages and also act as environmental advocates in the community. International networks such as Transitions Towns\(^\text{18}\) which has local groups in the Blue Mountains also use creative visualisation and creative means to explore environmental issues and reflect community aspirations for the future.

\(^\text{17}\) Ruby Bloomers is a community circus performance group who perform street theatre and at local festivals, presenting roving characters (devised by the group) who relate to climate change. Some of the performers work as professionals in the environmental sector. Ecopella is a community choir group who hold public performances and sing songs about the environment.

\(^\text{18}\) Transitions Blue Mountains \url{www.transitionbluemountains.org.au}
Evidence from research and cultural projects in regional NSW by Australian environmental scientist, Curtis (2007) revealed:

*It (the arts) has the capacity to synthesise complex ideas and communicate them to a non-specialist audience in an engaging form. This makes the arts valuable in enhancing the teaching of scientific and environmental material and to raise awareness about environmental issues in a wide range of contexts.*

Views such as this reflect the increasing awareness and currency of the value of creative, and in particular, community based arts practice in Australia and internationally, and its role in providing other forms of social and community connectedness by using more creative communication approaches.

A creative based arts approach can help shift some dynamics of power to encourage a more active engagement with key issues. Creative based arts practice offers a different approach. It can be a powerful catalyst for actively engaging communities and reaching and informing them on a more personal and emotional level to assist in increased decision making, especially to change attitudes and behaviours towards the environment. If environmental educators repackage and drive the dynamic process of bringing these communities together into a creative context it can provide a critical cultural space to negotiate and provide a platform for problem solving of complex environmental issues.

This portfolio provides a starting point for discussion to explore the question of creative arts as a catalyst for community participation for environmental stewardship. It investigates new approaches that might provide new possibilities for environmental problem solving, and it considers some of their implications.

*Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship*
Joint Responsibility

The question of how individuals, communities, organisations and institutions develop and transfer skills to work more collaboratively across disciplines, and move towards more innovation and creativity in our problem solving is ongoing. This investigation has helped me to understand the need and legitimacy of the growing trend in, and necessity for, the return of an interdisciplinary approach, to reconnect and blur the divisions of knowledge and sharing the power.

There is a growing recognition that one of the major forces behind knowledge production is the role of creativity (Florida 2007) in local regional economies. Creative based arts projects, especially those involving communities, provide another form of communication working with different knowledge bases. Through approaches using a range of art forms utilised and selected for their appropriateness to the issue, communities can be involved in a participatory way to generate ideas, information and knowledge.

Chaos and complexity theories applied to conflict resolution are internationally at the forefront of the integration of theory and real world applications. In the scientific research context this investigation of issues of community participation highlighted the multiple levels at which complexity arises.

It is also provides government and environmental agencies as institutions more scope to channel their position on more controversial issues through a joint organisational collective approach, which may be more difficult in an individual organisational perspective, depending on the current political climate and factors.

\textsuperscript{19}International Conference on Chaos, Complexity and Conflict (2008). Creighton University, USA.
Strong evidence has been put forward by such researchers as O’Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann (2002) that shows the value of inclusionary processes. This supports the need for a critical response, to increase levels of experience of communities in participatory policy and include stakeholders in the sustainable management of biodiversity. Reinforcing this view O’Riordan and Stoll-Kleeman refer to Kates et al.2001(p641-2) Sustainability Science in Action diagram which looks at sustainability science and the role for science in public affairs and more innovative approaches to method and inquiry. It also raises important factors such as learning through sharing, owning and revealing and incorporate knowledge with knowing and feeling and combining it with understanding with intuition. This leads to creating futures through learning, adapting and forecasting.

The notion of:

`a creative and open hearted partnership between government, business, civil society and scientists. Such partnerships will be based on combined approaches to acquiring information on sharing appreciation of differences in understanding of causes, pathways and consequences, and on joint funding and action. (Stoll-Kleemann et al, 2004:p300-302)

This leads to more durable partnerships and community resilience. This portfolio emphasises the critical importance that community participation can play in unlocking new perspectives of meanings, values and understandings through exploring new relationships and partnerships. Creative arts approaches and processes utilised to deal with common issues can create a new and interesting dynamic and better understanding of how knowledge can be produced and transmitted, to shape attitudes and actions towards environmental stewardship.

The discussion in this portfolio provides a starting point for environmental agencies, artists and communities to explore the potential of creative arts as catalysts for community participation. They can support environmental stewardship, and also address the changes needed to integrate community
knowledge into mainstream knowledge production. The investigation hopes to provide new insights and models to guide strategies and projects that will be feasible and attractive, to provide exciting possibilities, relationships and partnerships for communities involved in environmental problem solving.
2. WORLD HERITAGE STEWARDSHIP IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Report 1:

Celebration of 10 years of World Heritage Listing, 2010, Blackheath
A human chain of local residents promotes environmental stewardship through forming the the symbolic international logo for World Heritage.

Photo: A Shot Above Photography.
Introduction

The current trend towards local community’s role in more active community participation plays a key role in shaping environmental decision making and policy making in the 21st century. This report addresses the urgent need for environmental agencies on a global level to consider the vital role of environmental communication and community knowledge in environmental problem solving and how this can be integrated to become a key catalyst in advocacy in promoting environmental stewardship. This report will outline key issues and challenges from different stakeholders’ perspectives in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA) and their relationship to World Heritage values and the importance of embracing social and cultural diversity in future planning.

Background

International perspectives

There are both global and local concerns about the importance of public education on environmental issues. This report will illustrate that by increasing pathways to access to environmental communication, community participation within diverse communities and organisations have capacity to lead in innovative ways. There are many educational programs that focus on children’s roles in environmental stewardship in education, however in this report it focuses in exploring more the ways of raising the general public interface that brings environmental issues to people’s everyday lives and that work towards joint environmental stewardship.

Facing the consequences of global warming and climate change in society creates complex challenges in the way environmental agencies and organisations balance the role of environmental planning, decision making and management (State of the Environment 2011 Committee).
The latest predictions on climate change from the scientific perspective through the Stern Review Report (2007) and the release of David Guggenheim’s documentary film featuring Al Gore and other key leaders in Inconvenient Truth (2006) reached a broader community audience have placed global climate change centre stage and made governments and communities take a closer focus. The consequences from the views and findings revealed in this film will have on local communities and their sustainability cannot be underestimated.

**Rio Summit (2002)**

The Rio Summit or the Earth Summit as it was informally known in 2002 held in Brazil marked an international shift towards confronting the challenge to review and evaluate global communication strategies and the role different players have in environmental problem solving. The issues focussed in this particular Summit were building on the main Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, signed at the first Earth Summit in 1992, that asserts: *that access to information, public participation and access to justice (referred to as ‘environmental access rights’) are critical for sustainable development.* While the Rio Declaration is considered a “soft law” agreement, Principle 10 reflects the broad consensus of governments that access rights (the rights to access information, participate in decision making and access justice) are essential to addressing environmental issues fairly and effectively.

This 1992 Summit represented a turning point in the way that the environment and development were looked. It was convened to address urgent problems of environmental protection and socio-economic development and to rethink the direction of economic, social and environmental activities that place with people and our planet.¹

One of the outcomes in the 2002 Summit was specifically in the context of the promotion of increasing environmental awareness and advocacy. Significantly, the Summit revealed that previous strategies had not been very effective and there was an important issue in particular to the non converted sections of communities who have a low level of awareness of environmental issues.
One of the key recommendations from the report of the Rio Summit was to review and develop strategies that built on existing interest groups who were advocates for the environment. This was one way to better understand people’s values and how this experience might be used to target individuals and groups of various interests and ages in the community.

The information deficit model

One of the other most heated debates at both a national and international level currently revolves around the issues of the politics of environmental communication and community participation. This is reinforced in research by Harriet (2002) about public knowledge and climate change. Harriet states that is believed and argued that in each case, in accordance with the ‘information deficit model’ (a term coined by social scientists in the 1980’s), recorded levels of ignorance are seen as a barrier to effective public involvement in the policy process. This view is challenged by the research findings and her study of 242 surveys from high school students and their parents she received from Newcastle, Australia. Her conclusions is that public understanding of global environmental issues drew not only on scientific information, but also on local knowledges, values, and moral responsibilities.

An interesting perspective by Matt Nisbet of American University, (2010)20 on the Big Think blog discusses a distinction between the so-called ‘deficit model’ of expert communication and his development of a public engagement model. He believes that major influences on public beliefs and decisions are their level of science literacy (improving a public’s understanding of an environmental problem) and how they can develop a sense of trust, identity and values through better public engagement. He also states that communication is a process of transmission which if it means popularizing and simplifying technical information that flows from experts to the public and what was addressed that dialogue would become one of two way perspectives.

As Nesbit explains that in his opinion in contrast to individuals serving as advocates, national science organizations, universities, and other expert institutions have a duty instead to avoid partisan advocacy and to sponsor efforts at civic education and public engagement. These efforts should seek to not only improve technical understanding of climate science, but also understanding of the social, political, and ethical dimensions of the issue. These efforts are not designed to argue in favor of any one policy or political party, but should rather provide the motivation and opportunities for citizens to connect, plan, learn, and voice their preferences on climate change.

A newspaper article from the Sydney Morning Herald (2010) expresses the frustration by the scientific community over the Federal Government’s lack of commitment to adequately addressing climate change issues, especially since the Copenhagen Summit in 2010. This report is one example which simply illustrates that messages such as this in the media reinforce for people in the community the lack of leadership on key national and global issues. More critically it reflects the growing uncertainty by people about the authority’s voice and credibility to address environmental issues. This impacts the motivational level of people to further investigate individual views and their actions.
**Issues in a World Heritage context**

One of the critical challenges in the world today is the ongoing protection of World Heritage Listed areas where stakes are even higher for preservation of these sites in this political climate. Caring for our country and understanding how people connect and are nurtured through environmental stewardship is important. What support can be provided to assist communities has become a major issue in Australia and internationally both from Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. This is especially relevant on a local level in regards to The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area in NSW.

Environmental stewardship undoubtedly plays an important role for people and is a driving force for many concerned in the conservation, interpretation and presentation of our natural and cultural heritage for transmission to current and future generations. Living in a World Heritage area adds another dimension to this issue of environmental stewardship. This includes the moral, ethical and legislative implications and the role of community participation in environmental decision making, planning and management.

One of the key messages of the Stern Review Report (2010) was the urgent call for coordinated action and international multilateral cooperation over the next 10–20 years.

In this report I investigate new approaches and raise key issues and barriers facing organisations and communities in a World Heritage context. One of the most important is developing pathways for nurturing new community advocates in environmental stewardship through improving communication and access to information. Another is the vital need for organisations to support local communities to build their resilience to meet the challenges in a globally changing world and the social, economic and political context in Australia.
Facing change in environmental policy making

On a local level, scientific research has identified the issue of climate change as intensifying in this region. It is one of the key threats in this region that impact both ecological and human communities and also a key driver that motivates people’s environmental anxieties and concerns. This interrelationship with the predicted increase of dry weather will result in further challenges, increased stress from those that already exist and put pressure on the issue of bushfire management. This raises the stakes in community expectations with environmental policy and decision makers.

If people are to consider ‘the environment’ (Johnson 1997, State of Environment, 2011) in its broadest meaning, including the living and non-living things in the natural and built environment, our environmental consciousness increases as people are constantly moving through these spaces. As residents, environmental or land professionals, volunteers or tourists, collectively can inevitably change the physical environment we live in through our human activities. It is like a push and pull mechanism the way the land changes and transforms.

Every change and every part impacts on the fragile human and ecological ecosystems whether it be a subtle or major change, temporary or permanent. People and organisations are also part of this interaction and dynamics paralleled with the existence of a range of values and differing agendas that can sometimes raise social tensions.

One of the first building blocks I would like to address is that of communication and its impact on the flow of information as one of the important factors. Communication and dialogue are necessary at many different levels, from federal to state government, between local environmental agencies, between policy and decision makers, and on the ground land managers and scientific researchers and to local communities.
The document that outlines the key direction for *The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan* (2009) was developed over several years with community consultation. It states that it provides broad guidelines but emphasises that each of the national parks within this World Heritage area have their own individual management plan. In regards to the specific ways that this document makes reference to environmental stewardship it strongly advocates that their objective is ‘to encourage community stewardship of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area through education, consultation and the provision of opportunities for community participation in its protection’.

As recognised in the World Heritage Convention, it also states, ‘a sense of community ownership of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is essential in achieving the stated objectives conserving and transmitting its outstanding values to future generations’.

Since the role of management is a mammoth task it relies on its conservation Partners21 for active participation to achieve its management objectives. One of the important underlying beliefs and assumptions in this Strategic Plan is that community members who have:

\[
\text{a sense of connection to the area will be more likely to support the area’s conservation into the future and less likely to oppose management proposals aimed at enhancing the area’s integrity and conserving its significant values.}
\]

**Environmental stewardship**

Environmental stewardship as illustrated is a term that has many levels of meanings at federal, state and local levels. It can differ in the way that it is interpreted and translates into policy and action depending on your role and connection to the land. For example, for farmers this term environmental stewardship can be part of a scheme which can mean receiving government

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economic incentives for undertaking more sustainable agricultural practices, whilst for others it means a more humanistic or spiritual perspective and connection.

There are various ways in which people interact with the natural environment and connect to the land, whether for recreational use, conservation of land management, income generation or agricultural activities. Either way, changes to land use, especially for urban development and its transformation, will always raise controversial issues with different users and stakeholders and is inherent in its process in the way that it disrupts the environment. In addition, there will always be different perspectives and ambiguity as to whose responsibility it is to look after our land especially from a community perspective.

The relationship of natural and cultural heritage
One of the current dialogues is the ambiguity and blurring of the boundaries about the significance of natural and cultural heritage for communities. This notion from a UNESCO World Heritage Listing often separates these two areas. As World Heritage Listing was given to this region based on natural assets it should not mean that any lesser value is placed on cultural heritage.

Because of the international focus I believe that there has been a bias and that issues of cultural heritage are given less priority and recognition and reinforce people’s interpretation of the environment as referring only to the natural context.

However, cultural heritage is still an important part of environmental stewardship. There is however work in progress in advocacy and research behind the scenes that is seeking re-nomination of this region for its cultural heritage values. The context for re-nomination is based primarily on Indigenous communities and illustrates this ambiguous
and complex issue. As issues of natural and cultural conservation of sites and place based conservation is gradually becoming recognised, intangible heritage (language, stories etc) and movable heritage are now valued for their cultural significance. The different art forms and cultural forms and cultural material of Aboriginal people are often inseparable, therefore there is a need to observe both the value and significance of the natural, environmental, social and cultural relationship.

This particular issue has made state heritage agencies and UNESCO bring in new policies and conventions to address this recognition of this interrelationship. A cultural landscape approach offers an opportunity to move away from a focus on objects and sites as ends in themselves, toward managing the material record and people's cultural associations in their historical and broader landscape context. The idea of cultural landscapes is that all parts of the landscape are alive with cultural meaning, that all landscapes contain the imprint of human use, and that human and ecological history is intertwined in complex ways.

However, the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan (2009) places more emphasis on Aboriginal cultural heritage and its conservation. Somehow it does not carry equal value and promoted to the same degree of non-Indigenous cultural heritage has been addressed. Recent emphasis on interpretive work that is promoted by UNESCO is now seen in a 'cultural landscape' framework and is gradually recognising this factor. The interconnectedness between natural, built and human interactions and their multiple meanings, interpretations and cultural significance both in a historical and contemporary context are gradually converging. It is therefore important that the conservation of sites that possess both natural and cultural heritage values and significance need to be observed.

Building trust between organisations and communities

Carr (2001) in her research on rural landcare groups in Australia strongly believes the ecological alarm has sounded and rural community groups have responded with determination and creativity to local environmental crises. In addition to the key issues, there are often barriers and challenges that prevent building trust and stronger relationships between organisations and communities, and these impact on communication issues.

Climate change and global warming and their impact on bushfire management and ecological communities are two key areas of concerns for environmental managers, scientific researchers and communities in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. One of the challenges, according to one perspective by Australian environmental scientist Merson (2006), is the difficulty of identifying climate change impacts on the ecosystems of this region and this illustrates the complexity of issues in scientific research:

much of the evidence of climate change impacts on the ecosystems of the region is at the moment anecdotal, and has not been supported by adequate and systematic research.

Sharing and learning from experiences

From an ecological point of view for example, the scientific research community can learn from other World Heritage sites about eucalypt decline, dispersal and migration. This can be seen in relation to the Alpine regions of the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales, which illustrates that some species are now no longer growing in the Blue Mountains region. Some horticulturists and botanists attribute this to climatic change.

There is also evidence of the lasting impacts of the intense bushfires of 2002–03 where normal regrowth of eucalypts has not occurred in the upper Mountains region. There is evidence that other factors such as soil erosion due to drought and extreme weather conditions and soil dispersion are
having a serious impact on many vulnerable plants and hanging swamp communities.

Primarily the impacts of climate change have been noticed through observation at particular sites. This has been the case for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area where research is being compiled jointly by different scientific researchers and environmental agencies. This research is being drawn from different existing research and primary research to establish baselines and monitoring systems for this region.

Whilst governments are increasingly adopting policies that devolve their economic and environmental responsibilities, they are also lagging behind. This has placed enormous pressure on environmental stewardship community groups to assume responsibility for their local environment and gain access to information. With often limited resources at state and local levels, it impacts on the support available and action taken by agencies and local communities in environmental stewardship. But at the same time being affected by these factors, it can also generate new and innovative ways of creating strategies, methods and partnerships for encouraging more active community participation in environmental issues.

What is needed is much greater public awareness of the real costs to present and future generations for government’s failure to effectively address climate change, and the longer term loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services that are presently taken for granted. Acknowledging these limitations is an important step toward increasing the capacity of the organisation’s and community’s ability to navigate through common challenges and lead to possible joint problem solving.

**Systemic Issues**

One of the ongoing challenges is also the internal advocacy by professional staff within environmental agencies in government departments accountable
to ministers at federal level to ensure the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area region’s priorities are addressed. This creates stresses both in management and in their role in a public interface position, leaving them feeling under resourced and sometimes challenged by political issues and power structures at the Federal level of World Heritage management.

This exemplifies the cumbersome nature of the hierarchical structures, processes and layers of governance that exist. It limits the way that agencies can be responsive and not be inhibited to undertake practical, direct action and initiatives involving communities.

Those individuals in organisations who are seeking change and support on the ground in promoting and supporting community’s World Heritage values and to meet community expectations will find this frustration an ongoing challenge. This disconnection is one of the important barriers to face. With consideration to improving communication this will provide greater support on a human and financial level. This will need to be achieved to ensure the vision and responsibility of local communities and multiple stakeholders to World Heritage obligations and conventions.

[23] From personal discussions with professional staff and advocates working on World Heritage issues who chose to remain anonymous.

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
Sharing World Heritage experiences

Being part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area communities and organisations can learn from other case studies in Australia. An important example about attitudes towards World Heritage Listing is illustrated in the *Tropical Rainforests in Queensland* community survey results from 2002–03. In this particular case for example, the Australian Government’s listing of the World Heritage Area in 1998 was met with hostility from the Queensland Government and many regional communities, due to a loss of timber and other forest resources.

As part of the monitoring, a follow up survey in 2002–03 was undertaken to ensure that community views would feed into the management of the World Heritage Area. This survey illustrates the impacts of World Heritage and highlights attitudinal change in the Queensland area. Community views illustrated there was a steady increase from 1992 with 51% in strong support and 17% in opposition and resulting in a slight increase in 2003 of 58% in strong support and 12.4% opposing.

One of the key survey findings is that there is a strong recognition of the quality of life benefiting from the World Heritage area but the most important advantages related to general quality of life issues, rather than actual visits or economic benefits. One of the most interesting points is that the perceived disadvantages are declining and that less than 20% of respondents identified disadvantages associated with living in a World Heritage Area.
As the survey report states:

Residents view the World Heritage Area as an integral part of their landscape, lifestyle and community. Responses suggest a strong sense of collective ownership and responsibility.

However, the community are still concerned about on-ground management and consultation and are not satisfied with the current on-ground management. In this particular case, from a community perspective, feral pests and human activities are their greatest concerns.

The majority of residents feel consultation and communication between management agencies and the community could be improved. The majority of residents believed they were knowledgeable about the World Heritage Area, but many were unaware of its boundaries and how it is managed. Other factors highlighted were the differing roles of the Authority, and that other land management agencies were poorly understood by communities. In particular, the community gave a mixed response to the issue of Aboriginal co-management of the World Heritage Area. While 58% of residents were supportive, 42% were opposed. This case study of mixed responses reflected in this particular data, has many parallels, I believe, with attitudes that environmental agencies currently face in the Greater Blue Mountains, even though quantitative data of this kind has not been undertaken that is geo-specific to this area.

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
A values based approach to community aspirations

Generally, little comparative research has been done in Australia about community and visitor attitudes to World Heritage areas with the exception of a few geo-specific areas of study (Wet Tropics Management Authority undated).

Community consultations by Blue Mountains City Council (2004) undertaken in 2002 and 2003 to develop their strategic plan for a 25 Year Vision for the City illustrate perspectives about the aspirations of the local community and about multiple sustainable benefits that include ‘encouraging environmentally aware lifestyles, better managing the urban/bush interface’, and ‘improving decision making processes at all levels to support the achievement of a more sustainable Blue Mountains’.

The key issue is: How can environmental organisations and agencies support communities who are willing to play an active role in joint environmental stewardship? Whilst most programs that Council deliver encourage residents to be involved in bushcare or swampcare groups, they often take on the agenda and priority determined by the agency rather than the community.

This raises complex issues about the value and the ambiguity of this relationship between the community and agencies. Carr (2001) strongly argues that agencies underestimate the work volunteers undertake in these kind of environmental activities. She asserts that this is the work the
agency should be doing. Carr also claims that agencies take little
time to understand the real drivers of the community’s motivation and their
value and importance of the role of sense of place and identity in
environmental stewardship. Some swampcare initiatives by Blue Mountains
City Council have successfully involved artistic activities as an attractor
for resident’s participation. Workshops in sustainability play a role in
promoting active community participation and addressing some
issues through experiential experience, but leave little scope from a
holistic point of view for a bigger understanding of the environmental and
cultural landscape and exploring more deeply people’s values.

This highlights what environmental stewardship means and the changes or
impacts which arise as a result of the construction of people’s meaning,
perceptions and values that generate different meanings to different people.

Environmental stewardship is undoubtedly a joint responsibility. There are
also individuals, artists, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community groups,
government departments, local council or environmental agencies that will
always have an ongoing role to play in the interpretation and presentation of
World Heritage sites and values.
Local community perspectives

Despite the amount of scientific and technical research that currently exists about the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area very little is known about the local community’s perspective on World Heritage values.

As one of the key stakeholders in environmental management, Blue Mountains City Council’s branding reminds the community that this city is: ‘The City within a World Heritage National Park’ and states on their website:

\[\text{We can all contribute to achieving a more sustainable Blue Mountains in our own special way. Be an Environmental Champion – help change behavioural patterns and positively influence the environment.}\]^{24}

Understanding the diverse communities in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBWHA) and people’s connection to World Heritage values and their aspirations is critically important. Communication is a key ingredient to stimulating community participation as well as building trust. This is dependent on what information is communicated and to whom?

^{24} \text{http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sustainabliliving} – Blue Mountains City Council website. Section in Planning, Health and Environment. C r e a t i v e A r t s a s a C a t a l y s t f o r C o m m u n i t y P a r t i c i p a t i o n i n E n v i r o n m e n t a l S t e w a r d s h i p
Looking back-2000 World Heritage Listing

One of the key issues which I think is important is to reframe in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage context and how the role of environmental stewardship got tipped upside down? Originally the driving force for lobbying and advocacy behind the World Heritage Listing was from a grass roots community level (Macqueen, 2007) but now its current situation is one of a primarily top down management approach.

This point goes back in time and back to the present, as 2010 was the 10 year anniversary and celebration of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area UNESCO World Heritage Listing and marks a significant decade for environmental activists and environmental policy managers and decision makers. This significant date of 29 November 2000 for the World Heritage Listing became a turning point in the way that environmental stewardship for the Greater Blue Mountains was acknowledged and promoted to the community.

This has raised many important questions about what changes and shifts occurred from this decision by the international UNESCO World Heritage Committee and the establishment of a regional World Heritage Advisory Committee. What did this mean for environmental activists and advocates, land managers and the general community? Are there assumptions made about the acceptance and advocacy by communities about environmental stewardship in this World Heritage Area? As an important landmark it is a time for reflection to understand what impact and relevance this has had on local communities in this region.

The lead up and campaigning for the 2000 World Heritage Listing goes back further to the work started by local environmental activist and early environmental champion, Myles Dunphy nearly seventy years ago25, and his

vision. Many passionate people and local residents who were committed
environmental advocates with creative talents such as poets, musicians and photographers for example, with scientific and ecological backgrounds, continued their campaigning working towards Dunphy’s vision.

In a flashback to the period of euphoria following the World Heritage Listing announcement you will find some people comparing it to the winning of an Olympics city bid. To celebrate the announcement, 12 May 2001 was marked with much prominence as the official public occasion at the awe inspiring Echo Point in Katoomba and generated interest from local, state and federal level politicians and ministers. Community celebrations evoked great passion, and enthusiasm followed in five World Heritage areas to spread the word across the communities.

I am interested in the way that a creative art, in this case, music, was used as a social connector to link communities to the promotion of the World Heritage concept. By placing community events in local parks and outdoor shopping malls through music by a touring band and local musicians, it was strategically planned to reach the general and wider public. Appearing to be accepted with popularity at locations and events in regional communities it made its mark.

**Tackling the divide of social and cultural diversity**

Getting World Heritage Listing for over one million hectares and the recognition of its diversity and evolutionary adaptation of a hundred eucalypts and its associated ecological habitats that covers eight national parks within twelve local governments was no mean feat.

In the lead up to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listing, mixed responses arose from consultations that were held in various local government areas. Divergent views about concerns of costs, resourcing, maintaining and complying with international conventions, legislation and ongoing responsibility were not always welcomed with ease or excitement.

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*Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship*
Whilst others embraced the potential tourism and economic incentives of such a World Heritage Listing, official World Heritage articles in the convention expressed the need for World Heritage to be a function in the life of the community.\textsuperscript{26}

Perceptions and understandings varied even more so within these local communities. Diversity of social, economic and cultural demographics in each of these adjoining areas raised a range of mixed emotions and the impact on current and diverse land uses as protected areas and the way it impacted in certain geographical areas and their specific environmental concerns.

Even though at a federal level our World Heritage Listing in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was endorsed unanimously, at a local level it was a different story. There is a more complex cultural lens that organisations to consider and there is much ongoing work and that needs to be taken into account in environmental planning and management.

On this level, Australian cultural researcher, Ang’s (2008) thoughts in her discourse about new views on Australia’s diversity are relevant in this context within the dynamics of what is required to have a broader representation and stake in environmental stewardship. As Ang states:

\begin{quote}
... so integration needs to be envisaged as something other than a common culture or shared values.
\end{quote}

Ang continues in her discussion and her reference to the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz’s comments about the way complex contemporary societies operate:

.. through in-built no-sharing – divisions of labour, spatial dispersal, social segmentation, specialisation of knowledge and expertise, and the unequal distribution of social and cultural capital.

However, he establishes that it is through the 'organisation of diversity’ that requires interaction and ‘this moving interconnectedness’.

I see this as a starting point of discussion and very relevant in the way I perceive the current situation, factors and changes to the perceptions that are needed in questioning who is the community and addressing issues of social and cultural diversity needs to be considered in approaching community participation and nurturing environmental stewardship.
Taking into consideration the twelve local government areas that make up the populations and geographical area of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Listing the natural and human diversity cannot be ignored. The systemic, social and organisational differences between these local councils and diverse players cannot be dealt with using a blanket approach. It requires taking into consideration the natural landscape and cultural landscape of these areas, consulting and identifying common and differing environmental concerns and taking into account specific features and variable factors.

In this context, I have found in my current work, as Ang pointedly states:

\[\text{Communication patterns in such societies are uneven and fragmented; relationships are often superficial, fleeting and partial. In such a context, people cluster around particular perspectives, ways of managing meanings and making sense of the world. It is important to remember that perspectives can change, and that people hold several perspectives at the same time.}\]

In this respect, Ang challenges the notion of working towards shared values and emphasises the importance of ‘simply to get to know and learn from and about one another’. This is where I believe that creative based projects involved in working with local communities and environmental issues can be most effective and can facilitate this kind of opportunity along with many other levels of engagement, participation and outcomes. This perspective not only applies to the Australian diversity of people and the multicultural context. These factors also function in the dynamics that can be applied in an approach working with people and organisations and understanding different perspectives on environmental issues.
As Ang concludes in her article:

there is no perfect way but only ways of juggling multiple, often competing truths and realities, and imperfectly reconciling divergent interests and perspectives.

Contrary to common perception that World Heritage Listing was positively embraced wholeheartedly by the local communities, it has raised issues of social and cultural disparities in terms of access to information and education about the World Heritage concept and its values.

Different expectations have been also raised about the limited capacity and role of the Federal Government to assist at a local level in funding and resourcing to designated World Heritage areas in Australia and the tendency to see it purely as an economic driver to attract tourism. However the ongoing dialogue and discussion about compatible agendas and the managing pressures of protection to minimise environmental impacts by visitors is still unresolved in some World Heritage areas.

The current issue of climate change, for example, and the various sources and credibility of information have shifted our thinking and challenged our lifestyle. Debates are inevitably complex, involving many stakeholders at many levels from a civic or governmental perspective and highlight how these issues can be divisive. Questions by climate sceptics regarding whether climate change is happening, at what level and to whom, are highlighting the best ways to address this global problem.
Currently, on an international level, these poignant issues about the growing importance and role community participation can play are being questioned and challenged within the environmental sector. How effective and what impact can communities play in environmental stewardship and what is their role in decision making?

There are many layers of decision making from international, federal, state, regional and local level in World Heritage management that make up the whole cycle in the way the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area is managed and monitored.

In addition, there are a number of plans that have been developed as necessary for different aspects in management that sometimes are fragmented. These rarely dovetail which makes the aspect of coordination, resources and collaboration an arduous task, not only with specific plans such as The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Strategic Plan (DECCW 2010), but also with the number of specific management plans for each site and the bushfire management plans required at state and local level.

**Who Cares About The Environment Report**

The recent report *Who Cares about the Environment?* (DECCW 2010) provides a useful resource which surveys NSW people"s environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and canvasses some new issues. Its purpose is to provide information to all sectors to help in identifying priorities, and developing, targeting and evaluating policy and programs. In addition, it designed to promote discussion and awareness of the social dimension of environmental protection and sustainability initiatives and the value of underpinning social research.
The research assists in identifying gaps in community knowledge and development of education programs. The problem here, however, is the way that community knowledge is interpreted and used in this context. It becomes a useful tool for developing knowledge and information on specific topics of the environment the community needs to know, and defining what the agency needs to tell the community.

Obviously it is a circular feedback mechanism. The findings of the survey on analysis are reductionist in method in the fact that they follow the traditional market research model in grouping people and their views in three main categories (the committed, the privates and the reluctant)\(^2\), and therefore it has its limitations.

One of the key findings of the main communication methods through which people received environmental information was that it was through the internet and through written material in brochures, magazines and newspapers.

This raises for me important issues of differences in social demographics and cultural factors and the different forms of marketing, promotion and distribution of information. There is much scope for advocacy work that is needed in the recognition of the multiple identities of people that are often not neatly packaged in boxes in terms of people’s values.

Often there is a lack of inclusion in data of certain social and demographic perspectives. More consideration needs to be given to promotional strategies when seeking involvement, and to not only use conventional methods and communication channels.

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\(^2\) The details of each of these categories can be found in the PowerPoint seminar presentations as part of the *Who Cares about the Environment Survey?* and report. See [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/community/2010533_WHoCares09seminars.pdf](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/community/2010533_WHoCares09seminars.pdf)
To stimulate new perspectives and involvement to attract those people outside of environmental networks and information is just as critically important. Utilising informal methods of promotion and community networking to reach others in the community, who are not affiliated to formal networks, community or social infrastructure, nor have access to technology and information, can be a real community and information asset.

Despite this the report does reveal some general views in that the environment remains a high priority for people now and in the future and comments that ‘there has been a marked growth in people’s knowledge and concerns specifically about climate change ...’

This 2009 research also ‘explores people’s understanding of environment, sustainability and other associated concepts in more depth, and it examines the motivations, triggers and barriers people have to adopting friendly behaviour’.

The launch of this report was followed by seminar presentations held across NSW regional areas to disseminate and discuss research. The report highlights how it remains in the top five issues for the NSW Government and that water related issues and climate change were the most prominent concerns of people. Some of the specific things which were also raised as important were for increased general education or community awareness, more money for research for environmental issues, listening to stakeholders, better consultation, and to make environmental issues a priority for action.
**Data from the report**

One of the interesting facts stated in this report relates to the issue of reliability of information sources in that more people were uncertain about their reliability than in 2003 when the last survey was conducted. However, environmental and conservation groups (national and local), scientists/technical specialists and schools were regarded as reliable by more than 80% of respondents, although all are at lower levels in 2003 (decline of 2–7%).

It continues to state:

*The only sources reliable by more than half of the respondents that maintained a degree of confidence they had in 2003 were local councils (71%) and government departments or agencies (64%). These figures were also dependent on particular segments of the community and there was still a lot of variation within each of these. For example that more university graduates and students trusted government departments and agencies than those in rural areas and retirees.*

This point illustrates that the responsibility these agencies and organisations have to disseminate information is quite high and is dependent on the communication methods that they use to reach different parts of communities effectively. Some of the other relevant key findings are that there was an increase in the number of people visiting national parks and 70% agreed that there should be greater involvement of Aboriginal people in management and conservation of the environment. In terms of engagement qualitative research in this survey suggested that interaction with the natural environment triggers concern, that regional participants in the survey tended to be more passionate and engaged and an interest or concern stemmed from involvement in outdoor activities.
Creative arts as a new path for communication

*Nature Through Fresh Eyes (See Appendix 2)*, was the first project that was undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in 2006. As a pilot project is was to explore the potential of experiential and participatory approaches with local communities was very revealing in its outcomes about understanding communities and environmental stewardship. One example from a participant from this project is the experience of a young refugee from Ghana who had only been living in the Blue Mountains for five months. She was supported by her sponsor to explore lots of places. She enthusiastically expressed her feelings through her involvement in this creative arts project using a paintbrush for the first time.

Besides sharing her visual expression and comparative feelings about Australia and her home country she expresses:

> Living in a World Heritage Area makes me feel good. Being involved in the project made me see things differently and appreciate nature.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{26}\) *Nature Through Fresh Eyes*, a partnership project undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in 2006. This enviro-cultural project for multicultural residents with artists and Aboriginal interpretive guides involved workshops, bushwalks, exhibition and video documentation.
Watercolour painting on rice paper by Abiba produced after the interpretive walk in an arts workshop for Nature through Fresh Eyes project (2006)

Sasparilla is good for people to use to making a tea and if you drink it is good for stomach pain. If you were in my home country, Ghana, we use some of these leaves to make a medicine. We use some tree like this one, mahogany, mango trees and lemon leaves and mix them together and cook and drink it. You are okay and strong.

Abiba, originally from Ghana

Another interesting example is illustrated in a cross cultural perspective from a community story in Branching Out 2: Stories from the Blue Mountains, the on-line exhibition.27 An elderly Chilean woman when interviewed by

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the community curatorium member who was the researcher about her associations with World Heritage values gave a surprising response. She admitted that she thought eucalyptus trees were only found in Chile and was comforted when she migrated to Australia and settled in the Blue Mountains about smelling a familiar aroma. It made her reminisce about her grandmothers traditions of burning gum leaves for medicinal purposes in Chile.

These kind of cross cultural perspectives highlights the level in which organisations have not even contemplated fully in Australia and the importance of sharing this cultural knowledge and its transferral of knowledge building across global borders.

As cultural production through storytelling can play a key role through creative arts based projects with communities it allows communities to explore and develop their own positions and perspectives on environmental issues through this artform and process.

One interesting perspective from a local resident who was also an artist was revealed when she commented to me in a workshop that she was a custodian of the environment years before it got World Heritage listing. It appeared to her that the label did not make any difference to her connection and the way she lived her lifestyle. This is also despite her experiencing severe bushfires during which her property was threatened. Her strong connection to sense of place was still to return and stay there like her parents before her, due to her emotional connection with, and love for, the bush.

Attachment to place is culturally and socially defined. Just as one’s own perceptions of place are dependent upon one’s own experience and memories, so attachment to place is influenced by our culture. (Carr, 2002)
I have found in these research projects a similarity to observations that Carr advocates that ‘a sense of community contributes a deal to concerted participative action by local groups’.

As she experienced through her extensive research and working with landcare groups in Australia, for example, she identified that environmental stewardship was critical to their success. She continues to state that ‘sense of community arises out of the fulfilment...of membership, influence, emotional connection and reinforcement of needs’.

Both environmental stewardship and World Heritage values can remain abstract concepts for many individuals unless they are able to connect emotionally or have direct experiences, or a specific environmental issue affects them and allows them to reflect on this in their own lives.

*It feels great to live in a World Heritage area. It's like I have woken up from a deep sleep.*

Local male resident, age 13

As illustrated, creative arts based approaches and cultural research can provide another option from the more traditional approaches of community participation to explore and promote environmental stewardship. Through the processes and methods their ability to tap into a deeper understanding of people’s motivation and learning, cultural and social values and behaviour, are critical to understanding a specific issue.

As the World Heritage Listing includes eight national parks there is a big question about the end usage of national parks generally, but especially by people of different cultural backgrounds and their values and connections to the Australian natural environment. The only detailed research Thomas

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28 This quote was collected by the participant through the *Nature Through Fresh Eyes* project, a partnership project undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in 2006. This project was a pilot project and the first type of this project undertaken with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute to explore participatory processes.
(Martin), 2001 and Thomas (Mandy), 2002 that has focused on this issue is about national parks in other geographical areas. However this is significant primary research with interviews and stories. This sheds light in the way that organisations need to shift our thinking to be more culturally inclusive. This comprehensive insight into the Vietnamese and Macedonian community’s experience highlights how existing cultural values play an important factor in influencing this connection or lack of connection to national parks.

More recently, models such as co-management with local Aboriginal community groups and local councils and National Parks are a good example. This kind of approach provides a new way forward in collaborative learning and sharing and seeks to improve communication and consultation methods to ensure that cultural specific issues and community knowledge are part of the decision making process.

This is a good starting point and process and in some cases Aboriginal managers are employed to assist in this implementation. But it is also part of the process of lifelong learning and the experiential nature of this kind of approach. This approach signals that a good flow of information, communication and responsiveness by organisations is understood. This is especially in terms of respecting community knowledge and acknowledging feedback when required to understand issues, community expectations and aspirations.

→ This is the case with Blue Mountains City Council and the local Aboriginal community and Gully Traditional Owners and their agreement with the declared Aboriginal place in Katoomba. Also, federal funding is available that supports National Parks initiatives with Caring for our Country and Living Country programs in co-management with local Aboriginal communities with a dedicated Aboriginal co-manager at regional level and employment of Aboriginal land managers and interpretive guides at a public interface.
From a community development point of view there are many facets that can be achieved in the way this kind of approach can be facilitated. There are opportunities to be explored for using creative means to nurture environmental stewardship and custodianship and what it can achieve. This can sometimes lead to building stronger community networks, income generation and employment through artistic and tourism opportunities for both Aboriginal artists and local Aboriginal people.

The geographical area of the Blue Mountains in which I have been working, though historically not well known for its multicultural heritage (though this could be misleading due to fragmentation and the lack of archival material and undocumented and invisible histories) has a growing culturally diverse population.

Professionally as a cultural worker in The Blue Mountains area when I design creative arts projects exploring environmental issues with local communities the aim is to increase access, equity and participation in projects. This is often done by promoting to culturally diverse residents by accessing them through partner organisations such as neighbourhood and community centres, multicultural networks and through word of mouth and social networking.

However, within the spread across the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage areas the Aboriginal population is quite significant even within the Blue Mountains region.

30This is based on my experience at a local level with several NAIDOC Week art exhibitions and from working with local Aboriginal artists and Elders and the local community in sharing knowledge through different artworks and language groups about different and similar motifs. In addition came the formation of a Blue Mountains Aboriginal Artists group, the Marra Mob, after NAIDOC Week art exhibition in 2006. The Marra Mob comprises local Aboriginal artists who generate commissions, merchandise and income from their artistic works while increasing their professional skills, especially in business.
Aboriginal culture is reinforced especially in its relationship to environmental stewardship. This also reinforced by National Parks Aboriginal Co-Management’s *Place Stories* digital storytelling project that brings personal stories and perspectives to the wider community. This project records the cultural maps and stories from the local Aboriginal communities.

This implies that if real environmental stewardship is to be promoted this constituency has an important part to play. Special programs and initiatives supported by federal funding such as *Caring for Our Country* and *Living Country* for example which supports models of co-management with National Parks and Aboriginal communities and promotes Aboriginal people’s connection to country.

It is often through creative based initiatives with participation in cultural camps and cultural activities and sharing of cultural knowledge, skills and practices that the important role that artistic and cultural expression plays in then uses this creative form to share through technology the stories of connection to country and environmental stewardship and custodianship.

This is where the nexus of culture in its broadest sense of its meaning and the use of creative based arts approaches and cultural production have been most prominent. In a cultural context, these kinds of methods are far more effective. Used nationally they reconnect Aboriginal people to country and help them explore their sense of place, identity and culture that is so embedded in their relationship to the land and this can assist in informing environmental policy and decision making. This can be the case for not only rural and regional Aboriginal communities but also urban communities and the way artists have responded and depicted their perspectives of their world.

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31 See [http://ps3beta.com/project/7626](http://ps3beta.com/project/7626) *Connecting to Country – GBW HA Cultural Values*, 4 May 2010 by Digital Landcare, for Place Stories and to view footage of Aboriginal communities from the Greater Blue World Heritage Area and their views, associations and values to connection to country.
Conclusion

As a cultural worker with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute involved in number of creative based projects based on the natural and urban aspects it has given me a unique insight. Working with local communities in the Blue Mountains World Heritage area I have witnessed creative arts to be a dynamic catalyst to attract new participants in the community through workshops about environmental issues and stimulating community dialogue to promote environmental stewardship.

Nurturing environmental stewardship through creative arts initiatives can generate new data and primary research. It can be also can generate research and information in understanding people’s values, especially when designing projects in an intergenerational and cross cultural context. As there are very few opportunities available for active participation in experiential and immersive experiences new opportunities can be created to tap into different knowledge bases and people with different interests and expertise.

It is important to understand the issues of World Heritage values and their relation to environmental stewardship and how creative arts can be utilised in this context. It is inevitable to understand how they are inseparable and how they play out in terms of management and community participation. In this respect it has been important to look at the factors that contribute to people's understanding. This is how the emotional connection and associations in caring for our land now and for future generations could be stimulated through environmental stewardship.

The notion of environmental stewardship and the appreciation and understanding of World Heritage values by people is not a given. It is something that needs to be nurtured and ownership gained by communities so that they understand more fully why community participation is so important.
Community development is also a key aspect of developing environmental stewardship. Building relationships, trust and community and how they are inherent in the kind of support and advocacy that they are seeking from communities are factors which are important for organisations to consider.

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBWHA), which includes the Blue Mountains region, presents the real challenges on the ground in the amount of time it can take to nurture and build trust, and act as broker in nurturing environmental stewardship. The issues of what approaches, processes and mechanisms that organisations use to nurture environmental stewardship in this region can sometimes become a deterrent if there is not a level of trust.

This often decreases the level of community input for future consultations and their connection to environmental stewardship. This is often disillusioning for people active in issues that impact on them locally and their livelihood and who have invested their time to participate. They oscillate between maintaining their integrity, vision and aspirations, and finding authorities with different priorities and ideas that challenge their sense and role in environmental stewardship. To explore what scope there is for a more equitable part for local communities to play in environmental responsibility and stewardship becomes an important challenge in this World Heritage area.

This adds to the complexity of how effective organisations can be in response to community concerns and participation in environmental advocacy and management of specific issues. Sometimes interventions are required as part of this process can lead to increased community participation. This may be introduced to provide more productive outcomes and mutual benefits to address environmental issues and problem solving.

Collaborative learning and information sharing that is more accessible to people working on different levels towards environmental stewardship can address the fragmentation and lack of cohesiveness that can exist within and
between organisations and in the community.

As growing community concern increases about current environmental challenges and threats from global warming, climate change and bushfires and their impact on this region, it is a critical time to re-evaluate the role of community participation and environmental stewardship. This inevitably raises the important issue of the work required by organisations to support and build our communities in this region and at what level and role they can play working together in joint environmental responsibility and stewardship.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations should be adopted to review policies, strategies and processes within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and its partners organisations including environmental agencies to improve communication and ensure greater opportunities for community participation:

- **Organisations should reach a wider public through identifying existing environmental advocates in the community. Through building of these relationships and access to these networks promotion of these champions can be used to attract new advocates of environmental stewardship and cultivate new ambassadors.**

- Organisations should identify and utilise a range of different communication methods such as creative based arts approaches to explore new means of cultural expression and communication to reach a broader public through active participation and experiential experience.

- Organisations should ensure that social and cultural diversity are factors taken into consideration to reflect the broader representation of the community and in public forums and community consultations.
By increasing opportunities for greater community participation it will reflect better the diversity of perspectives and experiences to in for future environmental planning. Despite community perceptions may sometimes differ from the environmental agencies on particular issues and there is always a number of opinions it does assist in understanding the behaviour and values within those communities. This continues to building upon the necessary work of promoting World Heritage values in the Greater Blue Mountains at a wider level and promoting environmental stewardship.
3. Creativity and Environmental Stewardship in New Knowledge Making

Article 1:

Swampcare community project – linoprints mounted as collaborative project for raising community environmental awareness ready to hang in shopwindow in Katoomba for WinterMagic Festival.
Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo

It is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies, and through sharing creativity that understanding is promoted.

(Matarasso, 1997)
Abstract

This article is of interest to cultural practitioners and environmental decision makers who are seeking to build environmental awareness and knowledge between communities and organisations. The combination of using a creative arts based and adaptation and landscape based conservation approaches together to work towards a more integrated approach and innovative pathway to for environmental managers and policymakers.

This article also includes an overview of case studies of art projects undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute which provides insights to a a new approach looking at the benefits and outcomes of projects that could be a potential model for that can be applied on a local, national and international level.

(Note: This article was developed as the basis for a power point presentation and paper by the author that was delivered and published for the 2006 ANZSYS Conference on The Value of Community Participation held at the Carrington Hotel, Katoomba).

Introduction

Arts as a mediator for environmental advocacy

Art, in particular a visual medium, has played an important role in society and been used in cultures around the world as a form of communication for thousands of years. It has played an important function for humanity and its survival. It was used to document the world and connect communities and transfer information and knowledge. It represented complex social systems and reflected interpretations of the world seen through people’s experiences and emotions and was often translated through the human hand. Often though, it was not the single artist’s view but a communal representation.

Creative based arts practice with community based environmental management processes are creating new approaches toward playing a role in Australia’s sustainability that reconnections people trying to tackle common issues and sharing experiences to create community dialogue on a local level.
What has changed over time that has disconnected us from these kinds of fundamental connections with our world and the sense of community?

There are numerous factors which have, over time, resulted in our lack of connection to the natural world where daily life was previously so intertwined and interconnected in this way. As the world has progressed socially, politically and economically, knowledge systems have been developed that have created structures that shift the balance of social and human interaction and dynamics, not only in access to information and transfer of knowledge, but in access to power and resources.

**Systems and landscape based conservation approaches**

Current environmental research plays much emphasis on a systems based approach to conservation (Merson et al 2012). This acknowledges that nature is dynamic and so is the relationship with human activities and their interventions and the way they use and interact with the land. Also important is a landscape based conservation approach (Merson et al 2012) which works towards taking into account the whole landscape not only from an environmental perspective but on a social, psychological and political level. This then opens up a complex web of understanding the diverse perspectives, multiple uses and interpretations and connections with the land of local communities for both recreation and for people’s livelihood.

**Communications and communities**

In contemporary times, people’s attitude and values to environmental issues and perceptions of major environmental crisis are shaped by media communication. People are moving more into a communication era of intense bombardment of different types of media available to gain and distribute information through technology. As people are using technology more in their daily lives, the digital age is even more challenging both in its use and management.

Television and print media also still plays a dominant role in the way world views and values are represented. They reinforce the perception that people should look towards ‘authorities’ to be leaders (such as the current
Government), to be the solution for social, economic and environmental solutions especially in troubled times of a global financial crisis. As a result, there is much frustration and disappointment in community expectations and perceptions of authority and credibility are shifting.

However the situation that exists reflects more that social and economic systems that have been created in our society are so unwieldy that they are unable to respond adequately to the current economic crisis as well as the burgeoning environmental crisis. With certain existing structures it raises the issue of their ability to adapt to rapid changing factors and conditions and our survival. It questions how this impacts on a community and society in the way that problem solving is approached and the complexity of issues.

This is forcing society to look at new models for more innovative approaches and ways of communicating and problem solving to reconnect people and communities. These kinds of approaches bring the human element and local experiences back to playing a role in finding solutions. They can provide more flexibility for responding to critical and core issues for improving community wellbeing. However what needs to be questioned is how responsive and valued are local communities by government and environmental authorities?

As Diamond (2005) asks, `will modern technology solve our problems, or is it creating new problems faster than it solves old ones?`

This question by Diamond raises quite a dilemma for society. However, whilst there are vast differences between past and present societies people and organisations can still learn from the past to consider our future.
The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and its creative arts approach

As an independent entity in NSW established in 2005, the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) set a new benchmark for interdisciplinary research and collaboration in environmental research and conservation of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It also took the lead in innovation to explore the potential for utilising creative arts to engage communities in active participation and creating experiential projects. This was the key approach to the development of the community engagement program of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute between 2006-2011 managed by a community cultural development position.

This inaugural position of the Cultural Development Worker was funded by the Australia Council for the Arts with seed funding for projects.

Projects were designed that included arts and non arts participants and people from scientific and environmental experience, backgrounds and skills e.g. Swampcare (2005), Rock Art Lives On!(2006) and partnership project such as Nature Through Fresh Eyes (2006) and the, Seasons Greetings (2007). All projects were conducted in the Blue Mountains and are illustrated and discussed further in this article as examples of the creative arts based approach and the specific outcomes of the project.

This particular approach using community cultural development processes also gave local communities the opportunity to work with professional artists to explore specific issues and values through sharing of ideas and skills exchange using artistic and cultural expression. This can range from developing not only artistic skills but also social skills in verbal and non-verbal communication, negotiation and listening skills, information sharing, social networking and learning skills in technology. More importantly, it provided a vehicle to stimulate intergenerational, cross cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue in research projects.
Political shifts in community arts

Building on some of the field work and documentation of Australian projects by Mills and Brown (2004) in community cultural development this article will discuss this in the relationship of this practice to address environmental issues. Their survey presented new perspectives on community cultural development practice and its evolvement and application in other non-arts contexts and the many levels in which this particular framework operates.

Community arts grew out of the 1960s on the assumption that communities who were unskilled could learn new skills by working with experts such as professional artists, in an unequal relationship. Often this was used for social and political activism. In the 1980s it was no longer an appropriate concept. It began being referred to as ‘community cultural development’, suggesting a more two-way relationship and a skills exchange. This term also implied a more strategic approach and consideration embedding both short and longer term skills and benefits enabling more scope for community capacity building. With this more collaborative approach it created a more equitable relationship with the role of the artist and working with communities (Gerrand, 2002).

Some of the problematic areas for community based arts practice in Australia are related to some of the difficulty within the arts sector, especially on a federal arts funding level, of being able to define this practice in a changing global environment and society. This means that the role and range of skills of a cultural worker such as myself is constantly shifting. This has been the case in Australia where it has reached a critical point where ‘community arts’ (as it was previously termed) has had to reinvent itself. The social value in a current political and funding climate forces a new language and descriptor.

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32 This comment also reflects the recent shifts in political and strategic thinking on arts funding and the scoping study undertaken in the transition in the Australia Council for the Arts from Community Cultural Development Board to ‘Community Partnerships’ Board in 2006.
The new philosophical and political positioning places this practice under the Australia Council’s Division of ‘Community Partnerships’. This term ‘community partnerships’ however is also gaining much currency across different sectors at local, State and Federal levels.
Case Study: Swampcare Project

Background and Methodology

Art workshops were organised over six weeks by the Community Engagement Coordinator after an approach by a community member who was passionate to raise awareness about the endangered giant dragonfly. Expressions of interest from the community and through the groups' network a group of eight residents of the Blue Mountains worked together with local aboriginal artist/tutor Kim Mooney to teach them to design, cut and print a series of lino prints on the Giant dragonfly and its habitat. Various sources of scientific information and visuals were used which also included a talk by scientific researcher and giant dragonfly specialist.

Public outcomes

By participatory research through observation and visual journals that were used by participants and verbal debriefings there were several outcomes and benefits. Sharing and exchanging information and skills and through peer to peer learning the group gained much in deepening the understanding of the species. The photograph below shows the one of the three mounted displays ready to display in the shop front window for Winter Magic Festival in Katoomba, 2006.
Completing mounting of group’s collaborative work of lino prints.

Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo

Whilst there have been examples in Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute past community engagement projects, since its inception in 2005 in working towards increasing community participatory processes, it has been complementary in working towards the integration of scientific research and building knowledge production.

The most challenging question within this context is: Can creative based projects be another form of cultural research that can sit side by side scientific research?
Australian academics and cultural practitioners, Smith and Dean (2009) clearly articulate:

the problematic nature of conventional definitions of research, which are underpinned by the fundamental philosophical quandary as to what constitutes ‘knowledge’.

They state the OECD\(^\text{32}\) definition:

Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications.

The move towards experiential learning and knowledge through creative arts or practice-led research especially in academic and university contexts is a growing trend. However there is also a critical need for advocacy both within and outside of organisations to increase the understanding of the important value and quality of knowledge that is produced, and its application in a broader context than the arts.

As Barrett (2009) explains:

... there are important views about what constitutes useful and robust research and that there are various approaches to problem-based learning. They share a number of common features such as the involvement of learner-centred activity driven by real-world problems or challenges a learner to actively engage in finding a solution.

\(^{32}\) OECD stands for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
Barrett further acknowledges that:

*An elaboration of the subjective nature of the artistic research process can also be found in the principles of problem or action-based learning. A basic premise of such pedagogies is that knowledge is generated through action and reflection.*

Barrett’s reference also to Kolb’s ideas (1984) is that the experiential approach starts from one’s own lived experience and personal reactions. This emphasises that this approach acknowledges ‘that we cannot separate knowledge to be learned from situations in which it is used’.

This is reinforced as a result of experiences in regional NSW, and Australian environmental scientist, Curtis, strongly believes:

*that the visual and performing arts could enhance the educative experience, by helping to transmit information, creating a memorable moment so that information is easily recalled, and by associating the environment with pleasurable feelings so people would be motivated to act and conserve (the environment).* (Curtis 2007)

As illustrated through the following case studies, a community based arts practice approach is an important vehicle for the community to experience artmaking and learning skills in different art forms. It provides the catalyst to explore people’s issues of World Heritage values, sense of place and their relationship to environmental stewardship. It also offers the opportunity to integrate community development processes outcomes such as collaborative ideas, teamwork, social networking, community building and social capacity building with information and creative skills exchange. These all provide the foundation for more engaging and personal involvement from different sections of the community on an interdisciplinary and intergenerational level and by increasing connections between people.
Youth Week – Making Our Mark community project for Aboriginal youth and mentoring of local Aboriginal artists as tutors. Photo Cheryle Yin-Lo

Case Study - Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project

One of the key examples that illustrate the potential in this area was in a partnership project Nature Through Fresh Eyes. This was my opportunity to broker my first community based arts project with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute as part of my role as Community Development worker in 2006. It was initiated by a local Korean resident and member of the volunteer-managed Blue Mountains Multicultural Residents Association. This project was managed by a working committee comprising professionals and community people who met regularly in planning and delivering the project, and incorporated a mentoring component.

The partnership then developed further to including other organisations and stakeholders such as the local community centre and the Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group, and was supported by a number of arts funding sources from local, state and federal level governments.
Project Objectives

Developing this cross cultural environmental project was a key initiative to explore World Heritage values based on the Korean resident’s own experience as a migrant to Australia. The aim was to arouse people’s curiosity, increase the understanding of the Australian natural environment, in particular the bush, and dispel its myths. In tandem, this project also provided an opportunity to break the identified social isolation of first and second generation residents from different cultural backgrounds living in the Blue Mountains. This project ran over a six month period and involved approximately fifty people and their families from over twenty different countries in emerging and established communities.

Methodological approach

Five bushwalks for residents and their families meeting local Aboriginal interpretive guides and arts tutors (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) were organised in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The meeting of these people from different cultures and learning of Aboriginal culture was a rare event in acknowledging the „invisible” cultural diversity of the Blue Mountains and the participants” response from a cross cultural perspective.

Through an immersive approach involving bushwalks, accompanied by the local Aboriginal guides and mobile artist tutors, participants were supplied with art materials, visual diaries and disposable cameras to record and document their experiences.

Further art workshops were held indoors with art tutors to assist community participants to translate their responses and extend the ideas generated in their visual diaries into recorded experiences. Then there was the opportunity for participants to explore the materiality of art media using drawing and painting materials and freshly ground ochres which were then translated to small individual canvasses. These grouped together then produced a collaborative group mural which, when mounted in addition to
two larger group murals, was also completed for public showing in culmination of the project.

Benefits and outcomes of the project
An important component of the community development aspect in community based arts projects was the opportunity for mentoring for the Korean resident, working closely with me as cultural worker to transfer skills in project planning and project management. This provided a skills exchange that set the precedent for the future for social and community capacity building. This later led to expanding paid employment opportunities for this particular community participant. It provided the context for collaborative and experiential learning that is a key outcome that can be generated using this kind of community cultural development approach.

Community feedback
Research and evaluation was conducted before, during and after the project and also used the tool of the visual diaries and meetings for feedback on issues arising. Participants and project partners were able to gather feedback, findings and monitor any changes in perceptions and attitude throughout the project. One of the evaluation methods used involved a participants feedback survey devised by VicHealth for evaluating community projects.

As often experienced in these projects there are both tangible and intangible outcomes and impacts of change that occur, some even after the project is completed, which are difficult to track and monitor.

Debriefing of the project revealed that it was an ambitious project but it undoubtedly left lasting impressions, longer term social bondings and rich rewards on many levels for both the community participants and the project

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partners. The main investment in time through community participation and the high level of human resources required in logistics of the project were also factors that were acknowledged.

Key comments also expressed were for the need for a permanent and dedicated space for this kind of communal activity and workshops to address the ongoing high interest from participants. These issues was raised as existing community spaces were in high demand and sometimes difficult to obtain to fit within a project time frame and the community’s availability.

**Documentation and distribution**

A video was made documenting the project and then transferred to a DVD format. This was generated as new material and copies distributed to all local branches of the local network as they had a longer shelf life so as to increase access to a wider and broader audience.

This was used as informative data and evaluation material in addition to the completed visual works. Quotes and written texts by community participants to accompany artworks were collected and revealed people’s associations and values about place, including comparisons to Australia and their home country, their experiences living in a World Heritage Area and their bushfire experiences. Comments from their experience and their participation in the project ranged from ‘exhilaration’ to overcoming their ‘fear and mystery of the bush’.
The transformative aspect of this particular project for participant Kyung-Mi, born in Korea, aptly expresses her emotional experience which then led her to further formal studies in environmental studies:

*When I emigrated from Korea I hardly noticed the shake of my inner spirit despite not being able to form a single sentence in English. However, when I moved from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, the real journey started. I was simply lost in connecting myself to the land and its surrounding environment.*
Three Sisters
Acrylic on canvas

Kyung-mi Cho, Korean resident and community participant in Nature Through Fresh eyes project (2006)

Full version and quotes by other community participants from this project can be found in Appendix 1 of this portfolio.

Written surveys conducted after the project indicated that there was an increased understanding of their immediate environment, increased social skills and confidence and that new friends had been made. This project also created interest for participants wanting to participate in future projects and created local employment and increased confidence to work cross culturally.

Qualitative responses were collated from surveys conducted of participants, including one from an Iraqi refugee and migrant which confirmed that through this project she reconnected herself with her arts practice. She had previously been a well known artist in her country but found she stopped making art when making the transition to settling in Australia.

Another participant, a refugee from Ghana, tried painting with a paintbrush as an art medium for the first time and enjoyed the experience. Her visual expressions were about making comparisons with home and Australia, and about the Australian flora she discovered on the bush walks and the scents
and similar plants used for medicinal purposes. Some visual works also incorporated poems and words from other languages and the opportunity for participants to reconnect with their mother tongue when making reflections about the environment.

_Bundeluk, Darug interpretive guide with two multicultural residents from Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project (2006)._  

The culmination of this project was the mounting of an exhibition at the local civic centre with artworks by participants (both adult and children) which was visited by over 700 people (including the exhibition launch). Interest was also generated by other organisations such as the local government’s environmental education officer who created new opportunities by showing the portable works at environmental events targeted at the wider community in different locations in the Blue Mountains.

Wider distribution both in the physical and digital form meant that this body of work from the project had opportunities to be shown to the local government sector at a state conference in one of the local major hotels. It also reached another dimension of national audience distribution when SBS TV expressed interest and came to film the project subsequently using it as a segment for their show in their program series, _Here Comes the Neighbourhood_. This was a highlight which demonstrated that through one
community based arts project had the ability to reach a broader audience and to promote World Heritage values and environmental stewardship with multicultural perspectives in a positive way.

As defined in this research project, utilising creative based arts practice through different art forms can be the catalyst for individuals and communities to explore cultural expression and an individual's underpinning values. It provides the vehicle for collaboration, social inclusiveness, community building, exploring a community’s cultural, individual and collective identity, attitudes and values.

**Shaping our world**

Using creative arts and in particular visual arts as a means to share and represent the awe inspiring Australian natural landscape and its interpretation is not new. As Carr (2002) states in her groundbreaking comprehensive study and analysis working with Landcare groups in Australia, the environment has been used as metaphor over time.

*The environment as metaphor is a rich source of inspiration*  
... Some landscape geologists and geographers writing from the 1930s through to the 1970s was the belief that landscape, like the environment, is recognised as an important but fundamentally ambiguous term which may be read in a variety of different ways at different times and places and for different purposes by different people.*
Background-Aboriginal Rock Art and its significance

The significant Aboriginal rock art in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area marked by hands thousands of years ago has played, and continues to play, an important social and cultural role in the region, in particular in the role of mapping country in research and documentation depicting the holistic interrelationship between human and natural ecosystems through cultural information, knowledge and places of significance.

Research undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute highlighted the significant importance of Aboriginal rock art depictions from the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It is an important old visual art form in storytelling and knowledge and cultural production from a range of levels and from a scientific and creative arts research perspective and is a testament to the continuous community connections.

As documented, the term 'Country' means more than just the land, as culture, nature and the land are all linked. People’s lives and spirituality are linked to the land and to custodial relationships. Aboriginal connections to Country involve cultural practices, families, communities, knowledge and learning of songs, stories, art, tracks, places, landforms, plants and convey natural forms. Through these drawings a few specific animal species can be identified and these tell us a lot about past ecosystem conditions, the distribution and abundance and diversity species and the complex web of interrelationships between species. With this information, sometimes new ecological questions are raised.

33 Mapping Country was a project undertaken by Shaun Hooper and Dr John Merson for the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute. It involved Indigenous cultural mapping within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area documenting social, cultural, environmental and land use connections.

34This cultural information was developed for a poster as an outcome of the Australian Research Council grant for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Ecosystems Project undertaken from 2006–09 with a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners.

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Case Study- Rock Art Lives On!

Background

*Rock Art Lives On!* (2006) was an exhibition curated by the author as part of the Community Engagement Program of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute. This new cultural material developed for this exhibition comprised of community interviews with the local Aboriginal community and Elders, archaeological photographs by non-Aboriginal rock art specialists and ecologists and new contemporary paintings that were commissioned by Aboriginal artists living in the Blue Mountains, and interviews and text panels, reflected an important milestone in sharing knowledge. It was displayed during the 2006 Blue Mountains Music Festival at Katoomba Public School and funded by Blue Mountains City Council Cultural Partnerships Program.

*Commissioned artwork by Graham Davis King from the exhibition, Rock Art Lives On! (2006). Photo Cheryle Yin -Lo*
Visuals inspired by rock art in the Greater Blue Mountains area and information were displayed with the voices and views of Aboriginal Elders, rock art specialists, archaeologists and contemporary Aboriginal artists as a way of sharing cultural heritage and contemporary interpretations and their connection to country and the rock art. Bringing the stories and cultural material and knowledge to a creative and cultural space that was available for public viewing at the Blue Mountains Music Festival was a rare event. It provided the neutral ground for the emotional realisation that this knowledge could be shared collaboratively with the Aboriginal and non Aboriginal community.


*Photo by Cheryle Yin-Lo*
This assisted in slowly dissolving previous tensions and improved relationships both on a physical and a spiritual level between language groups and the archaeologists, and raised and challenged the politics and issues of gender, power, who is the expert, and what and who was able to share cultural knowledge. In this case, visual and oral storytelling provided an important means from Aboriginal communities, archaeologists and rock art specialists to combine knowledge bases. However, there are some restrictions regarding some knowledge and stories and who can have access to them. These exceptions can relate to access physical access issues to some specific sacred sites and spiritual and kinship connections and cultural protocols such as gender issues.

Case study-Seasons Greetings

Another example of a successful partnership project was Seasons Greetings. This was in collaboration with the in which Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute local Aboriginal community and the Blue Mountains Aboriginal Cultural Resource Centre, Shiney Pictures (a local video company), Blue Mountains City Council and National Parks and Wildlife to support the documentation and interpretation of the seasons in the Blue Mountains. This was accomplished through a range of investigative activities of bushwalks, visual journals, photography and video and cultural camps, digital storytelling and written stories. Community participants were supported through painting art workshops facilitated by Aboriginal artists and photography and video workshops facilitated by non-Indigenous artists.

Sharing of cultural knowledge and skills especially about bush tucker and medicine and connection to country were key outcomes of this project. This culminated in a visual exhibition with an opening of a smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country at the Blackheath Tourist Information Centre. This led to continuation of the project into the next stage with successful funding initiated by Aboriginal artists.
Aboriginal artist Chris Tobin and community participant Shay Tobin
at Seasons Greetings exhibition opening at Blackheath.
Photo: Cheryle Yin - Lo

Discussion and Comparisons

One rare Australian example which best illustrates the important role that painting can play as a visual record and sharing of cultural knowledge is The Spinifex Arts Project\textsuperscript{35} based in Tjuntjuntjara Aboriginal community in Western Australia. As a result of severe drought that coincided with the British nuclear testing in Maralinga during the 1950s and 1960s the Spinifex people were forced to move southwest to a Mission, leaving the northern part of their traditional lands and reconnecting with family groups dispersed by events to the east. Established in 1997 as part of the Native Title documentation process, paintings from this community were formally included in the preamble to the Native Title agreement ratified by the Federal Court in November 2000.

Using acrylic paint on canvas as a means of sharing their culture, stories and community knowledge, the community (both men and women) groups separately visually mapped out their land, showing claimants birthplaces in the Spinifex area. As part of this process they celebrated their success of the land claim and bequeathed ten major paintings to the

\textsuperscript{35} For more information see Spinifex Arts Project www.spinifex.org, Accessed 6 August 2010.
People of Western Australia (WA). These paintings are now housed at the Western Australian Museum. They also established an effective and respectful working relationship with WA State Premier Richard Court through the land claim negotiation process, the Premier then became Patron of their Spinifex Foundation.

Cultural interpretations

Australian historian and local resident, Thomas (2004), in his contemporary detailed analysis of the social and cultural construction of the Blue Mountains region, discusses the relations between myth, reality and society that have influenced our perceptions and associations in shaping the identity of this region. Using historical and archival references and contemporary sources he strongly argues that:

_A s a form of collective imaging, myth can be seen as active_  
_force that inspires action and activity, thereby influencing_  
_ human destiny and the social pattern. Myths can be read in_  
_the way dreams are read: as an index to the hopes, fears and_  
_temperaments of those who brought them into being._

It is this context and social construction that Thomas states he ‘draws upon the human experience of a particular landscape’ and the collective memory that reflects the disparate stories of place.

As photography developed worldwide in the mid 1800s it became a technological invention that brought new dimensions that shifted the way we viewed the world and constructed our own world.

Photography has also become one of the most common media used for both artists and scientists to record and interpret the world. In contemporary times the role of the artist hasn’t really changed. They are still the interpreter, the recorder, the reflector of life who captures the mood and changes that take place in our changing world, arousing our emotions.
What has shifted is the development of the variety of art media and techniques available to artists. In the last three decades, the mode of cultural production and the methods in which it is generated have seen the artist evolve into a cultural practitioner involved in multiple roles and processes. This has been particularly so in the role of professional artists and designers working with local communities in a more collaborative approach and in the role they can play in society addressing social issues.

This is a new perspective of making art and viewing creative arts not only for its appreciation on an aesthetic level but for playing a critical role in current and future knowledge production. This is part of the current dialogue in the way the arts and ecology movement has evolved internationally as a recognised form of artistic and cultural practice, by well-known contemporary professional artists\(^\text{36}\) such as John Wolseley and Janet Laurence.

*Creativity is not limited to artists. Revolutionary scientists used creative as well as critical thinking to conceive of, and prove, through carefully designed experiments ... Many artists need to have a scientific and mathematical understanding of the properties of paint, film, light and other media, as well as a deep familiarity of art history.*  
(Chaffee 2008)

\(^{36}\)Well known contemporary Australian artists such as John Wolseley (painter) and Janet Laurence (digital media) are key examples of people who have spent many years exploring environmental interpretations through their artwork to produce substantial bodies of works looking at these dynamics.

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From a cross cultural perspective, Chinese Australian artist Andrew Lo, whose work features in the *Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains* online exhibition, is also a rare example in his approach to Chinese painting based on the spiritual Taoist principles and philosophy. This early influence as a child has led him to his large scale contemporary interpretations and series of works on the Australian bush and in particular of the Blue Mountains.

Through his combination of the aesthetics and methods of traditional Chinese painting using ink and rice paper, he has created a new visual experience and discovered new techniques of application.

![Forest Glimpses. Ink on rice paper by Andrew Lo](image)

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37 *Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains* online exhibition developed by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in 2009 with a community curatorium. See [www.bmwhi.org.au](http://www.bmwhi.org.au)
As an environmental economist, philosopher, university academic and potter, Lo provides the passion and inspiration for his work and that of young university students from a range of disciplines, on field visits. The opportunities in these experiences reveal a new way of seeing, learning and discovering the environment and the natural landscape. Sometimes he also enjoys the discovery of a new species of plant (some of which are now named after him!). A new understanding of the relationships in ecosystems through the students visual journey and experiential experiences in the bush and the sharing of Lo’s artistic skill and environmental knowledge is unique in its approach to environmental stewardship.

Lo states:

I love painting the Australian bush, in particular the old growth forests which I explore and study regularly for academic research as well as artistic purposes. As a lecturer in Environmental Economics at University of New South Wales, forest conservation has been a favourite research topic of mine. I love painting these forests, which seem to be made for Chinese brush and ink rendition.

My encounters with the beautiful and pristine Australian bush give new meaning to all the magnificent and monumental landscape paintings of the traditional Chinese masters I grew up with.

Artists’ collectives are attracting interest that concentrates on environmental issues in urban and regional contexts. Projects such as Synapse, an initiative and partnership funded by the Australia Council for the Arts with a number of other funding partners, reflect the change and growing trend to support interdisciplinary practice.

38 Lo’s commentary on his paintings in art catalogue in 2002.

Synapse state that they believe that the:

*collaboration of arts and sciences has the potential to create
new knowledge, ideas and processes beneficial to both fields.*

Partners such as the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) also provide opportunities for artists and scientists to work together. This exploration of the nexus between the disciplines of science, arts and technology supports different knowledge bases in project collaboration and includes artist residencies using creative methods. Other resources which have been developed included initiatives such as the Synapse database, and a moderated e-list and blogs using social media to connect individual, cultural practitioners and organisations in a virtual community. Exhibitions and publications generated from the artists’ residencies also become an important form of communication and promotion to share with the wider community the significance of this interdisciplinary practice.
The power of a local community’s artistic creation or co-creation through their collaborative art making is with the new groups of emerging artists who are committed to social ecological processes that go beyond the ideas of authorship, creative identity and means of communication typical of previous generations.

Artists’ collectives\textsuperscript{40} and organisations working with art and science and with communities are devising new frameworks of working and resources. Such examples are Proboscis (UK) with portable technologies and raising environmental awareness with the community through experiential activity, Common Ground (UK) and Green Museum (UK), who work on specific contexts and build trust and relationships with local communities through creative based processes working on environmental issues.

Proboscis in particular have developed excellent resources and documentation and use a number of accessible and portable technologies to track environmental monitoring with residents. Green Museum has also developed a number of toolbox kits for natural resource managers, communities and artists.

This process, where the ideas of modernist authorship were personal and identity driven, compares with the authorship of today which is frequently more diversified and collective. Whilst there are number of models both in Australia and overseas of the artist/ scientist collaboration and artists as translators as the communication bridge to the public, this is a shift where the public are often perceived as passive audiences.

This can also lead to change and a shift in behaviour and actions as a result. It can also provide skills development and the production of new knowledge and utilise processes which can distinguish community based arts practice from other traditional methods of community engagement and participation in environmental advocacy.

\textsuperscript{40}Proboscis \url{http://www.proboscis.org.uk/}, Common Ground and Green Museum \url{http://www.greenmuseum.org/}
As Nowlin in Rogers (2003) asserts:

*There is a notion that art and science are polar opposites, and that artists and scientists only visit the other side as a kind of escape from the rigor of their own disciplines ... There’s a place where they overlap. There’s no doubt that science and new technology can transform the world we live in, but they can also transform the nature of art.*

Tim Collins and Reiko Goto (2002) have developed a work in progress in developing this concept of the artists’ modes of practice within a social-environmental setting. From their research, it is often the way that most artists have elements of these two or three modes of practice embodied in their conceptual intent in the range of their works. They argue that this kind of process is overlapping modalities rather than a linear hierarchy and that this kind of expression is the most lasting form of social art. It is primarily based on an internal relationship to social, political and environmental systems where no single modality is more important than any other.

This can be paralleled to the way the process can be viewed in terms of community and artists’ collaboration in community based arts projects. It is embraced with the circular ring surrounding the Venn diagram with The Artist in Society/ The Artist in the Environment and lyrical expression which can be defined as the form of artistic and cultural expression.
Lyrical Expression, Critical Engagement, Transformative Action: An Introduction to Art and the Environment

Tim Collins, 2003

However, as Collins (2003) says about the interrelationship between environment and society:

This is an area of massive cultural flux, one where strategic energy in terms of interdisciplinary arts practice can result in creative engagement with significant social-political returns.

Complexities of evaluation and benefits

Also too there is complexity in this kind of work in measuring a range of factors and their impact (Holden 2006). This sometimes leaves the practice of community based arts practice without the credibility that is due. Providing qualitative and quantitative data of some of the undocumented intangible
benefits for a direct participant or stakeholder in a project can often occur after the completion of a project and sometimes many years after that.

As benefits can be intangible or anecdotal, some believe, as I have experienced, that it cannot be evaluated or valued equally by the same means as scientific data and research. This does not make it though of lesser value. This is a stage and process that needs to be addressed and promoted better with community based arts practitioners and cultural workers. However it creates a dilemma in its undervaluing of its social and cultural importance of the knowledge produced and also of the community’s important role and capacity to seriously inform decision making and policy.

The concept and understanding of community based arts practice in the Australian context is constantly evolving as a practice. It is a constant dialogue within the arts sector about its benefits to communities and it’s instrumental role in its desired outcomes and its role in social change, especially in the evaluation and monitoring phase. Sometimes comments from sceptical people who may not have previously experienced this kind of participatory process can reduce involvement in arts to just a warm and fuzzy experience, undervaluing the more layered potential it has in producing new knowledge and information and ways of seeing.

Key researcher in this area, Australian environmental scientist Curtis (2007), reveals in his case studies and research that he witnessed this process through his involvement of community based arts practice in regional NSW. He affirms that community cultural development projects result in good environmental outcomes. One of the reasons the participatory arts are valuable in changing people’s environmental behaviour is a combination of pleasure and of being involved in the art making process. This is a critically important distinction where these experiences provide, as Curtis states:

\[ \text{a less didactic approach to engaging individuals,} \]
\[ \text{communities and the broader society in environmental} \]
\[ \text{awareness and issues ...} \]
Views about the real sustainable benefits and how you evaluate community based arts (Flowers 2001) are constantly contested. Formal approaches, tools and resources for evaluation have been developed and are available but are minimal and qualitative feedback from participants is sometimes perceived as lacking credibility compared to a more quantitative data approach. Due to some of the intangible and transformative outcomes that may have resulted whilst the project is in progress and after its completion, such community participatory experiences can often be misunderstood as a practice 41.

Most often though, creative based arts projects, from my experience, can provide a level of transformational experiences. This is not only for individual artists in their own creative process and practices, but also for artists working with communities and the impact that has on the community’s experiences. It also provides project participants and stakeholders with a deeper sense of involvement, investment and increased understanding about the people they have been collaborating with and the specific issue being explored. This can often lead to possible new perspectives from all the players.

It does, however, provide a starting point for discussion to investigate the way that different approaches may be applied in exploring issues of environmental stewardship and what level of community participation it may be possible to stimulate. I would argue that artists and scientists alike must learn to think about nature not as something in the background of human culture but instead as an extension of humanity that is an essential condition of life.

The proposition that throughout this portfolio there is new scope for a new dynamic and collaboration: that of the artists, scientists and communities. This three prong approach can even extend further to include the environmental organisations as artistic collaborators, and the creation of new relationships and partnerships that have never existed in this way.

**Ecological Sustainability**

As the issue of World Heritage value needs to be increased and promoted more effectively in this region, ecological sustainability is at the forefront of agency and community concern.

One of the key aspects to this research is the theme of communication. As there is an increasing trend to understand better and promote the holistic approach of the interrelationship of people and the environment and creativity, how best can organisations reach communities for them to understand better the shift in behavioural change and attitudes? These dynamics and their role in problem solving in combination with community development and community wellbeing are embedded in current thinking.

One of Australia’s more successful examples of a not for profit organisation, Big hART\(^43\), which is committed to the arts and social change, and is a rare as an example of also influencing social policy, especially in regional areas. This provides strong evidence of what is possible in this area of practice. As an organisation that works in an interdisciplinary and intergenerational manner, it is made up of community builders, field workers, researchers, artists, arts workers and producers.

In its recent project, GOLD\(^44\), Big hART developed, with 33 families in the Murray Darling Basin area of NSW, stories about the impacts of drought. Big hART used photography as an integral part of its creative development


process, which was well documented and had extensive national media coverage. Young people were given access to cameras, many with no prior experience. The youth worked with local farming families to record their stories, especially in confronting issues of severe drought affected communities, the effects of economic and social decline and impacts of climate change in this region. One particular aspect was the death of one farmer due to severe depression during the project which affected the project, the project team and the local community and their families.

The profound impact that this project had on one community is not to be underestimated from a social, environmental, economic and cultural level. Television footage highlighting this project on the ABC’s 7.30 Report\textsuperscript{45} illustrates how effective and necessary it is to utilise this framework, the unexpected outcomes that evolve, and the strong relationships and partnerships that develop. Through Big hART’s evaluation of projects they are also able to demonstrate the economic implications and savings on such projects and the policy implications as a result of this new data and knowledge that is generated from the project and its many layers.

It is increasingly acknowledged that government models of decision-making need to better account for a broader range of knowledge, beyond technical and scientific knowledge. This includes the fact that processes of social interaction in decision making determine substantive outcomes, rather than technical scientific details about ecology or biology, and have primarily focused on the natural environment and less about the interrelationship of human impact and people.

\textit{Community based creative processes, when embedded into an agency’s policies and strategies, can be very powerful in strengthening the knowledge, engagement, social capital and}

\textsuperscript{45} ABC TV 7.30 Report on 9 March 2010, 8 minutes, at \url{http://vimeo.com/10051138}. 
leadership required to achieve policy objectives. (Mills and Brown 2004)

There is a growing interest in utilising community based arts projects that focus on environmental issues and management (both urban and natural) and the success of achieving sustainability outcomes with the triple bottom line from local, regional and international perspectives to achieve social, environmental and economic outcomes. As Hawkes (2003) suggests, the arts and culture (or cultural vitality) should be seen inclusive as the fourth pillar of sustainability, along with social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability.

These are some of the current perspectives on the role of community’s wellbeing in a more holistic approach. It is becoming essential to consider it in social, cultural and environmental planning and management. Some government agencies now acknowledge community engagement, also known as active citizenship or participatory democracy, as a building block for sustainability and wellbeing (Mills and Brown 2004).

Key cultural practitioners such as Mills and Brown (2004) have documented for the Australia Council for the Arts case studies that illustrate such processes and how they are being increasingly applied to enrich the policies and actions being taken on some of Australia’s most complex environmental challenges. Whilst coming from an instrumental and sustainable perspective, it does attempt to outline the positive achievements and productive social, environment, economical and cultural outcomes that can be achieved in various contexts. Overall, and significantly, these processes have been found to be valuable for building trust between government and communities, as a precondition for joint environmental decision making about complex issues. Their emphasis on community cultural development principles and processes can be applied successfully with these new frameworks and community partnerships between agencies and institutions.

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
Consideration of issues of planning processes and time frames need to be developed in partnership over a lengthy period of time for integrating the community cultural development process.

One key successful example that has illustrated the way this combination of ‘players’ can collaborate on common environmental issues is the Murray Darling Basin Project, a controversial and emotional issue on water supply and resources. The culmination of this integrated project resulted in a specific theatre project, the Murray River Story, performed to a local audience and which has been put forward as an example of the knowledge-building function of the arts with respect to ecological issues. This project also involved the SunRISE 21 Artists Industry Program (Mills and Brown 2004) with artists participating from digital media, video, theatre, playwrighting and sculpture backgrounds with economic and business outcomes.

It was built upon the significant history of the Murray Darling Basin Commission and their use of arts activities as communication tools within their education programs, especially targeting schools. Some of the key achievements from this project were re-evaluation, from an institutional point of view from the Mildura Irrigation Trust, of sustainability issues and a better understanding of the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders and the debates on irrigation. From the scientists’ perspective, their involvement and feedback indicated that they better understood that engagement with the arts as a means of raising community awareness of the scientific undertakings was crucial and a step towards building cross sectoral knowledge about the river and its problems.
Projects like this build our confidence in the combined knowledge making and specific and meaningful outcomes that can be generated. Curtis’ thesis (2007: 297) and research on the impact of visual arts and performing arts on environmental behaviour concludes that:

the role of the arts in community development have relevance in what is described as community capacity - building for environmental sustainability ... Ecological sustainability requires collective action. Creative based arts projects especially those that are community based arts are a good means of building community capacity, therefore an important approach to develop in an environmental context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a growing interest and a number of reference points that can guide us in this journey of exploring this emergent approach of creative arts in an environmental context. The combination of local communities and agencies/ institutions and scientific research working together as a collaborative form of knowledgemaaking is still new but it provides a starting point and avenue for learning. It is an exciting cutting edge field of practice that provides not a fixed framework but a flexible framework to accommodate the scale and range of creative based arts projects and context.

This provides the valuable data of information creating the specificity and the combination of local knowledge. The sources of knowledge with more collaborative approaches provide new information with which to build and inform policy and decision making.
4. **Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains**

This section in the Portfolio consists of two online public exhibitions as submitted articles. See weblinks below.

Please view the following on-line exhibition.

4.1 **Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains. Documentation of community curatorium online exhibition.** (Article 2)


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*Branching Out: Stories of the Blue Mountains on line exhibition.*

*Home page on Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute website

Concept developed by the project community curatorium

Design and technical support by Sarah Terkes*
4.2 BRANCHING OUT: STORIES FROM THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Please see Appendix 3. PowerPoint Presentation – Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains community curatorium model and process.
BRANCHING OUT: STORIES FROM THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

4.3 Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains. Curated by the author and documentation of physical exhibition shown at Blue Mountains Music Festival in 2007. Please view

View from Lett St Katoomba
Charcoal on paper
Rachel Szalay
4.4 Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains

Article 4

Abstract

Current issues and new challenges in the 21st century force us to look at the world differently and our relationship to it as individuals, communities and societies.

As complex issues emerge in current environmental problem solving there is an international trend to seek out new ways and modes of communication to engage local communities encourage cultural participation. This article illustrates the emerging practice of using creative methods in an environmental context and in particular the process of the model of the community curatorium. This model provides a catalyst for active participation of communities to express their values about their sense of place which is a prerequisite for nurturing and promoting environmental stewardship.

An emerging practice: Creative Methods in an environmental context

The views expressed are based on experiences working with local communities in the Blue Mountains and how to develop these ideas in relation to the vexing issue of seeking effective ways to actively engage communities in environmental stewardship or nurturing people to care for the environment. One of the critical issues is how to address the gap in scientific communication and bring combined knowledge together. Combined knowledge from local community knowledge and the specialised technical language of scientific researchers and environmental agencies, policy makers and decision makers together, can form a rich resource of learning and knowing to inform particular environmental issues (Yencken...
2000). Creating a public interface of current environmental issues is an ongoing challenge which requires a major shift from current approaches.

What I contemplated was what shifts and new methods and communication strategies could I develop in empowering communities in environmental decision making and how can environmental stewardship be nurtured? Since policy and decision making is often driven from a top down approach, the question I was interested in was: What kind of innovative mechanism could be created that would be a communication loop generated from local communities? What was needed was to create an ongoing dialogue and an investigation of what new skills and knowledge may emerge from a creative based approach in an environmental context.

This raised the issue of how to develop different modes of lifelong learning, more effective communication and information strategies. Shifting environmental information from a communication approach that is less didactic for people and less reliant on fixed and static knowledge, to a more dynamic process of self reflection to explore their own opinions about issues is vitally necessary. This is where creative arts can help provide that vehicle for arousing people’s emotions in personal and social connections. As creative arts can provide the bridge to communicate and stimulate ideas and dialogue, the challenge is in finding ways to interpret and synthesise complex ideas. This approach could nurture and create a nexus between scientific research and information and local communities.

With professional experience working in a scientific research context and using creative means to explore environment issues, I drew upon my skills as an exhibition curator.

An opportunity also arose through the local event *Blue Mountains Music Festival*46 to develop the first stage of this project. This was through the

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46 The first physical exhibition was mounted in the hall of Katoomba Public School in partnership with Blue Mountains Music Festival and the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in 2006.
development of a physical exhibition to showcase local artistic talent and community stories utilising the eucalypt as a catalyst from historical and contemporary perspectives and to share that with large numbers from a broad audience on a local, regional and international level. The positive visitor feedback generated from this exhibition illustrated the important need to provide the catalyst for local perspectives and voices, reflections of resident’s sense of place and identity, and to share it in a public space. This exhibition was a rare occurrence which involved a number of contributors from the artistic community, local community and volunteers.

It prompted me to seek further information about building on the interest, momentum and spirit of the local community and their pride and emotional response to this project.

As a result, I further designed a framework for a creative research project, *Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains*\(^{47}\), which was to extend this initial concept from a physical exhibition, which had been held previously, to a mixed media online exhibition, and to experiment with a new model of community curatorium.

\[\text{Looking towards Narrow Neck, Katoomba, by C.S Ralph c. 1950} \]

\[\text{Photo: Courtesy of the Deane Family}\]

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\(^{47}\) This project was undertaken during March–Nov 2009 at the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in Katoomba, NSW working with a community curatorium to research, develop and design the online exhibition.
This exhibition included archival material, social history and contemporary artworks drawing from community, public and private collections, and was researched and developed over a six month period. The most important component of the project was inviting selected local community members with diverse skills and experience to participate in the innovative model of a community curatorium. In this model everyone brings ideas, knowledge, skills, expertise and diverse perspectives and acts a social connector. Selected community members were invited to develop, research and design this virtual exhibition and participate in a creative, immersive and experiential process. It was designed as an interdisciplinary approach that would allow navigation through the complex themes and issues while enabling networking with diverse local communities in the region.

In this article I will examine the community curatorium model and its methodology to illustrate how this approach can be used as an important communication tool and how we can draw upon creativity as a natural human resource for and cultural asset exploring community values and local environmental issues in the specific region of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area of NSW.

To assist in addressing complex key local and regional issues such as bushfire management and the impact of global warming and climate change in a World Heritage area, it was evidently important to understand the drivers of the local community’s values and connection and association to World Heritage issues. This highlighted the important role of institutional, individual and community shared responsibility and of working towards collective environmental stewardship, thus shifting the dynamics of communication, authority and power.

Three main levels of creativity emerged and unfolded through the different stages of the project to develop new narratives and reconstruct new perspectives.
Members of the community curatorium were involved in a number of tasks and possessed a number of skills, most importantly the ability to apply creative thinking in brainstorming and problem solving in developing the exhibition in the research and curatorial phases. Latent creativity was also stimulated and demonstrated by community members in both written (e.g. poems, oral histories, short stories) and visual works (paintings and sculptures). These works formed part of the exhibition and the creators were then involved in art making of new works through community workshops. Thirdly, the artistic process and creative research by artists and their contemporary visual works through painting, photography, drawing and moving film all reflected new ways of seeing and knowing. As the works in the exhibition are based on specific personal experiences and responses they form part of the social and relational factors of situated knowledge.

**Discovering new ways of communicating**

*The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt. In such a climate, it is ever more necessary to cultivate human creativity, for individuals, communities and societies can adapt to the new and transform their reality only through creative imagination and initiative. The notion of creativity itself must be more broadly used, not just to refer to a new artist object or form but to problem-solving in every imaginable field.*

*Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate.*

*From World Commission on Culture and Development Report (1995).*

As international voices such as the World Commission on Culture and Development pointedly state, it is inevitable that organisations and individuals need a more collective and holistic approach to problem
solving in the 21st century, not only on a global scale but also on a local level. This is timely as global discourses re-express the current need for more integrated strategies to address complex environmental problem solving. However, even though creativity has been identified as playing a key role, it is still a largely untapped and under utilised natural asset and resource in society.

Whilst environmental issues can be complex when involving the interrelationship between social, cultural and political factors which sometimes can be conflicting, there are times when solutions can be even more challenging.

Creative arts are often used in social such as health and housing to engage communities but in environmental applications it is an emerging practice slowly gaining recognition in Australia. This has possibly been stimulated by better recent documentation of projects that have been undertaken in this area in Australia (Mills and Brown, 2004), and raising confidence in the potential of positive social and cultural outcomes. But it is still undervalued on a social and cultural level and struggles to be recognised as reliable subjective data or evidence from a qualitative approach alongside scientific research and methods of supposed objectivity.

However, recent evidence of community based art projects and data developed by Curtis (2007) in regional NSW has found that creating inspiration for the arts can shape the environmental behaviour and attitudes of communities. This research also witnessed the experiential and immersive approach of stimulating curiosity, imagination, innovation and creativity.

Due to the growth of many international virtual networks that have emerged in this area, the term arts and ecology is becoming a little more known.
However, over the last few years there has been growing interest and a proliferation of websites supporting individual artists about their concerns and responses to climate change and global warming. As many of the websites state it is through the artist’s perspectives that new and unique insights, information and knowledge can be gleaned that cannot be generated by other means. What I am interested in is an extension of this and how the potential of an interdisciplinary approach with artists collaborating with local communities and working with the dynamics with environmental policy and decision makers to provide a new platform of communication.

As community resilience is becoming a key element in adapting to constantly changing factors both locally and globally, new insights, skills and knowledge are required, as problem based approaches towards issues are a way to increase community’s environmental understanding, providing opportunities for active community participation and engagement to make issues more accessible, tangible and relevant are essential. However, a major shift is needed in increasing better communication, dialogue and understanding of issues that is more often based on barriers created by scientific and technical language, which can often inhibit or alienate someone from the general public. In particular, conceptual understanding of what some people consider abstract ideas can pose a communication barrier. It is, however, a multi-pronged approach that is required with local communities and environmental decision makers and policy makers so that communication loop and feedback mechanisms are created to bridge that gap.

**The Model of the Community Curatorium**


This became an important vehicle for communicating human and cultural values about the local environment to a broader section of the community through increased public access online. The site was designed with three components of **people, place and events** and new stories can be lodged with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute to create personal and emotional connections to stimulate environmental stewardship.

As Project Convenor, developing and designing this as a creative arts based research project provided the context to inspire people’s creativity as a new approach to communicating ideas and exchanging information. Also built in the design and process of this project was a key component of using the model of the community curatorium as a creative think tank to interpret the theme. This involved selecting six people from the local community, from diverse backgrounds, age and experience, and with arts and non-arts skills to research and develop the content and presentation of the exhibition.

Drawing upon the different knowledge bases, diverse lived experiences and skills rather than relying on a curatorial model from a more conventional single professional curatorial perspective it provided a fertile ground to explore diverse and divergent perspectives and synergies within the group whilst still working towards a common vision.

Whilst each community member brings different community networks, interests and multiple identities, this model challenges the politics of authority, voice and power of representation and existing knowledge and creates a new cultural space for dialogue and negotiation for interpretations for public access.
Demystifying the role of the curator

The community curatorium is an important model and methodology to recognise the challenges and shifts from more conventional exhibition curatorial approaches and the shift in authoritative power and voice in developing an exhibition compared with bringing a collection of works together, decision making and taste making from a more single professional curatorial perspective where the curator is often perceived as the dominant voice.

According to Gallery Director John Kirkman, who was well known for establishing this model and practice in Western Sydney:

A curatorium of experts can address the different perspectives of the subject with authority, and brings skills not held within the centre ‘to guide the modus operandi’. 49

The community curatorium model challenges the assumptions, the expertise and skills set and moves to a more democratic mode that is a joint and collaborative process. It provides for the community, and despite the participants being untrained in this area, provides an opportunity for skills exchange and development, shared information and ideas and learning of new skills in research, curatorial and technical processes.

One community curatorium member at the beginning of the project was surprised by the process, that the group itself could determine its own vision and visual aesthetics for the exhibition. Even though there were Terms of

49 Interview by Maisy Stapleton, Executive Officer, Museums and Galleries NSW with John Kirkman, previous Gallery Director of Casula Powerhouse, Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest, in Sydney, NSW, July 2005.
Reference for the group about the role of the curatorium there were no predetermined outcomes or limitations imposed by the organisation’s voice of authority or position. An elderly member of the curatorium felt liberated, positively overwhelmed by the dynamic team of talent and skills the project convenor had brought together. This was an indication of the excitement of working with new configuration of group dynamics as he had been used to working with an existing like minded group of similar age for many years. Despite being out of his comfort zone he was inspired even at this early stage of the process to be an active participant and to consider what he could contribute.

As the Project Convenor it allowed me the opportunity to extend my many years of practical experience as freelance curator to implement this community curatorium model which had previously been used only in public gallery spaces. It was a new stage in the evolution of this model to use it for the first time in this region and present it as a virtual online exhibition in the Blue Mountains. Deliberately choosing to develop an online exhibition format was critical for breaking down the geographical and social barriers. It also shifted the exhibition to an availability for wider access to audiences rather than limiting it to a specific geographical locality or physical exhibition spaces.
As Andrea Whitcomb in Cameron and Kenderdine (2007) points out:

*Using an online form of exhibition and community curatorium model creates the opportunity for the institutional authority and the curator to become a facilitator rather than figures of authority.*

As a practitioner acting as the facilitator using the community curatorium model in many projects over the years I have found it a dynamic model as it takes one into a shared role of responsibility and decision making. The transmission of the concept of the community curatorium is a framework that can be transposed to different contexts and geographical locations, creating a new synergy, new knowledge and unexpected outcomes every time.

Through the development stage of the Branching Out project it was important to emphasise the potential impact for shifting current modes of thinking and to use creative thinking in developing an exhibition through new associations and interpretations. Communicating the specialised and technical language of science and the environment often does not include the human perspective approach that connects people more on an emotional level to issues but can at times encourage people to perceive themselves as separate from the environment. The recognition of this important aspect is clearly stated by new media artist Armstrong (2006), and his philosophical approach to his work in the principles of *ecosophy* in its positioning of ecology and philosophy and the way we perceive ourselves in the world.

As Armstrong states *ecosophy* is focused with:

*‘a broader study of dynamic relationships ... it was concerned with human behaviour – the way we act towards each other and the natural systems we are a part of’.*

With this in mind, using different forms of modalities and art media in the content of this exhibition provided more accessible pathways for looking at
social, environmental and cultural changes over time and towards the environment and people's interrelationship to it.

As a result this mixed media exhibition explored historical and contemporary perspectives and people’s changing perceptions. It was an important vehicle for bringing ideas from disparate communities spread along twenty five villages on a single ridge divided by a highway and became the social connector to help shape a more collective identity and linking social networks and cultural connections.

New beginnings and shifting perceptions

In this first stage of the research phase the community curatorium members were nurtured as community researchers. This highlighted the need to build on existing skills and introduce new skills to support their work which involved a range of tasks and skills. This involved planned group meetings, brainstorming to identify issues and themes and prioritising exhibition content. Other skills included community networking to source cultural material, research methods, curatorial and interviewing skills. The curatorium were also given visual journals at the commencement of the project which served as an important research tool to record ideas (written or visual) or reflect on issues as they arose throughout the project. It is also a mechanism for the group to reflect on their own individual values and positions on issues that then can be shared in a group situation in monthly curatorium meetings where new research and community contacts were also shared.

The group were trained in specific skills in research and in recording identified cultural material on research forms to develop a portable ongoing community resource in cataloguing and an archive repository of cultural materials and their location in the community.

One of the main points of discussion by the curatorium in developing the exhibition content was about the authoritative voice and whose voice is it? Did the content and messages have to represent the organisation’s voice? As
the project convenor I reassured the group that the community curatorium model is unique in many ways and organic in its process and would be based on this specific group’s perspectives, experience, interest, knowledge, associations and concerns. It allows the group to bring a range of perspectives and voices which may sometimes not be their own to develop the content of the exhibition without being confined by linearity or chronological presentation. This revelation challenged assumptions and conventional modes of developing exhibitions but was very liberating and gave them flexibility to apply their creative ideas and thinking.

The Gaps and Challenges

Cultural gaps were identified in representation where fragmented histories and material that were not yet documented, such as the non-European heritage and multicultural heritage of the region, were revealed. In readdressing these gaps in the exhibition attempts were made to generate new material and stories such as in interviews and contemporary reinterpretations of existing cultural sites.

Brainstorming of ideas was overwhelming and daunting for the group as they realised the enormity of the task. It also highlighted the complexity of themes and issues they wanted to include in the exhibition, representations and non-representations or gaps as they were referred to by one community curatorium member, and how could they be represented in the exhibition.

The networks and associations of ideas, people, issues and themes over time to shape the exhibition content were dynamic and full of excitement and passion. The vast challenge for the group for selecting the artworks to finalise the virtual exhibition for the website for public access was one of openness, listening, collaboration and negotiation. This demonstrates how building personal and social relations and connections are embedded as a vital ingredient for collaboration in creative based projects.
Discovering new ways of communication

In addition, there was a need to address the dilemma and bridge the gap between more abstract ideas about environmental issues and scientific research and how these communication gaps may be translated through cultural expression. By re-examining the process of art making and the artist’s creative process the research phase becomes an important part of material thinking (Carter, 2004) and the way the artist is involved in multiple roles in producing their work. Interviews with the two landscape artists (a painter and photographer) involved in Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains reveal that there is multiple layering of knowledge that emerges from their visual works which is more than just aesthetic. Information can be shared through the visual representations and the details and specificity of the location and significance of sites on ecological, social and cultural levels which possibly cannot be obtained through other research methods.
As Hemmert explains about his painting, Stone Country No. 2:

‘Stone Country is a series I’ve been working on for the past two to three years inspired by a reserve out near Tarana called Evans Crown. An Aboriginal place of spiritual significance it was brought to my attention by anthropologist, Dr Dianne Johnson.

It’s a place I enjoy going bushwalking in and it has an abundance of parrots and kookaburras, the latter whose
laugh quite often welcomes one upon arrival. I’ve taken some of my closest friends to share in what I consider one of my top 10 spiritual sites. My friends who have always seen my paintings of the area beforehand are equally moved by the feel of this area.

It is a place peopled by huge granite tors and the eucalypts is a curious thing indeed. In an unusual symbiosis the trees quite often twist, twine and curve to the forms of the rock and often a partly fallen tree whilst still rooted in the earth will follow the curvature of a boulder and then continue to strive up towards the canopy of its fellows.

Another aspect of this place is the abundance of leaf litter. Wildlife here have an early warning device created by nature. No one can enter without the crunch and snap of leaves and twigs alerting the animals of one’s presence.

As for the bushwalker, one is for ever on the lookout for snakes, as aided by the trees shadows it’s often hard to distinguish snake from stick ... or as a friend viewing this painting has called them ‘snicks’.

I am currently still working on paintings of this area. As my friend Joan remarked on a walk out there, It would provide you with a lifetime of painting. I’m inclined to agree.

Approaching it through creative expression and visual culture as a stimulus for the senses was an important alternative to the mode of communication and creative enquiry through this interrelationship.

As the project developed, creative community researchers become a very powerful human resource and catalyst in communication to the wider community, shifting perceptions and perspectives and creating social networks and personal emotional
connections. This was especially demonstrated through lively dialogues and anecdotal story telling through the interaction and collaboration of the community curatorium working in an interdisciplinary and intergenerational approach in a cross cultural dynamic situation.
New knowledge seekers and makers

An important issue for the community curatorium was their attempts to try and uncover more multiple layers and voices than the usual dominant representations of European heritage and perspectives and clichéd perceptions of the Blue Mountains often depicted in tourism brochures. One such example is that by an elderly member of the community curatorium and his photograph of a significant cultural site. One photographic example in the exhibition is one of the oldest gum trees in the area. Located outside the significant historical landmark, the Woodford Academy, it can be seen prominently from the highway. The sandstone heritage building symbolises European heritage but through discussions with the Indigenous community this curatorium member was given a reinterpretation of meaning and place. This new interpretation and re-looking at this familiar site revealed another history that is evidenced by the stone grooves of Aboriginal presence prior to European explorers and settlers.

Other community participants with no or very little art experience were involved in art making workshops generating visual work that was part of the exhibition content. This stimulated many community members and encouraged the nurturing of latent creativity that was transformative in nature.

One example is that of a Korean resident who explored painting in one of the community workshops\textsuperscript{50} for the first time, and who expressed her initial feelings and fears of the Australian bush and contrasts in her attitude and interaction with nature and the cultural differences. She was inspired by the

\textsuperscript{50} These art workshops were held in 2006 with multicultural residents of the Blue Mountains, professional artists and Aboriginal interpretive guides as part of BMWHI’s Community Engagement Program in the project \textit{Nature Through Fresh Eyes}. The program was initiated to break social isolation and barriers about fear of the bush.
Australian bush through the interpretive walks with Indigenous guides and community workshops in art making and now has a new sense of relationship with her local natural environment. The transformative nature for this local resident was quite profound in raising environmental conscious level, both on a personal and a creative level.

**The cyclic nature of knowledge production**

As accompanying texts for the online exhibition are written in the first person, they become reflective pieces by the contributors and testaments of lived experiences. They develop into a form of narrative inquiry by the community that reveal collective consciousness, combined knowledge and develop new social groupings and networks. Various cultural materials from a cultural research perspective were observed to identify any patterns of individual and collective interpretations and to reveal the community’s sense of identity and place, inspiration, connection and values.

For local communities, having a strong sense of place and identity is unquestionably essential according to Carr (2002) for nurturing environmental stewardship and for future problem solving. This project works towards raising the consciousness not only of the community but environmental decision makers and policy makers. In addressing some of the complex issues people are facing in this region it is useful to better understand the embedded social structures and systems that impact on the environment and which are part of the integrated and community collective approach of environmental stewardship.

This project worked on a multilevel approach. At different stages of the process it provided the opportunity for local communities to be involved in an immersive and experiential project that generated personal and creative responses and reflections, creative thinking, unleashing latent creativity and exploring the artist’s creative process as a form of knowledge production and situated knowledge. Through these various responses human values were
expressed about their observations of their local environment, their relationship to their land and the natural environment and of living in a World Heritage area. It helped us to discover a new dynamic of dialogue discovering new associations and ways of seeing and connecting.

Four pillars of wisdom

A number of commentators from the environmental and cultural sector in both Australia and internationally have now recognised how critical it is for global and local ecological sustainability to engage communities in active participation (O’Riordan et al. 2002) on environmental issues and processes and the interrelationship to developing and understanding scientific research. This is reinforced with ongoing dialogue from both these sectors of the essential need for integration of culture as one of the ‘pillars of sustainability’ (Hawkes, 2004) to understand better the social, economic and environmental aspects of society or, as environmental scientists refer to it, as the ‘four pillars of wisdom’ (Yencken et al. 2000). In this case, I prefer the term ‘four pillars of wisdom’ as it seems more apt as it addresses the broader philosophical approach that is required to address issues of power and the political forces of what this implies in terms of changes on an attitudinal and practical level.

This holistic approach is vital to really achieve understanding to nurturing and engaging communities in problem solving and building their adaptability and community resilience in rapidly changing times. Through these processes organisations can improve the level of interest and active participation in supporting and shaping a community’s identity, values and their future.

Other cultural researchers in Australia (Mills and Brown, 2004) have clearly demonstrated that there is the urgent wake up call for integration in problem solving with diverse stakeholders, especially with government agencies and communities, as the strong basis of community wellbeing and environmental sustainability.
New knowledge making – dilemmas and challenges

The value of the community curatorium model is in combining knowledge from diverse perspectives. It highlights and improves understanding differences and synergies on issues and themes, bringing together experiences and sharing of information not only from a community curatorium level but with community networking. It draws from a range of knowledge and skills bases (i.e. artistic, community, scientific, Indigenous etc) that work towards creating dialogue and negotiation of shared common values and commitment to solutions for increased understanding that can inform decision makers and policy makers in environmental management.

However, the issues that combined knowledge can create can raise the dilemmas and tensions that exist within the community about particular issues. This is the case in the complex issue of bushfire management in the Blue Mountains. The community curatorium understood the importance of representing diverse and divergent views from residents to scientists to fire ecologists. The inclusion of the controversial and emotional story by one Blackheath resident and his frustration over the management of bushfires in the Grose Valley (which is known as the home of modern conservation and has strong emotional connections for the community to this site) portrays the dilemma volunteer fire fighters are faced with in this event. This is accompanied by a fire ecologist’s photographic record of the burning ridges of the Grose Valley and is representative of the way this creative expression can provide the safe space for this dialogue on contested ground. It also heightened critical issues for those not familiar with the complexity of this event. This bushfire also generated another contemporary photographer’s creative response with striking and stark images of hanging swamps after the bushfires in the Shipley Plateau area of the Blue Mountains.
Other complex issues and challenges can be raised in forming the community curatorium group, such as who should be invited as part of the group, as a question of community politics. This requires planning of the project to ensure balance in the interests and skills that can best benefit the vision of the project to avoid narrow personal agendas dominating the group and the process. Other potentially contentious dilemmas which can be created include the content of inclusion and exclusion of cultural material, knowing who to contact in the community for contributions, as well as publicising a general community notice for expressions of interest.

However, the role of the community curatorium is to interpret and create meaning and significance which is relevant to the group and what may be developed to be of interest to the wider community when it is accessible online. This is part of the creative thinking process and learning and of understanding new perspectives, connections and associations.
Findings and unexpected outcomes

One of the levels which the community curatorium model and the process inherently reveal is the unexpected findings and connections which can lead to new research. This creates fertile ground for further research and community participation and can be followed up in the future. Through one young member of the community curatorium an important reconnection and resynthesis of her grandfather’s photographic archives from the 1950s and 60s gives us information about the changing landscape and connection to nature over time. This has influenced her own contemporary artistic practice, love and passion for nature, and her personal commitment to environmental advocacy and lobbying. One rare piece of footage of moving film from this family collection raises the issue about what did happen to the eucalyptus oil industry in the Blue Mountains depicted by her grandfather during this period. Sometimes new questions can emerge.

Community responses

This project, by activating the community curatorium model in the Blue Mountains for the first time, has generated different and varying degrees of community participation and involvement. The completed exhibition now provides a new community resource that gives a glimpse and insight into some of the interesting stories, interpretations and experiences of the community’s identity and values. Through the community curatorium’s networks the distribution of the online invitation of the launch to view the exhibition goes through various layers of community email networks and creates a wider circle of access, knowledge and public responses. The exhibition is also then promoted to a diverse range of potential audiences connected to the organisation through Board members and partner organisations, the organisation’s staff, project team and researchers, exhibition artists and community contributors, various local community organisations, cultural heritage networks, schools, environmental networks, libraries and tourism networks.
An ongoing feature in response to the interest and emotional connection this exhibition has created is the request from other community members who feel they would like to respond or contribute to the existing online exhibition. This is part of the communication loop of information sharing and the ongoing dynamic process through emotionally connecting to people’s stories. The creative expression of written and visual interpretations has inspired reflection, raised the environmental consciousness and stimulated new understandings in the community.

Through creative thinking, art making and cultural expression of this region, this exhibition has provided the starting point, and opened a new path, for communication in building new knowledge. It is especially significant that this exhibition is placed on a website that is located with an independent scientific research organisation that can provide the neutral and cultural space for contested views. In understanding diverse stakeholders’ perspectives this community curatorium model and process can provide a new pathway for environmental agencies and policy makers to better understand community values and the impact these can have in future decision making in the region.
BUSHFIRE STORYTELLING PROJECT

Embers

Photo: Ian Brown
5.1 Burning Memories

Introduction

The topic of bush fires arouses much opinion and high emotions within a local community. From preparation to response of natural disasters such as bush fires there always multiple perspectives on the issues of management. Information is required from scientific research of fire regimes, from assessment of procedural and technical operations to reporting to understand post-bushfire events. There is much discussion nationally about the need for improved communication and procedural issues in bushfire events and the complexity of bushfire management.

As an important process of knowledge building, narrative inquiry (Trahar, 2013) and stories from specific bush fire events are critical in understanding community issues, actions and behavior. However, formal communication and establishing mechanisms drawing from local community experiences has been slow in recognition by organisations and agencies responsible for bushfire management. This report is an overview of some of the different models that are currently being implemented in Australia that address this need and the growing trend to develop appropriate and effective mechanisms.

The report also discusses the invaluable role that active community participation and knowledge play and demonstrates in approaching contemporary bushfire management. With a more participatory approach it can be an important starting point for collaborative sharing and learning between local communities and organisations.

This report it will give a current insight and discussion about national case studies and the current implementation of integrating social media, technology and digital storytelling and its benefits for increasing community participation. Social media and web based technology approaches can assist environmental agencies to bring

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
disparate information together and improve the level of engagement and connection with communities. With this approach it also provide new skills and create a greater understanding about building community knowledge of bush fires. As it result this information leads to increased public access and distribution to this valuable community information.

These models provide an opportunity by environmental agencies in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area to implement to assist them to respond more effectively to the stress and impacts of climate change and local people’s needs and expectations.

**Social context of fire and its management**

To understand the broader context of bush fires, from a social and ecological point of view in Australia, according to environmental scientist and co-founder of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, John Merson (2006), fire became a more significant factor around 100,000 years ago, with the drying out of the environment at the end of a major Ice Age. This resulted in the decline of the country’s megafauna and the emergence of more fire-adapted species with their effects on the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Other insights by prominent environmental scientist, Flannery (1994) also remind us how fire was an even more significant feature of the landscape with the arrival of the first Aboriginal inhabitants around 60,000 years ago. He explores how these people used fire to manage the landscape and how it affected fire-dependent species such as eucalypts and banksias (Flannery 2005).

For the Aboriginal population, the use of ‘fire stick farming’ to manage and clear the landscape (Jones 1969) was both a means of preventing extremely destructive fires and a means of controlling the movement of game.
Such cultural practices such as ‘mosaic burning’ over many thousands of years have also profoundly shaped the Australian landscape.

Whilst there are now better methods for fighting bushfires and managing some of their more damaging impacts on ecosystems (Merson 2006), environmental agencies need to see this as an urgent issue to address to assess the important cultural and social practices in contemporary bushfire management.

Whilst the re-introduction of traditional Aboriginal strategies of mosaic burning might limit the damaging impact of intense fires spreading into urban and agricultural regions, such efforts will have to be carefully designed to take into account the specific ecosystems involved.

Research tools also developed by the CSIRO and other partners are assisting to better understand the varying factors on specific fire conditions. Other positive implications from this research are critical for the Rural Fire Service, and other agencies engaged with bushfire prevention, especially in their approach to controlled burning in World Heritage protected areas with high biodiversity values.

The role of storytelling

Whilst oral storytelling is an ancient form in human culture throughout time it continues to play an important social and cultural role in society. This report looks at storytelling and its application in modern technologies and as an artform of creative artistic expression. The idea of recording and passing on information and knowledge to future generations has been a long tradition. As with many other human forms of recording and communicating, people build meaning into our stories. Some of the issues and challenges of bushfire management can be controversial, given the diverse stakeholders and players contesting ground with responsibilities for managing a bushfire event. At stake the telling and shaping the narrative

51 The term mosaic burning is a landscape mosaic burn (LMB) that is a multi objective planned burn that may be treated over several years. Application of fire to areas within the burn may be undertaken in different seasons and under different intensities. The different burning patterns and intensities create a mosaic of patches of burnt and unburnt vegetation for both fire management and ecological objectives across a large landscape. See http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm
of these bush fire events and how does this influence people’s attitudes and perceptions, behaviour and actions. Human emotions and what remains in people's memories becomes critical. Therefore, community knowledge plays an important role in the complex nature of bush fire management and storytelling is a vital tool in sharing and exchanging knowledge, experiences and in community healing.

Community Education, Knowledge and Technology

This next section of the report gives an overview of examples of organisations nationally in Australia that are moving towards new models of community participation with the use of media, social media and communication technologies. These models provide opportunities to include a range of oral and cultural material together and provides an inclusive frameworks for diverse perspectives from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives in knowledge building of bush fires.

Case Study One - Culture Victoria

Digital Storytelling is a powerful form of media expression that enables individuals and communities to reclaim their personal cultures and stories while exploring their artistic creativity (ACMI, 2013). The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) is Australia’s premier engine for screen and digital culture industries and assists in the creation and recording of hundreds of stories by individuals, community groups and organisations through its respected Digital Storytelling program, and ensures public access to the stories through exhibition.

Victorians have always shown resilience and a great sense of spirit in starting over, time and time again. Thirty years on from the Ash Wednesday bushfires a website has been created as a tribute to Victorians’ determination to overcome natural disasters and get their lives back on track. Every person who was touched by the fires is encouraged to tell their story and encourage people to contribute their story. A collection of selected stories are published in visual, written or audio form and all contributions are valued. The names of contributors are listed on the website and all contributions are stored in a special commemorative archive.
An expert reference group, including representatives from across the Victorian Government, select a collection of stories. The stories represent themes of recovery, healing and hope, in addition to the range of geographical areas affected by the bushfires and a cross-section of perspectives from the community. See http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/telling-community-stories/5308/organisational-storystellers-bushfire-stories/

Case Study Two- The Centenary of Canberra Exhibition

The Centenary of Canberra in 2013 coincides with the ten year anniversary of the 2003 bushfires that devastated Canberra. Mount Stromlo is hosting an exhibition in 2013 that will commemorate the destruction, recovery and renewal of fire affected areas from between 2003 to the present day. The exhibition includes historical information and artefacts, exhibits of ACT Fire Brigade Museum, memorabilia and artefacts donated by community members, art & photography by community members, personal recollections and expressions by community members, multimedia presentations and a Memory Tree – come, recollect and record and encourages community members to share their views on the past, present & future. The mission in undertaking this bushfire anniversary project is to build a sense of pride for those affected directly by the 2003 bushfire event, and for Canberra as a whole. It engages the community by establishing and raising awareness of the significance of the area and educate visitors about its history. See http://www.scopemountstromlo.com.au/ppf/

Case Study Three- Hotspots Fire Project

The Nature Conservation Council (NCC) is a non-profit, non government organisation ‘that works to conserve nature and protect the water we drink, the air we breathe nd the places we love’ and represents one hundred and twenty environmental groups across NSW. One of the key areas of focus is ‘building on the skills and capacities of community environmental groups’ and one of the important programs they have initiated is the Hotspots Fire Project.52


The *Hotspots Fire Project* is an interesting program in its approach that is based on "the best available science and operational knowledge available." It is a training program which provides for landholders and land managers the skills and knowledge needed to actively and collectively participate in fire management planning and implementation for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity conservation.

As a result this also creates an important communication loop in knowledge sharing. This is important in the way that combined knowledge can be developed using a training program with practical skills in understanding and managing the complex nature of fire regimes and implement strategies together across landscapes through collaborative sharing and experiential learning.

As Professor Ross Bradstock from the Centre of Environmental Risk Management emphasises:

> *The Hotspots is probably one of the most interesting programs of its kind, because I can’t think of a better way to inform people about this critical issue of understanding fire and understanding the needs of our native plant and animals with regard to fire.*

It is also a key model for the way it has been established by over nine agencies and government departments. It offers a bridge between the gap of fire management for Natural Resource Management and Fire and Emergency Management. But also provides the opportunity for further partnership exchange in other states linking into the knowledge base of organisations that are associated with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute network that are key environmental agencies and local council responsible for bushfire management. This has further future potential in the ongoing learning and exchange amongst organisations in the way they can utilise their research, data and community knowledge. See [www.nccnsw.org.au](http://www.nccnsw.org.au).

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57 The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) was established in 2005 to develop a new interdisciplinary research model for World Heritage issues.
Case Study Four- The Storyboard Tool Kit (Victoria)

Another interesting project in Victoria is the toolkit, STORYBOARD\textsuperscript{58}, initiated by Regional Arts Victoria and the Department of Sustainability (DSE) and the Victorian Country Fire Authority. This educational tool was designed to address an important community need to provide an interactive online community resource in response to the 2009 bushfires.

STORYBOARD provides a model and important insight to changes in the way environmental problem solving can be approached in using digital technology creating a new pathway in skills and knowledge building, increasing public access and community participation. This Victorian model reflects an important trend of environmental agencies to acknowledge the role of community knowledge and stories.

It is an example in collaborative learning that can be a new mechanism and process to inform environmental policy and decisionmaking. It includes forms of creative expression such as digital storytelling through the technology of a website.

Through locational maps, stories can be viewed geographically. Alternatively, videos and pictures can be viewed chronologically using a timeline, or by topic by selecting a 'tag'.

This portal has also built in social networking and media technologies to encourage people to join their Storyboard Facebook page and blogs which has creates a new virtual community supported by a resources and web links section.

As it states on the website:

\textit{STORYBOARD provides you with a creative space to share your photos, videos, artworks and stories with others who have been affected by this devastating event. An ongoing project, STORYBOARD is also a safe place to archive your precious images and record local histories.}

\textsuperscript{58} See \url{www.rav.net.au/storyboard}. Accessed on 7 March 2009.

\textsuperscript{59} Quote from \url{www.rav.net.au/storyboard}. Accessed on 7 March 2009.
STORYBOARD and its purpose to also provide a community archive to record local histories is an important community resource. It fills a gap in the process of cultural production of a community and is a repository of important cultural material, both intangible and tangible form.

As in regional areas like those in Victoria, The Blue Mountains region has very similar characteristics. Local communities comprise of people who represent a number of community identities, roles and responsibilities.

The STORYBOARD website encourages community contributions and is socially and culturally inclusive as its purpose is:

_to capture the myriad creative responses to the bush fires not only from artists but all those affected by fire._

This reflects the dual roles or multiple roles community people play. Community interpretations and memories work on multiple levels. Different perspectives influence their visual and artistic representations of bush fires for example the volunteer firefighter who is an artist or the environmental scientist who is a photographer.

This reveals the different ways that people can perceive or fear bush fires according to their range of lived experiences in other contexts. It also shows how they apply their knowledge and skills in adverse conditions and new contexts to build their community resilience.

**STORYBOARD’s objectives:**

_the sharing of stories has the power to engage people, assist communities to collectively deal with trauma and create stronger networks so that they are self-determining, aware and resilient._

From an environmental agency point of view it was an ideal way:

to recognise people develop knowledge and learning about
fire and risk in different ways, the Department of
Sustainability and the Victorian Country Fire Authority are
seeking to deliver their engagement programs in
collaboration with multiple agencies and using a mix of
approaches.  

They realised that identifying the arts as an approach to deliver knowledge
also served as a way to support parts of the community who perhaps would
not otherwise engage with bushfire risk issues. This is an important and
relevant point about how we nurture those in the community with low
awareness and provide a means through which they can become interested,
and so access and learn more.

See www.rav.net.au/storyboard for full details about STORYBOARD
project in Victoria.

The Blue Mountains & Community Perceptions

On a local level, the NSW Rural Fire Service, Blue Mountains District is one
of the world’s largest volunteer emergency services and in the Blue
Mountains a long history of volunteers helping to meet the emergency needs
of the community.  

The Community Liaison Officer, Eric Berry, in an interview on local radio
and on a podcast explained the importance of community education and
the impact of the Victorian Royal Inquiry into bushfire management.
He particularly explained its relevance and the learning that can be applied
to the local Blue Mountains area which has very similar physical terrain
where fires happen in an almost identical manner.


dsp_content.cfm?search_start=21&this_page= 3&CAT_ID=723&pff=1
Black Saturday was a wakeup call not only in NSW but in Australia generally. He believed that it was important take some lessons and learn from Victoria. These community attitudes are particularly relevant but challenging in public education and understanding the level of people’s action in bushfire events.

Berry clearly stated that many local (Blue Mountains) people think that the bushfires in Victoria happened elsewhere, and there is a common perception that this could never happen here or to them.

*People have already gone asleep. They believe it won’t happen to me. Ninety per cent of people believe it won’t happen in their village. People have to accept it will happen to you. Not if but when.*

One of the changing factors that also impacts on the level of bushfire support available is the knowledge of the changes of population settlement throughout the Blue Mountains over the years. However, one thing that remains constant is that there is only one road in and out of the Blue Mountains. In response to these factors, Berry states that even though changes have been identified it is hard to address them especially without increasing human and financial resources but they are needed. Finally, Berry stresses in this podcast that *’recommendations come at a price of something else and evaluation is hard to measure’.*

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63 & 64 Podcast interview with Eric Berry, Community Liaison Officer at RFS Katoomba, with Mark and Sami Horton BLU-FM 89.1 local radio on 6 August, 2010 about the Victorian Royal Commission findings on Firewise Friday segment, 17 mins, available to listen to at http://www.bluemountains.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?search_start=21&this_page=3 &CAT ID=723&pff=1
A recommendation is for a national curriculum for students to teach the history of bush fires. One of the key areas that emerges constantly in recommendations is community education for youth and young children and the variable factors in bushfire occurrences and management. This builds a case for more attention to the use of technology and web based educational and community resources. This could be used to build a community’s capacity about environmental science to develop a more coherent and sophisticated understanding of bushfires increasing their knowledge.

Berry emphasises that there is an increase in research and evaluation of what you do from a social science approach to find out more about why people do certain things prior to and during a bushfire and monitoring this. Educating young people on the relevance of bushfires, Berry believes should be a high priority.

Knowledge making is important but more critical is the way that the information is used. Findings collected through people’s personal stories as a result of the first Bushfire Storytelling Project workshop held by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in Katoomba in 2006 and facilitated by local professional storyteller, John Hockney working with the organisation’s Community Engagement Coordinator were revealing. Conclusions found that there were many complex factors issues that influenced people’s emotions, actions and behaviour.

It should not be underestimated that by using a more creative means to facilitate stories from the community that a level and depth of issues could be discussed safely and with trust in a group situation. The dynamics of the group demonstrated a respect for people’s confidentiality and there was a need to share both the negative and positive aspects during and after such a traumatic event as a bush fire.
Some of the key issues and factors revealed that people’s behaviour and emotions act on many levels, especially with respect to fear. The first emotions were about the anxiety of preparation for bush fires and what people did and what equipment they had. Then came the anguish and panic of whether people would stay or leave. If they left, what were they prepared to leave, what would they take, and what was most precious to them? Another factor was the reality of self preservation, family, and the camaraderie and dependence on neighbours for support and assistance which brought strangers together and saw new friendships emerging out of a common experience.

People’s senses have become more acute living in the Blue Mountains. The smell, the noise and the visual sense of how close smoke and fire are moving toward your home induces a constant state of anxiety and checking of radio reports. The conflicting moments and decision making around leaving can be a dilemma as many do not want to leave. The first night away after being forced to leave, residents felt a sense of despair and uncertainty not knowing what the future was to bring. It stimulated reflective moments of what was important to them. The need to return the morning after and return to a site after a bushfire is like a dream to some residents. For some it is the realisation of the memories of things lost forever.

The reality then hits as they discover any remnants of personal belongings amongst the remains, deal with insurance claims and seek financial and counselling assistance. The main focus is on the way individuals and communities can rebuild their lives to get life back on track but this can be complicated on many levels. This provides an enormous insight into what measures are required to provide a safe and more supported environment. And it highlights the important need for better coordination and communication of a number of services and agencies to provide the trust and resources that provide a sense of place for communities.
Conclusion

The role of narrative storytelling to share stories and lived experiences of bushfires is a critical part of the experiential learning of bushfire management. This form of creative arts has been an important resource and tool in building collective community knowledge. Despite most rural fire services in the Blue Mountains not having a formal mechanism to record people’s feedback from bushfire events, an opportunity exists to establish an effective mechanism to value this important information and to bring different sources of information together.

By using creative expression to unlock complex emotions, memories and stories it has contributed to the community healing, something which many Blue Mountains residents felt was needed. The previous lack of acknowledgement by environmental agencies and The Rural Fire Service as perceived by the community to address the issue of community healing was revealed in the bushfire storytelling workshops held by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute.

Through direct dialogue with the community in a group situation it provided an important vehicle to develop a new avenue of communication on bush fire issues and education. The outcomes resulting from the workshop highlight the growing need to review, combine and extend different methodologies of research to inform environmental policy and decision making and how critical it is to address different community needs in a post-bush fire situation. This means community and multiple agency involvement is essential in using mixed approaches to environmental communication and sharing knowledge and is a growing trend across the environmental sector.

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
In conclusion, this report reinforces the role of social media and technology and its community and organisational benefits in application in an environmental context. It also illustrates the relevance in application to the Greater Blue Mountains Area by environmental agencies and its potential to be considered as an emerging tool for community engagement and participation. By being open to new approaches and processes that environmental agencies may move towards new solutions in bushfire management from technical and operational perspectives. This can increase a greater understanding of perspectives of people’s emotions, human values and environmental concerns and their interrelationship through new applications of technology and increase public access and dialogue.
5.2 Christmas Has Changed Forever

Report 2b:

The Untold Stories

Introduction

Bushfire management which is one of the controversial topics that today arouses communities’ anxieties and emotions across Australia. With the experiences of the Canberra and Victorian bushfires in the last decade which affected communities nationally these concerns have been intensified. With the predicted effects on human and ecological communities of global warming and climate change regional NSW is especially vulnerable.

This report examines the way we can look at narrative storytelling as an important means of combined knowledge production, and what information and stories can be shared to learn about bushfire management in the context of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

This will be illustrated through findings from personal accounts by local community members documented in The Bushfire Storytelling Project undertaken by The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute between 2007-2009. The report will also provide discussion about the processes, and complex issues that contribute to increasing the understanding people’s actions and behaviours.

As a result, the report makes recommendations as to how the role of community storytelling environmental agencies can increase their understanding of local communities and their experience of bush fires and increase a sense of environmental stewardship. As the nurturing of environmental stewardship is the responsibility for the environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment, it recognizes it as a means to working towards a more sustainable future.
Therefore in the management of contemporary bush fires there is a trend towards looking at the different roles and joint responsibilities that both communities and environmental agencies play to ensure the conservation of the cultural heritage and built and natural assets of this region.

This report is an overview of the key challenges of bushfire management and explores the role that documentation of community stories of ‘lived experiences’ (Van Manen 1990, Boylorn, 2008) plays. Narrative storytelling by local communities can play a key role in building community knowledge. Human experiences, choices, and options are factors that influence one's perception of knowledge. Lived experiences focuses on the personal and unique perspective of people and how their experiences are shaped by subjective factors (Boylorn, 2008). Lived experiences as a form of qualitative research can be very valuable to knowledge production and future environmental planning and policy through a human values based approach (International Union For Conservation of Nature, 2011).

**Bushfires in the Blue Mountains**

In the case of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area which borders Sydney’s rapidly expanding suburban boundaries, there is a real risk of conflicting policy priorities between the protection of urban property and that of biodiversity conservation under the *World Heritage Act, 1983*. This is a national problem as evidenced in the Kakadu World Heritage area to suggest that too much preventive burning may be damaging the area’s biodiversity.

Achieving an effective balance between such priorities is not only important for Australia’s biodiversity, but for the management of World Heritage areas across the globe.

Bushfires in the Blue Mountains region, particularly in the last decade have impacted dramatically on local residents and are part of this region’s past
and present experiences. However, there has been very little recorded or documented about individual experiences from a community perspective.

This particular report represents the ‘untold stories’ through the analysis of interviews with individuals and group storytelling workshops and their retelling of bushfire experiences that address community healing. Everyone has a story to tell and contribute to the community’s bushfire history. Whilst different emotions, experiences and perspectives are valued, they can also be controversial. It should not be underestimated in the role that community storytelling plays in knowledge production and transmission within a community and for community building resulting from adverse conditions.

The importance of community dialogue

Important community perspectives in this report will be discussed about information that was revealed as to how Blue Mountains residents experiences with bushfire events can be shared and inform future planning for rural fire agencies and environmental managers. Formal mechanisms or processes are currently established for community sharing their bushfire experiences. This kind of community information of personal experiences has very little opportunity in both informal and formal mechanisms within environmental agencies to be recorded. This project proposes a new approach to gathering qualitative information and the important need to review processes of community feedback post-bush fire events to feed in a cyclic knowledge bank of shared experiences for future learning of experiences.

Often community and organisational knowledge is confined to separate domains especially in environmental issues. There is an imperative to bring these multiple knowledge bases closer together to inform collaborative policy and decision making that complements technical and operational knowledge.

The Bush fire Storytelling Project was undertaken by The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute between 2007-2009. It was convened by the Community Engagement Coordinator and workshops facilitated by storyteller, John Hockney.
However, bushfire management is one area organisations cannot afford not to be looking forward in joint decision making and problem solving.

**Methodology**

The Bushfire Storytelling Project workshops were undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute during 2007–2009 to record past and recent bushfire experiences by local residents in the Blue Mountains. Two community storytelling workshops were held at the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in Katoomba and Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. These workshops were facilitated by a local professional storyteller, John Hockney and convened and by the Community Engagement Coordinator of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute. (Selected transcripts of ‘Examples of Community Accounts’ are included in this report. See Appendix 4 for additional transcripts from group discussions rom workshops.)

The workshops illustrate the important knowledge gap that exists between official and unofficial accounts of dramatic bushfire events. Community stories were orally shared in small groups by Blue Mountains residents and audio recordings made by the facilitators and then transferred to written transcripts. Willing participants responded to community fliers promoting the free workshops that were circulated to local community network attracting a range of people from diverse social backgrounds, age and life experiences.

Historically, as Christmas time in the Blue Mountain is often the peak period for dramatic bush fires to occur, it becomes a time of mixed emotions for many local people—both celebratory but also a feeling of uncertainty. By providing facilitated workshops with a professional storyteller for local residents it provided a safe space to share oral and written stories as a tool
for knowledge building.

These community stories documented in this report which are anecdotal and are from various individuals that make up an important part of the mosaic of the picture of how environmental agencies and researchers recall and record an event in this local community.

Stories were obtained in various forms through informal group conversations and with prompt questions from the workshop facilitator. Excerpts from a video, titled Western Sydney Firestorm, December 2001-January 2002 (Top Notch Video) was shown to the group and was used as a catalyst to prompt people’s memories and assist in recalling accounts.

Personal items were brought in by one participant who was also a visual artist such as photographs and artworks based on the effects on her personal items that she had produced in response to the Warrimoo bushfire event.

Contextual information about Blue Mountains bush fires was provided through additional research by the facilitator from the media, internet research and publications as provided as resources for the group.

**Review of storytelling approaches and issues of community participation**

Sometimes attracting community participation can be a particular challenge. This is due to people putting themselves in a new environment and context which they may not have encountered before and being part of a group dynamic with new people in the community.

From an ethical perspective, the workshop participants were reassured that confidentiality of comments, experiences and their stories in the process of the storytelling workshops would be respected by the group. This level of trust was critical for participants to open up to strangers around the table, to prevent feelings of vulnerability or judgement by others.

This needs to be accommodated in the facilitation to ensure this issue is raised with the group up front at the beginning of the workshop session. Facilitators also sought permission so stories could be shared in a more public arena such as on such as The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute website. (See bmwhi.org.au)
There were complex skills required by both the workshop facilitator and the project convenors as recorders of these community experiences from these group conversations of The Bushfire Storytelling Project. It highlighted the important role and responsibility documenting and recording the transcripts to re-construct and re-evaluate it from alternate points of view.

As Somekh et al (2007) explains the importance of ‘the consciousness of interpretation’ and the role of inquiry in action research and practice (Carr, W. 2006) and the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it become critical factors in the way that this applied. In this case, to the use of the community stories resulting from The Bushfire Storytelling workshop.

In promoting The Bushfire Storytelling Project to seek community participation, one neighbourhood centre in the Blue Mountains was concerned that this storytelling approach may draw out the trauma of an event for the workshop participant. However, whilst this may be the case for some potential participants it is also equally important to confront and share the experience. This was still an important step towards community healing for other workshop participants, in a positive way which resulted in community bonding and sharing of experiences. Time, memory and selected moments of an event can sometimes only give us a snapshot of a continuous temporal experience.

However, subjective and personal stories of ‘lived experiences’ are important to value and validate community stories. Narrative inquiry Trahar (2013) argues is that all researchers should foreground the importance of the context in which research takes place and develop methodological approaches that are grounded in their local contexts. To do so, they need to pay attention to how knowledge is constructed, shared and understood in those contexts.

What is even more critical is that these stories provide us with context and specificity about particular locations and events based on community and individual human values and actions. Much of our knowing is unconscious in nature and sometimes people ‘quite successfully replace absent stimuli with theorizing an imagination’ (Somekh et al. 2007).
People often also listen and observe the unspoken and non-verbal observations of the individual and group’s participation and responses.

Interpretive sequences which included explanation of the event, reflections, feelings, and speculation also came into play in the telling, reinterpreting and documenting of community stories.

*Our hopes, fears and desires influence how we think,
perceive and remember.* (LeDoux 2004)

But community stories of this kind and many others that speak from a person’s account of the event can often be selective in memory and distort the reality of the event. This brings into play the association of past experiences as they build up in the way people are constantly building on layers of individual human experiences.

Depending on how you view the multilayered event, a person experiences various states simultaneously on a visual, auditory and physical level. This kind of information and people’s responses are difficult to distinguish in this context in contrast between the clear boundaries and clarity that is often found in official bushfire reporting. Identifying conflicts and locating their source is important but may be difficult and challenging. However, this is necessary because the conflicts stand in the way of creating or discovering common ground and thus, achieving integration.

Integration, as in this case of knowledge arises out of ‘*conflict, controversy and difference*’ (Repko 2008). It is a complex matter to understand that the conditions in which communities do or do not act are only part of the problem. As Davis (1991) points out, there can be ‘*cleavages and conflicts within these communities*’.

Whilst groups may organise and interact within a single residential neighbourhood they also as groups manage to pool their resources in a common endeavour, then as he states ‘communities act’. Also group
formations of smaller units of collective action can occur where they act in the interests of that smaller group which may not be acting as a single community. They may interact conflictually, instead of cooperatively toward a common goal. Davis (1991) concludes that it may be more useful to shift our attention to where disparate groups in the same locale join together in a common cause.

More importantly, is to examine interests and conditions that engender community in the first place. It may be more of a case of sharing common relations to the place of residence, where they have their homes, raise their children, and relate to each other, as neighbours can and ‘do forge solidarities on the basis of interests that are inherent in that relation to that place’ (Davis, 1991). In this respect, many people invest in the future of their domestic property or places of residence and have a common interest in a neighbourhood in what happens to that property, as well as an interest in what happens to the neighbourhood in which that property is located. In this case, people with a similar investment in the same territory may have similar economic and political interests.

**Combined knowledge sharing**

The role that community bushfire storytelling play in communicating different stories and what information is revealed? How can these experiences be shared with the wider community and managers of bush fires in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA) that environmental organisations can learn from and can inform future bushfire management.

Official media and bushfire reports and quantitative data often cover the technical and operational aspects of bush fires. They have helped informed us to monitor the frequency of fires over the years which illustrated the decreasing number of human lives that are lost. Even though there may be articles on personal stories and experiences printed in the
newspapers often not much of this information is used as a source of research to directly to build up the data of our knowledge base on this issue?

However, the combination of these records and data needs to be brought in parallel with the sharing of human perspectives and on the ground experience. Decision making based on technical and operational issues of bushfire management can only benefit from drawing upon multiple knowledge bases and diverse perspectives. This can but help the vital need to increase our understanding, and preparations by local people for future bushfire events.

Examples of community accounts
This report draws upon textual analysis and the findings and information that can be gleaned through local residents and artist’s stories and images and what it can tell us about their experiences and people’s behaviour and attitudes.

* Cognitive psychology explains successful communication between individuals having different perspectives by exploring the way our brain subjectively constructs perceiving, seeing and acting. (Repko 2008)*

Often possible sources of conflict between different versions of an event are based on assumptions and theories. Intuition is an important element that plays a role in creating common ground. The opportunity for community participants to discuss, formulate and modify their views during conversations and make sense of their experiences in peer group situations is a rare experience particularly about bushfire experiences.

An examination of personal stories from residents reveals the high emotions and unexpected behaviours and actions during bushfire events. It highlights the unexpected patterns of the way human perceptions develop different realities around the same or a similar event. These important stories depend on where people perceive themselves -emotionally, geographically and
socially and the role of organisations involved in the actual and same event. Often this kind of information from people can be dismissed if not properly utilised as a form and source of valuable information that we can learn from.

**Account 1**

The following community stories were generated through workshops and were undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute during 2007 and 2009.

*As a new comer to the Mountains, and experiencing my first bushfire, I could find plenty of information on preparing my home and garden and contents for an imminent bushfire situation but there was no information available to inform me of how I would be notified of all impending emergency to my immediate vicinity apart, presumably, from the smell of smoke!*

*A lot of stress is created from the unknown factor. Together with the unpredictable nature of bushfires it would be good to have a standard procedure in place to notify residents of bushfire areas, especially new comers.*

**Female Blackheath resident, originally from the UK.**

**Analysis of Account 1**

As recalled in the experience by the Blackheath resident in Account 1 there was a sense of frustration and possibly fear of the uncertainty, or as she described it, of the unknown, in her new context which created emotions of anxiety. One makes a plea to stress the importance of the distribution and access to information, in particular to new comers to the Blue Mountains in the future so they do not have to go through her experience, a practical solution to her dilemma.
However, the politics and boundaries of responsibility in the community are sometimes ambiguous. This raises a point about how can this information or particular story can be shared and whose role and responsibility is it, so organisations can learn from this experience. Was there existing information available that the resident was unaware of, and how would they know where to access it through the local Rural Fire Service or neighbourhood centre?

Not as a direct action resulting from the sharing of this story but an illustration of a similar local identified need for collective action, the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre and their subcommittee bushfire group is working closely with the Rural Fire Service in supporting local residents in bushfire preparation and communication of information.

Account 2

*I did not grow up with knowledge of bushfires. The older people talked about experiences they had lived through or the second hand stories they offered up around the table. But children were not invited into adult stories so we were content with playing outside.*

*It was only after I became an Aboriginal Discovery Ranger for National Parks and Wildlife Service that I was to gain firsthand knowledge of what a bushfire was capable of.*

*Firstly I was stationed at Lithgow, in the office (fire headquarters). My job was to assist with logistics. We, as a team made sure there was enough food and drink for the firefighters as they came back from the frontline. Making sure all of their needs were met with regard to sustenance and nutrition. Careful monitoring of the health and wellbeing was paramount as was making sure that they had an open line of communication to their loved ones.*
The second contact I had with bushfires in the Upper Mountains was when I was stationed at the end of Evans Lookout Road. My job was to stop the general public from entering the fire ravaged area. Remarkably there was a large number of people who come to see for themselves the damage that the fire had inflicted on the landscape. Some only saw damage and devastation-somehow not seeing the amazing process of regeneration, of sustainability and of continued life.
There was a father who had brought his ten year old son down – it was the boy’s birthday. All he wanted was to run down into the burnt out area, knock burnt out trees over, kick the ground and disrupt the floor of the valley -to make his mark. His father saw this as an event that he was going to make happen. No amount of telling these two individuals that they were being denied access for their own safety was working. Unfortunately they had to be spoken to sternly and warned of the ensuing steps with the law which was their next option if leaving was not on their agenda. Thankfully, for all peoples’ safety, they left.

The ignorance of safety in events caused by nature is an injustice. Had those two individuals gone in, others would most probably have had to follow -putting all at risk.

The one thing that truly stands out in events caused by bushfire is the true human spirit. People want to help normally, as they themselves would like to be helped. However, this grows stronger the closer people are to the source of the danger.

The other thing that stands out for me is the dedication and commitment I saw in the fire headquarters (both Katoomba and Lithgow) was the amazing amount of knowledge and respect that filled the building for each other and the fire.

Female Aboriginal Discovery Ranger, mother and visual artist
**Fire Dreaming**

*Gouache on paper*

*Elly Chatfield*

**Analysis of Account 2**

This account of a bushfire experience by someone in a professional role illustrates the difficult role and dilemma that one person is faced with in terms of power and authority and a person’s safety. The participant also relayed an important cultural issue and for her as an Aboriginal female which also impacted on her decision as she felt she could not assert herself even though she had authority. More intriguing is the motivation of the behaviour of the father and son and what action the Aboriginal Discovery Ranger felt they could undertake in these circumstances.

*Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship*
The participant reflects on her experiences as a child and about the relationships between adults and children. As she comments:

*The older people talked about experiences they had lived through or the second hand stories they offered up around the table. But children were not invited into adult stories so we were content with playing outside.*

It also reveals this strange phenomenon of the fear and fascination of bushfire and people’s curiosity and need to experience something that was considered dangerous from one person’s perspective but adventurous, exciting and an experience not to be missed by others.

The account by the Aboriginal Discovery Ranger leaves the reader with some questions as to the inappropriateness of this man and his son’s behaviour. Curiosity obviously played an important part for them and maybe the notion of man’s power over a devastated, charred landscape. It is a surreal image leaving the reader with a sense of confusion and disbelief as to motivation and intention of these human actions in this particular bushfire event.

The inner voice of the community participant’s writing reveals the conscious thoughts that went through her head at the time, understanding the implications of their actions but feeling compelled not to take any particular action. Some of the things revealed in the story are difficult to explain.
Account 3

The ‘Must’ Xmas (2001)

My friends are professional people both heading into their second marriage. They have lived together for about a year and they now seem inseparable.

One evening, as Christmas 2001 approached, I visited them on the way home they invited me to stay for dinner. During the course of the evening, I spoke of my Jehovah’s Witness upbringing saying that I had not had the pleasure of Christmas as and birthday parties when I was growing up.

A couple of days later my friend phoned and explained that he and his wife were having a large family gathering on Christmas Day and asked if I wished to join them. Not having had any other offers, I accepted the invitation.

By Christmas Eve, Glenbrook had erupted, bushfires were all around, and although no properties had been lost, everyone went to bed that night with the thought of surviving the next day on their minds: would it be hot? Would the fires worsen?

I went to a Penrith Church service early on the Christmas morning, then to my friend’s house where I shared their friendliness, the lovely food, watching more than forty people enjoy their meal, and later the exchange of presents. I had never been part of this before. A truly magnificent time!

When I thought about going home I was told the highway was closed because of the fires. I decided to go to Blacktown
and visit a friend. My friend’s family and I spent a couple of hours looking at decorations and lights people had fitted to the front of their houses into this area.

Late in the evening, I heard the news—the most devastating fires had occurred in areas that had no expectation of fire the day before at Warragamba, Glenmore Park and Sutherland.

Next morning I woke early and drove to the local National Park entrance. Everything I saw was black. A middle aged couple were walking out of the park, and I asked them how they were. They explained that their Christmas day was spent looking after their house and those of three neighbours who were on holidays. The woman finished the conversation—‘we finally finished Christmas dinner at ten o’clock last night’. I spent the next couple of hours looking at the black sandstone and trees with wisps of smoke still rising from their blackened trunks. My most enjoyable Christmas Day seemed a lifetime away.

Glenbrook male resident and poet

Analysis of Account 3

Account 3 has many different layers to the information from which it can be interpreted. It marks not only the attachment and importance of friendship but the significance of it this particular Christmas. Usually a celebratory occasion, Blue Mountains residents now feel this time of the year is one to reconsider going on vacation and being away from their property. This has particularly shifted residents’ thinking in the last ten years due to the increasing number of bushfires. In this case the community participant was a poet. More visual details of his acute observations are revealed, and these come into play to add meaning to the emotional experience.

It also provides a sensual and visual feeling to the technical aspects of fire and his observations—‘I spent the next couple of hours looking at the black
sandstone and trees with wisps of smoke still rising from their blackened trunks’ – and the after affects.

These selected accounts are representative of the different moods, individual emotions and reflective thoughts generated a specific bushfire event. Creative writing provides the vehicle that releases the subconscious thought and provides revealing insights to the mind and human behaviour. It delves into the visual memory of the writer isolating moments and selected thoughts that shape the record of events.
Account 4

Well! We stayed because it had been drummed into us. I'd lived in the mountains for 30 years and I'd been deeply involved with conservation and the bush. The bush was a living thing – I'd been involved in lots of hazard reduction burning and I was very aware of the need to stay. It had been drummed in a lot over time, and from the bushfires – and they talked about experiences and what saved houses, and then they told us the firestorm passes very quickly, and then you get out and start putting out the spot fires around.

So that was our plan to do that and there wasn’t really anytime to think about it. But we were almost stuck – it was almost too late to leave – anyway – so what frightened us was that our studio was on fire – our caravan – and our boat, and our garage had been put on fire. We had actually put a
lot of things in the car – in the garage to save. And this fire came so quickly – which was deliberately lit – I might add, which is the main perception I had about all this. And how we were not believed about that. It’s the politics that goes on behind the scenes – it’s extraordinary.

Female resident from Warrimoo

Analysis of Account 4

This workshop participant experiences on Blue Mountains bushfires reveals a number of conflicting issues and personal dilemmas that are faced in bushfire management. More specifically this story illustrates the feelings and emotions that come into play in decision making on an individual level when it comes to action and her recalling of the event. In the phrase ‘we stayed because it had been drummed into us’ ... illustrates the view in relation to what messages are communicated by fire authorities to the community about fire protection – personal and property.

Whilst there are certain actions that authorities would recommend prior to and during a bushfire the specificity, variable and contextual factor that come into play cannot be underestimated. These kinds of factors make bushfire management a complex issue in relation to both dispelling some of the perceptions and facing the realities from an organisational and community perspective. It raises the issue of community expectations and the pressure it places on their relationship to authorities, in this case the Rural Fire Service and the frustration of the inadequate level of resources available in this event.

Ingham"s (2009) work with the NSW Rural Fire Service into decision making on the fireground and the education and training reinforces these factors. Her groundbreaking research identified a crucial role of visual perception and the somatic and aesthetic awareness in time-pressured decision making. This research was based upon personal encounters with real life experiences
by the firefighters in decision making. It was revealed that the information that was to be documented and needed to be completed on an official report did not allow for some of the intuitive and visual factors that come into play in this situation.

Whether a bushfire is a natural occurrence or manmade intervention the facing of these tensions become highly emotive in a community from many different perspectives. The need to suppress and put out the fires regardless requires coordination and cooperation in a community context. As this Blue Mountains resident strongly expresses:

\[
\textit{We really have to be self reliant, and we can’t depend on a fire brigade to come and protect us. So that’s a huge lesson we learned in the Blue Mountains.}
\]

\[
\textit{We need to look after ourselves. And this is my concern. It is how you pass this information onto other people and have it so that it’s developing stories and procedures and talking to each other.}
\]
Summary of community accounts

These recorded stories are a snapshot of the representative stories from the last decade of bushfires by local residents. As stated they are layered in their meanings and associations, and in their intensity of emotions and diverse perspectives on the same or different bushfire events. Whilst there are issues of complexity and ambiguity they still reflect an important insight to the potential that stories can play in community sharing and bonding, the diversity of community perspectives in assessing the impact of bushfires and people’s individual and collective actions. Some of the key findings from these stories revealed many levels of people’s behaviour and emotions, especially fear. The first emotions were about the anxiety of preparation for bushfires and what people did and what equipment they had. Another issue was the anguish and panic over whether people would stay or leave, which constantly created a state of complexity and personal dilemma. If they left, what were they prepared to leave, what would they take and what was most precious to them?

Another factor was the reality of self preservation and family, as the camaraderie and dependence on neighbours for support and assistance. It also brought strangers together and saw new friendships emerging out of a common experience.

Conclusion

People’s senses have become more acute living in the Blue Mountains over the years. Local residents develop an innate sense of smell and feeling of upcoming and nearby bushfires. It becomes a total sensory experience. The atmosphere changes, people can feel the heat, the wind, smell, smoke and the noise. People’s safety becomes vulnerable. Through using visual senses,
monitoring can be assessed on how close the smoke and fires are moving towards people’s homes. These feelings create a constant state of anxiety in the community, exacerbated by checking regular radio reports and the geographic proximity of the fire.

These community accounts contribute to building on many years of history of bushfire management experience in this region (Merson, 2006) from formal and informal information. This information becomes more critical over time as the need to protect the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It is even greater now as it is becoming more fragile and vulnerable. This is due to the intensity of climate change and global warming with their unpredicted factors and variables.

However, there is always ongoing learning on many levels from both communities and environmental agencies and other key stakeholders. In working towards a more collaborative and integrated approach to management strategies there are always new stories and experiences to share, new techniques, technology and equipment and combined knowledge that can move communities, environmental policymakers and managers forward into the future in environmental problemsolving.
Recommendations

- The Rural Fire Service in the Blue Mountains review the formal mechanisms and communication channels available for community feedback and input pre-, during and post bushfire events.

- Rural Fire Services Blue Mountains to develop a formal system of recording and documenting community stories and experiences supported by human and financial resources.

- To present regular public community forums on bushfire management in joint partnership with local community groups, Blue Mountains City Council, NSW Rural Fire Service, National Parks and Wildlife and the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and other interested stakeholders to share their experiences, visuals and audio stories to support residents in ongoing learning about bushfires in their area/region.

- For environmental and rural fire service agencies to integrate community stories as part of the critical information for social and cultural research with official reports that can inform policy decision making in a combined knowledge capacity.
6. LAWSON PUBLIC ART AND INTERPRETATION

Lawson Town plaza existing public art

Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo
6.1 The Value of Public Art in Environmental Stewardship

Report 3a:

Introduction

This report discusses the role of public art in environmental sustainability and the sense of place and identity in examining some of the innovative examples in regional Australia and overseas. Issues of sustainability are moving towards addressing the ‘triple bottom line’ i.e. social, environmental and economic (Elkington, 1994) and are embracing a more integrated approach to environmental stewardship and problem solving.

The complexity of globalisation in regional areas is multifaceted, not only affecting the flux of the local economy but simultaneously affecting issues concerning the social and environmental fabric. Globalisation can bring both harm and rewards to regional Australia, depending on the role of local communities in the decision making process along with local authorities, agencies and environmental policy makers.

The social and cultural forces associated with globalisation have overwritten local social and cultural practices, and globalisation has generated a world of restless landscapes in which the more places change the more they seem to look alike and the less they are able to retain a distinctive sense of place. (Knox and Mayer, 2009)

In addressing environmental issues on a global level, Agenda 21 (1992), the international program by the United Nations, marked an important and timely position relating to sustainable development. It was the first summit to discuss global warming related issues and also the first document with a worldwide mission that advocated establishing the groundwork of an undertaking by cities and local governments for cultural development.
The fourth pillar of sustainability

However, cultural advocates have strongly expressed the need for integration of the ‘fourth pillar’ (Hawkes, 2001). This encompasses in seeking cultural outcomes as well as the ‘triple bottom line’. As cultural analyst Hawkes (2001) argues, it is necessary to ensure community wellbeing and sustainability. Its critical role in public planning processes is inevitable through the transmission of values and the way they are expressed in a society’s culture through social and cultural production.

Cultural values are a critical part of the interpretation of place and the role of public art and in seeing how particular sites ‘acquire meanings and how places and sites are used by cultures’ (Crang, 1998). The World Heritage Committee’s Global Strategy focuses on two key themes which view human co-existence with the land and human beings in society. This shift in direction reflects, as they state in their strategy, the growing recognition ‘that material and immaterial, natural, spiritual and cultural factors are complexly intertwined in the heritage of many countries’.
Knox (2009) specifically refers to small towns as a key example when he states that:

There are towns where ordinary residents experience the vagaries of the global economy and the impacts of global climate changes. But they are also the towns from which we can learn how to develop a sustainable future.

Case Study- Small Towns, Big Picture

The question of sustainability in small regional towns and the value of the arts in community development, economic development and environmental management in regional towns are well illustrated in The Small Town Big Picture Project (2001–02) in Victoria. As a project in partnership with the Cultural Development Network and the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities at Latrobe University, it originally focused on an audit of five regional towns in Central Victoria and the triple bottom line – the social, economic and environmental.

With the involvement of the Cultural Development Network, they strongly advocated for a more integrated approach that introduced the ‘fourth pillar’ (Hawkes 2001) of culture to the sustainability indicators in social, economic and environmental terms. Not only did it attempt to address these factors, it also strengthened connections and partnerships between the arts, academic institutions and policy bodies in regional development, including local government.

This project illustrates the nexus between policy and cultural practice. In this respect, this research was gathered and local data analysed against sustainability indicators, then translated and interpreted. This was through an arts-led community engagement program involving hundreds of people in five towns. Artists used processes of collecting, interpreting and

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The Small Towns: Big Picture Project (2001–02)
[http://culturaldevelopment.net.au/_projects_past.htm](http://culturaldevelopment.net.au/_projects_past.htm). A triple bottom line university audit of five small towns in Central Victoria by La Trobe University.
expressing the research data, which was transformed into creative works. Ranging from visual arts, theatre, music, works in clay, film and fabric and video, many of the original artworks left a legacy and are now embedded in public spaces in the town. This developmental work also led to the commissioning of a community public artwork program in one of the original audited towns.

**Placemaking and Public Art**

When current trends towards urban planning centre around ideas of metropolitan regions and global cities, it is important to reflect upon the role and potential of smaller places. Smaller places often play a pivotal role with regional economies in that they lend character and distinctiveness to the regional landscapes that make up larger geographical regions.

Many small towns suffer from economic stagnation and find it difficult to deal with the many internal and external influences that affect their community wellbeing. With limited capacity, these local communities sometimes find it difficult to respond to economic and social change, and problems of environmental change, and can suffer from social malaise and be in need of revitalisation. This sometimes can often contribute to economic decline and loss of local distinctiveness, character and sense of place. Local policies and initiatives also contribute to the economic development, their environmental quality and their community wellbeing.

Placemaking is a term used in the 1970s by architects and planners to describe the process of creating squares, plazas, parks and streets and waterfronts, by transforming public spaces to become points of attraction and interest through landscape design and economic growth. There is particularly strong growth in placemaking in the urban and business districts of Australia.

However, this is played out differently in regional Australia, where points of tourist attraction are often based on cultural heritage, natural or cultural attractions, the promotion of alternative lifestyles and, more recently, on
local organic food and wine. One thing that is common to both urban and regional scenarios is the move towards environmentally sustainable lifestyles and design of places, spaces and public art.

Public art, where art works are accessible to people in physical public domains, plays an important role as a symbol for sense of place and community wellbeing. It serves an important role in social and cultural spaces for communities. Whether it be static or kinetic artworks at specific sites and locations, public art has now expanded to a broader cultural landscape approach. The role of public art in the community has not changed dramatically over the decades, but different modes and techniques of the fabrication, materials and technologies available impact on the type of artworks produced. This process has moved through a number of phases.

A shift in practices through which communities participate and are engaged in public art processes however has occurred. Artists and designers involved in public art, and those local authorities and organisations that commission public art, have different individual and philosophical approaches to conceptualising and making public art. More local government authorities and cultural institutions now have legislative requirements and public art policies in place. As a consequence, community consultation frameworks are also required, with more thorough processes to engage local communities more actively. In some states in Australia, public art budgets are an important priority and are assured a specific percentage of yearly allocation of public funds.

One key period in Australia which gave the opportunity for communities to work with professional arts was the 1990s, through the Australia Council’s Community, Environment and Design Program (CEAD)\(^{67}\), managed by the Community Cultural Development Board (which is no longer in existence). The legacy of some of this funding of public art is now spread throughout Australia in local communities and places. This was the catalyst for

\(^{67}\)Australia Council for the Arts Report 1995–96

connections with community collaborations and new partnerships in significant co-funding from local government and the private sector. It was also a period of exponential employment growth for artists working in collaborative design and public art. It provided a national model for government support of collaborative and creative approaches to urban design, and now nearly all local governments and state governments have established related funding programs. What was significant was that it supported a significant amount of regional activity involving Aboriginal communities, and communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as a way of developing community pride and ownership.

Cultural commentator and practitioner, Armstrong (2005), reflects on her experience working with professionals in design and architecture, on issues of public art. She questions collaborative projects and raises the issue of the role of art in public space and who can claim to be the artist. As Armstrong states 'many architects and landscape architects believe that they are the artists'. She believes public art is more than decoration. As she recalls about the artists’ role in the Land Art in the 1960s and with installations in public spaces they served to remind the population of controversial and deeper issues and brought social and environmental issues to attention.

\(^{68}\) Land Art is a term that refers to an artform that emerged out of the 1960s and 1970s where landscapes are inextricably linked by using natural materials to create artworks.
The 1980s was a time of urban renewal when, as Armstrong states, artists worked with architects and landscape architects and with communities. But this dynamic also raised dilemmas in the context of certain projects where the artists were employed for the purposes of re-invigorating economic development. This sometimes limited the artists to their client’s agendas, meaning the work was not always aligned with community aspirations.

Community views comment that the artworks

\[ \text{tended to be tokenistic, paying-lip service to the site and} \]
\[ \text{community specificity through banners, community made} \]
\[ \text{tiles in footpaths and murals ...} \]

Across Australia, in the 1990s, urban spaces were transformed as Armstrong states into clean, attractive settings for public play, which served major political and corporate goals.

**The Arts, Social Value and Sustainability**

This raises questions about social values and how to break down barriers of contemporary art that reflect and arouse community self-reflection to ensure the potential for the public domain to act as a rich cultural sphere. Armstrong refers to Barrett-Leonard’s works (1992) and his particular interest in the notion of the public and the complex issues associated with art and contemporary society, and competing interests and agendas, which become moral dilemmas.

As an example from outside Australia, Common Ground in the UK promoted the concept, *Local Distinctiveness* (1983) which continues to be part of their campaign to collaborate in celebrating and promoting variety in their surroundings.
In this campaign they looked at the rich range of things that make England such a complex place and through a range of projects and activities they created *England in Particular*\(^69\) through which they hoped to inform and gather details, stories and examples to help communities share their particular knowledge.

They refer to the ‘local’ implying a neighbourhood and its distinctiveness. It was about particularity which is manifested in many ways.

> It is about continuing history and nature jostling with each other, layers and fragments – old and new. The ephemeral and invisible are important too: customs, dialects, celebrations, names, recipes, spoken history, myths, legends and symbols.

As they state:

> All these things are folded into identity and need reinvigoration by the new. Localities are always open to outside influences, new people, ideas, activities, and just as nature keeps experimenting, they must face the paradox of persistence and change. But change may enrich or it may homogenise and diminish.

The essay *Losing your Place*\(^70\) expands on this. Their commitment to commonplace things, the locally abundant, is, they believe, what we take for granted. What they found was important was to demand the best of the new so that quality and authenticity adds richness to their surroundings.

Thinking globally and acting locally is a slogan that resonates strongly in smaller regional towns and is relevant to villages. The value of public art and

\(^69\)See [www.england-in-particular.info](http://www.england-in-particular.info) under [www.commonground.org](http://www.commonground.org)

its role in environmental sustainability has gained immense popularity in engaging local communities, especially in regional areas, and evidence illustrates that it can address a number of sustainability issues.

Common Ground (UK) is a community conservation movement designed to promote the importance of local distinctiveness and the common culture. It does this by forging close links between local landscapes and the arts, using the arts to reveal how we engage with the subjective values of place. It was initiated because landscape values are revealed purely objectively and scientifically. This only resulted in the rare and spectacular aspects of our environment being seen as valuable; meanwhile those familiar landscapes which held great value for communities were being lost at an alarming rate.

To enable people to give value to familiar places, Common Ground has produced books, paintings, sculpture and events, all of which reveal the power of partnerships between artists and local communities to make manifest subjective values and meanings embedded in landscapes.

One of the main areas of concern for Common Ground was the loss or erosion of local distinctiveness of places. They maintain that this `bleaching of identity, detail, craftsmanship and meaning affect us all emotionally and culturally."\(^{71}\)

While they accept change is vital, they point out that the scale, type and rate of change occurring now is unprecedented and is capable of obliterating all that has gone before, particularly the common things that give character to our places. Erosion of local distinctiveness is not only a result of development – there are many small changes which rob places of their local diversity.
Case study: The Lawson Project (Blue Mountains, NSW)

On a local level, the historic township of Lawson in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area faces all these changes, especially as a World Heritage listed site. Located on the Great Western Highway it is on the transport corridor to the central west of NSW. As current changes take place due to the four lane highway upgrade, major redevelopments to the physical infrastructure and main shopping and town plaza are shifting its identity and creating anxiety in the community about the town’s future on the social, cultural, environmental and economic level.

In Lawson, changes that slowly erode and transform the physical and natural landscape and the emotional psyche of the community have been dramatic. The landscaping and building of new roads and footpaths, and the installation of traffic lights, all indicate that the town’s access and economic importance are in major transition.

The major commercial and retail area is being redeveloped and Blue Mountains City Council’s vision to develop it as an environmentally sustainable town is emerging. With design elements that have incorporated integrated water systems for the public toilets and installation of new public art and footpaths and walkways, the new modern and contemporary look sometimes contrasts with the visual aesthetics and the desire of some community members to retain the heritage features. This tension and conflict can be seen in the example of how a village fights to retain its local distinctiveness without being homogenised. Budget constraints and physical limitations are sometimes barriers for the local council to respond to community aspirations for public art ideas to incorporate heritage items in the redesign of the new town.

A photography project undertaken in partnership with the local youth centre in Lawson and the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute during Youth Week in 2009 clearly reflects perceptions and attitudes by youth about their sense of place. Comments by youth reinforced these values of not wanting their town of Lawson to be like suburbs in Western Sydney that somehow
reflect perceptions of its lack of character and distinctiveness. Also, many commented on the contrast between the built features with concrete and new paved walkways with their desire for more integration of natural features and plants to bring back the life and spirit of the place.

One of their favourite public artworks recently installed is a circular interactive artwork that can play musical tunes. Using their feet, young people can play with it for hours. They are mesmerised by the xylophonic sounds that can be modified with their own pace of walking or running, and the public artwork can be enjoyed by individuals or groups of friends.

One example that illustrates this point locally is the development of the Love Lawson Festival which has emerged in the last three years out of adverse conditions. It aim was to restore the community spirit and social cohesion that were disappearing. Despite community tensions and differing opinions within the community, and problems in communication with the local community and the local council, the festival has restored relationships and partnerships. It has generated a community energy working voluntarily for a common vision that has gained the people a positive profile and has put Lawson on the map with local and regional tourists. One of the key events is the markets which promote handmade crafts with a branding of Made in the Mid Mountains and promotion of the different groups and genres of local artistic talent.

Other suggestions by community members in recent art workshops\textsuperscript{72} held in Lawson related to the existing public art spaces and their future use as places for social gatherings, musical performances, and storytelling including Aboriginal ceremonial gatherings and sharing of Aboriginal culture with the

\textsuperscript{72} These community workshops were undertaken by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute during 2010 to develop conceptual ideas for future public art in Lawson and presented to Blue Mountains City Council for consideration.
wider community. With dominance of the representation of European heritage to Aboriginal heritage to date, past narratives of the multicultural heritage of European farmers are often not visible. However these new links between ideas and proposals arose to explore further these cultural representations in future public art plans.

Practising artists Milne and Stonehouse, successfully worked on an artists/planner collaboration with the Design Team for Carrington Place, Katoomba Town Square in 2002 to produce high quality outcomes. This set the precedent for the way that professionals/experts as artists, designers, architects and planners can work collaboratively with integrity. This does not compromise community participation and values their creativity to meet their design aspirations. Following this model in other towns in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area would provide consistency in meeting the sustainability needs of this region. Where the Upper Mountains attracts most tourists with its natural attractions such as the Three Sisters, we can lay the foundation to explore and promote the rich cultural, social and natural assets for Mid Mountains communities in the showcase for a sustainable village such as Lawson.

Discussion
As recommended by Public Art Southwest\(^7\) the importance of leading by example should not be underestimated in creating a positive context where local communities value the benefits of public art. From a local council perspective it should be clear where high quality design is required and how public art is expected to contribute to the built environment.

This point provides an opportunity for local planning policy makers who should provide certainty with regard to what is expected from developers, and planning guidance, through against which major new developments are judged or appraised with regard to the integration of public art.

\(^7\)Public Art online by Public Art Southwest, UK at http://www.publicartonline.org.uk/resources/practicaladvice/localauth/publicartandplan ning.php#
At the strategic level it is important for authorities to set out their specific approach to public art, highlighting how they will integrate work within their own capital projects as well as their expectations for others through the planning system. Principles and objectives for public art should be given local emphasis and made relevant to local circumstances and expectations. Local traditions and recent work should be highlighted in order to legitimise the way in which existing public art contributes to the distinctiveness and identity of local areas. An ideal strategy is one that can establish consistent guidelines for selecting, recruiting and briefing artists, and ensure the effective and appropriate project management support, maintenance and, where appropriate, decommissioning.

Other models of working in public art, such as in an artist-planner model, demonstrate how to work collaboratively with communities in a more equitable relationship. This is clearly illustrated with the philosophical position and processes that Australian public artists, Milne and Stonehouse (2008) undertake. Their interdisciplinary approach enables them to respond to diverse environs, ‘to develop artworks which are site specific, integrated and yet also intervene meaningfully to reinforce and build upon the cultural layers of the locale’.

They talk about site specificity of artworks that places them within the context of a cultural milieu and an investment in a place rather than the practical purchasing of a signature artwork that becomes the key focus. This holistic approach as Milne and Stonehouse (2008) express it reveres the interaction between diverse communities and their places and:

*predicts the ongoing flux of real space and cultural production. The signature of communities recognises the integrity of place and ensures the longevity of its signifiers ... A fluent approach to the planning process of place making is its blurring of authorship.*
Some experts are threatened by an intrusion of others into these formerly distinct territories. However, these edges were never really sharp:

*The engagement of artwork within the public arena imprints its presence into the fabric as cultural memory as an important part of the locale.* (Milne and Stonehouse, 2008)

This is a critical point for local communities reclaiming ownership of public spaces. However, the social and cultural politics are challenging where public spaces need to cater for a range of different needs, community expectations and visual aesthetics and the process of developing and producing public artworks will always be contested ground. Whose memories and ideas are captured? How can existing and future public art cater for the diverse constituency in a community?

The impacts of globalisation, as Knox (2009) states, can:

*undermine the distinctiveness of smaller urban places and threaten their vitality and culture... They are often places that encourage local arts and crafts... They can be havens in a fast world, places whose inhabitants think globally but act locally.*

**Conclusion**

The Lawson community has their vision and has already expressed in previous community consultations the potential for a number of community driven initiatives in eco-tourism and historical walking tours, with new artistic environmental markers to link different sites within Lawson. The move towards a more economically stable and environmentally focused aspiration provides the community with much pride and energy to put their town on the map. This approach to sustainability and community wellbeing which inspires both local residents and tourists to achieve growth in the future, will shift and transform the community.
As Amin (2010) advocates:

Woven into the awareness of the specificity of the local cultural environment ... is the potential significance of the urban infrastructure in regulating relations between strangers.

He believes that policy discourse on diversity seems to have evolved in directions that are more sensitive to the dynamics of bodily encounter and local specificity in these kinds of interventions. Neighbourhoods, as he states, acknowledge vary sharply the culture of negotiating difference that can affect cultural practices. The awareness of the powers of place can help tackle social cohesion by changing the patterns of contact between people from different backgrounds and social exchange in everyday situations such as in public spaces.

These factors can play a key role in bringing local communities together in the way public art and public spaces are utilised. In creating opportunities in conceiving and creating community in the consultation phase and participation in the production stages of public art, placemaking of social and creative spaces opens the way for developing healthy community wellbeing and environmental stewardship.
6.2 RE-CONSTRUCTING PLACE

Report 3

*Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo*

*It is through placemaking and storytelling that place and identities are known and transferred.* (Somerville *et al.* 2009)
This report outlines the key drivers in placemaking in an urban context as a means of shaping people’s attitudes and connection to sense of place and identity essential to environmental stewardship.

This particular urban case study focuses on Lawson, a historically significant village in the Blue Mountains in the midst of town redevelopment due to a highway upgrade, and these community dynamics through a public art workshop. It emphasises the importance of community knowledge through cultural expression which can re-shifts the power in the way the processes of design for public art can also build strong community and social networks.

**Introduction**

One example to the potential of collaborative partnerships and knowledge making in nurturing environmental sustainability was the partnership between The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) with Blue Mountains City Council Strategic Planning staff in 2007. Playing a key role in assisting Blue Mountains City Council, The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) acted as an intermediary. Forums and workshops were organised based on the framework, themes and objectives of Blue Mountains City Council’s, *25 Year Vision for the City: Towards a More Sustainable Blue Mountains (2004)*.

This brokering role of The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) supported the local community to articulate their concerns working towards resolving community issues and increasing community understanding about the complex nature of the town re-development. This case study of the Lawson Public Art Project was initiated as a secondary outcome of the wider community consultation undertaken.

As part of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute core team, the author of this Doctorate worked on the community engagement strategies in collaboration with consultant, Sandy Booth designing and convening these workshops. This resulted in the development of the Mid Mountains Collaborative Framework (BMWHI, 2007). This also led to the implementation of the Collaborative Community Government Framework and establishment of the Mid Mountains Sustainability Reference Group by Blue Mountains City Council.
In facilitating community visioning workshops with the Lawson community both arts and non arts approaches and fun and interactive techniques were used. The active participation of Council staff in workshops increased access, community dialogue and trust was developed.

Lawson Town village, within the Blue Mountains City Council (2001), manages ‘a City within a World Heritage National Park and enhancing its designation as the inaugural NSW City of the Arts’. With this in mind it has the task to ensure that these roles are balanced and that it reflects the area’s vitality, balance and aspirations on an economic, environmental and social level. The planning of public art in the redeveloped town of Lawson has an important part to play in this context. In this case, the development of public art is installed with the authorisation and collaboration of the local government that owns or administers the space. Hence, the aim of public art from Council’s perspective is:

\[
\text{to enhance the natural and built assets of the Blue Mountains} \\
\text{and to reflect its unique character, history and future aspirations.}
\]

According to Council’s Public Policy, commitment ‘to developing inclusiveness and partnerships within the community’ and ensuring interpretation of work ‘is in keeping with partnerships and ongoing dialogue with the community’ ‘is of vital importance.

**No Sense of Place**

Despite the vision and aspirational statements in Council’s Public Art Policy some community advocacy groups in Lawson are seeing things differently. Negative responses to the destabilisation of the village due to the redevelopment and construction of the four lane highway and shops present another view. Slogans such as ‘*No Sense of Place*’ are reflected on the brochures by one particular group. This sentiment is representative of one of the diverse community perceptions and emotions that are currently underlying the physical and psychological changes taking place.
However, the reality is that residents are experiencing daily disruption as drivers and pedestrians. Renegotiating their daily lives on the road, held up in traffic jams and with road work, dodging major digging and building construction around them, puts local residents under pressure.

One of the key challenges as the town is being reconstructed is the struggle to save the removal of items and materials with heritage significance from the town shops. This a major concern for the community who are determined to retain the cultural heritage of their town. Lobbying the local council to retain these items or reuse them in the design has been regularly undertaken by concerned residents. Whilst the village is gradually being physically demolished the need for cohesion and stability is strong in the community. This, and anguish over the new aesthetics, function and future of the town from a social, economic, environmental and cultural level, has created uncertainty amongst some local residents.

Stories, ideas, locations and materials thus dismembered are put back together, but re-membered (Carter 2004). As Carter says about collaborations, 'local invention’ is the consequence of ‘moving beyond nostalgia’ of place and the processes that produce and define a creative culture.

The reconstruction of the historic village, well known for its association with the famous Australian explorers Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, is transforming into a new entity that reflects the shift towards a more environmentally aware 21st century contemporary town. Through research and planning Lawson has been nurtured as a model town for Blue Mountains City Council. It has the potential to be a showcase for promoting environmental sustainable design with integrated water systems and more aesthetically considered public art. With this transformation it shifts its focus for the town to be revitalised as new regional tourist attraction rather than a town in economic decline.
Public art in the context of this project reconnects local Mid Mountains residents to a sense of place and village renewal in the town of Lawson in the Blue Mountains. In the midst of changes of urban development and highway widening, urban design and environmental sustainability are being challenged, in tension and in a physical state of flux.

Changes over the years in population size, social demographics and settlement patterns, and the shifting political agendas and economic climate, all play an important role as drivers of community motivation, expectation and aspiration. A cultural mapping project\textsuperscript{74} undertaken in 1987 in Lawson was relevant for the community members involved at the time. The act of map making empowered community groups and a number of conservation and rehabilitation landscape projects were initiated as a result. This indicates a need for reactivation and rearticulation in what drives the current population. Unfortunately, some issues are less relevant than they were a decade ago and some have changed. What has shifted is how these issues are currently addressed where new factors, possibilities and stakeholders exist with the different stages of the redevelopment of the town. It is undoubtedly timely and necessary to refresh in the minds of environmental decision makers and Council personnel these community aspirations, which are still burning issues to address and are intensified in this current local climate of infrastructure development.

\textsuperscript{74}In 1987, a community map was made by people in Lawson, NSW as part of the Common Ground Maps in Australia project. Working with photographer Malcolm King, and using pin-hole cameras that they made from post-paks, the map was created on three doors and still hangs in the Mid Mountains Community Centre.
In this context communities yearn for certainty, stability, and need to cope and manage and adapt with the physical, emotional and spiritual changes taking place, and this proves to be challenging. Witnessing the demolition and reconstruction of place has a dramatic impact on those reclaiming space, and the loss of environmental ecosystems and cultural heritage arouses mixed emotions.

*Lawson Community Map (1987)*

*Photos: Courtesy of Helen Armstrong*

As Dovey (1989) states, the use of the terms `place, sense of place and Spirit' of a place reflects the attempt to appreciate architecture, urban design and landscape as a meaningful experience rather `than objects in space'.

Carr (2002) also emphatically advocates, based on evidence from her research in Australia, that environmental stewardship cannot be achieved unless there is addressing of people's sense of place and identity. She also stresses the important role of community development as an integral part of this promotion of environmental stewardship.
These community art projects provide the opportunity to regain ownership over public space through an analysis of some of the underlying structures, processes and layers.

*The use of space in the built and natural environment is never neutral. It can have economic, ecological, social or leisure dimensions that are sometimes in tension or even in competition, with each other ... Public art seeks to develop an environment of inclusiveness and interaction within and between communities.*

In response to community concerns and the protracted delays in town redevelopment, an intervention was triggered by the issue of community ownership participation and to inform future planning of public art in Lawson.

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*City of Blue Mountains Public Art Policy, June 2001, Blue Mountains City Council.*
This was conducted by providing free community art workshops to reconnect cultural heritage and explore creative interpretations. These actions were undertaken independently by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and in consultation with Blue Mountains City Council. The project brought residents together at the local community centre in a new ‘social and cultural space’. Over three workshops we attracted forty-five adult participants with an additional ten children ranging from 6–15 years of age. Two-thirds of those who attended the workshops were female. A new community group of people was brought together from a disparate set of individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Some people knew each other whilst others were new acquaintances from the Mid Mountains community.

Moving out of the comfort zone

The workshops catered for a range of ages and skill levels and were developed to trigger people’s creative thinking. As was observed, this situation could be confronting for those not accustomed to utilising these
faculties. But in spite of this response, generating a concept also revealed how liberating and exciting it can be to discover skills of latent creativity. Claims by many participants that they ‘didn’t know how to draw’ or that they were not artistic were common through the workshop. Reassured by the facilitators that the task is to ‘just put your idea down’, confidence slowly built up within the community group over the sessions, after they had overcome the initial sense of confrontation and tentative moments of certain perceived expectations.

Along with the mix of people with little or no art experience, there were also a few artists. The group had different interests, experience and knowledge bases. The workshops did not require participants to have any art experience or skills, but they were provided with a supportive environment by facilitators and given art materials to explore the sense of play in two or three dimensions.

The most dynamic aspect of the project to observe is at the cross generational level. For example, having young teenagers and young children working alongside refugees, teachers, migrants, parents, an anthropologist, historian, a conservator, scientist and an Aboriginal artist in active informal dialogue and sharing of ideas and stories posed no barriers as they worked on their visual concepts. Presentations of concepts were carried out by the participants. This involved active listening by the group and respect for other people’s ideas, even despite the different ways that people wanted to manifest their concepts.

As the purpose of the workshops was to explore and develop concepts for the vision for public art in a practical group context, the energy started to build up in the workshop and momentum was generated. This kind of creative community consultative approach allows the opportunity for community members to explore and develop their own style and means of artistic and cultural expression. It also served an important vehicle to identify what was important to them and their connection to place.
Direct experience through site visit

Co-facilitated by a local professional public artist and the author the group were introduced to a site visit to observe existing public art works to get people moving through the space. This highlighted important reactions and responses as people moved in and around to generate ideas. This outdoor site visit stimulated informal socialising and discussions about the works in the town centre square and visioning of future aspirations. Whilst this site visit evoked negative responses and comments such as – `well there’s not much space left to put anything new‘, for others it was a prime opportunity where they saw endless possibilities and potential to beautify the public space in small and large ways.

![Image of public art](image.jpg)

*Lawson Town plaza existing public art*
*Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo*

Building trust

During the introduction at the beginning of the session it was important to communicate to the community participants in the workshop the parameters of the project. It was also explained that there was a level of uncertainty as
conceptual ideas generated did not guarantee that they would be executed for production, but only presented as a range of options that would be considered by the local council.

Bearing this in mind, the level of trust and faith in the process was impressive with only one cynical participant who felt that the process "was just paying lip service to the Council". This particular person only stayed a short time in the first workshop but then attended the third workshop and unexpectedly took a leadership role with the group in assisting and recording community ideas. This person also was representative of some of those in the community who have felt overconsulted over the years and that there has been little achieved and actioned by local Council and who find it difficult to see progress and forward movement.

The impact of the power relationships

The advantage of an independent non government organisation (NGO) such as the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute conducting and funding this project made a difference to some participants. Those participants felt a strong sense that they did not want to endorse predetermined outcomes that were Council driven or dominated. With this mindset, community participants felt more freedom to express their views and willingly shared their ideas without self censorship, feeling more confident about putting their views forward.

This project demonstrates the key role that this brokering and facilitating role can play and the scope we had in the openness with the community in the complexities and politics of power. Due to previous experiences, some active residents, who had been informally overseeing the different stages of development of their town by being active on reference groups with Council, had displayed a sense of mistrust because of these experiences. On the other hand, they were also enthusiastic that their ideas would make a difference as it was in a new context and relationship, removed from the dominant

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship

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expected outcomes. But there was a very friendly atmosphere and community spirit that was strong where the group’s commitment to attend and determination that ‘we might as well put our ten cents worth in’ was inspirational.

Understanding and meeting community expectations is a challenge but so is accessing the communication channels that need to be unlocked. With the number of agencies and authorities and the range of stakeholders involved, regular information flow between them and local communities is critical. This can only instil a sense of responsibility and of joint ownership of local initiatives. This is necessary and can better serve and explain situations, processes, delays and information delivered with more confidence by agencies building these relationships with communities as partners, rather than just as users or rate payers.
The expert and the role of community participation

Discussions with Council indicated that different models have been used within this local government area. One such model is that of the ‘artist planner’ approach which has previously been used in two public art projects with Council. This particular framework allows more scope and opportunity for a collaborative approach which combines both the artist's vision and response and the embracing of community ideas, aspirations and participation.

_Rick McConaghy, public artist, with workshop participants._

_Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo_

This model was recommended to Council in the written proposal prior to the planning of the workshops with the strong recommendation to rebuild positive relationships after tense negotiations with Council and the local community over aspects of the town’s development in the past.
What makes people participate?

During introductions by the group in the Lawson public art workshop participants were asked about their motivation for attending the workshop. Many responses related to curiosity, whilst for others it was to explore their creativity. Other responses varied from ‘felt I wanted to contribute’, ‘I am a parent and wanting to contribute to the community’ to ‘I have children but also want to create public art that is tactile for children and adults’. One participant revealed that she ‘never comes to this kind of thing and stays at home and rarely comes out of the house.’ The participant saw the workshop promotional flier around town but couldn’t remember where she picked it up, and was brave enough to ring and book a place.

However, on this occasion she felt she wanted to come and make her contribution. This was an important point of attracting those who do not normally attend community consultations and for new voices to be heard.
Current public art work redesigned through using original bricks from a heritage building that existed in Lawson.

Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo

The community members were involved in the practical and interactive component of the workshop. In the first stage, participants were encouraged to brainstorm as a group and even mind mapped some ideas collaboratively. Then there was the opportunity to explore how they could visually represent their conceptual ideas for public art for Lawson village redevelopment.

Public art and community perceptions

As part of the session the group was given a presentation by the public artist to discuss potential public art examples that were designed for other places. This extended people's imagination and gave them an idea about the range and types of public art today, especially in NSW and nationally but stressed that we had no predetermined ideas or outcomes, that drawing original ideas from these community workshops was the main key outcome. Also, examples of works were shown that were comparable in size and budget76. This gave participants more scope for exploring possibilities on a creative

76 The specific amount of budget available for public art was not revealed by Council for the project even though it was requested by the facilitator prior to the workshop.
level, with the advice of the public artist as to the potential for using certain renewable materials and sustainable technology that are now available to be incorporated, and their suitability, and for them to visualise their own artworks and ideas.

The concept of what is public art was generated with lively discussion revealing some participants having a fixed idea of it being associated with static public artworks. When the issue was raised about the opportunity for time based and ephemeral artworks it challenged people’s notion of what public art is, its purpose and meaning to residents. As a result the discussion then evolved to new ideas about portable works and mobile artworks that can be placed at several locations in Lawson and so not confined to the town centre square. These included visual and artistic markers to link different sites from historic, cultural heritage and environmental trails.

![Lawson Public Art workshops- sharing visual ideas with the group. Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo](image)

**Concept of cultural landscapes**

In World Heritage contexts, the concept of *cultural landscapes* has growing support and interest in the wider interpretation and integration of the physical, natural, built, cultural and movable heritage and their relevance to current local communities. The need to connect to these spaces and their social significance encompasses a more layered and complex interpretation and opens up many possibilities and multiple narratives (Staiff 2008). This does not confine interpretations of public artworks to static objects in space limited to a specific or defined physical location.
As Mitchell and Buggay (2000) explain:

Protected landscapes and cultural landscapes share much common ground: both are focused on landscapes where human relationships with the natural environment over time define their essential character.

This has been an important factor in the recent international recognition of the value of both the natural and cultural landscapes and protected landscapes and the ‘convergence in conservation strategies.’ In particular, the international World Heritage Committee agreed that cultural landscapes could meet the criteria of:

outstanding universal value and that they have values in their own right that are different from the scientific and the perceptually based scenic qualities of properties valued for their natural characteristics (Mitchell and Buggay 2000).

Community concerns to retain elements of the town’s cultural heritage were important to the new town vision. Suggestions were made by the community for the re-use of existing heritage items that had to be removed from the demolished town site. Suggestions to build these items into the new design of the town planning and future public art were highly recommended by the community participants. However, from a Council perspective, this was not always possible to accommodate due to constraints of the cost of this undertaking. This is one issue that is a fine balancing act.
CREATIVE THINKING: COMMUNITY CONCEPTS FOR PROPOSED PUBLIC ART

The ephemeral space

Graham King, playing didgeridoo as an Indigenous Welcome to the workshop and as an example of the cultural activity that could take place in the plaza.

Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo

Common ideas that seemed important to the three workshop groups that participated included a need to establish the public spaces as meeting and social places for the community throughout the seasons of the year. This initiative was important to act as a social connector and to provide public spaces as places for the creative imagination and activity for sharing stories, talent through performances and music and ceremony, especially from an Indigenous perspective and involvement. Ideas were also discussed about
the physical transformation of spaces to reflect the different seasons and colours, to use solar lights at night in the trees to break the dull, cold and empty winter space, or to celebrate with outdoor film nights and food markets as new social and cultural spaces to share the diversity of talents and cultures. Youth requested more sheltered and shaded meeting spaces that would provide seasonal use.
THE SPIRIT AND ENERGY OF A COMMUNITY AND PLACE

The metaphor of water

Many participants had a strong feeling about reflecting the town’s spirit and energy and life in future public art works. Water was one of the key metaphors for this expression and was manifested in some participants ideas. This linked in well with the environmental and cultural history of the town, historical references to it as The Christmas Swamp and its water ways and connections. Currently, this significant landmark, which was constantly brought up by community participants who felt it was important to commemorate, is currently only acknowledged as text and the word Christmas Swamp engraved in a sandstone block, with no visual representation that can be inspired by the visual concept or the form.

One enthusiastic resident approached a Council representative about their fountain or water feature idea prior to our workshop and illustrated how certain barriers can be created by premature dismissal. Conversation outcomes resulted in the community person feeling discouraged by the expert against this feature due to high costs of maintenance. However, through our community workshop and after consultation with our facilitator, who is a professional public artist, it raised possibilities about new technologies in sustainable design and material that were not high cost.

The intervention of these community workshops was also intended to address planning issues, and introduce ideas that may be made possible with good design, planning and budgeting at an early stage. One of the key barriers, however, is information about time lines and stages of development of infrastructure. These are sometimes difficult to obtain and coordinate when it comes to community participation and planning. With new technologies and eco-sustainable materials now available, this idea could be more cost effective and so considered more seriously.
Concept for a water feature by female resident and artist from Polish background

Concept for a water fountain incorporating the human form made of natural rocks and materials and plants by a local resident who is an Iraqi refugee. A place for contemplation and children to play.
Environmental awareness and community knowledge

Interactive and sensory elements were also high on the agenda, with a few concepts incorporating this in the community’s ideas and designs. Specific environmental knowledge was also generated through the recent workshops which revealed people’s observations about nature such as the regular visits by the local bowerbird to the town square. A conceptual idea, by a female resident, for a proposed public artwork that plays homage to this is shown below.

**Concept 1**

*A real life bowerbird nest*  
*Photo: Cheryle Yin-Lo*

*Concept by a female resident, for a proposed public artwork*

The participant sketched the design in the workshop and used only their imagination and had no visual reference. This photo I took was after the workshop and I saw the uncanny similarities of shapes and design in nature as conceived by the participant.
Concept 1

This conceptual idea would be to make the sculpture kids size, so that you are able to walk through it. It could be made from materials such as blue metal or blue plastic for the bowerbird nest. It could be a cubby house style for kids to play in and could having a wishing well that people could leave blue items in.

Male participant in community workshop, Lawson.
Concept 2 was designed by a male resident who also produced a small three-dimensional model in plasticine to illustrate his creative idea. He was keen about the sensory and in particular the auditory potential of his proposed life size sculpture, which was inspired by the habitat of the Eastern spine bill and banksias. This participant wanted to bring colour, the sound of musical instruments and bird sounds together in an interactive way, using recycled and renewable materials. The public artist who assisted in facilitation of the workshop suggested additional information about a renewable material now available that can respond to human touch.
The young children that were involved in the workshops preferred to
develop ideas through more direct observation and were keen to depict more
animals and living things from nature in the town landscape. Two young
participants even illustrated an eco clean-up machine to keep the town tidy,
demonstrating a sense of pride in the place they live.

Another factor which illustrates the specificity of place is through the
Lawson residents wanting to proactively shape their social, economic and
environmental futures, and who, out of adversity, created a local Love
Lawson Festival. This volunteer-run initiative was established about three
years ago and is annually getting more community interest. This event
provides an important social and cultural vehicle that re-establishes the
connection to place and people. It also provides economic opportunities for
locally handmade goods, a showcase for local cultural talent and
professional artists in a cross art form event from all ages, with
environmentally sustainable activities for the community.

**Creative visualisation**

The community workshops encouraged local residents to creatively
imagine or visualise what Lawson could be like in the future. Community
members expressed their desire for Lawson to be a model town of
environmental sustainability. This was also prompted by the recent newly
designed environmentally sustainable public toilets which were designed
with an integrated water system funded by Council. In addition, the recent
announcement of a Clean Technology Park to be located at the Lawson Industrial Estate, highlights the potential and community wellbeing of a future Lawson with social and economic aspirations and opportunities for sustainability.

It was at this point people felt some hope and inspiration that social, cultural and environmental outcomes can be achieved and co-exist simultaneously with proper planning and design. However, conflicting new development of shops by private developers has caused many community members to express feelings of disapproval for the inconsistency and lack of environmentally sustainable design, and some community participants have expressed comments about the aesthetic ugliness of the conventional concrete structures.

This then has challenged some community people on the values and integrity of World Heritage concerns and questioned their role and influence in environmental stewardship. Mixed emotions from responses in the local newspaper (the Blue Mountains Gazette) on this issue prompts strong advocacy to maintain World Heritage and questions Council’s inconsistency of values and action. Other letter respondents feel that –“they just want the town to be completed” and so just accept what is being built. The exhaustion from delays and the need for expediency are constantly in the minds of the community, local Council and other stakeholders in the development of the highway and the town.

**Conclusion**

Sarkissan (2010), an experienced Australian community facilitator, reinforces strongly the role of creative visualisation and for communities to be actively involved in exercises of ‘community visioning’ for the future. As she strongly advocates, future thinking is now an established part of the planning process and practice. Community resilience and the need to prepare and support communities for the future are essential. Collective visioning is an important part of this understanding to address the anxieties and fears of communities and their level of resourcefulness. It can assist communities to move forward,
to feel they have a sense of control of their lives and to be active in problem solving on an internal and external level, despite rapidly changing factors on a local and global level.

Particular settings such as Lawson face different needs, challenges and opportunities, which affect how they keep their social cohesion despite the diversity that still exists within the community. Local communities, both established and new residents, all find a way to connect with the new Lawson but it is a big transition. However, flux and change in shaping the local culture are a part of the ongoing renewal and revitalisation to reconnect with place and activate new opportunities and social and cultural enterprises and networks.

In the introductory brief at the commencement of the workshops, the facilitators reinforced to all community participants that their participation and level of contribution would be greatly acknowledged. The process of developing conceptual ideas was intended to be put forward as possible options to Council for the planning of public art and public spaces. These workshops had been discussed with key personnel at Council prior to them being held. This has been an important process toward collective and community ownership. What needs to be tested with Council’s future decision making is whether these ideas are acknowledged and valued, as well as considered and assessed for their viability.

Due to the protracted time frames of the planning and development stages and decision making processes of the town’s redevelopment, it was not possible to include the final outcomes of this project. At this stage, meetings with Council on initial feedback on ideas were very positive but outcomes are still uncertain. Discussions on an artist planner model process and possible community ideas in the next stage were strongly supported.
However, this will still depend on a number of factors, budget and costings, further community consultation and decision making processes.

From a community perspective, permission had still been granted to the community to share their contributions. This is documented in Appendix 5 of this portfolio. The process has created an important bridge and communication link between creative ideas by communities and opportunities for the local Council. This otherwise would not have been created without an intervention or brokerage by an independent entity such as the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, to give the community the opportunity for input that can lead to better decision making. It still addresses the fundamental need for community participation in shaping cultural policy that impacts on public spaces and promotes the community’s active role in environmental stewardship.

**Recommendations**

- Blue Mountains City Council should use an artist-planner model, incorporating community consultation as part of the process in the development of the design concepts, in future planning of public art in Lawson.

- The outcomes of these three community art workshops as presented to Council in a PowerPoint presentation should inform future planning and commissioning of public art.

- Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute should advocate to increase awareness of developers and Council that community knowledge and information are a critical part of planning the use of public spaces for promoting environmental stewardship and sense of place and identity.

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78 For the community’s workshop data and recommendations, please see Appendix 5 powerpoint: Lawson -Future Planning of Public Art.
CONCLUSION

7. NAVIGATING TOWARDS COMMON GROUND

Report 4:

We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities
disguised as insoluble problem s. (O’Leary 2005)

John W. Gardner

Introduction
The growing trend towards joint problem solving in the 21st century is
becoming more critical with current and long term global challenges. This
report examines the importance of combined knowledge making
in v o l v i n g s c i e n c e a n d c r e a t i v e a r t s and its contribution to
environmental decision making and the transitions, new skills and
approaches that are needed. Current approaches in navigating towards
common ground raise complexities with the changing nature of relationships
between institutions and communities. This report examines the role of the
Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI)\(^1\) as an independent
non government organisation and knowledge broker. As a n e n t i t y a n d new model for interdisciplinary research on World
Heritage issues its key a i m s a r e to identify, initiate and coordinate cross-
disciplinary research to inform policy and management; and to build collaboration
between the range of different stakeholders concerned with the Greater Blue
Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHAn).

This shift leads towards models of increased participatory approaches in
environmental decisionmaking and policy management. This presents a way
forward for organisations to evolve continually in their processes and
procedures towards policy and decision making approaches to governance
within the framework of sustainable development.

See Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute w w w . b m w h i . o r g . a u
Opportunities for shared governance

As global demands increase in managing environmental problems the need for both communities and organisations to adapt to rapidly changing factors creates a challenge. It forces the need for society to reflect and to find ways to respond and seek solutions. As a result of this the capacity to address community needs, expectations and aspirations are also intensifying and coming into sharper focus. These factors have caused dramatic shifts to the way in which power and responsibility are shared. This is between federal, state and local governments of environmental policy and decision making and the impact it has on local communities. It also demonstrates the interrelationship at these levels and the increasing need for effective communication, coordination and collaborative partnerships.

One of the key realisations is that opportunities for learning are through an integrative approach. As part of this approach an individual or organisation has to be willing to enter a new space of learning, trust and negotiation. It requires a dramatic mind shift to not necessarily abandon specific interests or agendas but a willingness to listen and reflect on their own positions on particular issues or information. This reflective approach allows for the opportunity to see their view or position in a new light, through the valuing of the information exchange and open dialogue. This can be highlighted through the benefits of community practice within and between people in organisational structures and across sectors. In working in a collaborative and transdisciplinary exchange and in partnerships with local communities, it can provide combined and new insights to problem solving and build new relationships and connections.
The Wheel of Participation

This model illustrates the interconnectedness and role of communities as the central core. For effective community participation all these elements interplay and need to flow in a dynamic way for dialogue, exchange and learning. [http://www.regionalplanning.ca/main.htm](http://www.regionalplanning.ca/main.htm) on 1.2.2011

There are alternative methods for community participation using creative based approaches of communication as the social and cultural space. These can be used to explore new collaborations and partnerships. These approaches provide the catalyst to bring new opportunities and partnerships where culture plays an integral part of this new knowledge making.

This is the starting point that can provide practical strategies for organisations to navigate towards common ground at different levels to deal with real world problems. This cutting edge approach to environmental stewardship which can impact on future decision making in the 21st century is new ground to be explored through creative arts and collaborative knowledgemaking.
In the current environment of a pluralistic society context, natural resource problems are often referred to as ‘wicked problems’\textsuperscript{79}. Climate change and global warming are examples of this, due to the fact that these issues defy efforts to delineate their boundaries and to identify their causes. Therefore, issues such as these are problematic in nature and characterised by inherent problems. As Bellamy explains, this is particularly applied to policy problems which involve ‘\emph{multifunctional spatial areas}’ (Bellamy 2007) (i.e. rather than the use of a single resource by a local community), and which are often positioned in substantial institutional and organisational fragmentation requiring collective responses across interdependent public, private and community sectors.

The nature of these ‘wicked problems’ therefore requires coordination and cooperation across vertical and horizontal dimensions of policy, institutional systems and structures. However, the traditional hierarchical governmental structures find it increasingly difficult to continue to manage, adapt and evolve, and new and alternative approaches are necessary to explore and identify to address this issue.

Many of those involved in environmental management and advocacy are, however, aware of the pitfalls inherent in genuine efforts to take a more people inclusive approach to natural resource management problems, such as protected conservation area management.

With this in mind, more effective strategies with communities are a key to improving environmental management on a local, regional and global level and are just as applicable in Australia. Incorporating local communities more

\textsuperscript{79}The concept of wicked problem was introduced by Churchman, CW 1967. Rittel, H and Webber, MM 1973, formally described the concept, of wicked problem in their treatise.
into biodiversity management decisions made by government is a largely untried domain and is not a straightforward or easy path to follow as O’Riordan (2002) clearly states, but ‘incorporating people into practice of biodiversity can be achieved’.

It is his belief that it should be policy, so long as the primary objective of adaptive tolerances of ecosystems functioning remains.

*We know as little about the workings of participatory democracy as we do about the functioning of ecosystems.*

*Opening up management to societies of interest means establishing a creative mix of scientific knowledge and cultural knowing that is still basically untried. There is no blue print, only experiments, trials and imaginative learning.*

As O’Riordan (2002) articulates, this is the area of sustainability science that is most open. It is also the most contested and sensitive to what he believes relevant to the success or failure, and what he describes as ‘the ideologically impregnated’.

The promotion of deliberative and inclusionary procedures relies on community connectedness and patterns of governance that are still very rare. Such patterns as O’Riordan describes *need to be open, trusting, accommodating and sharing, yet effective and responsible*.

**Creative arts as combined knowledge making**

Often creative arts can provide that alternative approach which is characterised by the qualities that O’Riordan discusses: those of community connectedness and trust, used as a catalyst for engaging communities simultaneously improving and exploring social and cultural issues in Australia. However, it is less well known in its application in the environmental context. As an emergent practice it has an important part to play as an innovative approach to connect and share those community perspectives on contested issues. Its value lies in exploring human values
that contribute to new knowledge making, providing a possible strategy and approach to specific environmental issues and problem solving.

**Creative arts practice and the role of community cultural development**

Government agencies wishing to more effectively enhance community wellbeing need to recognise or incorporate the community’s culture (and thus its values) within their policies and strategies. They can do this through participatory creative approaches such as community cultural development. If we can acknowledge culture and recognise it as a living, breathing part of individual and community life, then we can give new meaning and force to efforts to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development (Mills 2005).

Community cultural development involves artistic and creative processes as a way of exploring and expressing social and cultural values underpinning these cultures and society. Community cultural development principles which have shaped the projects I have undertaken in this portfolio provide the opportunities for communities to work with skilled artists who are engaged to facilitate people to think creatively and critically about their experiences. Arts and cultural workers such as myself are now working in a range of contexts and with various partnerships in the local government and non government sectors (Mills and Brown 2004, Mulligan and Smith, 2006) outside the cultural sector and in particular with growing interest in environmental issues in different localities.

One of the solutions currently practised in Australia to deal with these complex issues is the application of community based arts practice. Whilst community based arts practice is not new within itself, it is an emerging practice when applied in its specific use in an environmental context. Community based arts practice is beginning to demonstrate a range of productive outcomes on a local community level. In working with diverse stakeholders in a more holistic and inclusive approach it can achieve positive social, economic and environmental outcomes with the community and with
government agencies and non government organisations (Mills and Brown 2004).

One of the solutions is in the role of non government agencies and their involvement. One of the important active roles which they can play is to act as an intermediary agent in these interventions, using alternative approaches such as creative arts based in community participation. Community participation relates to issues of the role of contemporary governance in the communication and decision making process and cycle, whether from a moral, social, legislative or ethical dimension.

This has been the wakeup call for the arts and cultural sector to take a more comprehensive and critical look at increasing the profile and advocacy of creative based approaches as applied in other non-arts contexts and across sectors where it can play a critical role. Until this work is undertaken the status of humanities e.g. utilisation of the creative arts, will be perceived as a marginal approach and won’t gain acknowledgement in its value or relevance by other disciplines or sectors of the community.

It undoubtedly needs to be part of the integrated approach required to better understand and explore the human relationship with nature and land and the impact of using creative means. There is the realisation that arts and cultural workers have an important role to play as translators, conduits of knowledge, facilitators and brokers in the community in knowledge and cultural production. What they are facing is that the application of creative arts to tackle these larger problems independently has now moved to a more interdisciplinary approach. It also has shifted the perception of the role of cultural activism in environmental justice which can be perceived as a narrow agenda in the 1960s and 1970s to a new dimension tackling a much bigger playing field of internal and external factors. Thus new skills and strategies in collaboration and learning are required.

Mills (2005) in her presentation at the Just Communities Conference provides much evidence through her research and illustration of case studies of
community wellbeing. For her, the recognition of the interrelatedness of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors is vital. Mills’ research has found that the understanding and application of the arts by government agencies has primarily focused on applying the arts in an instrumental way by implementing policy using arts as a tool or as a way of educating communities about environmental issues, for example. However, she argues that it is more than this. More significantly, she describes the transformational possibilities which means:

*let’s allow creative activity to help determine policy by developing and negotiating shared understandings of various policy challenges and mapping out solutions.*

Mills strongly believes that it is through this transformational approach that we can unlock new solutions to the challenges faced by all governments in achieving the wellbeing of communities in integrated policymaking.

*We need to develop our cultural sensibilities; learn how to recognise the cultural dimensions of what we do, become more self conscious about them ... and recognise how our habits of thinking, seeing and behaving can be transformed through our active participation in creative processes.*

As ongoing international dialogue about sustainability and community wellbeing continues, it forces, as Mills states a new paradigm shift to including environmental sustainability, economic viability and social equity. Once this balance can be achieved between all these three it can result in new habits of thinking, seeing and behaving.

In Mills’ research she found that transformational art processes can assist in engendering these new habits. They can stimulate new ways of thinking through encouraging debate, extending knowledge, illuminating divergence and highlighting consensus around shared meaning, purpose and values.

The environmental case study of The Murray River Story (Mills and Brown 2004) demonstrates how participatory community arts processes were used
and that trust-building was essential in allowing hybrid knowledge, that is, knowledge synthesised from a diverse range of knowledge systems, to develop. As Mills explains, *The Murray River Story*, a play devised by people from all walks of life, brought together lay, scientific and Indigenous forms of knowledge about the river. The community theatre processes involved provided a vehicle for conveying technical information about ecological sustainability and water management to the community, and for projecting information about community needs and desires into the policy and management arenas of the catchment authority.

Transformational art processes can bring about new ways of seeing by connecting policy makers with those for whom the policies are intended. By agencies and organisations seeing local communities as partners rather than just users and clients, the relationship shifts towards a more open approach to combined knowledge making and the value of community perspectives. This can encourage the move towards more innovative approaches in the organisational and agency policies and their programs. A consequence of this, as Mills has observed, is:

> building and strengthen social capital between groups – even when those groups appear to have competing or conflicting interests. They are the language with which we articulate and challenge our habits of seeing, thinking and behaving.

Transformational creative processes can help make visible the cultural concepts which underpin many public planning policies.

Creative thinking can play such an important role within the context of change. In building more confidence in the development of mechanisms and processes to understand how community knowledge can flow into research, there is a real need for the development of policy making and reviewing policy. These processes provide an opportunity for learning and teaching exchanges between communities and managers of environmental agencies. The process in creative arts allows communities a way to represent themselves and their world through knowledge building in cultural production and to influence environmental decision making.
The role of cognitive factors

One issue, which is part of the dilemma constantly being challenged, is the tension between the validity and credibility of evidence that is used in the social sciences and humanities compared to the natural sciences. Also, what we need to recognise is that the specialised and technical language and presentation of this kind of evidence to people can often alienate rather than engage or connect people. This more often has to do with the emphasis on the hierarchy of knowledge in our society and people’s perceptions.

These attitudes and how this information is transmitted and received can affect people’s emotions and their behaviour. Curiosity and lack of contact with certain people, interests and ideas in society different from people’s own values, can either create excitement or create information gaps in knowledge, myths and perceptions. On the other hand, this impacts on increasing a person’s knowledge base and experiences in positive and negative ways.

On this premise, more community participatory methods mean that it can draw on understanding that will assist in improved understanding, negotiation and resolve fundamental differences in people’s values, perspectives and approaches. This can be applied to environmental stewardship but also to address and explore specific environmental issues. As every day we encounter a range of differing perspectives through the people and ideas that we meet, this affects our own interpretations and perceptions of the world. Facts and events are based on those experiences that we bring to a certain situation and affect the way we subjectively construct, perceive, see and act in our environment. As Harding et al. (2009) states:

Creating common ground is like building a bridge in order to span a deep chasm.

In navigating towards common ground (Harding et al. 2009), the term implies that:
every act of communication resumes a common cognitive frame of reference between the partners of interaction.

In respect of this theory, cognitive psychologist, Bromme (2000) further postulates that:

all contributions to the process of mutual understandings serve to establish or ascertain and continually maintain this common ground.

Whilst common ground theory was developed to explain everyday encounters, cognitive psychologists are now applying it to communication across academic disciplines, especially the natural sciences. This is a pertinent point where the significant finding of interdisciplinary communication is based on its ability to discover differences in common ground. This occurs when cooperative partners from different disciplines and theories

find out that they use the same concepts with different meanings, or that they use different codings (terms, symbol systems) for similar concepts.

As Bromme continues to explain:

common ground is also about knowledge that is distributed among or is common to disciplines and can also comprise agreement on what is not part of the shared knowledge.

Working towards integrating knowledge and information from a range of sources and multiple knowledge bases however raises a number of issues and is not a natural process. It brings forth issues of the implications of change for communities and organisations in their knowledge making and decision making processes and respecting the value of the different knowledge bases. In particular, reflecting the way these players have been currently working, and the quality of their relationships to go through these transitional phases and understand what is required to achieve navigation towards common ground, is vitally necessary.
In navigating towards common ground in language and knowledge, moving forward to an understanding of the need for a holistic approach is critical. Whilst it is sometimes theoretically understood that it is necessary to provide practical solutions to environmental problem solving, it requires more ongoing dialogue, creative thinking and openness to new ways of thinking and doing things.

We need to move beyond the traditional approach of basing research only on scientific evidence and data alone. Today’s environmental problems and dilemmas are now far more complex and require a shared approach that acknowledges the importance of the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities (Repko 2008). Without these multiple perspectives or bird’s eye views we struggle to find sustainable solutions and a common language or knowledge base to commence any productive dialogue. However, mechanisms need to be established and brokering and facilitation is necessary to bring these players and elements to the common ground to explore the opportunities and collaborations and partnerships.

More critical investigation is required as to the systems, language and knowledge bases of these disciplines and the equal recognition that they all have a part to play in knowledge and cultural production to acknowledge our place and identity in the environment.

This report will examine some of the processes of community participation in achieving solutions in environmental decision making in both natural and urban contexts, and a call for a broader understanding of culture and the environment and its role in stimulating environmental stewardship to a wider base of the community.
Landmark research undertaken in 2004, *The Environment and Ethnic Communities*\(^80\) addresses the cultural diversity of Australia. It investigated the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to environment issues and water use of six of NSW’s largest non-English speaking ethnic communities. This research as it states:

*will assist educators, communicators and policy makers across many sectors in the design and delivery of communications, strategies and programs for ethnic communities.*

The research also revealed these significant groups were not being exposed to mainstream communications about environmental issues because of language and cultural barriers. What is important is how this research is utilised practically, both in the field and at management level. What is critical is how cultural values come into play in interpretation, connection to place and issues of environmental stewardship. It is also important to assess the way this translates in a public interface to address new ways of connecting places and spaces to the wider community and to these specific community groups.

More recent movements in the last decade have been through creating an information exchange through various forums, networks and workshops\(^81\),

\(^{80}\)In 1996 this research investigated the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to environmental issues and water use of six of NSW’s largest non-English speaking ethnic communities. In 2004 the Department of Environment and Conservation conducted new research in partnership with the Sydney Catchment Authority and the Sustainable Energy Development Authority (now part of DEUS), to build on the 1996 research, as well as findings for the broader community in the *Who Cares About the Environment?* research series, [http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/ethniccom.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/ethniccom.htm).

\(^{81}\)Community Cultural Development NSW (CCDSW) played a key role in convening these forums and the formation of a state network, and The Australia Council supported two Arts and Ecology forums which the author was involved in Arts and Ecology Cultivator Group.
through building networks and alliances with a range of cultural workers, artists working with local communities, local government, environmental managers on a state, national and international level. This has been used in planning and conceptualising strategic approaches in the use of creative arts for environmental problem solving and stimulating environmental stewardship.

As we apply this to global complexity through lessons of ecosystems and our relationship to our human communities, it becomes critical in understanding the potential synergies and collaboration that can be integrated. In many of his writings, physicist and systems theorist Capra pushed for Western societies to abandon conventional linear thought and question the reductionist views of Descartes\textsuperscript{76} and his influence on the way we viewed natural sciences. Capra advocates a more holistic approach where systems thinking is critical and is a useful concept in visualising patterns and relationships across disparate information and knowledge systems. In this way he emphasises the web-like structures of all systems and thus the interconnectedness of all these parts.

Why is combined knowledge making important, what kind of knowledge can be revealed and how can it be applied? New approaches are necessary to move forward and these are vital in environmental management to shift thinking for new solutions and directions. Through the application of adaptive governance and creative and systems thinking this can help shift the power dynamics.

\textsuperscript{76}Descartes was the 17th century French philosopher regarded as the first thinker to provide a philosophical framework for the natural sciences based on a fundamental set of principles that one can know as true without any doubt.
Integrating combined knowledge making

Creative based approaches using a more open dialogue approach which focuses on environmental issues and stewardship is an emergent form that can provide some of the qualities O’Riordan (2002) states are necessary but rare. It is an important step and timing as more innovative methods are being explored that can create a more active dialogue and participation by communities. However, using creative means can often cause negative attitudinal barriers from those that undervalue or fail to understand that there needs to be a range of ways to produce knowledge for research.

This raises the common dichotomy of linear, rational and scientific approaches in contrast to the fluid, emotional and the less fixed nature of community knowledge. This paper aims to argue that both these approaches are necessary if real progress is to be made for environmental solutions. In acknowledging how the differences in approaches can identify different outcomes, they both can provide specific kinds of data and information. When combined they can be a powerful tool of understanding by examining and assessing the interplay and interrelationship of these dynamics.

As Syme (2004) points out, natural resource management is increasingly being seen as requiring an integrated methodological approach in which a number of environmental and social sciences are brought together (Syme, 2005). However, as he perceives it, the idea that communities need to be consulted and directly involved in policy setting and program implementation is still undervalued. There has been considerable discussion of how this integration should be achieved invoking concepts of multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in applied research and development.

One of the key findings from a community psychologist’s perspective is that the broad integration necessarily involves community participation and people skills in facing the world with many environmental threats from global warming and environmental degradation. As so actively discussed in
public dialogue, environmental changes have been contributed to by human activity.

As Syme recognises there is a strong role for social scientists, and in particular, community psychologists, to play in addressing sustainable behaviour. Secondly, the recognition that natural resource research involves complex systems can provide methodological insights for community psychologists.

Whilst there is a growing acceptance of the need for community participation, there has been little analysis of the type and extent of participation that is most effective in natural resource management (Buchy et al, 2001). Currently, this issue is high on the agenda but questions are constantly raised as to the process of community consultation, participation and implementation. What role and at what level can community knowledge play alongside the specialised and technical knowledge used by environmental decision makers and scientific research to influence issues of sustainability and environmental stewardship?

From an international perspective, according to a recent survey, more than fifty countries report that they pursue partnerships with local communities in an effort to protect their natural resources. Whilst this trend is gaining recent popularity, the concept of community still rarely receives the attention and recognition of value that it should get from those concerned, such as environmental managers and policy decision makers.

The aim is not to make a simplistic claim about the role of communities or idealise this situation in terms of the relationship between environmental agencies and communities, but to have a greater understanding of the successes and challenges of the social, political and power contexts in which communities emerge and operate. Understanding the nature of these complex relationships in community requires understanding the internal politics of local regions and their relationship to external forces and
stakeholders in specific contexts, and their aspirations for the role of joint environmental decision making.

Agrawal and Gibson (2001) state:

*Community we argue, must be examined in the context of conservation by focusing on multiple interests and actors within communities, on how these actors influence decision making, and on the internal and external institutions that shape the decision making process* ...

As they state, community based conservation initiatives must be founded on images of community that recognise internal differences and processes, their relationship with external actors, and the institutions that affect both.

**The challenge and power of knowledge bases and interdisciplinarity**

It has been argued that input from ordinary people needs to complement other forms of knowledge that may challenge existing knowledge so that citizen science is essential in society. Popular scientific journalist, Cribb, who specialises in scientific communication, reinforces this point that *‘science belongs to us not just to the scientists’.*

He emphasises the importance of science communication and scientific journalism in the sharing of knowledge.

*‘Knowledge needs to be in the public domain’* states Cribb. His development of a web portal to an accessible scientific website[^83] to centralise information has proven to be very popular. His deliberative approach to decentralise the knowledge base breaks down the barriers to demystify science information for the public.

The relation between public dissemination and the scientific information that informs environmental issues needs to be combined with creative communication. This has important value as one of the catalysts to move us forward towards ‘common ground’ and is critical to explore as a legitimate research tool, where quantitative data can often override the qualitative approach which is the case when investigating using arts and cultural expression applied in an environmental context for problem solving and finding new communication strategies.

There are strategies from both local and international perspectives that can be shared on this topic. This can inspire communities and organisations to be open to a new mindset of working together in partnership for collaborative learning. One key issue that raises complexity in management issues is the role of community participation. This obviously has implications relating to adaptive governance and the implications within and outside the organisation and the influence of local communities in decision making. It raises some of the changes, barriers and challenges in responding to community input and the way that organisations manage this process.

As Sarkissian (2009) states, the considerations of value and power are central to resolving governance issues emphasising the ‘participatory’ rather than the ‘representative’ governance. Face to face dialogue is the core of collaborative governance and vital in ‘building trust, shared understanding, mutual respect and commitment’ (Sarkissian 2009) to the process. Commitment to this process involves ‘mutual recognition and interdependence of participants, and openness to seeking mutual gains and shared ownership of the process’ (Harding et al. 2009).

**Combined knowledge making in Indigenous contexts**

One current example is in the Northern Territory in combined information gathering to develop a strategic framework for future investment between CSIRO, different government agencies and Indigenous land corporations and consultants in cultural and natural resource management. One
important aspect is the role that creative expression can play in this transfer of knowledge. Textile printing has also been used as part of this project as a creative method to depict traditional land management activities in the Top End of the Northern Territory84 to share with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Practices of traditional ways of fire burning and using different methods of communication is also an area that scientists and local Aboriginal people have joined collaboratively in learning and problem solving, through working closely in building relationships and trust, taking in the specific cultural context and factors about traditional ways of fire burning on site for contemporary bushfire management.

One of the complexities, and a critical point that is raised is about the problems of this integration, is often the dismissal of local or community knowledge That this can be dismissed in preference to specialised knowledge by experts who have been more dominant and more institutionalised, can be perceived as lacking in rigour and as unreliable and is common in a wide range of situations.

This brings into play the importance and value of different methodologies and multimodalities and multiple approaches and the value of experiential knowledge.

The distinctions between different types of knowledge is important to discuss especially in relation to the prominence of recognition of lay (which may not be linked to a specific locality) or community knowledge in dealing with wicked problems (Harding et al, 2009.p21:22)

**Integration of sustainability for community wellbeing**

These issues co-exist with international trends towards a growing recognition that combined knowledge making is essential for environmental problem solving framed within issues of sustainability (social, environmental

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and economic) and community wellbeing that no longer can be ignored (Yencken 2000). One of these issues is the shaping of culture (i.e. ways of living) and people’s values and their response to their environment (i.e. what is around them) and the challenges to understand and manage the interconnectedness of social and natural systems. The transition for this rapid reshaping of our social systems needs to be considered in this process. Governance includes collective action and describes how the whole system of interrelated players performs these actions (Sarkissian 2009).

There is an increasing need to study how adaptive governance impacts on the outcomes and actions of new information, research and knowledge that is generated through the interplay of different values and deliberation is important. As deliberation is a particular kind of communication that is characterised by informational, argumentative, reflective and social dimensions (Dryzek 2000), this is necessary if we are to move beyond community consultation in circumscribed workshops to exploring more innovative and community participatory processes.

**Current trends**

In Australia, whilst theoretically we have desires to apply these principles, we have only seen the tip of the iceberg of combined knowledge making. This practice is still in its early stages of emergence and application and many challenging issues arise. Therefore more work is still needed towards a stronger network with organisations across sectors and with diverse communities. This is necessary on a number of different levels to find creative and innovative solutions to build our expertise, share our experiences, knowledge bases, research and evaluation approaches and resources specifically in this application of environmental problem solving.

This raises the important issue of the quality of the relationship and the level of engagement with environmental agencies and local communities.

*Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship*
As Chambers and Beth (1992) say, these problems:

... of poor conservation outcomes have forced policy makers to reconsider the role of community in resource use and conservation. In a break from previous work on development which considered communities to hinder social change, current writing champions the role of community in bringing about decentralisation, meaningful participation, cultural autonomy and conservation.

This situation raises the problem, as Agrawal and Gibson say, of how:

to achieve a transition from a colonial and authoritarian past to a democratic future involving more voices and organisations at all levels.

With these views becoming more prevalent internationally, such models as adaptive governance processes, which indicate a shared governance concept, become more significant in terms of community participation. As adaptive governance encompasses a more collaborative approach, having a shared understanding and vision, trust and collective learning are encouraged. This is in opposition to an imposed change or conflict, suggesting that an organisation needs to, and has the capability to be, flexible to respond to changing factors, both internally and externally, and to review their decision making mechanisms, processes and procedures.

It is important to realise that local communities are not homogenous but as Agrawal and Gibson (2001) describe are:

composed of people with heterogenous interests, human skills and knowledge that could gain the experience of managing resources together.

Legislation and drafting of management plans are often written in a language that is sometimes inaccessible. Information dissemination needs to be addressed on a number of levels of both production, dissemination and
distribution and take into account the multi modalities of communication that are required.

If a new concept for improved promotion of environmental stewardship is to be nurtured and established it will undoubtedly occur as Agrawal and Gibson say:

\[ a \text{ result of struggles, contestation and cooperation among a network of peoples.} \]

To navigate towards common ground new skills need to be acquired to manage in the:

\[ \text{modern age and the management of valuable resources in an ever-widening global economy.} \]

Findings expressed in the recent publication, Environmental Decision-making: Exploring Complexity and Context (Harding et al. 2009) highlights 'the recognition of the complexity, uncertainty, open-ended nature', hence fluidity, of many environmental problems and sustainability issues which require new approaches to be adapted to cope with these fluid situations.

Harding et al. (2009) explain that there is a trend 'towards a new science' for complex environmental decision making and that multiple knowledge bases are a key component. They refer to this new concept as 'post normal science' (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1991), and in this context it is an approach that deals with situations where:

\[ \text{the facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes are high and decisions are urgent and is meant to complement normal science}. \]

In this respect it does not pretend to be either value free or ethically neutral. If we adopt this view presented in post-normal science it implies that we
acknowledge the issue of coping with uncertainty on natural and human systems. This can be examined at different hierarchical scales and as a result new levels of complexity arise.

More precisely, it examines the relationship between these different knowledge bases, between the technical, methodological and epistemological techniques used. In this respect, assessment is required on the levels of uncertainty and decision stakes according to whether it is high or low.

This raises a commonly asked question about integration of knowledge and its possibilities in an interdisciplinary approach. This integration is achieved through the various disciplines addressing a common issue. This means that it is necessary to move out of the comfort zones and shift into a new space for discovery, learning, sharing and negotiation, and co-production of knowledge.

**Communities of practice and the value of tacit knowledge**

How do we build these knowledge bases into a knowledge system that can be beneficial to further our understanding or contribute to environmental
problem solving? As outlined in the experience of knowledge management of New York State (undated), the three main components that are critical are people, processes and technology. In the combination of these it gives opportunity for people to create, share and use knowledge who collectively comprise the organisational culture that nurtures and stimulates knowledge sharing.

This brings into question the processes and methods used to acquire, create, organise and share and transfer knowledge. As the growth of technology and its application is more accessible, the mechanisms that store and provide access to data, information and knowledge created by people in various locations or sites are more available.

The practice and learning of what is being experienced and happening on the ground and in the field with local communities is essential and critical to inform policy at higher levels of environmental agencies and management. Finding ways to document, record informal and formal information and the resources, tools and technology needed to do this effectively are always works in progress. More importantly, how this information can be utilised and put into practice in a working context is the major challenge along with a range of ways which this can operate and be achieved.

The promotion of `communities of practice’ within organisations in different sectors is an important and practical way to share knowledge, information and skills. As Callahan (2002) suggests, it can often foster informal communities to manage tacit knowledge (personal knowledge) in a rapidly changing environment. Often tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer to another person through writing it down or verbalising it. It can be a challenge as to how to convert easily much of it which is unspoken or unrecorded. Most often people are not aware of the knowledge they possess or how it can be valuable to others.
In business, this practice has been found very useful to support organisations and management to create a work environment that ‘enables knowledgeable people to learn, adapt and respond effectively to novel circumstances’ (Callahan, 2002).

This is an important fact about recording what people know but more importantly about how knowledge is used and transferred. In this respect, it generally requires personal contact and trust.

Tacit knowledge consists of habits and culture that we do not recognise in ourselves. However there is belief that tacit knowledge can be converted to explicit knowledge and sharing of lessons learned with integration and continuous improvement of the organisation. It is used as a greater focus on the management of knowledge as a strategic asset by encouraging the sharing of knowledge.

Knowledge management comprises a range of strategies and practices which are used in an organisation to ‘identify, create, represent, distribute and enable adoption of insights and experiences’ (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). This is a revelation where insights and experiences comprising knowledge, are either embodied in individuals or embedded in organisational processes or practice.

Com m unities of practice can appear nebulous to managers who are accustomed to more immediate and direct benefits (Callahan, 2002).

The identification and nurturing of communities of practice is an active process that is illustrated by increasing or creating people connections for interaction among members of particular groups, mentoring, knowledge mapping, through technology to generate an environment where the knowledge is shared and not locked up in one individual and encourages collaboration.

This is also related, as Callahan says, to ‘social proof’ through the telling and sharing of stories about people, organisations and work are a natural way for
people to transfer what they know. Stories are very powerful and the ways other organisations have implemented communities of practice can have a significant impact, as Callahan suggests, to influence decision makers to adopt this strategy and approach. It can enhance the artefacts (i.e. documents and tools) that already exist and create new artefacts as Callahan found in workplace contexts. These artefacts (old and new) take on enhanced meaning for the group ... more knowledge becomes unspoken and more tacit knowledge is created.

Callahan introduces Wenger’s (2003) *Arrow and Cloud* diagram and the learning process. Even though the arrow and cloud represent different organisational entities, one informs the other and is a flexible approach to support communities of practice but provide the support that nurtures a new organisational form. It also makes a link between project work and communities of practice to work through real life problems. Without consideration of this approach organisations lose competitive edge which also exposes the organisations to significant risks if people are not sharing the new thinking, models or tools.

*Arrow and Cloud*

*Wenger, 2003*
This is where the vital point is in striking the balance between projects and other management teams and this flow of information, learning and collaboration. This model does provide one appropriate strategy for both the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute and its partner organisations: to continue to build on the trust, relationships and knowledge bases that can be inclusive of local communities in knowledge brokering and management.

This nurturing of communities of practice also fits comfortably with the notion of `emergent properties’ Lawson et al. (1989). An idea that is used in the context of the natural sciences presents important concepts about complex cognitive structures which are actively constructed by the learner. This creates a learning paradox as Lawson et al. (1989) refer to in that these complex structures guide our behaviours `with novel emergent properties arising from combinations of simpler structures as in natural sciences’.

In this context, emergent properties allow for the recognition of qualitatively distinct levels of organisation and complexity. The levels are comprised solely of unique combinations of the same fundamental units and arise from not novel parts but rather they arise from a novel arrangement of the same parts.

These conceptual shifts of communities of practice and the nature of emergent properties in thinking can provide the opportunities to approach the notion of navigating common ground.

This new insight, which works on a deeper level of understanding and practice to apply to navigating common ground, provides new ways of being, seeing and acting. This is particularly in relation to the way that local communities, agencies and organisations like the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute can start to pioneer complex environmental decision making and management processes.

This then brings in to question an important issue about tacit knowledge or knowledge, that is experiential learning and personal experience, and how
this is interpreted and valued. One of the most common problems and challenges is that people may not be aware that the tacit knowledge that they possess (Harding et al. 2009) may be of value to other people, or they may not know how to transfer this knowledge. In this process and stage of transmission it requires extensive personal contact and trust.

Interviews conducted in 2008\(^8\) with environmental managers of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area highlighted the importance of collating and disseminating information and shared research objectives. It was evident through these interviews that there is an important role for an independent entity such as the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) to be a conduit for communication and collaboration between all the clients and agencies. It also raised the challenges of knowledge transfer and the move towards its application in management processes.

This illustrates the important shift that is required in terms of terminology used and the perception of relationships. Often the term ‘users’ is used in national parks context and with local councils. In my perspective, a view to seeing clients and users as community partners can shift the orientation to a more joint responsibility in the use of natural resources and in maintaining resources that impact on both bush and urban contexts and communities.

**Cross sectoral partnerships and convergence of agendas**

My reference point and experience reinforces the importance of community and professional networking across sectoral relationships and partnerships, working with organisations which include agencies and authorities, and community organisations and public spaces where information can be disseminated and ideas shared in a variety of forms. This is especially vital in the way that issues of sustainability span across governing authorities at local, state and federal level. Through written, visual or oral presentations,

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\(^8\) These semi-structured interviews were conducted by the Executive Director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute during May–September 2008.
seminars, conferences forums and workshops and creative based projects and initiatives, there is much scope for participation and collaboration to be facilitated.

Information dissemination rather than debates or discussion about controversial issues are rare. The lack of opportunity for both internal and external forums for more wide public discussion is often absent. Nurturing cross sectoral and multi agency cooperation can even change the way in which agencies behave, making them more willing to take risks and experiment with new ways of working.

Information sharing and transferring of knowledge is impacted by the role of the internet, social media and Web 2.0 and websites with online resources, and has a role in shifting power in social and knowledge bases. Sometimes it is necessary to draw upon people, resources and ideas that go beyond the government sector and environmental agencies to explore more innovative approaches and models that are applicable to that sector. This more open dialogue and fluid approach to move across different sectors and their practices and processes is an untapped and underutilised resource.

Reports and resources within organisations that share methodological approaches in community engagement, for example with other organisations, can be a valuable asset when shared with practical experiences of local communities. As legislation has pushed the even greater need to address the value of community participation in policy and decision making processes, there is a range of different frameworks in organisations to draw upon. One example is the development of a comprehensive matrix table of different community engagement methods developed by a local government.87

87 Blue Mountains City Council has developed a Community Engagement strategy with a comprehensive matrix of different methods and specifics on budget considerations and benefit. Parramatta Council has adopted the IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) framework for community engagement.
This informs managers of the different resources and assessment of purpose depending on the context, issue and budget. It takes into account different forms of communication for different target groups.

A community online web portal such as community.com.au is one example of how to assist individuals and organisations with resources to develop productive partnerships and collaborations. This transition moving beyond the discipline, organisation or sector, provides a rich and strategic asset of knowledge building. In working towards a greater understanding of integration of combined knowledge making there are innovative approaches emerging to address these issues.

At the recent Parks Forum titled ‘Common Ground’, park leaders from around the world came to discuss critical emerging issues facing park managers. Its focus, which was timely, was about how they can work more effectively to find common ground with each other and with new partners.

Some of the key, common issues that emerged addressed more the social dimensions in conjunction with the technical and operational requirements of management, and their use of community of practice to encourage collaborative learning within organisations.

**Participatory approaches to adaptive governance**

With the outcomes of the reports from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and the release of the Brundlandt Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, (1987) known as *Our Common Future*, it was evident and internationally acknowledged that there was an accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and that this would have consequences to economic and social development.

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88 Parks Forum is the peak body for park managers. The forum was held in Sydney in August 2010.
As a result, it was recognised that `the marriage between economics and ecology was long overdue’ and a new world agenda was needed. The relationship between culture and development `should be clarified and deepened, in practical and constructive way’ (WCCD, 1996).

When it comes to approaching environmental issues and problem solving, more focus has been on natural resource management. More recently it has been on water issues and climate change and global warming. This reveals a lot about the way people have interpreted and perceived the environment and their role in environmental problem solving and environmental stewardship.

Experience from the Blue Mountains World Heritage region, which is part of the Greater World Heritage Area which was World Heritage listed in 2000, illustrates the issues. Considered the lungs of the Sydney basin, tensions are increasing about the urban/ bush interface and the spread of urban sprawl, and the impacts of current infrastructural development of a major four lane highway creating a transport corridor to the west. These changes are affecting and destabilising both human and natural ecosystems.

Combined scientific research and community engagement projects that use creative arts with local communities are an approach which assists in information dissemination and articulation of community values and vision. This opportunity of working with environmental agencies in a collaborative way and in a new research model for management is invaluable but setting the processes and mechanisms and identifying the technology still needs to be mapped for the effective sharing of this knowledge. This is based more on what Harris (2002) describes in his Ladder of Engagement using bounded and open dialogue approaches and a trend towards this kind of approach to problem solving of issues.

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute is a non profit, independent non government agency that has a role in knowledge management and working in partnership with environmental agencies through scientific research and community cultural development www.bmwhi.org.au
Natural resource management has been for many years seen by environmentalists as best protected by national legislation. However, it has become evident that due to some of the poor outcomes resulting from this top-down policy approach, professionals need to look to local communities to make any real changes.


As an example, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as an international body attempted to acknowledge their benefits in understanding large-scale phenomena and informing international negotiations.

   In doing so, traditional centralised assessments have failed in assisting local decision makers in taking actions to help prevent global environmental problems, or in implementing responses to adapt to local impacts of global change.

In the article Adaptive governance: Proposals for climate change science, Lynch (2010) argues that a move away from reliance on centralised, top-down approaches to a more flexible, multilevel approach is necessary. This, she believes, can adapt quickly and easily to new information. This approach could encourage diversity and innovation in the search for solutions, whilst ‘recasting the problem as one in which every culture and community around the world has an inherent interest’.
Lynch’s (2010) controversial comments on the challenges of adaptive governance, scientific management and climate change are an excellent example of these conflicting issues. She describes:

*adaptive governance is a means of directing attention to otherwise neglected options that can help reduce our vulnerability to climate change. It has emerged more or less spontaneously as a loosely-coordinated array of pragmatic responses to manifest failures of scientific management at the local level.*

As a result it is not surprising that recognition of which in the last decade has followed innovations in practice.

Through her groundbreaking case study in Victoria, Lynch’s team proposed opening up the established frame, based on insights from adaptive governance. This was field-tested in a place called Alpine Shire and independently corroborated by other research. Lynch proposed more intensive research centred on case studies of local communities and extreme events, each of which is unique under a comprehensive description. The research team developed a *procedurally-rational approach*. This means in terms that it accommodated inevitable uncertainties, integrating scientific and local knowledge into policies to advance the community’s common interest, and relied on learning from experience.

Their belief in constitutive decisions, suggested structural changes that *begin with harvesting experience from the bottom–up*, to make policies that have worked anywhere on the ground available for voluntary adaptation by similar communities elsewhere, and to inform higher-level officials about local resource needs.

One of the key findings her research revealed is that:

*The common interest lies in reducing the vulnerability of people, property and other cultural artefacts, and the natural*
Further action outlined in the Garnaut Climate Change Review (2008) stresses three key actions, that of mitigation\textsuperscript{90}, adaptation (through global and regional strategies and local management plans) and most importantly creating and sharing knowledge. This is interpreted as including best practices, research, communication, public and political support, education and training, capacity building and networking.

This point is critical to the overall approach and where often least action is supported and undertaken. It also emphasises the creation and support of networks to encourage ‘cross fertilisation’ of knowledge amongst researchers and between researchers and managers. Unfortunately the absence of the role of communities does not play a role in this action as outlined in Garnaut’s review, nor is there community representation on the steering committee of the review. This strongly reflects the perceptions of value and role in community participation at this level, or with processes that engage with communities.

The issue of adaptive capacity in building organisations and communities to cope with adverse effects such as climate change make it vital that the role of community participation in decision making is not be overlooked. In this context there is still much to be shared, learnt and understood; it is an evolving and relatively new field.

\textsuperscript{90}Mitigation as referred to in Garnaut Review defines it as monitoring, reporting and mitigation of climate change ‘effects through environmentally sound choices and decisions at a range of levels: individual, community, institutional and corporate’.
Community engagement or community participation?

Community participation in promoting environmental stewardship can be achieved in a variety of ways and using different forms of multi modalities of communication. A number of environmental agencies and local government authorities have policies and community engagement plans and strategies which can be helpful in deciding the most appropriate and cost effective method. This is an important change that has been shifting in the last decade to the different methods of communication and community engagement strategies. This then impacts and results in changes by organisations to have confidence, skills and resources to undertake these new methods, and different sectors use a variety of their methods to suit their context and target groups. Within this context of change, it is necessary to understand how this community input and knowledge gets fed back into research, development and policy making or reviewing of policies. This process should be both learning and teaching between managers and the communities themselves.

More participatory methods now currently being introduced in government and local government such as The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Program for example with its approach and principles that addresses various communication challenges commonly faced in problem solving real world problems while conducting public participation activities in consensus building, while still valuing differing perspectives and building on people’s understanding of an issue.
Table 1. The ladder of engagement (Harris, 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of involvement</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information giving</td>
<td>An exact program of monitoring has already been decided upon. Those initiating the program then disseminate information to communities about it through the media, special publications, rural visits etc. In this instance there is no expectation by the initiator, or recourse by communities, for feedback on this program. It is a one-way flow of information from inside to outside.</td>
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<td>There is already a perceived need for a monitoring program and strong ideas of what it should entail. The initiator then collects information from communities to provide his or herself with more details on which to make final decisions on the exact form that program of monitoring should take. There is still no expectation of, or recourse for, necessarily altering the approach based on the information received. This is again a one-way flow of information but this time from outside to inside.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional consultation</td>
<td>Those initiating monitoring share several proposals for different programs with communities and ask them for feedback on which they think are the best approaches, and/or how they might be improved or changed in some way. In this instance there is now some leeway by the initiator to change their plans and a limited expectation by communities that their feedback will be acted upon. This is now an, albeit limited, two-way exchange of information but where the ultimate decision-making power still rests on the inside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of involvement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bounded dialogue</td>
<td>Where the initiator approaches communities and explains what they perceive to be the problem or the issue at hand that needs monitoring. They then have a free exchange of information and discuss options with communities but decisions about what exactly can be done have to be made within carefully defined boundaries, whether these are legal, financial, social, cultural or a combination of any or all of these. This is now a two-way exchange of information in which decisions are often jointly made but where power ultimately still rests on the inside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open dialogue</td>
<td>Where the initiator and communities sit down together and decide whether there is a problem or issue that needs to be addressed through monitoring. They then jointly work out exactly what form this should take through a fully free and fair exchange of information and decision-making, usually through consensus building. This is a two-way exchange of information and a joint power sharing and decision-making process.</td>
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</table>

We can learn still from international experience and perspectives as Pretty and Vodouhê (1998) say in reflection to community participatory methods in developing countries and the way we approach these issues in the Western world. Whilst conventional forms of community involvement have relied on questionnaires and fleeting visits to gather information, both of these forms have their drawbacks and can be limited.

Often the research methodology used was the inadequate process of developing questionnaires, which tended to be drawn up beforehand without reference to local aspirations, capabilities and experience. They state these were thus often too long and ill adapted to local conditions or changing circumstances.
Fleeting visits tended to introduce spatial, temporal, people and project bias (Chambers, 1983) and not take into account more holistic or contextual factors. This is one of the drawbacks with these conventional forms of community involvement.

Singh and Rennie (1996) explained that these frameworks of community participation proved to be more efficient and cost-effective ways of gathering information from local people than using more conventional based methods as they experienced in their research. Such perspectives identify an overall picture, rather than just look for statistical significance, and emphasise the importance of local knowledge.

This particular participatory approach and implementation known as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) has become a popular method (Chambers, 1992) which requires the use of research based on a listening approach with a combination of iterative methods and verification techniques which have developed an improved modus operandi.

This changed approach had several critical benefits, namely empowerment through sharing of knowledge and respect through learning and listening. More importantly as Chambers noted was the ‘localisation by use of local knowledge or materials and inclusiveness by engaging with all ages, sexes and social groups and the expectation that there should be enjoyment and fun’ involved.

More and more studies have shown that this kind of implementation of inclusive research is an essential component of successful research and monitoring work in many sectors. This stresses the importance of learning from and by local people and the methods of learning (Pretty et al. 1998):

Both methods are based on the principle that local people are creative, capable and can do their own investigations, analysis, and planning (Pokharel, undated).

This kind of approach becomes an important breakthrough necessary to unlocking the keys to the barriers many are facing in the complex and
multifaceted nature of environmental management to be beneficial to environmental problem solving. This insight can result in it reflecting on generating a new resource and skills to achieve combined knowledge that brings new understandings and shared vision within communities to common issues.

Discussion

Creative means can break down the artificial divisions of knowledge bases and reshape them in a more integrated and holistic way. It is critical to bridge the communication gap between scientific information and language and environmental language to increase knowledge production for local communities. This creative approach can provide the critical cultural space to negotiate and be the ground for problem solving of complex environmental issues and to bring new understandings and shared vision within communities.

The challenge for agencies and organisations to possibly embrace a new idea, approach, perspective or practice that may come from communities" experiences requires planning and development of processes. This can be assessed to see how it can be aligned with the organisation’s objectives and the way that community knowledge can be incorporated, communicated or fed back to the community.

One of the key areas of focus has been in issues of adaptive governance and interdisciplinary approaches to environmental research and problem solving. In addition to its philosophy and commitment to theories and concepts of adaptive governance in exploring processes with their member organisations, it also leads to a new model for knowledge production.

This can better utilise various skills, experience and knowledge within individuals and the organisations and agencies in informing environmental policy and management issues. Reviewing current practices and ways to
improve effective environmental management and adaptive management processes is ongoing and can develop different insights to problem solving.

Through better coordination of existing knowledge, identifying knowledge gaps and producing new knowledge it provides a fresh approach that challenges current approaches and the way this knowledge can be used and relevant to organisations to assist them in policy making and environmental decision making.

But factors such as commitment and trust have played a large part in building and maintaining organisational relationships in the past, now and into the future. The factor of trust and its importance is reinforced in the Garnaut Report on Climate Change (2008). This brings organisations closer towards more effective working partnerships by suspending judgement to respect other perspectives and views. By changing the mindset, the removal of perceived and attitudinal barriers of competing interests both in knowledge and funding becomes an opportunity rather than a hindrance. This joint approach as a model for working can only be a positive gain but requires reflection on the way we are doing business through this combined knowledge approach.

Some of the issues that have already arisen in understanding organisational culture and context are issues and barriers of certain policies, systemic structures and processes. For some organisations it can sometimes be difficult, due to the lack of flexibility, to respond to issues and communities within a short time frame, or in different time frames and cycles of research, projects and funding, to meet community expectations.

**Collaborative learning**

Partnerships and collaborative learning play an important role in this growing trend in Australia and internationally towards a new approach to adaptive management and governance through a more holistic approach. This move forward is a necessary step to acknowledge sustainability as the interrelationship of the social, environmental and economic factors to find
solutions to environmental issues.

A reframing of the dynamics of this combination of players between the Blue Mountains Institute as a non-government agency, local communities and government environmental agencies and managers is necessary. This needs to be acknowledged and valued as a powerful force of knowledge production in the future. This also provides fertile soil in identifying the challenges and opportunities that bring the diverse players together in navigating towards common ground. In seeking joint practical solutions or new perspectives from an individual or organisational perspective we gain not only a deeper understanding from a scientific and human level but most importantly the specificity of a context and issues on a geographically specific level.

These lead to infinite possibilities of better mutual outcomes that can be achieved with a shift in attitude towards collaboration and respect for ongoing learning. Sometimes new questions can also be raised and open up whole areas of new research or understanding about an issue through investigative research.

Interdisciplinary and cross sectoral learning environments can be created through my proposal for the establishment of an Arts Eco Lab for example in providing the cultural space for furthering ongoing community dialogue without judgement. It brings focus on key environmental issues through creative expression with digital (visual, sound and film recordings) and social media for developing physical and virtual communities. With this works in progress can be developed that foster ongoing dialogue to assist local communities. This can assist to better inform each others in the community to increase their participation in environmental decisionmaking and how a reciprocal relationship can develop to build better communication with environmental agencies.
As stated in *Our Creative Diversity by the World Commission of Culture and Development* (1999), the recognition of the diversity of local knowledge has taken a significant turn. This is particularly so in relation to ecological knowledge and traditional management practices, which were long perceived to be obstacles to development. The growing interest in Indigenous ecological knowledge and traditional management practices, has raised confidence in the value of community knowledge generally and has demonstrated that it offers solutions not only found from generations of experimentation and observation, but also embedded in local systems of value and meaning.

One of the major challenges is how to translate this recognition in a practical way at a field level, as well as change the policies and instruments in ways that can strengthen the cultural dimensions of the relation between the environment and development. As this report clearly states *‘convergence is not universal’*. This has challenged internationally the frame of reference which cannot continue to be solely within a Western system of values framework alone. This is due to some areas in which modern science may contradict long held practices and traditional beliefs. The problem as they conclude is to find ways of handling such conflicts.

As ancient, non-Western and Indigenous cultures have demonstrated it is through integration rather than the separation of knowledge bases that development of culture, innovation and creativity can flourish. There also have been periods in Western civilisation where this has occurred.

Whether it be art and design and our way of living, seeing and being as part of the environment and the world around us, science also coexists in everyday life in different manifestations. The failure to recognise these relationships and our fluidity to move between these spaces is much more omnipresent than we realise. It is about the recognition of how we value and how we use both our inner and external resources together on a human level that much can be achieved that creates lifelong learning.
Conclusion

Biodiversity and cultural diversity of ecological and human systems are inseparable in the world. We need a culturally diversified approach to issues of culture, environment and development due to the important variants to ecological sustainability. The notion of sustainability itself raises the question of how nature is conceived and consequently the cultural values that condition a society’s relationship to nature.

The vision for the future in ecological sustainability and environmental stewardship is in valuing and understanding difference, ensuring simultaneously that an approach towards a universal value of global ethics\textsuperscript{91} is a common morality as people can see themselves as being bound and motivated by a core of shared commitments, ethical values and principles.

The principles of democracy, transparency, accountability and human rights should be universal, not selective. One of the pathways is through creating opportunities for community participatory and creative processes to explore this plurality of perspectives. However, this will not emerge without sustained effort by people, organisations and institutions influenced and mobilised in the commitment to strive towards this common ground.

\textit{This is not a utopia. This is a pre-requisite for human survival and human progress on this planet}\textsuperscript{92}.


Appendix 1

COMMUNITY VIEWS OF WORLD HERITAGE

Quotes from community participants involved in the pilot project Nature Through Fresh Eyes community project from 2006. These quotes provide insight to the human values of Blue Mountains residents and their connection to place.

It feels great to live in the World Heritage area. It’s like I have woken up from a deep sleep.

Dominic age 13, Australia

I loved being involved in the project. It was great because I had the opportunity to do an Indigenous welcome for the participants from other cultures to my land through a smoking ceremony. It should be mandatory. Many of them told me how much they really appreciated being welcomed to the land. Some people discussed with me about the bush being the wild and usually seen as something to be feared. But they felt comforted as we walked along together.

Chris Tobin, Darug interpretive guide

I came to Australia from Chile in 1983 and have lived in Medlow Bath for about 12 years. The bush around Medlow Bath has that natural, peaceful and remote beauty which instills in me a sense of trust.

I often take walks by myself without hesitation, knowing that the bush is safe, however mysterious.

Gloria born in Chile
The World Heritage area is a terrific place to live. People are friendly, nature is lovely, air is crisp. However in January 2002, The Mt Hall, Mt An nan and W arrimoo bushfires came very close to our house. We were worried we would lose it. At 4am one morning the fire brigade came to back burn the gully behind our house. It was very nerve-wracking!! We had all our precious belongings in the car, ready to evacuate. Luckily, after two weeks, it rained and the danger passed.

Debbie, originally from NZ

I have only been living in the Blue Mountains for five months and arrived in Australia from Ghana in 2003. Living in the World Heritage area makes me feel good. Being involved in the project made me see things differently and appreciate nature. I am lucky as my sponsor takes me out all the time so I get to see a lot of places especially tourist places such as the Three Sisters and the ferries in the city.

Abiba Amadu, born in Ghana

I love the beautiful bush and community up here. Australia is such a big country with different natural habitats which is great. Germany is small but people care a lot about their environment.

Mandy born in Germany

Thank God there are places like the World Heritage area. I hate how everything is built up and even wilderness areas are a commercial enterprise.

Veronica born in Australia
I was a refugee from Iraq and came to Australia in 1993. I have lived in the blue Moutains for about 6 years and had a family business which did not give us much time to do any bushwalking. The project gave me and my daughter the opportunity to enjoy nature and to learn about A boriginal culture and how they related to nature.

We loved the conversations on the walks with other participants, sharing our memories of our own countries. This project also helped me to reconnect my passion for painting. I am a self-taught artist as I actually trained in science. I believe I have a gift from God for painting, so my goal now is to return to what I love.

**Zahra born in Iraq**

Living in the World Heritage area is definitely better than living in Sydney. I feel the air is free to breathe! There is a total difference between Austria and Australia. In Austria every bit of land is taken up by agriculture-towns and cities. Austria feels tiny compared to Australia. There is so much room and sky here.

**Heidi born in Austria**

I came with my mum on the bushwalks. It was heaps different being in the bush. I learnt so much especially about all the different trees and leaves. I really liked meeting the other people on the bushwalks. It was cool!

**Ameline age 13, born in Turkey**

When I emigrated from Seoul, Korea to Sydney about 11 years ago, I hardly noticed the shake of my inner spirit. Although I couldn’t form a single sentence in English properly, everything including language and culture seemed only superficially different and I felt I could handle it fine.

However, when I moved from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, the real journey started. I was simply lost in connecting myself to the land and its
surrounding environment. I did not know how to appreciate the Australian environment. I realized soon that in the Blue Mountains, we live so closely to nature, wilderness if you like. It wasn’t the familiar built environment that I have known and exposed to for most of my youth life. I loved nature in Korea. In every opportunity I had in Korea, I went to the country side and enjoyed somehow tamed nature.

In the beginning of my life in the Blue Mountains, I encountered lots venomous creatures in our garden such as red back, funnel web spiders, red belly black snake etc. Once I was bitten by red back. The fear towards unknown creatures in me was always there.

However, my inner-transformation happened when I learned about ecology and ever since then it remains as my favourite subject. Ecology being the science of the relationships between organisms and their environments, I slowly have realized the value and the place of every single creature.

Kyung-mi born in Korea

I think living in the World Heritage area is awesome! It’s a privilege to be here and I feel a sense of community here.

I live near the Hydro Majestic Hotel in Medlow Bath. In 2002 I was evacuated a few times due to potential bushfires. I went to the Clairvaux Centre in Katoomba where I had friends and colleagues I knew for daytime safety.

Yvonne born in Scotland
Appendix 2

See PowerPoint - Blue Mountains World Heritage Community Engagement Projects (2011)

• Presentation to National Arts Eco-Forum, Noosa in 2008 funded by the Australia Council for the Arts.

• Presentation to the Board members of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute in Glenbrook, 2009.

• Presented as guest lecturer to undergraduate students at University of Western Sydney on Working with Communities in 2010.

Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute

Cheryle Yin-Lo
Community Engagement
Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI)

- Established in 2004 as an independent non-for-profit organisation.
- In 2009-2012 focussing on the knowledge needs relating to the conservation and management of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWHA).

History of position in BMWHI

- Community Cultural Development (CCD) Worker inaugural position based at BMWHI in 2005 to integrate process across research activities.
- Position & project seed funding from Australia Council for the Arts (18 months)
- Position funding from Arts NSW (1 year)
- Currently undertaking work place based Doctorate of Cultural Research (CCR UWS scholarship until 2010)
2009 Community Engagement

- Community Engagement Projects and activities are designed to address BMWHI’s strategic objectives & goals mission and values and work across the two research areas-Natural & Cultural Heritage.
- Two key focus areas: Community Cultural Development (CCD) and Public Education
Integrating Community Engagement & its role in addressing BMWHI Strategies

- Identifying knowledge gaps
- Brokering & facilitating (research & partnerships)
- Using community engagement processes-arts & cultural expression, enable dialogue & participation of the public in knowledge production and application

Integrating Community Engagement & its role in addressing BMWHI Strategies

- Interdisciplinary research
- Communicating research outcomes
- Integrating Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values in policy & management
- Promoting environmental stewardship
- Develop & nurture collaboration between the Institute and its member organisations
Why is CCD important to BMWHI objectives?

- To bridge the communication and information gap between the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences (i.e., over reliance of technical language and knowledge) for the public.
- To provide a more holistic approach by working more collaboratively and closely with other research team members and partners.
- To provide a catalyst for individual and community narratives and experiences that can assist in informing environmental management and policy issues.
- For raising community awareness of environmental issues and promoting environmental stewardship & World Heritage values.

What is community cultural development (CCD)?

Framework & Integrated Approach

- Holistic, cross cultural & interdisciplinary
- Catalyst for tackling complex environmental, social and economic problems affecting community wellbeing and increasing community resilience in a changing global context.
- Provides the ‘cultural & social space’ to exploring challenging issues from diverse perspectives and ages.
- Encourages community participation (i.e., social & cultural diversity) through arts & cultural expression.
- Encourages community decisionmaking in concept, direction and management of projects.
- Provides skills exchange & promoting social capacity building e.g., mentoring, income and employment opportunities.
Tools & Methodologies in CCD

- Workshops and projects utilise different artforms (e.g., currently using oral storytelling, writing, photography, visual arts & crafts, video).
- Future: Working towards developing digital storytelling, installation, multimedia, music, dance and performance) as expression of people's sense of place, culture and identity, values and 'narratives'.
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Photovoice method (photos & text)
- Community curatorium (i.e., developing exhibitions)
- Visual Diaries & journals
- Interdisciplinary, cross-cultural research
- Documentation & Evaluation (e.g., CCDNSW Arts & Ecology Cultivator Network)

'New Knowledge Production'

- Combining knowledge of diverse perspectives in the community and improving understanding of differences
- Brings together experiences and sharing of skills and knowledge from a range of knowledge bases (i.e., scientific, artistic, educational, environmental, Indigenous, community and cultural)
- Nurtures 'community researchers'
- Assists in working towards informing policy and management issues
- Creates dialogue and negotiation of shared commitment to solutions for improved positive outcomes
Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project

Nature Through Fresh Eyes

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
Partnership Projects

- **Nature Through Fresh Eyes**: with Blue Mountains Multicultural Residents Association, BM Refugee Support Group and Mountains Community Resource Centre to exploring understanding and association with World Heritage values from a cross cultural perspective. Guided interpretive walks with Indigenous guides, visual journals, art workshops & exhibition and comments by participants.

- **Indigenous Time Pod**: video making and workshops with Aboriginal youth & Elders with Shinye Pictures. Shown at the Edge Cinema for NAIDOC Week.

- **Seasons Greetings**: documenting six seasons of Aboriginal calendar (see Agenda Item 5.3-Community Engagement Report for details). Currently in progress.

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*Nature Through Fresh Eyes*

Painting by Kyung-Mi Cho, born Korea
When I emigrated from Seoul, Korea to Sydney about 11 years ago, I hardly noticed the shake of my inner spirit. Although I couldn’t form a single sentence in English properly, everything including language and culture seemed only superficially different and I felt I could handle it fine.

However, when I moved from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, the real journey started. I was simply lost in connecting myself to the land and its surrounding environment. I did not know how to appreciate the Australian environment. I realized soon that in the Blue Mountains, we live so closely to nature, wilderness if you like. It wasn’t the familiar built environment that I have known and exposed to for most of my youth life. I loved nature in Korea. In every opportunity I had in Korea, I went to the country side and enjoyed somehow tamed nature.

In the beginning of my life in the Blue Mountains, I encountered lots venomous creatures in our garden such as red back, funnel web spiders, red belly black snake etc. Once I was bitten by red back. The fear towards unknown creatures in me was always there. However, my inner-transformation happened when I learned about ecology and ever since then it remains as my favourite subject. Ecology being the science of the relationships between organisms and their environments, I slowly have realized the value and the place of every single creature.

Kyung-mi Cho, born in Korea

BRANCHING OUT: Stories from the Blue Mountains Exhibition
Branching Out Exhibition

Key focus

• Using the eucalypt as a catalyst for stories — past and contemporary using social history, archival material, scientific material and contemporary artworks
• to research, develop & design an on-line mixed media exhibition on BMWHI website

Process

• Extending on from first exhibition at BM Music Festival
• Bring together diverse individuals to establish a community curatorium and interdisciplinary project team
• Drawing upon private, public and community collections
• Bringing together geographically isolated communities along single ridge in the Mountains to work collaboratively and explore synergies
Title: Three Decades Photograph

Artist: Helen Deane

This mixed media work was inspired by photographs my grandfather took whilst bushwalking in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. My grandfather was an avid bushwalker and introduced me to it when I was very young. Furthermore, my grandmother was a botanist, so she fostered in me a love for trees and plants from an early age. So between them I had no choice but to love the bush. The stories and photographs my grandfather and grandmother shared with me about their experiences trekking through the Blue Mountains helped create the awe and fascination I have for the place now. My grandfather was a keen photographer and could always be seen with his camera wherever he travelled. The photographs he took on his bushwalks in the Blue Mountains are, in my opinion, the best in his collection and the inspiration for my own work.
Title: Postcard 1904
Artist: Helen Deane
Postcards I found that belonged to my great great grandmother inspired this mixed media work. More than 100 years ago she decided that she wanted to move to Lawson and the Estate agent would send her postcards depicting scenes from the natural environment in the Blue Mountains. I found these so beautiful I wanted to find a way to incorporate them into my own art practice. These images contrast sharply with the commercial depictions of the mountains we often see on postcards now. 101 years after my great great grandmother moved to the Blue Mountains, I followed her example and did the same. These postcards have travelled a long way through time and thus were my inspiration for this work.

Bushfire Storytelling Project

- Record past and recent experiences of local bushfires as 'community healing'
- Provide a vehicle for dealing with complex and controversial issues about fire regimes and management and impact of climate change
- Storytelling workshops with local storyteller/writer
  - Stories
  - Group transcripts
  - Poems
  - Photographs

Swampcare Project

- Community initiative & exploring new way of environmental advocacy
- Increasing community awareness of current groundwater issues, hanging swamps as endangered habitats and impact on e.g the local Giant Dragonfly and Leura Skink
- Group collaboration
- Linoprint workshops & talk by scientist
- Public display in main street windowshop for Winter Magic Festival in Katoomba

Swampcare group
Swampcare Group

Swampcare Group
Winter Magic Festival
Rock Art Lives On! Exhibition

Rock Art Lives On! exhibition

- Exploring Aboriginal community and Elders’ ‘Connection to Country’ and relationship, association and cultural values and interpretation of local rock art sites, stories, symbols
- Combined scientific/archaeological photographs and contemporary artworks by local Indigenous artists
  Exhibited at Blue Mountains Music Festival
Dream from my Ancestors
Artist: Elly Chatfield

2006 NAIDOC WEEK

Naidoc Art Exhibition

Naidoc Art Exhibition
NAIDOC WEEK EXHIBITION

- Annual event and partnership project
- Supporting and promoting Indigenous art and culture in particular their sense of place and identity in the World Heritage area
- Opportunity to support ‘reclamation of culture’ and work with Aboriginal artists from different language groups sharing cultural knowledge and stories
- Increasing profile and visibility of Aboriginal people and culture to wider community

Indigenous arts & cultural development

- Benefits by support and increased involvement by local Aboriginal artists in professional arts and cultural practice e.g.
- More peer support and regular ‘informal’ network i.e Marra Mob for skills exchange, increased profile through group exhibitions, increased employment opportunities through commissions, art tutors for workshops, enviro-cultural tours and producing merchandise
- Establishment of a regular selling point at local café for original artworks and merchandise
- Working towards increased support and better strategic coordination promotion of Aboriginal people and culture, for co-management issues, employment and opportunities for cultural and tourism initiatives.
Renewal Project

• ‘Intervention’ and response to re-build trust with local Mid Mountains communities and local council
• Impact on community of four-lane highway currently being built through the Mountains and redevelopment of Lawson village
• Art project as partnership at inaugural Lawson Festival to record and explore peoples association, cultural values and connections to place. Used to inform BMCC.
• Led to further work of developing Community Government Collaborative Framework (BMWHI/BMCC)
• Next stage to monitor level of community participation in development of public art and interpretive works for new village

Renewal Project – Lawson
Earth Journeys

A leading award winning World Heritage ‘enviro-cultural’ education schools program endorsed by UNESCO

AIMS

• To engender within school students a sense of place, a positive connection with the natural environment and cultural landscapes

• To provide knowledge skills and understanding that will foster responsible stewardship of their local environment and, in general, the earth.

Earth Journeys

• Iconic representation
  Foster a connection to place through the gum tree as their local totem
The tree as a metaphor

- For students themselves, on their journey of development through school and then ‘branching out’ into the world.

The gum tree—‘iconic representation’

- Develop an appreciation not only of the characteristics of the gum tree but also the water systems and surrounding biodiversity & habitat.
Earth Journeys
Experiential learning

Acts as a catalyst for behavioural change

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
Leads to engagement

With environmental issues and the importance of biodiversity

Acts as a catalyst for behavioural change
Vision & Future

- Maintain Community Engagement profile (with Coordinators roles) & project funding
- Establish BMWHI as a leading organisation utilising community engagement in a dynamic and creative way for environmental issues
- Continue to identify and research innovative and appropriate CE processes for BMWHI research projects and activities
Appendix 3

PowerPoint Presentation presented at
Material Inventions: Applying Creative Research Conference
Deakin University, Melbourne 2009

Community based arts as catalyst for environmental stewardship

The model of the community curatorium

Cheryle Yin-Lo, Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute
Presented at Material Inventions: Applying Creative Research Conference
Deakin University, Melbourne 2009
Branching Out—Stories from the Blue Mountains

Creating the common ground

- Working as a community cultural development worker since 2005 using arts and cultural expression to explore complex environmental issues and problem solving
- Organisational context: based in a not for profit research organisation (est. 2004)
- Working in partnership with local communities, universities, environmental networks and government agencies (local, state and Federal level) in the management and policy of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (World Heritage Listing, 2000)
Unleashing latent creativity

Engaging communities, creativity and cultural production

The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt. So if ever there was a need to stimulate creative imagination and initiative on the part of individuals, communities and whole societies the time is now. The notion of creativity can no longer be restricted to the arts. It must be applied across the full spectrum of human problem solving.

Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate. World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995

Applying Creative Research

Multilevel approach

Community involvement in researching and creating an on-line exhibition. Applying creative thinking.

Artistic contributions from the community which have been created for exhibition content. Latent creativity.

Presenting and interpreting contemporary artists and their works in on-line exhibition. Art makers and meaning makers.

Knowledge making
Interpretations & Meaning Making

Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains

A mixed media exhibition using the eucalypt as a catalyst for stories, memories and experiences researched and developed by a community curatorium.

Drawing upon archival material, cultural heritage, social history and contemporary artwork from community, private and public collections from historical and contemporary perspectives.
Establishing the
The Community Curatorium

A community curatorium was established with six people to interpret, develop and research the content, ideas and themes of the exhibition to work collaboratively for eight months.

This group of individuals from the community from arts and non arts background with a variety of skills and knowledge and community networks.

An interdisciplinary and cross cultural group was formed from a range of different ages and nurtured as community researchers and curators.

Demystification–
The shifting role of the curator

• The traditional role of the individual curator vs a community curatorium model

• The origin of the community curatorium model and my experiences

“A curatorium of experts can address the different perspectives of the subject with authority, and bring skills not held within the ‘centre’ and guide the modus operandi.”

John Kirkman, former Director of Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest
Process of the community curatorium model

- Establishing terms of reference
- Regular monthly planning meetings
- Seeking community expressions of interest
- Brainstorming theme and interpretations
- Use of research journals
- Use of research contact sheets in identifying cultural material
- Community networking
- Research skills
- Interviewing skills
- Identifying multiple audiences
- Identifying multiple sources and meanings
- Creating new primary source material

Dilemmas and Tensions

Grose Valley Burning Photo: Ian Brown
Findings and unexpected outcomes

- Community responses to viewing the exhibition
- Discovery of latent creativity
- Inspiration and emotional connection to promote environmental stewardship
- Diverse views & perspectives
- New ways of communication
- Creates better dialogue

The on-line exhibition is promoted to a range of audiences:
- Board members and partner organisations/ agencies
- Community curatorium members and their networks
- Exhibition contributors and artists
- Community organisations email networks
- Community newsletters
- Cultural and heritage network
- Artist networks
- Environmental networks
- Local libraries
- Schools
- Tourism networks
View the Branching Out: Stories from the Blue Mountains
On-line exhibition
www.bmwhi.org.au/
whatson/projects

Wyn Jones: Blue Gum Forest – after the fire
Appendix 4

BURNING MEMORIES

Selected material and excerpts from a group Bushfire Storytelling Workshop held in 2006 at the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, Katoomba.

Facilitated by local storyteller, John Hockney and co-facilitated by Community Engagement Coordinator from Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute.

Excerpt 1

Well! We stayed because it had been drummed into us. I’d lived in the mountains for 30 years and I’d been deeply involved with conservation and the bush. The bush was a living thing – I’d been involved in lots of hazard reduction burning and I was very aware of the need to stay. It had been drummed in a lot over time, and from the bushfires – and they talked about experiences and what saved houses, and then they told us the firestorm passes very quickly, and then you get out and start putting out the spot fires around.

So that was our plan to do that and there wasn’t really anytime to think about it. But we were almost stuck – it was almost too late to leave – anyway – so what frightened us was that our studio was on fire – our caravan – and our boat, and our garage had been put on fire. We had actually put a lot of things in the car – in the garage to save. And this fire came so quickly – which was deliberately lit – I might add, which is the main perception I had about all this. And how we were not believed about that. It’s the politics that goes on behind the scenes – it’s extraordinary!

All we had was a few tools – not much else – not much at all, and no fire brigade, cos they were in Cross Street and other places, so we
were at great risk that we thought the fire brigade would come, unfortunately, because it does not happen.

And we really have to be self reliant, and we can’t depend on a fire brigade to come and protect us. So that’s a huge lesson to learn and in the Blue Mountains we need to look after ourselves.

And this is my concern. It is how you can pass this information onto other people and have it – so that it’s developing stories and developing procedures and talking to each other.

I went back in the afternoon and we had the night there and it was so eerie – so eerie – because everything was black – and there were still things burning. You could hear the trees explode and trees falling over, and the fire was still going on in our garage, so that would flare up again and then our neighbour would come and put it out.

**Female resident, Warrimoo**

**Excerpt 2**

**Facilitator:** So your neighbours – you all helped each other.

**Female:** Oh! The neighbours were the best thing – incredible – there were – this was the first fire and we had people coming up our driveway we’d never seen before – young people. That’s the most wonderful thing and our house would not have survived without our neighbours.

**Excerpt 3**

That’s what – now when you look at the video you realise they are volunteers – and as volunteers they are risking out their lives. There’s an expectancy from the community that they should be there – but really they are volunteers. And the actual volunteer bushfire brigade chap who drove the vehicle in Cross Street. His house was two doors
away from us – so he knew he had to drive that truck down to Cross Street, whilst his house and his family were being threatened – so I think that we should, or do not, realise what they go through.

Facilitator: Can I ask how your parents were dealing with this?

Female One: They seemed – well – they seemed really not too perturbed at all.

Female Two: It’s a generational thing I suppose.

Female Two: Like Dad was saying, Oh! It’ll be alright. I mean there on Christmas day and that was when all the fires were around Glenbrook. This was not good with fires all around, and here we are sitting down having Christmas dinner together. (Laughter from the group).

Facilitator: It’s interesting – did they then see or go to your house to see? Was there a change in their attitude then?

Female One: It took them a long time to come to our place to see what happened. I guess in a way. I guess some people deal with these things by blocking it out. Like I would say to my father – you must have a plan of action of what you need to do – before you have someone coming to tell you to get out. You cannot rely on – he didn’t seem to listen to me – and I said you have to declare exactly what you are going to do and when you are going to do it.

Excerpt 4

Well! You went to Springwood to a bushfire thing for people to register so they could check you were bona-fide. I guess it was all the way up the mountains. It was in the civic centre in Springwood – and we just went and said this happened, and they asked if we needed help, but we said „No”.
But they had a group of people who you could talk to if you wanted to.

There was this lady working there who kept ringing me up to see if I wanted her to come round, and I'd say I'm OK. Actually she made an excuse to come and see if everything was alright. Some time later I checked her out and she was from one of the organisations giving money.

I think it was amazing. I was standing at the letterbox in the street – and I was thinking this is the first time I have ever felt part of the community – and I reckon that is the most important thing, you know. And I wrote to people who organised things and thanked them as well.

It was overwhelming – it really was overwhelming. There was a social psychologist who was very helpful. In fact the people next door went at the same time. But we would meet every day and just talk – and we'd talk for hours and hours and we built up this great friendship through that.

But that was the healing – the talking!

**Female resident, Warrimoo**

**Excerpt 5**

**Female One:** Well! We are installing some huge water tanks at the moment – and I'd say have your own water supply. I think that's the main thing. I'm much more aware and concerned of where fires can lead to. I'm very conscious – but always have been about the space around our house. Where there is no vegetation – that's really important.

**Facilitator:** Was there some before?
**Female One:** Yes! Probably to plant more fire resistant trees, but I guess it really is about having your own water supply.

**Male One:** .... the foreman looked and said it’s not good enough. Do you have a dam? ... Yes but it’s dried up ...

Excerpt 6

**Female One:** Well! Even when it was black – when I was standing in the black, I would rather be there than anywhere else.

**Female Two:** Yes! It’s like getting an attachment to it.

**Facilitator:** I remember going to the Grose Valley lookout when the fire had swept through – it was amazing not a sign of life, yet within a year I couldn’t see the valley floor for the green.

There is this incredible re-growth. I’m not sure the majority of people understand the power of nature and its adaptability – it rejuvenates, it comes back.

**Aboriginal Elder:** It gives you strength – how trees sustain!

*Shipley Plateau after the fire*

*Photo: Jan Thornley*
Appendix 5

Lawson: The Future Planning of Public Art Community Workshop

Process, research findings with community and recommendations

Presentation to Blue Mountains City Council
Pre-Planning Process

• Stakeholder meetings: BMWHI consulted with BMCC and Lawson Alliance prior to community workshops. Submitted proposal of project plan to build on continuing relationship with Lawson community and to explore conceptual ideas for future planning of public art in Lawson

• BMWHI contract professional public artist, Ric McConaghy to co-facilitate workshops with BMWHI Community Engagement Coordinator, Cheryle Yin-Lo

Community Workshop at Mid Mountains Community Centre - Lawson
Promotion

- BMWHI initiate and fund workshops and invite Mid Mountains community to develop conceptual ideas for future planning of public art in Lawson
- Promotion through presentation at Mid Mountains Sustainability Reference Group.
- Distribution of information through fliers, community email lists and MMCC newsletter. Media release sent to BM Gazette (unpublished) and word of mouth.

Community Art Workshops

- BMWHI invite Mid Mountains community to develop conceptual ideas for future planning of public art in Lawson
- Community consultation through three art workshops and site tours held between July-October 2010 in Lawson
- Venues: Mid Mountains Community Centre (2) and Ben Roberts Cafe (1)
- Approx. 45 adults/teenagers and 10 young children participated in workshops
Workshop Session Outline

• Registration
• Welcome & introduction to project objectives and powerpoint presentation of examples of public art
• Group introductions and reasons for attending workshop
• Site tour of Lawson
• Morning tea
• Practical workshop- developing concepts and ideas
• Presenting ideas to group and discussion
• What next? Informing about process of next stage
• Workshop Evaluation
Key issues-Community Concerns

• Request for more consistency in community consultation, input and regular communication with BMCC and Lawson Alliance about development of town centre, processes and timelines for new shops and development and budget for public art

• Integrating environmentally sustainable public art work and user friendly public space for all ages

• The need for more natural aspects and plants to be integrated into the plaza planning

• Maintaining heritage items especially from demolished shops and integrating into new design plans and public art works (either in concept or design element or actual item to be integrated)

Themes: Spirit and energy of community
Themes: Spirit and energy of community

- Public art works that encapsulate the spirit and energy of the community. More works that are vertical and coming up from the ground to break the horizontal flatness of the open area.
- More colour, fluidity and movement

Themes: Environment

This conceptual idea would be to make the sculpture kids size, so that you are able to walk. This conceptual idea would be to make the sculpture kids size, so that you are able to walk through it. It could be made from materials such as blue metal or blue plastic for the bowerbird nest. It could be a cubby house style for kids to play in and could have a wishing well that people could leave blue items in.”
Themes: Environment

Themes: Environment
Themes: Water

Concept for water feature by female resident and artist from Polish background. Copyright of artist.

Concept for a water fountain incorporating the human form made of natural rocks and materials and plants by a local resident who is an Iraqi refugee. A place for contemplation and play.

Theme: Ephemeral & Seasons

- Temporary art that can be moved from site to site within Lawson
- Ampitheatre area used as performative space for music, storytelling and ceremony
- Regular outdoor cinema, food markets & stalls
- Solar lights in trees all year round
- More colour glass in pavements
Theme: Heritage

- Tribute to European explorers through mural on wall near pub
- Christmas Swamp—a visual commemoration
- Heritage of shops—actual items integrated in new design or integration of concept or design elements
- Auditory—people’s stories
- Aboriginal cultural & natural heritage

Theme: Local Heroes

- Mural on Lawson Pub wall that depicts historical explorers of the Blue Mountains
- Tribute to local contemporary ‘heroes’ such as the late Peter Carroll and his dog as icon and marker for Lawson for tourists
Outcomes

- Conceptual ideas for Lawson public art generated by community and documented to be presented to BMCC
- Increased community building and social networking
- Demonstrated concern about positive environmental impact of Lawson town development and its integration into planning with public art
- Recommendation to BMCC to utilise ‘Artist Planner’ model for developing public art that will embrace community ideas and consultation

Recommendations

Prepare a concept plan of town square space suggesting possible art opportunities for various spaces.

Take plan back to the community for comment and feedback. Series of three public meetings. Ideas presented in context and not isolated ideas.

Present to council for consideration and comment. Present finished concept in public spaces for further comment and revision.

Identify which elements will need to be commissioned and which elements with community input and local sponsorship and in-kind support.
Appendix 6

PowerPoint Presentation:
Research Forum: Bringing Together Science and Management

Research Forum
Bringing Together Science & Management

Cheryle Yin-Lo
Community Engagement
Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Environmental Stewardship

• Research for completing Doctorate Culture of Research (DCR) at University of Western Sydney
The twentieth century has transformed the entire planet from a finite world of certainties to an infinite world of questioning and doubt.

In such a climate, it is ever more necessary to cultivate human creativity, for individuals, communities and societies can adapt to the new and transform their reality only through creative imagination and initiative.

The notion of creativity itself must be more broadly used, not just to refer to a new artistic object or form but to problem solving in every imaginable field.

Quote by Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate

World Commission on Culture and Development Report, 1995
Community Engagement

- Community engagement projects and activities are designed to address BMWHI’s strategic objectives & goals mission and values and work across the two research areas-natural & cultural Heritage.
- Two key focus areas: Community Cultural Development (CCD) and Public Education

Integrating Community Engagement & its role in addressing BMWHI Strategies

- Using community engagement processes-arts & cultural expression assists in ‘translating’ and ‘interpreting’ complex issues to diverse communities (Curtis, 2007)
- Enable dynamic dialogue & participation of the public to understand about diverse perspectives
- To identify knowledge gaps, brokering & facilitating (research & partnerships)
- Integrating new knowledge making and combined knowledge production and seeking new ways of its application
Integrating Community Engagement & its role in addressing BMWHI Strategies

- Holistic and Interdisciplinary research
- Communicating effectively research outcomes
- Integrating Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values to inform environmental management, policy & decisionmaking
- Highlighting the important and necessary role of community participation in environmental decisionmaking (O’Riordan, 2002) to environmental agencies and managers

Why is CCD important to BMWHI objectives?

- To promote a strong sense of place and identity with communities critical to nurturing environmental stewardship (Carr, 2002) and promoting World Heritage values.
- To explore human and social values, attitudes and behaviour through creativity, creative thinking, latent creativity and artmaking
- It is a catalyst to engage people on emotional level and builds social connections, relationships, networks and trust
- To provide a catalyst to stimulate multiple perspectives from individual and community narratives and experiences that represents the social and cultural diversity of the region
- To bridge the communication and information gap between the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences (i.e over reliance of technical language and knowledge) for the public.
- To provide a more holistic approach by incorporating community knowledge with scientific research and other forms of research
What is community cultural development (CCD)?

Framework & Integrated Approach

- Catalyst for tackling complex environmental, social and economic problems affecting community wellbeing and increasing community resilience in a changing global context (Yencken, 2000 and Mills & Brown, 2004)
- Provides the ‘cultural & social space’ to exploring challenging issues from diverse perspectives and ages
- Encourages community participation (i.e social & cultural diversity) through arts & cultural expression working with professional artists
- Builds skills in community decisionmaking in concept, direction and management of projects
- Provides information & skills exchange & builds organisational, individual and social capacity building e.g partnerships, resources, funding, mentoring, income and employment opportunities

Tools & Methodologies in CCD

- Workshops and projects utilises different artforms (e.g currently using oral storytelling, writing, photography, visual arts & crafts, video).
- Future: Working towards developing digital storytelling, installation, multimedia, music, dance and performance) as expression of people’s sense of place, culture and identity, values and ‘narratives’.
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Photovoice method (photos & text)
- Community curatorium (i.e developing exhibitions)
- Visual Diaries & journals
- Interdisciplinary, cross cultural research
- Documentation & Evaluation of creative and community based arts as cultural research
BRANCHING OUT: Stories from the Blue Mountains Exhibition

‘New Knowledge Production’

- Combining knowledge of diverse perspectives in the community and improving understanding of differences
- Brings together experiences and sharing of skills and knowledge from a range knowledge bases (i.e. scientific, artistic, educational, environmental, Indigenous, community and cultural)
- Nurtures ‘community researchers’
- Assists in working towards informing policy and management issues
- Creates dialogue and negotiation of shared commitment to solutions for improved positive outcomes
Branching Out Exhibition

Key focus
- Using the eucalypt as a catalyst for stories – past and contemporary using social history, archival material, scientific material and contemporary artworks
- To research, develop & design an online mixed media exhibition on BMWHI website
- Community contributions welcome – see BMWHI website www.bmwhi.org.au

Process
- Extending on from first exhibition at BM Music Festival
- Bring together diverse individuals to establish a community curatorium and interdisciplinary project team
- Drawing upon private, public and community collections
- Bringing together geographically isolated communities along single ridge in the Mountains to work collaboratively and explore synergies

Storytelling

- **Telling stories from the human perspective approach has proven to be more powerful in shifting attitudes, perceptions and connecting with others in the community and sharing their values.**

United Nations Environmental Planning Forum on Sustainability, 2002
Bushfire Storytelling Project

- Record past and recent experiences of local bushfires as ‘community healing’
- Provide a vehicle for dealing with complex and controversial issues about fire regimes and management and impact of climate change
- Storytelling workshops with local storyteller/writer
  - Stories
  - Group transcripts
  - Poems
  - Photographs

Dream from my Ancestors
Artist: Elly Chatfield
Partnership Projects

- **Nature Through Fresh Eyes**: with Blue Mountains Multicultural Residents Association, BM Refugee Support Group and Mountains Community Resource Centre to exploring understanding and association with World Heritage values from a cross cultural perspective. Guided interpretive walks with Indigenous guides, visual journals, art workshops & exhibition and comments by participants.

- **Indigenous Time Pod**: video making and workshops with Aboriginal youth & Elders with Shiney Pictures. Shown at the Edge Cinema for NAIDOC Week.

- **Seasons Greetings**: documenting six seasons of Aboriginal calendar

Nature Through Fresh Eyes
Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project

Nature Through Fresh Eyes
Painting by Kyung-Mi Cho, born Korea
When I emigrated from Seoul, Korea to Sydney about 11 years ago, I hardly noticed the shake of my inner spirit. Although I couldn’t form a single sentence in English properly, everything including language and culture seemed only superficially different and I felt I could handle it fine.

However, when I moved from Sydney to the Blue Mountains, the real journey started. I was simply lost in connecting myself to the land and its surrounding environment. I did not know how to appreciate the Australian environment. I realized soon that in the Blue Mountains, we live so closely to nature, wilderness if you like. It wasn’t the familiar built environment that I have known and exposed to for most of my youth life. I loved nature in Korea. In every opportunity I had in Korea, I went to the country side and enjoyed somehow tamed nature.

In the beginning of my life in the Blue Mountains, I encountered lots venomous creatures in our garden such as red back, funnel web spiders, red belly black snake etc. Once I was bitten by red back. The fear towards unknown creatures in me was always there. However, my inner-transformation happened when I learned about ecology and ever since then it remains as my favourite subject. Ecology being the science of the relationships between organisms and their environments, I slowly have realized the value and the place of every single creature.

Kyung-mi Cho, born in Korea

Nature Through Fresh Eyes Project
Swampcare group

Swampcare Project

- Community initiative & exploring new way of environmental advocacy
- Increasing community awareness of current groundwater issues, hanging swamps as endangered habitats and impact on e.g the local Giant Dragonfly and Leura Skink
- Group collaboration
- Linoprint workshops & talk by scientist
- Public display in main street windowshop for Winter Magic Festival in Katoomba
Swampcare Group

Swampcare Group
Winter Magic Festival
New project: When Phyto Meets Myrtle

- Translating the key message of the spread of the Phytophthora dieback to the public in educative, engaging and fun way
- Artistic collaboration with Ruby Bloomers Circus performers
- Partner organisations and researchers involvement in conceptual process
- Funding from BMCC Cultural Partnerships

New Approaches & Summary

- Integrating community knowledge with other forms of research as a valued form of cultural research
- Sharing of experiences, methodologies and frameworks for community participation and engagement
- ‘Community of practice’ (NSW Parks Forum, Callahan)
Future Visioning & Summary

• Maintain Community Engagement profile and position & project funding
• Establish BMWHI as a leading organisation utilising community participation in innovative, engaging and creative ways
• Identify and sharing innovative models and frame works to community participation and creative based arts on a local, national and international level
• Sharing of experiences, strategies, reports and research on communities in GBMWHA
• Combined knowledge making and application
Appendix 7

Invitation flyer to Research Forum

current research to support park management in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

Tuesday 2nd August 2011, 12:00 to 4.30pm
NPWS Blackheath Heritage Centre
Govetts Leap Road, Blackheath

ARRIVAL & LUNCH

12.00
Welcome and purpose of the Forum

13.15
Acknowledgement of Country

Overview of BMWHI projects

Peter Stodie (BMWHI) & Jacqueline Reid (NPWS)

14.28
Creative Arts as a catalyst for environmental stewardship

13.45
Peter Stodie

13.48
Rosalie Chapelle for Jack Pascoe (UNSW)

14.02
Apex Grasslands endemic to the GBMWA

13.48
Cempein Lo (BMWHI)

14.05
Water as the ecosystem services of the GBMWA

13.48
Rosaie Chapelle

14.15
Potential new bioenergy agroforestry systems for the NSW central tablelands

13.55
Cempein Lo & Kym Moore (UNSW Masters Students)

SHORT BREAK

14.20
Short Break

14.35
Fire & climate change in the GBMWA

14.35
Kate Hamilton (OEH)

14.55
The impact and risk of Phyllostheca camphorata in the GBMWA

14.55
Michelle Byron (OEH)

15.50
Phytophthora ornamental Dieback

15.50
Zoe-Joy Nowy (USYD)

16.10
Update on remnant of GBMWA

16.10
Jackie Reid

16.30
Forum Wrap-up

16.30
Peter Stodie

Please RSVP to jacqueline.reid@environment.nsw.gov.au
by Friday 29 July 2011 Ph: 4784 7326
Lunch will be provided – please advise if you have any special dietary requirements

Creative Arts as a Catalyst for Community Participation in Environmental Stewardship
Appendix 8

Evaluation-Sample Tool 4.1

Participation Evaluation Survey by Vic Health used in community cultural development projects in this portfolio.

**SAMPLE TOOL 4.1**

**PARTICIPANT EVALUATION SURVEY**

1. Why did you get involved in this project?
   - I've been involved before
   - Curiosity
   - I felt it was time to try something new
   - I am interested in [the subject area]
   - Have some fun
   - To become involved in the community
   - Other reasons:

2. Were your expectations met?
   - Yes
   - No

3. What is the most important thing that has happened for you since starting this project?
   - One example only please

4. Did you enjoy being involved in the project?
   - 1 Yes, loved it
   - 2 Liked it
   - 3 Neutral
   - 4 Didn't enjoy it
   - 5 Hated it

5. Did any of the things from the following list happen through being involved in the project?
   - tried something new
   - took a risk and survived
   - created good / interesting art
   - explored interests, talents
   - learnt new things
   - felt proud of myself
   - felt well, healthy
   - learnt new skills
   - learnt specific skills e.g. painting, acting
   - did something positive for myself
   - did something positive for the community

6. Would you like to be involved in another project?
   - 1 Never again
   - 2 I don't think so
   - 3 Maybe
   - 4 Yes, if possible
   - 5 Definitely

7. How can we improve our community arts projects?

THANK YOU
Appendix 9

Sample Tool 4.3

Community Arts Project Evaluation Survey: Project Journal Guidelines by Vic Health used in community cultural development projects in this portfolio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY AREAS TO COVER</th>
<th>POSSIBLE ISSUES TO COVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>How is the role of project officer going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What management issues are there at the moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How well is the project working within your own organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How well are timelines and milestones being achieved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project objectives</td>
<td>Does it seem like the project is achieving its objectives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are your original objectives changing in any way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Were you too ambitious? not ambitious enough?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your shorter term aims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project participants</td>
<td>How well are things going with participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have you recruited all the participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are participants feeling about the project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some of their hopes and expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are participants relating to each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is the group developing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant events</td>
<td>What is particularly significant at the moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does it compare to previous entries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does the group feel about this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community connections</td>
<td>What connection is the project making with communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is this progressing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What supports are being provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What supports are needed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of the project</td>
<td>What impact is the project having on the participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What impact is the project having on the target community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What impact is the project having on the local community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintended outcomes</td>
<td>Are there any unintended outcomes of the project at this stage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are they positive? Are they negative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other key issues</td>
<td>Are there any other key issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the significance of the issue?</td>
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# Tables, Illustrations and Diagrams

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<td>Cover</td>
<td>artwork</td>
<td>Forest Glimpses. Ink and colour on rice paper (undated)</td>
<td>Andrew Lo</td>
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<td>Blue Gum Forest-after the bushfire</td>
<td>Wyn Jones</td>
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<td>Firebark (undated)</td>
<td>Copyright and courtesy of Christine Stickley</td>
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<td>Swampcare project-lino print of giant dragon fly. (2005)</td>
<td>Female workshop participant</td>
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<td>Swampcare Project- Completion of mounting of group collaborative work for Winter Magic Festival, Katoomba (2005)</td>
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<td>Lawson Community Map (1987)</td>
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<td>Current public artwork in Lawson using original bricks from Lawson heritage building</td>
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<td>Public art concept and drawing by 15 year old Lawson public art workshop participant</td>
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<td>Real life bowerbird nest Bowerbird nest drawing of proposed public art by female resident at Lawson public art workshop</td>
<td>Cheryle Yin-Lo</td>
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<td>Three dimensional concept model of proposed sculpture</td>
<td>Male resident</td>
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