

LIVEABLE CITIES, LIVEABLE TOWNS

THE ARTS RIPPLE EFFECT
VALUING THE ARTS IN COMMUNITIES



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Community is defined by both people and place, the two are inextricably linked. Places are imbued with cultural significance and social meanings that are constantly being made and re-made which makes ‘place’ much more than simply a physical environment.⁵⁰

Arts initiatives can transform public spaces that may once have been problematic or under-utilised into places that become meaningful and aesthetically pleasing to the communities that use them.

“There is an increasing body of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, on the positive contribution of arts and culture to a city’s or region’s liveability.”⁵¹

The Victorian Neighbourhood and Community Renewal programs that have adopted arts-based engagement approaches have shown that it is possible to both re-engage communities that have been excluded from the political and social mainstream,⁵² and create inspirational public space outcomes.

Adopting art-based participation models can also be powerful tool for engaging community debate on the use of public space. When a community becomes involved from the design to realisation phase of a project it can enhance their sense of belonging, encouraging them to become custodians of their local environment.⁵³

⁵⁰ Mulligan M, Humphery K, James P, Scanlon C, Smith P & Welch N. (2006). *Creating Community: Celebrations, Arts and Wellbeing Within and Across Local Communities*. Melbourne: RMIT Globalism Centre & Vic Health.

⁵¹ Arts Victoria. (2008). *The Role of Arts and Culture in Liveability and Competitiveness: A Submission to the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission’s Inquiry into Enhancing Victoria’s Liveability*.

⁵² MacDowall L, Gilmour J, Adams R J & Blomkamp E. (2013). *Government and the Arts: An Evaluation of a Cross-Government Partnership Brokerage Model for Supporting Creative Communities at Renewal Sites*. Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Victorian College for the Arts, Faculty of VCA and MCM, University of Melbourne. (unpublished)

⁵³ Dannenberg A, Jackson R, Frumkin H & Schieber A. (2003). ‘The Impact of Community Design and Land-use Choices on Public Health: A Scientific Research Agenda.’ *American Journal of Public Health*. 93 (9):1500-8.

CREATING PLACE: NOCTURNAL

Nocturnal is an annual winter, after-dark art event that invigorates Dandenong's streets with temporary public art installations. An eight storey building in central Dandenong is illuminated by projections and public art is encountered in the city's laneways, car parks and streets.

Nocturnal started in 2006 and features artworks by established, emerging and students artists. It is delivered by the City of Greater Dandenong in partnership with Chisholm Institute, RMIT, Federation Square and Greater Dandenong's Walker Street Gallery.

Free guided night-time tours through the streets of Dandenong are part of the **Nocturnal** program exploring arts projects, light projects and meeting the artists.

The City of Greater Dandenong recognises that public perceptions of safety in its area are relatively low compared to many other parts of Melbourne.⁵⁴ One of the aims of **Nocturnal**, including the guided tours, is to activate spaces after dark and improve local residents' sense of security through a shared experience. Following the 2013 **Nocturnal** tours, 42% of participants reported that their perception of Dandenong at night had improved.

"Nocturnal showed me that the streets are quite safe, well lit and have interesting elements within."
(Nocturnal tour participant)

The **Nocturnal** tours have grown in popularity with a 45% more attendees in 2013 than the previous year, when 322 people took part.



Member of public inspecting artwork titled "*No Fence For Dreams*" by Julian Clavijo (2013) Photo: Jason Edwards Photography.

A high proportion of **Nocturnal** tour participants are locals, with nearly 70% coming from Dandenong or neighbouring suburbs.⁵⁵

"I was pleased to see how art is being used as a tool for rejuvenating the city. We must never underestimate the power of creativity to generate excitement and tighten a community."
(Nocturnal tour participant)

Since 2006 the City of Greater Dandenong has partnered with Places Victoria to implement Revitalising Central Dandenong, which is a \$290 million dollar program aiming to rejuvenate the city centre. A place making program is delivering an array of public realm improvements, including a wide-ranging program of public art.

⁵⁴ Preceel N. 31 January 2011, "Boost to Safety," *Dandenong Leader* newspaper, and Community Indicators Victoria, *Greater Dandenong Wellbeing Report 2007*, http://www.communityindicators.net.au/wellbeing_reports/greater_dandenong

⁵⁵ Unpublished **Nocturnal** survey data 2013, City of Greater Dandenong.

CASE STUDY: CLUNES BOOKTOWN FESTIVAL

Clunes Booktown Festival is an annual book-selling and literary festival held in the historic goldmining town of Clunes in Victoria. It is modelled on the the successful European concept of “Booktowns” with book-selling as their core theme. The festival was developed by a local community group, *Creative Clunes Inc* with the objective of renewal for their town.



Browsing at Clunes Booktown Festival Photo: Neil Newitt on commission from Creative Clunes Inc.

“A small group of us got together because we were concerned about our town’s survival. We had to work out how to become a sustainable community. It was a ghost town here.”

(Tim Hayes, Creative Clunes Inc)

Agricultural and manufacturing decline, drought and population loss had all taken their toll on the Clunes with mostly vacant shops on its main street. Creative Clunes envisioned a book fair on a weekend to test the idea that books could generate tourism and a better future for the town.

The first festival was held on a single day in 2007 and attracted about 6,000 people, way beyond the town’s expectations. The town ran out of money, food and even electricity. Seven years later **Booktown** has expanded to a weekend event attracting close to 20,000 visitors.

Only one bookstore existed prior to 2007 and Clunes now draws 50 book traders for the festival, with eight book traders permanently based in town and two on-line book traders. This is a remarkable concentration of bookshops for a town of under 2,000 residents. Creative Clunes has also developed two community-run bookstores originally managed by volunteers, who have now taken over these shops as businesses.

“We are delighted that locals trained by Creative Clunes will now be operating successful private enterprises that in turn will employ other locals.”

(Tim Hayes, Creative Clunes Inc)

Other signs of growth are installation of an ATM, re-opening of the Clunes railway station and redevelopment of the Clunes Museum into a community and information centre, The Clunes Warehouse. In 2012 Clunes was recognised as the southern hemisphere’s first international book town. The designation has been given to only 15 towns worldwide.

A survey of residents in 2010 found strong support for the festival, with 99% of respondents agreeing that the promotion of Clunes is the event’s greatest economic benefit.⁵⁶ 84% of residents surveyed believed that Booktown was beneficial in securing the long-term future of Clunes through promotion of the town, attraction of tourists, economic benefits, sense of a positive future and community spirit. Local support for the event is also demonstrated the high proportion of local volunteers – 42% of residents indicated they had volunteered at the event in 2010.⁵⁷

Booktown has expanded to include a suite of year-round Sunday Selection talks by prominent authors and the inaugural Clunes Booktown for Kids Festival will be held in late 2014. The Clunes Ceramic Award, now the second richest ceramic prize in Australia, is another arts initiative instigated by Clunes Creative in partnership with the Art Gallery of Ballarat and the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum.

⁵⁶ Kennedy, M. (2010). *Research Audit – Clunes Back to Booktown 2010*. Bendigo: La Trobe University, p 27.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 34.

"We must never underestimate the power of creativity to generate excitement and tighten a community"

Nocturnal tour participant, City of Greater Dandenong arts initiative.