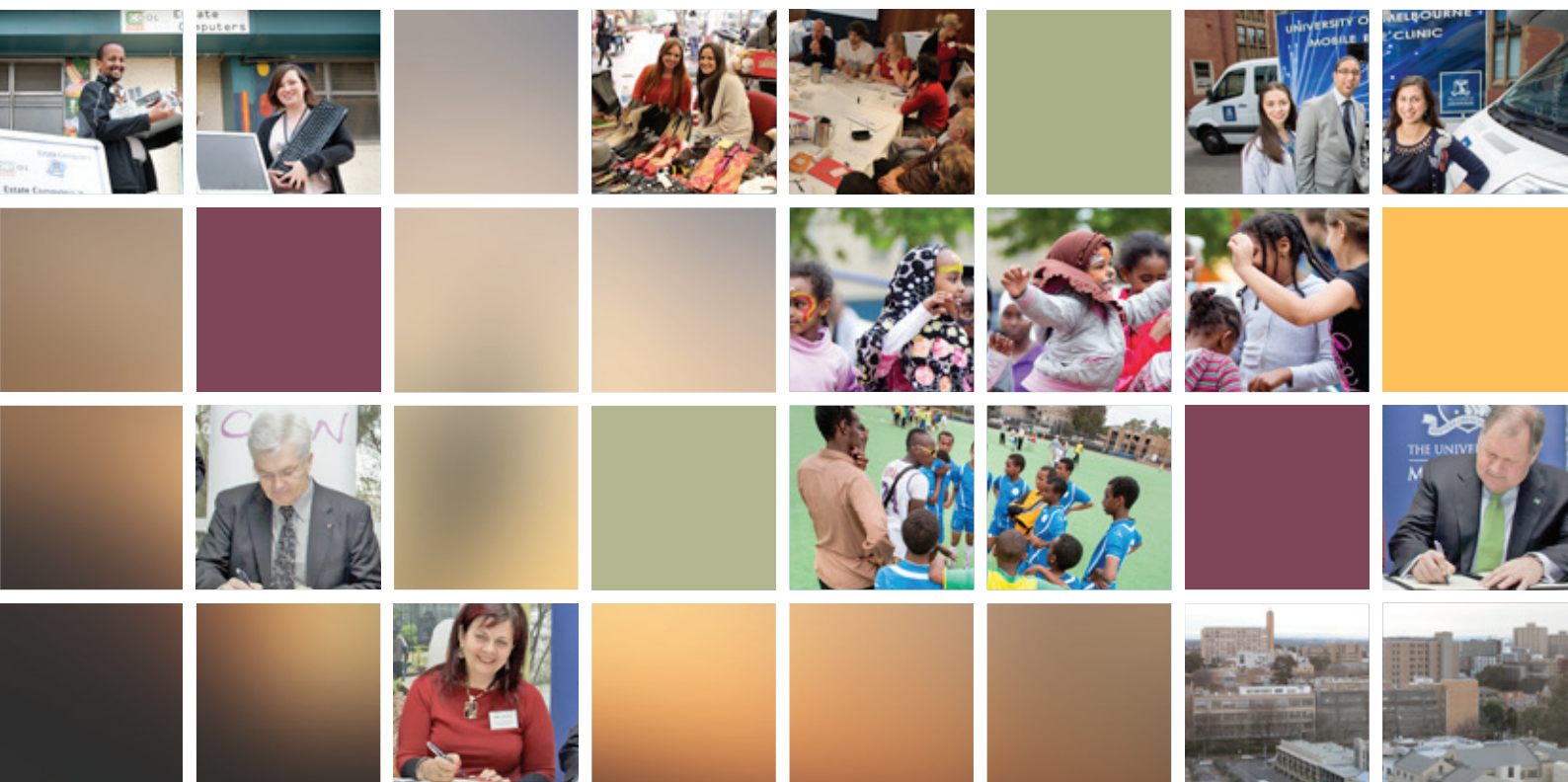


On the ground doing the partnership stuff

Bridging the gulf between the University and its neighbours

An evaluation of the Carlton Tripartite Partnership between the Carlton Local Agencies Network, the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne

Deborah Warr and **Richard Williams**



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McCaughey VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health



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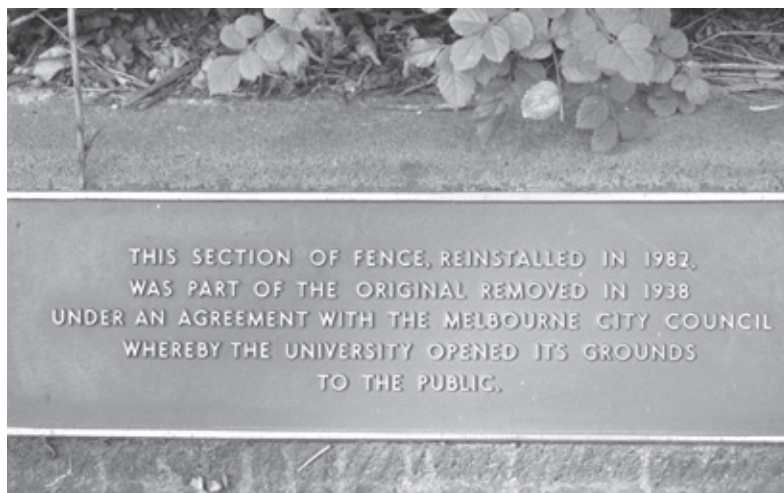
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GLOSSARY

- CAN Church of All Nations
CLAN Carlton Local Agencies' Network
CNLC Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre
COM City of Melbourne
CWLC Carlton Work and Learning Centre
DHS The Department of Human Services
DPCD The Department of Planning and Community Development
LLEN Local Learning and Employment Network
MEPO Melbourne Engagement and Partnerships Office
MOU Memorandum of Understanding
OFC Opportunities for Carlton
SALP Student Ambassador Leadership Program
SIFE Students in Free Enterprise

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Remnant of the University's original fence on the corner of Grattan Street and Royal Parade

1 INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

This report discusses an evaluation of a noteworthy partnership involving the Carlton Local Agencies Network (CLAN), the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne. It is significant because it represents a different kind of partnership enterprise for the University that required engaging with its neighbourhood communities and, in particular, disadvantaged and marginalised populations living in Carlton. The initiative became known as the 'Tripartite Partnership' or, more casually, the 'Carlton Community Partnership'. It is an ongoing partnership. Formally established in 2011, the Tripartite Partnership is an extension of the 'Opportunities for Carlton' (OFC) project led by the City of Melbourne. Given the University's physical, social and cultural prominence in Carlton's landscapes, it was approached to form a three-way 'tripartite' partnership.

Many of the objectives that were identified through the OFC initiative involved the University in different ways. These included promoting economic and social opportunities among the suburb's diverse population and providing access to local infrastructure and resources. Through its research, teaching and cultural activities, the University has had longstanding involvement in Carlton. A key impetus for the partnership was to explore how these activities could better serve local needs. The partnership also offered a timely opportunity to ease tensions between the neighbourhood and the University. The University is not always perceived as a good neighbour. Disputes have flared over its property developments and it is viewed by some in the community as a 'walled city' that is removed from, and uninterested in, the everyday concerns of its neighbours.

The broad goals of the Tripartite Partnership were to promote social, economic, educational and cultural links between the University and communities living and working in Carlton. There was particular emphasis on engaging with local disadvantaged

and marginalised communities who had limited contact with the University, yet could potentially gain great benefit from having access to the educational, research, employment and infrastructure opportunities that it offered. Facilitating community access to these opportunities became key objectives for the Partnership. Some objectives are strongly aligned with the University's core activities of research and teaching; others emphasised the social value of engagement and promoting social equity through opportunities for learning, knowledge that met local needs, employment and access to recreational and cultural facilities.

Through the partnership a diverse range of events, activities and projects have been initiated. The evaluation was conducted to explore the processes that were used to build links between the University and local partners, and the outcomes of these efforts. The conceptual framework for the evaluation identifies four key domains of activities that blended University and community priorities. These are research; education and learning; access to infrastructure; and creating local employment opportunities. Data for the evaluation were collected through key informant interviews, case studies, participant observation and reviews of partnership documentation.

Part 2 explains the background and context for the Partnership, including a brief history of the University's relationship with the Carlton community since the late 1960s. Part 3 sets out the evaluation design and method.

The findings are discussed in parts 4 and 5. Part 4 of the report discusses key themes that emerged in the key informant interviews: perceptions of the gulf between the University and the community; the significance of community development processes for building bridges between the University and the community; the central role of volunteering for exchanging resources between the university and the community; and reflections on the opportunities and challenges of intersectoral partnerships across dissimilar settings. Part 5 discusses case studies of four projects that were orientated to achieving different objects, and which involved complex partnership arrangements that straddled local and institutional contexts.

The findings show that the partnership contributed to new and mutually beneficial engagements between the University and local community partners. The findings offer insights into the challenges of university-community partnerships. They suggest that community development processes are critical for fostering

respectful engagement and cooperation across divergent institutional and community settings. The most consistent finding was the importance of cultivating expertise within the University to engage in effective community development processes. Engagement is not a 'one size fits all' activity and requires a range of strategies for partnerships across diverse contexts. The report concludes with a brief discussion of current partnership activities and considers the broader value of University–community partnerships and the local, institutional and civic benefits that can be generated.

Recommendations

The University should continue its involvement in the consolidation phase of the Carlton Tripartite Partnership. (A new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is due to be signed in October 2014). In the short term, this requires that:

1. Key University personnel participate in community planning processes that are currently underway through the 'Shape Your Carlton' consultation, which will guide the next phase of the Partnership.
2. University personnel contributing to monitoring of the Carlton Tripartite Partnership to maintain open channels of communication with partners, and identify positive and unanticipated outcomes that are being generated through Partnership activities.

More broadly, this report points to the value of the University being involved in diverse engagement strategies. There is significant scope for the University to build its profile as a leader in innovative engagement strategies that foster mutual benefits for the University and the diverse communities that are associated with its research and learning activities. To respond to these opportunities it is recommended that the University:

1. Draws on the outcomes of Shape Your Carlton to identify longer term projects that advance the University's commitment to social equity, and that respond to the three Grand Challenges set out in the *Research at Melbourne* strategy; i.e. understanding our place and purpose, fostering health and wellbeing, and supporting sustainability and resilience.¹

2. Provides ongoing support for staff and student volunteering that meets community needs and enhances students' learning and international students' experiences of studying in Australia. As a step towards this, it is recommended that the University investigate the establishment of a structured volunteering service. This investigation should consider the value and cost of induction, continuing support for local and international students to be involved in volunteering activities, volunteer registration, and a staff position dedicated to liaison between the University and community organisations.²
3. Continues to explore opportunities for local communities to have access to University facilities and resources, and investigates more effective ways of informing the communities about these opportunities.
4. Develops and trials innovative engagement initiatives that foster a culture of 'responsive scholarship' across the University. Examples of potential initiatives include:
 - A **Community Fellowship Program (CFP)** offering personnel working in community-based organisations an opportunity to take up fixed-term and supported honorary positions to foster university-community exchanges of ideas, practices and expertise.
 - A '**Community Collaboratory**' as a portal for accessing University-based expertise in conducting community engagement and participatory research, incubating new research partnerships in response to community concerns, contributing to building skills for community engagement and collaboration through teaching and learning, and delivering capacity building programs to foster skills across the University for community engagement with diverse communities.

¹ University of Melbourne 2012, *Research at Melbourne: Ensuring excellence and impact to 2025*, http://www.unimelb.edu.au/research/docs/MelbUniResearchVision_Apr2013.pdf

² This investigation needs to take into account the outcomes of the *Review of Student Volunteering, Orientation, Leadership & Transition (VOLT) Services*, University of Melbourne 2012, http://msl.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/697928/VOLT_Report_final.pdf

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THE PARTNERSHIP

The Tripartite Partnership involves the Carlton Local Agencies Network (CLAN), the City of Melbourne and the University of Melbourne. It builds on foundations established through Opportunities for Carlton, an initiative led by the City of Melbourne. To grasp the significance of aims and objectives that informed the Partnership, it is helpful to understand the local context. The suburb of Carlton is one of the most dynamic and diverse suburbs within the City of Melbourne. It adjoins the University's Parkville campus and has been the primary area of the expansion of the campus into the surrounding suburbs. Carlton is also within easy reach of RMIT University and is a major precinct of student housing.

Data from the City of Melbourne website (www.melbourne.vic.gov.au) shows that Carlton has a relatively young population (58% of the population are aged between 20-34 years), and a significant proportion low-income households (37% of residents earning less than \$300 per week). This is mainly accounted for by two high-rise public housing estates, and also by the large student population living in the area. The suburb also has many high-income households, and parts of Carlton, such as the commercial and cultural precinct of Lygon Street, attract large numbers of visitors and tourists. Local socioeconomic and cultural diversity contributes to a vibrant neighbourhood. However, access to educational, employment and recreational opportunities are unevenly available across populations living in the suburb.

The Carlton neighbourhood: community profile and local issues

In 2011 there were 14,104 people living in Carlton. Fifty-eight percent of the population were from 20-34 years old and more than a third (35%) were enrolled in a university or other tertiary institution. Almost half (47%) of the households in Carlton were single-person. The high number of tertiary students places Carlton in the 10th decile in Victoria on the Index of Education and Occupation, but in the 2nd decile on the Index of Relative Socio-economic disadvantage. The bulk of the educated population is transient and does not stay in the community to bring long-term economic benefit.

Of those who stated their country of birth, 4,587 (37%) were born in Australia and 7,869 (63%) were born overseas. A third of the population spoke a language other than English at home. By far the greatest number of these, 3200 or 22%, spoke a Chinese language, followed by Arabic (2%) and Italian (2%) (compiled from data from Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

Most of the low-income households in Carlton are clustered in two high-rise public housing estates that are landmarks in the suburb's skyline. These estates are entirely public housing, which creates sharp divisions from the increasingly gentrified surrounding areas. Gentrification refers to the migration of higher income households to lower-income neighbourhoods close to the city centre and the consequent displacement of lower-income residents (Atkinson 2000). Recent Australian research (Atkinson et al. 2011) has identified three key effects of gentrification. Initially it increases pressure on low-income renters who are faced with paying higher rents, relocating to lower-rent areas, applying for social housing or, at worst, becoming homeless. Over time this leads to a loss of social diversity and displaces lower-income owners and renters to areas further from city centres in search of affordable housing. This in turn leads to a change in the orientation of local services and infrastructure towards the needs of the newer residents, further disadvantaging those lower-income residents who remain. The shopping, restaurant and entertainment precinct of Lygon Street is pitched to the cultural interests and relative wealth of inner-city residents. The Carlton estate residents are conspicuous by their absence in this precinct.

Through these processes, diverse neighbourhoods such as Carlton are vulnerable to becoming socially fragmented, and there is anecdotal evidence that this is occurring between different sectors of the Carlton population. Many of the new apartment complexes built across Carlton in recent years are providing accommodation for international students attending the University of Melbourne and RMIT. This population tends to live in the suburb for shorter periods of time and have limited opportunities for connecting with others residents.

There is a history of friction between Carlton residents' groups and local institutions, particularly the University and the Royal Women's Hospital. Resident associations become concerned that the growth of these institutions would destroy the essential character of the suburb. In the 1960s the University began buying properties in Carlton and Parkville in anticipation of expansion. By the early 1970s these plans led to widespread community protest by the Carlton Association, resulting in the plans being curtailed. Shortly afterwards, the Association mounted a far larger campaign against the proposed clearance of 20 acres of Carlton for a Victorian government urban regeneration project. The success of the campaign gave the community the skills and experience of effective resistance. In 1998 the University again became the target of a resident-led campaign as a result of its plan to demolish rows of two-storey heritage Victorian era houses on Barry and Leicester Streets to make way for the construction of four large buildings. The residents were joined in their campaign by Melbourne City Council, the National Trust, the Victorian Trades Hall, and residents' associations from adjoining areas. As a result, the University agreed to modify the plans in consultation with the National Trust and the Carlton Residents Association (Yule 2004). Memories of these disputes linger in the community and were evident in the caution expressed by some informants about the University's renewed interest in Carlton. As well, the University's exemption from paying council rates continues to fuel hostility among some people in the neighbourhood. A survey conducted in 2006 noted many residents and organisations viewed the University as an 'elitist, arrogant, detached, exclusive and self-absorbed' institution, and 'a walled city' that is removed from, and uninterested in, the everyday concerns of its neighbours (Open Mind Research, 2006).

The evolution of the Tripartite Partnership

In 2008, in response to issues of worsening socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of access to infrastructure and services, and experiences of social exclusion among some populations in Carlton, the City of Melbourne initiated the Carlton Community Planning and Engagement Project. In turn, this led to a three-year community development and planning project, Opportunities for Carlton, which operated from June 2009 until June 2013. It was jointly funded by the City of Melbourne, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Human Services. The aim of the project was to bring community, industry and government together to develop and implement 'ideas designed to create a better Carlton'. In 2010 the project produced a community plan, which included an action to 'increase partnerships with major education institutions to respond to the needs of the community' (City of Melbourne 2010:3, 17), which led to a memorandum of understanding between the University, the Carlton Local Agencies' Network and the City of Melbourne. The purpose of the MOU was to co-ordinate resources and skills of the three major organisations in Carlton in support of the implementation of the community plan. The University's engagement at an operational level was co-ordinated by the Melbourne Engagement and Partnerships Office (MEPO).

The MOU was signed in August 2011 and subsequently extended to August 2014 (Elliott 2012). In her speech at the signing ceremony, Mary Parfrey, Coordinator of the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) and Chairperson of CLAN said:

As we look to the future, we see many possibilities and potential synergies in the partnership. I would like to emphasise the importance of Community Development principles and the need for this to be a community led direction for this MOU to be a success (Parfrey 2011).

The MOU was developed within the context of the University's Growing Esteem strategy, which uses the metaphor of a triple helix to represent the intertwining of the University's three core activities: research, teaching and learning, and engagement. With regard to the engagement strand, the strategy states that:



Roundtable Discussion, Carlton, 2013

Melbourne declares its intention to make research, student learning and engagement serve public ends. This includes taking up pressing societal problems in research, producing graduates prepared for responsibility, and promoting inquiry and open debate based on evidence and reason (University of Melbourne 2010:7)

It is clear from the strategy document that as the University strives to position itself as a nationally and internationally competitive research institution, the importance of engagement with its neighbourhood community in Carlton risks being overlooked. However the Carlton Tripartite Partnership has broader significance. The University of Melbourne staff and students engage in research and development in marginalised communities throughout Australia and the world. It is in these local settings that the impacts of many 'pressing societal problems' are found. Melbourne also trains a range of professionals – teachers, medical practitioners, social workers, planners, researchers etc. – many of whom will spend at least part of their working lives in marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The University also seeks and promotes opportunities for students to undertake volunteering and placements in local settings. These experiences enhance students' professional, educational and personal development. Educational, practical, moral and reputational issues provided compelling drivers for the University to be involved in the Partnership.

In 2013 the University funded Dr Deborah Warr from the McCaughey Centre for Community Wellbeing in the School of Population and Global Health to evaluate the Tripartite Partnership. The evaluation had several aims. Principally it set out to identify projects and activities that were developed as a result of the partnership; to identify effective processes for

University and community partnerships; and to explore emerging outcomes from partnership initiatives. More broadly, the evaluation sought to understand how the partnership supported the strategic aims of the University, in particular with regard to research, learning and teaching, and furthering the public good through engagement with local communities to generate mutually beneficial outcomes.

A community development approach for the Tripartite Partnership

From the outset CLAN emphasised that the Tripartite Partnership needed to be grounded in community development principles, and this approach was confirmed by other informants in the evaluation. Community development is more a practice philosophy than a defined process, and is underpinned by social philosophies stressing equity and social justice. It is widely understood as fostering 'bottom up' processes to harness local knowledge and expertise, and promote community-led organisation and advocacy for more equal distribution of resources and access to infrastructure.

A community development approach is expressed by the phrase: 'nothing about us without us'. Communities should have control over how problems are defined and the solutions that are devised to address them. Community development seeks to build the self-reliance of local communities, utilising existing strengths rather than identifying and seeking to rectify deficits. It values diversity and recognises that contest and conflict are as much part of a functional community as consensus and co-operation. It accepts the need to work with the multiple realities and inconsistent narratives that are found in communities (Cavaye n.d.; Ife 2009).

In community development approaches, paid workers and professionals must use participatory and cooperative approaches (Warr et al. 2013). Participatory practice is often represented as an incremental continuum spanning minimal involvement (information sharing) to full community control, including control over the allocation of resources. Community development approaches, however, seek to maximise potential for community participation in relevant decision-making processes, and stress the importance of effective participation beginning at the early stage of problem identification.

From the perspectives of policy makers, administrators and funders, the drawback of this process is that it is slow and time-consuming. It is based on a long-term developmental perspective and relies on building and maintaining effective relationships. It also relies on local knowledge, which is undermined by the staff turnover inherent in short-term projects and contracts. Community development is highly relational, and the experience and skills of the employees involved are critical factors. Effective community development also depends on partners having shared understanding of and commitment to its key tenets. Consequently it is often at odds with the current programmatic approach to social problem solving.

Tripartite Partnership objectives

As stated above, the Tripartite Partnership grew out of the Opportunities for Carlton Project, an initiative collaboratively developed through a partnership between the City of Melbourne and CLAN. CLAN is an affiliation of 26 not-for-profit community based organisations, groups and service support agencies that focus on or have a presence in the Carlton Community (CLAN 2013b). Key staff in the Community Development Division at the City of Melbourne worked closely with CLAN in the formative stages of the Partnership. Partnerships, initiatives and projects were developed through participatory processes. As projects developed, the need for expertise and resources emerged. The University was identified as a key local organisation to engage in the OFC initiative, and the Tripartite Partnership marked the establishment of a new three-way partnership, although the City's role continued to be strongly focused on supporting CLAN to actively partner with the University.

The Partnership focused on developing collaborative projects to generate mutually beneficial outcomes for the community and the University. These objectives were given extra impetus through growing recognition of circumstances of disadvantage and marginalisation among local populations living in Carlton, particularly public housing residents. The Tripartite Partnership also presented an important opportunity for the University to generally repair and re-establish neighbourly relationships with its local community.

The Melbourne Engagement and Partnerships Office (MEPO) was the contact point for engaging with the University. MEPO approached the early stages of the Partnership as a mainly contractual task and devoted much time to developing the MOU. Following this, carriage of the Tripartite Partnership was given to a MEPO partnership consultant, who possessed considerable expertise in community organisation and community development theory and practice. The evaluators worked closely with the Partnership Consultant to develop the conceptual framework for the evaluation, and consulted with partners throughout this process. The evaluation plan was finalised before approaching the University to fund the project. It was considered that the Partnership offered an important opportunity to consider the impacts that can be generated through university-community engagement with marginalised communities, and effective processes for achieving positive outcomes

3 METHOD FOR THE EVALUATION

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Describe events, activities and projects that were initiated or supported through the Partnership;
- Explore key outcomes and impacts that were generated from these activities and projects; and
- Identify effective strategies for university–community engagement and partnership, with a particular focus on engaging socioeconomically disadvantaged and culturally diverse populations.

The evaluation framework identified four key domains of activity to consider. These reflect key strategic goals for the University and community concerns (see figure 1). It was initially envisaged that a community researcher would be engaged to work on the evaluation in collaboration with the University researchers. Overcoming the difficulties of recruiting and training a local researcher from the public housing community, however, proved to be beyond the resources of this evaluation.

Community concerns:	University strategic goals:
Infrastructure. Reinforce the concept of the University as a public space and enhance the ways in which it can make positive contributions to local intellectual, social, cultural and economic life.	Research. Enhance research relationships between the University and the community, and promote the potential for University-based research and student learning to serve public ends.
Employment. Promote employment opportunities for local people in the University.	Learning. Increase recruitment of domestic undergraduate students from low socioeconomic backgrounds into undergraduate studies.

Figure 1. Evaluation domains.

The evaluation is built around four critical case studies of key projects that represent each of these domains. Staff from MEPO supported activities associated with these projects. A critical case is one strategically selected to provide the most information about the phenomenon being studied, which a representative case may not do. Critical case studies are more efficient and can increase the relevance of the findings to other similar situations (Flyvbjerg 2001). The evaluation is not restricted to these projects and refers to a range of initiatives that were developed through the Tripartite Partnership.

Ethical approval was gained from the Departmental Human Ethics Advisory Groups (ID 1238743.1). Data for the evaluation were collected through key informant interviews, documentary analysis and participant observation that was conducted between May 2013 and March 2014.

Data collection

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who were identified through a purposive sampling strategy. Thus the informants interviewed were judged to be people with the best knowledge of the Partnership and case study projects from key vantage points. As interviews were completed, informants were also recruited through snowball sampling methods, drawing on information gained from these interviews. Potential informants were first contacted via email and followed up by a phone call.

Twenty interviews were completed with a total of 23 informants. Nine of the informants were employed by community organisations or local government, five were employees of the University or a subsidiary, seven were students of University, and two were from small businesses. It was not ascertained whether those who were students were also residents of Carlton, as this was not material to the information they gave. One interview was conducted as a group interview with students and two interviews involved two informants. All but one of the people who were invited to be interviewed for this research agreed to be involved. This individual declined as he did not think he had sufficient involvement in Partnership-related activities.

Documentary analysis

A range of documentation from the partners, including relevant evaluations, was identified and reviewed. This material was used to provide context for the Partnership and insight into project contexts and outcomes.

Participant observation

The principal and assistant researcher attended numerous planning and progress meetings and community events over the course of developing and conducting the evaluation. Conversations at these events were not recorded but drawn upon for general impressions of how issues played out and were resolved over time.

Data analysis

The collected data were coded for content and themes. These analyses were used to identify impacts from the partnership and effective processes for University-community partnerships. They were also used to develop the four case studies that provided insight into how the complex partnership activities progressed over time to address key objectives. (See Figure 2 for a description of the case studies projects.)

Case study 1: Carlton Community Sports Carnival (Infrastructure)

The objective of this project is to develop sport and recreation activities that reflected community interests and facilitate access public access to University recreational infrastructure. This has become an annual event.

Case study 2: Carlton On-line Opportunities and Learning - COOL (Learning)

The objective of this project is to bridge the 'digital divide' in Carlton by providing low-cost computers for people on low incomes, training programs, information resources and a community website.

Case study 3: Horn Afrik - Carlton Horn of Africa Men's Employment and Training Advocacy Project (Employment)

The objectives of this project are to assist men from Horn of Africa countries gain appropriate employment and relevant training, provide referral to appropriate support agencies, and advocate on behalf of the men.

Cast Study 4: Research and Learning Engagement with Carlton Primary School (Research)

The objective of this case study is to consider the value of research and other relationships between the University and a nearby school that has an ethnically diverse community of children living in low-income households.

Figure 2. Case study projects.

4 FINDINGS: KEY THEMES AND ISSUES

Overview

The Tripartite Partnership supported a diverse array of events, activities and projects that were orientated to achieving key objectives of the Opportunities for Carlton plan. There was strong agreement among informants that the University's involvement in Partnership initiatives had either enhanced the outcomes of current initiatives or enabled new projects to be implemented. In this section we discuss four key themes and issues that were evident in the interviews and which explore the rationale for the evaluation, critical processes and significant contexts. The first theme focuses on the gulf that was perceived to exist between the University and its neighbours, and how the Partnership activities and projects served to build bridges between the institution, agencies and disadvantaged and marginalised communities living in Carlton. The second theme considers why a community development approach was critical for generating positive outcomes through the Partnership. The third focuses on the central role of volunteering for exchanging key resources between the University and the community. Many volunteering projects are ongoing initiatives at the University and important in enhancing students' learning and professional development. The Partnership offered important opportunities for improved coordination of volunteering to meet community needs. The fourth theme considers the opportunities and challenges of intersectoral partnerships and the significance of diverging power and resources between partners. In Section 5, we draw on the case studies to consider how these themes and issues played out in exemplary initiatives. These initiatives involved multiple local partners and coordinated activities, and we discuss how they sought to achieve Partnership objectives, and the opportunities and challenges that were presented.

We draw on the key informant interviews to illustrate issues that are discussed. When reporting these data, some quotes have been edited to improve clarity of expression or to sharpen an analytic point and this is indicated by an ellipsis [...]. To enhance their confidentiality, informants were assigned to the following categories: community worker (CW), University of Melbourne (UM staff), University of Melbourne students (UM Students) and small business (SB).

Bridging the gulf between the University and its neighbours

The Tripartite Partnership promoted new approaches to community engagement, identifying community priorities and establishing common complementary objectives. This was frequently contrasted with the community's previous experiences of working with the University, where community members' accounts of initial attempts at engagement by the University were mixed. While some had positive relationships with University students and staff others were notably negative, but all spoke of the mutual understanding of the goals and processes that developed throughout the Partnership. A University academic with several years' experience of engagement with Carlton explained that 'when this process started, we were the big bad neighbour', but that wariness towards the University had 'been broken down in all sorts of ways' (UM staff 5).

Many informants referred to the social distance between the University and the Carlton residents living in the nearby housing estates, and they believed that partnership activities had positive effects in building bridges between these contrasting worlds. This was achieved through engagement activities and student and staff volunteering. One informant described the broader social value of student volunteering:

We see it as a win-win all around because the students enjoy it [...] and all of a sudden are relating with a community that could be on the other far side of the moon, and it's a hundred and fifty metres away (CW3).

The world of the University is similarly unfamiliar to the residents of the local housing estates. Referring to a football match organised between estate residents and Queen's College students, the same informant said that even though the estate residents 'had

walked by this place hundreds of times on their way to Princes park to kick a footy, it's just forbidden territory on the other side of the fence' (CW3).

The Memorandum of Understanding created a solid foundation for the partnership, and required the University to attend to processes for engaging communities. Although the memorandum is couched in general terms and does not commit the parties to specific actions, its symbolic importance should not be underestimated. The launch of the Partnership took place in the Melbourne Town Hall, and the speakers included the Lord Mayor and the Vice-Chancellor. Commenting on the importance of this level of support, a university staff member drew on his experience of an industry engagement project with which he had been associated:

One of the things that was really important is that from day one we had the vice-chancellor's backing [...] and because [the Vice-Chancellor] was on board, deputy vice-chancellors and deans were on board (UM staff 5).

He explained that promoting community engagement projects within the University was a lot more work than the industry partnership because the benefits were not immediately apparent to researchers and senior management.

There were some early missteps from the University, both prior to and in the initial stages of the Partnership. These missteps pointed to the importance of partners and agencies all sharing a commitment to community development processes and sensitive understanding on the part of the University towards the pressures that are experienced in under-resourced community-based organisations who are continually struggling to meet high local demand for services and support. Several of the informants – community members and University staff – had experienced the University's early efforts at engagement with the Carlton community prior to the establishment of the Partnership. This is an area where the learning that has resulted from the engagement projects are very clear. Some of the early initiatives fell well short of expectations and at times reinforced community reservations about working with the University to generate mutually beneficial outcomes. For example, two community-based informants noted that in the early stages of the Partnership they had attended a number of meetings and were hosting a University-instigated project:

CW5: We had attended a few meetings but we didn't feel like we were getting anything out of it at the time. It wasn't adding anything to [the community-based organisation].

CW6: No. No, in fact, it was draining at times.

CW5: It was draining and certainly the project that we found ourselves involved in was problematic because, again, we seemed to be doing a whole lot of work but it was someone's else's agenda that we were, we were being asked to link into and it wasn't giving much back to [the organisation].

CW6: [...] [T]hen there was this shift, I think, from the University in terms of how they approached, you know, us, the community people, and at once the approach become much more practical. Like you tell us what you want rather than, 'We've got this great idea for you, you're going to love it' [...] the approach shifted.

It was necessary for the University to build new bridges and repair others through establishing different kinds of interactions with the community. It also dispelled some level of cynicism and distrust:

The overriding impression I got was they [people living or working in Carlton] kind of saw the university as a bit of [...] a walled city in the middle of Carlton that was sort of encroaching on the boundaries of the residential area of Carlton [...] [engaging people in the project] was quite a daunting task to start off with, there were a lot of people with very fixed ideas. They had encountered [...] people at the university that had possibly sort of reinforced those ideas as well. I think they saw the University as a bit patriarchal as well, so there was a bit of a philanthropic thing [...]: look how good we are, we're going to help this poor community, so it was quite tricky to start off with (UM staff 2).

A number of community-based key informants noted that a critical turning point in the Partnership was the involvement of key University personnel from MEPO, who brought considerable skills and expertise in community development:

This was a really big shift and it was an acknowledgement I think by the uni to say, well, this is, these are the structures that are currently in place. Instead of overlaying what we think might be the solution to some of your issues, we'll come and we'll sit at a table with you and we'll listen and then we'll see where the synergies are, where the connections might be (CW5).

This shift was important because it aligned the University to ways of working that were already established through the Opportunities for Carlton project. Among many informants, both community and University based, there was a strong sense that there had been positive changes in the ways in which the University engaged with local community organisations. A senior academic commented: 'some really good things are happening [...] the whole tenor of the conversation has changed' (UM staff 5). Through this careful and respectful approach the University became a valued and trusted member of the community. Informants from the community, the City of Melbourne and the University all spoke of the critical importance of maintaining and strengthening the relationship.

The significance of the community development model

As noted in Section 2, community development is grounded in social philosophies that seek to redress imbalances of power experienced by poor and disempowered communities. Hence it promotes participatory democracy over representative democracy and adheres to the principle of subsidiarity; that decisions must be taken as closely as possible to the citizen. The difference between this and a hierarchical, top down model is most keenly felt by people who are closer to the bottom of a hierarchical relationship. When MEPO adopted community development practices the change was both obvious and important to community members. One informant, frustrated with earlier less consultative approaches, was relieved when a new Partnership Consultant came on board:

[She said] I'm just here to listen, I'm here to talk, to hear what's happening at grass roots and then we can look at where we can link with the uni, but it needs to come from you and it needs to be owned by the community sector. (CW5).

Community development relies in the early stages on building trust and respect for the authority and expertise of community members, most often without having a particular project outcome in mind. Instead, potential projects and actions emerge as the relationship develops and the parties come to understand each other better. Informants explained the value of this approach:

CW5: There's been the dual thing of whoever's been in that [MEPO Partnership Consultant] role, their ears prick up and think of us because they get to know us when they hear things. And vice versa, when they hear us talk they think maybe I can –

CW6: Yeah, it's making the linkages that have been really good.

Informants responsible for managing organisations spoke of the importance of the gatekeeper role played by the Partnership Consultant, a conduit between the community organisations and the University. The concept of gatekeeping was introduced to urban sociology by Ray Pahl, who used it to explain the ways in which professionals can control and manage marginalised communities by restricting access between other professionals and community members (Pahl 1970). Gatekeeping can also have a constructive role, as long as the gatekeeper is trusted and accountable to the communities involved. Having access to a trusted gatekeeper from the University was seen by community members to be 'incredibly important' (CW5). One said that the Partnership Consultant 'has been the sort of linchpin of my relationship with the University' (CW7). Combining gatekeeping with a brokering role is useful for community organisations that otherwise have tenuous access to some kinds of resources:

I would imagine that someone needs to be there to broker relationships (...). I think you need that because it's one thing to talk about these things and what does a partnership really mean. Well, for the first time, I probably actually saw someone actually on the ground doing the partnership stuff, you know, supporting the partnership, helping facilitate it (CW 9).

From staff based in the University, there was growing recognition and understanding of the value of a community development approach. A senior staff member commented:

I didn't really know the depth of [the partnership consultant's] experience until one day I was talking to her about some social needs in [other similarly disadvantaged neighbourhoods] and she just began to detail, you know, community structures and [...] which buttons you'd push over there. I just realised she's got this vast experience, that you would find hard to normally recruit into a university, and would not normally, but in terms of social partnerships it's just essential (UM staff 5).



Harmony Day, Carlton, 2011

With regard to the need for a long-term commitment from the University, the informants were agreed that if the support of the partnership consultants were withdrawn there are high risks that the relationships that have been developed would atrophy or be lost. Small, poorly-funded organisations do not have the resources needed to build and maintain relationships that are not absolutely essential for meeting their service obligations.

There is a view that has grown from the programmatic approach to public policy solutions that once community development has been undertaken its benefits become self-generating and external support can be withdrawn. Speaking of this belief, one of the service managers said:

I know that's a cost effective way of working but I haven't ever in all my time really seen that work successfully, just because people and groups, they need structure. And they need someone to support them, remind them and keep the momentum going around those sorts of things. If it's not a core part of someone's job those sorts of links can... they're time consuming, they do take time and they do take effort and that time and effort eats into someone's core hours of work and it's only natural that those, those external things or lower priority relationships don't get the nurture and attention that they would get if there was someone, and it was their priority (CW7).

This understanding is essential for the evaluation of the merit of community engagement, particularly for realistically assessing the benefits that might be achievable with the resources that are available. Further, in contexts of complex organisational structures, high staff turnover and other factors, aims of community development leading to sustainable processes are increasingly unrealistic.

The interviews showed that community engagement requires sophisticated skills that are different from those required for engagement between like organisations. It is also time consuming and entails some hazards and pitfalls. Success is by no means guaranteed and is often contingent and partial. What one party judges to be successful others may not. With reference to the University, one of these pitfalls was succinctly expressed by an informant who said that 'people [...] can resent being the subject of other people's careers' (CW3). Nonetheless, it is a field of expertise that offers helpful strategies, particularly for working with the disadvantaged and marginalised residents of the public housing estates. Overcoming the gulf between the University and its neighbourhoods required learning from experience and employing new skills and different approaches. The Tripartite Partnership provided the commitment and encouragement for the University to travel along new pathways.

Volunteering

Several of the informants discussed the significance and impacts of volunteering projects and initiatives as important ways in which the University contributed to local communities. Although a number of these initiatives were established prior to the Partnership, it was important in promoting improved coordination between volunteering activities, projects and community needs. Community organisations such as the Church of All Nations, the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre and the Brotherhood of St Laurence have long experience with using volunteers from the local community, including from the University. Volunteering was a central issue in discussions that led to the establishment of the Partnership.

Students and staff from the University were involved in volunteering. For some students volunteering was part of their subject requirements, while others were motivated for personal reasons, including opportunities for getting to know local people and to do something socially useful in their spare time. Volunteering was organised in different ways. For example, the Church of All Nations is located on the edge of the public housing estate and runs a homework club for children living on the estate, using volunteers from the University and the neighbourhood. Many students were involved in projects to which they contributed a range of skills in information technology, marketing and other areas, supporting a variety of community-based initiatives. Some student volunteering initiatives

were managed by the University. These include Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) and the Student Ambassador Leadership Program (SALP).³ Through these volunteering schemes, students worked with community-based organisations and projects to run special events and provide services.

Opportunities for volunteering were particularly welcomed by international students, often as an extra-curricula activity. One of the students in the SALP scheme who became involved in organising the Sports Carnival explained that it was 'a great opportunity for me to engage with the community and spend some time with them [...]. I don't have any siblings and I never interact with kids' (UM student 1). They enjoyed being asked lots of questions by the children, such as, 'Why do you go to Uni'?. Another student involved in SIFE explained why he had taken up volunteering:

My whole involvement in SIFE has been very useful just to get to know the local community, how to reach people, how to help people [...] and in my case it's also been a way to develop communication skills, teamwork, all of those things. I believe when I came here I was very shy and now I feel that I am, that I can say things that I'm thinking, not just to be quiet, and I think this project was like the beginning of a big change in terms of my personality. (UM student 6)

This volunteering activity brings both substantial benefits and demands to community-based organisations. Organisations relied heavily on volunteers and spoke of the valuable work they do. A program coordinator stated that 'We wouldn't be able to offer that program or service unless we had tutors from the University of Melbourne' (CW3). At the same time, volunteering presented some challenges to community based organisations. The University depends on community organisations to provide opportunities for student volunteering because it offers critical 'real world' experience. Students represent an important resource for poorly-funded community-based organisations but these organisations are limited in the nature and number of student placements they are able to cope with. They must be careful to ensure that managing student placements does not detract from their capacity to provide primary services and support to their clients. This capacity is easily stretched, as one informant explained:

What we find is that we are such a fragile organisation that if the demand is that we, for example, receive students on a clinical placement of some sort, that can be creating more of a burden than a relief (CW3).

There can also be a mismatch between what the University believed it could deliver and what communities needed. Sometimes the University staff responsible for promoting community engagement underestimated the amount of work involved in the projects they supported, leading to far more being promised than could be delivered. Community members spoke of some University staff approaching the Partnership from a welfare perspective, assuming that poor communities would be grateful for whatever they were offered.

Volunteering was most successful when there was a good match between the nature of the task to the skills and availability of the volunteer. For short term specific tasks that were not dependent on developing trusting relationships, student volunteers proved effective. For tasks that relied on longer-term relationships, the demands of the semester cycle meant that students were not available for sufficiently long periods. This problem was particularly clear at the end of each year as students completed their courses, returned home or took up holiday employment. For on-going programs, working with students required considerable time to build new relationships every year. Informants associated with programs of this type found that retired local residents were often much more useful as volunteers.

The ways in which volunteer programs were managed and supported were also critical. Local organisations such as the Primary School and Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) that have established volunteer programmes allocate resources to recruitment and support of volunteers, but the resources are only sufficient if there is a low turn-over. The experience of informants who had dealt with students on short-term placements through SALP and SIFE relied on these University-based organisations to provide support to the students.

It is important to understand that volunteering involves much more than providing practical help to less fortunate people, as important as this is. In some instances, volunteering was an avenue for establishing ongoing connections with significant positive outcomes for all parties. For example, one of the students from the University volunteered to help with basic administrative tasks at the CNLC. It was soon discovered that she was undertaking postgraduate study in accounting

³ These programs have since been disbanded as a result of the Review of Student Volunteering, Orientation, Leadership & Transition (VOLT) Services.

and was asked to help with some of the major financial work, and subsequently joined the committee of management. Similarly, with the help of MEPO staff, CNLC recruited a University business manager who joined the governance committee. With support and planning this diversity of volunteering, ranging from students seeking experiences in diverse community-based settings to students and staff generously contributing their professional expertise to community based organisations, can generate mutually beneficial outcomes for communities and the University.

Challenges of intersectoral partnerships

A number of participants reflected on the opportunities and challenges of intersectoral partnerships where there is considerable asymmetry in power, resources and prestige between the partners. The University has an annual turnover of \$1,914m and the City of Melbourne a turnover of \$387m (University of Melbourne 2013; City of Melbourne 2013). In contrast, many of the organisations of which CLAN is comprised are poorly resourced and reliant on stitching together short-term program funding. As one informant explained, compared to the University, they were 'minute, microscopic really, in terms of scale' (CW 2). Further, many of the organisations rely on volunteer labour to keep running and CLAN itself is sustained through the voluntary efforts of partners to work cooperatively with other local organisations. The three partner organisations of the Partnership are themselves multiple entities, although operating at different scales and with contrasting organisational structures. Despite obvious differences between the University and the City of Melbourne there is nonetheless strong organisational congruence and they have collaborated on many projects over the years, as noted by one informant: 'The City of Melbourne partnership is always going to be important to the University' (UM staff 5). The formalisation of the Tripartite Partnership encouraged the University to establish new relationships with organisations such as CLAN.

The collected interviews showed that the concept of partnership was used to refer to a variety of relationships, depending on the context and informants' perspectives. The MOU established a formal partnership between three entities, but the functional relationships that developed within its ambit were between individuals and small groups. They varied according to the people involved and the task

at hand. Under the umbrella of the Partnership, many other working groups have developed to run events and projects. These partnerships tend to be loosely formed and temporary. Only a few are maintained throughout the whole process, from planning to acquittal. However it is an effective process and familiar to anyone engaged in community work. The issue of the challenges caused by the difference in size between the University and the community organisations was raised by another informant, who spoke of the parties being 'unequally yoked'. He went on to speak of the imbalance of:

[A] massive institution, which is understandably most probably self-interested at heart, dealing with a community that doesn't have the same structure that can sit at the table and deal with this massive institution in the same way (CW3).

Sometimes the difference in scale was used as a shorthand term that included considerable differences in culture and understanding of place. An informant from the CNLC said that:

it was just such a very, a huge thing to grapple with, as to how could Melbourne University be involved. So there was always a lot of talk about volunteers and using the students as volunteers. [...] I know the acronyms change all the time with that section in the university that deals with student leadership – there was the SALP team and there were a few others that don't happen anymore and the staff have come and gone a lot I've noticed. So to me that was all very well, but those are things that had been happening already anyway (CW2).



Garage Sale Trail

For community-based organisations it can be particularly difficult to know how to approach and navigate around the University to find the right people to talk to. The names of departments, units and services are orientated to University objectives and are not self-evident to outsiders. MEPO provided a useful 'front door' or conduit into the University for community organisations to begin to work out who they should be talking to about volunteering and research needs. Regular participation of MEPO representatives in community-based activities assisted in identifying community needs:

[I] had a lot of coffees with people, did a lot of listening, and basically tried to spot opportunities where we could get a couple of quick wins you know, matching things up (UM staff 2)

Participants discussed a number of initiatives that had been established or enhanced through having MEPO partnership consultants performing these liaison roles. Other informants stressed the importance of getting support up the hierarchy – the 'internal sell' (UM staff 2). Another informant commented on these challenges:

This sort of engagement work will, I think, always suffer in relation to research and teaching, although it's supposed to underpin and support all of it. It is the kind of work that people, I always felt in a way that I was asking people to do favours rather than it being a really validated, like, valid, recognised piece of their work or part of the, you know, role, and if it didn't have immediate, say, research opportunities then, or if it didn't immediately help their students in some way, then it was a favour (UM staff 2).



Free eye tests at Harmony Day, Carlton

For intersectoral partnerships involving complex organisations, many of these issues are ongoing. Other challenges are assisted through skilled brokering that understands the divergent issues facing partners.

Summary and implications

Many University and community-based participants noted the gulf that had long existed between the University and some of its neighbours, and they discussed the various ways in which activities associated with the Partnership had served to build bridges with local populations who otherwise had limited contact with the University. The findings suggested that a repertoire of engagement strategies are required to establish effective partnerships. From community-based perspectives, a critical turning point in the Partnership was the growing involvement of key personnel who possessed expertise and experience in community development theory and practice.

Volunteering is a key contribution of the University and these activities are organised in different ways. It is important to match volunteering schemes with community needs. Short-term specific projects can be successful with fairly minimal engagement. These projects only require relationships between individuals or a small number of community members. Most projects, however, require more substantial relationships, which in turn give rise to further opportunities for co-operation and new relationships. In longer-term projects, engagement is an ongoing process that requires specific skills and continuing support to reduce the burden and maximise potential benefits for communities. As often as not, it was through established relationships that needs and common interests were identified and projects enabled. It was particularly evident that for small community-based organisations working with vulnerable people and with limited space and resources there needed to be a good fit between volunteers' availability and program needs.

Data from the key informant interviews also showed how the University's engagement with Carlton is multi-layered, ranging from short-term tightly focussed projects to larger partnership projects to the collaborative development of engagement practices and policies with the City of Melbourne. The engagement was cross-sectoral and involved a variety of concurrent activities. This presented familiar and unexpected challenges, and reflective community

engagement approaches were again critical in navigating these issues. MEPO staff had critical roles in establishing and sustaining engagement with marginalised and 'hard-to-reach' communities. Further, these staff were well-placed to broker relationships between community organisations and staff across multiple University Faculties, offices and business units. This required mediating and translating the different needs and requirements of a large research and teaching institution and community based organisations.

It is clear that a great deal has been learned by all parties, and that the University developed substantially enhanced skills for working with diverse communities in a complex neighbourhood context. The partners gained a more nuanced understanding of each others' needs, coming to understand that neither the Carlton community nor the University is a homogenous entity, but a complex collection of different components and interests.

5 INSIGHTS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The aim of the four case studies is to show how different projects aimed to achieve partnership objectives. The issues discussed in Section 3 were drawn from the case studies and unfolded in specific initiatives involving multiple local partners. The case studies were selected to explore objectives for the Tripartite Partnership across key domains of research; teaching and learning; access to infrastructure; and promoting employment opportunities. Partnership activities built on pre-existing relationship between the partners as well as the web of relationships that grew around the activities.

Carlton community sports carnival

The sports carnival is now an annual event. At the time of writing three carnivals have been held – in 2012 on the 28th March and 24th November and on the 23rd November 2013. The carnival was originally conceived in response to a goal in the Opportunities for Carlton plan to develop sport and recreation activities that reflected community interests. The events bring together a number of local and other primary schools to play a Futsal tournament and join in other sports activities. The City of Melbourne funded a locally based non-government organisation, Sports Without Borders (SWB), to manage the project, and encouraged the organisation to engage with the University. Working within a community development approach, SWB uses sport to build social connections, individual and community capacities and social inclusion. It has particular focus on working with migrant and refugee communities.

Building on insights from the first sports carnival, held on a weekday afternoon, the second and subsequent sports days have been held on a Saturday. An

organising committee was formed and included a team of three young people living in the Carlton Housing Estate who were resourced and supported by SWB to take on these leadership roles; a partnership consultant from MEPO; representatives from Melbourne University Sport, Drummond Street Services (a local welfare agency); and students from the University's Student Ambassador Leadership Program (SALP). Other partners included the Carlton Football Club; the Football Federation of Victoria; Tennis Victoria; Helping Hoops Basketball; Melbourne Heart Football Club; Carte Crêpes and Chai Chai. The latter two are local social enterprises that donated food and beverages on the day. The Victorian Multicultural Commission provided funding and scholarships for some of the young people to maintain their participation in sport.

The sport and recreation facilities on the University's Parkville campus, managed by Melbourne University Sport, were hired for the event. While the primary focus of the events has been on young people from the Carlton public housing estate, participants were also drawn from Princes Hill Secondary College, Carlton Primary School, Bendigo, Heidelberg and Flemington.

Similar to other projects, planning and running the Sports Carnival was a collaborative effort that:

Brought a whole lot of diverse players together, people who don't normally, always interact with each other [...] who all bring something unique and something important (CW1).

The Sports Carnival achieved a number of significant outcomes. It offered young people living in the Carlton housing estate leadership opportunities to work with diverse partners to exchange insights and skills. Notably, it provided community access to University infrastructure:

The university was a part of the planning along the way, they hosted the sports management training at the Sports Centre, and some of the guys from the Sports Centre helped run some activities with the kids, and then also they hosted the sports carnival (CW1).

It also provided an important and pleasurable opportunity for local housing estate residents to visit the University and learn more about what goes on here:

People enjoyed it [...] we had a good turnout from the community, the young people really enjoyed being a part of it, and for a lot of people, a lot of the kids especially, it was the first time that they'd even been to the University. So you've got kids

living a hundred metres, three hundred metres away from the university who have never even been a part of it (CW1).

Key informants widely agreed that involving parents and children enhanced the benefits of providing opportunities to become more familiar with the University. SALP students involved in organising and running the event said they talked with parents about the University and that this widened parents' notions of what the University was. For instance, they imagined it to be a smaller place and they were unaware that the sports facilities existed. Parents also used the opportunity to ask the SALP volunteers about their studies.

Challenges were encountered in organising such a complex event involving multiple partners and objectives. The role of MEPO grew over the three years, during which time new personnel brought critical skills into the office. Partnership consultants also learnt from previous events to better streamline processes for liaising with the Melbourne University Sports. An informant in a community-based organisation noted that the MEPO partnership consultant:

[C]omes from a community background [...] she's a very good broker. She understands the needs and expectations of both [university and community contexts] and is able to fit them, and that's [...] you know, that's a very significant plus and it certainly had a big impact on this process (CW1).

Other challenges arose through navigating the complex organisational arrangements within the University. For instance, Melbourne University Sports is a semi-autonomous business unit of the University and the implications of this are not readily apparent to people outside the University or even to other University staff. The unit is expected to operate as a self-sustaining business. Hence it charged for cost recovery in hosting the event, and had limited capacity to attend planning meetings in other parts of the University. The potential for shared interest was present as well, as an informant from MUS explained:

I think the population, the cohort that was coming here, were really surprised that they could just walk onto campus. It wasn't, you know, I mean, that's about breaking down the ivory wall or that perception that there is an ivory wall so that's something again that I personally feel very strong about and I know that even though it's not, it's not our top tier concern because our concern is to

provide programs and services to students and staff, we consider the greater Carlton area is still part of our community (UM staff 1).

As wrinkles in the process were ironed out over the three years there was a general feeling that the Community Sports Carnivals were a success in achieving their social objectives. A university staff member highlighted the symbolic importance of the housing estate residents being invited by the University on to its campus:

[T]he kids came and they played and they were so at home on our campus, and so did their parents. Mothers sat there chatting all day, and you know, it's taken a lot of work to get to that point where we're accepted even at that level (UM staff 5).

The events made an important contribution to overcoming barriers between the University and the residents of the public housing estate. Teams comprised of children and young people from the estate were able to meet and play against teams from other areas. One of the students arranged for a country team to be involved, which further increased diversity among participants. The children's families visited the University, many for the first time, and contributed to the event alongside University staff and students.

The sports carnivals show that complex community events or projects often achieve a variety of outcomes in addition to the stated objectives. It is clear from the improvement in the organisation of the first and subsequent events that the University and the Carlton community had both gained skills and capacity. Students who were involved spoke of learning event management skills, how to work as part of a team and the importance of relationships. New organisational relationships were developed. Melbourne University Sport is keen to build on the association it formed with Sports Without Borders, as are owners of one of the small business involved: 'It's definitely something we'd be interested in doing more of' (SB1). These developments highlight the importance of continuing commitment over the longer term.

The Sports Carnival initiative created an opportunity for public housing residents to visit the University. Residents living in the local public housing estates generally have limited contact with the University, and visiting the grounds and speaking with staff and students offered opportunities to increase their understanding of the university environment. The event generally promoted social interaction across diversity: among primary students from different parts

of the city and between children living in the city and in the country; between children and university students; and between parents and students, although it remained difficult to get other local primary schools involved. The event provided opportunities for student-run social enterprises to participate and make a valuable contribution to the success of the day. As an ongoing event, there were opportunities to improve processes over time and high potential for this initiative to evolve into a long-term collaboration. The case study also illustrates the challenges of negotiating with the University as an entity with multiple organisational parts and divisions that are positioned within different operational logics. For example, Melbourne University Sport was keen to support these kinds of community engagement initiatives, but at the same time it was constrained by its need to cover operating costs.

The Carlton On-line Opportunities and Learning Project (COOL)

The COOL initiative was funded in 2012 with a Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) Digital Inclusion Grant of \$125,000 to support a coordinated, intergenerational, approach to 'bridging the digital divide' in Carlton. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that less than 40% of Estate residents had a home internet connection, compared to 86% of households in Carlton and 72% across Victoria (Simons & Kimberley 2012). The COOL project provided low-cost computers for people on low incomes, training programs, volunteer support and a community website. The computers were provided by a subsidiary, Estate Computers, a social enterprise that refurbished and sold mostly ex-government computers at low cost. The University also donated computers. The project was implemented by an informal partnership between the Church of All Nations, the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, the Capital City LLEN, the University, the City of Melbourne, the Department of Human Services and DPCD.

The Church of All Nations auspiced the project for its first 18 months, providing a collection of donated second-hand computers. The Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre used some of its Adult, Community and Further Education funding to provide training in basic computer and internet use, and in setting up a small enterprise. The project officer for Estate Computers was an estate resident.

Apart from contributing to the implementation of the project, the University provided volunteers through the Student Ambassador Leadership Program and Students in Free Enterprise. The SALP and SIFE students contributed through a range of projects, including producing a marketing plan for Estate Computers, information sheets for estate residents explaining technical terms related to the internet and how to choose an internet service, and a pamphlet about the COOL project for the Neighbourhood Learning Centre. The students were introduced to the community by a university staff member and worked with one person from the project. The relationships were essentially the same as those between customers and small businesses, and did not continue after the individual projects were completed. One of the SIFE students explained their involvement in the project:

I helped develop a marketing plan for Estate Computers. That was my role [...] we worked out the demographics of the people on the estate and then we worked out, well, we looked at the competition, are there any other [...] organisations in Melbourne offering really, really affordable used PCs to low income people. Once we did the research we worked out what would be a good price [...] but would also allow COOL to make a bit of money to keep it going [...]. We also worked out, I guess, a way to advertise the service [...]. We got one of our friends in a different SIFE project who was good at graphic design and photography and he came up with some posters and a new logo for Estate Computers (UM student 7).

From the 'customer' perspective, the Co-ordinator of COOL explained how the engagement of the University had helped the project:

[O]ne of the students [...] did a very good proposal for marketing. It was an eye-opener, you know when you don't have a marketing background and also you don't have the time to actually focus on that, when someone actually focuses on these few things it kind of gives you something to think about. [...] Also we had a, actually a very good student [...] and he was someone who was very, you know, keen, liked computers, and he used to come every week and help me set up computers and deal with the customers (CW 4).

MEPO staff also arranged for the University to provide expertise through the involvement of key staff and coordination resources. University students were involved as tutors in the training sessions. The project

offered important opportunities for public housing residents to acquire IT skills and University students to have real-world learning opportunities. There were some difficulties in aligning project and University timelines, with students' involvement being limited to semester periods.

The project co-ordinator's relationship with University staff and students led him to speculate about other ways in which the University might help the project. He was keen to provide low-cost wireless internet access to residents in the towers, as the cost of installing data cable in the buildings was prohibitive. He had investigated ways that the University could assist by using its status, purchasing power and IT expertise. Although this had not been fruitful at the time he was interviewed, he was continuing to work with a University staff member to investigate the potential of the NBN for the estate.

COOL aimed to address overlapping factors to improve children's educational opportunities and parents' learning and employment opportunities. An evaluation conducted by the Brotherhood St. Laurence showed that the project had positive impacts for residents (Simons & Kimberley 2012). Projects such as COOL are innovative because they bring together such a diverse range of partners to address multifaceted issues. They require effective coordination. The Partnership enhanced capacities for coordinating varied activities within the COOL project, and the University made key contributions in bringing student and staff volunteers to work on short term projects and to provide longer term support to run programs such as homework clubs and other expertise as required. Projects of this kind are grounded in building cooperative and long-term relationships between university and community members. This emphasises the importance of according all participants social dignity. If partnerships are not grounded in mutual respect the risks for communities can outweigh potential benefits. Involvement across many University faculties and units brings a range of resources into projects, but it can be bewildering for community-based partners to work out how to link up with the right people in the University. The project also identified ongoing difficulties in identifying employment opportunities for adults.



COOL and Estate Computers projects

Horn Afrik: Carlton Horn of Africa Men's Employment and Training Advocacy Project

The Horn Afrik advocacy project was created as part of a longer term project set up by CNLC to respond to the particular needs of a significant group of Islamic African men living on the Carlton public housing estate. They are from a group of countries known collectively as the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti). They have undertaken tertiary education at graduate and postgraduate levels, mostly in Australia, but still have great difficulty finding employment.

In 2007 the CNLC received funding from the City of Melbourne to undertake research into the situation of this group of men. The research highlighted issues including the loss of status, marginalisation, inability to provide for their families, frequent rejection and boredom that they faced. The project works with the men and their families, and has received funding from the local and federal governments. It is managed by a Somali-Australian community development worker.

In 2011, a newspaper report claimed that while unemployment in Melbourne's African community was 26%, unemployment among African-Australian graduates was as high as 90%. The report stated that 'commercial pilots, doctors and other professionals who have migrated from Africa find it difficult to get their qualifications recognised here, so they drive Melbourne's cabs as a means to feed their family' (Willingham 2011). It was also claimed that younger Africans who had studied in Australia found it difficult to get work because of racist attitudes. One of

the community workers spoke about her agency's experience with this group:

Quite a few of these gentlemen are Islamic, and people seem to hear the word Muhammad, or Ishmael or Saddam, and their eyes glaze over and the gentlemen do not get a job, and that has been time and time again the same thing they experience (CW9).

She explained that as a result of the advocacy of CNLC and the Adult Migrant Education Centre and the support of the local Federal MP, the ANZ Bank and the National Australia Bank set up a mentoring program for African refugees:

Quite a few of the men have been at least trained for six months or working for six months and some of them have even been absorbed into the bank, so that's been a wonderful outcome (CW9).

It was hoped that the involvement of the University would provide access to jobs by giving special consideration to applicants from the housing estate, but this goal was at odds with the University's policy of filling low-skilled casual and part-time vacancies from its student body, and its adoption in 2010 of an Indigenous Employment Framework which actively promotes the employment of Indigenous Australians.

However, the involvement of the University led to other possibilities being explored. The Brotherhood of St Laurence had received funding to establish work and learning centres in Victoria, and had asked for proposals from local organisations about setting up a centre in Carlton. The proposal from the Church of All Nations was successful and the Carlton Work and Learning Centre (CWLC) was established there at the beginning of 2012. The MEPO partnership consultant joined the CWLC's Local Advisory Committee, and through this learned of the need for participants to gain job interview and presentation skills. The consultant linked the CWLC with the University HR department, which led to its staff using their volunteer time to stage simulated interviews for CWLC clients and provide them with feedback. It also led to the department providing temporary placements to CWLC clients, and to the manager of the CWLC contributing to a University HR staff training workshop. At the time of this research the HR department was investigating the possibility of its staff offering mentoring for CWLC clients.

From the perspective of the CWLC, this was a very successful outcome, as the following example provided by a worker from the Centre shows:

Well for me, yes it has [been positive], and I mean we have had one person placed temporarily at the Melbourne University in the HR department during their busy period last, sort of Christmas period [...]. It was a short period but this job seeker in particular hadn't had any Australian experience and to be able to put Melbourne University HR administration officer for even a short period spoke volumes when she put her resume through the next time. And she went on to work at AMES and then to La Trobe and now she's settled into a permanent position, permanent at RMIT in their HR department, not just admin but HR, and her background has been HR, so I really see a very, a very direct influence that that paid work experience from the University had on her journey to employment (CW7).

At the time of the research the possibilities of this initiative were still becoming apparent. The University staff involved saw considerable potential and connections with University strategy:

I'm hoping you know, for everybody, it'll broaden our view of the world and our perspective but it'll, it could also really help with, I mean I can just think racial awareness, cultural awareness differences you know, hopefully it'll do a lot of things [...] It's really interesting at the moment and there's a lot of cross connections. There's a program happening in the University and in fact I'm going to this, called Courageous Conversations about race. [...] It's actually also understanding we all have biases and stuff like that, and because that's really important in the interview in the other contexts as well. So I think this actually supports some of that, you know, it'll actually be a practical cultural awareness. [...] I think one of the common things is most people, most people know the need to have a job, understand that, and what a job can do for you so I think people will want to help people as much as they can in terms of achieving that end (UM staff 3).

The last sentence of this extract illustrates the importance of the values and beliefs of the individuals involved in the partnership. The evolution of the original project after obstacles to its initial aims was increasingly driven by individuals who were motivated to help others gain access to the benefits of employment, without reference to the broader aims of the Partnership.

A key feature of this case study is the way in which the project adapted to obstacles that came to light early in its implementation. Because of the relationship between the partners and their shared commitment

to helping community members gain access to employment, new strategies for achieving this were able to be developed. This recursive, action learning process is central to the community development model. The case study also shows how local-level initiatives can be limited in addressing pressing social and economic issues such as unemployment. While individuals can benefit from programs to improve English language proficiency, and mentoring and other work preparation programs, these efforts go only so far in the face of wider socioeconomic conditions and competing needs of other populations in similar kinds of circumstances. At the same time, one of the less anticipated outcomes from the projects was that it raised awareness of issues of racism and discrimination and highlighted the relevance of anti-racism initiatives within the University.

Research and Learning Engagement with Carlton Primary School

The final case study focuses on the Carlton Primary School, which is located in Drummond Street on a site adjoining the Carlton public housing estate. It is a small school, and 90% of the children are from Horn of African countries. With its proximity to the University it has, over the years, had connections with the University through teacher training programs and with various researchers across different faculties. The school is a member of CLAN and has a community liaison officer who has a prominent role in local initiatives. In the early stages of the Partnership it was considered that it was important to reactivate connections with the school. This was timely as the school had recently become involved in a number of newly established research projects involving researchers from the University, and staff were wary about the value of these collaborations, including concerns that involvement in research projects was at times a burden for the school community. The school was not averse to being involved in research per se, but they wanted research projects that addressed emerging local issues and which used collaborative processes that meshed with the school's philosophy and its commitment to local community development. This case study draws on the school's involvement in four research projects over recent years.

Despite the proximity of the school to the University, the families had little connection to the University other than indirectly through research projects:

This particular school has a highly unusual profile in the inner city. As I'm sure you well know, most local university educated parents make sure their children don't go there, which is quite unfortunate (UM staff 4).

The school's research relationships involved personnel across a number of faculties. Some of these relationships pre-dated the partnership agreement. From the school's perspective, this research was not always productive or helpful. This was attributed by the informants to divergent expectations about how the school could be involved as a research partner, rather than seeing the school only as a convenient setting for research. These issues were not irresolvable:

It didn't start off brilliantly because we weren't well matched in our understandings of community. [...] We had very different expectations and approaches [...] and at the end of it, I felt we had been used in, in a, - it wasn't nice. But anyway [...] then things changed a lot (CW6).

A key shift in the relationship between the school and the University was brought about by new staff coming on board in MEPO who recognised the implications of research and the burdens that it can place on small, under-resourced schools:

They really didn't want to be seen as some sort of social laboratory. [...] There are some real pockets of disadvantage in that community and in some respects they might be over researched [but] they do some amazing work there [...] and they take a real strengths-based approach. [...] They've been bruised in the past by stuff that the University has maybe tried to do (UM staff 2).

These new staff brought with them an understanding of community development processes that they used to re-engage the school to explore possibilities for participatory research projects. This enabled a better alignment with the school's ethos.

The shift in engagement styles opened up new possibilities for research and particularly projects that responded to needs identified by the school. For example, a project was established to improve language and literacy outcomes for Somali children and address poor literacy among Somali parents. Unlike children of other migrant groups who tend to keep their parents' language while learning English, the Somali children in the school were rapidly shifting from speaking Somali to English. The Partnership Consultant learned of this and arranged a meeting between the school and a researcher in the School of Languages and Linguistics.

A small pilot project was developed which involved providing the school with a range of bi-lingual texts to copy, give out and read with students and parents. Without the partnership consultant's relationship with the school the project is unlikely to have taken place. The school now has a direct relationship with the researcher, whose enthusiasm for the project was obvious:

I just think it's an absolutely fantastic thing to do, and it's probably one of the most effective projects the university could fund in terms of directly connecting children and families and schools. So it's actually quite a simple project, but I think really quite, you know, quite effective (UM staff 4).

Other research projects have been recently established in response to community needs. These have also adopted a participatory formulation of research questions and are grounded in good communication between researchers and school staff. Despite the merit of these projects, they present challenges to researchers who must operate within the strictures of university research environments:

The problem for me was that the grant was actually quite small. I had to put in a lot of in-kind [support], and actually some of my own funding, and just finding the time. I had problems finding a co-worker, because I needed someone with very [particular skills] and once I did find the person that was [...] fantastic, that person's actually wonderful and keen to keep working with them, but finding the resourcing and the time was the biggest challenge. (UM staff 4).

These are ongoing issues for researchers aiming to work collaboratively with local community partners.

MEPO partnership consultants were also able to channel other opportunities into the school. They organised engineering students from the Endeavour Program in the Melbourne School of Engineering to visit the school, talk with the students and to do some practical activities. This was appreciated by the school. They also organised for surplus University property to be donated the school, where it was either used in classrooms or made available to families. This initiative established an ongoing connection with property management personnel:

CW5: There's been a number of smaller connections that we find really useful

CW6: It's the linkage isn't it? [...] We asked for some donations of something, got some donations. [...] That's how we met [the property

manager]. He just rings me up now periodically and says, 'I've got some more stuff for you' and it's all kinds of things.

CW5: Pencils and paper...

CW6: [...] we've got a loom that now the kids do weaving on. Like it's all kinds of stuff I just couldn't believe it was all going in skips [...] A lot of pens. He said 'You wouldn't believe how many pens get left behind in lecture theatres', and he just collects them all because he doesn't like waste.

The school also has students and staff volunteering in school-based programs, and there are plans underway to establish new volunteer programs. Community-based informants noted that 'having a key contact person (from MEPO) makes it so much easier' (CW5), and they were keen to refine processes to keep communication channels between the school and the University open. With the right processes in place, many of the community informants recognised the value of academic connections:

You've got all these professors of planning and engineering and social studies who could come together to support any of the projects that we dream up [...] providing support through their knowledge and expertise to suggest that this could work or, no, that was tried in France and don't go near it [...] they've got a whole lot of knowledge that could be harnessed (CW9).

Summary and implications

These case studies illustrate how the themes and issues discussed in Section 4 played out in key partnership projects. Each of these projects had ambitious aims and required cooperative collaborations to achieve desired outcomes. Importantly, they represent a range of objectives and settings. The case studies consider critical challenges that were encountered and how some of these were resolved. Other issues remain outstanding, largely because they lie beyond the capacities of local organisations to address. These include macro-level socioeconomic factors that are contributing to the ways in which household disadvantage is clustering in particular households and parts of the suburb. The University, with considerable resources and local, national and international reach is in a better position than community organisations to address some of these issues. The data discussed here clearly show that for these efforts to be effective, they need to be conducted in close collaboration with communities.

6 BUILDING ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Key findings

Effective partnerships need attention and cultivating. This is particularly important when they involve partners with considerable asymmetries in size, resources and power. In this context, a community development approach was important in establishing processes in which all partnership participants felt they are able to contribute and have some influence. While the original Opportunities for Carlton project, involving the City of Melbourne and CLAN, was explicitly grounded in a community development approach, when the University joined up to form the Tripartite Partnership there were initial assumptions by University staff that partnerships could be adequately framed within legal frameworks. This is undoubtedly the case with many of the University's partnerships, as they involve partners where there is much common ground in terms of institutional understanding and expectations of reciprocity and mutual benefits. The Tripartite Partnership, however, aimed to engage some of the more disadvantaged and marginalised populations living in Carlton and this meant adopting new approaches.

A key early challenge was to acknowledge and address widespread antipathy and scepticism among community-based organisations and residents towards the University. Partnership consultants in MEPO, drawing on community development theory and practice, brought critical skills to bear in the tasks of building bridges between the University and community-organisations. From community perspectives there were clear perceptions that over the course of the Partnership the University developed the capacity to work in new ways that aligned with the established ways of working together among the membership of CLAN. This ethos emphasises the fundamental importance of promoting genuine community participation in decision-making

processes. As the partnership unfolded, there was growing recognition among some University-based informants of the value of a community development approach, and that it relies on substantive expertise and skillsets. Drawing on these skills, the MEPO partnership consultants are 'boundary spanners' who performed critical translation roles to create common purpose in the multi-sectoral Partnership.

Many of the background issues that reflected difficulties in establishing university-community partnerships are well recognised and not insurmountable. The research shows that the willingness of the University to stand beside community partners, to participate as equals, and to recognise and value the expertise and knowledge of community members provides an essential foundation for addressing these challenges.

The recruitment of new personnel into the MEPO office following the establishment and formal launch of the Partnership provided an opportunity to consider the impact of different expertise. It was clear in the interviews that this was a critical turning point in the Partnership and enabled University and community-based partners to build on the aspirations of the MOU. MEPO was able to take on an effective gatekeeping and brokering role in facilitating access to the University, coordination of University partners and streamlining communication channels. Effective gatekeeping is not necessarily obstructive. Applied with transparency and accountability, it ensures that the partnerships work for the benefit of all partners, and is important when there is marked divergence between partners. The MEPO partnership consultants were also effective in translation tasks – finding common ground that acknowledged and met the different needs of the partners.

It is clear that university–community partnerships require considerable effort. The evaluation showed some of the important benefits that can be generated for partners. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement in the United Kingdom makes a compelling case for the value of community engagement to higher education institutions. There are benefits for universities, staff and students and civil society. These include meeting community needs for research and expertise, enriching student experiences, promoting positive attitudes to universities in the wider society, strengthening a university's brand and identity, building trust and respect towards higher education institutions, demonstrating an accountability to the community, creating knowledge flows, promoting

corporate responsibility and social justice outcomes, and stimulating creativity and innovation (The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement 2014).

The evaluation showed that many of these positive outcomes were being generated through the Tripartite Partnership. Importantly, the case study projects demonstrated the ways in which partnership projects can address key issues confronting local communities and generate positive outcomes. Projects and other activities provided opportunities for public housing residents to visit and participate in University-based activities. The University's Parkville campus became more familiar to local residents who previously had limited knowledge of its institutional dimensions. There was improved coordination and matching of volunteer activities that met community needs and provided students with positive learning and social outcomes. Involvement in 'real life' projects enhanced students' learning, and international students, many of whom lived around Carlton, particularly valued opportunities for informal interaction with their neighbours. Community-based respondents expressed more positive attitudes towards the University as a result of their involvement in Partnership activities, suggesting that the University's involvement was serving to improve its reputation in the neighbourhood.

The evaluation identified challenges in achieving key objectives, which are important to acknowledge. Some issues, such as unemployment issues among migrant-background populations, require higher-level intervention. It is worthwhile to note that the projects were sufficiently flexible to identify other useful medium term strategies when obstacles were encountered. For example, while objectives of offering entry-level employment opportunities proved to be too ambitious, a project identified other opportunities, such as drawing on the University's Human Resources expertise to offer public housing residents opportunities to acquire some practical employment and job interview experience. Other challenges are well-recognised: opportunity costs for researchers who put time and effort into community engagement in highly competitive research environments (McLean et al. 2009); sustaining partnerships in the face of institutional reorganisation, changing funding arrangements and staff turnover; and the limitations of local level initiatives to influence wider socioeconomic contexts (Amin 2005). These are not reasons to give up. University-community partnerships are important mechanisms that can achieve much in addressing the

complex and interlinked outcomes of socioeconomic disadvantage and marginalisation.

Rationale for University-community partnerships

Communities, particularly under-resourced communities, have high needs for good quality research to identify community needs, understand community and social issues from other vantage points and gain access to a range of knowledge, labour and other resources (Dumlao & Janke 2012). For communities, partnerships with universities can be used to identify research needs and community-based placement opportunities that enhance student learning (Gamble & Bates 2011). For universities, community partnerships promote the potential for University-based research to serve public ends. Internationally, there is growing recognition of the value of partnerships between tertiary education institutions and their communities.

The University of Melbourne has a long history of engagement with a wide spectrum of communities – through its teaching and its public lectures, with the business community, with the medical profession, and others. This small evaluation concerns the experiences of people affected by the University's engagement with the Carlton community, particularly the economically marginalised community of the Carlton public housing estate. While the findings are drawn from that initiative, those that relate to practice are applicable to engaging with other (marginalised) communities.

The most significant and consistent finding was the importance of the involvement of MEPO staff and the ways in which it brought community development expertise to its gatekeeping and brokering role in partnership activities. This points to the critical significance of institutional structures that support wide and diverse community engagement. Engagement is not a 'one size fits all' activity and requires a range of strategies for engaging and partnering with different kinds of partners and across diverse contexts. Universities with strong and sustainable community-based partnerships have created institutional mechanisms for supporting this work.

In common with their international counterparts, there is strong agreement among Australian universities that engagement is important. Staff and students in many universities are also likely to be involved in significant community engagement, even if this is not widely recognised or rewarded. In fact, a key

challenge in promoting and demonstrating the value of engagement is the prevailing perception that it is difficult to measure and track, especially compared to the quantitative measures that are used to show successful grant funding, student numbers and publications (Barker 2013). Countries such as the UK and US are further ahead in acknowledging the value of engagement and developing supportive institutional mechanisms. In Australia, we are in a position to learn from this pioneering work and to consider how it can be adapted for national and local contexts.

Sustaining and building on partnership achievements

The Tripartite Partnership is an ongoing initiative and the MEPO partnership consultants have continued their involvement in projects and activities that have resulted from it. Drawing more directly from the original Opportunities for Carlton project, MEPO consultants are taking a lead role in the Shape Your Carlton project which aims to develop sustainable mechanisms for knowledge sharing, collaboration and participatory decision-making among local stakeholders (CLAN 2013a). This is envisaged as a community-driven mechanism with channels for University engagement. The model being developed is informed by the concept of collective impact (Kania & Kramer 2011). Collective impact models recognise that the unitary efforts of single organisations to address major social issues, such as the ways in which inequalities are being reproduced in neighbourhoods, are limited. Rather, the collective impact of systematic and coordinated responses involving diverse partners and stakeholders are more likely to be able to address multifaceted and complex social issues (Kania & Kramer 2011). There has been wide community engagement to these governance processes and to identify new initiatives. More broadly, it is timely to consider how the skills and experience that are being consolidated within MEPO can be harnessed as a resource within the University to further build capacities for engagement and partnership with other disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

The importance of institutional support for effective community engagement highlights the need for new approaches to supporting community engaged learning, teaching and research. In some institutions, this extends to allocating core funding for institution-wide and integrated support for community engagement strategies that are linked to research,

learning and community objectives (Hart et al. 2009). Specific strategies include quarantining research funds for community engaged research projects; ongoing support for student and staff volunteering; coordinating staff volunteering to meet specific community needs; implementing induction programs for student volunteers to maximise the mutual benefits of short term involvement in community settings; identifying the ways in which universities can support and build capacity for participatory research methods, such as Community Researcher and peer researcher methods; developing 'Community Fellow' schemes to foster university–community collaboration and exchange; and other novel ideas.

Reflections on the methodology

The organisation of the report highlights the complexity of the Partnership, and the challenges for the evaluation of complex community-based, multi-faceted partnerships are well-recognised (Riggs et al 2013). Community work is characterised by indeterminate boundaries and co-operation and the distinctions between contributions often dissolve. At the same time, it is the complex, coordinated and interactive effects of these kinds of initiatives that are the key to their effectiveness in tackling 'real world' issues.

This evaluation used a participatory action research methodology. The researchers worked collaboratively with key agents involved in the Tripartite Partnership. Although MEPO staff were not identified as key informants as it was felt that this would diminish the credibility of the evaluation, the researchers had many discussions with them in order to develop a good understanding of the activities that were taking place across the University and in the community. The researchers worked closely with MEPO staff to initially identify key personnel, and a snowball sampling strategy was also used to diversify the range of participants in the study. The evaluation focused on exploring how partners and personnel engaged with the selected projects, including their contact with MEPO.

The range of key informant interviews that were conducted enabled the researchers to explore various perspectives on the partnership activities, both within the University and in the community. Compiling some of the data collected into case studies enabled us to show how different projects brought together partners and objectives, the outcomes that were achieved and the challenges that were encountered. Data were

collected over a period of nine months and provided insights into how projects unfolded over time.

This evaluation focuses on one partnership. Better understanding of the benefits and challenges of university–community engagement could be gained from wider systemic analysis of similar partnership initiatives. We focused on four key projects and are likely to have overlooked the outcomes of other events and activities that were instigated through the partnership. It is also important to note that some activities and initiatives pre-dated the establishment of the Tripartite Partnership (for example, student volunteering schemes and research collaborations). In these cases we have focused on exploring what additional capacities were brought into these initiatives through the Tripartite Partnership. With additional

resources, more comprehensive data could be collected to identify and consider the outcomes and reach of a range of engagement strategies. For example, event logs or audits of engagement activities could be useful in developing baseline evidence for current engagement that could be used to compare outcomes and impacts of future engagement initiatives.

Concluding comments

These findings inform University engagement strategies to foster respectful, fruitful and sustainable partnerships with people and groups in the community experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation and for whom such partnerships can deliver many benefits.



Part of the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus. The two towers on the right belong to the Carlton public housing estate.

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