

Engaging Creative Communities in an Industrial City Setting

A question of enclosure

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*Gateways: International
Journal of Community
Research and Engagement*
Vol 5 (2012): 1–15
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ISSN 1836-3393

Much has been said about how ‘creativity’ might infuse policy-making and planning – especially in the wake of popular bestsellers by Richard Florida and Charles Landry on ‘creative places’ and the ‘creative class’ (the latter a supposed demographic group associated with creative industries such as film, design and music, who are said to be the key to the economic fortunes of cities). Creativity, it is said, can be facilitated in particular urban environments, given the right preconditions such as ‘hip’ inner-city precincts, café culture and walkable dense clusters of design firms and retail and residential spaces. The common argument is that the presence of conducive qualities for creativity helps attract new migrants and industries, and in turn generates new ‘scripts’ for places, even whole cities, whose competitiveness and civic fortunes can be turned around – a ‘creative reinvention’ of sorts (see Gibson & Kong 2005 and Kong et al. 2006 for a discussion of this policy script and its popularisation internationally).

Since then, such ideas have been criticised heavily, from issues of classism (Peck 2005), elitism (Barnes et al. 2006), gentrification and social displacement (Catungal, Leslie & Hii 2009; Indergaard 2009) and inherent neoliberalism (Christophers 2008; Gibson & Klocker 2005) to problems defining such a loaded and mercurial concept as ‘creativity’ (including related definitional difficulties around what constitutes a ‘creative industry’ (O’Connor 2009; Pope 2005; Throsby 2008)). Creativity is therefore a contested concept – no more so than in the conduct of research with ‘creative’ communities.

Responding to these critiques, this article discusses a project where deliberate attempts have been made to connect with the unheralded or surprising forms that creativity takes outside the established arts – what is known in the literature as ‘vernacular creativity’ (Edensor et al. 2009). If creativity is semantically opaque and its mobilisation as cultural planning discourse frequently politicised, what then are the political and practical implications of seeking to engage with creative communities beyond the established arts? This article considers such engagement in the context of a project based in a regional area of

Australia where creativity is often overlooked. It does so through the notion of enclosure, which has helped us both analyse the policy landscape of the arts and creativity and imagine capacities to form new enclosures around communities of practice, policy and research in ways that challenge old precepts.

The project in question is the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded Cultural Asset Mapping for Regional Australia (CAMRA) Project – a Linkage initiative that combines federal government funding with support from municipal councils, peak arts bodies, and local and regional government associations. The overall aims of the project are to work outside any pre-given definitions of ‘creativity’, assumptions about where it resides or whether it is in fact a good thing for policy-making and planning, and instead to build partnerships with communities through which creativity is defined, located and discussed (see the project’s website, <http://culturemap.org.au/>). We use the phrase ‘cultural asset mapping’ to encapsulate this alternative framing, drawing on prior community-engaged research where the means were as important as the ends – the politics of knowledge production being foregrounded in the process of doing research (Underhill-Sem & Lewis 2008). Case study regions where such partnerships have been formed during the CAMRA project include rural and regional areas in Australia – locations not usually associated with creative industries, which have even been typecast as ‘lacking’ creativity in previous audits and creative class studies (see Gibson & Klocker 2004 for a critique). One such location is Wollongong – 85 km south of Sydney and one of Australia’s key centres for heavy industry, notably coal and steel production, as well as sea transport, freight and logistics.

In Wollongong, reliance on heavy industry and manufacturing has triggered successive civic anxieties about economic futures, and regional economic plans have variously looked to tourism, education and creative industries for their capacity to diversify the city’s economy and to insulate jobs from global economic fluctuations (Waitt & Gibson 2009). There is a presence of what are typically described as ‘creative industries’ in Wollongong, including a theatre scene, visual artists, filmmakers and designers, and the city has pockets of gentrified ‘creative class’ activity, partly in the inner city and also on its scenic northern beaches (a function of lifestyle and amenity). Wollongong City Council cultural planners, who are industry partners on the CAMRA project, wanted to include well-established arts communities in the project, but also – mindful of the critiques of creativity alluded to above – wished to explore a more expansive understanding of what creativity might be, and where it could be found. This was important in Wollongong because, with its industrial base, strong working class culture and challenging demographic mix (high levels of cultural diversity, newly arrived migrant and refugee communities, socioeconomic inequality,

problems of youth unemployment), any project focusing only on the established arts and creative industries would quickly run the risk of reinforcing existing divides and being accused of elitism.

NEGOTIATING RESEARCH METHODS

— A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Clarifying our approach took a year of regular meetings by university researchers on the CAMRA project with cultural planners at Wollongong City Council, as well as the pursuit of specialist projects on specific *forms* of vernacular creativity (custom car design, surfboard shapers, Aboriginal hip-hop) and *sites* of creativity (for example, the live music venue, the Oxford Tavern, host to Wollongong's fringe/alternative/punk subcultures until its untimely closure in 2010). In industry partner meetings, planners at Wollongong Council emphasised the importance of genuine engagement with established arts and creative industries, but also the need to seek more broad views about 'creativity' beyond the expected voices. Indeed, a back story to the project was precisely that a 'gulf' had been seen to emerge between those most vocal in local cultural planning debates (from the established arts and creative communities) and a heterogeneous population who were generally disengaged from cultural planning processes. Council often ran consultation sessions at particular times of the day in central venues such as libraries, and lamented that it was the same prominent figures who frequently attended, leaving unanswered residual questions of representativeness and diversity of views across the community.

Stepping into this context, the CAMRA project was presented with a methodological challenge to both leverage the existing expertise in arts and creative industries and move beyond any perceived 'arts mafia' to locate alternative voices, places and ideas. What emerged out of the year's worth of regular meetings was that a mixed method approach was required to conduct cultural asset mapping in Wollongong. Specific projects meant it was possible to dedicate time and energy to locating and exploring alternative creative sectors beyond the usual places, while a series of other activities would be pursued by the project, as a whole, with the broader population. A pragmatic approach was taken initially to selecting specific creative activities and sites: Aboriginal hip-hop emerged as a focus because of the involvement of several of our undergraduate students (of Indigenous background) in the region's hip-hop music scene; custom car design was a focus because of the authors' prior knowledge and awareness of a creative scene in Wollongong surrounding car design, which had also recently been demonised by mainstream media in the area as 'hoon' culture; the Oxford Tavern live music venue was chosen because of the involvement of one of the authors as a musician there; and surfboard shaping was chosen because another of the authors is a keen surfer and knew of the region's high-quality custom surfboard workshops (but also, crucially, knew they had been

previously ignored by the city's cultural planning and creative industries' strategies and audits). These initial choices set the scene for detailed longitudinal analysis of vernacular creativity in Wollongong, as all existed outside official discourses of creative industries in Wollongong (Waitt & Gibson 2009), but as initial selections they were not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, the real possibility existed that these particular choices would only produce another partial and thus problematic sense of what constituted creativity in Wollongong.

Figure 1: Andrew Warren, Ben Gallan and Josh Edwards administering a map interview at the Viva La Gong festival, November 2009 (photograph: Chris Gibson)



It therefore became apparent that a much more ambitious public research exercise would be needed to broaden the net. This latter exercise came to be the hosting of a 'cultural mapping lounge' (Figure 1) at Wollongong's largest annual civic festival, Viva La Gong, in November 2009. The cultural mapping lounge consisted of a stall manned by staff and students and CAMRA personnel from the University of Wollongong and the University of Technology, Sydney, at which members of the general public – literally anyone – were invited to have their say on two basic questions: 'What is the coolest place in Wollongong?' and 'What is the most creative place in Wollongong?' These two questions, although simple, were the product of many hours of debate from within project partnership meetings. They were chosen because they invited people in a reasonably accessible 'pop culture' format to reflect on their city, on cultural life, and on creativity. In addition to these questions, members of the general public were asked to explicitly identify on a paper map of Wollongong their 'cool' and 'creative' places with blue and pink highlighter pens. Drawing on advances made elsewhere in a previous project (see Brennan-Horley & Gibson 2009), these maps were later collated and combined using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology to produce analytical and statistical reports on where Wollongong residents located 'cool' and 'creative' places

(see Gibson et al. 2012, for a detailed discussion of these results). All in all 205 people participated in this exercise, producing 160 interviews and maps (some participated as couples or as whole families, responding to one interview and drawing on one map). Members of the arts and creative industries focus group, conducted in the week following the Viva La Gong public mapping exercise, were asked the same questions, and provided with the same maps and pens in order to produce an identical set of comparable data.

Within specific sub-projects, the methods developed were tailored to the communities from whom views were sought, and could be extended over a lengthier time period. Individual creative practitioners in surfboard production, custom car design and Aboriginal hip-hop were interviewed numerous times over a two-year period, with trust built through repeat visits, informal chats and discussions, and support from researchers outside the bounds of the project (for instance, for custom car designers during visiting festivals, or by attending gigs by Aboriginal hip-hoppers). At the Oxford Tavern we sought views from those involved in its music scene both currently and through 20 years of its history as a live music venue: the musicians, booking agents and punters who made it the city's premier alternative live music venue until its recent tragic demise. In-depth, longitudinal conversations with different kinds of vernacular creative communities were also made possible.

In keeping with previous literature on the politics of community-engaged research (Burrawanga et al. 2008), a process of constant negotiation occurred between the focus which was hypothesised initially and the themes that emerged in the conduct of doing research with members of the creative communities. The expectation of the Oxford Tavern research was to describe a close-knit live music 'scene', which could be interpreted within subcultural theory frameworks. Subcultural theory describes the manner in which people affiliate through music, fashion, behaviour and attitudes into discrete social formations such as punk, hip-hop and rave cultures (Gelder 2005). From this interpretation, it was thought that the connection to cultural planning would be forged through valorising otherwise disenfranchised subcultural formations as legitimate elements of Wollongong's creative community (in the manner of Willis' (1990) now-classic study of creativity among working-class youth; see also Shaw 2005). Instead, what was encountered were apathetic attitudes towards the scene itself – rarely did music-scene participants at the Oxford perceive what they did as particularly cultural or value it as anything more than a personal attachment to music and drinking. In context, the whole time we were researching and writing about this scene there was a threat that the venue was planning to close (which it eventually did, in 2010), and people were angry about this prospect. We anticipated that participants in the music scene there would hence voice strong opinions about the value of the venue to the city's creative subcultures, and complain about its neglect by local policy-makers.

Over a couple of beers in informal situations outside the research context, everyone had opinions about the situation. Yet trying to encourage people to talk on tape or sit down for interviews at times outside the music scene's activities was far more difficult. Therefore, different techniques were adopted such as using social networking sites to keep the research engagement casual. Through such strategies we made contact with an older generation of people no longer at the Oxford – ex-music-scene participants who were looking back in retrospect rather than wanting to talk about contemporary issues such as the survival of the venue.

What transpired was that, instead of an empirical exploration of specific cultural planning themes, a looser narrative approach emerged within which the aim was to simply ask people about their first ever experience of the Oxford Tavern and then let them narrate a story from their lives involving the Oxford. This narrative approach enabled a form of personal dialogue with researchers not possible through semi-structured interviews. Rather than providing a mere backdrop to specific questions linked to hypothesised themes, narratives allow reciprocal relationships to unfurl between events, places and social identities important in sustaining the lives of people within altering circumstances (Søndergaard 2002). We thus resisted the desire to press for further comment on questions of cultural planning and creativity, instead allowing discourses to unfold in their own manner. Some participants did not even need to be asked another question: they would provide a personal history of their whole involvement in the scene, and offer up critical insights, without need for further prompting. The aim was to facilitate casual chats about the periods that people were involved with the venue, and then later piece together the general story of that venue.

It remains moot whether this methodological approach could be easily replicated – again reflecting the situatedness of knowledge production. As Nagar and Ali (2003) intimate, moving between and across subject positions in research is context and path dependent. It happened to be that one researcher was already in the Oxford Tavern's music scene. Participants would share stories with him more easily than they might other researchers; hence some of the older participants would say, 'Well this is before your time but I'll tell you a story', and they would then expound on a theme. Positionality of the researcher is critical (Rose 1997), and personal history in that scene, or ability to be able to talk to members of a particular creative community with intimate knowledge or shared experience or history, is important (Gold 2002).

The story was different again when working with Aboriginal hip-hoppers. Here, being present at the university was critical, as was luck in coming in contact with Indigenous students who participated in the region's hip-hop scene. On one occasion a conversation between researchers and Indigenous students turned to hip-hop and students were asked if it would be okay to get in contact to participate in research. One researcher subsequently met

people at Nowra youth centre – a space not of our choosing, but rather where the hip-hop scene's members were already hanging out. For a while the research constituted nothing but 'being around': meeting hip-hoppers once and saying who we were, where we were from, what our interests were, and watching and listening to hip-hop music being made, rehearsed and recorded. This accords with Kusenbach's (2003) method of the 'go-along': talking, recording and conversing with people as they stroll or 'hang out' in their own familiar everyday urban spaces.

In subsequent meetings interviews were requested and conducted. The process was, in other words, a familiar one in qualitative social science of building trust and rapport (Cameron & Gibson 2005). Once we had talked to key people who were operating from the youth centre, they were very good at mobilising others, who were easily convinced to participate in the research once trust (and even friendship) was apparent with the researchers (cf. Tillmann-Healy 2003). Gaining trust opened up more opportunities to get to talk to other people; those involved in hip-hop were willing to talk about what they were doing and were enthusiastic about showing us their music, taking us through how they'd go about making a track on the computer with the equipment they had. They talked about key people who were important in that process, speaking fondly about opportunities to perform; but then underneath that hinted at issues and difficulties they were having in accessing opportunities to perform around the local area.

Reinforcing Gibson's (2006) argument, the perceived boundary between non-Aboriginal researcher and Aboriginal research subjects was less profound in the CAMRA project experience than the shared camaraderie enabled by a focus on music, on a shared passion for the creativity involved in songwriting. With CAMRA this resulted in collaborative publications between Andrew and local participants in the Aboriginal hip-hop scene (see Warren & Evitt 2010), which in turn constituted co-authorship as a strategy to negotiate and unsettle the relations of power that infuse research processes, and thus an attempt to decolonise research (Burrawanga et al. 2008). The key was to listen and not ask too many in-depth sensitive questions about life ambitions and problems. Rather than press for contemplation on critical issues, 'being around' and then doing gentle interviews were opportunities to create a space for discussion of positive creative forces in the lives of participants (Kusenbach 2003), an antidote to the all too familiar story of the same kids being typecast as 'problems' at school and in the community. Reflecting on this experience, the potential problem lies in having expectations about what one can glean from research participants too early in the process. Instead, in this case, meaningful insights about vernacular creativity among a disenfranchised community emerged slowly, and gently, from within deliberately easygoing research encounters.

REDRAWING THE BOUNDARIES OF 'ENCLOSURE'

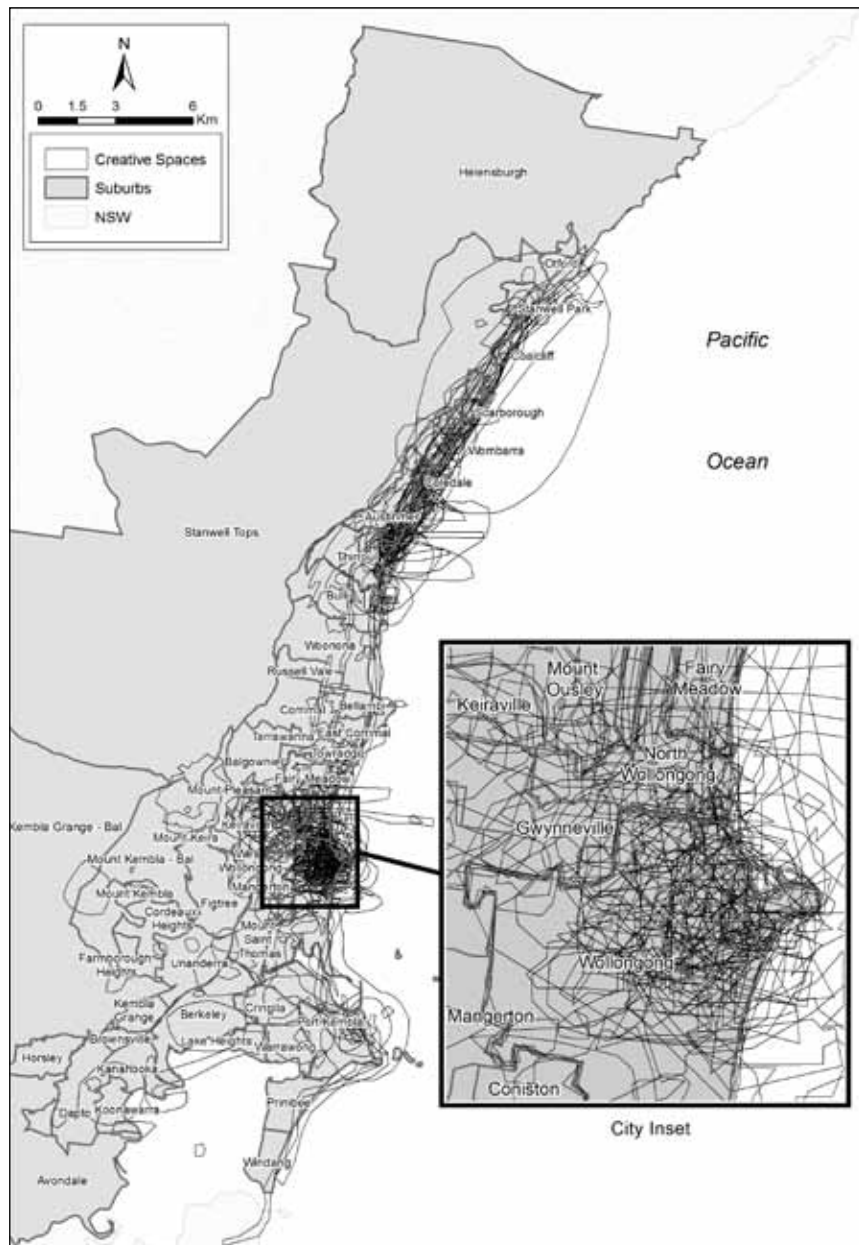
Qualitative and in-depth explorations of specific forms of vernacular creativity, as outlined above, helped inform the CAMRA project's wider agenda of understanding local cultural assets beyond predictable off-the-shelf creative city strategies (for empirical detail, see Gallan 2012; Warren 2012; Warren & Evitt 2010; Warren & Gibson 2011). The problem remained that in choosing specific case studies other forms of vernacular creativity may have been overlooked. How can researchers engage with unidentified communities, whose locations, contours, personalities and proclivities are simply unknown?

Our answer was the cultural mapping lounge at the popular, free Viva La Gong festival, in the hope that a quick, short sample of the general public could be recruited in a non-threatening, and even entertaining, research exercise. Admittedly, much less detail was provided by the general public than was possible through in-depth case studies, but the benefit was the possibility of capturing far more diverse forms of creativity, including seemingly 'mundane', 'hidden' or controversial examples. Extensive analysis of the results is not possible here (see instead Gibson et al. 2012), but it is worth drawing out a few insights from the public mapping exercise relevant to our discussion of the politics and pragmatics of research process. At the Viva La Gong mapping lounge, members of the general public had much less than was expected to say on established arts and creative industry activity, and instead a broader mix of predictable and unpredictable activities were identified and discussed – from community gardening to school choirs, from knitting circles to migrant cultural programs. The Viva La Gong exercise proved a point about the community's willingness to participate in research – they were queuing up at one stage – quite a contrast to the 'consultation fatigue' (Diduck & Sinclair 2002) that sees formal community consultations, town meetings and focus groups so poorly attended. The resulting map analysis (see, for example, Figure 2) had within it enormous scope for representing the diversity of views and experiences of the general public in Wollongong. These included, but were not limited to, expressions of localism and pride in specific suburban community initiatives; vernacular creative activities not otherwise included in cultural planning strategies; engagement with 'nature' such as beaches and the city's escarpment backdrop; city-wide sites of creative gravity (including regional galleries and nightlife-entertainment districts); and even outright dismissal of the arts-centric notion of creativity in favour of a grassroots emphasis on the everyday creativity used by working class and disadvantaged people to survive and make do with few financial and community resources (further detail on this is provided in Gibson et al. 2012).

Yet paradoxically, with the Viva La Gong cultural asset mapping exercise there was a self-effacing tendency, where members of the general public being interviewed would say 'I'm not in a position to be able to comment on that; I don't know

anything cultural; I'm not creative; I don't know anyone who is creative' – even when they did, or themselves were actually involved in activities that might be of interest to cultural planners (revealed after gentle probing by the researchers). There was a sense in which members of the general public felt a lack of validity to speak. We wondered where exactly that came from: working class humility, a sense of eschewing seemingly middle-class cultural or artistic pursuits, or a history of having been excluded from the dialogues of cultural planning – having been outside the enclosures of policy-making?

Figure 2: 'Where is creative Wollongong?' — all responses, combined, Viva La Gong cultural asset mapping exercise, November 2009 (Source: Gibson et al. 2012)



Rather than spend too much time discussing specific results, what is most relevant from a community-engaged research perspective is that knowledge-production is clearly a dialectical or iterative process – and that knowledge about what is 'creative' and where it might reside must be understood through a continual process of 'becoming' by way of dialogue within specific policy-community-university exchanges (Cameron & Gibson 2005).

In our case, where cultural planners have a familiar set of connections to the established arts and creative industries, it is through these sets of connections that discourses on what constitutes creativity emerge. These dialogues are the avenues through which ‘assets’ and ‘problems’ for a city and its creative industries are defined, made real, and ultimately shape cultural policy for the city. In Foucaultian theory this is called ‘enclosure’ – where government and ‘experts’ build sets of connections in the policy-making realm and a sense of enclosure forms around those connections (Dufty 2008; Rose & Miller 1992). This notion of ‘enclosure’ is a specific and technical one, normally found in sociological critiques of policy and governance, but much less common in methodological literature. According to sociologists of Foucaultian persuasion, policy discourse is framed within that enclosed set of connections, and ideas outside this enclosed web of iterative dialogues between experts and government remain excluded. This was at times visibly evident in our arts and creative industries focus group, conducted shortly after the Viva La Gong mapping lounge (and within which we asked the same questions as we did to the general public: ‘Where is cool and creative Wollongong?’). At the arts industry focus group, it became obvious upon arrival that most participants already knew each other and were reacquainting and re-establishing existing connections, reproducing and rehearsing certain conversations about arts-related topics, casually, as they had coffee before the day began. These spaces and interactions within the focus group setting were about cementing those already enclosed, semi-enclosed, or informally enclosed dialogues. This contrasted enormously with the somewhat random, even chaotic, jumble of ideas, places and themes that extended from our general public mapping exercise at Viva La Gong – an exercise without depth of expert insight in comparison to that of the focus group, but which nonetheless had all the hallmarks of a rich ‘vox pop’ format: diversity, confrontation, dissent, surprise, off-the-cuff comments, and more than a few ‘hidden treasures’.

Looking back on this exercise, it also becomes arguably clearer why it is that vernacular creative activities such as surfboard shaping or custom car design have until now been eschewed within formal civic cultural planning processes. Certain cultures and creative endeavours (especially museums, theatre and visual arts) have full-time employed gatekeepers and those crucial gatekeepers interact with the gatekeepers of cultural policy and planning within this realm of enclosure (Gibson 2011). What Council considers legitimate within the sphere of cultural planning is informed by societal perceptions of what counts as ‘arts’, or what counts as ‘creative’ – but is also a product of the socialised networks within which policy enclosures form. Other forms of vernacular creativity might be equally ‘artful’, yet not show up on the policy map.

Surfboard shapers, for example, considered their work very much artistic – a soulful, creative, innovative, design-driven

industry. Local surfboard workshops such as Byrne employ shapers who have played a pivotal role in Australia's professional surfing history: Tom Carroll won two world titles on Byrne surfboards. With beaches spanning the entire length of Wollongong and being central to cultural life in the city (as was abundantly evident in our cultural asset mapping exercise at Viva La Gong – see Figure 2), one might expect Wollongong to have made mileage out of this seemingly obvious local cultural asset. Yet surfboard shapers we interviewed recounted having been to Council meetings and attempting to talk about it, and then realising that there was little awareness of the existence of a surfboard industry in Wollongong (it was still assumed to be essentially a steel/coal/manufacturing city). Surfboard shapers talked extensively about how Wollongong had an amazing natural asset: Wollongong is located on a remarkable wave-influenced coastline and there are already within the city people who work within surfing and have become internationally renowned for their activities. And yet the enclosures around arts and cultural planning have yet to embrace surfboard shapers. Surfboard shapers, like custom car designers, are simply not part of the social and professional networks through which the policy landscape of arts and creativity are enclosed.

Conversely, other forms of creativity were downplayed by participating community members: people involved in custom car design, for instance, rarely perceived what they did as creative or artistic and were dismissive of Council initiatives towards inclusive cultural planning practice as being 'irrelevant' for them and their pastime (cf. Diduck & Sinclair 2002). Custom car designers did not describe their activity as 'cultural' or 'creative' – it was more about an outlet for personal expression. They had had an interest in cars since they first obtained their licence while at high school, and customising cars was a chance for them to do something interesting outside the confines of boring, repetitive and tiring work in heavy industry. Custom car designers could pull together different people and skills – friends they had in the local area – in ways that perfectly matched academic descriptions of the network sociality present in other more familiar creative industries such as music (Brennan-Horley 2008). And yet they didn't see custom car design as particularly creative, or as a legitimate form of art. Thus a form of self-exclusion accompanied actual exclusion from official policy enclosures of art and creativity.

In the case of custom car design, the situation is made more complex again because related to the activity is the wider politics of customised cars being associated with stigmatised 'hoon' behaviour – in contrast to the creativity and skilful work involved in designing and rebuilding cars. Overcoming the gulf between the established arts and creative industries and custom car design means not just becoming more inclusive (cf. Davies & Dwyer 2008), but shifting perceptions and challenging stereotypes. Car shows, for instance, attract a diverse audience, from young to old, from grandparents to little children – people who outsiders might not necessarily think would be connected to a custom car design

scene, or a creative scene for that matter. So to engage with such people requires a reshaping of thinking about ways to encourage or develop community arts and creativity (Anwar McHenry 2011). It requires local government to take some initiative to break outside the enclosures that form over time around policy-making spheres, as well as questioning accepted wisdom and existing regulatory practices where appropriate, such as handling community resistance to the staging of car shows in public spaces, issues to do with insurance, risk management, local traffic plans and waste management – all the bureaucracy that surrounds urban planning, festivals and events. Policy-making on creativity outside predictable dialogues and enclosures needs actions on themes far more quotidian than many creative city strategies appear to be.

Pushing this notion of ‘enclosure’ further, a different set of enclosed dialogues occurs, even within Council, that further complicates this discussion. It became obvious within the CAMRA project that cultural planners – who have been very keen to broaden the scope of the dialogues informing cultural planning – act within the local government context where culture and creativity struggle for legitimacy against other ‘basic’ needs. In this context it has been argued that Council more broadly has higher priorities than arts and culture. Cultural planners in turn see themselves as on the sidelines – as their submission to the New South Wales Government’s *Inquiry into the development of cultural infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD* document reveals:

A significant period of 8–10 years of research and planning for improved cultural facilities still leaves Wollongong in a position where little substantive change has been achieved. Lack of resources has been a fundamental issue. However the lack of recognition of the important role of the arts and culture is a major cause of this stagnation (Wollongong City Council 2008, p. 10).

The enclosure surrounding cultural planners and established arts and creative industries in Wollongong is, in other words, superseded by another kind of enclosure – that of the ‘core’ business of Council – which serves to exclude culture from claiming its rightful place in the sandpit of holistic city-wide planning.

CONCLUSION

We have shared some reflections here on what works and what remains difficult when seeking to engage communities in cultural planning research – and in so doing have attempted to broaden the scope of what constitutes ‘creativity’. For us, as researchers, pivotal was the dynamic of taking the time to listen to participants and let their stories unfold, not arriving into the research context with an agenda or a set strategy. We concord with Kusenbach’s (2003) recommendation that in the research context it is essential to allow time to go for a drive, go for a chat, hang out, to hear someone’s story. Through our various attempts during the CAMRA project to engage with vernacular creative communities, the forms of

enclosure that enfold the policy-making sphere were subsequently rendered vividly – and at times our research strategies had to adapt in order to overcome the boundaries normally assumed as a given around the established arts and creative communities.

It remains to be seen what Wollongong Council does with the variety of insights delivered by the CAMRA project. A worst-case scenario may be that we have extensively documented a live music scene before it died; that we spotlighted temporarily vernacular creative scenes such as custom car design and surfboard shaping (with little permanent recognition forthcoming); and that we captured momentarily a multitude of snippets about grassroots cultural assets through Viva La Gong – activities, people and places that might remain beyond the ambit of future cultural planning. The project continues now into its next phase, in which policy dialogue around the results is the key goal. As researchers increasingly attuned to the manner in which enclosures form around policy-making spheres, it is incumbent on us to both open up opportunities to include in these dialogues otherwise neglected forms of vernacular creativity, and to resist scenarios in which we ourselves unwittingly produce new enclosures around our own particular ideas, objectives and predilections.

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