

# Droga Residency: Closing Thoughts

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# Research + Engagement Scope



**31** Meetings/Interviews

**5** Cities

**4** Lectures

**2** Workshops

**1** Discussion Session

**1** Closing Presentation

# EXCHANGES

From lectures to workshops to meetings, a number of activities undertaken during my residency were designed to create opportunities to share, workshop, and discuss about social impact design.

The goal of the residency was to not only advance that dialogue with those that I engaged, but also for me to understand this discussion in the Australian context. In particular, my research explored community development practices and how marginalized populations engaged with or were affected by it. The research included explorations into strategies (e.g., tactical urbanism) and issues of influences (e.g., race and privilege).

# LECTURES

A young girl with her hair in a bun, wearing a bright pink jacket and blue pants, is hula hooping with several colorful hoops (yellow, green, blue) around her waist. She is in the center of the frame, looking down at the hoops. In the background, there is a large, white, geometric structure with blue accents, resembling a modern pavilion or play structure. Other people, including children and adults, are visible in the background, some sitting on chairs and others standing. The scene is outdoors on a paved area under a clear blue sky.

## LECTURE CONTENT

Lectures focused on core social impact design topics, including

- collaborative design
- community engagement
- community expertise
- human centered design
- tactical strategies
- systems thinking





## WORKSHOP CONTENT

Workshops focused on discussing with and training participants on key strategies of critical engagement including negotiating privilege and responsive empathy.

# WORKSHOPS





## **WORKSHOP ATTENDEES**

Workshop attendees often included architects, government employees, community organization staff, artists, and community members.

# **WORKSHOPS**

Social Good



Social Justice





In addition to discussing the possibilities of social impact design, there was a focus on developing more criticality around the outcomes of such work. The aims of the work shouldn't be just about "feel good" efforts but also about meaningfully impacting unjust conditions and systems of inequity. Such a repositioning should influence everything from how designers and other built environment practitioners engage communities to what is the scope of our projects.



Above: A scene from Dick's storyline

Below: A scene from Rick's storyline



## RETHINKING ENGAGEMENT

One example, "Dick and Rick," is an illustrated series that uses a parallel story format to distinguish between typical and more equitable engagement practices.

## RETHINKING SCOPE

Workshop participants in Alice Springs were asked to think more broadly about how we might define a better brief for an indigenous art centre, one that could aspire to achieve an outcome of social justice, not just social good.

**NT** News

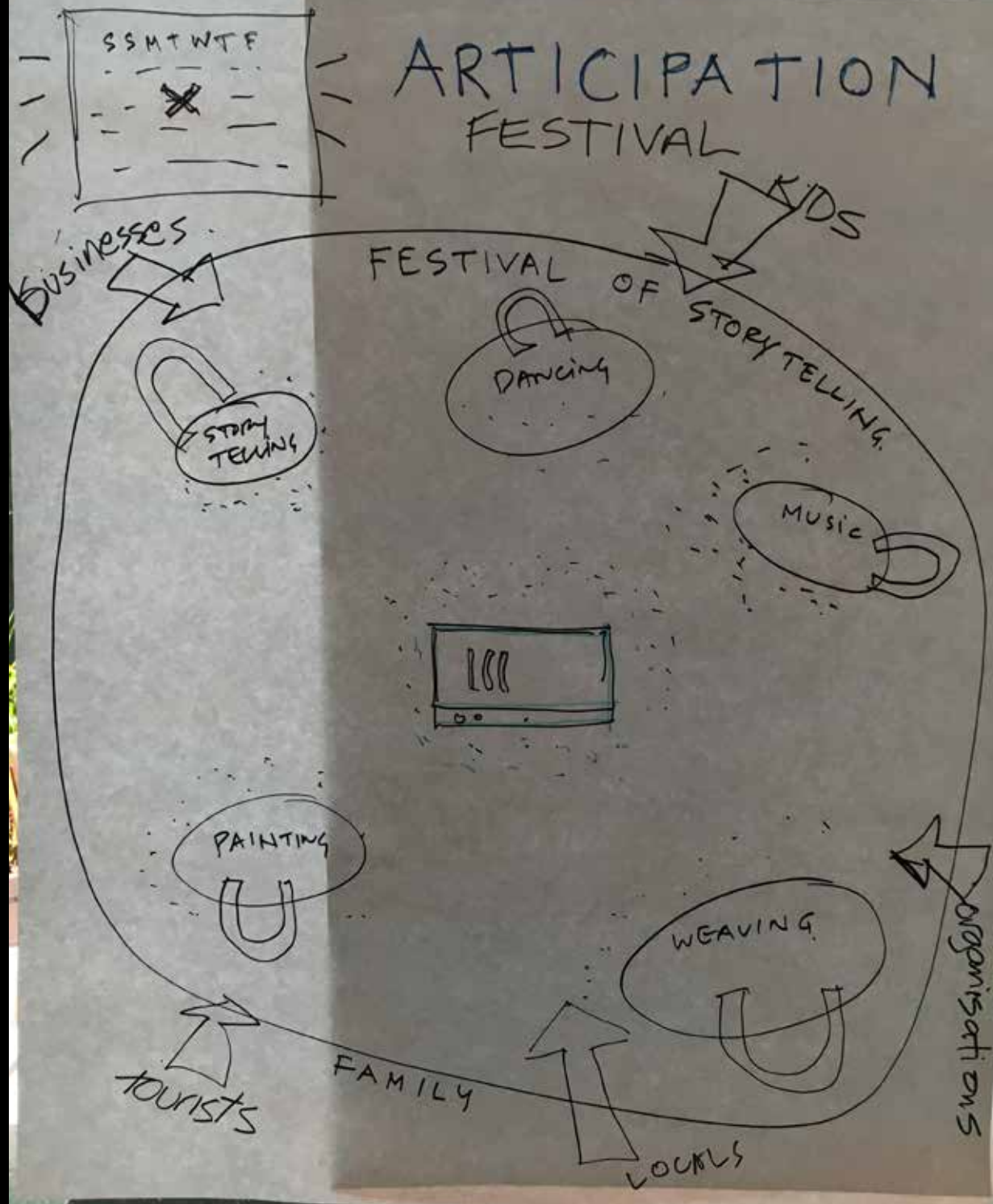


📷 Territory Labor leader Michael Gunner has unveiled his plan for an indigenous art and culture centre in Alice Springs. PICTURE: Justin Kennedy

Northern Territory

# Territory Labor pledges to contribute \$100M for indigenous art centre in Alice Springs





## RETHINKING ENGAGEMENT

The workshop participants then developed prototypes of how to engage local communities in that conversation.



# REFLECTIONS

My practice is a global one. That broad footprint and range of experiences provides an interesting vantage point from which to engage and understand different contexts. I came as an outsider, visiting Australia for the first time. In my time here, my explorations took me to locations and engagements from Central Sydney to Fairfield, Footscray to Fitzroy, Darwin to Alice Springs. What follows are reflections on the Australian context, filtered through my experiences here and abroad. Some challenges are unique, others universal. But they all have implications on what it means to exist and thrive, particularly for marginalized communities. May these reflections provide fodder for conversations about belonging, diversity, equity, and community development.

**BEING ACCOMODATED  
IN THE CITY**

**BEING EMBRACED  
BY THE CITY**

“ We have an integrated city  
where it is possible to live a  
segregated life.”

- Mary C Curtis



Australian society has made great strides to embrace multiculturalism. Yet, the presence of “diversity” is not the same as “integration.” Diversity speaks to a variety of groups being represented. Integration speaks to the quality of that presence, and focuses more on inclusion. It is something that must be achieved both physically and emotionally.

For multiculturalism to fully live up to its aspirational vision, it needs to engage not only what it means to accommodate a variety of cultures as part of Australian society, but how the people - and not just the cultures that they're a part of - might be fully embraced and engaged as individuals who belong.

Sydney is one of the most diverse cities in the world AND it also suffers from considerable uneven distribution of that diverse population. As recent reports have highlighted, there is significant spatial inequity of access to transport, jobs and education for those who live in the west and southwest suburbs. And because these suburbs hold the most significant percentages of the nonwhite population, the brunt of the inequity burden aligns not only with class, but also race and ethnicity.

Race, ethnicity, and class are also categories that have physical and emotional manifestations. Statistics, maps, and events can provide a physical understanding of how race, ethnicity, and class play out in the city. But there is also an experiential impact to what it means to move through a city when one is visibly a minority. Several nonwhite interviewees spoke of instances of explicit and implicit bias, and how that impacted how they occupied space as well as their understanding of their positionality within the immediate context and Australian society. And as person of color, I found that some of their experiences and feelings echoed my own within the country.

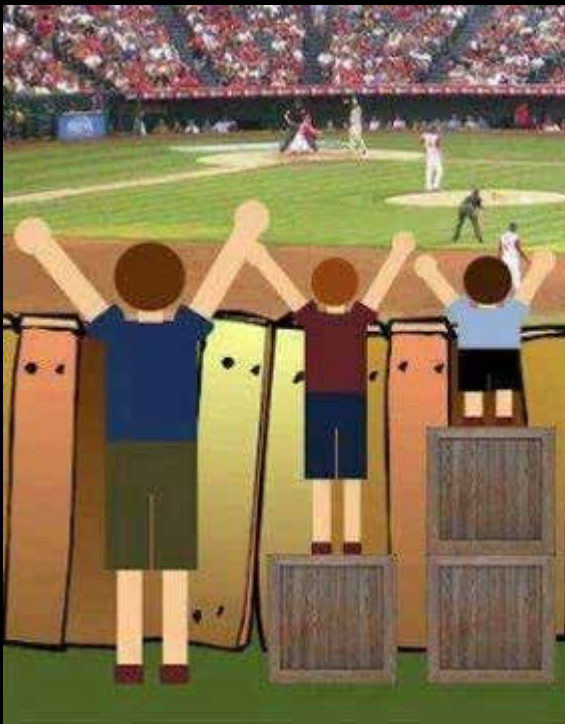
WHAT IF WE COULD ALL GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING  
OF WHAT IT MEANS TO FEEL INCLUDED AND WORK  
TO DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES WHICH ENGENDER  
THAT?



**FAIRNESS**

**EQUITY**





It was often commented that Australians have a strong sense of fairness, a belief that everyone gets the same fair shot. It is not too different than the American ethic of the “land of opportunity,” where each person has an equal chance to “pull himself up from his bootstraps.” Such mindsets presuppose that everyone starts from the same place. Yet a myriad of factors, from physical ability to racial/ethnic identity to class to gender, often keep that from being a reality.

When the outcome of a project, program, or policy is to give everyone the same access to opportunity or resources, it can often reinforce - rather than alleviate - inequities that already exist.

WHAT IF "EQUITY" REPLACED "FAIRNESS" AS  
THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MANDATE FOR  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES?

**MYTHIC  
NARRATIVES**

**TANGIBLE  
REALITIES**





“ Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Narratives can be powerful forces within a society. They can help distill complex issues into components that can be more simply understood and shared. But narratives can also be a barrier to engaging the specificity needed to meaningfully address those complex issues. Such a barrier, is also a barrier of emotional and tangible proximity. This makes it possible to be simultaneously concerned but removed from a problem.

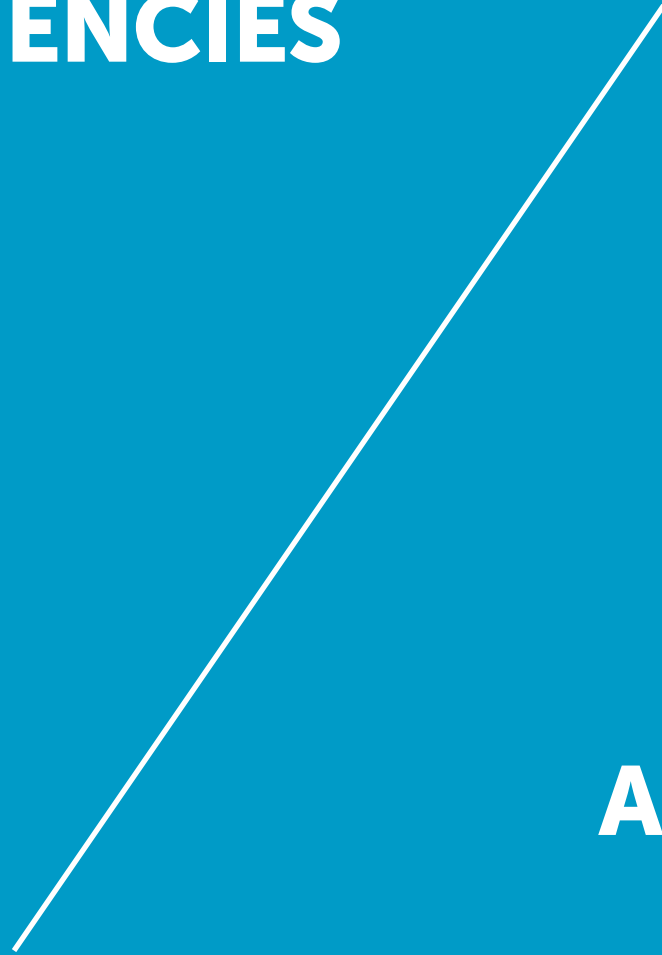
When talking about indigenous communities, the “Northern Territories” (NT) often seems to exist as such a narrative. A number of people identified it and were moved by it as a place where great injustices still existed. Yet, far fewer had direct experiences with the people or places of the NT.

There are aspects of the NT that are emblematic of some of the country’s racial and equity challenges. But spatially locating the heart of that challenge in a place that is distant and unfamiliar to many Australians, can also serve to provide a buffer to seeing and engaging racism and inequity closer to home.

WHAT IF CONVERSATIONS COULD EMBRACE THIS  
MORE PROXIMATE (AND OFTEN UNCOMFORTABLE)  
CONTEXT THAT, WHILE LESS VISIBLE, IS NO LESS  
POTENT?

**DEFICIENCIES**

**ASSETS**





“We are losing our culture, slowly.”

- Denise



Denise grew up in the Trucking Town Camp in Alice Springs and has a job with Tangentyere Council. She co-  
led the effort to renovate and upgrade the community center in Trucking, and is still active in spearheading community-serving programs there. In her spare time, she volunteers to develop different creative fundraising schemes to help pay for items such as stipends for sports team coaches, transportation to sports competitions and cultural activities, and weekend excursions to the bush to teach younger residents about cultural practices.

“ When Aboriginal culture/life is discussed, it is often from a framing of deficit. ”

- Jefa Greenway

There are other Denises out there, not only in indigenous communities, but also in immigrant and refugee communities. Yet resource conversations involving those populations often start from a place of deficit rather than assets. Such a mindset often engenders a culture of design and project implementation in which things are done “for” or “to” a group of people rather than “with.”

It is true that there is real need in these communities, but there are also skills and aspirations. Acknowledging and working with those skills and aspirations can mean the difference between a project that helps maintain the survival of the people impacted and one that supports the capacity of those people to thrive.

**WHAT IF PROJECT, PROGRAM, POLICY CONVERSATIONS  
STARTED WITH EXPLORING WHAT ARE THE EXISTING  
ASSETS AND WHAT COULD BE DONE TO STRENGTHEN  
THEM?**

**PROFITABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**

**EQUITABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**









In Sydney and Melbourne, real estate development is having a dynamic impact on their urban evolution. The conflicted trajectory of the often discussed Sirius Building in Sydney is emblematic of that. The potential shift from working class to high end residential follows a pattern of gentrification happening in cities around the world. This often includes a scenario where poor and marginalized residents endure life in a neighborhood when it's struggling, but have to leave when the area becomes desirable.

Relocation schemes have been discussed for the Sirius residents, but they are in areas significantly further from the access to resources that the residents' prime location currently affords.

When the primary measure of success of development is financial return, such tradeoffs seem rational. But profit-based development is not the only way. “Equitable development” creates healthy, vibrant, and diverse communities of opportunity through intentional strategies that ensure that everyone, particularly marginalized populations, can participate in and benefit from decisions that shape their neighborhoods and regions.

With equitable development, profit does not disappear from consideration; it’s still a key component. But success is measured by the broader outcome of the implementation of what is “best for all.”

**WHAT IF REDEVELOPMENT DECISIONS, SUCH AS THOSE  
SURROUNDING THE SIRIUS BUILDING, WERE ALWAYS  
MADE ACCOUNTABLE TO VALUES OF EQUITY?**

# Thanks!

A special thanks to the Australian Institute of Architects Foundation, the Droga Family, my hosts and partners in various locations around the country, and the many people who took the time to share their thoughts, take me around, and engage with my workshops and lectures.

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