

Arts the key to future generations

By **ROB O'BRIEN**

Five regional and urban councils from across Australia will come together next month to showcase groundbreaking arts projects they have helped design to creatively engage their communities.

The councils – Charters Towers Regional Council (Qld), the City of Greater Geelong (Vic), Liverpool (NSW), Latrobe (Vic) and the rural city of Wangaratta (Vic) – will all present their initiatives as part of the Generations project at the Regenerating Community Conference in Melbourne.

The Generations project, created by the Cultural Development Network (CDN), was developed

to explore the links between engagement in community-based arts activities and active civic engagement at a time when councils are under pressure on a number of different fronts.

Each council project has developed collaborations between local government, artists and communities based around global issues or ongoing concerns to the community.

“The main goal of the Generations project was to examine and explore the role of arts to civic engagement or local communities,” said CDN program manager Kim Dunphy.

“There’s been a lot of research previously into how the arts benefits health and wellbeing and economic development, but we felt this area of civic engagement with

the big issues communities face was a link not well explored.”

Initiatives undertaken for the Generations project tackle issues such as climate change adaptation, improving indigenous relations, youth disengagement and providing for an ageing population.

Ms Dunphy said the research component of the project would benefit future council initiatives.

“The intention is that people will learn from that research how to do things differently in the future,” she said.

The five councils have come together twice a year over the three-year period of the project to discuss progress and learnings.

Chris Gibson, associate professor in human geography at the University of Wollongong, said that an increased emphasis on the arts, particularly in remote communities, could not only improve engagement but could address issues such as skills shortages and unemployment.

“The arts were increasingly seen by local governments in the 80s and 90s as a way of creating social inclusion, connecting with migrant communities – there was a community development emphasis of the arts.

“In the last five years or so it

has become much more linked to economic development strategies. Local governments are increasingly seeing arts programs as potential incubators for creative industries.”

Mr Gibson said that councils had begun to realise the economic benefits returned from creating a thriving local culture.

“Progressive local governments are realising they need to plan more holistically, so separating off community and economic development programs and local cultural programs as if they’re separate concerns is false.”

Director of the Cultural Development Network, John Smithies, said that the outcomes of the Generations project could be used by councils for future cultural programs.

“The important thing about Generations was that they were multi-year to start with, and were led by the council and CEOs, they weren’t just the initiative of the arts department.

“One of the outcomes will be councils following the model of Generations and adapting it.”

The Regenerating Community Conference will be held from September 2-4 at RMIT University in Melbourne. For more information go to www.cdn-generations.net.au

Agents of change

The five councils’ Generations projects saw some diverse approaches to the arts program.

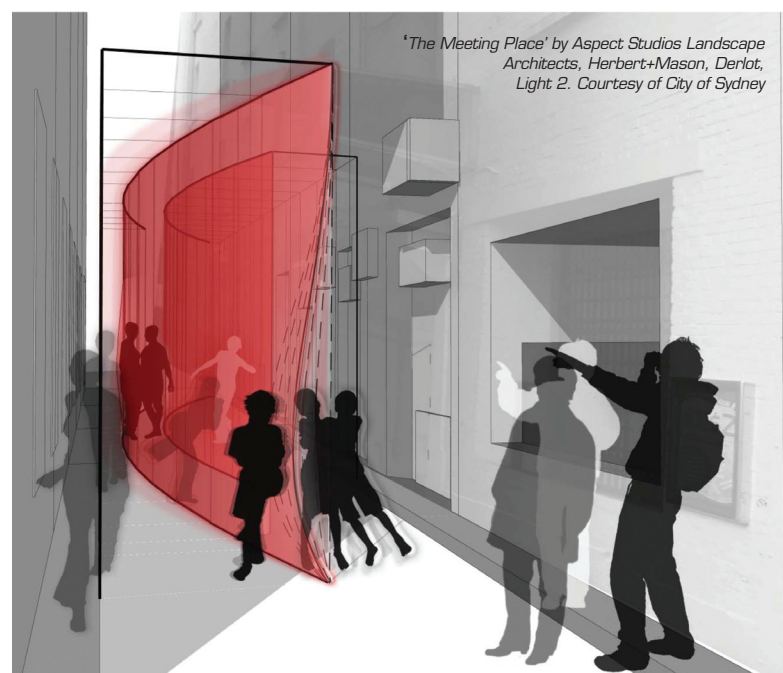
Charters Towers Regional Council – Working with three generations of pastoralists and Aboriginal families who have a traditional association or ownership of the land, the initial step involved bringing the families together through informal gatherings on the theme of country. Over a series of social encounters and gradually more creative activities, the project aimed to build the bonds of trust that could eventually lead to Aboriginal families building new businesses and new lives on land shared with the pastoralists.

Part of the **City of Geelong’s** three-year arts project called Connecting Identities, the Memory Bank involved collecting stories in digital format that revealed the diverse personal meanings and associations of local places in the community. Memory Bank opened at the National Wool Museum in July 2008. Community members were able to deposit their ‘digital’ memories, through stories associated with each location. The stories will later be given a wider audience by siting them at their source location. Using a mobile phone, people will be able to listen to stories about the land on which they are standing. This aspect of the project is being developed in collaboration with a Canadian team of story collectors who first developed the idea in Toronto.

With a culturally diverse community in a burgeoning part of Sydney’s south western urban fringe, **Liverpool’s** Aboriginal and Arab youth have experienced challenges in engaging positively with schools. Liverpool Council has worked with local communities and young people to develop alternative activities to address young people’s disengagement with the school system. Access to council facilities and resources were used to build the confidence of otherwise neglected young people and support them to take on projects that engaged and inspired them.

As a city that has lived with coal, through its location on the reserves of the Latrobe Valley, **Latrobe City** faces an internationally common problem of an increased political resistance to the burning of fossil fuels. The community is faced with the negative image of a polluting city while the council has to plan long term to respond to potential major changes. Latrobe City focussed its Green Expectations project on the task of engaging local communities around issues of sustainability. The project has three themes, firstly an exploration of the history of the Latrobe Valley and how coal was created in the area; secondly a navigation of the current situation in regards to greenhouse gases and climate change; and lastly an opportunity to play with ideas for our future in regards to energy generation and use.

The Rural **City of Wangaratta**, like many places in the developed world, has an ageing population. Generations Wangaratta invited old and young and in-between to reflect on the stories and experiences of the past and the present in order to imagine a shared future. A series of arts-based events and activities contributed to the creative skills, negotiations and understandings needed to bring that fulfilling and meaningful future into being for us all.



‘The Meeting Place’ by Aspect Studios Landscape Architects, Herbert+Mason, Derlot, Light 2. Courtesy of City of Sydney

By George! It’s art

One of the art installations – called *The Meeting Place* – being considered for the City of Sydney’s annual *By George!* urban art exhibition. The installation is designed to heighten the experience of moving through the urban space of Little Hunter Street.

The City of Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore said it had received more than 500 registrations and 68 submissions to transform the city’s laneways.

The proposed temporary artworks are going through the DA process before being installed in time for the City of Sydney’s Art & About event in October.