

Local Heroes? Learning from Recent Community Strengthening Initiatives in Victoria

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Abstract

Since its election in 1999 the Bracks Labor Government's approach to community strengthening has evolved from experimental piloting to a more coherent strategy employing community strengthening as a way of exploring more engaged, 'joined-up' and networked approaches to governance and policy-making. Rhetorical support for community strengthening is beginning to be backed by scaled-up actions and investments that engage and link citizens, community organisations, public and private sector organisations at local and regional levels. Initial evidence is emerging about the ways in which some community strengthening strategies are associated with improving outcomes and addressing disadvantage at the local level. Key success factors appear to include strong local community ownership and leadership backed by sustained state and local government investment in the social and physical infrastructure priorities identified as important by local communities. The jury is still out, however, on the extent to which community strengthening should be seen as a core element in — or a diversion from — a broader shift away from dominant neo-liberal public policy settings.

Keywords

Community strengthening, democracy, network governance, public policy, Victorian government

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide a concise overview of the development and implementation of community strengthening initiatives by the Bracks Labor Government in Victoria and to draw on this experience to reflect on emerging lessons about the significance of the renewed Australian and international interest in community strengthening strategies.

The core argument is as follows. Since its election in 1999 the Bracks Labor Government's approach to community strengthening has evolved from experimental piloting to a more coherent strategy employing community strengthening as a way of exploring more engaged, 'joined up' and networked approaches to governance and policy-making.

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Key success factors appear to include strong local community ownership and leadership backed by sustained state and local government investment in the social and physical infrastructure priorities identified as important by local communities. The jury is still out, however, on the extent to which community strengthening should be seen as a core element in — or a diversion from — a broader shift away from dominant neo-liberal public policy settings.

The rebirth of community strengthening

The widespread resurgence of interest in strengthening local community infrastructure, institutions, networks and capacities reflects one of the key contradictions of globalisation: the faster the speed and spread of global flows of information, resources and people — the greater the desire and need for local knowledge, local governance and local connectedness (Bauman 2000; Hutton and Giddens 2000).

More specifically the renewal of government support for community strengthening policies and strategies has been driven by the increasingly influential conceptual framework and evidence linking investment in social connectedness, social capital and civil society to improvements in economic productivity, social inclusion, public safety and public health (Adams and Hess 2002; Productivity Commission 2003; Smythe, Reddell and Jones 2005). A second, complementary source of support for community strengthening approaches has come from the emerging public policy experimentation with the ideas and practices of network governance and joined-up government (Rhodes 1997; Fischer 2003; Considine 2003).

Stripped of their rhetorical flourishes, community strengthening strategies being pursued by Australian national, state and local governments commonly involve supporting and investing in:

- community engagement processes and mechanisms enabling citizens to discuss and identify community concerns, goals, directions, priority actions and indicators of progress
- partnership initiatives linking local communities with public, private and civil society agencies and organisations
- physical infrastructure needed to strengthen local community networks (e.g. meeting places; cultural, sporting and recreation facilities; transport and communication links)
- social infrastructure needed to strengthen local community networks (e.g. capacity building, leadership development, information sharing and volunteering support programs).

The rebirth of community strengthening in Victoria

'Community strengthening' is, of course, not a new idea in Victoria. As in the rest of Australia, a host of initiatives, referred to in the language of the time as 'community development' policies and programs, were extensively promoted and explored during the 1960s and 1970s. These initiatives found a particularly fertile environment in Victoria due to the strong Victorian local government and community sector legacy of support for and involvement in social policy and community services activities. However, the overwhelming dominance of neo-liberal, market-driven policy settings during the 1990s, under the guidance of the Kennett Liberal Government, led to a dramatic disappearance of the language and practice of community development in Victoria (Alford and O'Neil 2001).

The Bracks Labor Government took office in October 1999, following an election result that surprised the many commentators who had been expecting the comfortable re-election of the Kennett Government. Firmly burned into the minds of incoming government ministers was the memory of the way in which the media had characterised the previous Cain and Kirner Labor governments (1982–1993) as financially irresponsible (Considine and Costar 1993). The new government faced four other significant constraints. Firstly, it was a minority government dependent on the ongoing support of at least two of the three independent members of parliament. Secondly, the Victorian Upper House (Legislative Council) remained under the control of the Liberal and National parties. Thirdly, the members of the newly appointed ministry were inexperienced, some without previous experience of being in parliament, much less running a department. Fourthly, the skills and capacity of the Victorian public service had become increasingly focussed on out-sourcing and contract management with a diminished capacity to explore and develop broader policy options and processes.

All of these ingredients combined to create a cautious political culture in which 'balancing the books' and 'not frightening the horses' were paramount objectives. A reputation for prudent economic management was seen as an essential foundation from which to build a program of broader social, environmental — and community strengthening policy reforms.

Actions

The development of the Victorian Government's community strengthening agenda can usefully be understood in terms of the following four overlapping phases:

Phase 1: Resetting the goal posts (November 1999 to October 2001)

The Bracks Government's first step in resetting the Victorian policy 'goal posts' was the Growing Victoria Together Summit held at Parliament House in March 2000, chaired by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke and attended by over 100 key private, public and community sector stakeholders (Victorian Government 2000). The opening paragraph of the Summit Recommendations noted that the aspirations of all Victorians were "most likely to be achieved by a cooperative approach to maximising economic growth within a just and

inclusive society". Importantly, the recommendations also included a commitment to balancing and integrating social, environmental and economic objectives — providing a trigger and mandate for the development of the Growing Victoria Together 'triple bottom line' policy framework launched by the premier in November 2001 (Adams and Wiseman 2003; DE&T 2002). The vision outlined by the premier in Growing Victoria Together (Victorian Government 2000b) was expressed in the following way:

"By 2010 Victoria will be a State where:

- Innovation leads to thriving industries generating high quality jobs
- Protecting the environment for future generations is built into everything we do
- We have caring, safe communities in which opportunities are fairly shared
- All Victorians have access to the highest quality health and education services all through their lives".

While it was envisaged that a community strengthening approach would inform the full range of actions needed to achieve this vision, it was also important that one of the 11 'important issues' included in Growing Victoria Together was identified as "Building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities". Key progress measures for this 'community strengthening' issue were identified as:

- the extent and diversity of participation in community, cultural and recreational organisations will increase
- in a crisis there will be more people Victorians can turn to for support
- inequalities in health, education and well being between communities will be reduced

The development and launch of Growing Victoria Together can therefore be understood as the first step in creating a platform for the re-emergence of community strengthening strategies in Victoria.

Phase 2: Piloting and experimenting (October 2001 to December 2003)

One of the abiding themes in recent policy debates about community strengthening priorities and directions in Victoria has been about the balance between focussing on 'core' social policy investments such as health, housing and education and investments in policies and programs explicitly badged as 'community strengthening' initiatives. Given the run-down in investment on core social policy programs and services over the previous ten years, it was understandable that the initial Bracks Government focus was on rebuilding core services through expenditure on community services infrastructure and staff such as nurses, teachers and police.

An additional significant action undertaken early in the first term of the Bracks Government was the review and revision of guidelines of the Community Support Fund (CSF). The CSF had been initially established by the Kennett Government as a mechanism for utilising a percentage of funds raised from gambling to support community initiatives and infrastructure

development. The revised guidelines were designed to enable the CSF to become a more proactive and strategic mechanism for resourcing new community strengthening experiments.

Over this period a range of proposals about ways of re-exploring community strengthening ideas and practices were emerging from Labor Party, public service, community sector and local government sources. These were brought together in October 2001 with the launch of the Community Building Initiative under the auspices of the Office of Community Building in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The government described the defining characteristics of its approach to community building in the following way (DVC 2005b). “The Community Building Initiative:

- Is practical and uses an action learning approach from which government and communities can learn.
- Aims to make a tangible difference and address real issues (such as health, education and the environment) at the same time as building community capacity.
- Focuses on disadvantage while taking a positive asset based approach to defining issues and opportunities for communities.
- Emphasises improved partnerships with government and changing how government relates to communities.
- Promotes different ways of achieving traditional government outcomes.
- Provides specific funding for a limited set of initiatives (eg Demonstration Projects) but also expects all government departments to contribute direct and in kind support.”

The Community Building Initiative identified the following four ‘flagship’ initiatives:

- Expanding the role and scope of the Community Support Fund (CSF) so that it could play a more strategic role in supporting community strengthening projects and activities.
- Developing 11 Community Building Demonstration Projects (with initial funding of \$500,000 each) as a basis for learning about the next steps in implementing effective community building programs.
- Continuing support for the Community Capacity Building Initiative (CCBI) established by the Department of Industry and Regional Development to strengthen local capacity and leadership in small rural communities.
- Continuing to support the Neighbourhood Renewal Program established by the Office of Housing in the Department of Human Services to improve social and economic outcomes in the state’s most disadvantaged areas. Neighbourhood Renewal, based on the place-based, community regeneration approach of the UK Neighbourhood Renewal program, involves working intensively with communities in the ten most disadvantaged localities in the state to develop a shared vision and ‘Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans’ designed to:
 - increase people’s pride and participation in the community
 - lift employment, training and education opportunities and expand local economies
 - improve personal safety and reduce crime

- enhance housing and the physical environment
- promote health and wellbeing
- increase access to transport and other key services and improve government responsiveness.

A diverse range of 'contributing programs' being implemented across the government were also identified, including: Local Learning and Employment Networks; Best Start, Safer Communities, Local Priority Policing, Community Jobs Program, Skillsnet, Healthy Communities, Victorian Population Health Survey and Rural Womens' Network. The Community Building Resource Service (2005) was also established to share information about good practice and expand community building training opportunities and resources.

At the same time the government was also beginning to experiment with a range of mechanisms designed to broaden engagement in public decision-making. Traditional consultation methods such as surveys, focus groups, public meetings, policy submissions and stakeholder reference groups have been augmented by newer methodologies including on line feedback mechanisms and community cabinet meetings designed to expand opportunities for direct interaction between citizens, policy-makers and politicians.

Phase 3: Establishment of Department For Victorian Communities (December 2003 to May 2005)

In November 2003 the Bracks Government was re-elected with a majority in both houses of parliament. An early machinery of government reform was the establishment of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) to provide an institutional mechanism for achieving the Growing Victoria Together objective of 'building cohesive communities' through a more integrated approach to planning, funding and delivering services at the local level. (DVC 2005a). To achieve the government's stated vision of building "more active, confident and resilient communities" DVC is committed to the following objectives:

- "Communities that shape their future – helping communities respond to new challenges, by working together with government, community agencies and businesses.
- Communities that encourage participation – creating opportunities for increased participation and volunteering in community activities.
- Communities that embrace diversity – supporting and advocating for Indigenous communities, young Victorians, women and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Communities that gain lasting benefits from the Commonwealth Games."

The department provides support to — and helps integrate — the work of the following ministers: Minister for Victorian Communities; Minister for Multicultural Affairs; Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs; Minister for Women's Affairs; Minister for Aboriginal Affairs; Minister for Aged Care; Minister for Employment And Youth Affairs;

Minister for Local Government; Minister for Sport and Recreation; and Minister for Commonwealth Games.

The specific view of community strengthening informing the work of the department — and the government — has been defined in the following way by the Minister for Victorian Communities, John Thwaites, MP (DVC 2005b):

“Community strengthening lies at the heart of our approach to government in Victoria. It is about harnessing the energy of communities so that they can shape their own futures. It is about fostering new and lasting partnerships between communities, government, business and other sectors. And it is about changing the way Government works, to better understand and respond to the needs and aspirations of Victorian communities. It is about finding new ways to tackle disadvantage and create opportunities, delivering tangible benefits such as jobs, educational options, safer places to live and work, better services and a healthy, sustainable environment. It seeks to achieve these benefits through revaluing community participation and local decision-making.”

Phase 4: Mainstreaming and ‘changing the way government works’ (May 2005 onwards)

By the end of 2004 an increasing level of public scepticism was apparent, particularly in local government and community sector circles about the slow pace of progress in the provision of clear signals about the way in which community strengthening would be ‘scaled-up’ from an eclectic mix of pilot projects into a genuine attempt to “change the way government works” in Victoria (Mowbray 2004). The launch of several important new policy documents and initiatives in the first half of 2005 provided evidence that progress was indeed continuing.

Growing Victoria Together II (GVT II), launched in April 2005, ‘refreshed’ the policy directions outlined in GVT I as an integrated social, economic and environmental policy ‘roadmap’ and framework for ongoing community discussion (Victorian Government 2005a). GVT II reaffirmed the government’s commitment that two of the ten key elements in its vision for Victoria would be ‘Building friendly, confident and safe communities’ and ‘A fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity’.

The launch of GVT II was followed closely by the release of a discussion paper, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria* (Victorian Government 2005b), and a month later by the government’s social policy action plan, *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage* (Victorian Government 2005c). In his introduction to *A Fairer Victoria*, Deputy Premier John Thwaites noted that, despite strong economic growth and significant social policy investments “not all Victorians are getting a fair go. Many people continue to experience disadvantage because of who they are and where they live”.

A Fairer Victoria endeavours to address disadvantage and improve social outcomes by identifying 14 strategies and 85 actions costed at \$785 million over four years designed to:

- improve access to universal services:
 - Giving children the best start in life
 - Getting young people back on track
 - Responding to family violence more effectively
 - Helping older Victorians stay independent
- reduce barriers to opportunity:
 - Providing fairer access to services
 - Making services more affordable
 - Boosting access to affordable housing
 - Improving access to justice
- improve support for disadvantaged groups:
 - Building a new partnership with indigenous Victorians
 - Creating new opportunities for people with a disability
 - Increasing support for mental health services
- improve support for disadvantaged places:
 - Building stronger communities
- make it easier to work with government:
 - Changing the way we work with communities
 - Developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level.

Actions designed to achieve the strategic objectives of 'building stronger communities' include further expansion of investment in Neighbourhood Renewal; Neighbourhood Houses; the Community Capacity Building Initiative; community transport; volunteering; and the use of schools as community facilities. Resources are also committed to support the continued expansion of local government community planning and community indicator initiatives, DVC local community strengthening teams, 'In the Community' discussion forums, streamlined community grants systems, community enterprise initiatives; and community sector capacity building. A series of further partnership experiments with local government and community organisations designed to reduce place-based disadvantage have also been funded along with the 'Agora Think Tank' as a forum for community sector, business, local and state government discussion about future community strengthening challenges and opportunities.

Importantly *A Fairer Victoria*, along with the complementary DVC publication *Actions for Community Strengthening with Local Government*, identifies a number of new machinery of government initiatives designed to engage and link citizens and policy-makers at local and regional levels. This includes a strong commitment to mandating local government as a key platform for community strengthening initiatives and the establishment of a new system of Regional Managers Forums. These forums will bring together state government regional

managers, local government CEOs and other regional stakeholders as an implementation mechanism enabling more joined up regional and community development strategies.

Assessing the outcomes and significance of Victorian community strengthening initiatives

A full-scale evaluation of the outcomes of recent the Victorian experiments in community strengthening is well beyond the scope of the paper. However, the following comments provide some of the initial indications of impacts, lessons and implications.

Firstly, the in-principle commitment of the Bracks Government to the language, ideas and practice of community strengthening is now clear as it ts preparedness to back that commitment with significant investments in programs and capacity building. This includes an evolving recognition of the need to shift community strengthening from a disparate range of unconnected experimental programs to a more integrated approach to changing the way government operates.

At a program level, the most comprehensive evaluation to date has been of the Neighbourhood Renewal program (Ministry of Housing 2005; Klein 2005). Independent evaluation of the initial (12-month) outcomes of Neighbourhood Renewal projects indicates:

- 50 per cent resident participation in governance of most projects
- 14 per cent net perceived improvement in community pride (with the Long Gully project registering a 27 per cent net improvement)
- 1000 community job places created and 60 per cent of trainees going into ongoing employment or further education
- student absenteeism reduced in targeted schools (40 per cent in the Glendonald Estate area in the Latrobe Valley)
- 15 per cent net perceived improvement in local education and training opportunities (with the Wendouree West project registering a 25 per cent net improvement)
- an average 37per cent net improvement in resident perception of housing conditions (with the Fitzroy project registering a 63 per cent net improvement)
- property crime down in 60 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Crimes against the person down in 90 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Significant reductions in crime in 'hotspots', with one area in the Latrobe Valley registering a 41per cent reduction.
- an overall net improvement in resident perceptions about government performance (in the Fitzroy project there was a 38 per cent net improvement).

On a more qualitative and anecdotal level, long-term Wendouree West resident and resident group member Faye Macintosh noted that she sees a genuine difference between older methods of community consultation and the present Neighbourhood Renewal project: "We weren't told, we were listened to — we were asked what we thought, what we felt" (Nichols and Wiseman 2003). Her colleague in the Wendouree West Residents group Kevin Waugh

speaks with enthusiasm about the local benefits of a project he initially greeted with scepticism. “Now, when people walk down the street they’re not looking at the ground, they actually look up and talk to you, look you in the eye. They want to actually talk to each other.” In a few years, he says, Wendouree West “will be a great place to live. It will be a community that actually believes in itself, an inclusive community, everybody here will want to be here” (Nichols and Wiseman 2003).

At a state-wide level the Department for Victorian Communities (2004) has begun to explore ways of collecting data on community strengthening trends and outcomes. Table 1 summarises initial trends in these ‘community strengthening indicators’ for the period 2001–03.

Table 1. Summary of trends in key community strength indicators, 2001–03

Indicator	Percent 2001→2003	Change
Feeling safe walking alone down the street after dark	55 → 59%	▲
Enjoying diversity, including multiculturalism, in the local area	69 → 73%	▲
Feeling there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important	36 → 42%	▲
Feeling valued by society	42 → 55%	▲
Volunteering	32 → 35%	▲
Members of organised groups — all groups	68 → 63%	▼
Members of organised groups — sports groups	29 → 28%	➤
Members of organised groups — school groups	15 → 15%	➤
Attendance at local community events		n/a*
Ability to get help from friends, family or neighbours	92 → 92%	➤
Ability to raise \$2000 within two days in an emergency	79 → 80%**	▲

Source: DVC (2004)

These trends are, of course, at a very broad level in an initial two-year period and considerable care is obviously needed in attributing causation. The next step here is to begin the process of establishing appropriate, locally-owned indicators and the data sets to support them. One important step in this direction has been the DVC publication in May 2005 of the first state-wide set of local community strengthening indicators at LGA level (DVC 2005). At the same time the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation has funded a longer-term project to establish an agreed set of community wellbeing indicators and data sets related to support and build on local community engagement and community planning strategies (VicHealth 2005)

A range of evaluative and reflective assessments of the lessons to be learned from the first phases of new community strengthening initiatives in Victoria are now emerging and confirm

lessons being learned from similar experiences elsewhere in Australia and internationally (Howe and Cleary 2001; Raysmith 2004; West 2004; Klein 2005). Successful community strengthening projects commonly have:

- strong local community leadership and ownership
- strong leadership and support from state and local governments
- effective engagement of a wide range of community, public and private sector stakeholders
- high levels of trust and excellent communication between all partners
- clearly defined and agreed goals
- appropriate resources and skilled staff
- relevant training opportunities
- clear, tangible benefits
- investment in long-term sustainability and capacity building.

While the specific roles, responsibilities and capacities of differing spheres of government vary, useful actions that governments can take to support community strengthening outcomes include:

- creating a supportive community and public policy environment by articulating and demonstrating commitment to values and practice of community strengthening
- providing adequate investment in core public infrastructure (schools, hospitals, transport, etc.)
- building policy-making and policy implementation practice based on principles of respectful partnerships with communities — and with other public and private sector organisations
- creating supportive public sector culture and practice
- developing integrated 'triple bottom line' policy frameworks
- creating supportive institutions and mechanisms
- funding pilot and demonstration projects
- funding ongoing community strengthening programs — infrastructure, information, linkages, etc.
- supporting the development of skills and capacity
- supporting development of research tools and data sets to measure progress and learn from successes and failures
- supporting evaluation and learning — and disseminating the outcomes of this work.

Broader implications

Sceptical critics such as Scanlon (2004), Brennan and Cass (2002), Carson (2004) and Mowbray (2004) have suggested that a good deal of the emerging theory and practice of community strengthening and social capital is best understood as a woolly rhetorical blanket thrown over the ugly old scars of capitalist business as usual. They suggest that many claims about the benefits of strengthening social bonds and increasing civic participation are

overblown and that attempts to present local self help, volunteering and social entrepreneurship as panaceas for deeply-rooted structural inequalities and injustices are naïve and misleading.

Many of these warnings are justified and salutary. While local strategies can create significant improvements in community infrastructure, capacity and wellbeing, they are no substitute for the progressive state and national tax, income security, service delivery and labour market policies needed to create the conditions for broad and sustainable reductions in poverty, inequality and social exclusion. No amount of local community capacity building can substitute for long-term investment in the core public infrastructure of schools, hospitals, health centres, housing, transport, parks and meeting places that provide the real foundations for resilient and healthy communities. No amount of citizen consultation and civic engagement can overcome the corrosive impact on public trust of the 'children overboard' and 'weapons of mass destruction' fiascos — nor replace the urgent need to democratise political and corporate decision-making at regional, national and global levels.

However, there are at least four ways in which a thoughtful and reflective approach to strengthening local community connections and institutions can play a positive role in opening up space for the new political ideas and practices needed to challenge the dominant public policy logic of neo-liberal globalisation.

Firstly, the re-emergence of mainstream public debate about the virtues of cooperation, collaboration and contribution provides a welcome antidote to the dominant discourse of competitive and acquisitive individualism. One of the greatest challenges for supporters of political and social movements seeking to move beyond neo-liberal globalisation has been the search for a common, compelling language to articulate alternative values, hopes and dreams. The simplistic calculus of social capital investment is far from being a sufficient answer. The broader challenge is to reclaim and renew the radical potential of the language of 'community' and 'society'; of mutual respect and mutual support; of common ground, common wealth and common humanity; and of social justice and solidarity. If the advocates of community strengthening have provided some public space for reopening these debates and discussions then have they have done some useful service.

Secondly, the rediscovery of some of the older insights about community development under the new banners of neighbourhood renewal and local capacity building has provided an important platform for rebuilding investment in basic community infrastructure. It should not take rocket science — or social capital scientists — to see that towns or suburbs that are healthy for people to live in need meeting places, sporting and cultural facilities, parks, banks, health centres, schools and railway stations. And they also need people with the leadership, communication and organisational skills to run clubs, committees, services and campaigns. Much of this vital social and physical infrastructure has been swept away by successive

waves of economic rationalist cutbacks. Evidence about the positive social and economic impact of good public spaces and strong social networks can therefore make a useful contribution in mounting the case for reinvesting in core community facilities and skills.

Thirdly, debates about social connectedness and community strengthening have contributed to the development of a more fertile environment for exploring new state and civil society institutions and relationships. Can we imagine alternative banking and financial institutions more responsive to savers rather than shareholders — and to local rather than transnational investment priorities? Recent experiments in community banking might provide some starting points. Can we revisit earlier experiments in industrial democracy and cooperative employment in ways which are relevant to a globalising knowledge based economy? (Mayo and Thake 1997). The renewal of interest in local economic development and community enterprise projects might provide some of the testing grounds. On a broader front, reimagining progressive political and social practices clearly requires something more than crude choices between private charity, corporate philanthropy or state dependency. Are there ways in which critical reflection on the strengths and limits of community strengthening can trigger more creative thinking about politics and policy-making that transcend the sterile debate between advocates of state and market-driven solutions?

Fourthly, new models for engaging citizens and communities in identifying and agreeing on social, economic, environmental and cultural priorities have the potential to open up larger questions about the actions and institutions needed to revitalise democratic practices (Bogason 2000). New models of democratic governance for schools, health centres, water catchments or urban development can contribute to learning about ways of striking the right balance between local accountability and ensuring an equitable distribution of national — and international resources. Citizen juries, citizen dialogues, consensus conferences and deliberative polling can be valuable tools for broadening the range of voices heard in public debate and encouraging more informed discussions of complex and contentious policy and planning issues (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). This in turn has the potential to contribute to public policy decision-making made less on the basis of manipulating and massaging public opinion and more on the basis of 'public judgement' arising from informed and respectful dialogue between citizens from diverse starting points.

For all these reasons the kinds of community strengthening — and community engagement — initiatives being explored in Victoria and elsewhere are best understood not as panaceas but as useful contributions to the tool kit needed to build more democratic, less market-driven frameworks, institutions and practices for public policy decision-making.

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