Central Dandenong: Australia's comeback city? Lessons about revitalisation for diverse places.

Contacts

Prof Helen Sullivan
helen.sullivan@anu.edu.au
61 2 6125 3067

Crawford School of Public Policy
College of Asia and the Pacific
J. G. Crawford Building
132 Lennox Crossing
The Australian National University

Dr. Hayley Henderson
hayley.henderson@anu.edu.au

Crawford School of Public Policy
College of Asia and the Pacific
J. G. Crawford Building
132 Lennox Crossing
The Australian National University

Prof Brendan Gleeson
brendan.gleeson@unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute
Level 3, Melbourne School of Design (Bldg 133)
Masson Road, The University of Melbourne

Executive Summary

This Research Briefing shares lessons learnt about the experience of revitalisation in Central Dandenong, Melbourne. The key messages are for policymakers as well as community and business leaders concerned about revitalisation, especially in culturally diverse centres suffering from urban decline. Our research on Central Dandenong was conducted as part of a comparative study of seven other European and North American city experiences and offers insights for both Australian and international contexts. Overall, we found that both the Victorian Government and City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) along with the strongly connected private and community sectors have delivered strong advancements in revitalisation since 2005 with some areas of work that require ongoing and deeper attention to realise the benefits of the public investment made.

There are three overarching lessons about what has worked so far:

A commitment to redistributive policy focused on redressing decline.

Significant public investment and the appointment of experienced and resourceful professionals to the early tasks of revitalisation laid the groundwork for lasting transformation. Both the Victorian Government and the CGD were prepared to undertake a programme of great difficulty and importance in terms of redressing disadvantage, including creatively experimenting with innovative practices that aren't universally supported nor have been considered successful, for example in applying the Infrastructure Recovery Charge. The Victorian Government's commitment to revitalisation was initiated with appropriate funding and the appointment of highly skilled personnel capable of designing and delivering a clear plan to overcome operational roadblocks and to deliver physical transformations early on. Revitalisation was then carried forward through local leadership with high spending on targeted projects. It is important to highlight as well that revitalisation has been carried out in the Australian context where, in contrast to many Western cities affected by austerity politics and weak social protection, redistribution continues to be a strong feature of social policy generally.

A capacity to leverage deep-rooted, local networks in and between government, community and businesses to collaboratively undertake revitalisation initiatives.

Investment and focused work from within the public sector are not sufficient to undertake revitalisation. In Central Dandenong the governments' programme of revitalisation was enhanced not only by their ethic of collaborating with local stakeholders on a "shared vision" but especially because leaders within the community and businesses, from education providers and faith groups to trade associations and private sector committees, already knew each other, worked together and were predisposed to collaboration with the purpose of collectively improving local fortunes. Active and organised local leaders provided vital input on strategy design, partnered or led on delivering revitalising initiatives and put their organisations to work on addressing gaps where they existed and advocating for governments to maintain a focus on revitalising Central Dandenong. The agency demonstrated by these sectors and the fluid capacity of government to satisfactorily mediate in responding to their needs has been a vital component of revitalisation.

A focus on pursuing (cultural) pluralism in the context of revitalisation.

People of culturally diverse backgrounds in metropolitan Melbourne have continued to find unique and enhanced opportunities in Central Dandenong during the revitalisation process. First, policies of different scales (from the specific revitalisation programme to general social policy in health or education) are generally imbued with an ethic of cultural pluralism, whereby differences are accommodated, respected and

even celebrated. Second, housing affordability across diverse typologies has been maintained, ensuring social mixing and experiences of "everyday multiculturalism" (Lobo, 2010) in the area, which has been important for building mutual understanding and a place identity based foremost on cultural diversity. Third, the mix of different land uses attracts many people to the area and activates the public realm, from the Dandenong Market, the library and train station to Harmony Square and cultural precincts, in a way that also supports safety, casual encounters and builds understanding across groups. Public realm infrastructure and services also provide many opportunities for lasting connections to be made, for example in language courses run by churches and neighbourhood houses. Finally, many migrants access education, training and employment opportunities. The ethic of cultural pluralism in general permeates society in Central Dandenong, which was taken up in revitalisation and helped to build conviviality.

This Research Briefing elaborates these findings from our investigation on revitalisation in Central Dandenong conducted between 2015 and 2018. It provides insights about the lessons for revitalisation and it points to potential threats to realising its potential over time. Faltering public investment in key policy areas, such as migrant settlement services, as well as exclusion from key opportunities experienced by some groups, such as under-participation in the workforce by migrant women, are some of the undermining tendencies that deserve policy attention. Also, our research highlights that no new significant office or residential developments have been realised and that small-scale retail and commercial activation has stalled in recent years, necessitating a renewed focus by governments to continue activating the area. Despite the fragility of revitalisation in facing some of these threats, the Central Dandenong experience offers hope and clear lessons for action for other local and international settings dealing with legacies of crises in terms of structural economic shifts, job insecurity and growing socio-spatial polarisation.

Specifically, this Briefing offers the following lessons about revitalisation:

> Public investment should be commensurate with the necessary first steps to initiate revitalisation. Mechanisms can be built into publicly-led revitalisation programs for cost recovery, for example through surplus value capture or recovery charges. The initial public investment should enable infrastructure improvements, deliver key public projects ("catalyst" and "demonstration" type projects) and remove roadblocks for private investment (e.g. through land parcel reconfigurations). While there was significant initiating investment, ongoing commitment by the largest funding body, the Victorian Government, has waned with some of the strategy's original projects remaining unfunded and, without ongoing monitoring and evaluation, no new specific revitalising initiatives have been proposed over the last decade. Subsequently private sector investment has also dropped away. Ongoing policy attention and public investment is required to both monitor the process of revitalisation and, where necessary, to address areas of revitalisation that remain stalled or present threats for future decline.

> Revitalisation strategy requires a clear plan with streamlined processes for delivery. In this case, though controversial and not without issues, the application of special zoning and the transfer of planning powers to the Victorian Government, along with special forums for collaboration and negotiation, worked to accelerate implementation.

> Experienced personnel with local knowledge and strong interpersonal skills provide the best support for agile and flexible delivery. In this case, both the Victorian Government and the CGD relied on the relational skills and technical knowledge of key people to build partnerships which gave traction to the programme of revitalisation.

> Just as it is important to acknowledge the relational and political skills of key personnel tasked with leading revitalisation strategies, it is equally important to design effective formal

structures to support collaboration between levels of government and to ensure all of the necessary areas of government (departments) are represented, thereby maximising opportunities for policy synergy (and to avoid missed opportunities of reinforcing revitalisation) as well as shared planning and budgeting.

> The capacity for local government to effectively lead part of the revitalisation effort is important for long term success. This is important not just because local governments are the natural leaders of local processes of change, but because in contexts where macro-policy can fluctuate often, local communities cannot depend on secure, long-term funding for discretionary revitalisation projects. Local leadership in this case was evidenced politically, in the capacity to prioritise investment in one area over others to support revitalisation, as well as it was in financial management and planning: The CDG carefully identified key revitalisation projects, funded them and managed their delivery, while also designing strategies to address problems as they arose (e.g. mitigating gentrification through a new Housing Strategy, proposal to remove paid car-parking in parts of the centre to stimulate retail activity). It was also evidenced throughout the RCD project through consistent participation in collaborative forums with the Victorian Government, where joint problem-solving and knowledge-sharing was common.

> Continued commitment to basic welfare is vital to enabling citizens to partake in the opportunities of revitalisation. Lower levels of government and non-government stakeholders concerned about the longevity of revitalisation efforts should continue to advocate for commitment to basic services that deliver equitable opportunities to local residents, for example in health, education, public transport, migration services and employment assistance.

> The involvement of the beneficiaries of revitalisation is indispensable. Not only is community consultation important, there is a growing role for non-government actors to become organised and participate in the definition and

delivery of revitalisation. The Central Dandenong experience highlights how governments might support the operation of networks that are well-connected to communities (e.g. market traders, inter-faith network) or how networks may evolve to have strong advocacy powers (e.g. South East Manufacturers Alliance or Committee for Dandenong). The interaction between local leaders should be enhanced to deliver revitalisation (e.g. mutual board participation, advisory committees).

> In operationalising the bipartisan support for cultural pluralism in the Australian context, the public sector should ensure special consideration for the recognition of diversity through revitalisation (e.g. through culturally responsive forms of engagement, designing in places of cultural recognition) and continue to encourage and fund initiatives independent of revitalisation that build understanding in the community. This means supporting the many positive contributions being made by cultural groups to revitalisation, including by faith communities, as well as recognising the many benefits of engaging with these communities that are already well-connected to local people and their concerns (e.g. as evidenced in the example of the local Interfaith Network). Special attention should be given to society's most disadvantaged in revitalisation, in this case in responding to the needs of minority migrant groups' different settlement requirements and pathways to inclusion, for example in accessing training and employment.

> Revitalisation strategy requires a strong focus on housing to preserve opportunities for social mixing. A plural society where revitalisation opportunities are afforded to diverse groups requires heightened attention to housing markets, especially in mitigating the negative effects of improvement (i.e. gentrification). A housing focus should at least address the need to increase dwelling provision, increase typology diversity and maintain affordability. This was not a central feature of the initial RCD program and as a subsequent focus of revitalisation is more challenging to address.

> The mix of land uses and the design of the public realm should enhance the quality of short and lasting interactions between people. In this regard, revitalisation in Central Dandenong has been very effective in intermixing land uses and enhancing public spaces and services (e.g. library, the market, retail, grocery and coffee stores, university and TAFE facilities, pop-up park, civic square, the Drum Theatre, cultural precincts). Many public spaces are periodically used for special events and festivals as well. The way people go about their daily lives, in public spaces as well as through shared organised activities, provides multiple opportunities for building intercultural understanding and tolerance. The improvement and activation of public spaces has also led to an improved sense of safety.

> Revitalisation requires a focus on education and employment to equitably deliver opportunities to its planned beneficiaries. While improvements can be furthered in Central Dandenong especially for minority groups, revitalisation has proven how new opportunities to access education can be provided and how new opportunities in employment can be enhanced, for example through food retailing, health services, construction and residential care services.

Introduction

This Research Briefing was developed based on a study of collaboration in governing revitalisation in Central Dandenong, Melbourne. The research was conducted between 2015 and 2018 on a decade-long period of revitalisation (2005-2015), which is still underway today through the efforts of multiple institutional, business and non-profit actors to redress urban decline in Central Dandenong. In 2005 the Victorian Government assigned $290 million to initiate revitalisation through the Revitalising Central Dandenong (RCD) programme, while the City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) has shared carriage of the renewal effort investing at least $100 million in specific projects to support revitalisation over the period studied. Revitalisation has occurred in collaboration with a diverse range of non-government actors, from tertiary institutions and traders' groups to welfare non-profit organisations and churches. Our research involved policy and statistical analysis, as well as thirty-eight key stakeholder interviews across these diverse stakeholder groups. It is the role each of these groups have played and the interactions between them in support of revitalisation that formed the focus points of this study.

The uniqueness of the research conducted is that it involved the comparative study of collaboration in urban governance relative to seven European and North American experiences. The broader study examined how collaborative governance practices between government tiers, policy areas and with non-government actors in urban policy was affected by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and any subsequent "austerity governance," such as public spending cuts, reconfigurations of government apparatuses and punitive approaches to managing households out of work. For this reason, the conclusions from the Central Dandenong experience of revitalisation are held in contrast with other international experiences where relevant lessons can be offered.

This Briefing starts out by offering a short background discussion of why revitalisation in Central Dandenong was selected as a case study and how it can be understood in relation to global trends. It positions changes to funding that affect the revitalisation project as part of an ongoing Australian ethic of economic rationalism and as an artefact of political dynamics as opposed to any austerity program repeatedly found in the other case studies. The Brief then outlines three major findings that have supported effective revitalisation in Central Dandenong with multiple components for understanding what works and the main factors uncovered that threaten the process of revitalisation underway. Lastly, concluding remarks offer potential ideas about governing revitalisation in the future with key lessons.

Background

Why Central Dandenong in this international study of austerity and collaboration?

The logic behind the selection of eight cases was that they were similar insofar as they are Western cities with a history of practicing collaborative governance, in which changes to public spending patterns had impacted the course of urban policy over recent years. They were different in terms of the salience, severity and duration of any funding changes, the exact nature of collaborative governance, and the local traditions through which governance practices unfold. Central Dandenong was selected as the Australian case because:

> It is **representative of place-based urban renewal** undertaken across Australia and internationally predominantly since the 1990s. It reflects a focus on targeted social investment within a broader context of fiscal conservativism (for more information see: *Henderson, Sullivan, & Gleeson, 2018*).

> The initial Revitalising Central Dandenong (RCD) introduced by the Victorian Government as well as initiatives driven by the local government **incorporated a range of actors.**

> The duration of the project, from its initial debate in the late 1990s through to its current implementation, enabled a comprehensive examination of governance practices in a single area through **multiple changing political cycles and public spending patterns.**

> A history of urban decline and the socio-economic indicators suggested that the community is relatively disadvantaged compared to the metropolitan area and, therefore, **the assumption was that any introduced "austerity" measures would "bite" hardest there.** In this regard, the case was selected in 2014 in anticipation of an austerity programme signalled by the early policies of the Abbott federal government (2013-15).

When the large comparative study was proposed in 2013 the international team was interested in studying a range of different responses to public spending changes that were affecting long term policy initiatives in Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester, Nantes, Melbourne and Montreal. Responses included governance regime changes, resistance movements, revolt, acceptance or "austerity realism" as well as possibilities of "renaissance," recovery and ongoing confidence despite periods of economic uncertainty, including through greater government involvement and "insourcing" rather than outsourcing in delivering urban policy. While most other cities in the study highlighted the impacts of a retreating state, research on Central Dandenong illuminated many possibilities untried and uncontemplated in other places precisely because of the strong role of multiple tiers of government in driving revitalisation in an area affected by urban decline.

The other outliers to "austere neoliberalism" are Nantes and Barcelona. On the one hand, while Nantes is affected by cuts and tax reforms, it might be characterised as "Keynesian" in pursuing counter measures from a relatively robust local fiscal base and a growth mentality. On the other hand, the facts on the ground changed in Barcelona with the election of Barcelona en Comu on a progressive political platform that offered policy alternatives to austerity.

Many of the other cities also experience problems associated with urban decline, reducing their communities' capacity to respond to economic, environmental and social change. The process of decline is typically evidenced in failing retail, vacant buildings, public realm deterioration, stressed services and stagnating population numbers as well as rising social challenges, including growing unemployment and poverty. A centre's disuse and decline can occur for a variety of reasons: for example, like in Central Dandenong, due to contracting local manufacturing sectors, poor past planning decisions (e.g. shopping mall developments) and the rapid suburbanisation of neighbouring areas that can attract residents

to move out. These reasons have prompted governments and other local stakeholders in business and community to seek to revive their urban centres, for example through new or improved local amenities, services, housing, infrastructure and job-creating economic activity.

What has been achieved to date through revitalisation in Central Dandenong?

Leadership in redressing urban decline through planned revitalisation in Central Dandenong has sat with both the state and local governments. At the beginning of the process, between 2005 and 2010, the Victorian Government took on a strong leadership role with a highly skilled and locally based team to manage the complexities of commencing the revitalisation effort. This included undertaking broad consultation to finalise a master plan for Central Dandenong, negotiating land acquisitions as part of the development plan, identifying and carrying out major public realm (public space, roads, infrastructure) improvements, coordinating with other areas of government to align project programming, setting up the innovative recovery charge and working with the community and local government to manage the initial phase of the project.

Representatives from the CGD provided vital local knowledge and connections to local leaders during this time and from 2010 has led revitalisation. The CGD invested in major projects to support revitalisation between 2005 and 2015, such as upgrading the market and theatre as well as the relocation and redevelopment of the municipal building, with a state-of-the-art library and public square (more detail in Section 3.2). It should also be mentioned that all tiers of government fund grant programs and outsource some areas of social policy that have fundamentally reinforced revitalisation, for example from supporting strong inter-faith relations and multicultural events to facilitating access to migrant settlement in the area.

Collaboration with and between non-government actors is a strong feature of revitalisation. Individual traders and business owners have invested in the area as well as organised networks of collaboration to advocate for further improvements to the area that support economic activity, such as the longstanding South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance or the Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce and the more recent Committee for Dandenong. Large and small non-government organisations (NGOs) operate to deliver vital social services, while volunteers from many churches also provide support to disadvantaged households in the community, especially asylum seekers, former refugees and other disadvantaged migrant groups. Tertiary education and training businesses choose to operate in Central Dandenong (e.g. Deakin University, nearby Chisholm TAFE).

Leaders from the public sector, private business, education providers, NGOs and churches often work together with a view to reinforcing improvement processes, for example by sitting on one another's respective boards and designing shared training-to-employment programs. Many of these relationships and networks predate planned revitalisation and have served the process immensely, providing avenues for gaining insights about local realities and for providing input into the design process, but also in reinforcing its delivery with their own continued service. Revitalisation has also strengthened some networks by offering a positive project to galvanise their initiatives.

The collective investments and approach to delivery of revitalisation strategies have led to tangible improvements lauded by most of the thirty-eight interviewees drawn from different sectors who participated in this research. Many traders said that their anxieties during major works associated with the revitalisation, for example about the possibility of losing income, were allayed when transformation occurred; they thought Central Dandenong "looked fantastic" (I35) or "a lot better for it" (I27). As another business person commented:

> Dandenong has been revitalised looks wise and with the injection of all these different cultures and nationalities that are now here, it's evolving into an interesting multi-cultural, international place… I think it is working. If you look at the main street of Dandenong, there's been a lot of money revitalising that, there's a lot of infrastructure going in, there's a lot more new buildings going in. People are investing a lot of money here and by doing that, they are showing that it's an important place and people feel good being connected with something that's growing and positive (I25).

We also talked to community members who recounted how they felt safer and that it was now a "very vibrant city" (I27). Multiple local service providers and representatives from NGOs were also generally pleased with the outcomes of revitalisation. For example, one person who worked in the library pointed out the "vital connection" between the beautification of the area while delivering improved accessibility to basic services:

> …where we were before next to the old market … it was just a sort of dead dying area. So council obviously have had a very far reaching overview and futuristic thinking to come in and put money into this space, vitalise this space and that naturally then brings it all up. I mean I remember coming to an Afghan restaurant here maybe four or five years ago and being quite scared in Thomas Street. But now you can see this life here and we've got Centrelink, we've got DHS…Shops are opening. They've revitalised the station, we've got Harmony Square…it's vital (I32).

In general, the improvements to public space and key facilities, such as the library and market, have led to a growing sense of pride in place, delivered important services and provided opportunities for encounter. The designation of cultural precincts was especially noted in creating a sense of place and in attracting people to the area, for small-scale commerce and dining. The project has not yet delivered on the goal to attract significant private investment and development in the centre, such as new major office buildings, hotels or residential buildings, indicating further work is required to solidify its position as a centre for investment and development location. Interviewees showed interest in pursuing ongoing commitment by higher levels of government, for example with the Victorian Government's support of catalyst projects or the Federal Government's investment in the area through a "city deal," suggesting this would support delivery of some of the RCD's original objectives to bring in more significant private investment.

Beyond the physical improvements to place, it is difficult to pinpoint or attribute economic resilience or community well-being to one or even multiple actions associated with the revitalisation. Our research suggests that it is a fragile combination of multiple factors that have made Central Dandenong a centre on its way to becoming an Australian "comeback" city. The proceeding lessons cover these factors; many are directly associated with the revitalisation process and others are longstanding features of the community, attributes of other public services or business activity. What is abundantly clear is that Central Dandenong has maintained or improved a range of economic and social outcomes, which stands in stark contrast to many international cases of crises and decline associated with the GFC and, in many cases, austerity policies.

In Central Dandenong, the population almost doubled between 2006 and 2016 from nearly 17,000 to 30,000 while in many other urban centres, such as in Athens, the population in the centre of the city has declined while the rate of homelessness has increased (indicators of urban decline).

Unemployment in Dandenong is high relative to the Melbourne and Australian contexts, though was reduced from 15.3% in 2001 to 13.4% in 2016. In contrast, unemployment in almost all other centres we studied rose, for example in Barcelona to 18.6% in 2012 (25% in Spain).

**Population
Central Dandenong**

17,000
2006

30,000
2016

The cost of rent in Dandenong stayed below the line of rental affordability of 30% of median household income during the period of revitalisation studied (ABS, Censuses 2006-2016) and the offer of private dwellings increased in number and diversity (type and size). While gentrification is a threat given trends in decreasing affordability, overall economic indicators suggest that revitalisation has to date occurred in a way that is compatible with average household needs and ability to pay.

Furthermore, revitalisation has occurred all while Dandenong has become increasingly diverse culturally, linguistically and religiously in a comparatively harmonious way, with most interviewees citing "multiculturalism" and the diverse character of the neighbourhood as its strongest asset (refer to Section 4.3 below). The everyday multicultural interactions that occur in a normalised and constructive way stand in contrast to places like Baltimore or even Leicester where, in a context of austerity measures, support for multicultural governance has deteriorated and equal access to services and grants programs has been undermined.

Lastly, it is possible to see the effects of change in the employment opportunities available in Central Dandenong and its surrounds, whereby jobs lost in manufacturing are being replaced in the growing industries of health services, food retailing, grocery stores, building services and aged care residential services. Interviewees from the public sector indicated greater investment in the area was needed to continue to increase employment, in particular in white collar jobs. The proceeding section of this Brief outlines the strong points of revitalisation to date as well as some undermining tendencies to be observed and addressed.

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What has worked in revitalising Central Dandenong?

Redistribution for redressing locational disadvantage

The Victorian Government's kick-start to transformation

Addressing urban decline means operating in an urban area with complex challenges. On the one hand, the physical setting can present challenges, for example, with irregular land parcels, dilapidated buildings and run-down infrastructure. The community itself can be beset with social problems. In fact, Central Dandenong has experienced high relative socio-economic disadvantage in Victoria since at least 2001 (ABS). On the other hand, the scale of investment required to initiate both physical and social transformation usually surpasses what local governments can afford. Revitalisation strategies also occur in contexts of low confidence, where businesses are hesitant to invest, and in places where community members at times feel fear or shame. The early commitment to revitalisation made in 2005 by the Victorian Government was transformative across all these domains. The level of funding and the highly skilled team that operated with a clear plan and collaborative ethic ensured revitalisation became firmly embedded.

Public investment in the Victorian Government's RCD initiative surpasses most state-funded renewal initiatives (with the exception of Melbourne Docklands), including the more recent Geelong revitalisation project (and federal City Deal). While an initial investment of AUS$290 million was made, the overall net cost to the state budget has been estimated (Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2011) at between AUS$110-120 million after land sales and income recovered through the infrastructure recovery charge (5% of all sales). The capacity to inject significant funds early in the revitalisation process enabled infrastructure improvement and

delivered key public projects. The funded operation included the public acquisition of key sites (over 150) (negotiated as well as compulsorily) to create larger land parcels for development of public projects as well as the sale of land for projects of scale by the private sector. Physical change ensued in the centre, including the consolidation of the Department of Health and Human Services tenancies in a new building and the physical transformation of the main street (Lonsdale).

These interventions kick-started revitalisation and generally served to generate positive flow-on effects, including a change in community experiences as well as "confidence" among many established businesses and some limited new investment by the private sector (one aspect of revitalisation yet to succeed). In the business community, "proprietors remain buoyant that, notwithstanding any of the external challenges that they will face from time to time, that they will survive and prosper" (I3). One condition identified that contributes to this positivity was the continued investment by government in infrastructure to send the "right signals" to the private sector to continue to locate and invest in the area.

In some cases, where initial funding isn't enough to deliver fast physical transformation (e.g. because revenue-raising responsibilities are transferred to the development authority[1] through land sales, selling development rights) the process of revitalisation can become stalled, especially in times of economic crises, undermining confidence and long-term transformation. For this reason, it is vitally important that revitalisation goals are matched with commensurate funding and early infrastructure improvements to successfully initiate a project of this magnitude.

Early project planning of the Victorian Government's RCD initiative included important steps to overcome operational and procedural roadblocks. This

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1   It is also relevant to note that while in some international experiences the transfer of authority to an arms-length development authority has been successful in diminishing the impact of fluctuating policy by changing administrations, this was not the case in Central Dandenong. It is worth investigating an approach to delegate authority to an arms-length agency in a way that could provide stability through administration changes (ironically, however, self-funding capacity has been shown to support this approach, also mixed representation on administering boards).

provided investors, developers and local businesses with a clear message about commitment to revitalisation and clear processes to follow. In particular, the area subject to RCD was zoned for "comprehensive development" and, importantly, planning powers were transferred to the Minister to streamline approval processes on major projects following a master plan developed in collaboration with local actors. Ceding of planning powers to the Victorian Government was viewed as essential by participants in the research from both local and state governments for facilitating the project, accessing the available funding and in setting up new structures for collaborative work. Nevertheless, the relationship dynamic was tense at times given the loss of direct decision-making powers at the local level and the exclusion of local actors from some decision-making forums (e.g. budgeting). Overall, the benefits of accessing the RCD program outweighed concerns about loss of planning powers and over time the collaborative work between the local and state governments built trust and project efficacy.

A specific collaborative forum was established between the CGD, the development agency (then VicUrban) and the Department (planning) which provided recommendations to deal with project planning needs and procedural blockages. A forum was also created for developers to discuss proposals prior to application to improve outcomes and ensure planning requirements were met. Dedicated personnel worked to overcome roadblocks to delivering major projects, including the above-mentioned acquisition of small and irregular configurations of land parcels in the centre area. The State's role in removing considerable roadblocks accelerated what can be a slow commencement to revitalisation and offers precedents to support future revitalisation programs.

In addition to the relatively high level of funding and clear initial planning, the RCD project led by the Victorian Government's development agency was put into action by a dedicated and highly skilled team. Key personnel facilitated timely exchanges on important issues and this approach delivered agile responses to critical issues. The team reached across sectors, from business to community leaders, to engage and understand local needs. The capacity to reach different groups and overcome challenges was a function of the strong interpersonal skills and relationships that existed between key actors, factors of important consideration in the design of interjurisdictional revitalisation programs. "Soft skills of individuals were critical to this project" (I9), including trust and relationship building, leadership, communication and facilitation. It is important to plan in relationship-building time and fora, as it is the "goodwill, partnerships and conversations" that are a vital yet "unofficial part of a project" (I2). As one government planner affirmed, "goodwill and unofficial conversations go a long way" (I14). "A cluster of highly skilled people" (I7) support the "traction and effectiveness" (I9) of these projects. Overall, the project:

> …relied on the likes of (certain people) knowing who the decision-makers were within government, knowing how to get to them, have influence and how to get the decisions made…because we didn't have that well-functioning formal structure, what it came down to was three guys, four guys who just were on the same page and who knew how to work the system to get things done…the fact that we had very capable individuals at the coalface meant that you could overcome a number of the hurdles that you invariably face in these projects. If you didn't have the right individuals in those spaces, some of those hurdles could have just stopped things dead in their tracks" (I1).

Despite significant investment by the Victorian Government, initially with commencement funding and since with sporadic improvement projects in the local area (e.g. road crossing removals 2014/15, 'Little India' precinct recognition 2016), their financial, policy and human resource support for revitalisation has fallen away over time. For example, significant unplanned changes were introduced when the Victorian Government's development agency was repurposed following changes in administration in 2010 and again in 2014.

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Most significantly for the revitalisation project, some of the planned catalyst projects remain unfunded and, while some ongoing delivery support is provided by the urban development agency, formal monitoring and evaluation has not occurred since 2011 and no new projects have been introduced to address the evident failings of revitalisation (e.g. lack of commercial activity and new major private investment, threats to housing affordability). The first part of this study was dedicated to understanding why these fluctuations in commitment have occurred, including whether the GFC and any posterior austerity policies were liable. Our research revealed four main justifications for the shifts in public spending patterns made by the Victorian Government, which are elaborated in detail elsewhere (Henderson et al., 2018).

The first though least significant justification relates to the GFC: While austerity measures were not introduced to curb project funding as occurred in many other Western cities during the study period, revitalisation in Central Dandenong experienced some of the flow-on effects of global instability. On the one hand, there was a constrained fiscal setting because of lower revenue raising capacity. This produced cuts in "non-traditional areas of government" (I13) or for "discretionary money" (I14) that supported residents, including settlement services funded by the Federal Government for recently arrived migrants or in emergency relief funding (I6), as well as in day-to-day operational activities and in reducing targets or the scope of projects in the business case that weren't funded in the first stage. On the other hand, global conditions can affect the investment planning of private business, including those responsible for land development in Australian cities. When global conditions change and revenue growth stalls, as it did following the GFC, policy-funding and private investment can be reduced. Some interviewees reported a kind of "panic" among developers (I1; I4) caused by the GFC that halted some redevelopment efforts in Central Dandenong.

The second reason funding commitments to revitalisation in Central Dandenong changed relates to a logical sequence of spending: The revitalisation strategy required higher levels of investment at the outset to cover land acquisition, staff costs and infrastructure delivery then lower costs towards the finalisation of the Victorian Government's stated twenty-year commitment to revitalisation. This perspective of natural progression was also cited in terms of the necessary transfer of responsibility back to the municipal government following a period of State Government stewardship. A positive attribute of the project identified by respondents was the capacity of the CGD in driving revitalisation (see next section). The strong role played by both the city and state, dovetailing each other to cope with changes in administration at different levels of government, is a defining foundational feature of revitalisation in Central Dandenong.

The third factor attributed to fluctuations in funding was the character of the political ideology of the two main party blocs (Labor and Liberal-National): the history of investment in infrastructure and revitalisation highlights how social-democratic Labor governments adopt more interventionist approaches to address market failure and pursue policy goals, while the conservative Liberal National Party promote market-led approaches and limited government involvement. The fourth and final influence on spending shifts is a pattern of discretionary public spending that can be linked to a desire to shape political fortunes. As one ex-member of state parliament explained, while "budgets are mostly fixed, you might have around a billion to spend a year (on)… capital works. It's no surprise that most of it lands on marginal seats. All governments, you know, have that. So what tends to get left in the safe LNP seats and the safe Labor seats tends to be the crumbs" (I13). Or as another interviewee from the private sector explained:

> Dandenong does all the heavy lifting in an area with a number of intergenerational unemployment issues. It really doesn't get the support of both the Federal and the State Governments. Part of its problem is that it's a safe Labor seat. So, what that does is the libs (LNP) tend to ignore us and Labor tends to take us for granted (I3).

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Overall, there are several key lessons to be learnt from the Victorian Government's role in the revitalisation of Central Dandenong. First, the level of initial investment was commensurate with the task of overcoming the multiple and challenging roadblocks to initiating revitalisation. This has also been proven as vital in other cases, for example in housing estate regeneration in England (Evans & Derek, 2000). Second, a highly adept team of professionals experienced in revitalisation and knowledgeable about the particularities of the locality was appointed to manage the investment from the Victorian Government's development agency with an in-situ presence and collaborative ethic. Their interpersonal and soft skills in delivering revitalisation were particularly remarkable.

The combination of these factors meant that a clear plan for transformative action was devised and implemented swiftly, minimising the impact of latter retreat in the Victorian Government's commitment to revitalisation in Central Dandenong. However, because the initial revitalisation effort by the Victorian Government has not been sustained over the long-term, some of the ongoing threats of urban decline have not been fully attended to, including in terms of stimulating private sector investment, a cornerstone objective of the RCD proposal. In contexts of highly fluctuating urban policy when administrations change the capacity to swiftly initiate revitalisation and ensure the smooth transfer of its leadership to the local government proved essential.

A strong local government capable of sustaining revitalisation

Just as the Victorian Government played an essential role in instigating revitalisation, the local government has sustained practices of revitalisation with a clear redistributional ethic. Over the period studied between 2005 and 2015, local government spending on major projects is relatively high compared to other outer metropolitan municipalities and in relation to historic spending by the CGD. It is also high relative to project spending in other areas of the municipality, reflecting a concerted approach to target spending in one disadvantaged area over the period of revitalisation (and a heightened ability to manage the political fallout this generated).

Direct project spending reached approximately $100 million by 2014, including upgrading the Dandenong market and theatre, as well as new projects like the council offices and Dandenong Library (see Table 1 below). Approximately 70% of funding for these improvement works was allocated between 2010 and 2014 when the Victorian Government's investment in RCD had fallen away. The local government has developed a Placemaking Framework which focused first on multiple revitalisation efforts in Central Dandenong including infrastructure upgrades and public realm enhancements. Council also has personnel dedicated to the revitalisation process from city planning to community and economic development.

Table 1. Local Government Expenditure, Major Projects in Central Dandenong 2005-2014

Major Projects	Year	Expenditure
Drum Theatre	2005/06	$13,000,000.00
Dandenong produce market	2006/07	$1,278,153.00
Dandenong produce market upgrade	2008/09	$4,420,000.00
Dandenong produce market upgrade	2009/10	$12,800,000.00
280 Lonsdale Street improvements	2010/11	$1,301,000.00
Dandenong Market major works	2010/11	$1,377,400.00
Municipal Building Project	2011/12	$5,780,000.00
Municipal Building Project	2012/13	$23,160,000.00
Municipal Building Project	2013/14	$33,640,000.00
Dandenong Market major works	2013/14	$1,740,000.00
Afgan Bazaar Streetscape Improvement	2013/14	$1,100,000.00
	Total	**$99,596,553.00**

Sourced from data in Annual Reports (The City of Greater Dandenong, 1999-2016)

The CDG has also sought to address gaps within the original revitalisation programme as they become clear, for example in managing gentrification with the introduction of a new housing strategy.
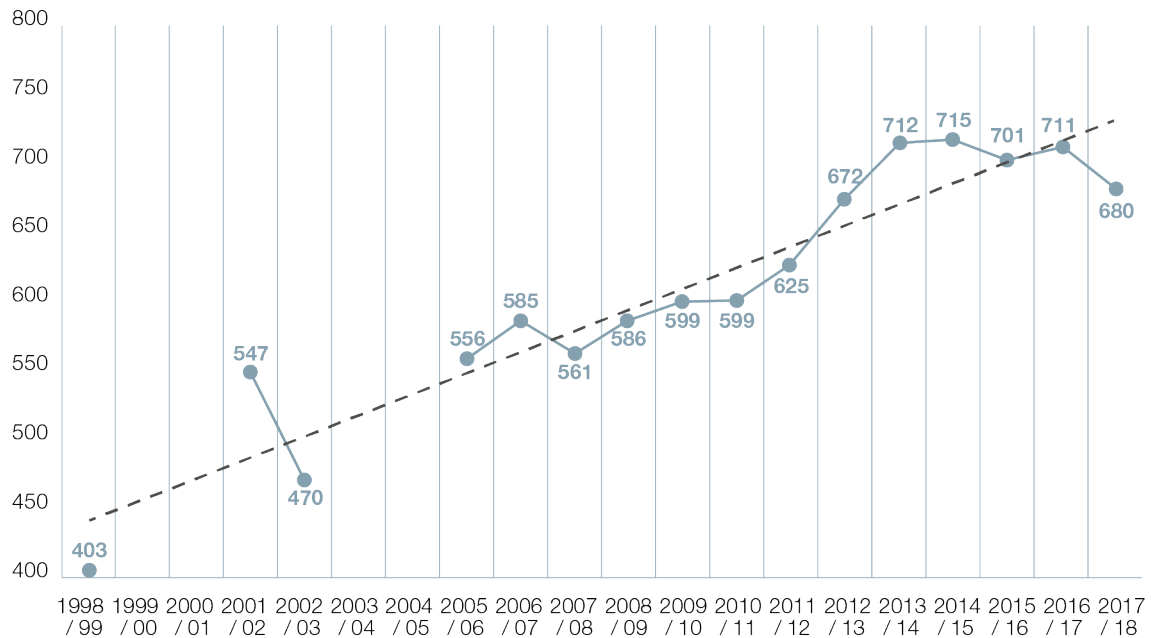
Municipal governments face relative deprivation in many other contexts. In Athens for example, the municipal budget has been reduced by over 20 per cent between 2010-2017 due to cuts in national government grants and a significant fall in tax revenues. Severe cutbacks and the discontinuation of services and programs is commonplace in places like Athens, Dublin and Leicester. The below graphics capture how different the experience has been in the CGD during a time of international crisis and in the absence of austerity policy with a growing number of equivalent full-time staff, increasing revenue (Figure 3) and expenditure (Figure 2). In sum, from this experience it is clear that municipalities with strong skills in financial management and an ability to creatively and skilfully use the powers granted to them, including for example to invest surpluses and reserves in major projects rather than hold them, becomes essential in contexts of fluctuating macro-policy. For the CGD, and in a context of limited revenue-raising capacity, the high level of investment made to support revitalisation efforts between 2005 and 2015 has ensured the continuation of an important programme of social and economic development in one of Melbourne's most disadvantaged and also iconic historical neighbourhoods.

Overall, our research detected an expanded role for the local government in governing revitalisation processes relative to past practices and compared to international experiences based on the strong internal skills on managing revitalisation and financial planning as well as in building alliances with local leaders to generate support for revitalisation. Nevertheless, the capacity of the local state is bounded by the permissions afforded to it by the State Government. Towards the end of this research, the role of the local government had become truncated because of a rate-capping regime introduced by the Victorian Government.

Local autonomy depends on an enabling context and this varies greatly between different State Government administrations. Local governments will need to explore increasingly creative ways to raise revenue for major project works associated with revitalisation. As we can see below (Figure 1) there are emerging challenges in maintaining and growing its now stagnating workforce numbers in a context of rate-capping and policy shifts. Finally, it is important to reiterate that larger projects capable of reverting decline, such as the relocation of a major government agency, new city-shaping infrastructure or in an employment-creating catalyst project, tend to require the investment of higher levels of government which at this stage is not part of the revitalisation initiative.

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Figure 1. Equivalent Full-time Staff, City of Greater Dandenong 1999-2018

## Figure 2. Local Government Expenditure, City of Greater Dandenong Council 1998-2018
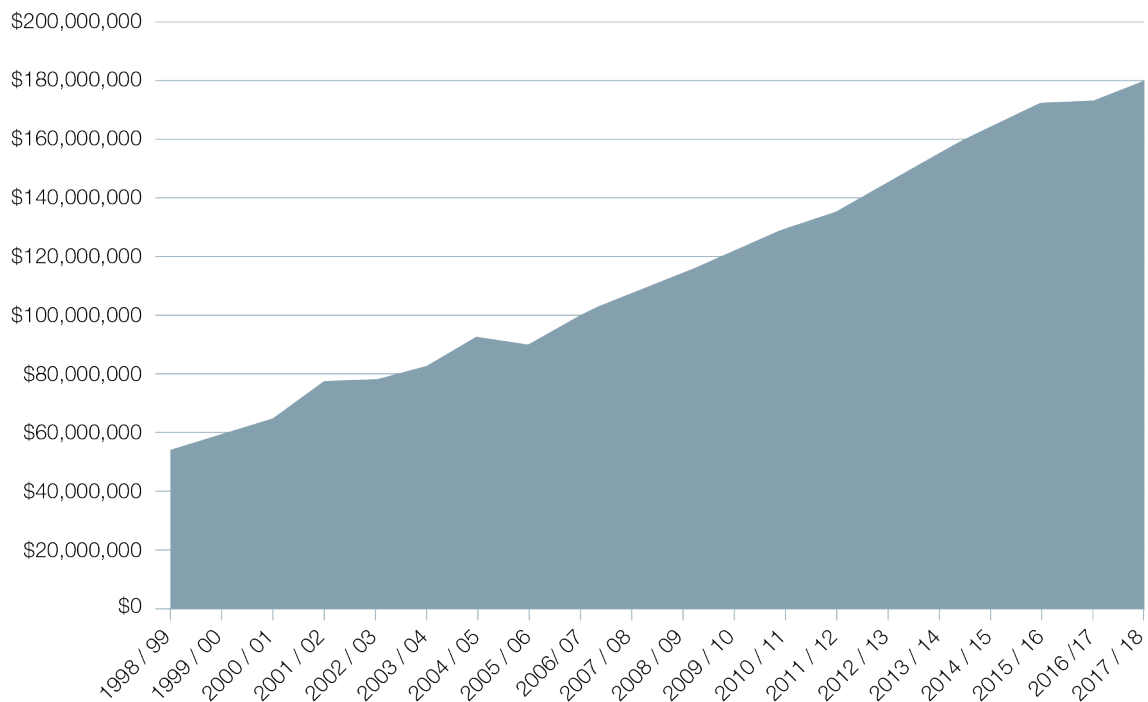
"

There has been a "seismic change" in the role of government "from a provider of big services to an advocacy role, to facilitate collaborative partnerships as a strategic investor (I4).

"

Figure 3. Total Revenue, City of Greater Dandenong Council 1998-2015 (data unavailable for 2003/04 and 2004/05)
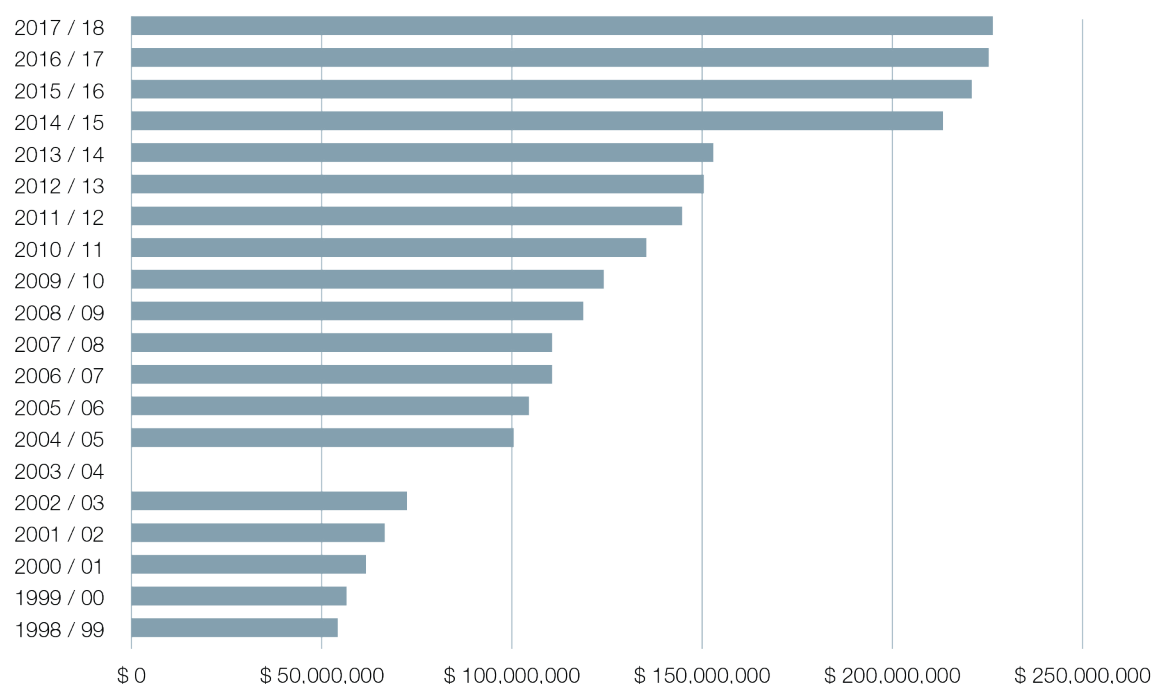
Source: developed from data in Annual Reports (The City of Greater Dandenong, 1999-2016) * No data available for years 2004.

The role of governments in delivering basic services

While the above sections highlighted the specific funding and associated management of spending for revitalisation by the public sector, it is also important to recognise how continued support by all tiers of government for basic services and infrastructure provision provides the backbone for a higher quality of life compared to many international experiences. In fact, these services, everything from public schools, hospitals and transport to English language classes, library rental rooms and internet and community grants, provide the baseline conditions for people to partake in the opportunities of revitalisation. In other contexts where basic services have been drastically curtailed, indicators show deepening poverty with significant numbers of people subsisting at income levels below the poverty threshold (e.g. in Athens 26% of the population).

In contexts where people experience material deprivation and lack access to basic services, it is difficult to mount a case for investment in physical transformations as a necessary part of reversing urban decline and impossible for community stakeholders to take part due to their general exclusion from the opportunities available in the city.

In Central Dandenong many people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities have access to local services that support integration, for example through English language classes or employment advice, as well as equip them in some cases for participation in State-led engagement efforts. Greater Dandenong has one of the highest used public libraries in Australia (20,000 visits per week per branch) and migrant families are the main patrons, benefiting from access to the "literacy officer" for basic forms and community support (I32), meeting spaces (I29), books, internet, support

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groups, activities and events (I30). In contrast, many of these services have been undermined with the closure of a number of libraries as part of austerity measures in the UK. The CGD also offers one of the largest youth services and counselling group in Victoria. It offers services through its neighbourhood houses such as financial literacy, settlement support and computer classes in multiple languages or access to translation services (I22).

The State Government also provides multiple services in Dandenong, as well as organises events and activities for cultural groups. Other organisations funded by government, such as the TAFE and Migrant Resources Centre, also offer services to support diversity and integration, such as English language classes (various) or sports activities (I23). This is not a comprehensive report of the level of access to basic services, it is an illustration of some of the ways government enables citizens to flourish in the (Australian) context as a backdrop to revitalisation.

However, the context of support is being eroded. While governments play a vital role in delivering public services, non-government organisations are taking on a growing role in service delivery. As one Council representative said, there has been a "seismic change" in the role of government "from a provider of big services to an advocacy role, to facilitate collaborative partnerships as a strategic investor" (I4). The sheer number of NGOs highlights their growing reach in service delivery, from sexual health and aged care, to migrant services and youth activities. As one interview commented: "Dandenong is really saturated with agencies" (I22).

In this context of increasing outsourcing, operational challenges are beginning to erode the quality of service provision. First, services may be piecemeal and lack coordination because of a fragmented delivery process between many different groups. For example, many services are delivered through cultural, faith, youth, aged or gender-based groups, providing targeted but not necessarily consistent support. "There are bits and pieces, you know, people in temples and some housewives wanting to do good stuff, but there's no single

organisation" (I20). Second, smaller organisations that depend entirely on government funding are vulnerable when faced with abrupt policy change. "Many organisations rely on State Government or Federal Government money to keep them alive and kicking, and that's not always forth coming, subject to certain policy changes, it may well be that a small group who are doing good work are unable to do it anymore" (I21). Finally, in an attempt for fair distribution of resources, governments may underfund multiple initiatives rather than select fewer projects, limiting the reach of some services.

In the context of high cultural and linguistic diversity, there are specific challenges relating to migrant groups in navigating the complex social service domain. Some interviewees commented that asylum seeker and refugee support services have dwindled given the lack of continuous funding from the Federal Government. Another challenge is capacity building relating to participating in "very" (I19) competitive funding processes, including relating to the fair treatment of applicants of CALD communities. Former refugees and asylum seekers face particular hurdles in overcoming fear of authority and government-run services or activities (I19, I21, I29). Language barriers and associated discriminatory practices also create limitations (I21, I4, I31, I32, I33).

It is worth noting the multiple services offered by organisations that fill some of the gaps. For example, Deakin University provided opportunities to access "pathways into courses and then ongoing support" for migrant students from low socio-economic backgrounds between 2012 and 2018 including with counselling, medical services and financial assistance, as well as community access to wifi and facilities like meeting rooms (I26). While this program has been discontinued, "many of the students admitted via the pathway have since graduated and gone on to employment or further study, demonstrating that the model was successful to a certain extent" (I26). Volunteers from church groups or working for larger NGOs like St Vincent de Paul provide services, such as language classes or assistance with forms to access social services.

From examining the experiences of other cities, there are both opportunities and threats associated with a growing "third sector." As it grows, there are opportunities for better networking between voluntary and non-profit organisations, including for advocacy purposes and for information sharing for improved service delivery. For example, in Montreal, in a general context of state restructuring "community sector actors are in search of a new model of social solidarity" to improve operations where funding is scarce. The third sector in many cities, like Baltimore, Dublin and Leicester, have been forced to find different sources of funding from the charitable sector and, in those places worst affected by the GFC, many NGOs have disappeared without ongoing funding.

There are vulnerabilities associated with increasingly relying on the third sector to deliver public services to be aware of, including of narrowing the scope of services, which has occurred in the Dublin case studied as a result of efficiency measures being introduced through the state's governance model, or facing the inadequacies of market-based solutions associated with the model of 'philanthrocapitalism,' for example in Athens or Baltimore where policy-making has become conditional on the extent to which local goals coincide with the goals and business thinking of large philanthropies.

International experience and the impact of some policy changes affecting some groups in Central Dandenong point to the need to be vigilant of widening poverty gaps, which could be addressed in part through comprehensive approaches to revitalisation that identify such gaps and design programs to deal equally with the built environment and social outcomes. It is also vital to ensure an ongoing commitment to the provision of universal welfare in areas of social policy such as in education and health as well as programs of significant reach in employment access, settlement and other migrant services and public transport.

Working collaboratively with local stakeholders on revitalisation

Collaboration is the "new normal" in public policy work as pointed out by many academics (e.g. Agranoff & McGuire, 2010; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002) and terms like "whole-of-government" or "integrated" approaches are common in practice. Collaboration has been central to revitalisation in Central Dandenong and what stands out is the role of inter-personal relationships that are built over time and put into action to support the multiple dimensions of revitalisation. In this section we first address collaboration between people from different areas as well as different levels of government. Though not without tensions and challenges, both formal and informal structures of collaboration within the public sector supported the revitalisation effort. There were also well-intentioned and adequately implemented community engagement strategies by governments.

Finally, we discuss how local leaders across sectors, for example in the private sector or between church leaders, have a long history of working together for different purposes in Central Dandenong and its region, which has provided a network of people that play fundamental roles in revitalisation. Just as there was mutual dependence between the State and Local Governments in delivering revitalisation, the capacity for organised action outside of and in conjunction with government is also imperative for revitalisation.

The first point of reflection relating to collaboration is on the way different areas of government were involved in the initial RCD initiative. In this regard the multiple formal structures played an important operational role. There was one high level project control board (PCB), internal project review groups, interdepartmental and other specific committees and working groups (for example, on infrastructure, education or consultation as well as with integrated local-state "ground" teams). Committees and working groups were organised to bring together "different groups into the room to cover different areas, like…the Department of Human Services,

Department of Justice, migrant groups, the police, etc…everybody was starting to hear one another and mix together" (I7). A range of interviewees commented that these project groups were central to project delivery in terms of overcoming 'silo' approaches.

However, many of the necessary interactions were not formalised as part of RCD and occurred as different issues arose, relying heavily on the individual skills and strategies of experienced bureaucrats. For example, during the early phase of RCD coordination between planning, roads and transport domains was required to resolve design and implementation issues associated with the transformation of Lonsdale Street. Both the VAGO evaluation (2011) and selected interviewees commented that the formal structures and process for collaboration suffered from some weaknesses in terms of problem resolution, accountability, articulation between certain areas of government and transparency at different times. In terms of the weakness of these formal structures, one former member of the Victorian Government's development agency suggested that:

> …what was drastically missing above the planning department was a forum that had real significance that could help break through some of the issues, or help the government make some of the collective decision-making that they needed to make, to make the job smoother, for example, to change the bus routes and rearrange roads…there was no forum for those sorts of decisions to be going up to, for the decisions to be made (I1).

Future revitalisation efforts would benefit from deeper horizontal integration through formal structures to maximise synergies between policy areas and avoid missed opportunities for collaboration, for example through shared budget planning and infrastructure sequencing. The CGD faces greater challenges than most other municipalities in Metropolitan Melbourne, for example with the highest rate of youth unemployment and low levels of educational attainment as well as other common flow-on problems faced by poorer communities, such as gambling addictions and family violence.

Such issues have not formed part of an integrated vision of revitalisation in Central Dandenong and future improvement programs would benefit from a more comprehensive view of transformation by including perspectives from areas such as health, human services and housing. Furthermore, some informants observed that having formal structures in place helps to "institutionalise" a project, which makes "politics harder to play", for example in budget allocation processes, in retaining key personnel or overall to "try and outlast bureaucratic and political cycles" (various).
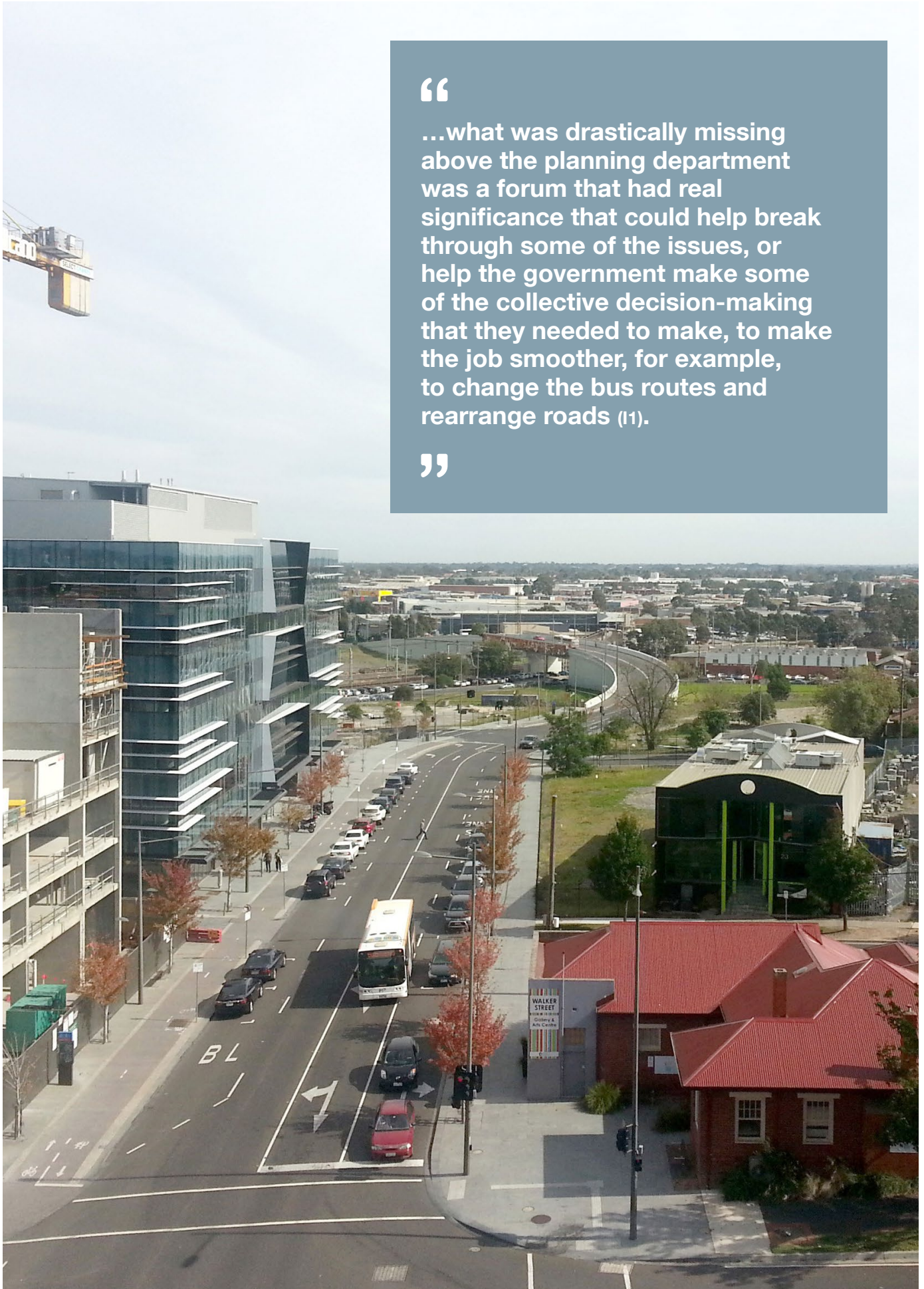
Second, collaboration between local and state governments was seen as "innate" (I1) by the team appointed to manage RCD from the Victorian Government's development agency. There were some tensions associated with the initial transfer of planning powers to the State and the sense that the local government was operating at times as an implementation body of the State, including without knowledge of financial decision-making on the project. For example, as one local Councillor explained:

> The intensive collaborative governance of revitalisation in Central Dandenong I would say is largely positive, but there's both positives and negatives because often, like any collaboration, one party has more power than the other (…the state government has more power now). Now, a good example of that is some of the common complaints to me from some residents about there not being enough parking in the main street…the state government decided to take away 20% of the car spaces in the main street. That was actually against the wishes of the council, both the councillors and the staff. But because the council had ceded that control over, while the state government had a role to consult, they ultimately could do what they wanted, and they took away 20% of the car spaces. (I16).

> " …what was drastically missing above the planning department was a forum that had real significance that could help break through some of the issues, or help the government make some of the collective decision-making that they needed to make, to make the job smoother, for example, to change the bus routes and rearrange roads (I1). "

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Despite some tensions, most public sector interviewees commented that there were concerted and effective efforts to cultivate good communication with necessary information exchange about revitalisation issues and opportunities, as well as knowledge transfer between levels of government. The formal PCB included representatives from VicUrban, the Department and Council, functioning as the most important forum for exchange, though shared working groups on specific issues also played a role. These formal structures of interjurisdictional collaboration were fundamental in managing "vertical coordination," including in managing tensions associated with power imbalances in resourcing and decision-making, as well as to identify opportunities for and facilitate information exchange and operational synergies. As one senior local government representative expressed, the relationship with the State Government has:

"…always been good. It's often been tense, but you know, such is partnerships and relationships that if there weren't constructive tensions I think we wouldn't have got as good an outcome as we have. From the State Government, one past executive echoed this sentiment, stating: "it's the joined-up approach between the state and council that's absolutely fundamental, see the state moves away and the council is there to manage its city as the custodian of the city" (I5).

Third, community engagement was also important in the early stage of RCD. As one former VicUrban representative commented, "if you're going to come into a city and start saying 'We're here to revitalise you,' it's really important that they not feel that you're some sort of interloper who has no idea about the local context or hasn't listened to what the locals actually want" (I1). There was an embedded stakeholder engagement approach during implementation with permanent staff in the area during construction to respond to issues as they arose which was identified as particularly important. For example, someone "would go up and down the street to make sure the people were happy and make sure the street was clean. And they (locals) knew us: they knew that they could come down, because we were embedded in the place" (I7). This VicUrban-led engagement strategy sought to include consultation feedback loops to fine-tune project details and smooth over operational aspects.

Overall, members of the past VicUrban team emphasised the importance of generating a "shared vision" (I1, I7). One local restaurant owner commented on the effectiveness of this model, suggesting that:

…the government today are a little bit more realistic and human in the way that they connect with business. You don't have to come in there and throw your authority all over the place and step on people and tell them what to do…I think manners work and I think council today and governments today are a bit more understanding like that. They know that going and demanding or using an iron fist to get a point across doesn't result in a good outcome (I18).

Despite the design of these consultation mechanisms, our research suggests that they did not reach some community interest groups or that some issues raised at the local level were not adequately responded to in the State-led RCD. In this regard, the main issue that emerged related to the loss of free car-parking and the loss of car-parking spaces in general (as mentioned in the above quote). Our research did not assess the adequacy of accessibility or transport planning aspects of the project, however the prominence of this issue in the interview responses is suggestive of some unresolved issues as it is of a potential loss of citizen voice in the revitalisation process. Nine of the fourteen business and community sector workers interviewed as part of this research identified car parking as specific problem associated with the revitalisation process.

Certainly, many local retailers in Central Dandenong have closed in recent years and our interviewees linked this to insufficient patronage and the cost of

parking. The specific issues identified at the local level which were seen to have been neglected in State-level urban and transport planning included a reduction in car parking spaces necessary for optimum patronage or service delivery, an increase in cost for parking (an issue of particular importance given more affordable parking options in other nearby shopping destinations), design issues (e.g. localised congestion of cars waiting to park) as well as a culture of inflexible fining (e.g. with parking inspector described as "vultures" (I18) for "fining people like crazy…after 10 minutes" (I34)) and cultural insensitivity in requesting and processing the review of infringement notices (I27).

The essence of the way the traffic outcome was perceived by many people interviewed in this research is reflected in this quote by a local government representative:

> We got a lot of things through to Vicroads and we got a lot of things changed through discussion and negotiation but when it all came down to it in the end, we lost half our parking…the actual design looks nice on paper, but the seats next to the road which nobody sits at ever, never, never have I ever seen anybody sitting on a seat. Not even in the summer. Why would you want to sit next to where the traffic is coming through or you getting this exhaust fumes (I35)?

Compared to other cases studied, however, the level of community dissatisfaction in Central Dandenong is low and the issues, such as the cost of car-parking, would be relatively minor to address. In other cases there is evidence of civil society groups (one which the Council is currently seeking to address through a trial of free-parking) unable to find spaces of meaningful dialogue directed towards improving the urban environment and their quality of life. In the extreme, this has led to powerful resistance movements that oppose engagement with the State apparatus (i.e. in Athens, Nantes). Generally, the Australian context presents an alternative to this in which liberal social democratic traditions persist,

allowing people to self-identify and find adequate support and stability to flourish. Specifically, in the case of Central Dandenong, there is a wide range of services available (see section 4.3) to support residents and opportunities to participate in public initiatives are common.

In this regard, the consultation exercises carried out as part of the RCD project were largely effective, especially the focus groups and the in-situ presence of key personnel who were accessible to local leaders and traders were cited as especially well received. However, there are other ways the Victorian and local governments interact with the community which provides opportunities for exchange on the identification of local issues and their resolution.

The City builds connections through distinct forms of engagement, such as Council's permanent programs for young people or once-off meetings that engage specific groups like the Afghan Youth Organisation on local issues (I26, I23). A wide range of partnerships were identified, for example in developing the local Pathways to Better Living Exhibition (between TAFE, Deakin University, Council and business groups) or between tertiary education bodies, such as Deakin University, Council's Youth Program, and cultural or sporting groups, for example to collaborate on local issues such as mental health, employment opportunities, disability services or gender equality (I26). Councillors, the CEO and other executives also reported being active members of boards in the community, for example for the local TAFE (Chisholm) and engage with business representatives, for example traders' groups.

The collaborations between the City and non-government actors are important for consultation and delivery of local policy and services. It also squarely reflects the level of organisation and engagement by leaders in the community, education and business sectors. This organisation is both a political strategy as well as a question of maximising functional synergies. It is a political strategy like the kind operating in the Barcelona case, to build alliances in support of revitalisation, for example with

community organisations and business groups that serve to exert pressure on upper tiers of government to keep focused on the area. It is also highly functional to each of their organisations in terms of defining and successfully implementing strategy.

In terms of collaborative structures in the community, there is evidence to suggest both the presence of long-term networks of local importance as well as increasing sophistication in the way groups are organised and engage with governments. Long term networks exist across sectors, for example in business among local retail traders or among small to large manufacturing companies through the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance and in the community sector between social policy and service providers as well as between religious leaders and associations, for example through the below-mentioned Inter-Faith Network. These networks have been created over long periods of time and are based on the strength of inter-personal relationships among their members.

Both the local and state government teams sought to "tie in really strongly with the existing economic development resources" (I1) and networks such as the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance (SEMMA) and the then Dandenong Retail and Traders Association as well as Chisholm Technical and Further Education organisation (TAFE). Each of these institutions is embedded in the locality and understands its interdependence on the others, for example the TAFE has hundreds of staff and over 10,000 students enrolled in the Dandenong Campus bringing benefits to local retail businesses (I12). Chisholm TAFE also delivers tailored education and training programs to meet local organisation-specific needs. This program has been linked directly to the RCD project through the application of an infrastructure recovery tax on land developers, which has been used in part to link up local companies' community funds as well as to support Chisholm TAFE scholarships.

There was a shared sentiment between Council, TAFE and local manufacturing business leaders that: "we actively work with each other all of the time … we understand where Dandenong is going." (I12). The networks created between local leaders across sectors play an important role in information sharing, shared problem-solving and maximising opportunities to leverage investment. Their presence enabled a smoother policy development and delivery process in revitalisation because there was an organised and receptive community to engage with.

New networks and collaborations also emerged as a direct product of the revitalisation process. One example of this is a new collaborative partnership between the traders of the Dandenong Market and the local Council through the creation of Dandenong Market Proprietary Limited. Previously, the Council employed a real estate agency to rent space to traders. However, there was increasing recognition of the market as "very important in terms of identity and the role it plays within the community, but also in a commercial sense in terms of the return that it gives to the Council" (I24). Council invested in the refurbishment of the Market (AUS$27 million) and created a governance structure to sustain and improve operations into the future.

Specifically, the company was set up as a subsidiary entity of Council to manage the market at "arm's length from Council business" in a way that would deliver "a financial return and a social return," specifically by creating an "inclusive place" where "people feel comfortable to spend their time" as well as "really good value for money" (I24). The company's board and management "interact with the traders" through an elected traders' committee (a process run by the Australian Electoral Office most recently in 2014) to discuss issues such as operation hours and marketing strategies, as well as informally as part of market operations and socially, for example at the Christmas party. Further research on the effectiveness of this model in delivering a financial return for Council along with meeting social objectives would be beneficial, particularly in the wider metropolitan and global contexts of many flailing produce markets.

Another major example of a new collaborative network is the Committee for Dandenong (C4D)

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(2012), a private sector entity representing the interests of the business community in Dandenong which makes representations to governments in favour of continued support for revitalisation as articulated in their strategic plan. According to one representative from the C4D, it was established because several business people with long term commitments in Dandenong were concerned about the process of decline that Dandenong had experienced and were encouraged by the initial stage of the revitalisation process. He explained that it was:

> …very frustrating as a business person when you have an attachment to a city to watch it struggle… (and) our group could see that the council here was very serious about trying to really regenerate the city" (I3).

In terms of lessons for future revitalisation, it is relevant to observe first the ongoing relevance of collaboration as a "given" in public policy and how both formal structures and informal strategies played a role in driving revitalisation strategy forward. Community engagement is also common currency and there are both positive attributes and areas for improvement in realising the potential of revitalisation in Central Dandenong. Most striking however is the clear mutual benefit of cooperation between the community, private and public sectors in delivering revitalisation through information sharing (e.g. through participation on organisation boards, through Council's advisory committees), partnerships for delivering programs (e.g. training through TAFE for local jobs) and development (e.g. Grocon delivery of new DHHS building) as well as through the powerful political influence of a networked community and private sector in lobbying both State and Federal Governments to invest in ongoing revitalisation initiatives.

The examples of collaboration in this brief offer a two-way lesson. For the public sector, it is important to identify and support strategic local stakeholders as part of a revitalisation strategy. However, it is

also clear how active and organised networks can identify opportunities as they arise or create them in the context of revitalisation. These types of networks have long been highlighted as valuable to urban revitalisation and the role of institutions in supporting their staff's involvement is viewed as an important facilitative action (see for example Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1996 report on "Creating Effective Community Networks in Urban Regeneration"). The experience of local leaders is seen in their agency, the way the use their personal relationships and professional skills to make collaboration effective. As these networks are built over time and on mutual understanding and dependency, they cannot be fabricated easily in the short term. Long term investment in relationship building is necessary as a part of successful revitalisation.

Cultural pluralism in the context of revitalisation

The value of being a "multicultural" city was repeatedly discussed by community leaders, business people and public sector representatives in terms of building a sense of community, in developing a shared identity and also as a factor that contributes to resilience in facing change (e.g. migrants' drive to succeed in facing changing labour force alternatives, in entrepreneurism). While "multiculturalism" is the terminology most often used by local people, an ethic of cultural pluralism that supports difference without imposing assimilation more aptly describes the dominant approach to dealing with diversity. In any case, and notwithstanding problematic use of race in media and political discourses as times, a common theme was how supportive Central Dandenong is as an environment and community for migrant integration.

As one NGO representative said based on work with asylum seekers:

> …they feel very safe in this community, in this area, and I think, the most important thing, they feel wanted. They feel comfortable because this has been a migrant area for a long, long time and within

> this community, there has grown up what I said earlier on, tolerance, real tolerance, which I haven't seen to the degree that we have here in other migrant areas in all honesty (I31).

As part of this research we wanted to understand how the urban environment and revitalisation process in particular has contributed to maintaining cultural diversity and tolerance. Local (e.g. Lobo, 2010) and international researchers (e.g. Amin, 2002) have argued that the everyday encounters and negotiations that occur between people helps to break down barriers of difference and build intercultural understanding, leading to a sense of belonging and inclusion. Others have also identified ways of interacting between groups that are more lasting and significantly contribute to building understanding and tolerance in diverse places, for example in places of employment, in schooling or even in local courses offered by libraries and other institutions (Amin, 2002; Fincher & Iveson, 2008).

So, in what ways are everyday encounters promoted in Central Dandenong? We argue that support for mixing between groups occurs through:

> Ongoing and bipartisan support for cultural pluralism across policy realms;

> Maintaining housing affordability and growing housing diversity;

> Promoting a rich mix of land uses with convivial public spaces; and

> Access to training and employment opportunities for migrants.

Ongoing and bipartisan support for cultural pluralism across policy realms

As mentioned above, we found a highly developed capacity for community organisation and growing advocacy work among culturally diverse communities. Specific traders or community groups have increased in number and, as one local politician commented, they are able to influence local policy through "advocacy, lobby and engagement…they've grouped up and they have a strength that was unimagined in the 1980s when the Indo-Chinese groups came. By grouping up, they have developed a voice in the community" (I6). For example, there are specific groups, such as the Vietnamese Association of Victoria, Little India Traders Group and Afghani Traders, which are active and have forged pathways to influence provide support and influence public policy.

Culturally diverse groups have also collaborated on submissions to government, for example relating to proposed changes affecting discrimination (I20) or acted through representatives to lobby different levels of government on different policy matters (I27, I20). One measure of success of the mobilisations by different cultural groups is that CALD community leaders of different faiths have been elected as Councillors and Mayor in Dandenong, providing a unique opportunity to influence the direction of policy n support of cultural pluralism.

Two reasons were identified for this organisational capacity and influence of cultural groups. First, interviewees discussed migrants' drive to succeed in their new home. As one senior local government representative commented, "there's not one person that I've ever met or seen over the time since I've been working here that hasn't been desirous of making a success of life. So, they want to succeed. They want to take up all the opportunity that everyone else has had to just be successful in life." (I2). Representatives from NGOs and businesses described several such success stories of migrants "hungry to succeed" (I27), such as illiterate migrant learning English and then volunteering (I21, I22) or starting businesses as well as organising group activities (I1, I3, I7, I13, I31). The second and vital factor that has supported the prospering of organised cultural groups is the bipartisan support for multiculturalism and access to opportunities to be involved in public policy-making (e.g. consultation exercises) and delivery (e.g. outsourcing, partnership initiatives).

> "
> They feel comfortable because this has been a migrant area for a long, long time and within this community, there has grown up what I said earlier on, tolerance, real tolerance, which I haven't seen to the degree that we have here in other migrant areas in all honesty (I31).
> "

The governments involved in the specific revitalisation process have recognised the value of cultural diversity in 'place-making' and tailored engagement strategies around this. "The cultural communities are critical to the success of the Revitalisation of Central Dandenong." (I16). In parallel with the Leicester case, multiculturalism was deployed in revitalisation as a kind of brand, supporting local cultural activities, culturally sensitive design and cultural and food tourism. According to one senior local government representative, the revitalisation process was "obviously going to build off the success of cultural diversity" (I2).

A key example of the way the formal planning responded to local cultural diversity is the way food has been used by the local government in community engagement. "We saw cultural diversity as a great strength which is why we promote the different experiences from the market to the retail end to the food end and to the event end" (I13). It is used by government as a medium to bring people of different cultures together, support interaction and build understanding. "If you make some flat bread, you all get sit around and talk. And so, we've used it as a mechanism of engagement. In other words, food is recognised as a...social unifier to bring together" (I4).

Partly because of the consultation program, food has also been used in place 'marketing' and in creating and growing a local tourism industry through collaboration between the local, State Governments and different cultural groups, creating places that offer specific cultural precincts or activities, such as the Afghan Bazaar or Little India. As one local Councillor commented, people "come to Dandenong for unique cultural experiences and in particular, unique food experiences" (I13). In terms of gender and diversity politics, one local government representative highlighted the enabling role of "a number of food projects where women, particularly, will engage with each other around the table" (I4). Overall food marks the experience of revitalisation, as one local business owner commented:

> …each ethnic one that comes in they bring their culture and they bring their food, so it adds to the ambiance of Dandenong, so that's been the most positive thing really in the last 10 years that I think is the new foods coming in because they're not an opposition, they bring people to Dandenong, that's a positive (I35).

However, support for cultural pluralism goes beyond the specific programme of revitalisation and penetrates many areas of public policy work. One example of this is the way all three tiers of government have provided support to the local Interfaith Network of Greater Dandenong (INGD) throughout the period of revitalisation. The INGD brings together leaders from the local Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh faiths to share information and experiences in community. The largest faith group in the City of Greater Dandenong is Christian, though there are comparatively large Buddhist (22,500 people), Islamic (19,000) and Hindu (7,500) faith communities (Census, 2016). The aim of the INGD is to promote "understanding, respect and tolerance for each other's beliefs by living together in peace and goodwill" (INGD, 2016).

Since 2014 Council has funded a part-time officer to run the INGD and provides office space for meetings. By formally creating and supporting a partnership, Council can reach out to recognised community leaders for advice on what to do in improving services for new migrants, or in developing culturally appropriate plans for disability and health. The INGD also assists Council in developing community statements or in providing culturally diverse and appropriate ceremonies at events. At the State level, the INGD has a range of partnerships, for example with the Police for inter-faith training or in providing vital input on developing culturally sensitive responses to family violence. Furthermore, the Federal Government in 2009 funded office equipment for the INGD. This multi-tiered support has enabled the INGD to consolidate and grow, for example now offering sixty inter-faith learning tours of

Places of Worship compared with 33 in 2013. Supporting the organisation of cultural groups and building inter-cultural understanding is a hallmark of governing revitalisation and in general of policy approaches in Dandenong. Policy-makers have not shied away from difficult issues, such as building links between groups that have been in conflict in the country of origin (I28, I32), and reducing fear in new migrant groups, for example of police activity (I10, I19). "Faith" in urban revitalisation has been studied in the United Kingdom over recent decades with positive outcomes or opportunities identified that are relevant to the Central Dandenong experience (e.g. Farnell et al., 2003; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003).

This research has shown how strong social networks within faith communities are important elements of local social capital and the way faith communities operate with social and civic commitments already contributes to revitalisation in many ways. While much of this has been recognised in the Central Dandenong experience, there are certainly some areas for improvement and many people face exclusion. For example, trauma counselling for many former refugees and asylum seekers living in the community is severely underfunded and programs to address domestic violence in culturally sensitive ways were two areas identified by some interviewees from NGOs as requiring further investment to properly enable some migrants to participate in urban life (I19, I20, I23). Racism and discrimination is another challenge to overcome, for example with some interviewees suggesting that employment opportunities should be more open to new migrant groups, including through quota arrangements (I19, I22). The following quote epitomises the challenge of recognising and responding adequately to the needs of some new, minority migrant groups:

> …some men, they say, "in (place of origin), we fight with my wife, but in the end, we come together." Here, he will come home and then the wife will go around and call the police, the police will find him and tell him: you breached the order. You go in prison ….Because we are not allowed to express anger in the way they always used to and, instead of educating them, here in Australia, even the kids, …, the son will take the phone and call the police… Child protection took a lot of kids, but they don't educate people in that law. You cannot apply law to someone who doesn't know the law. (There are many) single men and single mums…and then who will be affected? Their kids; Now they're breaking windows and stealing because the love of the two parents is not there, they don't grow in that love, they only see mum, mum also can bring you up, right, but has a boyfriend, so the child will say my dad is hanging around without a place, and my mum goes with someone else, that's bullshit, and the friend will say, your mother is too stupid, your mum is bad, that's prostitute. The boys would become very aggressive, why my mum doing this to me? I don't want to live in a family, they become drugs and alcohol, and forget about school (I19).

Overall, support by the state for cultural pluralism and in providing access to opportunities for cultural groups leads many migrants to flourish where they might otherwise face discrimination and exclusion. In Melbourne and Australia's diverse urban centres, it is vital for revitalisation work to be integrated with a commitment to cultural pluralism and enabling opportunities for CALD communities. For the public sector leading urban revitalisation, this means recognising and supporting the many positive contributions being made by cultural groups to revitalisation, including by faith communities. It also should translate into a specific engagement strategy with cultural and faith leaders as key actors already well-connected to local people and their concerns (including any training in cultural and religious responsiveness and sensitivity).

Furthermore, there is scope to deepen the reach of revitalisation to those most disadvantaged groups not currently enjoying the fruits of betterment and who face complex exclusion through deeper recognition of cultural difference in designing revitalisation strategies. This could be achieved through targeted engagement and a commitment to policy response across multiple areas of need (e.g. housing, training).

Maintaining housing affordability and growing housing diversity for a diverse population

One prevailing characteristic of Central Dandenong and its immediate surrounds is the level of diversity in the resident population: In 2016, 72% of the resident population was born overseas, up from 53.5% in 2001 and greatly more than the Melbourne region (20%) (ABS, 2001; 2016). The largest migrant groups are from Afghanistan, India, Sri Lanka, China and Pakistan, the most common languages other than English are Dari, Albanian, Hazaragi and Tamil and members of the community practise a wide range of religions from Islam to Hinduism (ABS, 2016). As one local business person commented, "the sheer weight of difference has helped that nobody is a majority and the norm is you come from somewhere else" (I8). Another community worked expressed a similar sentiment:

> When you see more people from your community, not just to Indians but I think to other communities as well and the shop owners are multi-cultural and you know… food is multi-cultural, I think it makes… it gives people a feeling of comfort and safety" (I20).

Though the background of the local population continues to change from the predominantly British, Italian, German, Polish and Greek migrants attracted to work in local factories in the post-war period, Central Dandenong continues to be an affordable place for migrants to settle, offering accessible housing along with a host of services. Four reinforcing trends can be observed during the period of revitalisation studied to support migrants' access to adequate and affordable housing, a precondition for delivering the geographic mixing of households in Central Dandenong:

> An increase in the offer of overall dwellings from 7,320 in 2006 to 11,016 in 2016 with an increase in the average rate of delivery between 2006 and 2016 from 370 new dwellings per year, compared to 52 per dwellings per year between 2001 and 2006 (ABS 2001-2016);

> The housing type is highly diverse compared to the Greater Melbourne context, with more semi-detached units and terraces than houses, a trend that is also growing (see Figure 4).

> The average cost of rent for residents in Central Dandenong has stayed below the line of rental affordability (30% of household income). In 2016, the average household earnt $1,026 per week and the median rent was $284 or 27.7% of the median household income.

> Access to public transport, grocery stores/market, social services and local employment (increasingly in retail) ensure that the cost of living remains affordable, without the stresses associated with car dependent and service poor residential settings on Melbourne's periphery.

Given these four factors, it is likely that Central Dandenong will continue to attract a diverse population, not only in terms of cultural background but also for example in household structure (e.g. non-family compositions) and age.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that rental affordability is declining in the area (from 24% in 2006 to 27.7% in 2019), reflecting a metropolitan wide trend of increasing rental costs. In Greater Melbourne median rents rose from $201 in 2006 to $350 in 2016 while in Dandenong they rose from $150 to $284. For Central Dandenong, this presents threats associated with gentrification. Our research suggests that rising rental costs are pushing some families into crowded conditions (I31) or into neighbouring municipalities (I29) where there aren't as many services (I22). This is not just a growing problem for low-income households, but also businesses. "With the influx of white collared workers and obviously the growth in that area" there are challenges to keeping "businesses that have survived around here on more affordable rents" (I2).

In this regard, a "lot of not for profits and NGOs that have operated out of the activity centre are finding it increasingly hard to remain" (I2). Though we have not studied this in detail, we noted numerous

Figure 4. Diversity in housing type in Dandenong (suburb) compared to Greater Melbourne
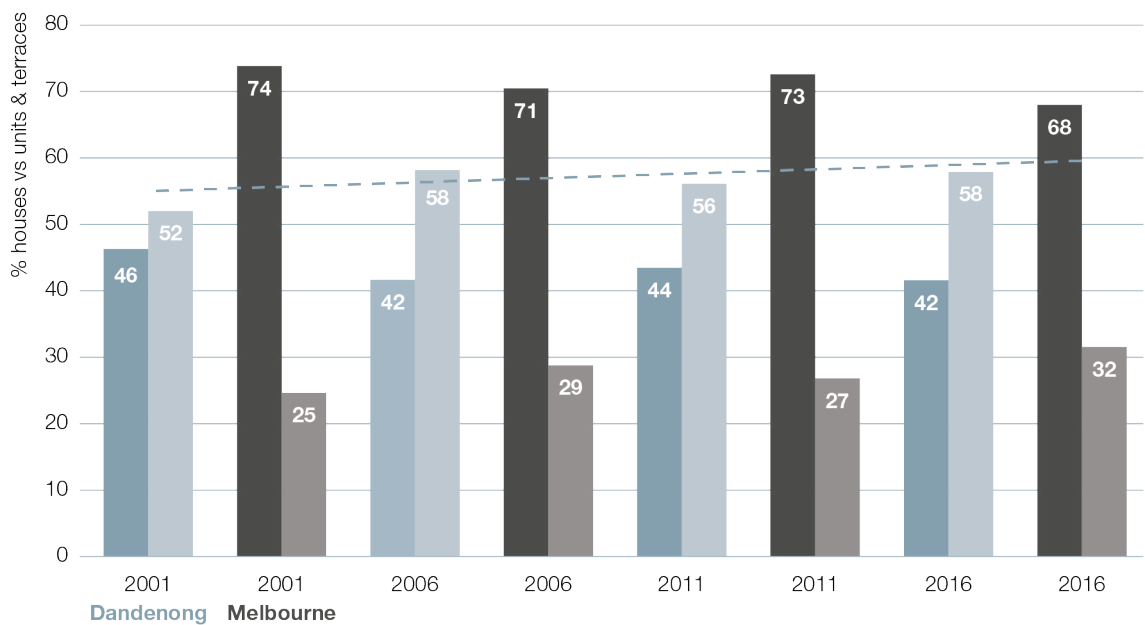

Source: developed from ABS Census data 2001, 2006, 2001 & 2016

Figure 5. Vacant commercial premises in Central Dandenong

Source: photos taken in 2017 by research team

vacant commercial premises on our visits to Central Dandenong. "It seems that perhaps sustaining those overtime is proving difficult for some… Businesses are coming and going also or closing also very quickly and many of the properties are empty" (I26).

Maintaining affordable residential, commercial and non-profit rents was not an aspect of the original RCD strategy, a missed opportunity now being addressed by Council in part through a Housing Strategy. In this regard, the case of Central Dandenong stands in contrast to the other cities studied where, in extreme cases, there is evidence of policy to incite displacement of the poor as part of urban renewal to encourage mobility from blighted to more prosperous areas (e.g. as identified in Baltimore) and more commonly, incremental cutbacks or a policy abys in terms of addressing the housing needs of low-income and diverse households.

In recognising the decline in affordability in Greater Dandenong and in Central Dandenong specifically the risk of "longer-term over-gentrification and loss of diversity" because of urban renewal (City of Greater Dandenong, 2014, p.57), the Council has a Housing Strategy (2014-2024) for facilitating more affordable housing. Our research did not involve the monitoring or evaluation of the Housing Strategy, introduced towards the end of our study. However many of its steps reflect the active role taken in addressing market failure and intervening to ensure a diverse and affordable supply of housing with the creation of a Housing Strategy Steering Group (with a Housing Development Fund) through:

> delivering accessibility to social services and public transport concentrated in the centre area;

> opening opportunities for negotiated arrangements with developers to provide affordable housing (on-site or off-site, or in-kind);

> expanding provisions for housing diversity, such as promoting shop-top housing and small lot design;

> vesting council land assets or development rights (i.e. air rights) in housing associations;

> pursuing development opportunities and engaging in partnerships (i.e. shared equity, joint ventures) with housing associations, affordable housing developers and the Victorian Government's Office of Housing to deliver urban renewal and social housing outcomes;

> providing support to vulnerable households experiencing rental stress, for example through providing home-based community care services or rate rebates.

For future revitalisation strategies, it is advisable that the above-mentioned mechanisms (and other relevant policy tools) are contemplated upfront to mitigate possible gentrification effects and that commitments to fund public housing or support housing associations to deliver diverse and affordable housing are increased by state and federal governments as part of urban renewal efforts.

Through housing diversity and affordability, a neighbourhood or greater region can reduce the likelihood of creating enclaves and begin to support the "everyday multiculturalism" Lobo identified in Dandenong, where casual, neighbourly greetings occur between a diverse population due to their easy geographic mixing nearby their homes and en route to access local services, commerce, employment and public transport. It is also through encounter at such destinations that tolerance and understanding is built between diverse population groups.

…encounters among strangers (rather than indifference or hostility) are a desirable goal for urban life, in order that all urban inhabitants have opportunities to explore their own hybridity through experiencing a variety of different situations and people in the course of their everyday lives (Fincher & Iveson, 2008, p. 153)

The right mix of land uses with a convivial public realm

What urban geographers Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson argue for is for urban policy to create opportunities for interactions between people in a way that builds understanding and reduces "rejection and indifference" (p.154). For example, a library reading space used by a range of individuals –who outside of the library may be identified as housewives, homeless people or school children or even branded as members of a "youth gang" - are all at once library users sharing an experience that brings them together and builds mutual understanding and tolerance of difference.

Central Dandenong through the revitalisation process has an increasing number of such spaces that offer opportunities for building familiarity and sociability between people. These spaces are intermixed with other land uses though are neither work nor home destinations, such as the library, neighbourhood houses, the market, retail, grocery and coffee stores, university and TAFE facilities, pop-up park, civic square, the Drum Theatre and cultural precincts. The State and Local Governments also fund important local events, such as the Food and Wine Festival and events that celebrate cultural and religious festivities, which serve to create opportunities for conviviality among migrant (and non-migrant) communities.

Because of the mix of land uses that attracts a high number of people to the area to conduct their daily lives as well as the convivial public realm, it is common to find groups of people of diverse backgrounds "just hanging around, like a routine… they feel this place as a homely place" (I19). In referring to the purposeful management of the Dandenong Market to support social inclusion, one board representative discussed both the prospects of encounter brought about through to purchase produce but also as a site for business opportunity and organised events:

…markets generally are sort of inclusive places, I think provide opportunities for people who are new to the country to I guess not only participate in local culture because of just coming to the market…but I think very much offer start up opportunities for businesses. (Also)…our hallmark event is an event called World Fair that we do in conjunction with City of Greater Dandenong… last year we had 38,000 visitors for that event and quite a number of them come from outside the immediate area…

The experience of revitalisation in Central Dandenong demonstrates how enhancing the public realm and facilitating a rich mix of land uses has functioned to provide opportunities of encounter for local residents as well as visitors to the area. As Fincher and Iveson prescribe, in Central Dandenong there is variety of social and economic infrastructure provided that offer opportunities for both fleeting moments of encounter between strangers (e.g. on public transport or the market) as well as sites with shared activities through which people might identify with one another (e.g. classes within a neighbourhood house, meeting rooms used for events at the library). The organised activities run by the state or including those projects run by organisations with public funding support stakeholders to become involved in community related initiatives, including with various considerations for migrant groups (e.g. through funded English language programs).

Lastly, the final rule of thumb offered by Fincher and Iveson (2008) regarding encounter has also been put to practice in Central Dandenong: to create safe and transparent spaces for encounter. Multiple interviewees commented on an improved sense of safety in Central Dandenong as a product of the revitalisation effort. For example, a few interviewees commented that Central Dandenong "feels safer" (I20) for women as a result of the revitalisation process, particularly around public places such as the railway station. Future revitalisation that designs in enhanced opportunities for encounter between heterogeneous groups will also benefit from the creation of vibrant and safe places.

Figure 6. Some of the public realm spaces for convivial encounters (pop-up garden, community festival, the Dandenong Market and the new Council building with library and Harmony Square)

Source: photos taken in 2016 and 2017 by research team

Access to education, training and employment opportunities for migrants

Central Dandenong has a rich offer of education and training services specifically designed to support migrant communities as well as a diversifying local economy with new job opportunities. For example, more people are accessing training opportunities in technical or other further education institutions (8.5% of the Dandenong population in 2011 compared to 11.5% in 2016). Chisholm TAFE has strengthened its offer of programs relative to the needs of the local population and local economy, offering training programs in conjunction with municipal run events and local networks such as SEMMA.

As a result of the revitalisation, Deakin University has opened a centre in Central Dandenong which offers specific "pathway" programs for CALD students. Multiple community-based organisations, including the neighbourhood house, library, church groups and non-profit organisations offer English language classes as well as support in the search for employment. While there are fewer opportunities in manufacturing the region, residents living in Central Dandenong are finding employment in growing industries like food retailing, health services, construction and residential care services. Unemployment in Dandenong is high relative to the Melbourne and Australian contexts, though has been reduced from 15.3% in 2001 to 13.4% in 2016. Notwithstanding new training and job opportunities precipitated by the revitalisation process in many cases, the decline in automotive manufacturing was identified by some interviewees as a structural

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challenge requiring dedicated government attention. In this regard, as one local politician expressed:

> It's about to get hit on the head with a sledgehammer in terms of closures in automotive component firms. Some are making a transition, but a lot are not and it's going to lead to some quite serious unemployment of people in the prime of their working life meaning have more men in their 40s and 50s and with no obvious replacement. I see no sign that the Federal Government is going to refocus on education disadvantage and no real support for industry transformation launching or change and it's going to be particularly felt in Dandenong, this loss of the automotive components firms (I6).

Or as another leader of a large NGO highlighted:

> …the layout of Dandenong has changed significantly from the point of view of a working environment. When we first came here, there was a heavy concentration on large factories, general motors, international trucks, Heinz, and several other big employers, since then, they have gradually wasted away and it's caused a lack of employment opportunities for young people in particular…now people have to travel longer distances for work, or have been unable to find work of a continuous nature, and now we have a situation of underemployment as well as no employment, and this has caused to a great difficulty for people coming here to live from other parts of the world, just finding a niche here (I21).

In addition to the challenges faced because of declining manufacturing, many of the new opportunities arising may not always be responsive to cultural norms or encourage participation by specific cultural groups. We found that women among CALD communities in particular face exclusion or discrimination. In general, there hasn't been significant improvements in terms of

female workforce participation compared to male participation during the period of revitalisation. For example, analyses of the local government's annual reports indicate is that female participation in Council's workforce relative to male participation has not changed over the study period: while the absolute number of female staff increased from 229 to 348 over a fifteen year timeframe between 1999 and 2014, the ratio of male to female EFT staff has not shifted (See Figure 7 below). Unemployment further disproportionately affects women from minority groups. Figure 8 below shows that in 2016 engagement in employment, education and training is lower for women compared to men born in Australia (Oceania) and that as a percentage there tend to be even fewer women from CALD communities fully engaged and far more not engaged or only partially engaged.

There are programs with specific funding or policy aims relating to expanding woman's rights within CALD communities, for example State funding for local NGOs to address cultural aspects of reducing family violence, including educating different faith communities about the importance of primary prevention (I8, I10), or major educational institutions offering pathways for CALD women who are young parents to re-engage in training programs (I12). Accounts about collaboration in service delivery locally also highlight that there are many government agencies, NGOs and education providers that offer female-specific programs, including for women from CALD communities. CALD support groups for women were mentioned in interview responses, such as the Chinese Women's Friendship Group or the Hazara Women's Network, as were specific service providers, such as Wellsprings for Women, the only female neighbourhood house in the region, which offers services such as English language, computer, business skills and financial literacy classes as well as activities around cultural adaptation in Australia for recently arrived migrants (e.g. how to cook healthy meals, parenting in a new culture).
Wellsprings for Women is an example local service provider that expands opportunities for women whose participation requires or is assisted by female-only environments. Other service providers

identified examples of specific training to support women from disadvantaged and minority CALD communities, for example with in dealing with victims of torture and trauma (e.g. asylum seekers from conflict zones). Despite significant advances in service offering, more is required to address gender inequality as it specifically affects CALD women, for example some interviewees suggested introducing

an equal opportunity policy at CGD with quotas to provide access to secure employment for CALD women. Some interviewees also commented that the revitalisation effort was yet to generate significant increases in white collar jobs and that dedicated attention to the opportunities for new catalyst projects was required to attract private development to the area.
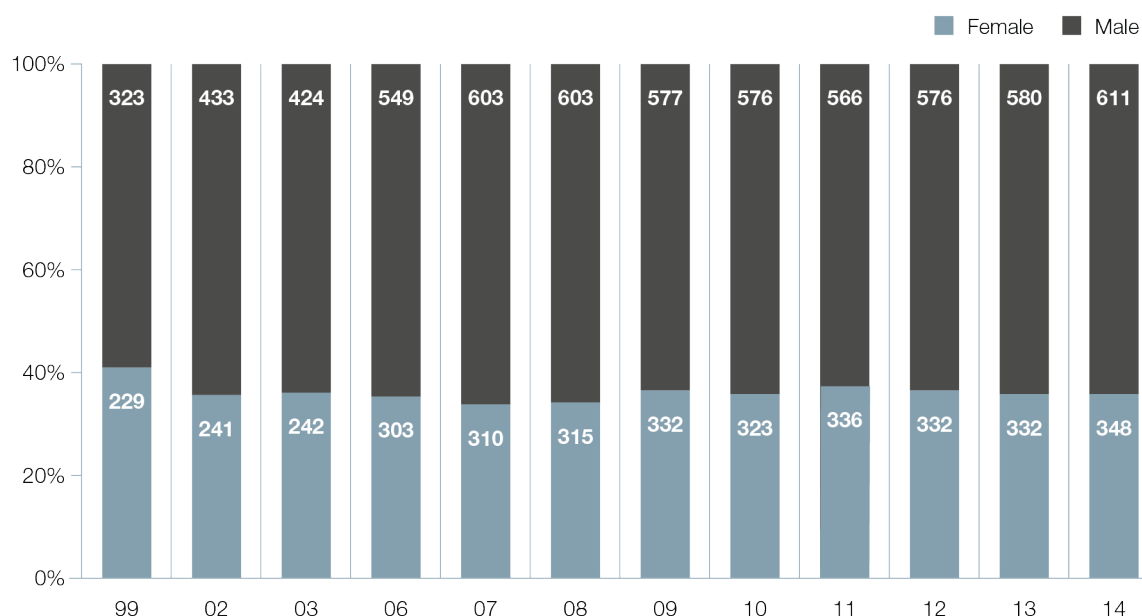
Figure 7. Equivalent full-time male vs female employment*
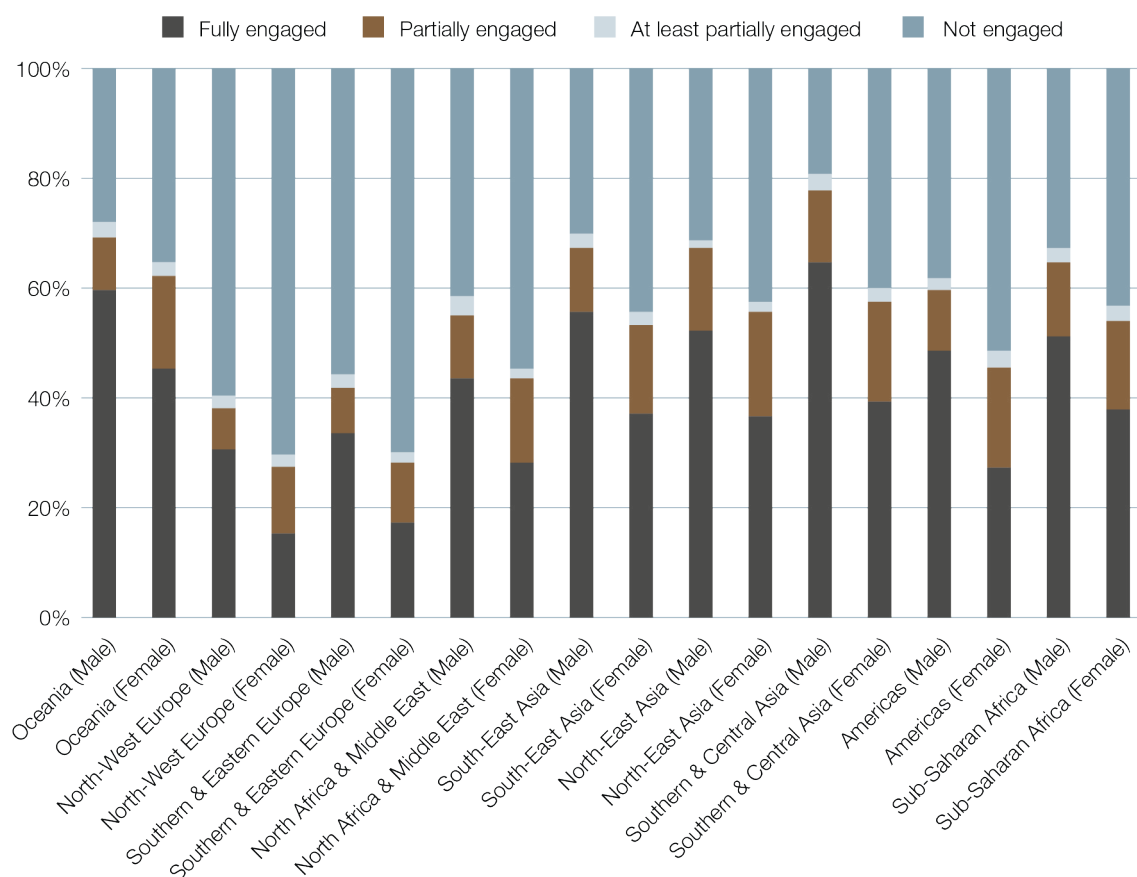
Source: developed from data in Annual Reports (The City of Greater Dandenong, 1999-2016
* No data available for years 2000, 2001, 2005 and 2005.

Figure 8. Engagement in Employment, Education and Training, by Sex and Country of Birth

Source: developed using data from the Census 2016, Australian Bureau of Statistics

> **(Manufacturing) It's about to get hit on the head with a sledgehammer in terms of closures in automotive component firms. Some are making a transition, but a lot are not and it's going to lead to some quite serious unemployment of people in the prime of their working life meaning have more men in their 40s and 50s and with no obvious replacement. I see no sign that the Federal Government is going to refocus on education disadvantage and no real support for industry transformation launching or change and it's going to be particularly felt in Dandenong, this loss of the automotive components firms (I6).**

Concluding remarks

Cities cannot avoid fallout from international crises nor are they immune to national policy voids or funding cuts that affect the prospect of urban centres. Central Dandenong shows the international community a political alternative to austerity. In fact, we found that the language of austerity is not applicable. However, the ethic of economic rationalism permeates policy practices and there is a kind of "perma-austerity" experienced at the local level due to the vertical fiscal imbalance in Australia and fluctuating waves of budget cuts and restructuring. Like in all other settings, welfare reform when it occurs hits the worst-off hardest of all, as evidenced in cuts to settlement services. Central Dandenong is one area that concentrates households experiencing disadvantage, such as relatively high rates of unemployment, and until recently was gripped by urban decline.

The response to these conditions has been the opposite of austerity politics. A collaborative effort to revitalise the area is underway with strong leadership and intervention by governments. Together with the backbone of basic service and infrastructure coverage available to citizens, revitalisation has improved the prospects of citizens. The project's successes are due to the collaborative effort between the State and Local Governments, the influence of the networked private and community sectors and the multi-faceted support for CALD communities to participate in the opportunities of urban life. In drawing from the experience of revitalisation underway in Central Dandenong, we would highlight the following eleven key lessons as stated in the Executive Summary:

Specifically, this Briefing offers the following lessons about revitalisation:

> Public investment should be commensurate with the necessary first steps to initiate revitalisation. Mechanisms can be built into publicly-led revitalisation programs for cost recovery, for example through surplus value capture or recovery charges. The initial public investment should enable infrastructure improvements, deliver key public projects ("catalyst" and "demonstration" type projects) and remove roadblocks for private investment (e.g. through land parcel reconfigurations). While there was significant initiating investment, ongoing commitment by the largest funding body, the Victorian Government, has waned with some of the strategy's original projects remaining unfunded and, without ongoing monitoring and evaluation, no new specific revitalising initiatives have been proposed over the last decade. Subsequently private sector investment has also dropped away. Ongoing policy attention and public investment is required to both monitor the process of revitalisation and, where necessary, to address areas of revitalisation that remain stalled or present threats for future decline.

> Revitalisation strategy requires a clear plan with streamlined processes for delivery. In this case, though controversial and not without issues, the application of special zoning and the transfer of planning powers to the Victorian Government, along with special forums for collaboration and negotiation, worked to accelerate implementation.

> Experienced personnel with local knowledge and strong interpersonal skills provide the best support for agile and flexible delivery. In this case, both the Victorian Government and the CGD relied on the relational skills and technical knowledge of key people to build partnerships which gave traction to the programme of revitalisation.

> Just as it is important to acknowledge the relational and political skills of key personnel tasked with leading revitalisation strategies, it is equally important to design effective formal structures to support collaboration between levels of government and to ensure all of the necessary areas of government (departments) are represented, thereby maximising opportunities for policy synergy (and to avoid missed opportunities of reinforcing revitalisation) as well as shared planning and budgeting.

> The capacity for local government to effectively lead part of the revitalisation effort is important for long term success. This is important not just because local governments are the natural leaders of local processes of change, but because in contexts where macro-policy can fluctuate often, local communities cannot depend on secure, long-term funding for discretionary revitalisation projects. Local leadership in this case was evidenced politically, in the capacity to prioritise investment in one area over others to support revitalisation, as well as it was in financial management and planning: The CDG carefully identified key revitalisation projects, funded them and managed their delivery, while also designing strategies to address problems as they arose (e.g. mitigating gentrification through a new Housing Strategy, proposal to remove paid car-parking in parts of the centre to stimulate retail activity). It was also evidenced throughout the RCD project through consistent participation in collaborative forums with the Victorian Government, where joint problem-solving and knowledge-sharing was common.

> Continued commitment to basic welfare is vital to enabling citizens to partake in the opportunities of revitalisation. Lower levels of government and non-government stakeholders concerned about the longevity of revitalisation efforts should continue to advocate for commitment to basic services that deliver equitable opportunities to local residents, for example in health, education, public transport, migration services and employment assistance.

> The involvement of the beneficiaries of revitalisation is indispensable. Not only is community consultation important, there is a growing role for non-government actors to become organised and participate in the definition and delivery of revitalisation. The Central Dandenong experience highlights how governments might support the operation of networks that are well-connected to communities (e.g. market traders, inter-faith network) or how networks may evolve to have strong advocacy powers (e.g. South East Manufacturers Alliance or Committee for Dandenong). The interaction between local leaders should be enhanced to deliver revitalisation (e.g. mutual board participation, advisory committees).

> In operationalising the bipartisan support for cultural pluralism in the Australian context, the public sector should ensure special consideration for the recognition of diversity through revitalisation (e.g. through culturally responsive forms of engagement, designing in places of cultural recognition) and continue to encourage and fund initiatives independent of revitalisation that build understanding in the community. This means supporting the many positive contributions being made by cultural groups to revitalisation, including by faith communities, as well as recognising the many benefits of engaging with these communities that are already well-connected to local people and their concerns (e.g. as evidenced in the example of the local Interfaith Network). Special attention should be given to society's most disadvantaged in revitalisation, in this case in responding to the needs of minority migrant groups' different settlement requirements and pathways to inclusion, for example in accessing training and employment.

> Revitalisation strategy requires a strong focus on housing to preserve opportunities for social mixing. A plural society where revitalisation opportunities are afforded to diverse groups requires heightened attention to housing markets, especially in mitigating the negative effects of improvement (i.e. gentrification). A housing focus should at least address the need to increase dwelling provision, increase typology diversity and maintain affordability. This was not a central feature of the initial RCD program and as a subsequent focus of revitalisation is more challenging to address.

> The mix of land uses and the design of the public realm should enhance the quality of short and lasting interactions between people. In this regard, revitalisation in Central Dandenong has been very effective in intermixing land uses and enhancing public spaces and services (e.g. library, the market, retail, grocery and coffee stores, university and TAFE facilities, pop-up park, civic

square, the Drum Theatre, cultural precincts). Many public spaces are periodically used for special events and festivals as well. The way people go about their daily lives, in public spaces as well as through shared organised activities, provides multiple opportunities for building intercultural understanding and tolerance. The improvement and activation of public spaces has also led to an improved sense of safety.

> Revitalisation requires a focus on education and employment to equitably deliver opportunities to its planned beneficiaries. While improvements can be furthered in Central Dandenong especially for minority groups, revitalisation has proven how new opportunities to access education can be provided and how new opportunities in employment can be enhanced, for example through food retailing, health services, construction and residential care services.

In concluding with the comparative tone of this brief, we would like to underscore the main risk to revitalisation in Central Dandenong and other centres affected by urban decline: the retreat of the state in driving urban renewal, a process which is so inherently complex it cannot occur without coordinated public sector effort. Some international settings show that an absence of public sector action in addressing urban problems can lead to multiple, often undesirable outcomes. The risks at present are complex, from a lack of private sector investment to attract new jobs and especially in terms of service shortcomings, (e.g. that support migrant integration). Renewed attention by government to realise the full potential in Central Dandenong would be beneficial and would serve to stave off the risks of public sector retreat experienced elsewhere.

In this regard, the broader project research highlighted the depressing state of "realism" in Leicester, where by local government austerity acts only to mitigate the worst effects of cuts of services without actively stimulating improvement and the third sector is crippled by cuts, undermining service delivery and any capacity to build government-

civil society networks. A second outcome of a retreating state is resistance or revolt. For example, in Dublin something of a political renaissance is occurring, including those who have never partaken in resistance movements and now actively oppose public policy that undermines their quality of life, through political rallies for example. In a society not so culturally distinct to our own, one Dublin Councillor commented:

> People are just incensed. Not because they are the left-wing. Not because they are radical revolutionists. It's because they've been shafted. They can see that they do not have pensions. They see no future for their kids.

Authorities across the globe ignore this reaction to public spending cuts at their peril. There is a loss of capacity there by authorities to substantively engage with its citizens and respond to their needs.

State absence can also lead to grassroots initiatives that can address public service gaps but run the risk of informality and operating unregulated, for example as the social medical centres, alternative currencies or social kitchens that exist in places like Athens. Another possible outcome is political transformation, such as occurred in Barcelona where a government administration of 32 years was ousted in 2011 (centre-left city government led by the Socialist Party of Catalonia was replaced by a conservative coalition), to then be replaced again by the radical left through the Barcelona en Comú,

These alternatives highlight the vital importance of active state participation in addressing cities' most pressing issues and to do so collaboratively with local actors. Our investigation of the revitalisation process in Central Dandenong confirms the value, indeed necessity, of this approach.

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Contacts

Prof Helen Sullivan
helen.sullivan@anu.edu.au
61 2 6125 3067

Crawford School of Public Policy
College of Asia and the Pacific
J. G. Crawford Building
132 Lennox Crossing
The Australian National University

Dr. Hayley Henderson
hayley.henderson@anu.edu.au

Crawford School of Public Policy
College of Asia and the Pacific
J. G. Crawford Building
132 Lennox Crossing
The Australian National University

Prof Brendan Gleeson
brendan.gleeson@unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute
Level 3, Melbourne School of Design
(Bldg 133)
Masson Road, The University of
Melbourne