# Towards more meaningful and useful evaluation processes

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# Questions to address today

• Why is a more systematic approach to evaluation timely?

• What is wrong with prevailing approaches to evaluation?

• What does success mean/what are we trying to 'measure'?

• What kinds of 'evidence' do we need to know if things work or not and what kinds of data collection methods will help us get such evidence?

• Why do we need a sector-wide approach in determining what constitutes good practice and in implementing more systematic and supported evaluations?

The Daylesford area's Swiss-Italian Festa is part of a relatively rich calendar of community-based cultural events and projects. However, life in the area is not all 'beer and skittles', with concerns such as gentrification, tourism impacts and underlying social divisions.

Broadmeadows project:

Natural beauty a neglected asset: interpreted artistically in the culturally inclusive Weaving Lands Project
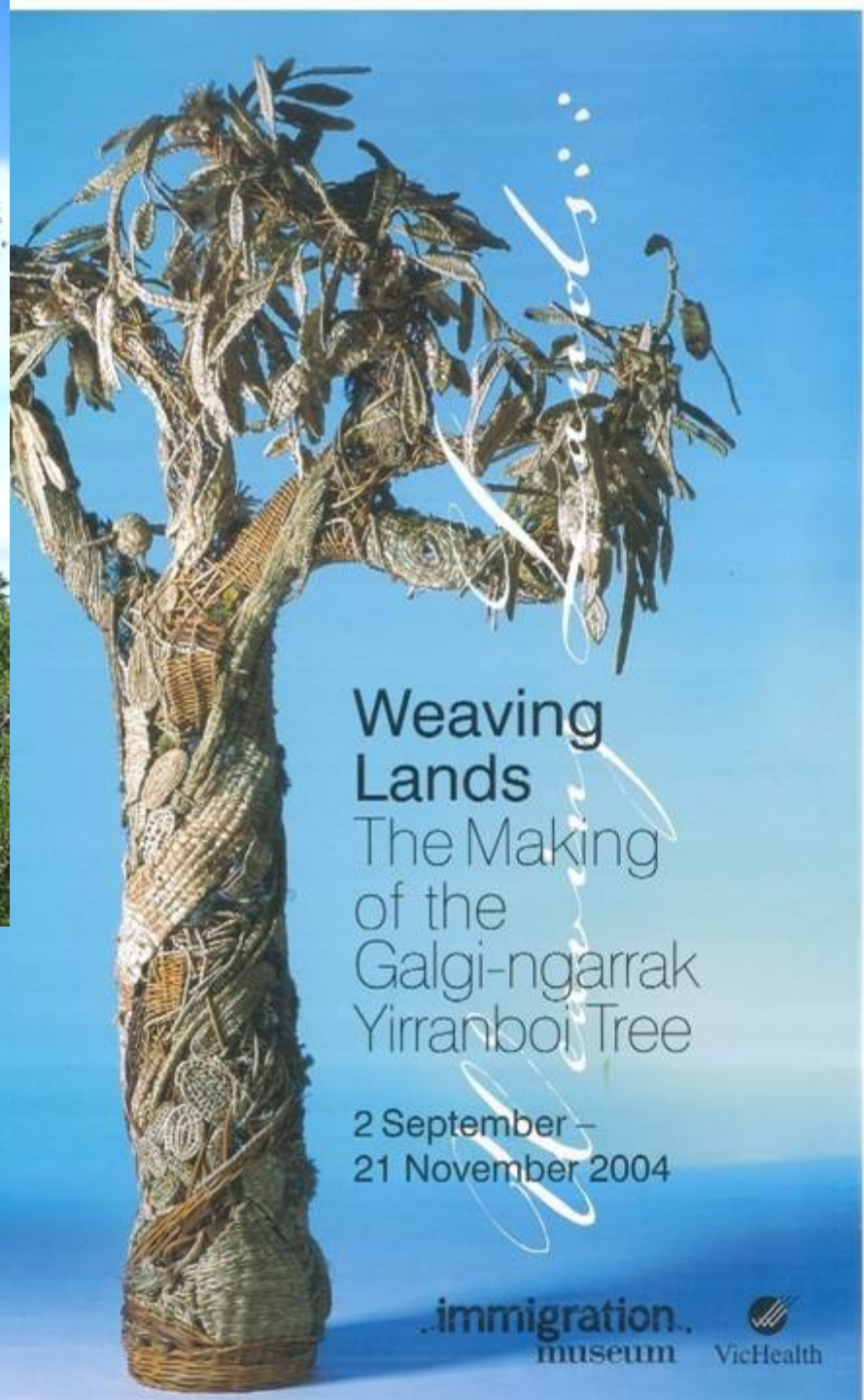


Weaving Lands
The Making of the Galgi-ngarrak Yirranboi Tree

2 September –
21 November 2004

.immigration.
museum       VicHealth

## Broadmeadows Multicultural Planting Festival 2005

Note that in our survey 38.6% of respondents said they participate in community events to "give something to the community" rather than for self-interest.

Hamilton's Top of the Town Ball: a very creative community celebration that raised $269,000 for the Hamilton Hospital, winning the national fund-raising award for 2004

Above: Some of the hospital staff at the Top of the Town Ball – their faces tell the story

**St Kilda:**

**Artists operating from studios in the 'Veg Out' Community Gardens in St Kilda are engaged in a range of community art projects: Above, Julie Shiels, visual artist and story-collector outside her studio; Right: Painter Giz James (right) who runs classes for people with 'special needs'.**

# What's wrong with prevailing approaches?

• A focus on individual projects not inter-related activities or the evolution of practice over time.

• Inadequate time and pressure to put a gloss on the outcomes

• Self-referential/"magpie" research – a lack of critical reflection

• Narrow range of evaluation methods used and narrow conceptions of what constitutes 'evidence'

• A focus on the tangible outcomes that are just the tip of the iceberg -- neglects the deeper and more intangible outcomes that defy 'measurement'.

Don't expect the arts to have linear, utilitarian and predictable social outcomes but support the arts and celebrations to help individuals and groups to build narratives of meaning in a changing world, and to exercise more agency and choice to overcome social isolation. This will have benefits for community health and wellbeing even if the causality is indirect, diffuse and difficult to measure.

# Data collecting methods used in our study

• Random and targeted **surveys**

• In-depth '**strategic conversations**' with practitioners and '**response interviews**' with a couple of participants – depth more than breadth.

• The identification and compilation of relevant **stories** which can be analysed in many ways and for many different purposes.

• **Photonarrative** (or photovoice) techniques that can engage people in creative ways and draw out less conscious reflections on lived experience.

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# Why we need a sector-wide approach

• Meaningful evaluations take time and different forms of expertise

• Removing some of the pressure to put a gloss on outcomes

• Share evaluation results with other practitioners to promote the conversation about what constitutes good practice

• Move beyond the focus on individual projects to look at related activities and the evolution of practice across a number of projects

• Ensuring that something can be 'left behind' when experienced practitioners move on.

# Where to from here?

## Recommendations to funding bodies

• Support a diversity of activities in local communities – from classes to the 'carnival'

• Project funding to include a creative development phase and a post-production assessment phase

• Consider the appointment of skilled and experienced Evaluations Officers to work with practitioners

## For practitioners

• Aim for meaningful evaluations that can improve practice over time

• Understand the value in communicating the outcomes to different target audiences

• Build the conversation about what constitutes good/authentic practice in order to build 'solidarity' and lead the debate on this topic.

**Different contexts; shared experiences**

**Is there a new humanism emerging in the world?**

Festival in Kolli Hills, India

Festival in Broadmeadows