

CULTURE 21 LAB

REVIEW OF GREATER DANDENONG'S CULTURE 21: ACTIONS SELF-ASSESSMENT

OCTOBER 2019

The **City of Greater Dandenong** is the capital of Melbourne's south-east, in the state of Victoria, Australia. Following the merger of the City of Dandenong and the City of Springvale in 1994, the City of Greater Dandenong spreads over 129 square kms, bringing together several suburbs, including Springvale, Keysborough, Noble Park, Dandenong, Bangholme and Lyndhurst.

With a population of approximately 160,000 inhabitants, Greater Dandenong is home to over 150 different nationalities and is considered Australia's most culturally diverse community. In this respect, cultural diversity has often been seen as one of Greater Dandenong's main assets and defining aspects, and this has been reflected in the work of community groups and in the City's public policies and strategies.

This document presents the results of the self-assessment workshop on culture and sustainable development, known as **Culture 21 Lab**, conducted on 6 September 2019 at the Drum Theatre in Greater Dandenong. Culture 21 Lab is a capacity-building programme designed by the Committee on Culture of the international organisation of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Building on the 100 actions and 9 thematic commitments on 'culture in sustainable cities' established in UCLG's **Culture 21 Actions** toolkit, Culture 21 Lab provides a space for local stakeholders from different areas and sectors to discuss how culture is integrated in existing approaches to sustainable development in the city, to identify strengths and weaknesses in this respect, and to formulate recommendations.

The Culture 21 Lab workshop held in Greater Dandenong involved the active participation of approximately 35 local agents, structured in three working groups. A full list of participants has been included in Annex 1. The Lab was coordinated and facilitated by the UCLG Committee on Culture and the **Cultural Development Network (CDN)**, in partnership with the City of Greater Dandenong. Drawing on the results of discussions held in the working groups, this final report has been written by Jordi Baltà, as expert appointed by the UCLG Committee on Culture, with contributions from John Smithies and Raji Uppal, respectively the CDN Executive Officer and Administration Officer.



C21LAB



OVERVIEW

Participants in the Lab were introduced to the Culture 21 Actions' Self-Assessment Guide, which became the main tool for discussions held throughout the day. In particular, working groups discussed each of the 100 actions included in the Culture 21 Actions toolkit and rated them between 1 and 9 as per how each item was being implemented in Greater Dandenong – with 1 amounting to complete lack of or non-implementation of a measure, and 9 a perfect level of implementation.¹ It is worth noting that the focus of the self-assessment is Greater Dandenong broadly, including public, private and civil society initiatives, rather than Council policies exclusively.

Figure 1 on the next page summarises the average marks given to each of the nine thematic Commitments, on a 0-100 scale. Marks provided by participants in Greater Dandenong's Culture 21 Lab are compared with those of a Global Panel convened by UCLG in 2015, which assessed the implementation of Culture 21 Actions items in cities around the world. As can be observed, Greater Dandenong stands above the global average in the 9 themes under review.

Marks obtained range between 50 and 69%, with 'Governance of Culture' (69.32%), 'Culture, Urban Planning and Public Space' (65.63%), 'Cultural Rights' (65%) and 'Heritage, Diversity and Creativity' (63.54%) being particularly high. In all of these fields, except for 'Heritage, Diversity and Creativity', the scores given in Greater Dandenong are over 20% higher than the global average, and even 30% higher in the areas of 'Cultural Rights' and 'Governance of Culture'. It is worth noting that the combination of high marks in items related to cultural rights; heritage, diversity and creativity; and governance of culture points to the strength of areas traditionally associated with cultural policy.

Comparatively lower marks are obtained in areas including 'Culture and Economy' (50%), 'Culture and Environment' (51.25%), and 'Culture, Equality and Social Inclusion' (52.08%) – all representing areas in which a transversal, cross-departmental integration of culture in other policy areas is required. Some of these areas are often weak in cities – therefore, while relatively low when compared to other themes addressed during the Lab, Greater Dandenong's scoring in the field of 'Culture and Environment' (51.25%) is still visibly higher than the global average of 30.11%.

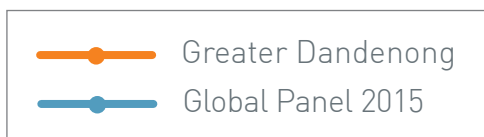
Finally, 'Culture, Information and Knowledge' (55.68%) and 'Culture and Education' (58.75%) are also significantly above the global average but slightly below those areas where higher scores were obtained.

A more detailed analysis of the evidence discussed and the assessments given, combining quantitative and qualitative elements, is presented in the following sections.

¹ Culture 21 Actions' Self-Assessment Guide requires Lab participants to provide a score between 1 (where an action has not been implemented or only initial steps have been taken) and 9 (where an action has been fully implemented and is well-developed) for each of 100 actions that make up Culture 21 Actions, and provides a description to enable cities' self-assessment. In each action, a score between 1 and 3 amounts to an "emerging stage"; a score between 4 and 6 to a "developing stage"; and a score between 7 and 9 places cities in an "advanced stage".

OVERVIEW

Figure 1: Greater Dandenong’s Self-Assessment and data from the Global Panel 2015



Source : Own elaboration, on the basis of results of the initial workshop convened by the City of Greater Dandenong on 6 September 2019 and the average obtained from a world panel of 34 experts invited by the UCLG Committee on Culture in 2015.



CULTURAL RIGHTS

The notion of 'cultural rights' is not common in cultural policy debates in Greater Dandenong or Australia, but the group discussing this chapter argued that the themes addressed by cultural rights are effectively taken up in existing policies and programmes (including the **Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy**, as well as the **Library Strategy** and the **Reconciliation Action Plan**), often under different names. This helps to explain that the overall mark obtained in this area is high (65%).

Several of the items addressed in this area received particularly high marks, including those that concern the adoption of guideline texts on cultural rights, freedoms and responsibilities – these are covered within **Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**, to which the City is committed, as well as in Greater Dandenong's own **Commitment to Aboriginal Australians 1995**. Similarly, while explicit minimum service standards to ensure basic cultural services have not been established, the group considered that the City delivers well above minimum standards, particularly in areas such as libraries, even if some aspects including accessibility in some suburbs of the municipality could be addressed.

Several mechanisms have been established to facilitate citizen participation in priority-setting, decision-making and policy evaluation, including the Arts Advisory Board and its working groups, which operate as open forums, as well as the Heritage Advisory Committee, and community involvement in several programmes and projects. However, there may be some issues to address as regards the participation of diverse communities, due to language, cultural relevance, lack of access to information, as well as more generally the need for greater participation for people with disabilities.

Some issues requiring further attention were also identified when discussing cultural engagement among particular groups. In particular, the group reflected on the need to better understand the obstacles and reasons for low engagement in cultural activities among some communities, something which the 'Community Connections' working group established within the Arts Advisory Board has recently been addressing. Likewise, while there was agreement that the Council is working to expand the engagement in cultural programmes, difficulties exist as regards some groups, including the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in events and in the creation of cultural programmes. As regards women's participation in cultural life, while the Council has policies to foster women's participation in general, particularly within its own 'walls', there were doubts about its effectiveness as regards the field of culture more specifically, and in fostering positive change in the broader community.

Some of the items addressed in this area concern the role of civil society organisations active in areas related to cultural rights. It was noted that civil society actors are frequently



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established at the state rather than local level. Often, human rights organisations have an awareness of cultural rights but this is not their main concern. Many culturally diverse groups have activities that are open to the community, although it was also felt that the Council could further support increasing membership when they were addressing a present need.

To sum up, among the good practices identified in the field of cultural rights are the following:

- The **Spirit of Enterprise** project, which celebrates the story of migration and settlement in Greater Dandenong. The project was considered a 'good practice' by the Jury of the **3rd edition of the International Award UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 in 2018**.
- The consultation process preceding the design of **Stockmans Bridge**.
- Community involvement in the **Afghan Bazaar Cultural Precinct**.

Overall the assessment emerging from this area shows a strong commitment towards active access and participation in cultural life. However, some weaknesses may be identified as regards engagement with vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, and in the need to understand better the reasons for low engagement among some sectors, as well as in fostering women's participation in cultural life.



HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

The 12 actions included in this chapter were all rated with marks ranging between 4 and 8 out of 9, with an overall mark of 63.54%, pointing to a generally good degree of development of measures in the core areas of cultural policy.

Developments in this area are strengthened by the existence of a Council department in charge of cultural affairs, although participants also recognised that the integration and understanding of cultural aspects across Council and with other areas of local policy could be improved, as could the linkages with the **Council Plan**.

Positive trends can be observed in several areas, including those that concern diversity, with programmes that explicitly encourage diversity and intercultural dialogue, and cultural events encouraging artistic expression and contact among different social groups. Similarly, the existence of policies protecting heritage, and the relations existing with local cultural heritage societies, and policies supporting the arts, was praised, even if some aspects could be improved, including the consideration of a range of arts disciplines and their specificities.

Participants agreed that the Council has good support mechanisms in the form of cultural facilities and support for creative organisations and spaces, while pointing that more attention to training and production of new and diverse arts and cultural expressions could be needed, as well as in fostering connection and reflection of the local community. Likewise, while policies and associated programmes are in place to increase engagement with local communities, efforts may be necessary to improve local artist engagement with newly-arrived and disengaged communities. Some measures concerning linguistic diversity have been undertaken.

Aspects arising as relatively weaker in this area include the allocation of resources to artistic research and development, as well as to innovation and community work in cultural policy, cultural grants and the funding of the **Drum Theatre**, although overall there is a healthy budget and amount of Council resources dedicated to culture. Policies dedicated to scientific culture should also be improved, even though short-term initiatives in this area, such as the **STEAM Festival**, could be identified. Finally, further development of international engagement could be necessary.

Good practices identified in this area include the following:

- The **organisation of large and small-scale public cultural events and festivals** presenting the City's artistic and cultural creation.

Overall the assessment demonstrates a well-established framework for cultural policy and development, covering the core areas of heritage, diversity and creativity, with particular strength in the recognition and celebration of diversity. More attention and resources could be needed in areas including cultural research, innovation and development, international engagement and the funding of the Drum Theatre.



CULTURE AND EDUCATION

As pointed out in the initial Overview, this area obtained a mid-range mark in the assessment (58.75%), attesting to the fact that most actions were given scores between 4 and 6, in what the Self-Assessment Guide terms a 'developing' stage.

The only action that obtained a higher mark, in the 'advanced' stage (7), concerns the inclusion of cultural skills and knowledge, as well as aspects related to diversity, creativity and heritage, in the curricula of primary and secondary education – here, participants highlighted the active school engagement in this area, as well as initiatives such as the **Interfaith Network's** good engagement with schools. While the inclusion of diversity, creativity and heritage in the curriculum was generally seen in a positive light, there were some doubts about the effective, good-quality provision of arts education in all schools.

There is also generally good provision of informal education opportunities related to the arts and culture, particularly through cultural community groups that receive public funding as well as in Council facilities (the Drum Theatre, libraries, Walker Street Gallery and Arts Centre). Some schemes and events (e.g. the **Cultural Threads** festival of textile art) have also fostered creative activities with a learning component. There are several information channels to disseminate available opportunities in these areas (e-newsletters, website, online platforms), although there may be doubts about their effective reach.

Cultural diversity is addressed by several educational institutions, including schools and TAFE (Technical and Further Education). Meanwhile, participants argued that the curriculum in high school has limited flexibility to connect with the local cultural reality. More generally, they suggested that there is a lack of awareness of how cultural aspects could be better connected with education, and no cohesive engagement between education and culture, including at policy level. Another weakness concerns the lack of engagement of business in creative training and other forms of creative learning and development.

The good practices identified in this area are the following:

- Events held in the context of **Reconciliation Week** on Aboriginal communities, particularly those with an educational component.
- The annual **HOME exhibition** for artists with an asylum seeker and refugee background, which includes workshops at the Walker Street Gallery, Heritage Hill, IKEA Springvale and local schools.
- The **She exhibition** of works by emerging female artists, which recognises, among others, recent graduates from educational centres.
- The local **Children's Forum**, as well as the establishment of children's advisory groups.



CULTURE AND EDUCATION

While some good practices can be identified and good development in some of the areas examined, a set of reflections were made about the aspects that could deserve further attention, with a view to moving from good individual projects to broader, more consistent policy. Areas to address in this respect include fostering a more integrated and cohesive platform for agents involved in culture and education, interacting more with business, ensuring better outreach of information and community ownership, as well as further political engagement locally.



CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

As noted above, this thematic Commitment received one of the lowest scores in the Lab, something that is not uncommon in cities assessing existing work on the relation between culture and the environment. In fact, the average of 51% obtained by Greater Dandenong is still visibly higher than the mark of the 2015 Global Panel. The overall score results from a rather diverse set of marks, ranging from 3 to 7 out of 9.

Scoring highly in this area were the items related to the support for citizen initiatives making sustainable use of public spaces – as exemplified by **community and school gardens**, the **Greening Our City Urban Tree Strategy**, and the **Sustainability Awards**, which recognise communities' efforts to make the city and environment a more sustainable place – and the appreciation of gastronomy as part of local culture, including the diverse gastronomies living in Greater Dandenong. Related to the latter, the **Regional Food Strategy** and the **cultural and food tours** contribute to integrating history and culture in awareness-raising on the production and consumption of local products.

While good Council strategies exist as regards both environmental **sustainability** and **culture**, as well as an awareness of their potential connections, only some of these connections have been effectively addressed. Workshops on environmental sustainability have involved schools and aboriginal history and addressed some connections with culture, but there is awareness that not all cultural communities have been represented. Cost was identified as a major factor in the delivery of the environmental Sustainability Strategy. In the case of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy, the connections with the environment are not made explicit but there is emerging change in this respect. The possibility of establishing a working group connecting these dimensions was seen potentially as a good idea.

Some positive steps have been undertaken in a few of the areas examined in this theme, including the promotion of public art in open spaces and the use of environmentally-friendly materials by some artists. However, in several areas participants suggested that more work was necessary, including further promotion of traditional knowledge and practices, through stronger dialogue with First Nations among others, increased recognition of the cultural importance of natural spaces, promotion of an awareness of the environmental impact of arts organisations and measures to address them, as well as awareness-raising of the connections between culture and the environment within the business community.

Some initiatives existing in Greater Dandenong were identified as potential good practices, including the following:

- The annual **Sustainability Awards**, which recognise relevant initiatives contributing to environmental preservation and sustainability in several areas.



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- **Schools' community gardens**, which provide education and awareness, and the excess produce of which is later sold.
- The annual **Sustainability Festival** organised by the Council.

A number of recommendations were formulated in this area, addressing in particular the need to foster awareness-raising on aspects related to the relation between culture and the environment, the integration of existing guidelines into policy and the setting-up of grants programmes to foster more sustainable practices.

Finally, the group also suggested that further attention to traditional culture should be paid in order to effectively address the relation between culture and the environment in Greater Dandenong.



CULTURE AND ECONOMY

As already noted, this topic received, at 50%, the lowest mark among the nine thematic Commitments examined during the Lab. The overall mark was however the average of a very diverse assessment, with individual marks ranging between 1 and 9.

The issues that scored higher in this area are generally those that concern economic regulations in the cultural sector and the availability of some public support mechanisms. Included here are the existence of mechanisms to guarantee appropriate contractual and salary conditions for workers in the cultural and creative sectors, public programmes supporting sponsorship and volunteering in cultural projects, and the inclusion of cultural venues and projects and food in local tourism branding initiatives. However, participants also suggested that more advocacy and education around legal and working conditions in the sector could be necessary, that there is capacity for further development and coordination of partnerships between culture and business, and that other cultural aspects (in addition to events, venues and food) could also be included in local tourism strategies.

The working group also agreed that there is a strong recognition of the importance of manufacturing related to traditional trades and crafts, while suggesting that there is room for improvement in the development of the creative industries. The latter aspect is in line with the conclusions of several other items examined, which point to the need for further exploration of the connections between culture and the economy. In particular, the group suggested that there is an opportunity for improvement in the inclusion of the cultural economy in local economic development strategies, which as of now already include only some cultural aspects, such as food, and raised the need to conduct impact studies in this area more regularly. Likewise, a more coordinated approach within Council towards the inclusion of cultural skills in local employability programmes is necessary. A gap is also identified as regards the availability of financing mechanisms targeting for-profit cultural projects (e.g. microcredits, venture capital, etc.), which was seen as an opportunity for development.

Some weaknesses also exist as regards the engagement of the business sector in local development. While some positive initiatives of engagement from business organisations in cultural projects can be identified (e.g. the Springvale Lunar New Year Festival, organised by the Springvale Asian Business Association, SABA, which attracts 50,000 people), the working group identified this as a development opportunity. Similarly, participants argued that corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes typically focus on social welfare and environmental sustainability and that, although some awareness on the importance of culture exist, more could be done to foster initiatives in this respect.

Some good practices connecting culture and the economy were identified, including the following:



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- The well-established **Volunteering Programme**, led by the Council, which involves volunteers in several cultural projects and events.
- The **Springvale Lunar New Year Festival** delivered by SABA.

As noted above, several items in this area were identified as development opportunities and should deserve further attention in the near future. The group emphasised in particular the need for further advocacy and education to improve support for cultural aspects in CSR programmes, the development of employability programmes to cover cultural knowledge and skills, and the consideration of financial mechanisms targeting for-profit cultural initiatives.



CULTURE, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

A large majority of the items examined in the connection between culture, equality and social inclusion received marks in the 'developing stage' (4-6 out of 9), thus resulting in an overall average of 52.08% which, although lower than the marks given for other thematic Commitments, sits visibly above the Global Panel average.

Two of the actions assessed in this area were given higher marks. Among them is the existence of cultural innovation programmes for young people in areas including digital environments and gender equality – a range of schemes can be found, run by Youth Services, Libraries and Arts and Culture Services. Training activities for young people have also been organised in the context of the **Short Cuts Film Festival**. Likewise, participants agreed that cultural organisations receiving public support are engaging vulnerable groups and working in disadvantaged areas of the city – however, some suggested that this approach may need to be revised, and that some public support could also be given for art work which is excellent in itself, regardless of the broader social involvement.

Meanwhile, the assessment of items related to the policy framework and monitoring mechanisms received more average scores. When discussing aspects such as the integration of cultural aspects in welfare policies (e.g. health, employment, social inclusion) and the analysis of cultural vulnerabilities or how cultural participation can be conducive to social development, the general perception was that there is an awareness of how ethnicity or religion can influence participation and wellbeing, and a positive appreciation of cultural diversity, but that probably a deeper understanding of connections in this area would be necessary. Some participants suggested that there may be a disconnect between policy and practice in these areas, with both addressing the need to effectively work with diverse communities but often in different ways that are not reflective on one another. A policy area that was seen as particularly weak concerned the taking into account of culture in local conflict or dispute resolution guidelines – some participants suggested for instance that there is a need to better understand the different relationships that diverse communities have with security and policing.

Also relevant in this area is the need for better training and capacity-building around barriers to cultural engagement, for both Council officers and civil organisations. As regards monitoring mechanisms, reference was made to some school surveys on cultural participation and wellbeing, although there were also some doubts about the feasibility of establishing a causal link between the two at the local level.

The discussion examined the availability of programmes and initiatives addressing the needs of specific sectors. Some examples were given of programmes that promote women's participation in cultural activities (such as the Step Up programme, **She** exhibition, and



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Cultural Threads festival), although overall a more comprehensive approach is missing. As regards the accessibility of cultural venues, positive measures have been adopted in several venues, but some spaces are heritage-listed (e.g. Heritage Hill), which makes changes difficult. Organisations representing people with disabilities believe that there remain some challenges in this area. In the field of intergenerational collaboration, there are some good initiatives in place (e.g. the Libraries' 'Living books' programme, as well as the collaboration between the **Seniors Festival** and the **Children's Festival**), but also some scope for growth.

Finally, some items addressed the role of civil society organisations. Here, there was a good assessment of initiatives that celebrate diversity and foster intercultural dialogue, including the **Interfaith Network**, Harmony Day events and other festivals and events around cultural diversity. Meanwhile, there is no established network or platform of civil organisations specifically addressing the link between culture and equality, although some of the working groups established within the Arts Advisory Board are considering this goal.

Overall, some good practices can be identified in this area, such as:

- Several **programmes managed by the Libraries** to foster cultural engagement and encounters among several age groups.
- The **Interfaith Network of Greater Dandenong**, which brings together several traditional and multi-faith groups, meeting monthly.
- Many **artists' development of projects and initiatives** with an inclusive, participatory approach.

As explained above, several ideas were shared for areas that could deserve further attention, including capacity-building on diversity as a cross-sectional aspect relevant in many policy areas, training for civil society organisations, the improvement of statistics, as well as more comprehensive approaches to fostering intergenerational encounters and women's participation in cultural life.



CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

As noted earlier, this is one of the areas in which Greater Dandenong obtained a higher mark (65.63%), visibly above the Global Panel average. Indeed, several of the items examined in this thematic Commitment were considered by participants to be in the 'advanced stage'.

Positive approaches exist both in the overall policy framework as well as in the broader understanding of the importance of culture in urban planning and public space. This includes the recognition of cultural issues and resources through the local history register and the Heritage Overlay, and the recording of local narratives across the municipality and in specific areas. The Council has also adopted or commissioned a range of documents which seek to take into account and protect heritage and landscape in planning initiatives, including the **Greater Dandenong Heritage Study** and a range of **information guides and checklists**. Participants argued that the notion of landscape is very important in Greater Dandenong, but, while this is well integrated in the Council's own work, it could be improved in its work with private developers.

Generally the role of culture in the renovation of historic areas is deeply understood and valued (and there are good signage programmes as well as community involvement in the naming of streets and public spaces), although there is a lack of input and representation from First Nations' cultures. Overall there may be an ad-hoc approach to active public engagement around urban planning (e.g. community involvement in the new **Springvale Community Precinct**, as well as in the planning of cultural venues such as the new Art Gallery), although there are increasingly mechanisms in place for permanent reflection in this area, such as the Public Art Advisory Group.

Tangible and intangible heritage is well collected and preserved, among others in the local Archive, though the lack of a local museum was noted. Meanwhile, architectural guidelines for the renovation of buildings and the planning of new buildings exist, particularly at state level, which, while useful, are not always in line with local expectations around cultural and heritage aspects.

Items related to the cultural uses of public space were evaluated very positively. These include the recognition of public spaces as resources for cultural participation and the universal consideration of some places as public goods (e.g. Harmony Square, The Drum, the Afghan Bazaar Cultural Precinct, Little India Cultural Precinct, parks, etc.). There are also good initiatives in public art (including the **Transformed** temporary public art programme as well as a range of **permanent installations**) and a **policy in this area**, although some participants noted the need for investment in a more structured maintenance programme, as well as fostering greater citizen awareness around public art.



CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

Among the other aspects discussed in this area which would deserve further attention are the consideration of the risk of gentrification when planning new developments and arts infrastructure (i.e. how to balance new infrastructures and sustainable communities, and going beyond consultation), the accessibility of cultural buildings through public transport (which would require negotiation at state level, given the State's competence in public transport) and the development of cultural impact assessment mechanisms, and related training activities, to inform urban planning.

A range of good practices can be identified in this area, including the following:

- Greater Dandenong's **recognition of several places as highly symbolic** because of their cultural relevance, the **consideration of cultural aspects in placemaking work** (see e.g. the **Placemaking Framework**), and the **promotion of public art**.
- **Community participation** in the design of new urban spaces and art infrastructure, including the Springvale Community Precinct, the Afghan Bazaar Cultural Precinct, and the new Gallery, as well as via advisory groups.

Several of the issues discussed in this area generated a lively debate and suggested that they may deserve further attention, including the recognition of heritage and narratives related to First Nations in aspects of urban planning and renovation, the consideration of gentrification in the planning of new infrastructures, preservation and awareness-raising around public art, and the relevance of public transport to facilitate access to cultural venues and events.



CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

The majority of actions examined in this area were perceived by participants to lie in a mid-range, 'developing' stage, which serves to explain the overall mark of 55.68%.

Some of the items, however, received higher marks. Among them were those that concerned the availability of policies and programmes enabling citizens' engagement in creation, production and digital distribution, as well as the engagement of cultural institutions in public debates and knowledge dissemination. As regards the former, relevant examples include the availability of a recording booth, the **Short Cuts Film Festival**, and other initiatives led by the Council as well as by community organisations. Meanwhile, libraries contribute to fostering information and knowledge and, more generally, a range of publicly-funded organisations engage in work in this area, contributing to the valuation of culture as a public good.

Another area that was also assessed positively regards the existence of policies guaranteeing access to free and plural information, which enables citizens' participation in cultural life – while admitting that despite the good policies, effective practice may lag behind, participants also agreed that Greater Dandenong celebrates culture and diversity well. Local media have ensured that the voices of women and diverse communities are visible, although there was a feeling that more could still be done to foster more diversity in the media.

Some critical reflections were also made when discussing items related to fundamental freedoms. While aspects like freedom of expression, opinion and information, as well as cultural diversity and respect for privacy, are enshrined in the relevant legislation, there were some concerns about specific instances where some books had been challenged or there had been limited support for the diversity of sexual orientations or gender identities. Some existing monitoring mechanisms in the field of fundamental freedoms were mentioned, including the police, community groups and organisations, and the local press.

Several items in this chapter address the availability of analyses and studies in areas relevant to culture and sustainable development. Participants agreed that some initiatives had been taken as regards the connection between grassroots cultural processes and social innovation, although some further progress, and more frequent analyses, could be done. Likewise, support exists to facilitate access to technology for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and some apps have been developed to support community access, but there do not seem to be monitoring mechanisms to identify obstacles to the access and use of technology. In a related area, while there are some training and awareness-raising schemes for cultural professionals on areas like copyright, copyleft and open source, the discussion suggested that more could be done in this area. Similarly, some initiatives discussing the connection between culture and sustainable development have been undertaken, including through the Arts Advisory Board and Culture 21 Lab, but there may be a need for more permanent mechanisms in this field.



CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Finally, one of the items addressed the availability of policies and programmes allowing people active in the cultural sector to participate in international cooperation networks. While some work exists in this area (e.g. via Greater Dandenong's 'sister city' relationship with the province of Xuzhou in China), the need for broader, more regular mechanisms was noted.

Some good practices were identified in this area, including the following:

- The short film *All These Creatures*, a diverse story, created and shot in Dandenong and co-produced by the Council, which went on to win the Short Film Palme d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018.
- The **availability of surveys in several areas related to culture, information and knowledge**, which provide very valuable information.

Given the perceived need to make progress in several of the topics reviewed, participants suggested that one way forward would be to establish a position to address relevant issues in this field.



GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

At 69.32%, the overall mark obtained by Greater Dandenong in this area was the highest among the nine Commitments analysed, visibly ahead of the score given by the Global Panel in 2015 (37.33%). Seven of the eleven actions assessed in this area obtained marks in the 'advanced stage', with the remaining four being mainly in the 'developing stage' or, in only one case, in the 'emerging stage'.

The overall framework of policies and mechanisms to develop participatory cultural policy and its connections with other areas of planning was generally assessed positively. Participants highlighted the existence of a cultural policy aligned with the Agenda 21 for culture, with a scope that goes beyond the cultural sector proper and which has support from the highest levels. This is complemented with a range of permanent and ad-hoc opportunities for engagement, via the Arts Advisory Board and its working groups (Community Connection, Public Art) as well as the Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, and opportunities for community engagement in all cultural and neighbourhood planning. At the same time, there may be room for improvement in community engagement for individual projects.

Some aspects related to partnerships with civil society and independent organisations were also assessed very positively. Among them is the involvement of citizens and community organisations in the management of facilities, projects and events, as exemplified by the partnership and co-location of facilities involving Connection Arts Space and the Walker Street Gallery, as well as the similar collaboration between the Dandenong and District Historical Society (DDHS) and the Springvale and District Historical Society (SDHS) including the shared civic archive. Likewise, participants agreed that the cultural organisations receiving public support are transparent, accountable and evaluate the services they provide, with citizens being represented in their boards.

The working group also rated positively the existing framework for the distribution of responsibilities and collaboration in the field of cultural policy among local, state and federal authorities.

The aspects that received more moderate assessments in this area concerned, on the one hand, some specific areas of policy development, including the development of gender equality by cultural organisations in receipt of public support and the strengthening of connections and engagement with local artists and unengaged communities, both of which were seen as potential development opportunities. On the other hand, some weaknesses were also identified in issues related to civil society organisations – including the lack of established platforms or networks enabling cross-sector collaboration (although the advisory boards and committees and the working groups partly fulfil this role) and the lack of public training programmes to strengthen the capacities of NGOs and other civil society organisations.



GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

Several initiatives in this area were seen as relevant good practices, including the following:

- The **incorporation of cultural considerations**, including the development of historical narratives, in **planning across Greater Dandenong's activity centres** (Dandenong, Noble Park, Springvale)
- **Co-location of public facilities** (Walker Street Gallery and Springvale Library) **by citizen-led, non-profit organisations** (Connection Arts Space and SDHS respectively)

In the future, participants suggested that attention should be paid to training programmes, advocacy and education initiatives towards strengthening civil society organisations' contribution to cultural life.



CONCLUSION

The Culture 21 Lab held in Greater Dandenong brought together an experienced, diverse group of people, who generated a rich debate, discussing relevant examples, needs and opportunities. Overall the discussion attests to the existence of a strong identity and a good policy framework, as well as substantial energy and willingness to move forward in some areas. This final section summarises some of the general findings and presents some recommendations for the near future.

The self-assessment of the nine thematic Commitments of Culture 21 Actions points to the following aspects:

Over the years, Greater Dandenong has developed a **solid cultural policy framework**, reflected in a range of policy documents and strategies, such as the current Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy. This is supported by good participatory mechanisms both in the field of culture (e.g. the Arts Advisory Boards and Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, as well as related working groups and ad-hoc consultation mechanisms) and in other related policy areas (e.g. the Children’s Forum, among many others). Indeed, the existing governance framework arises as one particular strength, with elements of good practice which could provide inspiration to other cities and local governments.

The **strength of the cultural dimension in local life and community-building** is also reflected in the frequent references to diversity as being constitutive of Greater Dandenong’s local identity, connected to community cohesion and something to be proud of, as also reflected in a number of community organisations, events and places. It is necessary to note, however, that while diversity associated with ethnicity, language and religion is recognised and reflected in policy terms, other dimensions of diversity, such as gender, disability or economic status, may need to be more strongly integrated in cultural policies and programmes. Connections with First Nations could also be made stronger in some areas.

Greater Dandenong has a **good network of cultural facilities**, including libraries, which serve a diverse range of purposes much beyond access to books and knowledge, as well as the Drum Theatre and Walker Street Gallery, among others. Occasionally, there was the perception that, for all their merit, there may be an overreliance on libraries as providers of many services – while commendable in itself, this may point to an excessive concentration of activities in Dandenong and Springvale, and risks leaving out some segments of the local community.

The City has also **good expertise in connecting culture and place-making**, including through public art and the use of public and green spaces as sites of cultural participation. Over the years there has been good reflection and practice in this area, as reflected in the recognition of several places as community hubs and public goods, and their role in image-building and identity.

CONCLUSION

There is an **understanding that culture connects with other dimensions of local sustainable development** (such as the environment, education, economy, and wellbeing) but this **has not always been translated into active, effective strategies**. There are however some good initiatives, often happening on an ad-hoc, short-term basis, which could be scaled-up or inspire more comprehensive, systematic approaches. There is an opportunity to make progress in this respect in the next few years, which should be reflected in political vision and will.

The city boasts an extensive number of **civil society organisations and informal citizen initiatives** which contribute to strengthening local cultural life. There may be a potential to foster cross-sectoral collaboration (e.g. between culturally-diverse community groups and artists, or between arts organisations and rights-based and social-oriented initiatives), as well as some need to enhance organisations' skills and capacities.

In certain areas, such as transport and mobility, and education, economy and urban planning, some **developments in Greater Dandenong are reliant on state or federal competences**. In some cases, such as in facilitating access to cultural events and facilities through public transport, lobbying and advocacy from the Council and other local actors towards state authorities may be convenient in order to address some of the needs identified.

Some needs can also be identified in areas related to knowledge and information. In particular, across several areas the need for research, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms was noted – e.g. as regards the economic relevance of culture and creativity, the connection between culture and wellbeing, or the identification of obstacles to further participation in cultural life. Likewise, there may be a need to strengthen training and capacity-building for Council staff and members of civil society, going beyond an awareness on e.g. cultural diversity and providing more specialised tools and reflections.

Emerging from this analysis, some recommendations can be formulated for work in the coming years:

Fostering Collaboration across the Council and Informing Future Planning. The Culture 21 Lab workshop was a good opportunity to foster dialogue across Council services. It pointed to shared awareness of issues and some existing collaborations, as well as the potential to foster this transversal engagement more systematically. In this respect, it could be interesting to set up a working group involving staff from different services to address themes of common interest around culture, ideally identifying a set of specific themes (e.g. creative economy, culture and the environment, culture and social inclusion). Ultimately, this work could inform a future revision of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy, with a broader scope, as well as the next Council Plan.

CONCLUSION

» **Exploring the Connections between Culture and the Economy.** One of the areas receiving a lower score in the self-assessment exercise, there is however an understanding that culture and creativity are relevant to the local economy. This should be better reflected in public policies and programmes, with a more sophisticated approach that recognises specific sectors (e.g. crafts, film) but also the ecosystemic nature of cultural sectors and their connections with the broader economy. The self-assessment suggested that research on the economic relevance of cultural and creative sectors could be necessary, and that attention could also be paid to the inclusion of cultural jobs and related skills in employability programmes (e.g. training, advice), the establishment of funding mechanisms targeting for-profit cultural projects, and the engagement of local businesses in cultural development, through CSR, sponsorship and other mechanisms.

» **Strengthening the Attention to Gender in Cultural Policy and Programmes.** Initiatives for gender equality have been adopted both in other areas of local policy and in culture (e.g. the She exhibition, and the Cultural Threads programme), but there is a perception that this could be addressed in a more systematic, comprehensive way. This may take the form of a specific review or policy document or the mainstreaming of gender aspects in the future Arts and Cultural Heritage Strategy.

» **Building on the Strengths in Culture and Place-Making, and Addressing New Challenges.** Along with the strengths observed in this area, the discussion also suggested that existing expertise, the willingness to improve and the identification of emerging challenges provide space for new reflections and programmes. In particular, measures could be adopted to consider the risks and management of gentrification in new urban and cultural infrastructure, fostering citizens' appreciation of and measures to better protect public art, and ensuring that place-making and related initiatives go beyond the 'activity centres' of Dandenong, Noble Park and Springvale and reach the whole community. In some of these issues, there could be connections with work done around the natural environment, e.g. by strengthening the notion of landscape as connecting culture and nature, and integrating elements of traditional knowledge in place-making initiatives.

» **Advancing Dialogue and Work with First Nations.** The need to strengthen work around First Nations was noted in several instances, including with regard to the acknowledgement and visibility of the heritage and narratives of First Nations, the recognition of relevant places, spaces and names within urban planning, and the exploration of ways to further integrate traditional knowledge in areas including culture and education, and culture and the environment. This is an area in which there seems to be willingness on behalf of both the Council and civil society to do more, and further work around the aforementioned items or others could be encouraged.



CONCLUSION

» **Enhancing Research and Analysis.** Several of the areas outlined above, including the economic relevance of culture, citizens' appreciation of public art, and the role of cultural diversity in community cohesion and well-being, could benefit from suitable research, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. There may be an opportunity for the **CDN's Measurable Outcomes Schema**, which assesses the contributions of cultural engagement to a range of areas including social, economic, environmental and governance aspects, to be applied in order to provide intelligence and enrich future work.

» **Reflecting on International Collaboration.** Items related to international networking and cooperation included in the self-assessment indicate that some further work may be necessary in this area. While this does not seem to be a key priority, both the rich local diversity and the lack of opportunities for regular engagement overseas may indicate a need to consider whether some opportunities may be established in the future – e.g. in the form of artists' residencies in Greater Dandenong or abroad, or a grant programme enabling overseas exploration.

ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORKSHOP

NAME - SURNAME	ORGANIZATION
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GROUP 1 – Cultural Rights / Culture, Equality and Social Inclusion / Culture, Urban Planning and Public Space

Facilitated by Jordi Baltà, UCLG Committee on Culture

Trevor Matthews (rapporteur)	Team Leader - Arts & Cultural Development, City of Greater Dandenong
Grissel Walmaggia	Place Making Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Melanie Learson	Art in Public Places Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Aysha Tufa	Library Services / Arts Committee, City of Greater Dandenong
Samira Farah	Signal
Hanann Al Daqqa	Community Arts Programs Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Taimi Clinch	Wallara
Hayden Brown	Community Advocacy Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Ed Cotter	Team Leader -Sustainability Planning, City of Greater Dandenong

GROUP 2 – Heritage, Diversity and Creativity / Culture and Economy / Governance of Culture

Facilitated by John Smithies, Cultural Development Network

Tilla Buden (rapporteur)	Manager Community Arts, Culture & Library, City of Greater Dandenong
David Wilersdorf	Drum Advisory Board
James Buick	Drum Theatre, City of Greater Dandenong
Chris Keyes	Dandenong Historical Society
Martin Fidler	Director - Community Services, City of Greater Dandenong
Darren Wilson	Environmental Planner, City of Greater Dandenong
Andrew Duong	Connections Gallery
Greer Davis	Arts & Cultural Development Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Matthew Kirwan	Councillor, City of Greater Dandenong

GROUP 3 - Culture and Education/Culture and Environment/Culture, Information and Knowledge

Facilitated by Raji Uppal, Cultural Development Network

Marissa Nathaniel (rapporteur)	Business Support Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
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ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORKSHOP

NAME - SURNAME	ORGANIZATION
Phil Faulks	Artist/Lecturer
Koula Kalaitzoglou	Library Program and Learning Co-ordinator, City of Greater Dandenong
Esther Gyorki	Curatorial and Exhibitions Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Natalie Brown	Library Services Coordinator, City of Greater Dandenong
Leonie King	Team Leader - Festival and Events, City of Greater Dandenong
James Mitchell	Senior Sustainability Planner, City of Greater Dandenong
Biljana Komnenovic	Community Development Funding Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Billy Kelleher	Theatre & Public Programs Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
Jacqueline Gray	Coordinator - Children's Services, City of Greater Dandenong



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