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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AHA	Aboriginal Housing Authority, South Australia
AHC	Australian Heritage Commission
AHP	Aboriginal Housing Panel
AP Lands	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CARSJR	Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation's Social Justice Report
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHIP	Community Housing and Infrastructure Program
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organisation's Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
NAHS	National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NIHG	National Indigenous Housing Guide
POE	Post Occupancy Evaluation
RAIA	Royal Australian Institute of Architects
RCIADIC	The Royal Commission Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UPK	Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku
VLGA	Victorian Local Government Association

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper seeks to position proposed research and comparative analysis of consultation methods used in remote Aboriginal communities in Australia, particularly in the Ngaanyatjarra and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands of South Australia and Western Australia. It focuses on consultation methods used for the project definition, design and construction of various aspects of the built environments of Aboriginal communities. The research seeks to identify a range of proven and endurable best practice methods for community consultation that more effectively engage communities in determining appropriate and sustainable improvements to their housing environments.

The research proposes:

- to review relevant Australian and international research literature and other documentation on community consultation methods.
- to document the current practices and procedures of design practitioners, associated professionals and service providers working with remote Indigenous communities
- to examine methods of consultation between practitioners, service providers and communities and to evaluate those methods in terms of their effectiveness in leading to improvements in built environment outcomes for remote Indigenous communities

The historic determination of policies for Aboriginal people by Local, State and National government and religious institutions did not generally require nor foster a consultative relationship with Aboriginal people. The relatively recent evolution of policy frameworks for cross-cultural consultation has largely originated from consultation and project implementation practices that are not policy based but which have affected policy.

A review of current policies suggests that cross-cultural consultation protocols have evolved largely from participatory 'on the ground' engagement with Aboriginal people in projects aimed at health improvement of living environments and sustainable land management.

National models for consultation, while drawing widely on recognised policy-based principles, provides little practical guidance for consultation practice with respect to built environment issues. However, the key aspects include the acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples must be afforded special consideration with regard to communication and decision-making arising from the consultation process. It is important that consultants and service providers negotiate with Aboriginal communities during the development of their consultation strategies to ensure that the communities understand and are in full agreement with the consultation process.

Working definitions have been proposed for 'best' practice, 'effective' consultation, the built environment, remoteness and sustainable environments. These definitions are useful to assist in building mutual understandings of local and cultural practices and environments, in the context of dynamic situations in remote Aboriginal Australia and will be subject to ongoing reviewed following the interview process.

Many policy-based guidelines exist in the form of protocols that assist in developing ways of communicating within different cultural frameworks. The various state governments and territories in Australia have a variety of published consultation protocols however not usually formulated for built outcomes. Both the Queensland and Northern Territory Governments have published health standards consultation protocols while the Western Australian Government is currently developing its community consultation protocols. This regional approach is currently a fragmented approach at best; given those traditional Aboriginal boundaries in remote areas have little relevance to State boundaries.

Consultation methods that arise from the acknowledged best practices of consultants working directly with Aboriginal communities can be described as 'bottom up' approaches whereas consultation methods that arise from policy devised by government and Indigenous agency agendas, can be described as 'top down' approaches.

This paper includes a summary of the involvement of architecture professionals tracing the early engagement of architects' involvement in housing policy and provision through service providers such as the Aboriginal Housing Panel from the 1970's onwards. The development of approaches to consultation and delivery can be traced through the development of top down approaches and health based approaches from the late 1980's onwards and the subsequent development of standards based models from the late 1990's. The influence of these practices is evident in the development of protocols which have been influenced by bottom up practices.

The lack of definition and uniformity in policy guidelines for cross-cultural consultation methodologies employed between Aboriginal communities and service providers can be contrasted to the literature drawn largely from the accounts of facilitators employed by Aboriginal communities, councils and agencies who manage the legal, monetary and administrative affairs on a community's behalf. In central Australia, a variety of methods have been used in cross-cultural situations. Some have been adapted from overseas experiences for local use, some have built upon aspects of Aboriginal traditions and there have been local innovations. There are however numerous understandings, protocols and practices which are common to the consultative methodologies employed. These include principles relating to cross-cultural communication, family and community representation, issues of seniority and gender, consultation protocols, shared responsibility and ownership, time requirements for consultation, and emerging but limited techniques specifically suited to consultation relating to the design of the built environment.

Cross-cultural and participatory consultation practices of built environment practitioners have been developed through working directly with communities, 'on the ground', and include work on integrated living environments, planning processes for settlements, the setting up of cultural enclaves, self help housing, family oriented approaches and participatory planning processes.

Consultation practices relating to the built environment developed from policy is an identifiable gap in the current literature. So too is the available documentation on processes and determinations resulting from post occupancy evaluation leading to a research methodology intended to focus on these limitations.

The research methodology proposes development of the themes and gaps identified in the Positioning Paper, through a series of interviews with design and other practitioners and service providers experienced in working with Aboriginal communities in remote central Australia. Interview questions that correspond to the key research themes proposed for this research project seek to encourage community representatives, practitioners and services providers to critically reflect upon the complex processes which inform housing and infrastructure projects, and the pivotal role of consultation practices in determining outcomes. Interview themes include: defining and identifying the contexts in which the consultation process and the design processes occur, defining the consultation process, defining the cultural, social, environmental and economic issues, and defining the post occupancy evaluation processes.

Many 'bottom up', participatory approaches have influenced regional policy and practice, however these efforts have not yet universally demonstrated that National or State based government policies and management regimes have been influenced by practices that are culturally and environmentally inclusive. There are successes in the generalised project management area in the setting up of contractual guidelines to ensure consultation and negotiation occur with Aboriginal people, but these protocols are not also established for the management, funding, services and housing implementation agencies.

The significant area for which there is little published information is how policy guidelines (or lack of them) translate to the realities of cross-disciplinary consultation in the field. This issue appears to be pivotal in the process of housing provision and the broader issues of cultural and environmental sustainability in the built environment. The process of implementation of housing and service provision requires ongoing consultation during construction and after occupation. There is little documented evidence of these consultation practices representing a significant gap in the literature. The proposed interview methodology will focus on these limitations.

# 1 SCOPE AND CONTEXT OF CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY RESEARCH

This paper seeks to position proposed research into consultation methods used in remote Aboriginal communities in Australia, particularly in the Ngaanyatjarra and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands of South Australia and Western Australia. It focuses on consultation methods used for the project definition, design and construction of various aspects of the built environments of Aboriginal communities. The research seeks to identify a range of proven and enduring best practice methods for consultation with remote Indigenous communities that more effectively engage communities in determining appropriate and sustainable improvements to their housing and community environments.

Evaluation of the everyday conditions in which many Aboriginal people live in remote areas demonstrates, in most instances, that typically limited consultation practices have been ineffective in determining the needs of people, and in affecting appropriate built environment outcomes (Ross 1998).

This research proposes to investigate the difficulties that arise from cross-cultural consultation as a result of differences of language and culture, and to identify consultation methodologies which focus on communication techniques are effective in cross-cultural communication specifically focused on the built environments of Indigenous communities.

This Positioning Paper provides the basis for subsequent future research into formulating both cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary consultation policy guidelines aimed at improving built environment outcomes for remote Indigenous communities.

## 1.1 Research aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to determine best practice models for effective consultation aimed at improving built environment and housing outcomes for remote Indigenous communities. It seeks to advance understanding of how effective working relationships are established with Indigenous communities.

The project will investigate, document and assess the consultation and evaluation practices of recognised architecture and design practitioners, associated sub-consultants, builders and service providers working in the practical development of remote, built environments for Indigenous communities.

The research proposes:

- to review relevant Australian and international research literature and other documentation focusing on cross-cultural consultation methods.
- to document the current practices and procedures of design practitioners, associated professionals and service providers working with remote Indigenous communities.
- to examine methods of consultation between practitioners, service providers and communities with a focus on built environment outcomes

In order to inform the research aims above, it will be essential to propose working definitions for best practice and consultation methods through:

- defining the extent and context of the built environment in remote Indigenous communities.
- clarifying the practical definition of best practice/s in consultation and documenting the outcomes of such practices.
- reviewing design methodology literature and practices involving cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural consultation practices

## **1.2 Background to the research proposal**

Recent design and construction projects undertaken by the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia have involved working closely with Aboriginal communities around Warburton, in the remote Gibson desert area of Western Australia. Feedback from representatives of these communities has revealed that existing methods for consultation with Aboriginal communities involving direct questioning need challenging and new, practical methodologies developed. A clear, if anecdotal, message has been received from the communities, that the most effective form of consultation is in “on the ground” dialogue (face to face within the community) in association with implementation programs.

Our work is informed beyond the literature, through interviews and observations of the community consultation practices of a range of architectural and associated consultants, particularly concentrating on the built outcomes of communities in the Ngaanyatjarra and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. Over a period of five years we developed a project to design, fabricate and install a community arts building for the people at Patjarr, north-west of Warburton in the Gibson Desert in Western Australia.

The impetus for this research came about through conversations with the people, the community advisers and in particular, with the architects involved in the design and maintenance of housing in central Australia. There was a widespread sense that the provision of housing and services was not achieving healthy and culturally or environmentally sustainable communities, despite the communities’ feelings that they had been ‘consulted to death’.

## **1.3 The failure of consultation practices to identify housing needs**

Memmott’s influential review of consultation for remote Aboriginal communities, confirms that contemporary and professional consultation practices and a lack of meaningful communication by architects and service providers, has failed to identify housing needs. The outcome being that design failings continue to be replicated. Most importantly, a “one size fits all” approach is one of the principle factors in the ongoing failure of governments and agencies in the provision of appropriate housing.

Aboriginal housing needs cannot be generalised, neither for the continent, nor for the regions. Aboriginal housing clients have distinct and varying cultural needs throughout Australia due to (a) variation in the domiciliary traits and constructs of the original Indigenous cultures and (b) regional variations in the cultural change processes imposed by Europeans. Cultural changes continue and these changes are influenced by the regional standards and styles of the non-Aboriginal sector (Memmott 1997 p23).

Cross-cultural communication problems arise from assumptions and misunderstandings on the part of well meaning architects, builders or bureaucrats arising from differences in language, values, assumptions, beliefs and experiences relating to the function and purpose of housing. From a non Indigenous perspective the function and purpose of a house in both the relationship of internal rooms and within the overall context of the yard and street is understood in terms of typical nuclear family preferences and the ubiquity of housing type. However the suitability of standardised housing for particular Aboriginal cultural, gender, age and extended family structures has to be questioned and can only be determined through effective cross-cultural communication requiring an understanding of cultural differences and an expertise in providing housing options responsive to particular requirements.

In terms of misunderstandings arising from consultations with Indigenous people about their housing preferences, there are a variety of reasons why an Aboriginal person may not respond meaningfully to inquiries on his or her housing needs. These include the clumsiness in putting questions; possible shyness, shame, disillusionment or anger; and fear or dependency in relation to other community members. In addition to this an Aboriginal person may not wish to divulge information of aspects of personal or group behaviour to a stranger or may assume that they are already understood (Memmott 1997).

Another important aspect of inquiring about everyday patterns of behaviour aimed at determining preferences in housing, is that those patterns may be assigned subjectively to the realm of the unconscious and not be understood objectively or consciously.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance to an Aboriginal of being able to see, hear and generally 'feel' the happenings in his camp. Much of the monitoring is done at an unconscious level (Heppell and Wigley 1981:150 in Memmott 1997 p24)

It is reasonable to suggest that unless there are consultation methods that can objectify understandings about lifestyle patterns and their design implications, there remains the probability that housing provision will be made on the basis of the cultural preferences of the provider over those of the recipient.

One other problem effecting cross-cultural consultation is the level of awareness by both consultant and client of the diverse range of design options of the built environment from housing hardware, layout, ergonomics and orientation to the overall context in which a house may be associated, including community facilities and infrastructure. Limitations in the expertise of the consultant and therefore the range of housing options offered to the client will inevitably limit the potential for an appropriate housing solution. Added to this is the fact that low literacy groups who have limited travel and urban experiences will have a limited understanding of the diverse design options of the built environment (Memmott 1997).

#### **1.4 A model for a national approach to policy for consultation with Indigenous peoples**

Of the number of published national policies that include guidelines for consultation with Indigenous peoples, one of particular relevance to this research on the built environment is the Policy in Relation to Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Peoples and the National Estate developed by the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC, 1997). The policy is intended to 'formally recognise the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander peoples in relation to the Register of the National Estate' and to outline the "guiding principles and objectives of consulting and negotiating with Indigenous peoples and communities on National Estate issues" (AHC, 1997 p.1). The National Estate encompasses all aspects of the natural and historic (built) environments of Australia.

Acknowledged within the Policy is that one of the reasons for the ongoing disempowerment of Indigenous peoples is to do with language, and that their 'skills, knowledge, networks and access to power' are not necessarily as developed as other stakeholders. The wording of the AHC policy also confirms that consultation practices must also be tied to the concept and practice of negotiation (AHC, 1997).

In developing their policy on Indigenous consultation, the AHC has drawn on national and international frameworks focussing on issues of relevance to Indigenous peoples; in particular the Jonas Report (1994), the Royal Commission Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) (1991) and the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (RATSIHPA) (1996). A key finding from the Jonas Report agreed upon the need for consultation with Aboriginal peoples and for informed consent to be a prior condition of any work done to their heritage. (AHC, 1997 p.1). The RCIADIC has recognised the 'unique position of Indigenous peoples',

together with the acknowledgement that service delivery to Aboriginal peoples has been far from satisfactory. A key recommendation has explicitly stated the 'need for specialised consultation' to facilitate 'Indigenous self determination, involvement and reporting in any research, programs and policies that affect Indigenous peoples'. (AHC, 1997 p.2)

Indigenous rights to participate in decision-making, with regard to sustainable development, have been recognised within the international conventions, Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity, held as a result of the Rio Earth Summit. (AHC, 1997 p.4)

The AHC Policy sets out the reasons for consultation and the subsequent principles under which consultation with Indigenous people, in relation to heritage issues, should be carried out. Each of the reasons and principles are underpinned by reference to an acknowledged national and/or internationally recognised principle.

A summary of the stated Reasons for Consultation include: Counteracting disempowerment (RCIADC), 'recognition of the principle of prior ownership of and continued rights in land and heritage' (CARSJR, ILO), and 'recognition of indigenous knowledge and practices that contribute to biological diversity and sustainable development and use of land'. (CBD, Agenda 21. (AHC, 1997 p.4)

A summary of the stated Principles of Consultation include: 'Recognition of Indigenous rights to self determination through choice and participation in the decision making process' (RCIADC), ' the need for active involvement in the design and implementation of programs and policies which may affect their interests' (RCIADC, ILO), and the 'recognition and protection of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property rights.' (CARSJR, ILO), (AHC, 1997 p.5)

The developed Guiding Principles provide a framework to "guide the Commission in its dealings with Indigenous people" (AHC, 1997 p.5). Specifically in relation to consultation methods, Point 24 b) includes the instruction to "accept and act in accordance with the principle that Indigenous peoples and communities must be empowered to decide how, where and the form that consultation should take. This includes the principle of the right to choose the most appropriate people and organisation to undertake consultation, even if it costs more, and is more time consuming, than consultation with other stakeholders" (Recommendation 192 RCIADIC) (AHC, 1997 p.5).

This national model for consultation, while drawing widely on recognised policy-based principles, provides little practical guidance for consultation practice with respect to heritage (and by association, built environment) issues. However, the key aspects that can inform this research reside in the acknowledgement that Indigenous people must be afforded special consideration with regard to communication and decision-making arising from the consultation process. It is important that consultants and service providers negotiate with Aboriginal communities during the development of their consultation strategies to ensure that the communities understand and are in full agreement with the consultation process.

## **1.5 Structuring the literature review**

This Positioning Paper seeks to describe the conditions under which various consultation practices are carried out in the delivery of housing and infrastructure to remote Aboriginal communities in central Australia. The review of literature reveals good information on cross-cultural consultation policies, protocols and practices developed within the framework of Indigenous rights, land management and cultural heritage projects, and regimes aimed at improving environmental and community health systems. What is not readily apparent, is literature that describes the cross-disciplinary consultation practices of the consultants and services providers working within the built environment, nor has there been much attention on the post occupancy evaluation of consultation practices in relation to built outcomes over time.

The review is structured to firstly establish working definitions in chapter 2 to define the context in which the research is operating. Through drawing on definitions suggested by practitioners and researchers working with Indigenous peoples, concepts for best practice, effective consultation, the built environment, remoteness and sustainable design are proposed.

In chapter 3, published national, state and Indigenous agency protocols and policies for cross-cultural consultation with Indigenous peoples are identified and critically reviewed with respect to their reference to built environment outcomes, and their implications for cross-disciplinary consultation practices. What can be identified is that these guidelines develop both from influential bottom-up or on-the-ground practices or are enshrined through government and/or agency policy-making agendas.

A brief chronological account of the design and construction work undertaken by architects and other consultants in the provision of housing and infrastructure to Indigenous communities commences chapter 4. This review introduces the various practices, the frameworks under which they have operated, and in the many cases, the methodologies developed by the consultants for implementation of effective new service delivery programs. Within these projects, consultation practices are sometimes explicitly described. More often, cross-cultural consultation practices are implied, and cross-disciplinary practices not considered at all in the written accounts. A detailed review of general cross-cultural consultation practices follows which define communication and negotiation practices and the social and cultural aspects of communication.

Chapter 4 continues to investigate cross-cultural and participatory consultation practices through examining a number of practice-based methodologies undertaken by architectural, landscape and anthropologist consultants working directly with Aboriginal communities in the planning and design of their settlements. These approaches are examined for information on their consultation methods that have been explicitly documented, or are embedded in practice methods. The review seeks to identify the gaps in these accounts. Top down approaches are then reviewed in identified government and agency reviews. The initial research suggests a perceived lack of critical analysis of the built environment project management regimes of state and Indigenous agencies, and in post-occupancy evaluation methods which could inform future design, implementation and maintenance programs. The literature review seeks to uncover where the gaps and limited analysis in existing cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary consultation methods are situated, in order to inform the second stage of the research, the interviews with selected practitioners and service providers operating in Central Australia.

## **2 WORKING DEFINITIONS: INFORMING CONSULTATION PRACTICES**

Many universal terms are used to describe certain situations or frameworks, but they need to be evaluated within the context of this research. The concept of sustainability is such an example, where sustainable development principles defined by large scale urban conditions may have limited relevance to the day to day cultural, as well as ecological, perspectives that define life in remote areas.

Definitions are useful to assist in building mutual understandings of local and cultural practices and environments, but they should very much be regarded as works in progress, especially when used within dynamic situations such as remote Aboriginal Australia. As noted by practitioners in the field, "remote Aboriginal communities are characterised by diversity and rapid cultural change. This will be reflected in the day to day reality of interviewing people in remote communities" (Miller & Rainow, 1997, p.96).

The conditions in which remote Aboriginal communities function include an increasing population, with disproportional numbers of young, poor and unemployed people, evolving legal situations with regard to land rights including the changing definition and occupation of Country, and substantially poorer health conditions in comparison to the broader Australian community. (Minnery et al, 2000) Within the overarching situations in remote environments, "the housing system (is seen) as a complex and dynamic outcome of many interacting, variables and relationships" (Minnery et al, 2000 p 245).

We propose working definitions for 'best' practice, 'effective' consultation, the built environment, remoteness and sustainable environments.

### **2.1 'Best' practice**

'Best' practice is an often-used term, but rarely do the writers suggest how best practice can be identified, measured or understood as a methodology when applied to the provision of practical built outcomes. Additionally, the influence of consultation methodologies on improving and measuring outcomes is rarely analysed.

Tomlinson proposes a useful but general framework in a South African case study, where he makes reference to The Habitat Agenda (Tomlinson 2002). He confirms that the term best practice is a highly debated concept most often clarified through established measurable indicators influenced by national and local political and economic agendas - underpinning principles espoused by a contested social agenda. National aims for best practice are most usually defined by overarching policy, however he makes the point that "best practice stumbles if there are not local champions." (Tomlinson 2002 p384) This implies that purely potentially distant government or agency policy cannot implement best practice, but to work effectively, it needs to operate within local or community agendas.

The AHC regards many of its practices in relation to Indigenous heritage as providing "best practice" in heritage conservation. Within their policy document they confirm that "best practice" includes their commitment to maintaining certain heritage practices in order to provide national leadership, towards these practices becoming standard practice throughout Australia. In particular, they confirm that Aboriginal people must be consulted about their heritage towards identifying values and ultimately working towards conservation and protection (AHC, 1997, p 6).

Minnery, Manicaros and Lindfield consider the elements of best practice in remote area indigenous housing where they proposed a framework for a matrix for practice and evaluation, based upon the stages and the components of housing provision. (Minnery et al, 2000) They confirm that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) uses concepts of best practice seen as "examples of action which could be recommended for further application whether in similar or adapted form." (Manicaros in Minnery et al, 2000, p 244). The researchers confirm that the key elements of best practice include an understanding of the holistic and inclusive approach to practice,

together with the need for continual evaluation and improvement through benchmarking. They caution that differences in conditions must be taken into account including “physical location, cultural norms and institutional context, and that best practice concepts and practices are never static” (Minnery et al, 2000, p 244).

The Minnery, Manicaros and Lindfield best practice model includes consultation practices as a component of the four processes of housing provision; needs assessment, development and design, implementation and post-construction. Although there is no detailed discussion in the paper regarding best practice consultation methods, it is noted in needs assessment as “consultation with community members” and in approaches to consultation with regard to cultural factors in the components category (Minnery et al, 2000, p 246-247). Less explicitly, consultation is implied throughout each of the four stages and six components through planning, assessment, project management, skills development, organisation, and evaluation regimes.

From a regional viewpoint, the Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) in its guidelines for consultation when working with Indigenous and Aboriginal people applies policy to suggest seven principles that underpin good consultation practice. They provide further details and checklists to formulate a process which instructs on the need to employ focus, inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity, provision of information, timing, responsiveness, evaluation and reporting in all consultation protocols and practices (VLGA 2003).

However, principles and guidelines may be seen to be only as effective as the skill and expertise of the consultants employing them, and by the quality and effectiveness of the outcomes to consultation. Further, these practices are necessarily defined by the particular viewpoints of the people and communities evaluating the ways in which consultation influences outcomes. Different groups such as architecture and design consultants, service providers and Aboriginal communities at the very least, will no doubt use different evaluation frameworks dependent upon cultural, institutional and environmental priorities.

A working definition for ‘best’ practice therefore should encompass action based processes that take into account the complex local and external systems that operate within a particular environment. For best practice to be applied, these processes should be able to be externally evaluated, through benchmarking where possible, and be applicable for future use.

## **2.2 ‘Effective’ consultation (methods and practices)**

The range of people with whom a single community or family may have to consult in the course of obtaining a house include key government authorities, key Indigenous regional councils and their local agencies, architects, landscape architects, engineers, builders, project managers, anthropologists, services contractors, hardware suppliers, economists, health professionals, education professionals and community managers. All of these bodies and individuals are involved in the delivery of housing and infrastructure to communities. Additionally, architects and other consultants are required to operate under building, planning, safety and environmental standards and guidelines that often require negotiation and communication with authorities and communities.

The diversity of participants noted above shows the range of both cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary communication processes involved in any consultation, which underpins the difficulty of achieving measurable effective outcomes in complex consultation situations.

The VLGA consultation guidelines confirm that adequate and appropriate consultation with Indigenous communities relies on relationships built on trust gained through demonstrating a willingness to work within community protocols and structures. (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in VLGA 2000)

Miller and Rainow confirm that consultation will be effective when good working relationships are established with Indigenous communities. One way of building good relationships is to affect simple improvements when visiting communities. The Nganampa Health Council's housing for health programs aim to ensure that the immediate results of consultation are made more concrete. In these terms, consultation, negotiation and action are seen as processes that should ideally occur during every consultant interaction with Aboriginal communities, when improvements to physical environments are discussed. To take the example of the concept of ethical surveys; "If you are conducting a survey of toilets, take a plumber with you to fix the broken ones" (Miller and Rainow 1997 p96).

Cross-cultural consultation practices have been documented in a number of case studies of built projects, where practitioners experienced in working with remote communities have undertaken measurable post occupancy evaluation over a number of years. In these cases, the cross-disciplinary aspects have not been considered in the reporting. These evaluations considered the full range of successes, in what have ostensibly been separate housing and infrastructure projects. Improvements to community health and wellbeing are recorded, where community, architect and provider expectations have been met and demonstrated through mutual acceptance of built environment outcomes. These practices are discussed further in chapter 4.

For cross-cultural consultation practices to be effectively and ethically carried out, they should be responsive to a variety of factors including:

- awareness of cultural differences and priorities to achieve appropriate representation and interpretation of data
- adoption of pragmatic approaches to time when planning for consultation to account for community schedules and competing priorities
- maintaining privacy and openly demonstrating this to the community
- reporting back to the community as immediately as possible (Miller and Rainow 1997 p97).

Effective cross-cultural consultation for built environment outcomes should be considered as a component of a cycle that includes an evaluation of the outcomes of the entire project. Consultation methodologies will be seen as effective when talking, demonstrating, reporting, reviewing and other communication methods have led to effective and timely action and sustainable outcomes.

## **2.3 The built environment**

The term built environment encompasses much more than is usually meant by the term housing and infrastructure. The general focus on houses and services by funding and management agencies often fails to adequately account for social and environmental dynamics, including family compounds and town planning, which affect local built outcomes.

Overcrowding is a serious issue in most Indigenous communities, and the predominant government and agency focus to provide essential shelter for remote areas has concentrated largely on housing provision according to bedroom numbers leading to specific house sizes. Consultancies undertaken by architecture and landscape architecture companies such as Tangentyere Design and Sinatra Murphy have extended this to include the entire house block to the perimeter fence as the family living environment, in recognition that preferred living spaces encompass the house interior, the verandah space and the surrounding yard, as places to sleep, cook and talk (Morel and Ross 1993, Sinatra and Murphy 1996).

Jim Sinatra and Phin Murphy, together with a multi-disciplinary design team confirm, in their study of the Kintore community in the Northern Territory, that the town has been forced to accept Eurocentric settlement patterns with an imposed grid-like layout of roads and house blocks (Sinatra and Murphy 1996 p. III). This approach historically

arose from the development of mission settlements in the nineteenth to mid twentieth centuries, seemingly confirmed by later century engineering-based town planning principles. It has demonstrated little regard for the underlying topographic and hydrological environment, let alone seeking understanding of cultural associations with Country,<sup>1</sup> for example in due regard to relationships with sacred sites important to men and women.

Minnery, Manicaros and Fielding suggest that a housing system approach may be used to define the “various parts (including dwellings, households and organisations) and of regular relationships and interactions among these constituent parts” (Minnery et al, 2000, p245). The built environment expands this notion of housing system to encompass all aspects of the physical environment of a settlement or place together with its social, cultural and environmental aspects. The built environment includes town and site planning, community facilities including the store, school and health centre and other public buildings, houses, house yards, building fixtures and fittings, landscaping, essential services and site engineering including roads, water and drainage systems and so on.

The design and management regimes required to implement house, community facility and infrastructure construction and repairs and maintenance, and the administration of policy, funding, community infrastructure systems are the components of the built environment which are the focus of the consultation methodologies described by this research. These factors require cross-disciplinary collaborations of architects, anthropologists, planners, landscape architects, ecologists, builders and others in planning for new construction and maintenance programs.

The implication for consultants developing consultation methodologies for projects in the built environment, is that Aboriginal community, state government, indigenous agency and service provider development aspirations and current practices should be explicated during the consultation process, to influence informed decision making on building and infrastructure projects.

## **2.4 Remoteness**

Rather than seeking to define this condition, it is useful to consider remoteness as a concept in order to inform aspects of consultation practices. Remoteness has been typically measured as a physical concept through the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia, based upon relative geographic information using road distances between centres to define remoteness (Jardine-Orr et-al 2002). However, this system takes little account of social and cultural issues. A more pertinent system to this research, the Griffith Service Access Frame, seeks to measure access to a range of services available in the context of population centre size, which is “dependent upon the distance, time or cost barrier between the location of the client population and point of service, and the economic capacity of the community to meet the costs of overcoming distance.” (Griffith, 1997 p3). From a built environment perspective, remoteness affects access to design and building expertise, to building materials, to sustainable services for ongoing operations and for maintenance and upkeep, and to communication systems.

The issue of access and time is a key component in the development of consultation programs with remote communities, and the ability of service providers and design consultants to sustain communication practices throughout lengthy building and maintenance programs are often highly compromised.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Country’ is a key word of Aboriginal English. According to Jay Arthur, it is now used ‘all over Aboriginal Australia to name the place where a person belongs’. ‘Country’ she explains, ‘may be either mother or grandfather, which grows them up and is grown up by them. These kinship terms impose mutual responsibilities of caring and keeping upon land and people’. (Arthur in Bonyhady & Griffiths.p115)

## 2.5 Sustainable environments

“Sustainable Aboriginal housing requires the integration of social, economic and environmental analysis and design” (Ross 2002 p140). If sustainability is to be achieved in the remote areas of central Australia, the diversity of local cultures combined with harsh environmental conditions demands that design consultants and service providers establish an understanding of local conditions for community development within an ecological framework.

For many of the older people in remote communities, attuned to a mobile lifestyle, their traditional camps provided culturally and economically planned settlements based upon socially flexible and ecologically efficient dwellings (Ross, 2002). Aboriginal people continue to be highly mobile, especially the younger community members, and yet where they typically live nowadays, in settlements based upon western planning, design and infrastructure principles, very little potential exists to respond to changing lifestyles, family patterns or spatial and material sustainability.

The transition from a nomadic to a predominantly settled lifestyle has been at the expense of a “comfortable integration of the social, economic (labour) and environmental dimensions of sustainability” (Ross 2002 p138), which includes the change from a minimal use of environmental resources to less sustainable use of resources. Ross states that sustainable Aboriginal housing requires the integration of these fundamental dimensions, together processes that ensure consultation and self-determination in the delivery and management of their living situations. (Ross 2002)

The implication is that consultation methodologies that will promote the design of socially, economically and environmentally sustainable built environments, must acknowledge the diversity of environments and changing housing aspirations and preferences of Aboriginal peoples. A sustainable consultation method will encourage design and implementation solutions “...to be explored locally, through Aboriginal participation in and/or control of the design project” (Ross 2002 p140).

This chapter has proposed working definitions for ‘best’ practice, ‘effective’ consultation, the built environment, remoteness and sustainable environments. The review seeks to position these definitions within a literature-based analysis. It is expected that the second stage interview component of the research will confirm and/or focus the context of the definitions.

### **3 POLICIES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

The historic formulation of policies for working with Aboriginal peoples, determined by Local, State and National government and religious institutions, did not generally require nor foster a consultative relationship with Aboriginal people. The relatively recent evolution of policy frameworks for cross-cultural consultation has largely originated from consultation and project implementation practices that are not policy-based but which have affected policy.

Many policy-based guidelines exist in the form of protocols that assist in developing ways of communicating within different cultural frameworks. A number of definitions for protocols have been published to explicate the methods for developing good working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples:

Protocol means observing customs and communicating in a way that is appropriate and relevant. (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000 P9)

Protocol simply means following the customs and lores of the people or community you are working with and communicating in a way that is relevant to them (ATSIC p21)

Indigenous people need to have the opportunity to develop protocols for engagement as these provide a framework for any work undertaken and the basis for the relationship. (VLGA, 2003 p2)

Protocols are descriptions of guidelines or steps that should be followed so as to enable... organisations to collaborate effectively... (Tangentyere 2000 p5)

Hence protocols enable consultants to understand the existing political structure they have to work within, rather than imposing a structure from the outside based on their own methods. The protocols set out guidelines to enable effective collaboration, they provide formal recognition, respect and appreciation of “difference” between Western and Indigenous peoples.

#### **3.1 The creation of guidelines and protocols to inform consultation: from the ‘bottom up’**

Consultation methods that arise from the acknowledged best practices of consultants working directly with Aboriginal communities can be described as ‘bottom up’ approaches.

The development of protocols between organisations concerned with improving the health of remote communities has had important implications for consultant and service provider engagement in cross-cultural community consultation. The relevance of health-based protocols to this research underpins the multidisciplinary perspective that acknowledges that improvements to the quality of houses and their fit-out are an essential component of healthy living environments (Pholeros et al, 1999, Memmott, 1988, Ross, 1996).

The three important studies reviewed below demonstrate that working from the bottom-up, that is, from analysis by practitioners and researchers of the actual conditions in remote communities, can provide the basis for development of effective consultation, design and implementation methods. These methods then inform the development of published guidelines and/or protocols.

Design assessments of remote communities undertaken by Tangentyere Council (Morel and Ross 1993) resulted in the Environmental Health Standards for Remote Communities in the Northern Territory (2001). This intensive study of seven communities in central Northern Territory resulted in guidelines for future design

including detailed recommendations for consultation. Informed by a study of householders' experiences, these diverse communities were able to comment on social, cultural, economic health and safety issues, thus affect the future planning of their housing, infrastructure and town planning.

Morel and Ross's research revealed a variety of consultation forms, from very detailed to cursory, however they found that effective consultation involves "two-way communication" and that

Inadequate consultation inevitably results in mistakes being made, community and householder dissatisfaction with houses and the various stages of the housing process, the perpetuation of inappropriate housing, and diseconomies in the use of housing funds (Morel and Ross 1993 p130)

They also voice concerns regarding instances where settlement planning processes have privileged external contractor and service provider programs and schedules, and where engineering and funding issues have resulted in poor outcomes for Aboriginal communities. In these instances, poor consultation has ignored important social and environmental issues leading to inappropriate planning (Morel and Ross 1993 p131).

The Housing for Health and the uwankara palyanku kanyintjaku (UPK) project by Pholeros, Torzillo and Rainow shaped the National Indigenous Housing Guide (NIHG) where key housing issues of safety, health, quality control and sustainability were appended with guiding and practical principles for implementation. (Healthabitat, 1999) Key issues, which could be seen to impact upon the overall quality of Indigenous housing, have been stated as:

Housing design should be appropriate to the location and cultural and social requirements of the community.

Houses should be designed in accordance with the ways Indigenous people use their houses; and

The quality of Indigenous housing in rural and remote areas should not be less than the standard applying to urban areas (Commonwealth State and Territory Housing Ministers' Working Group, 1999 p3)

Although consultation methods and practices are not explicitly described in the NIHG, the document, a detailed guide to the design and installation of every aspect of house and yard design, assumes that ongoing consultation, surveys and community and family input inform the design process.

The work by Paul Memmott in central Australia, the Tangentyere Housing Stock Assessment and other projects affected the establishment of the Tangentyere and Four Corner's Council in Alice Springs. In response to the health and shelter needs of "Town Camp" communities following dispossession from their traditional lands, The Tangentyere Protocols have been established by the Indigenous agency to promote understanding of and respect for the "Town Camp communities", towards improving access to health services, education and shelter. (Tangentyere Council in collaboration with Central Australian Division of Primary Health Care (CADPHC) and Centre for Remote Health, 2000)

The purpose of the Tangentyere Protocols was to enable the CADPHC to become aware of the philosophy, decision-making processes and core business of Tangentyere Council (Tangentyere 2000) The protocols include nine principles for working with Tangentyere which include: Standards of service, communication and the provision of information, informed decision making, access to personal information, confidentiality and privacy, the relationship between the user and provider, the involvement of family, friends, carers and advocates, research, experiments and teaching exercises and complaints and feedback (Tangentyere 2000)

Specifically the Protocols require consultants to participate in a cultural awareness program and encourage consultants to access language services. They further advocate sectors working together, maintaining respect for culture and the values of the organisation and support Aboriginal leadership and governance, with respect to Aboriginal decision making processes, which are less direct, and not always as transparent in comparison to professional organisation processes.

### **3.2 The creation of policy to inform consultation: from the ‘top down’**

Recommendations for consultation methods that arise from policy devised by government and Indigenous agency agendas can be described as ‘top down’ approaches.

Consultation protocols have been formulated by a variety of agencies to assist consultants and service providers in gaining an understanding of the people’s preferences for house types and their configuration in relation to cultural and social traditions, through an ethical and productive process. Other aspects of negotiation with Indigenous communities have also been informed through recent Land Rights and Reconciliation issues and initiatives.

Federal and State government and National Indigenous agency based policies include generalised protocols that guide consultation methodologies. Policies and protocols include:

- those developed through the National Native Title Tribunal and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
- the Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Community Housing and Infrastructure Program Policy for 2002-2005
- the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) – Delivery of Housing and Infrastructure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities Policy (1999)
- Policy in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the National Estate, The Australian Heritage Commission (1997)

The various state governments and territories in Australia have published a number of protocols for consulting with Indigenous communities, usually not specifically formulated for but applicable to built outcomes. Both the Queensland and Northern Territory Governments have published health standards consultation protocols, (e.g. Protocols for Consultation and Negotiation with Aboriginal People, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy: Queensland Government (2003)), while the Western Australian Government is currently developing its community consultation protocols. This regional approach is currently a fragmented approach at best, given that traditional Country borders in remote areas have little relevance to State boundaries.

These policies present a generalised contextual framework to practices and contracts that promote community participation and decision making in the design and construction of housing and infrastructure towards healthy settlement development.

Indigenous agency based protocols have the opportunity to provide an informed, regional policy framework. The Tangentyere Protocols as discussed in Section 3.1 focus on the philosophy, decision-making processes and core business of the Tangentyere Council and set out guidelines to enable effective collaboration (Tangentyere Council 2000).

Few published protocols or policies have been identified as being developed by Service Provider agencies, (such as the state-based Aboriginal Housing Authority in South Australia), whose responsibilities are to manage the provision of housing and infrastructure to Aboriginal communities in urban and rural/remote regions. Rather, this information is often embedded within project management regimes and contract agreements undertaken through architecture and building project arrangements, with

the result that consultation practices are often subject to the economies of project budgets and implementation timelines.

The management of most housing projects is contracted out to large multinational engineering/planning/project management firms who develop and administer housing contracts between architects and builders and service providers. Currently three firms manage most of the projects for remote communities in Australia under the NAHS program, intended “..to target acute housing and infrastructure needs in Indigenous Communities”. Of the total expenditure on housing and infrastructure in remote area, other funding is obtained through bilateral Commonwealth State Agreements and through ATSIC regional councils. (NAHS 1999 p5)

The policy framework does identify principles and practices for cross-cultural consultation, and has been refined over the past ten years, influenced by the analysis of good practice models developed from working directly with Indigenous communities.

A major issue is that where protocols exist, they don't always translate into good consultation practices that make a clear connection to implementation. The translation of consultation and negotiation protocols into guidelines and/or contractual regimes results in methods which are often only as effective as the experience of the consultant in working within cross-cultural frameworks. The following chapter documents a range of recognised practices and projects for remote areas and seeks to identify and evaluate where policy/protocol informs practice.

## **4 CONSULTATION PRACTICES WITH REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

There exists a well-documented history of disadvantage leading to a poor quality housing product for remote communities. Tied to these outcomes is also a history of connecting poor consultation processes with poor product. Summarised below is an account of the involvement of building professionals in housing policy and provision with service providers such as the Aboriginal Housing Panel from the 1970's onwards.

### **4.1 An overview of design, planning and consultation practices**

The consultation practices used by architects, planners and other consultants on housing projects in remote Aboriginal communities were first recognized as critical to the improvement of built environment outcomes in the 1970s. The Aboriginal Housing Panel (AHP), and later Tangentyere Council were the first organisations to implement processes and strategies for consulting with Aboriginal community residents about their housing needs and preferences (Memcott 1988). The AHP was established between 1971-73, and funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). It sought advice from, and discussion with, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). The AHP sought Aboriginal opinion and participation in the housing design and construction process. Most Aboriginal housing in Australia prior to the 1970s was developed from Euro-Australian traditions in building, attitudes to climate and social institutions. (Memcott 1988)

Between 1973 and 1978 the AHP developed and constructed, with Aboriginal participation and consultation, a range of housing designs in central Australia with the intention of undertaking a number of post-occupancy evaluations. These designs aimed to consider Aboriginal housing issues that had not previously been discussed in a professional forum. Issues were raised in seminars with the RAIA and included the following topics: the abandonment of houses upon the death of occupants; the lack of emphasis on personal possessions (including housing), the continuity of traditional kinship behaviour and obligations; and, Aboriginal beliefs and practices concerning health and sickness that were different from non-indigenous norms. (Memcott 1988). Some members of the AHP, such as Julian Wigley and Walter Dobkins, went on to work for Tangentyere Council who established a cross-cultural consultation methodology, which many architects and planners working in remote area Aboriginal Australia employ (Memcott 1989).

From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, under the consecutive supervision of Wigley, Dobkins, Dillon and Savage, Tangentyere developed and promoted a consultation process for Aboriginal housing which was inclusive of Aboriginal participation in design, construction and landscaping. Memcott states that their consultation practices were initially focused on techniques for observing, documenting and analysing existing Aboriginal domiciliary living patterns and other aspects of culture such as kinship and religious beliefs (Memcott 1989). Out of years of observation and discussion with residents of Alice Springs town camps emerged a more participatory design and planning process, which is well recorded. Jane Dillon and Mark Savage directed the housing design section of Tangentyere Council in the mid 1980s.

Tangentyere was the first organization to include comprehensive 'design-for-climate' strategies, including external yard areas, in their approach to Aboriginal housing (Memcott 1988). They also undertook post occupancy evaluations of the housing they built (Memcott 1988). The portfolio of houses created through Tangentyere since the 1970s ensures that Alice Springs town camps contain a variety of housing types which residents can take tours of, to identify designs they prefer prior to the commencement of design consultation (Memcott 1989). This is in contrast to many remote Aboriginal settlements where there is a dearth of housing variety and residents have limited experience of housing options.

In 1993 Dillon and Savage had left Tangentyere and were working in Sydney. At the National Indigenous People's Shelter Conference of 1993 Mark Savage discussed what he thought constituted "effective consultation" in the context of Aboriginal housing programs (Savage 1993). It is pertinent that in this discussion Savage does not focus on practical techniques, but on a general approach to consultation. In brief, he lists the need to ensure that the people most relevant to both sides of the discussion meet in a suitable place and at a comfortable time.

The right people are a consultant who knows what they are doing, and the community representatives who can make decisions or refer matters back. Also the housing occupants who have probably been given some idea of what is required of them (Savage 1993). He states that adequate time is required for parties to get to know one another and gain a "mutual and common understanding of what is going to happen, when it will happen, how much it will cost..." Savage reinforces that the object of consultation is not only the outcome of the house or road or plan, but through clear communication to "minimise unpleasant surprises for both sets of people." (Savage 1993 p6).

To complement the work undertaken by Tangentyere Council up to 1990, Petronella Morel and Helen Ross were funded by the Northern Territory Department of Lands, Housing and Local Government and the Australian Building Research Grants Scheme to undertake a study of housing needs, conditions, management and consultation in seven Aboriginal communities around Alice Springs. The research was managed by Tangentyere Council and the report documenting Morel and Ross's findings is entitled "Housing Design Assessment for Bush Communities" (Morel and Ross 1993). *Housing Design Assessment for Bush Communities* is one of the first Aboriginal Housing reports, used as a reference document by many consultants working with Aboriginal communities, which emphasizes cultural needs and their implications for housing and settlement design.

The executive summary of Morel and Ross (1993) contains a section on consultation that outlines processes for consulting on community layout (settlement planning) and on housing design. With regard to housing design they provide a list of issues that should be considered and discussed with Aboriginal residents such as house orientation for country and climate, numbers of bedrooms, types of facilities, types of storage, windows, floors, benches, heating/cooling and landscaping (Morel and Ross 1993).

Like Savage, Morel and Ross (1993) recommend that enough time is allowed for consultation delays and decision-making, and that costs should not be saved on consultation. They also state that all aspects of the housing process including community planning, housing management, design and construction should be discussed and that consultants should use a flexible approach to their practice and not rely on one or two techniques alone.

The consultation strategies and practices developed through the AHA and Tangentyere Council are documented thoroughly by Dillon (1986), Memmott (1988, 1989), Morel and Ross (1993) and Savage (1993). Together, this constitutes a consultation approach that focuses on the observation and recording of Aboriginal living patterns, social institutions and self-built shelters and dwellings, and the participation of Aboriginal families and community representatives in the design and planning process.

Since the early 1980s a slightly different approach has been developed in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands (AP Lands) of South Australia by Pholeros, Torzillo and Rainow (1994) that focuses on health more than other issues associated with housing. It is a good example of effective cross-cultural participatory consultation achieved through projects that have an immediate and tangible outcome.

In 1986 three people; a doctor; an architect, and an anthropologist, who had all worked in the AP Lands of South Australia, formed an organization called Healthhabitat with the aim of improving the health of Aboriginal people through environmental change (Pholeros, Rainow & Torzillo 1993). The aim of Healthhabitat was based on "...evidence

that improvements in essential health hardware in remote communities [would] lead to specific improvements in Aboriginal health status, particularly for children.” (Pholeros et al. 1993 p vi). In 1987 Healthabitat undertook an environmental health review, called Uwankara Palyanyku Kanyintjaku (otherwise known as the UPK Report), which described and quantified the physical environment of the life on the AP Lands. The UPK Report identified specific health problems that could be reduced by changes in people’s living environment in the AP Lands (Pholeros et al. 1993). Memmott (1988) states that studies of the AP Lands (including the UPK Report) by Nganampa Health were the of the first that systematically isolated and casually linked complexes of health problems with sets of design features, and then ranked them into a set of priorities based on the likelihood of improving health standards.

The technical findings about issues such as electricity, plumbing and water quality in Aboriginal housing which support Healthabitat’s nine healthy living practices, have been developed into the National Indigenous Housing Guide (NIHG) (1999). The NIHG is a reference tool for housing consultants to assist them in achieving sustainable design details and construction in remote Aboriginal housing.

In 2003, Healthabitat’s survey and fix methodology had developed into a national program called “Fixing Houses for Better Health”, which aims to make urgent safety and health hardware repairs to existing housing and surrounding living areas such as yards. Healthabitat’s strategy has never been focussed on designing new housing for Aboriginal communities, but on maintaining and fixing existing housing. As such their consultation methodology developed from a different set of criteria than that of Tangentyere Council, and is directed more at quantifiable health outcomes than cultural or social issues. Part of Healthabitat’s most recent methodology includes employing local Indigenous people on every project to ensure local people receive “on the tools” training about testing and fixing minor work on community houses, and using standardised tests to collect detailed data which contributes to a growing stock of information about housing faults and issues (Pholeros 2003).

## **4.2 Consultation methodologies: A diversity of participants**

While there has been an evolving development of methodologies arising from the consultation practices used by architects, planners and other consultants on housing projects in remote Aboriginal communities, the focus and purpose of those practices has been quite specific in addressing such issues as housing preferences, enculturation, living patterns, designing for climate, community planning, housing management and health. However the range of issues, and therefore, the range of people with whom a single community or family may have to consult in the course of obtaining a house are very broad. These may include key government authorities, key Indigenous regional councils and their local agencies, architects, landscape architects, engineers, builders, project managers, anthropologists, services contractors, hardware suppliers, economists, health professionals, education professionals and community managers. Whether or not the bodies or individuals involved in the provision of housing and infrastructure are coordinated or mediated through an officer or manager employed by a community there remain a broad range of issues which a community will be invited to consider if there is to be a substantial community participation in those issues.

Additionally, architects and other consultants are required to operate under building, planning, safety and environmental standards and guidelines that often require negotiation and communication with authorities and communities.

What can be concluded is that informed consultation is both a logistical and time-consuming requirement of the planning, design and construction process. As most consultants are based in major cities or regional areas at some distance from their client group, a substantial component of the professional dialogue occurs outside the communities. The reality is that much of the decision-making occurs outside the community forum, by government service providers and indigenous service agencies, the organisations with central responsibility for program and budget.

## 4.3 General cross-cultural and participatory consultation principles and practices

Most of the literature on consultation relating to the built environment derives primarily from the health field that is extended to embrace the provision of housing and infrastructure. Due to the limited documentation of consultation methodologies related to the built environment, some important general principles can be drawn from a review of broader cross-cultural methods.

Cross-cultural consultation methodologies employed between Aboriginal communities and service providers are drawn largely from the accounts of facilitators employed by Aboriginal communities, councils and agencies who manage the legal, monetary and administrative affairs on a community's behalf with particular reference to decision-making in Aboriginal land management (Walsh and Mitchell 2002). The familiarity of facilitators with mainstream Western political and bureaucratic systems means that a large proportion of facilitators are currently non-Aboriginal. The extent to which facilitators are familiar with both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, is a significant issue in effective cross-cultural consultation and decision-making.

The background, expertise and experience of facilitators are extremely diverse, as are the types of work and the circumstances in which they work. In central Australia, a variety of methods have been used in cross-cultural situations. Some have been adapted from overseas experiences for local use, some have built upon aspects of Aboriginal traditions and there have been local innovations. There are however numerous understandings, protocols and practices which are common to the consultative methodologies employed.

An underlying recognition of common (as far as can be defined within the diversity of Aboriginal groups) cultural and social factors is essential to developing cross-cultural consultation methodologies. Key aspects of these factors are explained below.

### 4.3.1 *Communication and Talking*

There is no literary tradition in the desert regions of Central Australia. Traditional communication is based on a complex oral culture, sophisticated sign and body language and limited graphic media including rock art and sand drawing (Walsh and Mitchell 2002).

Talking is the main way of communicating amongst Aboriginal people of central Australia.

We'd get more through just talking because we deal that way. They [Aboriginal people] were bored in that way of white people – black and white writing – written down (Shadforth 2002 p96).

In central Australia, English is a second language generally only spoken fluently by the younger people. Most non-Aboriginal people speak little or no Aboriginal language. In spite of this, verbal understanding is too often taken for granted. Where there is no common language effective cross-cultural communication can be facilitated through an interpreter (Walsh and Mitchell 2002).

### 4.3.2 *Representation*

While talking is the main way of communicating there are numerous issues to consider prior to any consultation. Who to talk to is important in community consultation because of the desert tradition based on small groups and finite resources. Aboriginal people seek to get the most for their family or group. (Tregenza 2002) Traditionally, there is no concept of a corporate body where all get together and make a decision for the wider group. While this concept is understood it is rarely followed. A 'community' therefore is both a non-Aboriginal notion and an historical imposition evolved from Aboriginal people choosing to stay on mission sites or return to their lands. Communities are usually a group of families who are tied by a bore or store but in other circumstances would not be living together (Tregenza 2002). It is for this reason that the

representation of one person is unlikely to be that of the whole group. This requires the participation of all family groups in any consultative process likely to affect it – a process intended to seek the opinions of all involved.

The tradition of support for the family group and the consequential expression of self and vested interest run counter to the broader social and communal aims of participatory decision making (Gambold 2002). However, the transition of even the most remote Aboriginal groups from independent nomadic families into interdependent sedentary communities necessitates a broader consultative engagement aimed at achieving consensus and ultimately, a sustainable balance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. For this reason the organisation of meetings must aim to involve the group or community as a whole. This requires giving advanced and repeated notice of proposed meetings so that everyone knows what is happening, and knowing the cultural group, the language and the politics so that consultation can engage a representative cross-section of opinion (Tregenza 2002).

The consultant therefore needs to understand the nature and composition of participants in a meeting whether individual, family group or community, and be aware of the local political and factional interests of participants (Memcott 1997).

#### *4.3.3 Issues of seniority and gender*

Traditional hierarchies, and the decision-making processes they support, are linked to restriction of information between genders and between various levels of initiates (Gambold 2002). Meetings with groups or communities need therefore to achieve a balance between the old and the young and between genders. Young people can facilitate translation for the older people who in turn can support the young people in consultative negotiations (Tregenza 2002). Acknowledgment of issues, which are either sensitive or restricted due to gender or seniority, can be addressed through separate discussions undertaken by facilitators of the same gender and/or age. Ideally, at least one facilitator should be an Aboriginal person (Walsh and Mitchell 2002).

#### *4.3.4 Conversational protocols*

There is an important distinction between the directness of questions and answers in conversation with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal culture tends to discourage direct questioning in favour of standing back, learning by observation and sharing experiences and opinions. Direct questions often of a personal nature or about Aboriginal law, are often seen as rude, intrusive and disrespectful of privacy (Reference). A less direct and more effective method of questioning can be achieved by presenting options (Memcott 1997). Questions must avoid leading the answer and the consultant should avoid ethnocentric positioning (Memcott 1997).

Unlike questions, answers need to be direct and unambiguous, yes or no, rather than maybe (Ward 2002). Guided conversation is the most essential skill for participatory methods (Pretty et al 1995). Aboriginal people typically talk in parables and use examples in explanatory conversation. Similar modes of conversation can be effectively employed in discussions that should be permitted to be informal and at times quite tangential (Tregenza 2002). In this regard the consultant should seek to find a common language through an awareness of client histories and environmental and social experiences, and facilitation towards expressing these experiences (Memcott 1997).

#### *4.3.5 Shared responsibility and ownership*

In the past many support agencies, both government and non-government, have preferred to act on behalf of Aboriginal people instead of assisting Aboriginal people to take action themselves. The mentality of dependence on support agencies has encouraged little confidence or responsibility beyond the traditional obligations to family. A relationship, which instils dependence rather than independence, is likely to be socially unsustainable (Mitchell 2002).

If consultation with Aboriginal people is to be effective it must divest support agencies and their consultants and facilitators the responsibility and ownership for the decision making process and encourage the recognition and practice of mutual responsibility (Gambold 2002). In order to achieve this, support agencies and Aboriginal people need to enter into a partnership where a balance between ownership and responsibility have both a public and a private benefit. Such a partnership needs to define common goals, to contribute knowledge and resources to the project and to provide all stakeholders the opportunity to be involved in decision-making (Mitchell 2002).

In terms of built environment outcomes, a dependent relationship between Aboriginal people and support agencies discourages participation in the planning of communities and the siting and design of houses. For example, recent changes to contracts for the construction of houses in some communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands have required contractors to employ local Aboriginal people in the construction process. This engagement is unlikely to directly affect the appropriate design and siting of houses that currently are dictated by the pragmatics of funding, economies of scale and logistics of production, however, it is evidence of an emerging engagement of Aboriginal people in their own affairs.

#### *4.3.6 Time*

One of the most significant impediments to effective cross-cultural consultation is the limited time made available for consultation and decision making. The numerous constraints on effective cross-cultural communication including language, traditional restriction of information, unrepresentative opinion and cultural protocols necessitates a consultation process that is significantly longer than in more typical practices familiar to design consultants. Added to this, the diversity of family groups in Aboriginal communities complicates decision making requiring time for the resolution of community consensus. Communities often feel under pressure to make decisions in a short space of time. Sufficient time is needed for the group to come to a view or a response that fits the known parameters and limitations that the outside agency might have (Tregenza 2002).

The consultant needs to understand the need for ongoing consultation beyond the first meeting, and the potentially protracted decision making processes arising from family or political interests and the need to confirm the reliability of information received in meetings through selective additional consultation. Finally, the consultant needs to anticipate the frequent and unpredictable interruption consultation timelines due to religious or cultural business requiring patience and flexibility (Memmott 1997).

The notion of Aboriginal self-determination is generally evidenced in the policies relating to consultation with Aboriginal people by government and non-government support agencies; however it would appear that the costs related to lengthy consultative processes run contrary to budgetary limitations.

#### *4.3.7 Communication through graphics and physical modelling*

While a common language may facilitate communication, the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures are considerable. Aboriginal people in the remote areas of central Australia to varying degrees, think and operate according to their own customs and laws maintained through effective institutions of traditional law, politics and economics (Downing 2002). Aboriginal people have had imposed upon them, in a very short time, non-Aboriginal systems of management, planning, housing and servicing. The partial and pragmatic adoption of many of these systems requires Aboriginal people to cope with complicated management and funding structures largely defined in 'paper and forms' which cannot be read or tangibly comprehended.

One important innovation in cross-cultural communication is the use of graphic and physical modelling techniques. These techniques are effective in communicating the quantitative, physical and temporal relationships that pervade non-Aboriginal managerial systems. Of particular relevance are physical modelling techniques which are very effective in conveying planning and spatial concepts in consultation aimed at

improving built environment outcomes (Gutteridge Haskins & Davey 1997). Paradoxically, these techniques are effective modes of communication for non-Aboriginal people yet are not generally used by planners and housing agencies in central Australian communities.

#### *4.3.8 Cross-cultural and participatory consultation principles and practices relating to the built environment*

Cross-cultural consultation methodologies related to the built environment are limited in comparison to more general employment of methodologies for other purposes such as land management and health which to some extent build upon Indigenous traditions. There are a number of reasons why this type of cross-cultural communication might be limited including: the breadth and complexity of interrelated issues included in the built environment; the limited methods published for communicating physical and spatial concepts; and there being no built tradition in Aboriginal culture like that provided by governments and service agencies.

The work of Paul Memmott on housing consultation in remote Aboriginal communities draws together both general cross-cultural communication protocols with specific consultation methodologies focused on housing (Memmott 1997). In relation to the methodologies Memmott highlights a number of points: in the early stages of the architectural design process the client should be presented contrasting options to illicit values on particular design attributes. This can be done using photographs, drawings or videos of houses in other Aboriginal communities. However there is no substitute for reality in conceptualising a design particularly if there is a locally available pool of houses with sufficient architectural diversity to generate contrasting values and choices concerning values and elements.

Memmott refers to the work of Tangentyere Council architects (Refer section 4.4.4) in which clients are encouraged to participate in housing design through sketching in the sand and graphic techniques such as arranging coloured cards and boxes representing room layouts.

An alternative consultation strategy in terms preparing a design brief for consultants with limited experience and technical knowledge is to engage experienced specialist architectural consultants, an anthropologist, and an Aboriginal person who can act as interpreter.

Memmott highlights the issues arising between Indigenous needs versus architectural conservatism in housing preference which arises out of a desire to achieve equality, acceptance and status through familiar housing types. Any deviation from the local white standards of housing may be resented. While this may be little difference to mainstream preferential conservatism the paradox for many Indigenous people is that they retain their culturally unique forms of behaviour in a conventional house leading often to stress, damage, disillusionment and abandonment. Clearly, the design consultant should demonstrate to the client any incompatibility between the client's needs and the design solution which the client may be requesting.

Memmott describes the dynamic factors in Aboriginal life effecting housing needs. Changing household numbers in relation to extended family transitions between houses and communities lead to changing spatial needs. Similarly, changing housing expectations lead to changing housing preferences. This implies a symbiotic process of adjustment between household behaviour and house design requiring housing design solutions that are robust in their flexibility and responsiveness permitting changes to internal layouts, enclosures of verandahs, extensions and appropriately located services.

Perhaps the most central conundrum in the provision of Aboriginal housing is the choice between maximising the number of houses through economies of standardised housing designs or providing one-off house designs to fit the particular needs of a household. Memmott argues that one-off housing design is justified when confronted with the problem of assessing Aboriginal housing needs from a relatively limited range

of housing designs and the many failures and stresses that have resulted from poor consultation. He suggests that the one-off design approach could establish a portfolio of relatively successful designs to the point whereby the process of consultation involves tours of existing houses for prospective clients.

In conclusion, the two central issues to be addressed if Aboriginal household needs are to be met with appropriate housing design is, firstly, the need for design consultants to understand how Aboriginal cultures operate at many levels and, secondly, the need for clients to realise that they are not simply limited to the choice between a few end products but able to participate in the architectural design process.

The process of consultation should be viewed ideally as one of potential empowerment whereby the Aboriginal client can be brought to understand the design issues, review their own priorities and needs and evaluate progressive designs as they are produced by the architect (Memmott 1997).

Examples of consultation specifically related to issues of the built environment can be drawn from practice-based approaches.

#### **4.4 Cross-cultural and participatory consultation practices: 'bottom up' approaches**

Cross-cultural practices developed through working directly with communities or 'on the ground' practices are considered to be 'bottom up' approaches, as already described in Section 3.1. The literature reveals that the practice based approaches of a number of significant design and consultation organisations can be categorised in relation to specific design and implementation methodologies:

- Integrated Living Environments (or decentralised housing) approaches (Healthabitat and Paul Pholeros)
- Settlements Planning Processes (Centre for Appropriate Technology, Moran, Burgen using facilitators)
- Setting up cultural enclaves (Merrima Design, Tangentyere Design)
- Participatory Planning Process (Tangentyere Design, land planning processes and facilitators)
- Self help Housing (Haar)
- Family Orientated Approaches (Sinatra and Murphy)

The following summary briefly reviews the documented practices of architects and cross-disciplinary teams who have been working 'on the ground' with Indigenous communities, to describe their practices and where possible, review their consultation practices.

##### *4.4.1 Integrated living environments*

Integrated living environments are a practice that Paul Pholeros developed from Julian Wigley and David Week's de-centralised housing approach. The basis for the Housing for Health approach to holistic house and yard design recognises Aboriginal living practices (affected by kinship and environmental relationships) that have implications for houses, indoor/outdoor living and hardware. On the ground consultation practices are based on working directly with families on their physical environments based upon gaining an understanding of health issues facing communities involving crowding, family dynamics and day to day living activities. Post occupancy evaluations are also undertaken through quantitative monitoring of housing activities (Pholeros, Rainow, Torzillo 2000).

From the review of environmental health in the AP Lands, Healthabitat developed a list of nine healthy living practices which were likely to improve people's health status: Washing people, Washing clothes/bedding, Removing waste, Improving nutrition, Reducing crowding, Separating of dogs and children, Controlling dust, Temperature control, Reducing trauma (Pholeros et al. 1993).

A methodology was developed for each living practice to test whether a house accommodated the practice. When a house failed, the health hardware in the building, such as taps, plumbing, lights, door locks etc., was upgraded to ensure the practice could be carried out. The house 'test and fix' methodology was also established to encourage a formal maintenance system in Aboriginal settlements, most of which lacked any systematic approach to repairs and upgrades, and to ensure that that each house survey provided some immediate 'service' to the house residents (Pholeros et al. 1993 p vii).

The direct participation of consultants with Aboriginal families and communities facilitates a level of cross-cultural engagement that is rarely achievable by more formal and abstract forms of communication that depend upon understanding through a common language. This is particularly so if the often-invasive processes required by consultation are supplemented by tangible outcomes such as repairs to dysfunctional housing services (Rainow 1999).

Generally, the test and fix policy adopted by Healthabitat links a problem with its solution more directly than do other forms of consultation, where the solution to a problem may take some time to achieve or at worst not be achieved at all. Consultation that does not lead to an eventual productive outcome, has been regarded as a common aspect of Aboriginal life.

#### *4.4.2 Settlements planning processes*

Settlements planning processes attempt to balance existing Aboriginal living patterns and historical non-Indigenous planning strategies. Aboriginal settlements were historically planned by missionaries or government departments who included grids and cul-de-sacs to settlement planned despite topographical and cultural conditions that suggested alternative strategies. Aboriginal peoples' occupation of settlements and their socio-spatial patterns do not fit neatly into suburban grid layouts. However, grids are efficient for servicing and reflect how non-Indigenous contractors prefer to construct essential services. Memmott has undertaken a number of studies on the socio-spatial organisation of Aboriginal settlements, which illustrate a different usage of space to non-Indigenous settlements (Memmott 2002). Moran has produced a planning report for alternative settlement planning strategies for Mapoon, Cape York which includes planning responsive to Indigenous socio-spatial mores and attempts to balance living patterns to existing non-Indigenous settlement grids and cul de sacs (Moran 2002). Walsh and Mitchell's book, *Planning for Country* demonstrates the most recent approaches to integrated settlement planning which aims to balance existing Aboriginal living patterns and non-Indigenous settlement planning. (Walsh and Mitchell 2002)

#### *4.4.3 Setting up cultural enclaves*

Paul Memmott, Shaneen Fantin and others have described social clustering tendencies in Aboriginal settlements and the tendency for people to live close to kin, and the relationship between social clustering and the orientation of enclaves towards Country. The social dynamics of families wanting to live close to kin are often ignored by housing organisations in the planning of settlements, and after placement, people spend much time renegotiating houses with other people, or moving houses so they can be next to preferred kin. Merrima Design in particular has referred to these tendencies when developing consultation programs (Memmott 2002).

#### *4.4.4 Participatory planning process*

Tangentyere Design established early on, a participatory planning approach to Aboriginal housing design. This practice advocates decision-making and control vested in the user/client group, and focuses on the architectural design process to inform the product, rather than limited optional choices from standardised models (Walsh and Mitchell 2002).

This architectural design consultancy based in Alice Springs in central Australia, probably established the first participatory planning approach to Aboriginal housing design in Australia. Tangentyere Design acknowledged that conventional design consultation based mainly on discussions leading to the determination of a design brief did not engage or involve community members who were to receive housing. Responses from groups as a result of this type of consultation were distant and detached.

The Tangentyere Design housing design consultation with the Nyirripi Community of the Northern Territory, in 1997 employed aerial photographs and landscape plans where the house recipients' names were placed onto serviced lot sites on the plans. The recipients moved their own names around over several days as they negotiated the location of their new house in relation to other family members and other house recipients.

This process evolved into a model of the community, approximately A1 in size, which included roads, houses, and other buildings, and which was used to discuss the local climate, car access, pedestrian routes, planting, and other urban scale issues.

Following the determination of the community plan, individual house designs were explored using 3D house components or boxes modelled at a scale of 1:50. These included smaller rooms (bedrooms), larger rooms (lounge/kitchens), bathrooms and verandahs. Also modelled were yard components including water tanks, windbreak walls, fires, swags (to give a sense of scale) and trees.

All relevant items were labelled with a dollar cost, so that housing recipients could be aware of the relative cost of items, and make decisions about their budgets. Modelling sessions were conducted with housing recipients starting with a base board to represent the house lot, marking the orientation, roads, and points of access for cars and pedestrians.

In order to publicise and record the design decisions, posters with photographs of the various layouts modelled by the different housing recipients were prepared after each week of consultation and posted in several places throughout the community (Gutteridge Haskins & Davey 1997).

Morel and Ross also list techniques for "informing people about house designs and layout", which have been paraphrased below, some of which are similar to those pioneered by Tangentyere Council's architects:

- Putting pegs to show where houses will be built, and how close together they might be;
- Using cut-out shapes of rooms to plan the layout of a house
- Walking through existing houses together and discussing them
- Using photographs to describe different housing styles
- Showing residents Tangentyere's "House Business" video which outlines issues associated with the housing process
- Using models and sketch plans by householders as a starting point for discussion. (Morel and Ross 1993 p6-7)

#### *4.4.5 Self-help housing*

Self-help housing was first facilitated by Paul Haar in the Torres Strait in the 1980's, and involved developing close relationships with the user/client group through living in and becoming a quasi member of the community while acting as a facilitator and funding manager. The community assisted with grant applications, and designed and built the dwellings, although few documented examples of these projects exist, due to the difficulty of obtaining small group funding, outside of larger umbrella organisations (Haar 2000).

The importance of participation of Aboriginal people in the design of community housing is reinforced in the 'self-help approach to remote area housing' in the Torres Strait. Families were encouraged to explore options for low cost housing using materials found locally and to employ simple construction methods suited to the available community workforce. Through trialling various materials and construction methods, learning from slides and videos, discussing climatic and lifestyles issues, and by employing models in the design process, families were able to develop house designs which were largely self-determined and climatically and culturally more appropriate (Haar 2000).

#### *4.4.6 Family orientated approaches*

Family orientated approaches are similar to self-help housing in that they advocate participatory planning. Sinatra and Murphy worked with recognised family political structures in Aboriginal communities rather than with other representative organisations which allows family groups control of their own planning and design process, and encourages working with other families for broad scale issues. This often requires working closely with old people and interpreters and can be politically difficult with younger members of the group (Sinatra and Murphy 1996).

The benefits of the bottom up approaches described above include greater potential for culturally and socially appropriate built outcomes with subsequent greater participation in and 'ownership' of the product. Issues with bottom up approaches include lengthy time periods required for delivery of housing with increased consultancy costs arising from necessary extended consultation and review processes. The need for integration of organisations for delivery of housing, health infrastructure, and the possibility for involvement of non-Aboriginal people as facilitators rather than Aboriginal organisations, increase the complexity and timeline for consultation and negotiation.

Consultation practices are developed from a local perspective and fine-tuned to suit the particular individual requirements of Aboriginal communities, but they are equally as influenced by the consultants' specific practice, professional expertise and training and familiarity with the client group.

### **4.5 Cross-cultural consultation practices from policy: 'top down' approaches**

The identification of bilateral agreements led to the establishment of State Aboriginal Housing bodies and the subsequent development of the National Indigenous Housing Guide. These very important agreements allowed for the development of Housing Guidelines linked to Building Code of Australia standards, used to inform the processes managed by State service providers. These practices most usually follow traditional urban and contemporary practice based arrangements.

In a 1999 audit undertaken by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) on the delivery of housing and infrastructure under the NAHS scheme, a review of consultation practices identified the role of contracted state program managers to consult with community leaders in the management and monitoring of built environment projects (NAHS 1999).

With regard to relationships with communities, section 3.27 of the audit documents the contractual obligations of project managers for consultation with communities over the life of the project. In addition to consultation with government bodies such as ATSIC Central, State and Regional Offices, Regional Councils and Inter-Agency Forums, project managers are seen to have a key role in consultations and negotiations with Aboriginal communities during the planning, construction and reporting phases of projects” (NAHS 1999 p21). In summary they are required to ascertain and facilitate:

- Community views on the project’s objectives to be reflected in desired project outcomes
- Community satisfaction with the final design of the works
- Community satisfaction with the quality of the construction
- Maximum community involvement in the project’s operation and maintenance, and
- The maximisation of employment, training and skills transfer to community members (NAHS 1999 p24).

In summary the ANAO audit confirmed the pivotal role of project managers in undertaking effective cross-cultural consultation with communities in the development of project management frameworks that will ensure consistent program delivery.

Nevertheless, little is known of the cross-disciplinary consultation practices undertaken between service providers, consultants and contractors which exist in practice but are not seemingly identified either within current policy frameworks.

#### **4.6 Post Occupancy Evaluation: of consultation practices and projects**

The Protocols for Consultation and Negotiation with Aboriginal people suggest that evaluation of what has occurred is critical. “Evaluation should be proactive and occur throughout the consultation, as well as at the end.” (ATSIC, p35). The document provides a checklist and suggested timeline for formal evaluation, and covers areas such as communication, resources, timing, assessment of outcomes, assessment of benefits to participants, use of information, decision making processes and feedback mechanisms. The protocols confirm that further evaluations should be carried out “as programs, plans, strategies and tasks are implemented and after a defined time (ATSIC p35-36).

There is almost no literature in the area of post occupancy evaluation techniques for built environment projects and the degree to which subsequent programs are informed by past, documented, experience. This is an area that this research seeks to inform through documentation of Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) practices of architecture and design consultants and others, through the interviews undertaken to inform the Final Report.

Memmott has suggested that POE, or at least “feedback, is needed on the performance of the design and construction of houses to inform future design options” (Memmott 1997 p29). There are implications here for evaluation of consultation practices alongside the evaluation of the physical fabric of housing and infrastructure projects.

An attention to the requirement for POE as a funded and ongoing aspect of contractual obligations of project managers and service providers suggests that consultation practices are not a linear process but rather are conceptually a cycle of consultation, negotiation and review, which in turn informs future consultation.

## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to document the practices of consultants and service providers engaged in built environment projects for Aboriginal communities with a specific focus on remote central Australia. Specifically, it seeks to document the variety of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary consultation practices in which consultants and service providers are engaged and to uncover the gaps in these practices. It is informed by an examination of the existing practices of selected architecture and design professionals and service providers, bringing this specific perspective to an analysis and critique of consultation practices. It intends to inform policy through ultimately proposing strategies and/or guidelines for consultation practices that take into account the multidimensional and non-linear processes that operate in the design, implementation and management of remote built environments.

This project methodology has been designed to gain the perspective of consultants and providers working in the field, through building upon the available literature with a series of semi-structured interviews. Limited reporting of observations of the building and infrastructure conditions of a range of communities may further inform the results of interviews undertaken in the Ngaanyatjarra and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands.

The Reference Group has been established to provide advice to the researchers on the project set-up, research and implementation methods, protocols, analysis of findings and dissemination strategies. Membership consists of experts from the broad areas of social and housing policy, architecture and building design and technology, together with representatives from the research focus of the Unaipon School and the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Architecture and Design. The Aboriginal Housing Authority of South Australia was invited to participate, at the inception of the research.

It has been essential to inform the Aboriginal communities and agencies in central Australia of the nature and focus of the research, however we have specifically not included interviews directly with community members. This is due to the concern raised earlier in the Positioning Paper, that many communities are subjected to consultations and surveys in relation to built environment projects where no immediate direct outcomes are in evidence. The scope and funding of this research cannot support the time and practical assistance desired for consulting with Aboriginal communities directly, and in support of ethical consultation practices as espoused by Miller and Rainow (Miller and Rainow, 1997).

### 5.1 Methodological steps

The various stages of the research project, and the methods to be used in developing a methodology for effective community consultation are as follows:

- Undertake an annotated bibliography and literature review into existing models for consultation leading to built environment outcomes for Indigenous communities, towards the preparation of the Draft Positioning Paper
- Determine ethical issues that need to be addressed, protocols that need to be followed, and strategies for interviews.
- Interview best practice professionals and representatives of service provider agencies in the field. Review existing consultation methods of practitioners and providers, and seek to evaluate these practices during site and studio visits. Where possible, observe and assist nominated professionals working “on the ground” with communities, to observe and document their consultation processes.
- Review and complete Positioning Paper
- Presentation of Early Findings to AHURI seminar

- Prepare the Draft Final Report and undertake the dissemination seminar. The dissemination seminar will be held as a special symposium at the Louis Laybourne Smith School, UniSA. This one-day program will be held following the initial presentation of the Findings Paper, and will be targeted towards the academic and broader community. Invitees to the symposium will include indigenous community members, indigenous community service providers, key policy groups and advisers and academics.
- Prepare and disseminate the Final Report for Reference Group consultation.

## **5.2 Review of the literature and existing policy**

The Positioning Paper shows that extensive literature exists in key texts and journals documenting the history and practice of communicating with Indigenous communities, primarily in the area of housing related to health improvement and reconciliation. The primary task involved in this review is to identifying the types of consultation practices and approaches that have been undertaken in relation to the built environment, with whom they have occurred and the particular context and/or project type. The intent of this review is to document the methodologies of existing consultation practices that have achieved acceptance by communities and provider organisations alike, where consultation can be seen to have had influence on built outcomes.

An aim has been to reveal where the gaps in documented practices may be, in order to seek specific detail from field and studio interviews. Published protocols which have influenced cross-cultural consultation methods and expectations for communication with remote Indigenous communities, provide the policy framework under which service providers, government agencies and private consultants operate. This review seeks to document these protocols alongside the contractual arrangements under which consultants and service providers are obliged to operate. Cross-disciplinary consultation, between consultants, builders, service providers and other professionals, a vital component of the design and building process, is rarely documented in the literature.

## **5.3 Interview groups and processes**

Drawing upon the recognised practices and the gaps in consultation in the literature and published policy, the interviews seek to confirm the range of organisations and practitioners involved in housing and infrastructure projects, to define the extent of the multifaceted processes (which include consultation) involved in these projects and to explicate the consultation methods employed by the various parties. Interviews focus on the detail of the day-to-day and on-site consultation practices undertaken to inform all facets of housing and infrastructure design, supply and maintenance.

Concentrating on selected regions within the Ngaanyatjarra and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands of South Australia and Western Australia limits the interviews to people defined by their experience in planning, design and building practices. Interview questions focus upon gaining an understanding of the interviewees' communication and feedback priorities, a realistic assessment of the opportunities afforded for consultation and the outcomes achieved.

The first aspect is the identification of the range of communities currently operating in housing and infrastructure provision, their particular interests and the interrelationships developed through project development and implementation. Broadly, these communities are:

- Aboriginal communities, and their representatives, where protocols for consultation and negotiation must be established with reference to community development strategies and programs
- Architecture and design, engineering, planning and other consultants, where practice methodologies and contractual obligations to provide a range of services and must be defined

- Service providers including national and state government, regional councils and Indigenous agency bodies are identified, together with their relationship to the Aboriginal community, to the consultants and to each other, is defined.
- Builders and other contractors, and their relationship to Aboriginal communities, design and other consultants and to service providers are contractually defined.

This research documents the existing consultation practices operating within and across these relationships based upon general literature research, confirmed and extended through interviews with design and other professionals and service providers working in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia.

The interview schedule is confined to the following interviewee groups, undertaken usually in small groups of three to five, including the two researchers:

- Municipal Service Officers and Community Advisors working with Aboriginal communities at Mimili, Amata and Kalka in the AP Lands of SA and at Patjarr in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of WA.
- Representatives of AP Services, Umuwa, AP Lands
- Architecture, design and health consultants, project managers and building contractors in Alice Springs, Adelaide and Darwin
- Representatives of IHANT, Northern Territory and AHA, South Australia

In formulating the interview methods for this research, it is recognised that processes undertaken by design practitioners (should) include consultations with Aboriginal communities, service providers, sub-consultants and associated professionals and builders and infrastructure providers. Service provider consultations (should) include communication with design consultants, Aboriginal communities, sub-consultants and associated professionals, builders and infrastructure providers and other service providers.

In the course of any built environment project, the design consultant/service provider should be afforded opportunity for observation and recording of existing building and infrastructure conditions, together with existing cultural and environmental practices. Ideally, the results of post occupancy evaluation recording and interviews should be available to inform the project brief. Further information regarding Aboriginal community needs may be informed by the consultation practices undertaken by other professionals including health, education and art and culture program providers.

The primary focus of the semi-structured interviews is to ascertain, through discussions on the history of building and infrastructure projects, how the multiple consultation and survey practices have been carried out, and the perceived success and/or failure of the consultation in regard to the ability of the end product meeting expectations of both Aboriginal communities and consultants.

## **5.4 Concepts to inform the interview process**

The interview questions correspond to the key research themes arising from the literature review. Rather than posing set questions to each interviewee, the structure of the interviews has been formulated to introduce general concepts and prompts, thus promoting free ranging discussions. These concepts seek to encourage community representatives, practitioners and services providers to critically reflect upon the complex processes which inform housing and infrastructure projects, and the pivotal role of consultation practices in determining outcomes.

*Concept 1: Defining the context in which the consultation process will occur.*

Prompts included: what the consultation is intended to achieve, how the community of clients are identified and how the range of consultants, service providers and others are identified.

*Concept 2: Identifying the context of the housing and infrastructure design process.*

These prompts relating to the design process seek to identify the consultants experience, expertise and knowledge of the design process, the context and history of particular projects and the particular professional issues which an architect, planner or designer would bring to a project.

Aspects for discussion included: the consultant's background and experience in working in remote areas, with Indigenous communities and with service provider and the context for establishing the project, including analysis of the structures of existing and new settlements, the processes and protocols involved in delivering built outcome, and the issues that arise from working in remote areas.

*Concept 3: Defining the consultation process.*

Issues of community representation, participation, communication and scheduling of meetings significantly influence the effectiveness of the consultation process.

Prompts seek to identify: the types of consultation that have occurred over the life of the project from inception to post occupancy evaluation and with whom, the processes and protocols involved in establishing the consultation process, identifying and evaluating effective consultation practices, ethical and non-invasive survey methods.

*Concept 4: Defining cultural, social, environmental and economic issues.*

Significant differences and unmet expectations may arise between participants engaged in consultation due to cross-cultural (mis)understanding, bureaucratic regimes including budget and timelines and poor communication practices which will influence the effectiveness of the consultation process.

Prompts for discussion include: identifying the issues that arise from working in cross-cultural environments, the availability of background information to inform physical, cultural, economic and environmental approaches to the project or the ability to conduct this research and the structuring and managing of project to enhancing Indigenous self-determination.

*Concept 5: Defining the post occupancy evaluation process.*

Rigorous evaluation of built projects reveal the changing living circumstances of Aboriginal communities, and post occupancy evaluations may well influence subsequent consultation processes.

Prompts seek to identify: the evaluation processes undertaken during the life of the project and the form and frequency of post occupancy surveys.

## **5.5 Data collection and analysis**

The data collected from semi-structured interview is recorded on paper, and transcribed electronically in a series of summary documents for feedback to the interviewees. This allows for any corrections to content and/or intent, and for dissemination to the Reference Group for comment. On-the-ground observations are generally descriptive, as it has been ethically inappropriate to document the existing housing and infrastructure conditions of each community, in the context of the frame of reference of this research.

The issues that emerge will be grouped against the identified research themes and interview concepts. It is envisaged that best practice models identified through the interviews will be compared with information from the literature review where possible, to confirm the detailed picture of current practices.

An early findings review, presented at an AHURI sponsored seminar in Darwin, resulted in a number of further interviews with architects, community members and service providers, which has extended the original scope of the project to include more detailed information from a Northern Territory perspective.

Information gained from the interviews may result in further examination of literature not readily available in the public domain, such as design reports and contractual documents used by consultants and service providers as briefing and scope of work documents.

The analysis of interview material is the basis for the findings in the Final Report, together with an update of relevant literature that has come to light during the course of the research.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This review of the underlying principles and protocols that inform consultation practices with remote Aboriginal communities reveals a diversity of participatory and non-participatory methodologies. Although much consultation is undertaken in a sensitive and inclusive way, many communities do not see the built outcomes as successful. There remains a real disparity between consultation practices and the ultimate delivery of housing and improved settlement conditions.

Essentially, the people in the communities are the catalyst for consultation in order to ensure that principles of self-determination are carried through in practice. Where the development of working protocols has allowed all parties to recognise and respect each other's traditions, expectations, and ways of communicating, is where a sense of community health and pride is most often self-evident.

While this paper has identified effective consultation methodologies relating to the built environment, there is documented evidence that these methodologies fail when they are not applied consistently, especially when practitioners and contractors have limited experience in cross-cultural communication techniques.

Many 'bottom up', participatory approaches have influenced regional policy and practice, however these efforts have not yet universally demonstrated that National or State based government policies and management regimes have been influenced by practices that are culturally and environmentally inclusive. There are successes in the generalised project management area in the setting up of contractual guidelines to ensure consultation and negotiation occur with Aboriginal people, but these protocols are not also established for the management, funding, services and housing implementation agencies.

The significant area for which there is little published information is how policy guidelines (or lack of them) translate to the realities of cross-disciplinary consultation in the field. This issue appears to be pivotal in the process of housing provision and the broader issues of cultural and environmental sustainability in the built environment. The process of implementation of housing and service provision requires ongoing consultation during construction and after occupation. There is little documented evidence of these consultation practices representing a significant gap in the literature. The proposed interview methodology will focus on these limitations.

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