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SUCCESSFUL URBAN ABORIGINAL-
DRIVEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:
A PLACE-BASED CASE STUDY OF
NEWCASTLE

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Centre for
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Successful urban Aboriginal-driven community development: a place-based case study of Newcastle

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Abstract

This discussion paper is a sociological account of the history of successful urban Aboriginal community development by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people in the Australian city of Newcastle. It endeavours to explain the strategy that Aboriginal people in Newcastle have adopted for taking matters into their own hands, putting themselves 'in the driver's seat' of their own affairs. In doing so, it identifies two phases – a community building phase and a community development phase – and describes some of the key social processes at play during each phase. The paper also describes the importance of community building and community development to the creation of urban Aboriginal social infrastructure, which it argues is really at the crux of Indigenous self-determination in Newcastle.

Keywords: Aboriginal community development, social processes, urban Aboriginal social infrastructure, self-determination

Acronyms

ANU	The Australian National University
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
NSW	New South Wales

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Although this research is based on comprehensive in-depth interviews with Aboriginal people who were generous and willing participants in this research, I would like to note, by way of respect to them, that this discussion paper does not 'speak for' or represent an Indigenous voice, or claim an Indigenous authority. Aboriginal interviewees were given opportunities to comment on the findings of this research in the form of three discussion forums held in April 2014, November 2015 and March 2017. They also saw a first and second draft of a lengthy community report that was circulated in November 2015 and March 2016, and earlier and later versions of the discussion paper that were circulated in October and November 2016. However, the writing of this paper involves a non-Indigenous researcher imposing their theoretical and analytical understanding onto data that were collected from in-depth interviews with Aboriginal people.

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Introduction

... economic participation underpinned by *cultural participation*, leads to vastly improved social outcomes. This requires cooperative effort with Indigenous leaders and greater emphasis on place-based solutions, while creating the right conditions for people to feel they can participate ...

[It is] important to acknowledge that almost 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in major cities or regional areas ... I want to see a focus from all governments on addressing the significant challenges faced by *urban and regional* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities ... (Turnbull 2016:3–4; emphasis added)

For Aboriginal people economic development becomes meaningless without cultural and social development and investment. (Gordon 2015)

It is often forgotten that the majority of Indigenous people in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the United States live in urban areas.¹ Urban areas are where some of the greatest challenges for Indigenous people converge – dispossession, racism, unemployment, disenfranchisement, homelessness and high rates of contact with the criminal justice system (Newhouse 2003). However, urban areas are also the sites of some of the greatest achievements of Indigenous people – the mobilisation of urban Indigenous communities of association, the creation of urban Indigenous social infrastructure, and the revitalisation of Indigenous culture and language. This form of successful urban Indigenous-driven community building and development has led to greater levels of Indigenous employment, education and social mobility, and communal entrepreneurship and innovation.

Many of these Indigenous-driven initiatives came out of urban Indigenous social movements that were motivated by aspirations for autonomy and empowerment. The most evident outcome of urban Indigenous-led social mobilisation, organisation building and community development is the establishment of urban Indigenous organisations and institutions. These include the Phoenix Indian Centre in the United States, the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative in Australia, the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Canada, and the Manukau Urban Maori Authority in Aotearoa/New Zealand, to name a few. Not only were these set up to provide ‘culturally vital’ Indigenous spaces in cities, and to create a sense of place and belonging for Indigenous people, they also led to the explicit development of

urban Indigenous self-government, urban Indigenous social infrastructure, and control over service delivery (Fitzmaurice et al. 2012:19).

David Newhouse calls this ‘the invisible infrastructure’ (Newhouse 2003). He is referring to the limited knowledge about urban Indigenous institution building and development in policy and research contexts, and the fact that the outcomes of such institution building and development are poorly understood in these contexts. Indeed, there is limited empirical research relating to urban Indigenous social organisation, institution building and community development (Lobos 2001, Todd 2001, Hill & Cooke 2014, Waa et al. 2014), and the urban Indigenous social infrastructure created by Indigenous people for Indigenous people.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to contribute to knowledge about urban Aboriginal-driven community development through a case study of the Australian city of Newcastle. Coopting Stephen Cornell’s turn of phrase (Cornell & Kalt 2003:iii), the paper shows how the creation of community-based Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle has put urban Aboriginal people ‘in the driver’s seat’ of their own affairs. The paper brings to the fore the distinctive role these organisations play in Aboriginal-driven community development and the realisation of urban Aboriginal people’s rights to self-determination, as well as addressing disadvantage and improving social wellbeing.

Importantly, however, in this paper I do not attempt to develop a ‘recipe’ for urban Aboriginal-driven community development (Ife 2013:5). I am mindful of the lens through which Indigenous development is commonly seen in terms of ‘deficiencies’ and ‘underdevelopment’, and that the remedy for these is often seen in western institutions (Bargh 2011:54). The paper does not describe an Indigenous development agenda per se; rather, it describes a struggle, the social processes that can be observed as part of the struggle, and the outcome of the struggle. Escobar describes the aim of the struggle of grassroots movements as ‘not power per se, especially not “state power”, but the establishment of conditions (which usually include non-formal or non-conventional forms of power) in which [people] can have greater autonomy over the decisions that affect their lives’ (Escobar 1992:421). In interpreting this struggle for recovery, self-determination and autonomy through a sociological lens, I aim to offer insights to scholars, policy makers and Indigenous people about the social and political strategies and processes of Aboriginal-driven community development in Newcastle.

This paper stems from a four-year in-depth, qualitative case study of the Newcastle Aboriginal community's success in addressing disadvantage and promoting wellbeing across the Council of Australian Governments' National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap) 'building blocks'. The research builds on a sociological ethnography conducted from 2000 to 2004 (Howard-Wagner 2006). The current study was designed to develop a collaborative approach between the Newcastle Aboriginal community, government program managers and administrators, and the researcher, and to promote research that addresses community-based, policy and scholarly concerns. The research aim was not only to tell the story of an urban Aboriginal community's success in addressing disadvantage and improving wellbeing, but also to tell the story behind this success. Those contributing to this research included 14 Aboriginal organisations, 7 government departments and 8 mainstream not-for-profit social service organisations in the greater Newcastle region. The study involved:

- lengthy discussions with local Aboriginal people in the design phase
- 71 in-depth interviews (some group interviews and some repeated) conducted with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working in Aboriginal service delivery and policy positions in local, state and national government organisations, Aboriginal organisations and mainstream not-for-profit organisations in Newcastle
- historical documents and oral histories
- a discussion circle with Aboriginal Elders
- several informal in-depth discussions
- followup interviews
- observations
- three community forums to discuss the findings of the research
- collaborator and participant feedback on a lengthy report of the research findings.

The texts, interview narratives and life histories together provide an account of Aboriginal-driven community building and development in Newcastle. They also provide important knowledge about the current challenges facing the local Aboriginal community.

This sociological account is constructed and told by a white sociologist who has imposed their theoretical and analytical understanding onto local Koori narratives about Aboriginal community building and development (Christie 2008:272); however, it is the local Kooris who

collaborated with, and contributed to, this research who give this sociological account its meaning.² Local Kooris also link successful Aboriginal community building and development with addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and improving Aboriginal wellbeing in Newcastle. They explain why, as one local Koori states, the Newcastle Aboriginal community 'sits at the top of the bottom socioeconomic pile' (interview 58). This is a reference to higher rates of employment and better educational outcomes among Kooris in Newcastle than in other urban Aboriginal communities in New South Wales (ABS 2011). At the centre of this sociological account is an Aboriginal community's endeavour to create autonomy and empowerment for local Kooris.

The research is informed by a growing and diverse body of Australian and international scholarship, both theoretical and empirical, on Indigenous capacity building, Indigenous development and the broader arguments about development (e.g. De Soto 2000; Cornell 2001, 2013, 2015; Hunt 2005, 2007; Pearson 2005, 2006; Behrendt 2007, 2010; Henry 2007; Langton 2007; Sen 2008). The research is also informed by the extensive body of literature analysing the function and governance arrangements of Indigenous organisations in Australia (e.g. Dodson 2002; Dodson & Smith 2003; Martin 2003; Smith 2005, 2007, 2008; Hunt & Smith 2006; Rowse 2005; Moran 2006, 2010, 2016; Hunt 2007, 2016; Hunt et al. 2008; Sullivan 2009, 2015; Dodson 2012; Howard-Wagner 2016). It also builds on a long tradition of sociological research analysing the relationship between community and wellbeing, going back to the scholarship of classical sociologists Ferdinand Tonnies (Tonnies & Loomis 1957) and Max Weber (1925, 1978). Researching community building in terms of its relevance to addressing poverty is also a burgeoning area of sociological study, dating back to the late 1980s (Chaskin & Joseph 2010:301). There is now a substantial body of sociological scholarship showing the relationship between successful social organisation (e.g. collective efficacy, social networks, organisational participation) and improvements in compositional factors (e.g. concentrated poverty, housing quality, crime rates, residential stability) (Chaskin & Joseph 2010:301). There is also a small body of sociological scholarship on successful societies (Lamont 2009, Bouchard 2013, Hall & Lamont 2013) and a disparate body of international scholarship on aspects of urban Indigenous community development (Lobos 2001, Todd 2001, Newhouse 2003, Walker 2006, Fitzmaurice et al. 2012, Hill & Cooke 2014, Waa et al. 2014, Kickett-Tucker et al. 2016).

The concept of ‘community’ is central to Aboriginal-driven development. I simplify this complex social phenomenon by splitting it into two phases – a community building phase and a community development phase – and describe some of the key social processes at play during each phase (see Fig. 1). These phases are explored in the first two major sections of the paper. I describe the importance of community building and community development to the creation of urban Aboriginal social infrastructure, which is really at the crux of Indigenous self-determination in Newcastle. A broad definition of social infrastructure is community facilities, community services and supporting physical infrastructure (Teriman et al. 2010:1).

In the penultimate section, I identify what is distinct about urban Aboriginal social infrastructure, and how the creation of such an infrastructure in Newcastle has contributed to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and improving Aboriginal wellbeing.

Taken as a whole, the paper endeavours to explain the strategy that Aboriginal people in Newcastle have adopted for taking matters into their own hands. In writing this, I am mindful that, as Gibson notes, ‘indigenous strategies for self-determination are diverse and holistic

and revolve around issues including land rights, law, environmental management, and control over service provision’ (Gibson 1999:45).

Community building

Aboriginal community building is described below as a socially constructed process in which Aboriginal people consciously engage in re-weaving the fabric of Aboriginal society. Although the way I have organised the interview data suggests that it is a socially cohesive process, it is far more complex. However, I attempt to capture the social strategies and processes that Aboriginal people engaged in in the context of the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination and autonomy in Newcastle.

Aboriginal relocation

Racialised segregation and living on ‘the mission’ had been a way of life for Aboriginal people in rural and regional New South Wales (NSW) since the late 1800s. Interviews, oral histories and historical documents indicate that the slow relaxing of Aboriginal protection laws in NSW in the 1950s initially led to greater Aboriginal mobility. As the economic situation worsened in rural

FIG. 1. A two-phase approach to successful aboriginal-driven community development



and regional NSW, Aboriginal people began relocating to cities. Those who migrated to Newcastle from the 1950s to the 1970s mostly came of their own accord, leaving behind the reserves and pastoral camps, and later an 'intermittent job market' (Gorring 1991:55). They came in search of employment and to escape the 'real feeling of apartheid' (respondent 7 in Gorring 1991:83). The existing research suggests that the two main reasons Aboriginal people were migrating to Newcastle at this time were that 'the employment picture for Aboriginal people in Newcastle [was] at the level of dependable long term working class employee' (Guth & Valance 1972:49) and there was 'liberal uninformed acceptance' among non-Aboriginal people there (Guth & Valance 1972:46).

Newcastle's economic growth was stimulated during World War II because it was an industrial area of importance. Its postwar economy was strengthened and diversified as a result (Suters Architects 1997). Employment was a big drawcard. For example, the Newcastle BHP Steelworks was a major employer of Aboriginal people until the end of the 20th century. It had a multicultural workforce, and Aboriginal people experienced far less racism than in workplaces in the rural townships in northern and northwestern NSW. There were also opportunities for work on the rail lines. As one prominent Aboriginal person noted, 'BHP was a spring of life ... It was not racist or biased. There were no barriers, BHP did that' (Bill Smith, cited in Maynard 2001:264). For example, the Smith brothers, who became prominent Aboriginal entrepreneurs and activists, came to the Newcastle region from Uralla to take up opportunities for work 'on the badly damaged rail lines after the 1955 Maitland flood' (Lake Macquarie History 2017:1).

Although there were opportunities for long-term employment, and economic entrepreneurship for a few Aboriginal migrants, such as the Smith Brothers, this is not to say that barriers did not exist. It was quite difficult to find accommodation because of the racism and prejudice associated with renting a house to an Aboriginal person or family (Guth & Valance 1972:48). Aboriginal people were still barred from clubs and pubs, movie theatres, swimming pools and many other public spaces around NSW.

In the 1970s, the Indigenous Family Resettlement scheme relocated 28 Aboriginal families to Newcastle from rural NSW, including 17 families from Bourke (5 of which returned to Bourke) and 2 families from Wilcannia (Mitchell 1978, Gorringe 1991). By 1974, about 1000 Kooris 'had come to Newcastle to escape the appalling conditions on reserves' (Jonas 1991:52).

Social mobilisation, the Aboriginal Advancement Society and the Awabakal Co-op

Just as Putnam and Feldstein found in their study of community building in the United States, Aboriginal people engaged in unusual forms of social activism and civic renewal (Putnam & Feldstein 2007). They came together to re-weave the fabric of Aboriginal society in Newcastle, adapting to new times and new needs (Putnam & Feldstein 2007). New solidarities were formed (Maddison 2013:295). The Smith brothers and other local Aboriginal people got together to push for social change for local Kooris living in the greater Newcastle region (as far north as Karuah and as far west as Toronto). In the 1970s, Aboriginal people in Newcastle were engaging in processes of social mobilisation that, in turn, fostered community building, and asserting their newfound agency at a particular political moment in Australia. It was a moment of heightened political struggle for land rights and self-determination nationally. Aboriginal activist James Miller describes the late 1960s and 1970s as the 'Awakening' (Miller 1985:192).

The wider political climate in Australia was right for this to occur. The Whitlam government abolished the White Australia policy in 1972, and its successor, the Fraser government, ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and passed national race discrimination laws in 1975. The local agenda in Newcastle thus coincided with the national policy of self-determination and decentralised governance adopted in the 1970s, and the Aboriginal development approach of the day promoted through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and later the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Policy processes were intended to support the creation of 'autonomous de-colonised self-governing [Aboriginal] entities' so that Aboriginal people could manage 'their lives in culturally appropriate ways' (Moran 2012:1). The Whitlam government encouraged 'the development of incorporated community-based Indigenous organisations, both for the conduct of Indigenous community affairs and for the delivery of government-funded services to Indigenous community members' (Sanders 2002:3).

The Fraser government continued with a broad policy of Indigenous self-management and self-sufficiency. The passing of the *Aboriginal Associations and Councils Act 1976* (Cwlth) furthered this, allowing for the formal establishment of autonomous, self-governing community organisations. The original intent of the Act was to 'enable Aboriginal communities to develop legally recognisable bodies that reflect their own culture and do not require them to subjugate this culture to overriding Western

European legal concepts' (Viner 1976). The passing of the Act saw the rise of urban Aboriginal organisations, which, as not-for-profits, relied heavily on government grants; few had statutory property rights, and revenue-raising capacities were restricted (Dodson & Smith 2003).

At an important meeting of the Newcastle Aboriginal Advancement Society in 1974, participants discussed ways to 'improve the general living conditions of [Aboriginal people] who were coming to live in Newcastle and its surrounding areas' (Jonas 1991:50). Aboriginal people were 'experiencing hardship in finding employment, housing and social outlets' (NSW Department of Education, Hunter region 1984:140). This resulted in the establishment in 1975 of the Newcastle Awabakal Aboriginal Cooperative (Jonas 1991:52), which superseded the Newcastle Aboriginal Advancement Society. The Awabakal Co-op, as it is referred to locally, is the foundational community-based Aboriginal organisation in Newcastle.

You had black fellas and white fellas coming together and saying, we have to do something about the disadvantage that is occurring here in the Aboriginal community within Newcastle. Very humble beginnings and I guess, probably unique, in the fact that it was, I guess, the first test of genuine reconciliation, the fact that you have black fellas and white fellas coming together to establish an organisation. The original intent of the Awabakal Co-op was more around that culture – preservation of culture. It was more about social activities and cultural activities and crafts and things like – it was a way of preservation. (interview 57)

... going back to – and it's probably the late 70s early 80s where there was an opportunity to set up Aboriginal organisations ... Our intentions were good and it was about setting up organisations that add value to community ... (interview 58)

Aboriginal community building in Newcastle thus occurred in a distinct period of Aboriginal resurgence, anti-colonial politics, and actions of Aboriginal solidarity in Australia, and also at a time of significant international change. It was an era when both sides (government and Aboriginal people) were forced to be innovative in ways they were sometimes slow to understand (Rowse 2002:233).

In his work on the Aboriginal community sector, Patrick Sullivan identifies this political moment as critical for the formation of Aboriginal organisations, noting that it can be traced to the political foresight of CD Rowley. As

Sullivan notes, Rowley had 'argued that a more effective way of governing Aboriginal [people] would be through the creation of what he termed "Aboriginal companies"' and that the state should 'provide the framework through which these companies could be established and directly subsidized', with the intent to 'hand over to them [such] special welfare activities as they agree to operate' (Rowley, cited in Sullivan 2010:1).

The Awabakal Co-op was not established as an Aboriginal company or business, nor under the *Aboriginal Associations and Councils Act 1976*. It was first registered as a Community Advancement Cooperative Society in 1977 under the *NSW Co-operation Act 1923* and later as an organisation under the *NSW Charitable Collections (Amendment) Act 1941* (Heath 1998:67). Its form of registration reflected the fact that it emerged from the endeavours of local activism, and its communal intent. It was formed from local donations, such as '... [Aboriginal] workers from BHP donating money each week' (interview 22). 'Awabakal' came from the name of the local Aboriginal people on whose country the organisation was formed, and the term 'co-operative' signalled that the organisation was a cooperative – that is, an autonomous association of people united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled community collective. As Heath notes, 'the decision to register under the Cooperative Societies Act was based on the feeling that the spirit of cooperative societies better reflected philosophies of traditional [Aboriginal] societies than that of other incorporated bodies which basically reflect competition' (Heath 1998:66). Its purpose was 'to provide empowerment to the Aboriginal communities of the Hunter through the delivery of health and social services, in a practice consistent with and relevant to community needs, while maintaining respect for our cultural diversity' (interview 59). The co-op was formed with the vision of meeting the employment, culture, health and welfare, sport, housing and education needs of Aboriginal people migrating to Newcastle from remote country towns in NSW, and thus its activities were mostly cultural, or related to the social economy. Its formal incorporation and governance structure reflected not only this vision, but also the fact that it was formed out of Aboriginal activism that produced a new kind of 'community of association' (Walker 2006).

Coming together to form an 'associational community'

You can't go from there to there without knowing the story. The importance of knowing the story is about

how other communities might be able to learn from that experience of all the intricacies of that and you probably couldn't replicate that anywhere. But it could also be a way of people thinking about we've sort of done that and we could do this ... How did everyone work together to achieve that? (interview 2)

Although there are many successful self-determining urban nation-based communities, as Walker notes:

The most common model of urban self-determination to date has been based on communities of interest (associational communities) creating a system of self-governing urban institutions to serve the housing, health, educational, cultural, spiritual, and economic needs of Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples in urban areas, without regard to tribal origin. (2006:2348)

Although some Aboriginal people living in Newcastle today might dispute the use of the term 'community' to describe the totality of Newcastle's 'mixed mob', Aboriginal community building in Newcastle from the 1970s involved Aboriginal people coming together to form this kind of associational community. Kooris relocating from other first nations countries – such as Dughutti, Gamilaroi, Wonnarua and Wiradjuri people – shared a deep epistemological empathy and an appreciation of how the imposition of 'Aboriginality' as a socially constructed settler category had entailed common life experiences, across nations and peoples, in relation to colonisation, dispossession, child removal, racism, discrimination and exclusion from the state. They shared similar knowledge systems, kinship arrangements, ways of doing business and ways of being in the world. They produced a new community of association in Newcastle.

Today, there remains a strong awareness that Newcastle's Aboriginal community is an urban associational community. This is reflected in the following interview extract: 'We're all Aboriginal but we all have varying language, varying dreamings, the whole thing'. The same interviewee notes the importance of this community attribute: 'the biggest quality we have in here is our knowledge of who we are, a knowledge of community and communication being open and being very transparent' (interview 55).

In part, these earlier developments around the building of an associational community can be read in the context of Miller's notion of 'Awakening' (Miller 1985) as the formation of a 'community of resistance' (Havemann 1999) that is deeply entrenched in the struggle for Indigenous rights (Yashar 1998, 2005; Petray 2010, 2012;

Dahl 2012). This is expressed in the following interview extract:

I think there's probably been a strong history of political activism and some really strong leaders in this community, that got together to make change themselves. (interview 1)

Aboriginal people restored their capacity to be responsible for their own future (Ahmet 2001) and unified as self-determining people to seek solutions to their own problems (Heritz 2012:43). One local Aboriginal activist and prominent community member describes this as occurring 'especially through the 70s and I think – and through the 80s and parts of the 90s – I think there was this concept of unity within the community and that we need to be united people in order to advance the cause' (interview 57).

However, read together, interviews with local Aboriginal people reveal that urban Aboriginal social organisation in Newcastle is also 'expressed as agency, and as something more than resistance, and within a sociological sense as a form of social organisation aimed at improving Aboriginal peoples' purposive ability to influence their own social world' (Petray 2012:1). This is what it has come to mean over time.

Using the term 'community' and describing the community in an associational sense do not deny the tensions that have existed, and still exist, within any community of association. As one interviewee notes, 'I think there's a strong sense of identity and community in the Aboriginal communities across the region. That's not to say there's not a bit of conflict from time to time' (interview 2). Aboriginal people living in Newcastle are a 'dynamic and vibrant people, truly "Mixed Mobs"' (Mixed Mobs Exhibition, Newcastle Regional Museum 2001).

The enabling context

In the beginning, Aboriginal community development in Newcastle was blessed with what Putnam and Feldstein call the "'true believers" in a position of power' (Putnam & Feldstein 2007:274) – state actors committed to Aboriginal empowerment and community development, who were prepared to invest in Aboriginal-driven community development. Trade unionists (NTHC 1968), state actors, and community activists such as Jack Doherty, Stan Masterson, Moira Sims and other members of the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group offered support over 25 years. Mayor Joy Cummings, Mayor Grey Heyes and local Paul Walsh played an important role in initiating

various actions that propelled community development along, or injected helpful mainstream interest in the cause of Aboriginal community development (Putnam & Feldstein 2008:273). Success bred success.

Resistance through protest was also used as a powerful political tool to influence government. In 1980, the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs cut the previously agreed 1980–81 funding for Awabakal Co-op from \$46 000 to \$13 000 (Beale 1980). In response, the co-op ‘closed its office doors’ and began operations from a tent in Civic Park opposite Newcastle City Hall (Beale 1980). The main reason for the protest was that the cut in funding would severely restrict the Awabakal Co-op’s five-year development plan for ‘setting up a permanent cultural centre, a medical service, a pre-school, and an Aboriginal housing company’ (Dawson 1980). This protest saw funding successfully reinstated.

In short, Newcastle was a progressive societal setting in which Aboriginal and non-Indigenous activists were engaged in a social and political movement for the recognition of Indigenous rights locally. This progressed from the establishment of the first local Aboriginal organisation in 1975 to the establishment of a tent embassy on the Newcastle foreshore in 1980, to the signing of a local document of reconciliation known as the Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of the City of Newcastle in 1993, and to the first People’s Inquiry into a Treaty in 2001.

The signing in 1993 of the Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of the City of Newcastle led to the establishment of the Guraki Aboriginal Advisory Committee of the City of Newcastle (the Guraki Committee) in 1999. This was a furthering of local commitment, establishing ‘a sound and rewarding relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the City of Newcastle’ (Richard McGuinness, former Chairperson Guraki Committee). It advanced reconciliation and community actions locally.

Aboriginal leadership and the mobilisation of communal social capital

In the early stages of community building, Aboriginal activists brought local Aboriginal people together and created an associational community at the local level. Aboriginal community building in Newcastle is not the ‘catalytic effect’ of what Max Weber (1978) described as charismatic leaders (Purdue 2001:2215). Aboriginal activists who directed their attention to community building did not simply project themselves into roles of Aboriginal leadership. They took on a normative role

in Aboriginal society as community leaders, looking after their new associational community, creating consensus and earning the respect of local Aboriginal people. Their role, and that of those who followed, as Aboriginal community leaders was earned through their demonstrated commitment to community and the movement, and through their various altruistic endeavours and innovative projects that aimed to transform the conditions of local Aboriginal people. This is reflected in local Aboriginal people’s discussion of the role of leaders in the formation and development of the Awabakal Co-op:

There’s a whole host of people. Aunty Gloria Smith, Uncle Bill Smith, Aunty Dorothy Wotherspoon, Uncle Ron Gordon, Uncle Ray Kelly, Aunty Colleen Perry, Aunty Louise Campbell, Uncle Jim Wright, Uncle Bill Jonas, Uncle Kevin McKenny. There’s a host of names and too many to mention but all have played a role – Uncle John Heath – all have played a role at various stages in the evolution of the organisation. I don’t think any of them ever anticipated that it would be the size it is today. (interview 57)

Aboriginal activists ‘came together for the greater good of the community’ (interview 2) and worked at building communal social capital, also called ‘within group’ social capital (de Souza Briggs 1998) or ‘bonding social capital’ (Lang & Hornburg 1998). This became the glue that held this new community of association together, creating a local sense of community. Many interviewees make the point that ‘that’s one thing that Aboriginal people have been very good at’ (interview 2). Aboriginal activists built a sense of community ownership of the Awabakal Co-op, and the programs and services it created, through close engagement with the local Aboriginal community in the development of the organisation, and its programs and services. To begin with, the local Aboriginal community identified the need for an Aboriginal medical centre, skills training and preschools (Hall & Jonas 1985ab). The creation of these earned Aboriginal leaders respect, and enabled them to build and mobilise organisational and communal social capital. This leveraging of communal social capital was used to generate what Michael Woolcock, and later Putnam, label as ‘linkage social capital’, particularly in relation to ‘influential others’ (Woolcock 1998, Putnam 2000).

As Jonas notes, there were ‘a whole range of activities which Co-op members undertake, usually in the name of the Co-op, which help build together Aboriginal identity in Newcastle’ (Jonas 1991:68). Jonas identifies this mix of community and advocacy activities as follows:

National Aboriginal Week activities, especially the NAIDOC Ball; providing children's Christmas parties; running sports days; sponsoring coaching clinics; liaising with the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group; speaking at a whole host of forums; lobbying politicians; and sponsoring Aboriginal sportspeople and students who travel within Australia and overseas. (1991:68)

Aboriginal leaders also built their own linking social capital, actively tapping into the activities and committees of peak Aboriginal organisations and government bodies, and sitting on – and often chairing – local, regional and state-based committees. Aboriginal leaders developed these links with governments, government departments and funding bodies on behalf of the local Aboriginal community, and the links were used to benefit the community (Purdue 2001:2214). For example, Jonas documents how Jim Wright, the first General Manager of the Awabakal Co-op, who later went on to successfully establish Yarnteen and Yamalong, built, accumulated and mobilised communal social capital for the community, and thereby earned respect and recognition locally:

One of Jim Wright's strengths, and one which had positive effects for the Co-op was his awareness of, and willingness to participate in, the broader Aboriginal community and movement. This earned him wide respect and enabled him to tap into events, which benefited the Co-op. For example, at the time when Awabakal were establishing a medical centre he was a member of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO) and he was the inaugural Convener of their Aboriginal Health and Resources Committee. When the Co-op was developing expertise in sites survey work he was a member of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Advisory Committee and a member of the Central Region Site Committee. He was Chairperson of the Newcastle Aboriginal Home Care Service Committee, Chair of the Hunter Aboriginal Inter-Agency Group, and has served on both Aboriginal Cricket and Football Committees from their inception. (1991:76)

Aboriginal leaders had what Purdue describes as both transformational and transactional leadership qualities. They were competent 'in the acquisition and management of resources, and goodwill by their personal attributes of vision, commitment and energy' [transformational leaders] ... [and] they earned the goodwill and trust of local Aboriginal people [transactional leaders]' (Purdue 2001:2215).

Aboriginal leaders were also 'seizing the moment':

When the Wage Pause Scheme was introduced, the Administrator and Directors were quick to realise that here was a way to gain funds to carry out important projects and provide employment at the same time. The Co-op successfully submitted for funds and, more importantly, successfully used them. This meant that further applications for funds were successful. It also meant that Awabakal began to show evidence of successful growth, it established excellent relations with the NSW Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs and the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs [at that time]. Both of these Governments were bodies looking for successful role models and both were willing to back winners. Awabakal began to attract resources and projects and the process of successful development became cumulative. Success breeds success! (Jonas 1991:77)

As Jonas notes, in those days, state and Australian governments were willing to back winners, and successful development attracted resources and projects – success bred success. In social capital terms, success also bred trust, enhancing 'linking social capital' (Putnam 2000). The Awabakal Co-op established a high degree of 'competence trust' among governments, government departments and funding bodies to the point that 'government departments wanted to give Awabakal projects because the management and the governance was good' (interview 55).

I think because of the community involvement, the Aboriginal community involvement, but also, the government departments, the various government departments. They were quite willing and open to work with the Aboriginal community and on that community level, that's been successful and I think that's because they have been working together. (interview 17)

From 1971 to 1991, the Newcastle Indigenous population grew from 360 (0.1% of the total population) to 2910 (1.0%). At the time, this proportion was higher than the national average (0.6%) for a major urban centre (Arthur 1994:10).

By the mid-1990s, the Awabakal Co-op had 'several hundred members', and 'its wages and salary expenditure was over \$1.1 million and ... making an important contribution to the Newcastle economy' (Heath 2001:68). Also by the 1990s, the 'majority of Indigenous people [living in Newcastle were] aspiring to a

similar future as the non-Indigenous: better jobs, higher incomes, private housing, and generally a more equitable slice of the economic cake' (Arthur 1994:34). Arthur also observes that the economic status of Aboriginal people living in Newcastle was improving; however, although home ownership was an aspiration, it was out of reach (Arthur 1994).

Establishment of a 'loose confederation' of Aboriginal organisations

The Awabakal Co-op was a 'hub' (Jonas 1991) or 'incubator' (Smith 2008) for major initiatives locally, because governments would only invest in new programs if they were under its umbrella (Jonas 1991). It was therefore the only community-based Aboriginal organisation in Newcastle for many years. However, other organisations, with diverse functions, began to populate the Newcastle landscape from the mid-1980s to 2003, creating what Arthur (1994) terms a 'loose confederation' of culturally centred organisations. It was a groundbreaking period of innovation and success. The confederation existed primarily because of the association between key Aboriginal figureheads who played a role in setting up Aboriginal organisations such as Yarnteen Limited, Wandiyali Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation, and Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre. By 2002, there were 14 community-based Aboriginal organisations, managed by and employing local Aboriginal people, seven of which had been established locally. The other seven had been established under the umbrella of state or national Indigenous statutory bodies: the Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Tenancy Advice Service, Durungaling Hostel, Kirinari Hostel and the Aboriginal Employment Service.

The Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council was set up in 1984. Although its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), board and members were local Aboriginal people, it was established under the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* with a specific statutory purpose – to make claims to acquire vacant Crown Land under the Act, as well as to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and sites within its jurisdictional boundary. Its purpose is to play a key role in creating economic opportunities for Aboriginal people within this boundary (NSW Ombudsman 2011:49). It is thus an agent of economic development (Rowse 2012:76), and the manager and protector of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

Awabakal Co-op operated alongside other local Aboriginal organisations that had been established as

national Aboriginal and state initiatives, such as the Kirinari and Durungaling hostels, which were formed under the auspices of the national body Aboriginal Hostels Limited. The local Aboriginal hostels provided accommodation and support to young Aboriginal males from remote localities on sporting scholarships studying at Newcastle's high schools, and later university.

The Aboriginal Legal Service also established a branch in Newcastle in the early 1970s. The Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service was established in 1984 as a sub-project of the Aboriginal Legal Service. The Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle, which was '1000 Aboriginal teachers by 1990 initiative – a government initiative – came out of the 1970s' (interview, former Director of the Wollotuka Institute).

The creation in the early 1990s of a national statutory authority and peak representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, saw further community-based Aboriginal organisations created, such as Yarnteen Limited in 1991, and Wandiyali Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation in 1994.

This process is captured in the following interview extract:

Yarnteen came out of the Awabakal co-op. The then administration for Awabakal co-op, Jim Wright, is the chairperson of Yarnteen. At the time Awabakal was very successful and had 12 projects, one hub administration. I was working with the administrator at Awabakal back then as project coordinator so I was overseeing the projects and communicating back through to him. Government departments wanted to give Awabakal projects because the management and the governance was good. However, it got really heavy with projects and they wouldn't give enough percentage to maintain a hub that could oversee all of that, I guess, reporting and governance across all the projects. So, what happened was six of the projects were trained up in governance and financial management.

They had their own boards and they became their own individual organisations. A lot of those organisations still exist today and Yarnteen was one of the organisations that was started because where Awabakal was welfare focused; the need was identified for that self-determination around steering our own training and our own employment opportunities and our business inclusion. So that's why, I guess, Yarnteen was registered in 1991. Its

vision was to enhance that economic inclusion for Aboriginal people and to do that, that was done by employment training and business development.

... Yamuloong is a social enterprise which gives people opportunity for employment, training and brings our community together. It's a community based centre that also is about sharing without the wider community, corporate and schools. Yarnteen also has a commercial arm so Yarnteen's independent with government funding through its own business operations, investment. So, I guess it's a little bit unique in that regard and they set some precedent for how Aboriginal organisations can become, I guess, independent and self-sufficient whilst still running programs that, yeah and meet the needs of our community. (interview, former CEO of Yarnteen)

From the outset, the business of Yarnteen was distinct from that of the Awabakal Co-op.

Awabakal had been created 'to provide empowerment to the Aboriginal communities of the Hunter through the delivery of health and social services, in a practice consistent with and relevant to community needs, while maintaining respect for our cultural diversity' (interview 57). It had already branched out into a medical centre, and childcare and disability services. Yarnteen was formed to provide employment and training services. It went on to initiate a number of community-based services and programs, including cultural maintenance activities, and sporting, youth and women's programs. Yarnteen led to the creation of the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre, which started out as Awabakal Cultural Resource Association with two small grants. The Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre has become an internationally recognised success – its founder and CEO has created an international Indigenous language database that is now used by Indigenous communities around the world.

Wandiyali Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation was established in 1998 as a community support and youth service centre. It was set up as a result of a meeting in 1997 between Stephen Kilroy, Vicki Docherty, and then Regional Councillor of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), James (Jimmy) Wright. Wandiyali is an agent for Aboriginal empowerment, social change and self-determination. It operates as an autonomous or safe 'Indigenous space' – that is, a cultural and social space that is restricted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Petray 2012). Wandiyali is deeply situated in, and part of, the

local community, and adheres to Aboriginal protocols in developing its organisational practices and programs: 'If there's anything that we need that is cultural, we don't just make decisions in here, our Elders are consulted and asked because they're the most important people in our community to us' (interview, General Manager of Wandiyali).

Aboriginal leaders continued to use Aboriginal communal social capital to create links with influential others and to gain support for local community initiatives. By harnessing access to small grants, they created successful start-up programs. For example, Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre started on 'two \$25,000 grants awarded to Yarnteen through federal government grants administered through ATSIC' (CEO of Miromaa). Aboriginal community leaders, CEOs and general managers of Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle have also been very successful in leveraging funds and grants from governments and companies to create innovative and successful programs.

Community development

Communal entrepreneurship and organisation building

Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle could best be described as Aboriginal community enterprises because of their communal social structures and because the social fabric of community is the vehicle for entrepreneurship (Peredo & Chrisman 2006). Aboriginal community entrepreneurs can be described as 'change agents' (Dees 1998, Dees et al. 2002:5). Their mission has been to create and sustain social value, recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission; engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation and learning; acting boldly without being limited to the resources currently in hand; and showing a high level of accountability to local Kooris and the associational Aboriginal community, and for the outcomes created (Dees et al. 2002:5). The objectives of the Aboriginal community enterprises are not only to make the world a better place for Aboriginal people, but to progress the cultural, social and economic rights of local Kooris; to improve their wellbeing; to address the social problems that are specific to them; and to provide a mechanism for empowering them and the associational community to take charge of their own lives. They provide an avenue for the community to challenge the historical and contemporary injustices, and institutional and structural barriers they face, and to take control in

correcting injustices, and overcoming institutional and structural barriers.

Local Aboriginal people also describe this local organisation building as a form of communal entrepreneurship in which they engaged in creating innovative Aboriginal community enterprises that, in turn, created Aboriginal community infrastructure, services and programs:

... So, there's that entrepreneurial stuff, I can make a difference by forming this corporation and we can do something together about drug and alcohol abuse, about domestic violence, about cultural heritage, and talk about the cultural heritage and language and history and that kind of stuff. That's all real strong. There's a real strong basis, so that we can tap into that strength-based approach. (interview 7)

A strong social or communal base drove the establishment of Aboriginal community enterprises locally:

There's a really good base here and it's a social base within our own community. There are some very big, dominant, longstanding organisations that the community respond to and have very significant cultural processes. (interview 58)

Our organisation plays a key role in this community because it touches on – well, it impacts on the community at a range of different levels, basically from birth through to Elders and at some point, at some stage, any member of this community will have a relationship with the organisation or an interaction with a particular service that we provide. (interview 57)

Although some of these organisations, such as the Wollotuka Institute, the Aboriginal Employment Service and the Aboriginal Tenancy Advice Service, are not community controlled, local Aboriginal people work in these organisations, managing their day-to-day operations. These organisations engage with, and have strong connections to, the local community, and also have an obligation to it.

The Wollotuka Institute, for example, has an Elders in Residence program. The program services eight local Aboriginal Elders who have a long history of connection with the Newcastle Aboriginal community. Many of them are foundational leaders who were involved in building the local associational community, but who also have strong

connections to country elsewhere and identify as coming from the nations associated with that country.

Again, this connection to community has been critical to Wollotuka's success. It has also created trust among local Aboriginal people in the higher education system:

So therefore, the connection of community to the government or the government institutions really makes a difference. For the university that's been integral to their growth over the last 30 years, the connection to community and the community interest in the growth of success in Aboriginal education. So, from other – I think that the community stuff has been the strongest. Because from that community then you get community encouraging participation for other young people as well. So, you have that generational trust in the education systems.

So, therefore, our Elders or our older generations will be saying to the younger people you should go to the university in Newcastle. You should take on further education because it's really valuable. So, we've been able to develop a culture of the valuing of education and I think that's another strong point in success. We have the largest numbers of Aboriginal students in any university in Australia. (interview 59)

For the most part, governments and government funding bodies that engaged with the local Aboriginal community and funded community-based Aboriginal organisations understood not only the social and economic benefits for the state, but also the cultural, social and economic benefits for local Aboriginal people.

Governance, culture, and doing business the Aboriginal way

Although conforming to western legislative and institutional incorporation models, the Awabakal Co-op, Yarnteen, Wandiyali, Wollotuka, the Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council, and the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre were established and then operated in ways that strengthened culture, and put culture at the centre of community governance arrangements and Aboriginal programs and services (see Fig. 2). This view is consistent with Diane Smith's detailed discussion of formation and governance of Yarnteen, for example (Smith 2008).

Importantly, a manager of one of the local community-based Indigenous organisations in Newcastle noted that putting at the forefront Aboriginal culture and knowledge

of, and engagement with, community is central to their organisation's success:

Knowledge of community, knowledge of who's in the community and understanding of our own culture first ...

To me, culture – if you've got the culture part, you're wellbeing's going to fit in under there. As long as that culture's taken into consideration and it's respected, then your governance and leadership will follow ...
You learn from your Elders. (interview 55)

Aboriginal organisations are not economically driven, but rather serve a civil society function. That is, they provide a way of achieving community empowerment, autonomy and governance; a way of sidestepping mainstream social, educational, employment, housing and health services; and a way of providing culturally centred services and programs and 'doing business the Aboriginal way' (interview 53). In short, they have provided a mechanism for achieving a separate Indigenous domain. As Newhouse similarly observes in the context of Canadian cities, the building of Aboriginal institutional infrastructure in Newcastle allowed the creation of diverse employment opportunities and pathways for local Aboriginal people, and for different members of the community to be involved in different aspects of Aboriginal-driven community development, sitting on boards or managing organisations (Newhouse 2003:13).

Aboriginal-driven community development and the formation of Aboriginal social infrastructure

So that's where Newcastle has really been – it's been better in that way. There are a lot of people working together to actually try and do a lot of better things for people or get better outcomes for Aboriginal people. (interview 17)

[Aboriginal organisations] have a leading role in [community development and success] ... we need to be able to lead the way and have a forum for sharing and this facilitating Aboriginal recognition, it's really important that we're able to do that because we want to be passing on our culture to our children and children's children. I think it's really important to have that opportunity because it goes back again, to identity and good role models and closing the gap. I think people's potential is closely linked to their identity, confidence and ability to be reaching that potential comes out of a community and a community that's given an opportunity to filter out into having a place where they can, I guess, be seen and recognised for their contribution. (interview 56)

The creation of Aboriginal social infrastructure has been a central feature of Aboriginal community development in Newcastle. The idea that social infrastructure is associated with sustainable communities is not new. What has not been described before is how Aboriginal community building and development have been directed at building Aboriginal social infrastructure,

FIG. 2. Snapshot of four Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle



and the pivotal role of Aboriginal social infrastructure to community. Aboriginal social infrastructure has increased Aboriginal empowerment and autonomy, helped to close the socioeconomic gap and improved Aboriginal wellbeing. The need for social infrastructure has been greater than the need for economic development. A key ingredient of community success is the standard of social infrastructure, which has helped to improve socioeconomic outcomes.

The socioeconomic outcome is an Aboriginal community that 'sits at the top of the socioeconomic bottom pile' (interview 58). What the interviewee means by this is that Newcastle stands out as a locality that is successfully reducing Indigenous unemployment, and also closing the unemployment and education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Indigenous population in Newcastle has fared better than the Indigenous populations in NSW and nationally across the past three Australian Bureau of Statistics censuses (2001, 2006 and 2011). It is also at the 'top of the bottom of the socioeconomic pile' in terms of higher levels of employment, wages and educational outcomes among its Indigenous population compared with 23 other urban NSW localities with populations of 2000 or more (ABS 2011). The Newcastle Indigenous population has the second lowest unemployment rate in the state (13.4% in 2011). The 10% gap in unemployment rates between the Indigenous (13.4%) and non-Indigenous (3.4%) populations is the second smallest when compared with the other 23 urban localities. The Newcastle Aboriginal population has the second highest median personal income among urban Aboriginal populations in NSW, at \$411 per week. It also has the second highest median household income, at \$1044 per week. It has the third highest rate of year 12 completion, at 31.6%, and the second highest rate of tertiary (university or other) completion, at 13.7% (ABS 2011).

Local Aboriginal people attribute this success to the Aboriginal social infrastructure that exists in Newcastle, and its creation and development in response to the needs of local Aboriginal people. For example, the Awabakal Co-op is 'the single largest employer of Aboriginal people in Newcastle and the Hunter region ... A hundred and twenty-seven staff. Ninety-seven per cent of the workforce is Aboriginal' (interview, former CEO of Awabakal Limited). The Awabakal Co-op came to 'represent a diverse urban population of over thirty thousand people across the Hunter Valley, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens' (interview, former CEO of Awabakal Co-op). Also, educational opportunities have come about as a result of the focus on Aboriginal education in Newcastle, and the creation of critical

Aboriginal educational pathways through academic and educational programs offered by the Wollotuka Institute, the Hunter Institute of Tertiary and Further Education's Purrimaibahn Aboriginal Education and Training Unit, and Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation. These place-based insights suggest that urban Aboriginal community development has mostly been directed at developing Aboriginal social infrastructure, and has been driven by Aboriginal people and organisations. However, it has been achieved historically as a collaborative, symmetrical relationship of connection between Aboriginal people, governments and other citizens.

Thus, it is not Aboriginal-driven economic development, but rather Aboriginal-driven community development and the creation of Aboriginal social infrastructure, that has provided the pathway for local Aboriginal people 'to have the same opportunities as all Australians – to get an education, find a job or start their own business, own their own home and provide for their families' (Gillard et al. 2010:2). Urban Aboriginal social infrastructure is the foundation that supports socioeconomic improvements, including skills development and jobs, and the growth of Indigenous business and entrepreneurship. The creation of this social infrastructure in Newcastle has been a step-by-step process in which local Aboriginal people have built strong, leading Aboriginal organisations and programs to meet the pressing local needs of Aboriginal people. This has involved starting with a vision and progressing towards realising it, and nurturing the programs.

Today, Aboriginal people and organisations in urban, regional and remote areas of Australia, and internationally, are not only being 'confronted with the realities of outside funding limits and the divergence ... between their priorities and those of funding bodies', but have 'the difficulty and incongruity of governing in the name of self-determination while remaining substantially dependent [on an outside source] for operating funds' (Cornell 2013:161). This is heightened by the reality that governments have changed the way they do business with Aboriginal organisations. The various reforms in Indigenous policy and service delivery, especially during the past 10 years, have accentuated the tenuous and precarious nature of the relationship of dependency that Aboriginal organisations have with the state (Young 1990). That is, survival depends on government funding.

Concluding comments

It was happenstance that all the highly competent and entrepreneurial leaders in Newcastle were in the same place at the same time, but it is not a coincidence that the next generation of highly competent and entrepreneurial Aboriginal leaders continue the journey, not only in Newcastle, but also on the Central Coast, in Sydney, in Canberra and beyond.

And it is not just happenstance that better than average employment and educational opportunities for Aboriginal people have long existed in Newcastle. Newcastle has a significant history of Aboriginal community building and community empowerment. The local Aboriginal people joined together in the 1970s with the vision of building an urban Aboriginal community, establishing community-based Aboriginal organisations, and creating the right conditions for Aboriginal people to participate, and for developing solutions to promote the rights of Aboriginal people and overcome the societal disadvantage that they experience in this urban locality. It is an example of an Aboriginal community that has developed successful Aboriginal organisations and programs, with a history of strong Aboriginal leadership, economic and social entrepreneurship, and high levels of social capital. The creation of this important Aboriginal social infrastructure has taken 40 years.

In using a sociological lens, I have been able to identify two distinct phases of Aboriginal-driven community development in Newcastle. The first was a phase of community building and political development. This occurred at a distinct moment in Australian history, contemporaneous with the Indigenous rights movement, and in the era of the 1970s Australian Government policy of self-determination. The second was a phase of creating a loose confederation of Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal social infrastructure. This was a highly socially innovative period when Aboriginal people were engaged in creating original culturally centred programs targeting the social, cultural and economic needs of local Aboriginal people. It was a moment of social entrepreneurship and asset building, harnessing their resources to create new social, cultural, educational and health programs and services, and employment and training opportunities. This was also a time when there were high levels of Aboriginal communal social capital, which was used to leverage support and resources from government departments and funding organisations. Significantly, these processes began at a time when governments (local, state and national) took a hands-off approach to Aboriginal-driven community development – they invested in, rather than directed, the establishment

of community-based Aboriginal organisations and the building of sustainable Aboriginal social infrastructure.

The model of Aboriginal community building and development in Newcastle offers important insights into the relationship between Aboriginal organisations and institutions on the ground, and their relationship with the state. This case study reflects on the importance of community coming together and creating the glue to form a loose alliance of urban Aboriginal organisations and institutions. The alliance (with its own governance structures, funding arrangements, programs and services) then worked to progress social and cultural development, and create urban Aboriginal social infrastructure.

In short, this paper highlights:

- the importance of place-based community approaches to successful urban Aboriginal-driven community development
- the role of urban Aboriginal organisations in urban Aboriginal-driven community development
- the significance of Aboriginal–state relations to urban Aboriginal community development
- the flow-on social and economic benefits of urban Aboriginal-driven community development.

Today, the Aboriginal community in Newcastle attempts to maintain what it has achieved in a less amenable societal context, in which there are higher levels of racism and less institutional support from local and state governments, and the Australian Government. Indigenous policy approaches now view Aboriginal organisations through a social service delivery framework that is common in postwelfare contexts in countries such as Australia, Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand. These approaches will be the subject of a separate series of papers produced from this research.

Notes

1. The high mobility of Aboriginal people to large urban areas and cities has seen rapid increases in urban 'Aboriginal populations' in coastal cities and urban areas of southeastern Australia, such as Melbourne, Wollongong, Sydney, the Central Coast and Brisbane during the past five decades. Today, nearly 80% of the Aboriginal population lives in urban Australia. Between the 2011 Census and the 2016 Census, almost half (49%) of the growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population occurred in the regions of Brisbane, the New South Wales central and north coast, Sydney and Wollongong, and Melbourne (Markham & Biddle 2017:1).
2. The word Koori derives from Awabakal gurri. Awabakal is an Indigenous Australian language that was spoken in the area of what is today Newcastle. The Koori people are Indigenous Australians of New South Wales and Victoria (*Australian Oxford English dictionary*).

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