

CASE STUDY 4

Mapping for Community Futures



INDUSTRY: World Heritage Areas and communities

THE PROJECT: Knowledge Mapping, Purnululu World Heritage listed National Park

THE BACKGROUND:

Elders in remote Australian Indigenous communities fear the loss of their ancient knowledge and the long-term effect this loss will have on their communities' futures. The loss of language in remote Australia has been significant; it is now at risk of being lost forever if youth are not engaged while the elders are alive. As these elders vanish so does their irreplaceable knowledge: each community has a unique dialect that is embedded in cultural practice.

If a language disappears, traditional knowledge tends to vanish with it, since individual language groups have specialised vocabularies reflecting native people's unique solutions to the challenges of food gathering, healing and dealing with the elements in their particular ecological niche.

Time Magazine, 23 September 1991

Purnululu community had stored a large collection of historical stories and video footage, as well as other types of data, which was rapidly deteriorating as it had been stored for many years. Most of the elders whose stories were collected were now deceased. The Purnululu Independent Aboriginal school was very keen to protect this information and to collect as many stories as they could from the remaining elders. The community also had a joint management relationship with the government, as their traditional lands were now a national park.

OBJECTIVES:

The community decided they would undertake a cultural mapping process, with the school being the main focus of the activities. Purnululu school wanted to develop curriculum that included teaching the kids about cultural mapping.

The objective in the first stage of this project was to secure funding, secure equipment, and engage the national parks agency in the project and to build partnerships that would support the project and provide technical expertise for the school.

THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN:

A successful partnership was built with Landgate, the agency responsible for land information for Western Australia. To demonstrate their support for the community mapping project, Landgate donated all of the equipment to be used to undertake the cultural mapping.

CHALLENGES:

The Park had a range of stakeholders from different community groups and government departments. The challenge lay in the fractured relationships and in the number of external interest groups that had expectations of what they might gain from the Park. The issue was that there were three key interest groups on this piece of land, one being the traditional Indigenous owners of that land, who had their own hopes and plans for the area. The other interest groups were the government departments who now managed the Purnululu World Heritage Area, and the tourism enterprise stakeholders who ranged from government departments to private tour companies, none of which were Indigenous.

OUTCOMES:

This project demonstrates that in situations involving a range of stakeholders who all have their own vested interests in a place, but have no clear or agreed shared vision for the project, sustainable outcomes are unattainable because everyone is heading in their own direction. This sort of situation can also create competitiveness, and those with the most resources or the most power will surely succeed. Getting the stakeholders to form a shared vision for the project in a situation where there is a great imbalance of power can be very difficult to achieve. It is a slow process that needs time and money, and a belief that it can happen. Participatory processes are slow, yet at the end of the day they are more economical as the likelihood of sustainability is far greater.

The value of this project for Purnululu school was that they received all of the equipment donated to the project, which will aid them in fulfilling their aim to include mapping in their curriculum. They continue to have the support of Landgate, who also provided them with incredible 3D maps of the park and 3D glasses, to use as a fun tool to engage the children in mapping. Being such an isolated school with minimal access to resources this was an inspiring achievement.



1. Purnululu National Park. 2. Purnululu School Kids. 3. Equipment donated to Purnululu Aboriginal School by Landgate to foster the school's interest in Mapping. 4. Purnululu National Park. 5. CEO of Landgate presents part of the equipment that will go to Purnululu Independent Aboriginal School. 6. Inside Purnululu School. 7. Women meet at Landgate. 8. Purnululu National Park. 9. Chair and Vice Chair of Purnululu School visit Landgate.