



SOCIAL COHESION IN BENDIGO:

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY  
ATTITUDES TO THE MOSQUE IN 2015



Report for the Victorian Multicultural Commission

**THE DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET  
FUNDED THIS RESEARCH THROUGH THE  
VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL COMMISSION.**

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Thank you to the Victorian Multicultural Commission Research Oversight Group, in particular VMC Commissioners Dr Sundram Sivamalai, Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts and Miss Tina Hosseini. Also Tony O’Hea and Elizabeth Blades-Hamilton, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet for their direction and support.

Thank you to Sutapa Howlader who conducted interviews and provided research support, and to Naduni Wichramaraachchi for her contribution to the literature review.

La Trobe University’s Transforming Human Societies Research Focus Area supported this project.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victorian Multicultural Commission contracted La Trobe University to study the Bendigo mosque protests in 2016. From 2014 to 2016, Bendigo attracted international attention because the regional Victorian city became the site of multiple anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and anti-racism protests that distilled national debates about safety, security, multiculturalism and Australian identity. Centred on a planning application for a mosque to service the population, some local people mobilised to protest against the proposed development through formal planning objections and street rallies together with external protestors. Counter-protests and other community-based activities were initiated to counter-act anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam sentiment. The planning and appeals processes proceeded as per regulatory requirements, however, due to the unprecedented level of vitriol and broad media coverage, the community was polarised.

The nature of the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islamic protests in Bendigo were qualitatively different from other contentious planning scenarios because they comprised a mass mobilisation of individuals and political groups against a particular group of people in society, rather than the development itself. The protests extended beyond a stance against a product or a type of physical infrastructure because they aimed to exclude Muslim people from experiencing the same rights and freedoms as others in Australian society to practice their faith.

At the heart of the issue was the desire to define and articulate the future of the city. Bendigo illustrates how geographical location of development and protests become significant expressions of the conflicts that can arise when lifeworlds collide. This is due to differences between individuals' and communities' experiences and desired futures colliding with institutional structures of development. Urban protests demonstrate territorial expression of adversarial, yet intersecting geographically and networked-based lifeworlds, as well as ideological and symbolic gulfs between people. Yet Cossley (2000: 84) notes that intersubjectivity, and recognising of others as 'autonomous, self-conscious being[s]' is part of citizenship responsibilities. However, people who

feel a sense of loss due to change and uncertainty, feel threatened, or are bigoted, may neglect their citizenship responsibilities as they seek to gain control over outsiders, rather than mastery over the changes that affect their lives.

Together, two stages of research were used to identify potential strategies or a model for effectively managing, negotiating and mediating community-based conflict related to urban change in multicultural societies. The first stage comprised a document review that examined the planning process. The second stage comprised interviews to identify the potential risk rationalities of each group with regard to their views on potential threats, perceived likelihood, intensity and duration of these threats and their outcomes. These were compared and contrasted to gain an understanding of the events that occurred, why they occurred, and how they may be managed in future.

The document review of the planning application, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and Supreme Court hearings identified that the planning system is robust. However, it became clear that planning objectors may not have had capacity to engage appropriately, leading to frustration and distrust. Objectors claimed that Muslim people and Islam were threats to human rights, democracy and safety; they also claimed their appeal was in the public interest. Their social milieu and their legal team who held similar beliefs reinforced objectors' views. Planning processes do not assess beliefs, but are bound by law that places rigorous requirements on objectors to provide strong argumentation and evidence to support their claims. The City of Greater Bendigo and VCAT determined that the objectors did not substantiate their claims with evidence. Instead both Council and VCAT determined the mosque development would provide net community benefit in terms of facilities and for providing a place of worship for members of the Bendigo community.

Alongside the planning process were a series of protests and events in which people sought to either stop the mosque or celebrate diversity. Interviews were conducted with 19 participants representing major government, business and community service organisations (CSOs), as well as with individuals.

The results indicate that animosity developed over this time divided the community. Council staff, staff at CSOs, business people and individuals who supported the mosque and the Muslim community experienced abuse in person, at meetings and online. Increased racial incivilities were reported to local organisations, and many in the Muslim community were scared; some changed how they used the city, and some families moved away. Council staff that did not support the mosque, and other prominent mosque objectors also experienced public and online abuse.

The main areas of conflict were the social impacts of the mosque development on the community, the erosion of human rights and democracy, the need for leadership, and the role of social media in social mobilisation. Ironically, the vehemence of the anti-mosque protestors meant they used their democratic rights against the cultural and regulatory institutions of democracy in their bid to stop Muslims from practicing their faith. Local objectors were assisted in their efforts with training, crowd source funding and the in-migration of people during protest events, which was made possible by social media.

Anti-racism/pro-diversity groups sought to create a positive vision for the city by focusing on activities, events and communications that reinforced the history and benefits of Australia's multicultural and religiously diverse society. The success of this approach was due to strong local networks comprising Council, business and community as well as individuals.

The Muslim community is the most deeply affected with regard to a loss of sense of belonging, a wariness about the potential lack of welcoming in public and commercial spaces, and frustration and hurt about the negative images and values attributed to them. Nonetheless, there were positive opportunities for the Muslim community, due to strong community support, the adoption of leadership roles, and approval of the mosque. However, all interviewees and the communities represented were affected. Many felt shame, embarrassment and anger, as well as empathy for the Muslim community. All mobilised to create change because they want a vibrant inclusive city for themselves and their children.

There are issues still to be addressed in the city, due to community polarisation. This comprises the creation of new conversations so that people with different views can communicate respectfully and learn from each other. This will not be easy, and many will not want to participate due to their world view and the polarisation that has occurred.

## Key findings:

- In Bendigo the greatest social impacts were created by responses to the mosque development assessment and appeals process. These were matters outside the scope of planning decision-making while inherently tied to it in the public perception.
- The Bendigo mosque development opened up space for vibrant debates on the politics of diversity, especially around notions of democracy, leadership, social networks and information sharing.
- Systematic responses suggest democratic governance is robust. In pursuing a local issue – dialogue about the future of Bendigo – the value and integrity of Australia's legal, social and cultural institutions were reinforced.
- Developing social infrastructure, such as a place of worship, emerged as a public good. Whether the building has a spire, minaret or dome, it is for the benefit of all in the community.
- Preparation will be necessary to work with the Greater Bendigo community as building works begin on the permitted mosque development.
- Strong and authoritative leadership was identified as important to facilitate healing within the community and to provide direction for the multicultural future of Bendigo.
- Social interaction was identified as a means to educate and overcome division within the community. Fostering inclusive events and social gatherings emerged as a means of positively engaging community members in intercultural conversations.
- Despite the negativity of relations during the time of the protests, greater intercultural understanding has emerged. Events also enabled people to gain a better understanding of how some people have to live their lives under pressures of discrimination and racism.

Based on the research outcomes, there are four key items required to address community conflict of this type:

- early identification of the issues/crisis;
- swift coordinated action by government, business and community agencies;
- strong leadership; and
- strong communication.



1

# FLASHPOINT BENDIGO



# FLASHPOINT BENDIGO

On 29 August 2015, about 1,000 protesters took to the streets in the regional city of Bendigo to protest against the approval of a mosque development; there were also counter-protests to counteract anti-Islam and/or anti-Islam sentiments. It was the largest Victoria Police operation outside the metropolitan area, and this event gained international attention. This protest was the peak event of over two years of conflict that distilled national debates about safety, security, multiculturalism and Australian identity.

Not only did the nature of these events test the integrity of local governance, the Victorian planning system and democracy, but also called into question the principles of multiculturalism and threatened social cohesion in Bendigo. Significantly, events opened painful questions about the essence of Bendigo as a city and as a community. Both within the city and outside the region, the overwhelming question was 'why Bendigo?' This research provides a narrative that addresses this question by exploring the development assessment process and the unique conditions that supported the mass mobilisation of people.

## 1.1 Planning application

In January 2014, the Australian Islamic Mission submitted a planning permit<sup>1</sup> to the City of Greater Bendigo for a double-storey mosque to service the local Muslim population, which represents 27 different nationalities. Current prayer facilities comprise a room at the local La Trobe University campus, which is not sufficient for the needs of the Muslim community. In addition to providing the Muslim community with religious facilities, the development would also provide leisure space accessible to the people of Bendigo, regardless of religious affiliation. On this basis, planning staff assessed the proposal as creating a net community benefit, and Council decided to issue a permit.

Subsequently 11 objectors<sup>2</sup> brought the matter to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

(VCAT), where Members upheld the Council's decision to give notice of approval for a permit. The objectors appealed the decision, but the Appeals Court of Victoria adjudged that VCAT had conducted its duties appropriately and thereby upheld both the Council and VCAT determinations. The Supreme Court of Victoria did not grant leave to pursue the matter further.

Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors and protestors disagreed with the decisions. Throughout the process, they unsuccessfully attempted to control the debate and influence decision-making to achieve their desired outcomes. It started with a local Stop the Mosque group and Facebook page that began two days after Council gave notice of approval. Local people mobilised against the proposed development through formal planning objections, social media, disruption at council meetings and street rallies. A substantial part of the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam campaign was supported from outside the region through training, attendance at public events and crowd source funding.

Counter-protest rallies, public events, a variety of regulatory, planning, social and educative strategies were employed to support multiculturalism and the mosque. These aimed to demonstrate support for the Muslim community, to correct misinformation, and to help non-Muslims better understand the diverse local Muslim community. During this time, the Believe in Bendigo campaign emerged, presenting an alternative future to the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam narrative.

Mainstream popular media and social media quickly politicised the key stakeholders, proposed development, and the planning process. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam narratives and counter-narratives formed the substantive debate about the future of the city, community health and wellbeing. Conflicts about demographic and cultural trends that change the urban fabric are common. In Australia and overseas, development approvals for mosques and Islamic schools often meet with objections

1 See Appendix 2 for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 'Planning on a Page' information sheet.

2 Objectors are those who engaged formally with planning processes; anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors refer to those who did not want the mosque, but were not necessarily formally engaged with planning processes.

that are thinly veiled or transparent racism. Work by Forest and Dunn (2003) suggests trust and tolerance of Muslim people and people from the Middle East is much lower than other ethno-religious groups. Previous research about migrants' sense of safety in Bendigo (Rudner et al., 2014) indicated that Muslim women who wear the hijab or niqab were believed to experience more verbal and gestural abuse due to their visibility.

## 1.2 Neutral decision-making

Fear, distrust and lack of familiarity with other cultural and religious groups can create concerns that should be addressed. However, public meetings and other activities associated with land use planning processes do not provide the appropriate forums. Strategic planning processes transform broad discussions about current social conditions and the future of society into place-based planning matters about the ideal city or suburb. Community concern about the effects of federal and state policy such as those governing globalised trade or migration on the notions of the ideal city, are not addressed. Statutory planning implements strategic planning objectives, but people and place are treated separately.

The rationales, research, professional judgement and political debate underpinning strategic plans are hidden in the objectives that direct decision-making. Planning schemes codify the moral, economic, social, cultural and environmental aspirations contained in strategic plans. However, during assessment, only planning matters that are identified in regulation and can be identified through scientific methods of inquiry are considered. So equity, health and wellbeing are translated into measureable outcomes such as distances to services, particulates in air, volume of traffic and so forth. Furthermore, statutory planning assessment privileges space over people, focusing on policy, maps and design images. Accordingly, planning application processes are about land use and activities permitted within particular parcels of zoned land, despite the fact that decisions embody broader ideological assumptions about what makes a good city.

By seeking consistent application of planning regulation that separates land use from people, planners aim to achieve the ideal of neutrality in decision-making, which can be advantageous or problematic. Discriminatory outcomes can emerge

from this neutrality. As Valverde (2012) notes minarets have been banned in Switzerland as it is easier to legislate against the design element than the people. Yet, in situations like the Bendigo mosque, the neutrality of planning can also protect planners from bias or political interference. Protection comes from equal application of established procedures to all developments of the same type, undifferentiated places of worship and assembly.

Conflicts arise when planning does not engage with the issues and emotions that people want addressed (Bugg and Gurran, 2011; Fincher et al., 2014; Pestieau and Wallace, 2003; Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 2003). As a result, when community members object to, or support a development proposal, they may also take issue with existing power structures that regulate community aspirations, hopes and concerns. This can lead to actions against the planning process because the structures governing public engagement are viewed as undemocratic. As Deputy President Dwyer explains in *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary) [2014] VCAT 786*:

33<sup>3</sup> Whilst we will deal with the specific social effects in this case later in these reasons, it is also worth re-emphasising that town planning is not a panacea for all perceived social ills, nor is planning decision-making a forum for addressing all issues of social or community concern, or attempting to resolve all issues of human emotion or behaviour. At its heart, planning is about the use, development and protection of land.

34 Within this context, planning controls are commonly applied to group compatible uses together in a spatial context (i.e. through zones and overlays). This is usually done to achieve an amenity outcome –e.g. to protect residential areas from noise, heavy traffic or emissions associated with industry. Planning schemes do not generally seek to regulate the compatibility of uses within zones on social grounds, other than in a few rare and express circumstances. Moreover, a planning approval runs with the land, and the compatibility of particular land uses within zones are generally assessed having regard to the broad land use designation, and not on the basis of the identity or character of the user.

3 The numbers in the quotations presented comprise the clause numbers used in the VCAT rulings presented.

In Bendigo, the proposed mosque development elicited high levels of emotion both against and for the mosque. At the heart of the issue was the desire to define and articulate the future of the city. While claims against Muslims and Islam were rendered irrelevant within the development assessment process, claims for equality and equity were supported by current political, economic and socio-cultural imperatives. Planning regulation and its application were not neutral. Fincher et al.'s (2014: 38) comments on neutrality are relevant:

However, it is clear that the technical criteria on which decisions are made – concerning a range of factors from parking and noise to neighbourhood character and economic development – are not 'neutral' when it comes to ethnicity and religion. Here, planning must be understood as political, in the sense that all technical planning instruments are designed to produce and reproduce particular kinds of places – there can be no planning without an answer to the inherently political question: what kind of place should this street/suburb/city be?

Implicitly and explicitly, the Council upheld values of multiculturalism and religious diversity for the city during development assessment and through its explanations for approving the development. Implicitly, applying established planning procedures that focused on land use rather than people and dismissing the need to assess perceived social impacts raised by mosque objectors supported diversity. Explicitly, the Council established the value of diversity by refusing to engage in discussions about the place of Muslims and Islam in Australian society. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors responded by initiating a number of actions aimed at legitimising their claims about 'what kind of place Bendigo, and all of Australia, should be'. Valverde (2012: 2005) succinctly encapsulates the issues explored in this report:

It makes sense that a mosque or a planner or a planning tribunal would chastise or simply ignore comments and submissions that raise issues outside the scope of planning law. But if a zoning hearing is not the right place to talk about how people feel about changing patterns of migration and settlement, where can one talk about these things? The mismatch between what people want to talk about and what the legal framework allows and requires has predictable results.

Residents feel dissatisfied and claim that 'city hall is not listening,' while planners and other experts fume about the public's emotionalism. Municipal politicians, on their part, end up feeling torn.

On the one hand, they do want to engage with their constituents (unlike the lawyers and planners) and, depending on their politics, they want to either validate or critique prejudices against newcomers. But on the other hand, they know that a planning process is supposed to stick to buildings, parking, and parks, and they know that populist mutterings about the social housing or the mosque being planned for their neighbourhood can easily be seen as a symptom that 'city hall' is nefariously plotting against the locals. Councillors who do not want to be swept out of power by populist resentment politics often make a point of distancing themselves from 'city hall' and even from government in general.

### 1.3 Assessing social and risk impacts

One way to consider these issues is by means of assessing the social impacts alongside planning matters. In both communicative planning and social impact assessment (SIA) literature, it is assumed that community engagement leads to better outcomes and can help solve intractable problems (Becker, 2001; Burdge and Vanclay, 1996; Legacy et al., 2014; O'Faircheallaigh, 2010; Healey, 1997; Sandercock, 2003). In particular, SIA practitioners and scholars argue that SIA provides a structured process for discussing and integrating community debate. According to Vanclay (2014: 3), SIAs ensure that:

1. the views of all stakeholders have been considered,
2. there has been adequate negotiation about development objectives,
3. the potential adverse consequences have been considered, and
4. the policy has been redesigned to reduce these consequences and mitigation or compensatory mechanisms developed.

SIA aims to systematically identify events leading to change, elements of change, and the direct and indirect effects of change on individuals and communities with regard to social, health, economic and environmental impacts. Assessing and managing risk is an inherent part of SIA philosophy and

practice. Although both engage with notions of hazards, possibilities, probabilities, trade-offs and compensation, there are, subtle differences between SIA and risk management approaches as the former focuses on expected rather than uncertain outcomes and consequences (Mahmoudi et al., 2013). In this way, social impacts can be integrated with risk theory and management to create a different understanding of what has and continues to be at stake within this particular community conflict.

Although Mahmoudi et al.'s (2013: 3) work focuses on climate change, it is still instructive for understanding perceived threats by various stakeholders – individuals and groups – in Bendigo. Of particular interest is the focus on the socio-cultural construction of risk and how it links to values and interests:

Social risk is understood as a specific way to manage uncertainty of outcomes. Risks always refer to a combination of two components: the likelihood of potential consequences and the strength of them (IRGC, 2005; Rosa, 1998; Zinn, 2008). The societal perspective of risk includes events that are socially defined and considers that social risks are always mediated through social interpretation and linked with group values and interests (Renn, 1998).

There is no doubt that SIA can be effective when integrated in strategic planning processes. However, its effectiveness is limited when assessing single site development such as a place of worship or its role in appeals tribunals due to the nature of evidence required to establish impact. Perhaps in recognition of these issues, the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) identifies larger projects rather than single site developments for SIA:

- Without limiting the matters in regard to which a social impact assessment may be appropriately required, proposals for: larger developments, including major retail, sports or social infrastructure proposals; a significant change of land use, including new highways, loss of agricultural land, sale or rezoning of publically owned land, [and]
- new planning policies and plans amendments to them, and/or, controversial uses or increases in intensity (e.g. brothels or gun shops, or of gaming or liquor outlets), should be fully assessed for their social impacts in a SIA.

The crux of the matter is that human rights are protected in legislation from local to global levels, and authorities have a responsibility to ensure these laws are upheld. Authorities can also lead discussion on these matters and are supported by the *Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities*. Selecting when and how to discuss these issues with communities is a matter of professional assessment. An important consideration for decision-making is the highly politicised nature of SIA that could create greater impact than the development itself. Peltonen & Sairinen (2010: 329) observe that 'policy analysis, such as impact assessments, loses its autonomy as it is totally corrupted by political motives'. Even Burge and Vanclay (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996: 70) state:

Special interest groups will define problems and see results of studies from their point of view, and attempt to use SIAs to their particular advantage, possibly distorting the intent of the study or the specific result in the process. In a litigious and/or confrontationalist situation, altruism and concern for such global (and even regional) goals as a quality environment and the future welfare of an impacted community are seldom part of the debate.

SIAs can still be useful as a process for identifying, assessing and mitigating social conflict that is related to planning decision-making, but this would need to be determined in any given situation.

This research aims to reconcile the potential role of social and risk impact assessment in, and alongside, planning decision-making. Discussion about the planning application and appeals process examines the role of SIA in planning decision-making, and then serves as an analytical framework for understanding community effects and mobilisation. Research methods included document review of the planning process, VCAT and Supreme Court decisions, analysis of popular and social media, key informant interviews with representatives from the Muslim community, Council, Victoria Police, media, faith-based organisations, business and use of spatial mapping.



2

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS  
AND METHODOLOGY



# THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND METHODOLOGY

While locally situated, the Bendigo mosque protests that emerged in response to perceived threats to personal, cultural and national identity reflect similar social movements on the international stage, such as Brexit in the UK and the Donald Trump phenomena in the USA. All cases represent claims to the future, based on dissatisfaction with the present, infused by an idealised and well-ordered past. Such conflicts have been explained in media as a reaction to a loss of power experienced by lower income groups who are described as conservative, poorly educated white Anglo-Europeans, who blame increased multiculturalism and religious diversity for their societies' ills. In contrast, the rise of multiculturalism and its increased representation in society is associated with an educated class supporting social democratic politics and globalised economic structures. Notwithstanding the representation of multiculturalism as a dominating social structure, the contribution of ethno-religious diversity to political, social, cultural and economic life still requires ongoing and vigorous justification and protection. Multiculturalism as a concept is still tied to debates about integration and cohesion, which are often misunderstood as pressures to assimilate.

## 2.1 Risk society

Struggles about safety, security, multiculturalism and Australian identity from national to local levels represent growing uncertainty and anxiety about one's place in the world. According to Beck and Giddens (Beck, 2009; Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1994), uncertainty and anxiety are responses to reflexive modernity, in which globalisation and mass economic restructuring has resulted in the loss of institutional traditions. These include the nature of work changing from stable employment in manufacturing and primary industries to precarious work in tertiary and retail sectors; transformation of gender relations with regard to equality and greater acceptance of sexual diversity; and fracturing of family and community structures with increased rates of divorce, transience and seeming demise of defined social classes.

This highly differentiated nature of society has emerged alongside greater individualisation and the need to 'create one's own biographies'. The boundaries of class, gender, social affiliation e.g. the church or occupations that previously structured people's lives have lost their influence, facilitating greater personal choice and responsibility. This requires people to evaluate scientific evidence and expert opinion for themselves to make effective decisions; paradoxically, people may also be experiencing a general loss of trust in scientific and political institutions. Thus ontological security is undermined as greater individualisation confronts one's sense of self-efficacy by highlighting the limitation of individual power. Hence, the 'risk society' describes the individual and social conditions that are associated with generalised uncertainty and associated anxiety.

Codifying the complexity of the risk concept into a typology can assist to distinguish the types of hazards, dangers or effects of social processes that are associated with the Bendigo mosque development. While introduced here, this typology is used as an analytical framework to structure, frame and discuss the social processes and impacts of the mosque protests.

### Life and being (ontology)

Existentially, risk is about the possibility of death. Regardless of whether one is conscious or sensitive to one's own existence, perceived threats presents a possibility of spiritual, psychic, or physical death (Langford, 2002). To constantly feel that one's being is confronted by uncertainty, creates insecurity and a desire to control the causes of anxiety through fight, flight, or freeze (Aicher, 1998; Porteous, 1977). These responses are instinctual, physiological and emotional, informing cognitive practices of risk management. If left unexamined and unchecked, perceptions and responses may not be commensurate with objectively defined probability of harm.

## Experience (action)

People create self and identity through physical and social interaction with their environment. Through public action, experiences and skills can be developed to support spiritual, psychological and physical growth and development, enabling a person to live and function in the world (Costall, 1995; Heft, 2001; Mead, 1964; Porteous, 1977; Proshansky et al., 1983). Shifting toward a cognitive understanding and evaluation of experiences, individuals and groups can devise and implement strategies to help them negotiate their world while protecting their ontological being. In this way, strategies, like those used by many stakeholders in this research, become a form of risk management in response to perceived, conceived or anticipated threats.

In the process of individualisation, the onus is on personal choice and responsibility to evaluate hazards, trade-offs and potential outcomes. However, there are strong socio-cultural expectations that individuals will internalise accepted norms of behaviour, with deference to existing systems such as the legal code, and act accordingly. Norms of behaviour are constructed through everyday practice, regulation, as well as stigma and blame when norms are transgressed, to form broader systems of governance (Burcell et al., 1991; Mythen and Walklate, 2005; Bevir, 1999).

## Knowledge (epistemology)

Constructing knowledge about potential threats is a significant tactic for managing and controlling risk. However, within the Bendigo context, science-based theory and frameworks that have been developed to identify, measure and monitor threats (Fox, 1999; Dean, 1999; Crook, 1999) are not necessarily used. It is assumed that assurance and certainty can be improved through control and management of risk, but this can also occur due to perceptions of control.

For individuals relying on expert knowledge to make decisions, assessing the evidence about threats and their management can be confusing. Different assumptions, methods, models, and experts can be used to define and calculate the probability of threats (Jaeger et al., 2001). Within a planning context, this is apparent with regard to the type of expert reports tendered during planning approvals and VCAT appeals processes. As such, scientific knowledge is transformed into economic and political ways of knowing through legal and political structures, and the media.

The risk management practices of groups and individuals incorporate ideological as well as assumed values by framing the agenda as to who, what and

how risk should be labelled and controlled (Lupton, 1999; Douglas, 1992; Dean, 1999). Each policy arena or organisation establishes its own formal and informal normative standards of risk that support internal institutional power structures. This creates an environment in which different stakeholders wrestle for dominant understandings of threats, probabilities and consequences (Lupton, 1999; Douglas, 1992; Dean, 1999). Since individual understandings of risk can be subsumed by the meanings held by social groups and society at large, groups and organisations can strategically seek to change conceptions about potential threats and outcomes.

## Reputation (political)

With the rise of social media, the effects of decisions have a much greater impact on decision-makers and their organisations with regard to reputation. There is a greater need for decision-makers to be cognisant of their socio-cultural and political contexts, and how their decisions can be legitimised (Jaeger et al., 2001; Japp and Kushe, 2008; Luhmann, 2008). The public nature of planning instils self-regulating processes in addition to legal processes, to manage how others may respond to decisions.

## Resources

Financial and other threats to resources are more material considerations compared to the categories noted above. Insurance provides a system through which individuals and groups can contribute towards a collective safety net (Jaeger et al., 2001). However, threats to resources may not be easily identified or calculated. These can be considerable in community disputes about development, especially if unexpected legal costs arise, as the Bendigo example suggests.

## Spatial/environmental (morphological)

Cultural conceptions of risk are inscribed in our physical landscapes. Urban space and its elements are products and representations of political, economic, social and cultural processes that result in an uneven geography of power (Harvey, 2000; Lefebvre, 2003; Sandercock, 1977). The material elements define and symbolise social relationships like land use zoning, designation of property ownership, the configuration of public and private and semi-private spaces, and expectations of behaviour e.g. noise laws. Space is further differentiated by the concept of place, which separates one physical area from another, and in so doing provides the opportunity for comparison between 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces and places.

## 2.2 Socio-cultural conception of risk

Grappling with the socio-cultural conceptions of risk in relation to urban change and social impact requires an understanding of how risk is governed. In community conflict, individuals, groups and organisations can support, re-interpret or challenge regulatory and social norms. These actions highlight contested areas of policy and practice. Various actors need to mobilise narratives, strategies and resources to reinforce or undermine particular societal structures, and support or attack the validity and legitimacy of specific institutions.

Risk communication, while not listed as part of the typology provides an additional perspective for interpreting the events in Bendigo. Communication by organisations, community leaders, protestors and the media aim to achieve specific results. Strategies and tactics can be used to attenuate or accentuate messages. In addition, purposeful messaging interacts with socio-cultural and political contexts that can support or contest understandings of information or events.

Research about the cognitive understandings of risk has established that people are more concerned about unpredictable, acute and new threats or hazards than those that are predictable, chronic and familiar (Slovic, 2000). In addition, negative information, especially if it is emotive, has greater impact on people's response and memories of events rather than positive or less emotive information. This means that communication messages can be easily manipulated through framing (purpose, language, structure) to create particular responses, thus requiring people to critically reflect on the information they are engaging. Furthermore, research indicates that people can be primed for messages based on selectivity of materials presented and their focus. New events and messages about events can be categorised and filtered so that they are anchored to previous information received, while the representativeness of messages and events with regard to people's experiences can elicit greater response. Unsurprisingly, the availability of the messages in terms of people's memory and imagination influence communications (Kahneman et al., 1982; Kasperson et al., 1988).

## 2.3 Risk and lifeworlds

Understanding risk as different rationalities held by people who inhabit different lifeworlds can support greater understanding of stakeholder groups, their values, motivations and likely modes of conduct. This in turn can result in more effective management of community conflict. Lifeworlds refers to the dynamic interplay between individuals' subjective experience of their world, the external conditions that influence the worlds they inhabit e.g. employment, housing, social networks, and the intersubjective meanings they create (Atkinson, 2010; Miller, 1992; Crossley, 2000; Rasmussen, 2014; Sandywell, 2004; Zhao, 2015). Using this conceptualisation can provide insights about how individuals, social groups and organisations shape their identities and create their biogeographies and engage in placemaking over time. Sharing values, beliefs and practices are acts of meaning making, linking symbolic and material environments.

Individual psychologies, different stages in the lifecycle and socialisation within the family and other close milieus, such as people from school, work and CSOs contribute to the making and shaping of lifeworlds, and therefore, identities. Furthermore, these processes of formation are embedded within a variety of socio-cultural structures in which each person's lifeworld transects and interacts with multiple levels of social and institutional organisation, including legal, planning and health systems, as well as those related to institutions of democracy, justice, gender, marriage and family.

Lifeworlds facilitates an explanatory framework for understanding the nested structures and interactions that occur from the micro/individual level to the macro/institutional level, across different social and institutional structures, as well as through time and space. Originally based in early phenomenological inquiries that aimed to find universal truths through lived experience, philosophical debates and operationalisation of the concept through research programs has expanded the concept into social psychology and sociology. The concept enables insight into the way in which different lifeworlds may be completely unknown and unfathomable to others. They can be nested within each other, or overlap in ways that provide glimpses into how different individuals and groups engage with their environments resulting in potential polarisations or collaborations. This was illustrated at a disrupted Council meeting that was

closed early, where lifeworlds collided to the extent that protestors succeeded in shutting down the meeting. Mayor Cox confirmed that, 'Only one point of view was heard.'

Communities, if viewed as a 'morally valued way of life rooted in mutual understanding' (Miller, 1992: 31) highlights how intersecting lifeworlds can constitute shared meanings that can be equally geographically and time bound or transcendental of place and time. Mutual understandings help to create assumptions about 'natural' ways of being, thinking and doing. They then become foci for reflection when confronted by situations in which taken for granted meanings are challenged. Habermas (2015: 124) explains:

From a perspective turned toward the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Single elements, specific taken-for-granted, are, however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet problematizable knowledge only when they become relevant to a situation.

Bendigo illustrates how the geographical location of development and protests become significant expressions of the conflicts that can arise when lifeworlds collide due to differences between individuals' and communities' experiences and desired futures, and with institutional structures of development. With the rise of social media, the steering of individual and group lifeworlds by political, media and other systems, are diluted by individual and group agency. Communication through new forms allows people to extend their lifeworlds and establish relationships that reinforce personal values and meanings (Rasmussen, 2014). In many cases, the lifeworlds of others are rejected, dismissed and ridiculed, even as they help reinforce the identity of the individuals or groups doing the criticising. Urban protests demonstrate territorial expression of adversarial yet intersecting geographically and networked-based lifeworlds, as well as ideological and symbolic gulfs between people. Yet Cossley (2000: 84) notes that intersubjectivity, and recognising of others as 'autonomous, self-conscious being[s]' is part of citizenship responsibilities.

Urban social theory and practice offers insight into the physical and symbolic expression of how lifeworlds and associated identity are enacted in public space. Essentially, movement and interaction in public space provides opportunities to develop mastery over the urban environment, create a sense of place and become familiar and comfortable with difference (Spinks, 2001; Jacobs, 1961; Cresswell, 2004; Aicher, 1998).

Individual and group confidence to use and participate in public space is gained through experience. Confidence is associated with feelings of self-efficacy and control, which influences how individuals and communities perceive, assess and create strategies in relation to potential dangers. As such, mastery affects the types of threats that may be encountered; views about the capability of others to carry out threats; and the ability of individuals and communities to counter threats. As Aicher (1998: 92) states, mastery:

...allows people to perceive many stressful events as predictable consequences of their own activity and thereby as subject to their direction and manipulation. A person having a sense of control would not generally feel vulnerable to random actions.

Yet mastery can also be associated with issues of territoriality about who belongs – where, why, when and how. Notions of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are constructed based on values often associated with various combinations of ethnicity, religion, gender, age and socio-economic status; outsiders are accredited with producing 'insidious harm' to the public good (Douglas 1992: 87). Areas marked by feel a sense of loss due to change and uncertainty, feel threatened, or are bigoted, may seek to gain control over outsiders, rather than mastery over the changes that affect their lives. Forrest and Kearns (2001: 2126) note that dominant cultures can feel as if 'the social cement of a previous era is crumbling and that we are being collectively cast adrift in a world in which previous rules of social interaction and social integration no longer apply'. This is exemplified in debates about Australian identity and lifestyle, and within the discourses of anti-mosque protests. While recognising the concerns of people who grieve for real and perceived loss, it is important to confront the socio-cultural construction of those who do not conform with the self-image of the 'community' as being socially dangerous, morally degenerate and polluting of Australian society (Douglas, 1992).

When individuals become aware of a disjuncture between what their environment offers and their personal preferences, individuals tend to either change their environment, change others in their environment or change themselves (Proshansky et al., 1983). Through various processes of engagement, individuals and groups have the capacity to change society, institutions and culture. Thus, depending on the psychological, social and physical permeability of the urban fabric, movement and interaction can contribute to closed or restrictive lifeworlds or contribute to enlarging them through exposure and experience. Massey (1994) asserts that lifeworlds or identity can be retained even as spaces or places change with time in relation to economic, social and cultural influences. She argues that place, viewed and experienced as outward looking, permeable and accommodating of diversity, reduces the distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and the sense of insecurity that promotes self-protection (Cresswell, 2004).

Integrating risk with psychological and sociological conceptions of lifeworlds means that different risk rationalities and how these rationalities are socio-culturally constructed can be explicitly acknowledged. Thus risk communication becomes a central focus for designing messages, with a particular focus on audiences and how they will respond, use and further disseminate meaning (Rasmussen, 2014).

These are the structures with which individuals and groups choose to accept, negotiate or contest and create some alignment between their values, beliefs and experiences and the world around them. With change occurring within and external to the self, individuals are engaged in a continuous process of negotiation with themselves as well as their environments. Through this interplay, multiple configurations of self emerge depending on perceived or required roles, functions, situations and location at any given time, revealing relationships between rigidity and flexibility of character, goals and methods of achieving personal objectives.

## 2.4 Studying the effects of protests and campaigns

As the role of social and risk impact assessment in, and alongside, planning decision-making has been addressed, the next stage of this report uses SIA, combined with conceptions of risk and lifeworlds, as an analytical framework to identify and assess community affects and mobilisation. Together, the two stages of research will be used to identify potential strategies or a model for effectively managing, negotiating and mediating community-based conflict related to urban change in multicultural societies.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and representatives from government organisations (n = 8). Interviews lasted 35-60 minutes. The purpose was to identify stakeholders' roles, functions, and responsibilities with regard to administering regulations, planning processes and decision-making procedures during the development approval process and associated public campaigns.

Semi-structured interviews of 30-60 minutes long were held with faith leaders, CSOs, business leaders and media (n = 10). These interviews aimed to identify stakeholders' roles, functions, motivations, responsibilities and community relationships with regard to the planning processes and associated public campaigns.

Difficulties were encountered in seeking interviews with anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam political leaders or protesters. Invitations were sent to anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam leaders and supporters identified through popular media and whose e-mail or website contact details were publically available. Only one ex-protester was willing to be interviewed. Contacts for mosque objectors listed in Council's publicly available development assessment files were not used as these contacts were listed for statutory, not research purposes. Social media was not used to make contact with anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam supporters due to the public nature of this medium.

Additional discussions were conducted with academics and professionals in the fields of planning, politics, geography and media regarding the contextual influences of the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam campaigns and to gain further insight into the study findings.

## Media analysis

Mainstream media articles from the Australian Broadcasting Association (ABC), Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), The Age, the Herald Sun and the Bendigo Advertiser (n = 183) were analysed as well as social media posts on Facebook, Twitter and Change.Org were analysed to identify themes, ideologies, beliefs, rationales and aspirations and how these contributed to organisational and communication strategies. These were supplemented by online videos of news reports (n = 18) and instructional videos from anti-mosque groups (n = 5).

## Stakeholder roundtable

A stakeholder roundtable (n = ~12) was held with community representatives to present the initial results from the research to provide feedback on the researchers' interpretation and analysis of the data, as well as to discuss additional perspectives or strategies not identified by the research.

## 2.5 Analytical framework

This research combined the theoretical work about lifeworlds, risk and social impact assessment by identifying the key stakeholder groups in the planning and social processes, as well as their roles, functions, objectives, social networks and modes of operating. The potential risk rationalities of each group have been constructed so that potential threats, perceived likelihood, intensity and duration of these threats and their outcomes could be identified. These were compared and contrasted to gain an understanding of the events that occurred, why, and how they may be managed in future.

Documents, transcribed interviews, and pdf versions of media were coded and analysed using NVIVO 11.2.2. This was an iterative process that identified key themes, dominant discourse, and emergent concepts. Data was further analysed by creating a chronology of events to identify specific moments of decision-making, social mobilisation and points of conflict.

The quotations used in this report have been edited to maintain confidentiality of participants and other people to whom participants have referred. There was also minimal editing of quotations for clarity e.g. repetitive wording that was not purposely used for emphasis, filler words such as 'ah', 'you know' and so forth. In every instance, the aim was to retain the original meaning of the quotation, and the broader context of discussion.

This research project had La Trobe University human research ethics approval.



3

## A MULTICULTURAL SNAPSHOT OF BENDIGO



# A MULTICULTURAL SNAPSHOT OF BENDIGO

## 3.1 Multicultural and religiously diverse placemaking

Victoria is home to one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world with over 200 nationalities represented. Prior to white settlement Aboriginal people spoke about 700 dialects of over 200 languages. White settlement progressed with English, Scottish and Irish, Africans, North Americans and French, as well as people from Europe. Afghanis, Lebanese, Iranians, Egyptians and Chinese, who migrated during the gold rush in the late 1800s. Immediate post-war migration resulted in greater numbers of Greeks and Italians, with Australia providing new opportunities for people from Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan since the 1970s through family reunification, skilled migration, and humanitarian reasons due to persecution and wars.

With the oldest immigration portfolio in the world, Australia's Department of Immigration (now the Department of Immigration and Border Protection) was created in 1945 to plan for post-war construction and nation building (Tvan, 2015). Since then, a suite of regulations from national to local level have been implemented to formally support and promote multiculturalism, anti-discrimination and anti-racism. These policies provide a governing framework for our legal, economic, social and community relations.

All communities, including migrant communities engage in placemaking. The material symbols of placemaking activities are evident in economic life through business and products such as ethnic restaurants, cultural products, and cultural life such as theatre, art and festivals, and the construction of mosques, temples and synagogues. Over time, migrant placemaking may become less visible as wider society, living with change, adopts certain practices and ways of being.

Embedded in Australian society are earlier knowledges and practices that form the foundation for maths, science and philosophy, much of which emerged from early Islamic society. Islamic scholars developed numbers, paper and advances in physics, geometry and chemistry, as well as advances in surgery and astronomy. Importantly, they reintroduced Greek philosophy to countries now known as Europe.

Historical perspectives on Muslims are eclipsed by current debates about Muslims and Islam in Australia that focus on issues of extremism and terrorism. Political and media commentary imply or fail to correct impressions that the presence of Muslims in Australia is recent, and that Muslims and the Islamic faith are incompatible with Australian society. Yet Muslim people have been practicing their faith and culture in Australia for over 200 years. Muslim people were engaged in trade with Aboriginal people prior to settlement, and participated in nation-building projects through the Afghan cameleer's participation in the construction of the inland railway and telegraph (Bowker, 2016). The first mosque was built in Maree, SA sometime between 1861 and 1882, and Eid festivals were recorded in Albert Park, VIC in 1882. Mosques were built in Shepparton and Melbourne in the 1960s. Since the 1800s, Muslim people have contributed to Australian society through business, defence, philanthropy and entertainment, in rural, regional and metropolitan areas.

Currently, 2.2 per cent of the Australian population and 2.9 per cent of people in Victoria reported they were Muslim in the ABS 2011 census. In contrast 22.3 per cent and 24 per cent of the Australian and Victorian population indicated they had no religion. The Muslim population is extremely diverse. It includes Aboriginal people, multi-generational Australians, and migrants from Africa, South and South East Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the Philippines and North America.

### 3.2 Ethnic and religious diversity in Bendigo

The Bendigo mosque conflict serves as a snapshot of a particular time in the city's broader development trajectory. With just over 100,000 people, Bendigo is a mid-size regional city located 150km (two hours' drive) northwest of Melbourne. Originally home to the Jaara Jaara people or Dja Dja Wurrung Clans, the land was taken over for agriculture as part of British colonisation. By 1850, gold was discovered and the area attracted prospectors from around the world. In a recent news article, Bendigo Citizen of the Year (McGinn, 2014) commented on the city's population diversity at the time:

"Bendigo in the 19th Century was probably the most multicultural city in Australia with all the gold-diggers from across the world. Fortunately, we are now getting a multicultural society back in again."

With the slowing of the gold rush, the population and economy slowly declined, continuing after World War II and into the period of mass economic restructuring in the 1970s-80s. Since 2000, the city has been reinventing itself. It now has a diverse economy, strong cultural life, a university campus as well as the benefit of majestic buildings from its early prosperity.

Ethnic and religious difference has always been present in Bendigo, although it decreased significantly between the gold rush and recent years.

**Figure 1** summarises place of birth as reported in the census between 1911 and 2011. The reduction in numbers between 1911 and 1921 is likely due to a redefinition of districts for counting. As the data shows, people have reported Asia, New Zealand, America and Europe as their birthplaces for every census presented, while 1954 was the only census in which Africans were either not represented or not counted. The inclusion of the Middle East was due to people reporting of Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt as their place of birth. However, in earlier census, these countries, as well as Syria were counted as part of Asia. In early census data, nationality may not represent country of birth due to colonisation. In 2011 data, these countries were combined with North Africa. It is important to highlight that Aboriginal people were not included in the census until 1971.

In the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, 88 per cent of people in Bendigo indicated they were born in Australia, of which 1.4 per cent of the population identified as Aboriginal; 7 per cent of the population reported they were born overseas.

While the proportion of the population born overseas represented over 80 countries, 3.3 per cent indicated their country of birth was New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland or the United States of America, with the highest number of migrants coming from the UK. People from other parts of Europe, throughout Asia, and countries including Africa and the Middle East region also live in the area.

Compared to Melbourne and the State of Victoria, the proportion of people born overseas and people who speak English as a second language in Bendigo is substantially lower. However, there was a 43 per cent per cent increase of people from non-English speaking backgrounds between 2006 and 2011. This actually translates into a very small fraction of the population, as all people born overseas from a non-European nation comprise only 2.5 per cent of the total population. Karen, Karenni and Hazara people with refugee backgrounds have settled in the area, and other groups such as the Sudanese, use Bendigo for services from surrounding towns. Council has signed the refugee charter, formalising its commitment to resettlement and support.

**Figure 2** summarises religion as reported in the census between 1911 and 2011. Bendigo has remained predominantly Christian as the census data indicates with Catholicism and Protestantism the most frequently reported religions. People of Jewish, Islamic and Chinese based faiths were represented until 1966, 1947 and 1933 respectively. Residents may have decided not to reveal their Islamic or Chinese faith due to the international political situation leading into World War I and II or actually left the city.

According to the 2011 Census, Christianity in its various forms is the most common religion in the city (62.4 per cent) followed by those who report not having a religion (26.8 per cent) or who did not state their religion (8.2 per cent). Only 2.5 per cent identified as non-Christian or were non-classifiable. Of this proportion of the population, the top three religions reported were Buddhism (0.8 per cent), Hinduism (0.2 per cent) and Islam (0.2 per cent). The Census only makes distinctions between the different sects within the Christian faith e.g. Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant. Churches serving the various streams of Christianity are located throughout the city. Significantly, the city is home to what is claimed to be the largest Buddhist Stupa in the western world, which has a capacity of 2,000 people, and a Karen Temple has recently been approved. In neither case did protests occur like those that emerged against the mosque.

**Figure 1: Bendigo place of birth**

Birth Place	1911	1921	1933	1947	1954	1966	1981	2001	2011
Australia	47002	23079	23667	25710	35100	38170	55144	78157	89585*
New Zealand/ other Oceania	177	125	117	79	84	81	256	528	
Europe	6,368	2,173	1360	864	1614	1883	2486	2917	3711
Asia	345	133	90	53	15	152	293	492	1406
Africa	28	33	24	16		12	18	90	255
Americas	83	38	27	12	15	22	106	85	124
Polynesia	9	2		4					
North Africa/ Middle East							24		541
At sea	45	18	7	1					
Unspecified	353	81	69		5	3			9

\*Includes New Zealand & Oceania. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

**Figure 2: Bendigo Religion**

Religion	1911	1921	1933	1947	1954	1966	2001	2011
Christian	53048	11445	22493	24069	33499	30039	59968	62781
Jewish	54	16	49	11	14	10		203
Chinese		21	0					
Confucian	21		0					
Islam	26	13	7	1			88	202
Buddhist	3		0				395	809
Pagan	0		0					
Hindu							75	243
Other Non-Christian	57	62	13	10	3	6		37
Agnostic/No Denomination	154	79	46	56	94	85		
<b>No Religion</b>								
Atheist	108	30	45	51	50	77		335
Object to state	671	62	0					
Unspecified	386	86	3461	2558	3258	4140	3972	8294

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

### 3.3 Muslim community in Bendigo

The Muslim community in Bendigo which numbers approximately 300 is very diverse with over 27 ethnicities/nationalities and languages. Members comprise individuals and families who were born in Australia, arrived as skilled migrants, are temporary migrants as students or workers, or have refugee backgrounds. While the mosque will serve and support this diversity, and local leaders try to represent the communities' interests, it is important to remember that the people have a variety of experiences based on personal and family background, education, income, English-language skills, type of employment and access to support systems.

As a result of the protests, people in the Muslim community questioned their sense of belonging. There was deep hurt, confusion and frustration about public accusations and media reporting indicating that Muslim men abuse their wives and children. Professional women who received positive support in the workplace were better able to maintain perspective because public hostility was balanced by workplace support, but women who are less connected with the broader Bendigo community now restrict their public activities to times when their husbands can accompany them. Some children were bullied at school.





# 4

# OBJECTING TO DEVELOPMENT

# OBJECTING TO DEVELOPMENT

Land use planning does not govern by recognising specific communities, but assumes that its logics, processes, practices and outcomes benefit 'all' communities. Premised on the common good and public interest, decisions are weighted toward the maximum benefit for the greatest number of people (Pelatonen and Sairanen, 2010). Traditionally this approach in Australia automatically favoured dominant groups in society, such as those with Anglo-European heritage, as the planning system and its practitioners were enculturated in this type of society. However, increased population diversity and evolution of planning practice to recognise the plurality of its citizens through community engagement is changing some system logics (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). This is apparent in development assessment and appeals processes where the vision and objectives of municipal strategic plans as well as economic, housing, health, arts and cultural plans, etc. are informing decision-making.

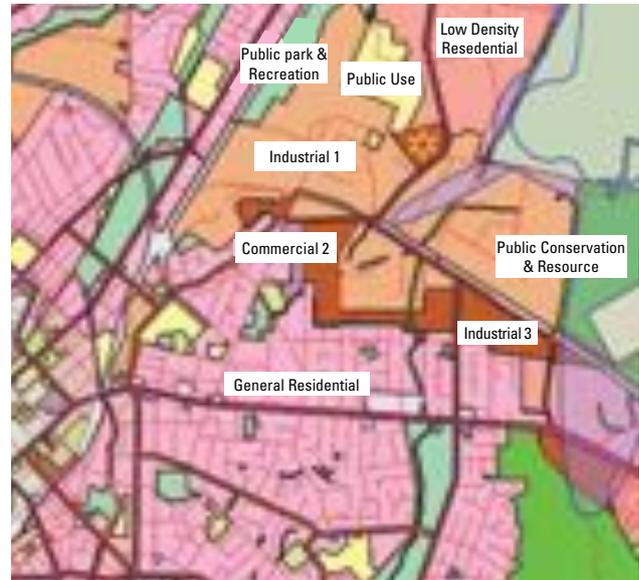
The common or public good, the public interest and net community benefit are not well-defined in planning theory and practice, yet are deeply embedded in the goals, values and practices of decision-making (Campbell and Marshall, 2000; Campbell and Marshall, 2002; Moroni, 2004; Murphy and Fox-Rogers, 2015). In simple terms, the public good refers to collective benefits that are indivisible and public interest as the aggregate of private interests (Murphy and Fox-Rogers, 2015: 232). The philosophical depth of these concepts, traced by Campbell and Marshall (2002), identifies how meanings of the public good and interest have fluctuated in the balance between emphasising the rights of individuals over those of the collective. Meanings have also responded to the tensions that arise from assuming unifying social goals when confronted with the reality of diverse populations. Importantly, Campbell and Marshall (2002: 164) assert that "...governments are expected to justify their actions and it is in this descriptive sense of defining what is 'good' that it provides a normative standard against which decisions or policies can be evaluated". Identifying public goods and defining public interests are key elements upon which community conflict is based.

By examining the procedures of decision-making, and the rationale for decisions by Council and VCAT adjudicators, it is clear that objectors lacked evidence to support their claims that the public good was adversely affected and that their case contributed to the public interest. Objectors' engagement with planning processes and their connected activities in the social realm indicated they did not know or acknowledge their role and function as a stakeholder, nor the requirements for legitimate participation. Their actions simultaneously illustrated a particular construction of the public good/public interest, a poor understanding or rejection of planning system procedures, and an inability to meet the standards of evidence required in planning assessment tasks. Before going further, it is worth reviewing the application and its conditions in more detail.

The documents reviewed for this section included the Australian Islamic Mission's mosque development proposal, VCAT and Victorian Supreme court rulings (n = 6), expert evidence reports (n = 4), report for VCAT applicants about the Australian Islamic Mission, and City of Greater Bendigo planning application files including meeting minutes (n = 1), objections (n = 435), and records of process.

## 4.1 Description of the development

Current prayer facilities comprise a room at the local La Trobe University campus, which is not sufficient for the needs of the Muslim community. Serving approximately 300 Muslims in the area, the proposed mosque will include a caretaker's dwelling, an office, two prayer rooms, an education room and 131 car parking spaces. The site will also function as a community space with a café and sports hall. Within the Planning Scheme, a mosque is considered to be a place of worship, which is defined as: 'Land used for religious activities, such as a church, chapel, mosque, synagogue and temple.' This is listed under the more general nomenclature of a place of assembly, 'Land where people congregate for religious or cultural activities, entertainment, or meetings.'



**Figure 3: Aerial image of site and land use zoning for the development site**

(Aerial image) Source: Researcher, 2016; Map data: Google, DigitalGlobe

(Land use) Source: <http://services.land.vic.gov.au/landchannel/jsp/map/PlanningMapsIntro.jsp>

The mosque development site is located in an area that is covered by an Industrial 3 Zone as marked with the red star (**Figure 3**). It is about three kilometres from the centre of the city, which is located toward the bottom left of the image in grey. The development site is adjacent to a heavier industrial zone, public use zone and low-density residential zone. Industrial 3 zone promotes industrial development but allows for a caretaker's house, leisure facilities, educational centre (not a school), and retail with a permit; the site surrounded by a low-density rural residential zoning. The design of the mosque and its facilities by GKA Architects aligns with the design principles of other mosques around the world; the facilities and its uses are similar to other faiths in Australia. **Figures 4-10** show the site layout of the mosque, its interior design and its elevations (City of Greater Bendigo, 2014: 16-20).

State policy encourages places of worship to be located in or near activity centres, and these facilities can be located in residential zones. When there are issues of land cost and amenity, places of worship are often located in industrial zones. A development permit is required when a new place of worship is planned for a residential area if it does not comply with floor space regulations or in industrial zones. However, new places of worship that comply with requirements in a residential zone or transforming existing structures from one religion to another do not require a permit.

In *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary)* [2014] VCAT 786, Deputy President Dwyer (2014: 14), identifies the differing permit conditions for a place of worship between a residential zone, which has 'as of right' land use, and an industrial zone:

- 39 Interestingly, the issue of the compatibility of two adjacent places of worship arises in this case primarily because both have sought to locate in an Industrial 3 Zone, where a permit is required to use land for a 'place of assembly' or 'place of worship'. In the new Neighbourhood Residential and General Residential Zones that now apply across much of Melbourne, a place of worship is an 'as of right' land use subject to conditions about maximum floor space of 250 m<sup>2</sup> and road zone access. A mosque meeting these conditions could theoretically locate immediately adjacent to a church (and vice versa) in many residential-zoned areas without a planning permit or third-party objection, and without any assessment of the compatibility of the two uses, or the identity or character of the users – including their particular faith or special attributes. It is perhaps surprising then that the siting of two places of worship adjacent to each other could (or should) raise greater compatibility issues, from a planning perspective, in an industrial-zoned area than in a residential area.



**Figure 4: Proposed site plan** *Source: GKA Architects*

- 42 Given a place of worship is allowed or permissible in a residential zone, the rationale for the permit requirement for a 'place of worship' in an Industrial 3 Zone would ordinarily be to enable an assessment of its compatibility with any special industrial and associated uses that are encouraged to locate in the zone, rather than its compatibility with nearby communities or other places of worship.

In his expert statement to VCAT, planning counsel to the City of Greater Bendigo, McGurn (2014) identified a number of reasons for siting a place of worship in an industrial area. These included issues of cost, size of land and distance in relation to the location of the mosque and how considerations for these and similar types of large developments may alter in a regional context compared to a metropolitan context:

- 65 Typically Local Planning Policy Frameworks do not provide obvious direction to the establishment of such facilities, most likely because there has been relatively limited growth in regional settlements until more recent years, and that existing community infrastructure has been established in decades past.
- 66 While such uses are often argued to be ideally best placed within activity centres (as sought in Clause 11.01-2), or in the case of Bendigo within the Central CBD area, the fact remains that this is often

impractical, or perhaps prohibitively expensive given the size of land required. A similar conundrum exists with the establishment of new schools or other large institutional facilities. The advantage in regional areas, over Metropolitan Melbourne is that there are typically better opportunities for locating these community uses within areas that are (relatively speaking) in close proximity, and readily accessible to communities. The subject site exhibits these characteristics given that it remains only 3.5 km from Central Bendigo, and is well connected to arterial roadways and has access to public transport.

In addition, McGurn (2014: 16) observed that the multiple activities on the proposed site are common to such developments, which does not preclude the mosque being situated in the Industrial 3 zone.

The proposed sports hall (while capable of being viewed as a land use in its own right – and subject of a permit application) is in real terms a complementary facility of the place of worship, which as I have indicated is a 'modern' expectation of a community facility of this nature. The sports hall will not have an unreasonable impact on the amenity of the area for the reasons that I have already articulated. I note that it is proposed for the Sports Hall to be made available to the broader community and I consider that this is a positive contribution to Bendigo.

Significantly, the café and sports hall will become community-wide facilities. This is an important aspect to the development in that it extends notions of the common good and net community benefit to include the whole City of Greater Bendigo local government area.

Planning permit conditions regulate site activities. The number of people at the mosque is restricted by permit conditions to 150 people, with the exception of Eid Prayers and Friday midday prayers, when the maximum capacity is 375 people. The mosque can operate from 5.00am to 11.00pm, with entry and exit to the premises restricted to 15 minutes before and after designated hours. The education rooms cannot be used as a school, and the sports centre will be able to operate from 9:00am to 10:30pm, but not at the same time as prayers.



**Figure 5: Proposed ground floor plan**

*Source: GKA Architects*



**Figure 6: Proposed 1st floor plan**

*Source: GKA Architects*



**Figure 7: North elevation**

*Source: GKA Architects*



**Figure 8: East Elevation**

*Source: GKA Architects*



**Figure 9: South elevation**

*Source: GKA Architects*



**Figure 10: West elevation**

*Source: GKA Architects*

In contrast to the permit conditions, McGurn (2014: 14-15) noted he did not believe there should be a limit of 150 people at times other than Eid and Friday prayers, nor that uses of the facilities should only occur at different times:

- 79 I understand the desire of Council to limit or manage the attendance of patrons at the facility, however given the nature of the religious attendance and the location of the facility and the limited impacts of that location I question the necessity to impose detailed restrictions on the varied number of patrons throughout the day.
- 82 Whether patrons are in attendance at the sports hall or for prayer or other purposes simultaneously is not in my opinion of significance given the provision of car parking and the restriction proposed on the hours of operation of the sports hall.

A review of other VCAT cases indicated that the hours of operation and the variable restrictions on the number of people using the site is consistent with permit conditions granted in other approvals, regardless of religious denomination.

A unique requirement contained in Condition 28 of the notice of decision by Council stated that no political discussions/campaigns could occur as a main function of the mosque. This condition was placed on the permit by Council, contrary to officer advice, to address community concerns, as noted by a Council participant (A). The Age (Spooner, 2014) reported the potential for constitutional implications since limitations would need legitimate purpose. This condition was later removed at the VCAT hearing (Garde and Baird, 2015b: 46)

- 145 Condition 28 was not appropriate for several reasons. This condition would have been difficult to enforce, and would place restrictions on freedom of speech. The grounds relied upon by third parties in the conditions application seeking retention of Condition 28 were wide-ranging, and included issues relating to security, the suggestion that the mosque will be a recruiting ground, and the suggested incompatibility of political Islam with the Australian Constitution. None of these grounds have been substantiated. The Tribunal accepts the position of the responsible authority and permit applicant. No good reason was advanced why Condition 28 should be retained in a planning permit.

The key issues for the site raised by other government agencies were vehicle access and visibility of the minaret in relation to the local airport. The key planning matters raised by objectors were: traffic, parking, height of the minaret with regard to air traffic, noise, visual impact on neighbourhood character, loss of vegetation and improper land use. The development proponent is required to develop and implement a landscape management plan, and the minaret must be marked for traffic control, with access limited to maintenance. Other conditions included general requirements to manage the environmental effects of construction, road and curb construction, stormwater, drainage, and lighting to reduce impact on neighbours. Since call to prayers are now sent through mobile devices, issues of noise related to this cultural feature were not relevant.

## 4.2 Consideration of objectors' concerns and appropriate assessment of impacts

The City of Greater Bendigo received 435 objections to the proposed mosque development from throughout the city, as well as from other parts of Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales, indicating that people beyond the local area somehow believed they were affected by the development. In addition to the planning matters raised above, objectors raised concerns about the potential for increased crime and violence against non-Muslims – especially against women and girls, the imposition of Sharia law, incompatible lifestyle, social division and creation of Muslim enclaves. Due to the number of objections and their anti-Islamic nature, public consultation meetings were not held. This was a variation from regular development assessment processes. Instead, Council staff focused their efforts on objectors whose properties were located near to the proposed development as they could more readily demonstrate a legitimate claim of material impact, as shown in **Figure 11** (City of Greater Bendigo, 2014: 13).

A major contention in the assessment of the application by Council was whether community concerns were properly considered and, consequently whether the potential impacts were adequately identified and addressed. The planning officer who assessed the development determined that no significant social impacts would be caused by the development (City of Greater Bendigo, 2014). Since a large proportion of the objections were deemed inappropriate for consideration because they were based on objectors' beliefs about Muslims and Islam rather than matters of



**Figure 11: Location of objectors within close proximity to the development site**

Source: City of Greater Bendigo, 2014

land use planning concern, they were deemed outside the scope of assessment. Regardless, all concerns were listed and considered as part of the development assessment process and reported in the Council Meeting Agenda (City of Greater Bendigo, 2014).

During the council meeting at which the development was approved, Council staff did not engage with the non-planning matters raised by objectors and protestors, who felt silenced as a result. They created forceful ways to be heard, including being disruptive at the Council meeting at which the development was approved. This meeting required police assistance to proceed, but was closed early due to the loud disruptive and intimidating behavior by protestors (Dow and Shenk, 2014). A subsequent Council meeting was cancelled in response to protest events.

Differing opinions emerged regarding the decision to avoid engagement with non-planning matters during interviews with stakeholders. While the decision was made in response to the volatility of the situation, some members of the community felt it further inflamed the situation. As Council participant (A) explained, Councillors usually follow up with planning applications:

“So it went through the normal process, but there was a tipping point and so when the project was presented to council, the planning officers made the recommendation that planning does not have a consultation meeting.

So the normal process is... they get the application, then it's advertised, the objectors or submitters contribute and then we bring all the parties together around the table to discuss and see if we can iron out any issues. So at that point, because it had got out that there was a proposed mosque to be built, there was already racist comments, and comments that are way outside the planning process. So councillors discussed it and as a group with the officers, we decided not to have the planning consultation.”

This was supported by statements by the Director of Planning as reported in the Bendigo Advertiser (no author, 29 May 2015):

“The city usually arranges a consultation meeting involving submitters, the applicant, officers and ward councillors but there are circumstances when consultation does not occur. This includes when either the applicant or submitters do not agree to participate in the voluntary consultation process or when a large number of objections are received, meaning it is not possible to hold a reasonable conversation between the parties involved.”

Council participant (B) believed a different approach should have been taken:

“I think probably what we should have done is – I don't think we should have ignored the opposition. I think we should have probably... tried to engage them or...”

At a distance though, probably through a third party to hear them but also to try to crack them in a way, to split them. They have different motivations for being involved with it. For some it is around that patriotic – you know, the attraction of aggression may be something and there might be other external concerns around employment or whatever. For some it was legitimate concerns around the mosque. For others it could have just been leadership in that platform of – their own personal ego. I don't know.”

Media participant (A) observed that objectors were shut down and that this may have contributed to conflict. This person gave an example that occurred during the public meeting that was held:

“It’s very funny when you hear people like [name withheld] who puts on that – ‘it’s just a process; we’ve started the first step and if people object there are opportunities for objecting and that will be then.....We’re not really entering into a religious or a belief-value debate because it’s about building a facility’ full stop, and I think in some ways that incensed some of the opposition who said no.”

Objectors made a planning appeal to VCAT to review the mosque approval decision. As required under state legislation the presiding Justice and Member at VCAT examined the technical aspects of Council staff decision-making, compliance with regulatory processes and consideration of the objectors’ social evidence. The adjudicators focused on the potential material effects of the development, and did not engage with objectors’ views of Muslims and Islam.

During this time, the objectors’ focus on social impact became more prominent. Indeed, Council participant (C) suggested that objectors seized upon the idea of an SIA after they realised that they must conform to regulatory processes.

Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, social impacts must be considered, and a decision made as to whether there are or could be significant impacts. A social impact assessment is not automatically required. The following sections of the Act guide planning decisions:

4. Objectives  
(2)(d) to ensure that the effects on the environment are considered and provide for explicit consideration of social and economic effects
- 12 What are the duties and powers of planning authorities?  
(2)(c) must take into account its social effects and economic effects.
- 60 What matters must a responsible authority consider?  
(b)(i) any significant social effects and economic effects which the responsible authority considers the use or development may have.

(1B) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f), the responsible authority must (where appropriate) have regard to the number of objectors in considering whether the use or development may have a significant social effect.

84B Matters for Tribunal to take into account

(2)(jb) For the purposes of subsection (1)(f), the responsible authority must (where appropriate) have regard to the number of objectors in considering whether the use or development may have a significant social effect.

In 2015 *Planning Advisory Note 63: Planning and Environment Amendment (Recognising Objectors) Act 2015* (Appendix 3), was published to explain a legislative amendment about the need to consider the number of objectors and how to determine significant social effects. Notably, authorities have the responsibility for determining significance, and effects must have a causal association with the development that can be substantiated by evidence. As the *Planning Advisory Note* and the VCAT assessment of the Bendigo mosque are strongly influenced by *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary) [2014] VCAT 786*, the relevant excerpt is provided below (Dwyer, 2015: 16):

- 48 Although this provision only took effect in its present form in 2013, it replaced a provision that the responsible authority ‘may, if the circumstances so require’ consider such effects. It now more clearly puts the significant social and economic effects of a planning decision on an equal footing with environmental effects, all of which ‘must’ now be considered.
- 49 We make a number of observations about the requirement in s 60(1)(f).
- 50 First, that the effects to be considered are those that the responsible authority (or the Tribunal on review) considers to be significant, rather than those that may simply be contended as significant by one party or another. This should be objectively ascertained through the decision-maker’s expertise and/or the material before it. It is therefore important that we indicate what we consider to be any relevant significant social effect.

- 51 Secondly, the significant social and economic effects must have a causal connection to the use or development proposed in the permit application under consideration, and having regard to the purposes of the legislation within which the requirement arises – i.e. the broader objectives of planning under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. As we have earlier indicated, planning decision-making is not the mechanism for addressing all issues of social or community concern, or resolving all issues of human emotion or behaviour.
- 52 Thirdly, from a town planning perspective, significant social and economic effects have traditionally been recognised as those that affect the community at large, or an identifiable section of the community, rather than affecting an individual or a small group of individuals.
- 53 Fourthly, a consideration of social effects pursuant to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* should be based on a proper evidentiary basis or empirical analysis, preferably through a formal social impact or socioeconomic assessment. There must be objective, specific, concrete, observable and likely consequences of the proposed use or development. A consideration of social effects should not be based on philosophical or moral or religious values. Nor is mere opposition by a section of the public, or a large number of objections, of itself, evidence of social effect.
- 54 Fifthly, the social or economic effect must be sufficiently probable to be significant. This will depend on the probability of the effect occurring, the consequences of the effect if it occurs, and the utility of the use and development giving rise to the effect. Both the positive and adverse effects must be considered.
- 55 Sixthly, a significant adverse social effect, if there is one, must be considered by the decision-maker. That does not mean that it will necessarily be determinative in itself and lead to the refusal of the permit. It must still be balanced with any other significant social and economic effects. Again, this should commonly

and preferably occur through a formal and independent social impact or socioeconomic assessment. Moreover, the social effect must still be balanced alongside all other relevant planning considerations, as part of an overall assessment of the proposed use or development in deciding whether or not to grant a permit.

The content of objections to the development and claims made at VCAT suggested the objectors and their supporters were proposing a different notion of the *public good*, felt presiding Justices and Members were prejudicial due to the nature of *prescribed process and procedures*, and did not subscribe to the same understandings of *legitimate knowledge and evidence*.

During the VCAT appeal, objectors raised issues of human rights and the public interest. Justice Gard and Member Baird responded to the issues raised. Although they could not adjudicate on the matter of human rights, they could assess whether they and Council staff complied with human rights and anti-discrimination legislation when carrying out their duties. In assessing the application, international agreements and Australian regulatory systems require professionals to uphold the law. Key international declarations include the United Nation's (UN) 1989 Convention on Human Rights, which enshrines people's rights to religion and UN adopted *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* in 1992. The Declaration considers the protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities as contributing to the political and social stability of the States in which they live. It positions the realisation of these rights as an important part of the development of any society.

Freedom of religion and the secular nature of Australian Society are enshrined in the Constitution. In Victoria religious freedom is protected by section 14 of the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, which also protects freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. The *Australian Constitution* (Ch.5, s.116) states:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

### 4.3 Identification of the public good or net gain

The individuals and groups who supported the mosque planning application and those who opposed it defined the public good or net gain for the community differently. These related to geographical scope, social and economic impacts, and cumulative impacts over time. There were over 40 submissions to Council in response to the planning application that supported the mosque. Supporters identified multiculturalism, equality, equity and right to practice one's faith as human rights, essential for democracy and the public good. People who objected to the mosque on anti-Islam/anti-Islam grounds (some objectors had issues only with material planning matters e.g. traffic) positioned Islam as a violent politically anti-democratic regime that affected the public good, which comprised the rights of non-Muslims to practice their lifestyle and faith, feel safe, and live in socially cohesive cities.

The two opposing views, essentially presented different imaginaries of net community benefit, and how they viewed the future of the city. Net benefit is a net-value sum that results in an overall positive impact on relevant communities. It is helpful to understand how net benefit is assessed. As explained in *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary) [2014] VCAT 786* (Dwyer, 2014):

- 23 A net community benefit analysis requires us to assess the benefits and disbenefits of any proposal, and to determine whether the overall outcome is one that will achieve a net benefit to the relevant community. This task acknowledges that proposals contained in planning applications need not contain only positive outcomes, in order to be found appropriate.

Council staff obtained strategic guidance for assessing the mosque application and determining the public good and net gain from council policies and supporting objectives of the *State Planning Policy Clause 19.02-4 Distribution of social and cultural infrastructure*. As explained by Justice Gard and Member Baird in *Hoskin v Greater Bendigo CC and Anor [2015b] VCAT 1124 (39)*:

The sweep of relevant considerations under the Planning Act is broad: under the State planning policy framework decision-making must endeavour to integrate the range of policies relevant to the permission sought and balance conflicting objectives in favour

of net community benefit and sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations. In a planning appeal, the Tribunal may be called upon to assess more generally the social effects of a proposal, having regard to such matters as adopted strategic plans, policy statements, codes and guidelines, as well as any relevant State environment protection policies.

Essentially, the dominant meaning for the public good or net gain was identified as the Muslim community's right of access to a place of worship. Significant issues of human rights, freedom of religion, and access to worship entered into decision-making even though those with authority to assess development proposals and to adjudicate appeals do not have direct authority on these matters. This is because Council staff and VCAT Justices and Members, are bound by the legislation to comply with human rights and anti-discrimination laws.

*The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* was considered one of the networks of regulations governing Council and VCAT decisions, including the Bendigo mosque appeal.

VCAT deliberations considered the matter of human rights as inseparable from the decision-making process. In the following lengthy excerpt from *Hoskin v Greater Bendigo CC and Anor [2015b] VCAT 1124 (29-30)*, Justice Gard and Member Baird simultaneously highlights the link between planning for spaces (land use considerations) and activities that affect users (individuals), without focusing on the users themselves, and how this relates to human rights. The counsel (Mr Balzola) for the objectors suggested that it was inappropriate to consider human rights as relevant to an organisation or corporate body.

- 97 Mr Balzola disagreed with the responsible authority and permit applicant. He submitted that under s 6 of the Charter, only human beings have human rights. He submitted that as neither the responsible authority nor the permit applicant are human beings, the Tribunal should not fall into the temptation of affording vicarious human rights recognition to persons who are not the subject of these proceedings. He submitted that the Planning and Environment List of the Tribunal was not the proper forum to recognise human rights where the party to the proceedings is a body corporate.

99 While the Tribunal accepts that the requirement in s 38(1) to give proper consideration to a relevant human right requires a decision-maker to do more than merely invoke the Charter like a mantra, it will be sufficient in most circumstances that there is some evidence that shows the decision maker seriously turned his or her mind to the possible impact of the decision on a person's human rights and the implications thereof for the affected person, and that the countervailing interests or obligations were identified. The Tribunal accepts that the responsible authority does have obligations under the Charter. The responsible authority is a public authority under s 6 of the Charter and, like the Tribunal in this review proceeding, is required to give proper consideration to the rights of individuals and the rights of the potential users of the mosque and associated facilities.

That is the case notwithstanding that the permit applicant, as an entity, does not itself have rights under the Charter. It is significant that there are two limbs to s 38(1) of the Charter. The first deals with acting 'incompatibly with a human right'. This limb is certainly applicable to a natural person who is a party and contends for a human right. The second limb prohibits the public authority 'in making a decision' from failing 'to give proper consideration to a relevant human right'. Clearly, there can be a 'relevant human right' whether or not a natural person is a party to the proceedings. Here, the human rights of the individuals who will use the mosque are relevant. Those rights are properly identified by the responsible authority and permit applicant.

The public good or net gain was invoked by the objectors at the Victorian Supreme Court by claiming their case was of public interest. However, this was not supported and the objectors were ordered to pay costs. The Supreme Court found no basis for the claim that their application was in the public interest or indeed raised important questions regarding the relationship between public policy and State planning legislation (*Hoskin v Greater Bendigo City Council [No 2] [2015] VSCA 370: 4*):

We would reject the applicants' submission that their application was in the public interest. It is true that the result of the application had implications for both proponents and opponents of the development proposal, and that it raised media interest. However, that does not mean that the application was brought in the public interest. Many planning objections generate publicity.

The applicants brought their application as private objectors, at their own risk, and the Court did not consider the issues raised by the applicants surrounding the interpretation of the PE Act to have prospects of success warranting the grant of leave to appeal. In so far as questions of human rights became relevant, they were raised by the respondents in opposing the application. There is no basis for the applicants' submission that their application raised important questions regarding Australia's international obligations or the relationship between public policy and State planning legislation. Nor is there any basis for inferring that the application was brought in the public interest from the fact that presidential members of the Tribunal sat at various times in the proceedings below.

In terms of defining the public good, the public interest and its connection to human rights, the underlying premise of the mosque objectors suggested that Muslims practicing their religion would stop non-Muslims from practicing their own. Objectors also claimed non-Muslims would no longer be able to use the area, and activities such as walking dogs, women wearing shorts and t-shirts, gambling, drinking and accessing bacon would stop. Although objectors posited these as externally imposed social impacts, many are actually self-imposed choices due to perceived threat. As Deputy President Dwyer (2015: 9) asserted in *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary) [2014] VCAT 786*:

Town planning decisions should reflect Australia's rich and proud history of welcoming all religions, and provide a society where people of different faiths can live, work and worship side-by-side, without fear of threats, intimidation or violence.

## 4.4 Legitimacy of knowledge and evidence

Objectors believed their views about Muslims, Islam and the potential impacts created by the Mosque were self-evident, citing examples of social conflict in places such as Lakemba, Bankstown and Punchbowl NSW and Shepparton, VIC. They indicated that Council would be open to legal action under sedition laws. A report that was commissioned by *Concerned Citizens of Bendigo* (No author, c2014) was tendered at the VCAT appeal to support these beliefs. However, this report did not present a reasoned argument. Instead it was based on Internet searches that focused on particular people who were or are associated with conservative and/or radical views.

The nature of evidence required in planning decision-making and for establishing social effects requires reports and studies that demonstrate scientific or social scientific process and rigour. Emphasis is also placed on existing legislation and policy relevant to the development being assessed. The issues raised and the material presented by the objectors did not conform with social impact assessment requirements as being 'objective, specific, concrete, observable and likely', nor was a causal relationship established with the proposed development and its use.

Identifying and evaluating evidence is a key task for planners and those adjudicating appeals. Council's planning assessment made distinctions between opinion and evidence (City of Greater Bendigo, 2014: 38) with regard to social impacts:

Notwithstanding the opinions held about the impact of the building of mosques in other communities, to refuse the application on social impact grounds would require evidence that the building of a mosque in Bendigo would indeed have adverse social impacts. Officers have considered the comments made and have concluded that opinions that a mosque has had a social impact in other places in Australia and around the world is not compelling evidence that the impacts perceived by those objectors would happen in Bendigo.

These comments were reinforced in statements made by the Director of Planning and reported in the media:

"It's not just enough to say you have a view there will be traffic impact or other impacts, you actually have to produce the evidence," she said. "It's just the same for social impacts, you can't just say 'we worry that there will be a social impact', you actually have to produce objective evidence." (Hall, The Age, 17 Dec 2014)

In addition, Justice Gard and Member Baird (2015: 43 and 55) concurred with Council planning about evidence regarding social impacts as well as economic impacts, in their ruling about the Bendigo mosque, finding no evidence that a mosque has had adverse social or economic impact in any other location in Victoria or beyond:

132 The Tribunal has already stated that it has not been presented with evidence or submissions with any substance as to what the consequences of the fears and assertions would be with respect to the proposed mosque, and its ancillary components, at the subject land. There is no evidence of abuse, harassment, intimidation, or loss of wellbeing or social cohesion associated with the operation of the existing places of Islamic worship in Bendigo, or in any other location in Victoria or beyond. Mr White's reference to cities such as Bradford and Lakemba were not substantiated with any documents or material of any type, and there was no identified specific link with this permit application.

184 In oral evidence, Ms Hoskin referred to a number of matters that are described by the Tribunal as suggested economic effects or impacts. Ms Hoskin argued that residents cannot sell their properties, or get a usual price for their properties, due to the mosque proposal. Ms Hoskin referred to an economic impact report addressing property values being obtained by the group applicants. No such report has been prepared or relied upon subsequently. No evidence of economic impact has been provided by the group applicants. It has not been shown by the group applicants that there will be any adverse economic effects or impacts.

185 The relevance of economic impacts in planning matters relates to the contended effects on the community, not individuals and their private financial interests. The effects must be demonstrable, and the effects must be significant, consistent with the wording in the PE Act.

#### 4.5 Power of process and procedure

These different perspectives about the public good affected how planners, supporters and objectors determined what information should be included in the planning application, development assessment and the appeals process. Conflicts arose because each of the parties associated with the planning application had different purposes, knowledge and skills for engaging in the processes. This was particularly apparent in the type of information provided by objectors in support of their claims, as noted above, and their engagement with the appeals process. The inability of objectors to get what they believed to be satisfactory outcomes from Council and VCAT through formal objection processes was partially due to their poor knowledge of the system and its requirements.

The Council, the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) and VCAT provide considerable information for lay audiences on their websites. This includes simplified overviews of planning, assessment and appeals processes, plus more specific information on each stage of the process – including forms and checklists. However, the sheer amount of detailed information could be potentially overwhelming. Some lay people in the process would require expert advice e.g. a lawyer, to guide them effectively through the processes, and more importantly, understand the decision-making parameters of planners and VCAT members.

In *Evers v Greater Bendigo CC & [2014] VCAT 816*, one objector sought to conceal her identity in the formal appeals process via the *Open Courts Act 2013* due to fears about the ramifications to herself, her image and her business in objecting. The objector was concerned that the media would focus on portrayals of her as racist, rather than having legitimate planning objections; impacts on her business, and that she would be vilified for being an objector.

As an applicant under the *Open Courts Act 2013 (OCA)*, she was not successful because her grounds for concealing her identity did not meet the requirements of the Act. In addition, she did not understand that her name would still be published in court documents, which would still allow identification to occur. However, it was determined that the applicant was already identifiable due to public contributions on social media, having involved herself in the dispute about the mosque despite not living in close proximity to the site. Furthermore, the applicant would not be prevented from engaging in legitimate proceedings of the public interest. Significantly, the ruling noted that being publicly identifiable for planning matters is important for determining whether a person is materially affected by a development proposal based on planning grounds.

As Deputy President Dwyer (2014: 1) noted in his explanation:

In particular, s 4 of the Act creates a statutory presumption in favour of disclosure of information in VCAT proceedings, and the Tribunal can only make a suppression order under very limited grounds in s 18. The Tribunal must be satisfied that the order is necessary, as opposed to being merely desirable, to achieve its purpose. Importantly, under s 14 of the OCA, VCAT must be satisfied 'on the basis of evidence or sufficient credible information' that the grounds for making the order are established.

Given the public nature of planning decision making at a community level, a citizen or group of citizens taking a stand for or against a particular proposal for the use or development of land should be publicly identifiable so that the extent to which their interests are materially affected by the proposal (if any) can be properly assessed or relevant planning grounds. It would be a very rare circumstance, if ever, that either a permit applicant or objector could satisfy the grounds for a proceeding suppression order to conceal their identity under the *Open Courts Act 2013* in a review proceeding at VCAT under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

In *Hoskin & Anor v Greater Bendigo City Council & ORS [2015] VSCA 350 (51)*, many matters were raised with regard to procedural fairness. Within VCAT proceedings, applicants and respondents are informed of the necessary dates required to complete actions, such as submitting documents, evidence or attending practice hearings. The objectors believed they were disadvantaged due to poor access to information, timelines, communications, and harassment, even though they were provided with extra time at various stages in the process.

The objectors argued that there was not enough information in the planning application. They made claims that they had difficulties finding witnesses due to the publicity of the case, which adversely impacted upon the willingness of professionals to present expert evidence in support of the objectors. Timelines were misunderstood, as objectors were waiting for reports from the respondents prior to submitting their own, even though all reports are due at the same time. Issues with communications arose because VCAT served papers on the named applicants and the onus was on them to communicate with the representing lawyer who practices in NSW.

Issues of harassment arose because the objectors believed the presiding member sought to intimidate the applicants. They sought his recusal because they believed he instructed the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO) to send a letter requiring material to be removed from the Rights for Bendigo Residents Facebook page. On this page were strong criticisms and defamatory matter related to Justice Gard who was presiding over the case, and Deputy President Dwyer who presided over the concealment of identity case.

Key issues were raised about objectors' timing and knowledge of the process as summarised in *Hoskin v Greater Bendigo CC & Anor [2015] VCAT 1125: 13-14*):

2. while the hearing was lengthy and was completed over six days, and there were also preceding Practice Day hearings, there is no suggestion of apprehended bias on the part of the President arising out of anything that was said or done during any part of the hearing process. The application for recusal was made only after the conclusion of the merits hearing and when the Tribunal had reserved its decision;

3. the application to recuse was made by the group applicants under the mistaken understanding that the President had given instructions to the VGSO, or been involved in the giving of instructions concerning the VGSO letters. In fact, this was not the case;

[2002] VSCA 132; *Bringing Contempt Proceedings under Section 137 of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998*.

4. the group applicants (and without intending any criticism) were unaware of the guidelines published on the Tribunal's website relating to possible contempt for unacceptable behaviour, and the roles of the Principal Registrar and VGSO in such circumstances;

5. following the correspondence, it would appear that steps were taken by Rights for Bendigo Residents Inc to remove various publications, resulting in the ending of correspondence and communication with the VGSO; and

6. there was a strict separation and clear demarcation between the role of the Tribunal as a decision maker in administrative review and contempt proceedings and the role of the Principal Registrar.

The objectors had legal representation, however their inter-state lawyer, did not appear to provide proper counsel on these matters. This may be due to ideological rather than legal motivation as the lawyer, who contested mosques in Sydney and Canberra, is linked to far right wing political and Christian groups. Regardless of the reasons, the objectors took the case to the Supreme Court, where their leave to appeal was refused.

The refusal was based on issues of evidence and the rationale is provided below (*Julie Hoskin & ANOR v Greater Bendigo City Council & ORS [2015] VSCA 350: 51*):

149 For the above reasons, the application for leave to appeal should be refused.

The proposed grounds of appeal do not raise questions of law which are reasonably arguable and they have no prospect of success because:

- (a) the Tribunal did not misdirect itself as to the terms of s 60(1)(f);
- (b) the Tribunal did not rely upon the decision of the Council with respect to significant social effects when that decision was flawed;

- (c) the Tribunal did not find that it had no duty to consider significant social effects in the absence of evidence adduced by the objectors; and
- (d) the Tribunal did not fail to consider whether the matter should be remitted for further consideration by the Council.

Throughout the process, the objectors were not able to establish that Council incorrectly assessed the application, or inadequately considered stakeholders and potential social impacts. They were also unable to establish that VCAT erred in its assessment. The primary factors were the lack of understanding of planning process, substantive planning matters, social effect and legitimate evidence.

#### 4.6 Adequacy of negotiation about development objectives

A formal SIA was not required by, or conducted by Council, however the stakeholders, their concerns and beliefs about potential consequences were considered. Although anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors and protestors sought to change the development objectives informing decision-making, it was appropriate for Council and VCAT not to negotiate on these matters. In general terms opening discussion by calling for an SIA would be discriminatory by treating a mosque differently to another place of worship.

An implementation of an SIA process could have assisted Council to anticipate and manage the public's response to the mosque planning application, if the number of objections, intensity and sustained nature of protests was expected. Similar developments in other cities and towns were unremarkable and in the early stages there was no reason to think that Bendigo would be different.

Having established that much of the controversy that arose in Bendigo was not directly related to land use planning, it is important to consider other influences. The Bendigo mosque represented conflicts that arose from other policy arenas related to immigration and urban development. The opportunities for the public to engage with broader issues, like immigration policies and their relationship with changes in their towns and cities, are often restricted to development assessment. As Valverde observes, 'planning and zoning processes easily turn into arenas in which all manner of concerns and fears and anxieties are aired, often in a dysfunctional manner' (2012: 204).

The SIA process can help individuals and different groups to articulate their values and knowledge in response to proposed developments, supporting council accountability to communities (Summerville et al., 2006). Feelings of exclusion or of being silenced, which are social effects, can be countenanced through participatory practices. Subsequent issues may arise if community members feel dissatisfied that processes do not meet their desires and expectations of having influence over decision-making. If there is no capacity to incorporate community influence, then the use of SIA to identify values and concerns may be deceptive.

Peltonen & Sarainen (2010) argue that there is need to distinguish between knowledge production in conflict and knowledge of conflict; they assert that transformative interactions can be achieved through mediation. Mediation can be effective for filling information gaps, understanding community experience, doing joint fact finding, social learning, developing alternative options, and supporting democracy (Becker et al., 2003; Gwartney et al., 2001; O'Faircheallaigh, 2010). Importantly, mediation can be beneficial for addressing perceptual, emotional or relational issues, rather than factual issues, and for matters where protecting relationships are important. In the Australian context, mediation can be defined as 'a system in which the parties in dispute seek the aid of a third-party facilitator – the mediator – who assists them to identify the issues at stake, develop options to address these, and thereby encourage early resolution of the dispute' (French, 2007: 213).

Outcomes can only be achieved when there is trust, accountability, and a genuine desire to participate by respecting the processes, other parties in discussion, and their contributory thoughts and feelings (Dingwall, 2002; Olekalns and Smith, 2009). If any party is 'unreasonable', the focus remains on interests and emotions instead of positions and joint goals; community conflict over development can become intractable, especially when the essence of conflict is prejudice. Objectors and protestors to the mosque, Muslims and Islam held deep prejudices, and they rejected the established planning permit and appeals processes; they demonstrated no desire to engage with views and positions that challenged their existing beliefs. SIA may not be beneficial if discrimination and antipathy are provided legitimacy and equal weighting in discussions.

Community participant (E) provides a context for understanding the extreme elements of anti-mosque protestors:

“But from their angle, it’s very much about religion. They’re just like – I think it’s just anything that they do, they’ll find a reason to make sure everyone’s against it. They’ll find a reason, even if they have to lie, they’ll find a reason to make this propaganda machine roll out and before you know it, everyone’s kicking up a stink about it.”

The timeline of development assessment and social response to change in **Table 1** highlights how organised groups can hijack planning assessment. The table provides insight into the social mobilisation that emerged against and in support of the mosque and Muslim people. Although use is separated from users in land use decision-making, the next chapter illustrates how this view was rejected in the conflicts about what makes a good city and society.

**Table 1: Timeline of planning application processes and social processes**

Date	Planning & Legal Events	Mosque Support Events	Anti-Mosque Events
6/10/13	Pre-application meeting		
25/11/13	Australian Islamic Mission submits planning application		
13/12/13	Clarification of land ownership; expansion, compliance with employment zone catchment. 1501-2 design principles; 15.02 sustain development; 33-01-4 landscape, 52.06-8 pedestrian routes, native veg removal		
9/01/14	Mosque application		
11/01/14			Stop the Mosque Facebook page started
11/02/14	Extension to 5 March 2013 for additional information		
3/03/14	Application to Council		
20/03/14		Inclusion events	
26/03/14	Letter from Tomkinson with notion of an application for a planning permit to be published Bendigo Advertiser 15 June 2014		
7/04/14		Bendigo Bank closes bank account	
9/04/14		Reported: Concerned Citizens of Bendigo required to close Bendigo Bank account	
11/05/14			Q Society organising meeting to inform Bendigo residents how to protest against mosque
13/05/14			Reported: People protested against mosque in Whipstick during the week
22/05/14			Reported: Stop the Mosque group crowd funding for UK lawyer who claims to be a mosque-buster
29/05/14	DEPI Letter		
30/05/14	City of Greater Bendigo reported as not doing objector mediation		
06/14		This is Bendigo Facebook page launched	
7/06/14	Letter from objector indicating inappropriateness of land use & fabrication of Tomkinson & Cardno traffic report		

Date	Planning & Legal Events	Mosque Support Events	Anti-Mosque Events
12/06/14		100 People show support for diversity	
19/06/14		Peace ceremony	
21/06/14		Uniting Church organised protest with balloons	
24/06/14			Threats by anti-mosque protestors against Muslims, a business and a councillor reported
28/06/14		La Trobe University support for mosque – in media	
12/06/14	Letter from Council supporting professionalism of staff and forwarding info for Vic Ombudsman & Independent Broadbased anti-corruption commission to objector in response to letter of corruption.		
18/06/14	Ordinary Council Meeting – decision not to have objectors meeting; City of Greater Bendigo approves mosque		Councillor states: “I’m not a fan of Islam”, Aim Report presented by objectors
19/06/14			Black balloons tied on a Councillors fence for the 2nd time
20/06/14	Permit granted; Information for Objectors – 21 days from issuing of permit?		
21/06/14		Rainbow balloons flow in support	
22/06/14	2 Councillors vote against mosque		
Jun-14		Change.Org petition for multiculturalism in Bendigo created	
9/07/14	Originating motion in VCAT		
19/07/14		Racism – It stops with me event	
21/07/14		Coloured balloons displayed in city	
Jul-14		No Mosque in Bendigo reported to Facebook for closure	
10/07/14			Call for Bendigo residents to crowd funding of legal action against Mosque
11/07/14	VCAT sets date for appeal		
18/06/14			Black balloons at a Councillor’s house & newspaper office
18/07/14	Name changed permitted on mosque application to Australian Islamic Mission Inc & objector’s suppression order of names lost		
19/08/14			Report: No Mosque in Bendigo Facebook page re-instated
20/08/14		Leaders state bigotry will not be tolerated	
11/11/14			City of Greater Bendigo launches Human Rights Charter
15/11/14	Directions hearing		
3/12/14	VCAT hearing; Objectors granted more time to obtain expert witnesses		

Date	Planning & Legal Events	Mosque Support Events	Anti-Mosque Events
1-3/12/14	VCAT hearing		
15/01/15			Man sentenced for death threats to the Councillor who received black balloons on fence
19/01/15			Objectors lodge appeal at Vic Court of Appeal
23-24/02/15	VCAT hearing		
13/03/15	Letter from Victorian Government Solicitor's Office re: inappropriateness of references to proceedings on anti-Mosque Facebook page		
15/03/15			Anti-mosque protestors attempt to disrupt event at mosque site
20/03/15	Letter from Victorian Government Solicitor's Office re: inappropriateness of references to proceedings on anti-mosque Facebook page		
30/04/15		Bendigo Interfaith Council walk	
11/05/15	Last day VCAT hearing		
17/07/15	Practice day & recusal		
27/05/15	Recuse of VCAT President rejected; stay application dismissed		
5/08/15	Notifying party of pending determination not normal practice		
6/08/15	VCAT upholds City of Greater Bendigo decision		
15/08/15	Further Practice Day Hearings		
29/08/15		Anti-racist groups protest	1st United Patriot Front protest
3/09/15	Filed leave to appeal application with additional time		
4/09/15	Hearing		\$10,000 given by Restore Australia to Stop the Mosque in Bendigo and the Victorian chapter of Patriot Defence League Australia.
7/09/15	Letter from the lawyer for the objectors: for leave to appeal		Restore Australia travelled to Bendigo to speak with residents
11/09/15	Application for a stay of the Tribunal order		
13/09/15	Application for leave granted		
16/09/15	Injunction to stop mosque rejected; City of Greater Bendigo Council meeting closed due to protests		Protest organised by Rights for Bendigo Residents
23/09/15	Stay application heard		
1/10/15	Amended Leave of appeal application		
2/10/15		Believe in Bendigo picnic	
4/10/15			Fake beheading at City of Greater Bendigo Offices by UPF
9/10/15	Written cases to court required	Victorian Premier meets with diversity & multicultural advocates	
10/10/15		Bendigo Action Coalition Protest	2nd United Patriots Front Protest

Date	Planning & Legal Events	Mosque Support Events	Anti-Mosque Events
13/10/15	Written case distributed		
14/10/15	Public locked out of City of Greater Bendigo Council meeting		
15/10/15		Australian Human Rights Commissioner Visits Bendigo	Leader of UPF changes due to mocking of exiting incumbent
28/10/15	Applicants apply for protective costs order		
6/11/15	Court informed leave of appeal would proceed & negotiations for costs underway		
6/11/15	Application seeking leave to appeal heard; Court informed leave of appeal would proceed & negotiations for costs underway		
9/11/15	Objectors: \$55,000 paid into account & 2nd respondent incurred costs of \$45,000. Objectors request to fix at \$30,000 for second respondent and \$25,000 for third respondent		
10/11/15	Protective order of costs dismissed		
16/03/15	Vic Court of Appeal rejects leave to appeal against VCAT decisions		Media reports a Councillor indicating application may go to Vic High Court
17/12/15			Objectors announce going to Vic Supreme Court
21/03/15	Applicant argues for each party to pay own costs – letter arguing for public interest; Both respondents argue that it is not in public interest		
23/12/15	Applicants pay costs on stay application filed 11 Sept 2015 and amended 16 Sept 2015; Applicants pay costs of application for leave to appeal filed on 13 Sept 2015 and amended 1 Oct 2015		
17/01/16	Objectors' lawyer cites issues with getting instructions and so 28 day for appeal had lapsed (by 14 Jan 2016); although authenticated orders of 17 Dec meant lodgement was within 28 period, the electronic lodgement rejected		
2/02/16	Objectors lodge late in Vic Supreme Court		
26/02/16	Letter from for leave to appeal granted & orders of Appeal from 16 12 2015 & Tribunal 6, 8, 2015 set aside		
27/02/16			3rd Anti-mosque protest
29/02/16	Further amended Draft Notice of Appeal; Applicant's Summary of Argument		
16/03/16	Respondents' Summary of Arguments: Letter from Council: Leave to be dismissed with costs		
15/06/16	Vic Court of Appeal rejects leave for objectors bid to appeal against VCAT ruling to permit mosque		





5

SOCIAL IMPACT AND RISK



# SOCIAL IMPACT AND RISK

The Bendigo Mosque example is just one of numerous situations where strong views, anger, anxiety and wrestling for power has had a significant effect on all stakeholders. However, the nature of the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islamic protests in Bendigo was qualitatively different from other contentious planning scenarios. The anti-mosque protest comprised a mass mobilisation of local individuals and national political groups against people who follow a particular religion, rather than the development itself. The protests extended beyond a stance against a type of physical infrastructure because they aimed to exclude Muslim people from experiencing the same rights and freedoms as others in Australian society to practice their faith. Furthermore, protests were supported by acts of intimidation and violence through social media, public space and private lives, as a way of controlling uncertainty, other people and democratic processes.

## 5.1 Historical context

Bendigo has experienced continuous socio-cultural change through various waves of migration, economic and social reform, physical development and technological advancement. Many of the issues experienced by the city's residents, community leaders, and the community as a whole, illustrate key themes of governing inclusion/exclusion effectively that have been debated in Australia since non-Aboriginal settlement. Over the past 150 years, concerns about particular groups of people and their impacts on the fabric of society have been raised about the Chinese, Irish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Sudanese, and even Catholics for example.

Historically, Bendigo faced competing pressures to respect difference and encourage assimilation with regard to Chinese migrant workers during and after the gold rush. Chinese people comprised about 20 per cent of the population in the 1850s. Many Chinese people had businesses, engaged in community activities and had social networks throughout the community; importantly their spiritual places and rituals were accommodated. This did not prevent authorities from enacting regulation to restrict Chinese entry to the colony and limit their community and business activity (Rasmussen, 2009; Lovejoy,

2011). Perhaps surprisingly, the city's Easter Day parade still incorporates the Chinese Imperial Dragon, as it has since at least 1893. Cultural practices such as these, have been and continue to be maintained by Chinese and non-Chinese people, symbolising a complex interplay of insider/outsider status.

Rasmussen (2013: 248) highlights how desire to move beyond difference without violence in colonial Bendigo is not too dissimilar to current debates about contemporary multiculturalism:

The Victorian colonial liberal ambition was to create a society without economic, social, sectarian or racial schisms. One part of the project was to exclude those who, it was thought, were not capable of sharing the dream. The other part of the project was to accommodate difference by focusing on inclusion and integration. Difference would be simultaneously acknowledged, accepted, disliked, and forgotten.

Economic, social, cultural and religious differences certainly existed – sometimes they were felt very strongly – but most people were highly motivated to keep the differences from becoming violent and divisive (Macintyre 1991: 12-13; Hirst 1990: 6-7). Bendigo public discourse exhibited this tension between the pressure to exclude Chinese as a race from the nation and its economy and the desire to accommodate difference and treat all Bendigonians fairly.

The nature of migrant societies poses challenges for conceptualising social impacts because ethno-religious change is part of the history and character of Australian towns, cities and regions. Within SIA and risk management, distinctions need to be made between the processes of change, the affects they create and the impacts on individuals, groups and organisations. As the quotation by Rasmussen (2013) indicates, current demographic changes are part of ongoing pervasive transformations supported by globalisation; furthermore interventions affecting these processes demonstrate consistency over time. Developments like the mosque, suggest

that ethno-religious change reinforces Australia's multicultural society, justifies policies of diversity and non-discrimination, and upholds democratic values. Therefore, the Bendigo mosque is reasonably viewed as a pervasive change that does not lead to significant effects or impacts on communities, as determined by Council's planner. Significantly, the planner's assessment is supported by the fact Muslim people and Islamic beliefs have been part of the city since the 1900s, and a prayer room already exists. However, responses to the mosque created new processes of change, creating discrete and cumulative impacts.

The particular framing of Australia's history and its heritage played an important role in identifying social impacts and risks. Historical narratives helped to construct threats, capability of people and/or organisations to carry out threats, and the potential consequences of threats being realised, which justified the claims of anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-Muslim campaigners.

For objectors and protestors, Muslims and Islam are identified as a threat to the heritage of Australia and Bendigo, which is presented as somewhat homogenous e.g. shared Anglo-European backgrounds, Christian faith, and a belief in democracy. In contrast, Muslims are conceived as people who are new migrants to Australia, rather than people who have contributed to the development of the nation and its communities. Muslims are primarily presented as people of Middle-Eastern background, and Islam is constructed as oppositional to democracy and Christian beliefs, although both are Abrahamic religions. Association of Muslim people and Islam with intimidation, violence and fear are used to create separation within society.

For supporters, Muslim people are part of Australian history and society. Values of multiculturalism, religious diversity, and democratic participation in society is emphasised. Notions of a common humanity, such as love and empathy are used to identify connection between people who are different. Instead, anti-Islam/anti-Islam people are viewed as a threat to society and peaceful relationships within a diverse population, as well as a threat to democracy.

CSO participant (B) asserted that extreme right-wing groups were hypocritical as they fought for their democratic rights while simultaneously denying the rights of others:

"These people who like to label people as un-Australian are, in fact, arguing for our constitution to be overturned. These people who are arguing for their civil rights are, in fact, using their civil rights to deny others the practice and use of their civil rights."

The following quotations capture various historical perspectives to demonstrate where conflicts could emerge during the Bendigo protests. These perspectives combine both past and future imaginaries of what makes a good city. The responses indicate that just as different elements of history can be emphasised to support a particular view, the desire and ability to ensure the dominance of one view, will have wide ranging effects across the city.

Gross generalisations about Muslim people in the history and development of cities were typical of claims stated in objections to the mosque received by Council, and on social media sites advocating against Islam. For example, the Bendigo Advertiser (Thompson, 2014) printed (online) a quotation from the Stop the Mosque Facebook page that suggested protestors are unaware of the history and past contributions of Muslims to Australian and global society.

"We are entitled to our views and request that the City of Greater Bendigo stops the mosque based on historical evidence that not one community in the world has benefited in a positive way from a mosque and Muslims setting up camp in a community."

In support of the mosque, a representative of the Chinese Association, quoted in a local paper, highlighted the long history of multiculturalism and religious diversity in the city, and the need for continued acceptance of new ethno-religious groups (Yu, 2014):

"We live in a secular society and there seems to be an agenda that we live in a Christian society. It is secular by choice, by the people, and with that we allow things like The Stupa, the Chinese temple, churches and cathedrals to co-exist harmoniously and the mosque should be no different.

"When our ancestors came here no one understood Chinese beliefs or traditions," she said. She said the Chinese community had been encouraged to keep its traditions "without people feeling threatened or scared... Bendigo had been a leader in multiculturalism since the gold rush days."

“We need to keep going with that and we need to embrace this new community the way we have embraced the Karen, the Sudanese, the Chinese and any other race or nationality.”

This positive framing of history seeks to show that the addition of a mosque is part of established processes of change in the city. The challenges of ethno-religious change are addressed by media participant (A). In this person’s view, Australia has a history of trying to achieve a mono-cultural community, although a story of welcoming new groups is promoted:

“Australia has been, even with all the waves of migration, a mono-cultural community. We virtually eradicated the first Australians. We basically said integrate... but every wave of migration it was like integrate or get stuffed.”

The following statement from CSO participant (A) reflects the views of many interview participants who were concerned about the disjuncture between their understanding of Bendigo’s multiculturalism and community life in relation to the image of Bendigo portrayed in the media due to the protests; referring importantly, to the embeddedness of diversity in the city’s life and architecture:

“There are children who are Muslim at every one of the state secondary schools. The last thing they need is these people coming and demonising them... I felt that it was important that people put a different side to this story.

I also felt that this city and this town has a long, proud history of community associations for good. You only need to walk up and down View Street and look at all the major buildings. Almost every single one of those major buildings was built through a mutual or a provident or some form of mutuality. That was common around this town.

This town was fostered and grew on one of the most multicultural goldfields on the face of the planet. Our history is multicultural in this town, more so than many others.”

Combined with international and national events and discourses, historical narratives inform individuals’ and social groups’ understanding of their experiences, and are inextricably related to the ways in which threats, possibilities and consequences are framed. Historical and risk narratives provide an explanation that can help support the boundaries of individuals’ and social groups’ lifeworlds, while providing a lens

for interpreting new information. This can contribute to a deep divide between people who hold different views about the mosque, Muslim people and Islam because bridging differences through a better understanding of history might not be effective. This is because people have the tendency toward confirmation bias, in which new information is assimilated in a way that reinforces existing beliefs, and also the strategies used to cope with uncertainty.

## 5.2 Muslim community

The diversity of the Muslim community in Bendigo, and their various contributions to city means that they cannot be homogenised as a group. Muslim people comprise multi-generational Australians, naturalised citizens, new and temporary migrants – including individuals who entered the country on skilled, family, student and humanitarian visas. This means that perceived threats, concerns about the mosque protests, media and political discourse, and experience of racial incivility and religious intolerance cannot be generalised – although there are tendencies.

The protest had an indelible effect on the Muslim community, affecting their sense of safety, security and belonging. Due to the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protests, interview participants indicated that many in the Muslim community now feel unsafe and engage in protection strategies. As such, people in the Muslim community did not initially respond to protests due to fears. Muslim people were afraid of experiencing verbal and physical abuse, afraid for their families and for the broader Muslim community. Many fears were substantiated.

Muslim women experienced the greatest increase in racial incivilities/religious intolerance. However, other visual minorities were affected regardless of their religious background. CSO participant (A) recounted:

“... [S]o we’ve seen an increase in clients and members reporting racism to us and that has been across the board from physical – visible migrants. That is visible even if they don’t look traditionally Muslim, but they look like a migrant. I think that that is probably people have had an increased sense of permission to voice that racism. It’s become more acceptable to make comments and to harass people, in my sense. I wouldn’t say it’s been – it’s not all our clients are experiencing it, but it’s a significant number of people from different backgrounds have come to us and said, this is what happened to me on the bus yesterday. This is what happened to me in the supermarket. I was followed home.”

Muslim women experience racism and harassment differently to men, and to each other, due to language skills, role in the family and connection with outside work. Unfortunately, women may not inform community services about the harassment they encounter. Some do not want to complain, while others, such as those from a refugee background, may view racial incivilities as manageable compared to their past experiences. CSO participant (A) observes:

"... [W]omen who wear hijab, they are absolutely recognisable as Muslim, and we have seen an increase in harassment. ... So we've started two focus groups with women to talk about what they've experienced, with our clients and community members... We've found that the women who speak very little English have not been very affected. They don't leave the house as much and when they leave the house they're not necessarily understanding what's being said to them. ... That would be the Afghan women.

I think they're also less likely to tell us, or to tell anybody, so that might be part of it as well, because there's a real sense of not wanting to complain.

We've seen that with our services as well. It is very hard to get any constructive criticism or negative comments about anything we do or anything that anyone else does. It's very much, we should just be thankful, kind of attitude. Then women who are in highly skilled roles, they might have experienced that harassment or negativity in public spaces, but they have very positive work experiences, and that seems to mitigate the effect that they feel. Whereas the women who are not working and have good English, so they know what people are saying to them."

Other community members also raised the issue of safety and the responsibility of the broader community support Muslim people. Media participant (B) recalls:

"...[W]e've got to make sure that we look after the people who are going to be using the mosque, and make them not feel like they're different... I was talking to [name withheld], and she said, my husband dropped me off here at the library the other day and said you have to walk straight in. Not because he's telling me how live my life, but because he's worried about me.

We'd never had that experience in Bendigo until the last 12 months. They shouldn't have to live like that, and our community is making them live like that. ...She's been here for what, five of six years. It's only been the last 12 months where she's felt unsafe. I just don't understand why we're now doing that."

Community participant (B) was also concerned about the effect of public events on the Muslim community and the need to discuss experiences. This person was sensitive to their experiences although could not fully imagine what it would be like:

"...Muslims I work with or ... train with at the gym – they're not deserving of all of this rubbish. What have they done to deserve the rubbish that's been generated? They're seeing and living through ... you're not seeing ... the impact on their life and their general happiness and freedom. They don't feel free when they're walking down the street... being looked at and feeling literally in danger. So those conversations need to be had on a regular basis with people."

Many in the Muslim community also felt encouraged by those who publicly expressed support for the mosque – suggesting that there were both negative and positive effects of the public protests. As community participant (A) said:

"I cannot describe to you how all of this felt. ...I felt such a shock when the protests against the mosque started. Really the best way to explain it is that I felt two shocks. Firstly, when all we felt was the shock of hate – of people all around us hating us and not understanding who we were. Then there was a second shock of love.

This second shock came from the Believe in Bendigo group. It was wonderful it was like we were not alone. This was a group of people who had nothing to gain, nothing at all, they had a good reputation in the community, they were all established business people and they were supporting us – this was a great feeling. They were speaking out for our community, being inclusive."

The initial strategy taken by many in the Muslim community to the protests was to remain silent and wait until the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam response dissipated. However, this did not occur. As such, some Muslim people joined the community groups supporting the mosque and

the Muslim community, while others entered into public discourse, which was difficult due to concern about vilification and safety of their families. Some members of the community already played leadership roles within the Muslim community and were publicly engaged. Others became leaders because they spoke out in public and in the media, so it was often also imposed upon them due to the dearth of Muslim voices in debate.

Media participant (A) speculated that public support for the mosque and the Muslim community may have supported more Muslim people to get involved in community events.

“...[M]aybe the thing is that all of these programs like Believe in Bendigo have encouraged the 300 or so that are here to be a little bit more confident to put their hands up without recrimination.”

Community participant (A)’s response confirmed this speculation about confidence. The deeper motivation for engagement, however, was thoughts about the future and creating an inclusive society.

“In the end I got involved because I thought about the future, for my children. It started with a picnic for Believe in Bendigo where everyone came and wore yellow and showed everyone that Bendigo believes in diversity. It reassured us, my family, that not everyone felt the [same] way of the anti-mosque protestors.

When I saw Believe in Bendigo people that’s when I wanted to get involved, then I was comfortable with more people knowing I’m a Muslim, I wanted them to know who they were defending, show them we are normal people with normal lives and normal worries just like them, to help them know who they are defending, and... together combat the stereotypes the anti-mosque protestors were talking about.”

In addition to joining community groups, initiating protective behaviours and engaging with the media, education became a major strategy for the Muslim community. Non-Muslims were invited to meet with Muslim people to discuss concerns and learn about Islam. This evolved over time into a joint ‘Question and Answer’ program with Council. This was supported by the development of the Interfaith Council, who helped educate each other and the wider communities they served. The City provided free space for this organisation to meet for a year.

For those who had leadership placed upon them, other issues arose that affected their personal wellbeing. Members of the Muslim community raised fears of misrepresentation in media. These comprised concern about their individual experiences being extrapolated to all Muslim people’s experiences, as well as anxiety about being wrongly associated with violence and terrorism. Muslim people also indicated that engaging with the media was a very serious concern, as they did not ‘buy in’ to put their families at risk.

Due to media attention, many have become tired of always being visible and always justifying themselves, their beliefs and those of their community. Community participant (D) indicated that some people in the Muslim community feel obligated to be leaders but feel uncomfortable about rejecting requests for their involvement. They just want to live their lives rather than participate in education seminars, and engage frequently as community representatives.

While some members of the Muslim community have made the decision to engage with the public through events and media, there is the potential that the needs, views and agency of the community as a whole, could be unintentionally eclipsed by the profile of supporting groups. Muslim people might still be excluded from leadership outside the Muslim community.

### 5.3 City of Greater Bendigo

For the City of Greater Bendigo, identifiable threats, the probability of threats occurring and their consequences refer to staff, the organisation and to the institution of government and governance. Staff experience and ability to manage community conflict over the mosque development depended on their position within the organisation, and their associated roles, responsibilities and functions. Their various perspectives on the permit process and community engagement reflected how the lifeworld of the organisation fractured into different fields of professional knowledge.

However, common to all staff experience was the magnitude of response that added to workloads – requiring additional time and energy, and the aggressiveness of responses that created stress. Work by staff represents Council, government and governance, but these cultural institutions extend beyond their staff, over time and space as apparatus of the state, which changes the nature of impact and risk – as discussed in later sections.

Planning staff assessed the mosque permit application, guided community engagement processes, and advised Councillors about the process. During the assessment and appeals processes, planners received numerous e-mails and telephone calls about the proposed development, many of which were angry and threatening. While the majority of Councillors supported the professional advice to give notice of approval for the mosque, the Councillors' last minute amendment to the permit conditions to restrict political discussion demonstrates the politically charged atmosphere at the time. Potentially, this could have called the planner's competencies into question.

Council participant (C), who believed the planning process was hijacked, noted the potential longer-term impacts of community conflict on planning staff. S/he suggested that future decisions might be treated differently due to the protests in Bendigo and the tightening of legislation in relation to social impact. As noted previously, the Planning and Environment Amendment (Recognising Objectors) 2015 requires that 'the responsible authority must (where appropriate) have regard to the number of objectors in considering whether the use or development may have a significant social effect' as well as providing basic guidelines for impact assessment.

"The legislation has been changed since... the tribunal is ...putting a pretty high bar as to demonstrating ... the social impact – but... [it has] alerted our planners particularly to the fact that if they're going to deal with an application which in any way could be seen to have a social impact...

...[T]hey're going to have to be a lot more rigorous in looking at that. One, because of the legislation ... and that's a statutory requirement but two, because of the experience of what's happened here. It's probably alerted them – whenever you see a new application you immediately.. do an environmental scan and think to yourself, how can this play out, who is going to be interested? It's probably made us more risk averse and more cautious.

...[P]lanners know that, in a way, because you can see two applications which are, for all intents and purposes, almost identical; one generates 100 objections and the other generates none. ...You often see this now, ... that one or two people who are well organised use their contacts, use their social media...

[they] can generate a substantial case against an application... I suppose this has really brought it home that ...a small group of people, who are very determined and obviously have the capacity to source some funding, can really run the planning system almost ragged...

... Any statutory planning officer dealing with any application that could possibly fall into this category... it could be the McDonald's example, it could be a minority Christian group wanting to build something, it could be someone wanting to build a ...synagogue. ... it could be a range of things. I mean, it could be something like someone trying to build a brothel, ...all these things could go completely viral ... I think it sort of catapulted us into a different space than we'd been before."

City of Greater Bendigo Community Partnership staff worked to educate the community and support Councillors; they were not part of the permit process. Initially, there was discussion in this unit about the reticence of planning staff to address the community issues being raised, but this view changed over time due to greater understanding about how this type of 'neutral' process could assist decision-making. The value of providing community forums for discussion, separate to the planning process, was still recognised due to the emotive and political nature of the conflict.

Community Partnerships staff engaged with the community via various education forums and conducted research with 120 people about social cohesion to support the Draft Greater Bendigo Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2016-2019 (recently exhibited). Staff in this section were often called on to address community concerns and they received many comments through e-mail. Council Participant (D) explained:

"...[T]here was an absolute bombardment... we were receiving really offensive...videos of decapitation .... Frontline staff, customer support...and Councillor [name withheld] and me were probably receiving ... a lot of stuff.

...[W]orking with the Muslim community to provide some information – more about the faith and ... what a mosque is all about – to customer support who were receiving a lot of letters, ...requests, [and] ... concerned phone calls. Some people were ringing up very angry. Others were just confused and really concerned because of the level of misinformation out there.

We have to respond to everything, so things like why are we supporting Sharia law? ...A lot of the time it would go direct to councillors so I'd be drafting responses from councillors. Not so much on the planning, the size of it or parking requirements and all that kind of stuff, but questions like how many Muslims are there in Bendigo?"

Staff also coordinated rallies, conducted community education programs such as the launch of 'Racism, It Stops with Me', and developed the human rights charter, cultural diversity and inclusion plan and human rights forum. Council received \$40,000 from the Victorian Government to fund the project aimed at supporting the interfaith council and increasing cross-cultural understanding. An online media campaign, targeting young men, was also part of the community awareness raising activities.

According to this interviewee, it was easier to respond to public queries once Council signed the City of Greater Bendigo Human Rights Charter. The Charter, which was developed in response to the protests, was launched in November 2014 (Holmes, Bendigo Advertiser, 11 November).

Councillors learned about the development and received assistance from staff in relation to planning regulations and cross-cultural issues. In addition to their legislative and organisational obligations, they also had obligations to represent their constituents. Experience of public anger and intra-Councillor conflict were the main threats to Councillors. All councillors experienced community anger and frustration via aggressive and threatening comments in the street, via e-mail, at community meetings, and at times, their homes.

Two of seven councillors objected to the mosque, which contributed to conflict at this level. The effect of disagreement indicated disunity as a leadership group to the public who supported the mosque. Yet, disunity does not necessarily represent a poor outcome, as it is also symbolic of democracy in pluralist society. The two opposing councillors demonstrated leadership to mosque objectors, who felt their concerns were being championed.

The capacity of objectors and protestors to the mosque to intimidate mosque supporters and carry out potential threats was implied at public events, including Council meetings. At the Council meeting that gave notice to approve the mosque, disruptive behaviour by anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protests resulted in the Mayor being escorted from the premises with police protection, which was widely

reported in popular media. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors targeted one Councillor who voted in favour of the mosque because this person is of Sri Lankan background – although non-Muslim. At the Council meeting, protestors played music whenever the Councillor spoke and physically jostled this person after the meeting; they also strung black balloons at the Councillors house, which transgressed boundaries between public and private space.

Council participant (E) observed that objectors at the meeting selectively displayed aggression to council staff, suggesting calculations about others' strength and ability to counter actions:

"[Name withheld] is a mate and when I walked out of that first meeting they shoved him. I stood in a front of a few. They wouldn't have a crack at me because they're weak."

Like many Muslim people, Councillors and other public figures in the debate experienced limitations to their liberty to use public space without interference and without undue fear. Council participant (B) detailed some of the public abuse s/he received:

"... I was standing at the lights ... and people were standing waiting to cross the road as I was, and a ... car pulls up, winds down the window, and a young bloke shouts all obscenities at me. .... That happened on a number of occasions in different locations.

"... I couldn't really understand why I was so identifiable in a crowd. It's because we have a strong media presence; it's different in a regional town to Melbourne, like the Mayor of Camberwell wouldn't be known on Melbourne TV. But because I was in the media every day on a whole wide range of issues."

This participant also indicated that people were unhappy that s/he supported the mosque were willing to, contact this person home rather than at work, and outside regular office hours:

"...I still get calls, and I've had a call at the weekend at 6 o'clock on Saturday, a person from Melbourne wanted to know why I voted in favour of the mosque. ...this person was quite persistent and I said, well, I'm just on my way out, I'm happy to make an appointment and discuss it with you during the week, but he didn't bother doing that. ...A lot of these people don't give... their name, and then after a few minutes they get all emotional and start abusing you."

All staff associated with the permit application had their competency, professionalism, and integrity called into question, regardless of whether they supported the mosque or not. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam supporters believed that the planning process, planners and Councillors were corrupt. In particular, United Patriots Front wrongfully or deceptively claimed that one Councillor was bribed by the mosque proponents. Pro-mosque/pro-diversity supporters believed that the two Councillors who opposed the mosque were inappropriately assisting extreme right wing groups. Claims of defamation entered into the public sphere as a result.

## 5.4 Business

Many in the business community united with regard to condemning the protests and supporting the mosque and diversity. Two businesses, Bendigo Bank and Jimmy Possum, were particularly public and influential with regard to supporting the mosque and a diverse community. Many business people also supported the social group Believe in Bendigo, creating bridges between their professional and community ambitions. Business people had the social, cultural and financial resources to mobilise, as well as the political freedom to engage with the issues in ways that government agencies could not. Actions by business people included public comment in the media, putting yellow Believe in Bendigo signs in windows, and donating money to public events supporting diversity.

Potential threats for businesses supporting the mosque and diversity included loss of clientele if patrons' views did not match the perspective of business, non-compliance with organisational policies, potential loss of future employees and business due to reputational risk associated with poor images of Bendigo.

The way in which issues of client, compliance and reputation risk were conceived was raised when one business closed the bank account of a local anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam group due to its racism. The rationale for the decision was based on a notion of inclusive community values and prosperity. As Business participant (A) explained:

"...[W]e noticed that there was a hate account that had been established to fight the establishment of the mosque and we said, well that's not right. For a bank that stands for community building, community strengthening and all things ...positive about community, we weren't going to condone a hate account

being established. So we'd shut that down and notified the accountholders that ...wasn't going to be tolerated or accepted.

"...[Y]ou've got to be clear and sure about what you stand for and our values are very clear. ...as an old building society going back over 150-160 years, we were about establishing and building community and feeding into the prosperity of the communities that we serve. Not ... pulling them down or taking the steam out of them.... I think it showed great leadership by [name withheld] at that time."

Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors decried this decision, and took to social media to encourage their allies to leave the bank. The bank was also ridiculed using aggressive sexual imagery. As University participant (A) remarked:

"Bendigo Bank had already taken a stance on it by – possibly inadvertently -because they'd had a bank account open with them with the anti-mosque group, which they subsequently closed down. So they were actually thrown into the middle of it – they were hated by the anti-mosquers as a result of that action."

Groups of business associated with the Bendigo Uncorked Heritage Wine Festival were directly affected by the protests. On the weekend of the first planned anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protest, the Festival was cancelled due to safety concerns for the public. This resulted in the loss of nine months of volunteer and paid labour, time and effort, and was estimated to have cost businesses over \$500,000. At a later event, shops closed in the centre of the city based on police advice (Cavanagh, Herald Sun, 29 April). This creates concern for the future among other event organisers.

Community participant (B)'s comments indicate concern about the potential financial risk for future festival organisers. This community participant also identifies that greater certainty can be achieved if council refuses to issue permits for protest events organised during festival activities:

"It was talked about last year leading up to our festival because of the timing of the various [protest] rallies ... [and] the 'Bendigo Uncorked' having to be cancelled when it was, which I didn't agree with... but it wasn't my decision to make. ... I sort of sat on the fence about it although I was disgusted by it, and angry understandably.

...[W]hat about all these wonderful things we're doing for the city and the events we put on, particularly the big one in November. Seeing that suddenly threatened, no matter how real that threat was or wasn't, it was quite annoying. It was said that at least \$500,000 worth of income for the city was ... thrown away by the cancellation of that event with all the visitation to town ... and all the activity. But ours generates well over \$2 million estimated just in that one weekend, a four-day event...

... [I]t was dumbfounding to me that someone in a position of authority couldn't turn around to the mob who said, we're holding a rally this day to promote hatred of a particular people. Couldn't turn around to that group and say, 'sorry, we're not going to allow that in our city'."

Business people who made public comment in support of the mosque and in response to anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam supporters' views were sued and their businesses vandalised. Anecdotal evidence indicates that businesses supporting the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam views were also affected; one business closed due to public comments against the mosque. As noted earlier, one VCAT objector sought to have her identity concealed due to the potential impacts on her business. Although the details are not clear, mosque objectors raised issues about defamation.

Council participant (C) noted that the effects on local business might continue in the future when the mosque is built due to the divisions that have emerged:

"...[S]o there is a process then where the mosque will have to engage contractors to build it, there are two thoughts or two things I've heard people say, there will be – there may be issues around which contractors do the contract because they may get a negative reaction, and there was probably some contractors who may decide not to tender for the job because there could be a backlash against them in some way or other."

These comments suggest that polarisation in the community can potentially affect people's livelihoods and the local economy. As the estimated construction of the mosque is worth \$3 million, refusal to engage with the project would result in loss of economic benefit from the region.

## 5.5 Media

Media as an institution and journalists as media representatives were generally viewed as a threat to Bendigo's social cohesion by both anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-diversity supporters, although views about the role played by local, metropolitan and national media differed quite considerably. Some interviewees were scathing about all media, while others indicated that local journalists and media organisations were fair and reserved in their reporting. Views about media and journalists do not take into account the experience of local reporters during the Bendigo mosque events – as they too were affected.

Discussion with media professional (C), who is also an academic, provided an insight into the tensions of covering events like the Bendigo mosque development assessment and the protests. S/he identified that journalists ultimately write for their editors, and their currency is the local story. Conflict, therefore, is interesting; telling something that is predictable, worthy and boring, kills a story. S/he noted that conflict does not have to be the focus of reporting, but can be framed to achieve different objectives. For example, conflict can be introduced through campaign journalism, in which an issue is advocated through research. Alternatively, solution journalism approaches retell conflict as part of a narrative to find a solution to the issues. Ultimately, editorial and story balance relies on judgement calls about the relevance of differing points of view and how each view should be weighted. Decisions about the prominence of different voices and/or perspectives will always be imperfect.

A few of the interviewees believed that the media helped to polarise the community. CSO participant (B) believed the media inflamed issues:

"...[T]he application for a planning permit for the mosque seemed to ignite a ... raw nerve with particular groups in our community. That was evident from the media ... The fact that the media gave oxygen to the people who were against this relatively innocuous planning permit in an out of the way place for a very small group of people is a pretty sad indictment of a ... regional town..."

...[The] editors, I'm sure, rue the day they gave oxygen to these people. But they did and all they did was allow the growth of the disaffection. We then witnessed the start of the Stop the Mosque In Bendigo site, which is run by religious extremists of another view."

Yet this person also recalled a former editor potentially using the paper to educate, which highlights how the relationship of the media to stories and local communities cannot be simply defined:

“But it wasn’t until I think [name withheld], who was the editor of the paper and he left the paper not long after that ... I often wondered if this had something to do with it, but he took a This Is Bendigo poster and put it as an insert in the [paper]. It went to every household, inviting people to put it in their windows.”

Some interviewees made the distinction between local and metropolitan or national media, indicating that the distance between national reporting and local communities resulted in sensationalism. Community participant (B) was very critical of the national media and identified how conflict is retold to ensure interest:

“... [Y]ou hear people say ... the national media aren’t interested in covering a diversity-celebrating event. They’re only interested in violent clashes and whatever. When they cover a follow up rally from these nutters that come and the police are so prepared that there’s actually no mixing of mingling and no violence occurs, the national media revert in telling the story of what happened today in Bendigo, using the footage from the previous violent rally. Instead of showing the peaceful version that occurred that day, they just can’t help themselves because their need to sell news is so much more important ... than the truth.”

The ‘truth’ in media, can be revealed in different ways, depending on the approaches and foci. With regard to local and metropolitan reporting, media participant (C) identified that there needs to be both in order to satisfy the aims of the fourth estate in situations like Bendigo; these aims are to hold institutions to account and to support social cohesion. Sensitive local reporting requires journalists to look more toward the future, and is therefore more responsive to maintaining local relationships and supporting social cohesion.

In discussing the role of the media, media participant (B) indicated that social cohesion was a key factor in decision-making. While acknowledging the need to provide story balance, advocacy journalism approaches were supported in this context:

“Some would say it’s just to report what’s happening and present both sides of the story. We didn’t take it that way. We saw it as saying okay, let’s look at what’s happening here and what’s happening to our community, and where do we sit in this and what role do we have? We very much felt that it was our role to join with people in our community.

... [W]e will take a stand and say that we don’t think that building a mosque in Bendigo is any different to building any other place of worship in Bendigo. We did not want anyone to feel like they couldn’t walk the streets of Bendigo feeling different or separate, or in any way unable to practice their faith simply because they were building a place that they wanted to worship in.

... I think you’ll probably find most of the local media... were pretty responsible around it. I think most people here saw it as an issue that it wasn’t worth presenting in a way we would ordinarily cover news events.

... [L]ocal media is a very different type of media to your nationals and your metro media, and your international media. They have to tell the world what’s going on. It’s on your TV screens, it’s on the radio and you’re hearing about it and seeing it all the time. Whereas our role is to work out, ... how ... things impact our local community? How does it make our people feel? What are the issues that really matter here?

... [N]ot every editor, though, in community papers has a position where they will say, ‘this is how I feel about this issue and we’re going to make sure our paper takes a stand’. ... But it was a huge human rights issue for us, and I think what happens with some mediums, particularly in journalism, is they forget that. You’ve got to stay connected to that, and there are ethics involved, and there are people involved. I don’t know that the journos working for the metro stations and the metro papers remember that.”

Media participant (C) pointed out that external reporting can more easily hold institutions and power to account. External reporters who ‘parachute in’ can reveal different but equally important truths. Metro and national reporters can more easily put relationships at risk, although this can have an effect on local journalists who often ‘clean the mess’.

Media participant (B) explained the frustration local journalists felt when their metro or national counterparts focused on violence during protest events when the majority of rallies were calm. Local and metro/national journalists have the ability to inflame or misrepresent issues, but as noted below, they also have the capacity to support local reporting through insightful comment.

“[W]e’d get frustrated with the metro papers, because they would come in and ... we felt ... paint a picture that wasn’t accurate. Some of the journos from the metros, were very, genuine in wanting to understand the issue in this community, and some of them were fantastic in taking a stand and giving a voice to our Muslim community and saying this is not good enough. How they were being treated. But overall, I think the media outlets themselves, the TV stations and the [name withheld] paper,... portrayed it [events] in a way that it just simply wasn’t.

...[T]hey would come in for the rallies, for example. I don’t know if you remember, they splashed two pages across their newspaper, a front-page photo of the violence. That actually wasn’t the case, and it was probably two minutes of a largely ignored event in the city. That was frustrating us, because we were saying if you didn’t publish that then the heat wouldn’t be on us so much and the issue may die down a little bit. But they just took that and ran with it.”

In contrast to high impact reporting of protest events, Media participant (B) noted that strategies were used to limit exposure of the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protests and messages on public media:

“... [W]e had to go to the rallies in case something did happen. That’s our job. We have to report it. But we didn’t give it much coverage on the day. The coverage we gave it ... the first time we reported it [was] around the police presence. The CBD being closed, the police saying stay away from the centre of town, just avoid it. Then the next time around everyone said hang on, we’re not going to avoid the CBD, we’re just going to avoid the rally ... That was the approach we took.

The first time we were all just feeling our way. The whole community was trying to work out how to deal with it. We didn’t know how ugly it would get. The second of the rallies, basically, we all just ignored them. Apart from the disruption it caused in the CBD they were non-events to us.”

Different approaches to media reporting were demonstrated by print/online images and masthead. Some newspapers used a stylised graphic of the mosque for much of its reporting, or low emotional images. In these articles, a factual reporting style was used, yet it was apparent that there was support for multiculturalism, religious diversity and a mosque. Others articles used more emotional language such as this title: ‘Fear and loathing in Bendigo over multi-million dollar mosque’ (Dow and Shenk, 2014). Although most articles reported on events, The Saturday Paper (Childs, 2015) and The Australian (Stewart, 2015) provided in-depth critical analysis that sought to identify why they happened, and why they happened in Bendigo.

Local media staff wanted to provide greater representation of the Muslim community, but felt unable to do so. From a media perspective, personal stories from Muslim people help reporters to engage with advocacy and solution journalism, as they are better able to educate people in engaging ways. Understandably, the protests and media coverage created concern for local Muslims, so few were willing to be publicly identified.

Journalists were not immune from public attacks and threats. They were also targeted through social media posts and personal e-mails. Offices needed to be under surveillance, and journalists used private or police protection at rallies. As Childs (2015) wrote in The Saturday Paper, ‘Reporters on the scene were abused. One senior journalist reported asking police to look after a young colleague from a rival paper’.

**Table 2** summarises media reporting for the different stakeholders based on risk communication. It aims to succinctly indicate how issues were framed, the purpose of reporting and the information selected for reporting. Comment is also made about the relationship of reports to existing knowledge and the availability of information. This is a simplified chart, as the relationship between producers, disseminators, reproducers and consumers of information and data can be active, passive and transformative.

**Table 2: Media Communications**

<b>Population</b>	<b>Framing: Purpose &amp; Language</b>	<b>Priming: Selectivity of Information &amp; Focus</b>	<b>Anchoring: Previous Events Affect View on New Events</b>	<b>Representativeness: Relatedness to Previous Knowledge &amp; Conceptions</b>	<b>Availability of Information: Recall and Imagination</b>
<b>Muslim Community</b>	Part of the community  Terrorists, Migrants, Outsiders but part of the community  Reported political discourse e.g. right to be bigoted, protecting Australia, death cult	Focus on: Interfaith support, Believe in Bendigo  Limited coverage of Muslim leaders' condemnation  Unrealistic expectations on Muslim leaders and members of the Muslim community to denounce violence	Positive events have less impact than negative events  ISIS coverage  International incidents e.g. UK machete attack; attack on Charlie Hebdo offices  National incidents e.g. Lindt Café siege  Asylum seeker debates	Knowledge and experience of other religions and cultures  Knowledge and experience formed by social settings  Knowledge about Muslims and Islam influenced by media based  Knowledge about Muslims and Islam influenced by anti-Islam/ anti-Islam social media  Knowledge about Muslims and Islam influenced by anti-Islam/ anti-Islam community organisations	Negative views are consistently available & easy to recall due to content, images, debate
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Councillors (pro-Mosque)</b>	Victims of harassment & violence	Focus on human rights views, planning process & legal obligations	Previous news stories & council decision-making	Experience as constituents	Experience as constituents  Public and private discourse evaluating Council staff and decisions
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Councillors (anti-mosque)</b>	Outsiders Racists Radicals Extremists	Focus on anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam views, connections to right-wing political groups & role in attracting UPF	Previous news stories & council decision-making	Experience as constituents	Experience as constituents  Public and private discourse evaluating Council staff and decisions
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Planners</b>	Factual description of process	Focus on process rather than people	Noting how situation is different to other mosque applications	Knowledge & experience of Council & planning processes  Stories about Council & planning processes	Public and private discourse evaluating Council staff and decisions
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Community Partnerships</b>	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment
<b>VCAT Members</b>	Factual description of process	Focus on outcomes rather than people	Noting how situation is different to other mosque applications	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment
<b>Police</b>	Professional	Resources: numbers, size of operation	Other public protests	Public imaginary e.g. provides security, power, legitimacy	Information & images are consistently in media

**Table 2: Media Communications (continued)**

<b>Population</b>	<b>Framing: Purpose &amp; Language</b>	<b>Priming: Selectivity of Information &amp; Focus</b>	<b>Anchoring: Previous Events Affect View on New Events</b>	<b>Representativeness: Relatedness to Previous Knowledge &amp; Conceptions</b>	<b>Availability of Information: Recall and Imagination</b>
<b>Businesses &amp; organisations</b>	Highlight leadership Collateral effects e.g. impacts on cancelled festival	Focus on pro-mosque/pro-diversity leadership & actions	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment
<b>Pro-diversity local community groups</b>	Believe in Bendigo & This is Bendigo – positively reported Anti-racism/anti-fascism groups – positive and negative criticism	Focus on: Community events, numbers, coloured Balloons, Believe in Bendigo logo Focus on flag burning	Believe in Bendigo logo in offices, on buildings & other places in public space	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment
<b>Local Mosque Objectors</b>	Racists, even if issues were based on planning grounds	On objectors who were anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam rather than those with planning concerns	Reference to other locales & applications without protests e.g. Shepparton, Ballarat	Associated with anti-Islam/anti-mosque protestors	Particular people easy to identify & link to issue
<b>Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam Groups</b>	Outsiders Racists Radicals Extremists	Focus on violence Images of tattooed & angry males	Reporting of protests in other cities Reporting of political events that federal MPs attended	Influenced by right wing political organisations	Influenced by social media, reporting of international events & association with national & international organisations with similar goals
<b>Anti-Racist/ Anti-Fascist Groups</b>	Outsiders Radicals Extremists	Focus on violence	Reporting of protests in other cities	Insufficient data to comment	Insufficient data to comment

## 5.6 Bendigo-based community organisations and groups

Bendigo-based organisations comprise Ethnic Community Council services by and on behalf of ethno-religiously diverse communities within the region, support services such as health, resettlement and housing, as well as community groups that have less formalised structures, services and representation. All organisations contributed to pro-mosque/pro-diversity discourse in the media, through public events and education programs.

### 5.6.1 Community Service Organisation (A)

The local community service organisation A (CSO A) is an independent community organisation that is run by, and represents the local multicultural community. They advocate for their members and engage in various support activities that help new migrants access language, learning and employment, as well as social engagement. Community organisation participant (A) explains:

“...So, looking at how we could support them in what they were facing. Not so much in the planning process ... had a lot of support in that area and I think Council engaged with them really well around the planning. But in terms of the community... [the] backlash of the protests and around planning a mosque, looking at how we could support them there.”

CSO participant (A) noted that people in the organisation were also affected. While expressing concern for other staff, CSO (A) identified that professional training helped to develop personal strategies to address the stress:

“... [T]here was a sense for some staff members, particularly ... newly arrived staff members, of, is this really a place I want to live? Just feeling quite downhearted about what kind of community they had brought themselves and their families into.

I think it does affect everybody working in this space. ... I've had a lot of training [in] how to separate that and re-traumatisation and that kind of thing and techniques to work with that. ... It's upsetting when clients or – our board member was attacked in a petrol station. We were here one night working late and she came in. It's awful when people have those experiences and you do take it home to an extent. It did make me question Bendigo and what the town's like."

When the Muslim community realised the debates and events about the mosque were not going to lessen, the CSO A's strategy was to focus on public education. Staff worked with individuals from the Muslim community to develop workshops and forums about Islam to deliver locally. Since February of 2016, ten workshops have been delivered. CSO A will also provide 'Say No to Racism' training by providing knowledge and skills about what to do in situations when someone is being offensive about culture and/or religion. There is recognition responses are needed to address the longer-term impacts of the protests and media coverage.

### 5.6.2 Community Service Organisation (B)

CSO (B) provides a variety of support services to socially and economically disenfranchised clients. Clients are culturally and religiously diverse, as such staff work with people whose views about the mosque cross the spectrum from anti-Islam/anti-Islam to pro-mosque/pro-diversity, as well as having Muslim staff and clients.

Backed by this organisation, the This is Bendigo Facebook page was created as a strategy to support the mosque and the Muslim community. The page was targeted by anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors and lampooned in a mirror This is the Real Bendigo Facebook page. Attacks on staff and clients extended beyond this page to other social media campaigns, public altercations and personal direct threats.

CSO participant (B) recounts a time when this person's family was threatened. An expert in extremism and politics who was contacted during this research indicates that these are illustrative of escalating incidents that are potentially dangerous:

"I have had people walk up to me and say, 'you're that mosque guy, aren't you?' I look at them and I go, 'are you talking about people's exercise of their civil rights, because yeah, I am the civil rights guy'. They start to open up and then I stand up and say,

'unless you want to see your civil rights in a place you'd much rather not think about, I strongly suggest you move on'. So I've had that sort of thing happen a couple of times.

... I had a photo sent to me on social media of my daughter leaving school ... making the observation, 'I understand she walks through the park. That must be a dark and lonely place'. I had a photo of my dog right ... I've got a small white fluffy dog, saying 'how would you like to come home and see your dog's head stuck on your letterbox?' Stuff like that.

... I lost count of how many death threats I had. ... I lost count of how many times I would cop abuse from people. I didn't have too many people come to my house, but we did have someone sneak in in the dead of night and hang some black balloons. Which I've got to tell you, black balloons don't really frighten me. I'm not a person who's frightened of balloons."

Like CSO (A), CSO (B) believes that training, work and personal experiences provides knowledge, skills and strategies for accurately assessing threats, the capability of others to carry out threats, and the effects of abuse:

"... [W]orking in the space I work in for as many years as I've been here, I'm well used to threats. You need essentially three things for a threat to be carried out: you need motive, you need opportunity and you need capability ... all these idiots ... are missing one or at least two of those things. They might have motive, they don't have capability."

Staff in both CSOs have a unique position in that their professional life puts them in direct contact with many people whose lifeworlds are different to their own. This provides greater ability to understand the opportunities and challenges others encounter when negotiating the broader diversity of Bendigo.

### 5.6.3 Interfaith

The Bendigo Interfaith Council was formed in response to public protests against the mosque. A Council staff member alerted the Administrator of the Catholic Diocese, who was also the Vicar general of the diocese about the mosque application, which provided time to prepare a response.

"... [O]ur perspective [was that]- they were entitled to have a place of worship. I knew it would cause a little bit of backwards and forwards and to-ing and fro-ing."

The aim of the Interfaith Council is to promote dialogue and support the mosque. Faith participant (B) recalls:

"Then subsequently, and most significantly from my point of view, the anti-mosque movement forced us to get serious about interfaith. Bendigo did not have an Interfaith Council at that time and it was the only significant city in Victoria that didn't.

Ballarat formed a council some years ago as did Shepparton ... and Latrobe Valley. The formation of an interfaith council in Bendigo was something that I had been pushing through Faith Victoria. I kept saying we need to do this, we need to do this!

... [T]here are all sorts of reasons for the formation of an Interfaith Council but it took a real crisis, like the mosque issue, to really force us all to act. ... I discovered as a result of this momentum ... that there were at least a couple of other people in Bendigo ... from the Bendigo Catholic Archdiocese and ... [an]other ... from the ... local Islamic community who were also passionate supporters of interfaith.

... [W]e had some initial meetings and ... encouraged the City of Greater Bendigo Council to get involved. The City didn't really need much encouragement as they were quickly right behind our efforts. Then before we knew it we had a council with representatives from over a dozen different faiths – many of which I didn't even know existed in Bendigo before the anti-Mosque movement."

The Interfaith Council encouraged religious leaders to speak with their congregations, provided two full-page statements in the local paper and did several interviews and several interviews on local radio. Discussions were held as part of 'The Bridge between Christianity and Islam' event which was facilitated by Peter Nobel in 2015. Faith participant (A) identified different education as a major strategy, and opportunities the Interfaith Council are pursuing or have completed:

"...[W]e've pondered whether we should get the principals of the secondary schools ... because we think the target audience is probably years 9 and 10. We'd like to try and get on to the circuit, if you like..."

... [W]e [also] want to educate ourselves about the other faiths. One thing that was very successful a few months ago ... took a busload of people to Shepparton and went round, because they've got a Sikh temple, they've got the four mosques. They've got an African, almost gospel, meeting area. They've got a Filipino something else, as well as ... traditional [Christian places of worship]. That turned out to be a marvellous opportunity.

The thing that was different this year [for Spirituality by the Lake], we involved artists. We had speakers, and they had talked to an artist, and the artist attempted to put before people their understanding of what the speaker had said.... We had – I think about 160 people there that day. Really went very well. That idea came from a young person who had worked with the Interfaith Council ... she came up with this concept."

Their actions were recognised, which has led to an invitation to host a conference as noted by Faith participant (A):

"... [W]e were able this year to run the interfaith night during ... multicultural week. We had about 160 people at it. Now they've had those things before, but this year, there was a different focus. ... We pulled it off. I'm quite thrilled about that.

... [T]his year we got an invitation from the Victorian Interfaith Network to host next year's Victoria-wide conference in November next year. ... we've accepted ... [and] Council has signed off that they are happy to co-host the event. So that's a bit of a win plus for Victoria and for country Victoria and for Bendigo."

The faith-based interviews did not indicate that they or their congregations experienced the threats or conflicts that other interviewees mentioned. Faith participant (A) stated:

"I've only had a couple of naughty letters ... three from the one person. I keep asking ... 'can we sit down and have a cup of coffee?' – and I get another letter. ... But he's the one objecting to where the – and telling us we don't know what we're talking about, because the Muslims cut off hands, and – dah, dah, dah. I keep writing back, saying, we have a golden opportunity to create a different atmosphere in Bendigo."

However, not all religious denominations are represented in the Interfaith Council. CSO (B) believes that some religious organisations in Bendigo may not support interfaith dialogue.

“The other thing that Bendigo has is in the early to mid-seventies it was home of the charismatic Christian revivalists in this nation. There was about six major churches that established themselves here. So if we look at the Interfaith Council, we’ve got all of those churches, the mainstream churches and many others in this interfaith council accepting that there is a diversity of religious opinion and practice that is acceptable. But if we – a great many – in fact, most of those charismatic churches are not part of that interfaith council.”

#### 5.6.4 Believe in Bendigo

In addition to these activities, the Believe in Bendigo group emerged. It comprises 124 local business and community leaders as well as individuals. Believe in Bendigo started a public campaign to promote a positive view of the city and its diverse population. The group placed double page ads in local papers, and 5000 people joined the Believe in Bendigo Facebook page in one week. They engaged with people who opposed the mosque, mostly residents close to the development site, and helped change their views to support the facility.

CSO participant (B) relays how the group started, which was supported by other interviewees:

“... [Name withheld] thought, this is just ... outrageous ... [s/he] emailed me and a couple of others and said, ‘what are we going to do about this?’ I said, well, ‘we should get some people together and talk about what we can do about it’. I offered my boardroom and s/he said ‘your boardroom doesn’t have cooking like my place. We’ll have it my place’. We got a bunch people around at their place and had a couple of meetings.”

A bright yellow logo was developed by Design Pond (**Figure 12**) to support a positive visual response. Throughout the city, the logo was placed in windows of businesses and homes, with one place of business displaying yellow balloons in the workplace. A peace ceremony, public picnic and other public community family based inclusive events were held.



**Figure 12: Believe in Bendigo logo**

Source: Design Pond

Believe in Bendigo members made a conscious decision not to go ‘head-to-head’ with the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups. They wanted to focus on a more positive strategy of inclusion. As Business leader (A) recounted:

“... Believe in Bendigo was about saying well let’s not go into a conflict situation. Let’s put ourselves forward on the right foot of being all the things that are positive about community, and celebrate those. So if there was a [protest] rally, we’d make sure that the next week or the week before we’d have a picnic in the park with all the things that are positive about this community.”

This approach was viewed as beneficial because it celebrated the city, created a safe place, and provided opportunities for participation that did not require an allegiance to a particular politic.

Faith participant (A) commented:

“I think one of the better moves of the Believe in Bendigo ... was that they decided to celebrate Bendigo. Not to be against anyone... I think they liberated a lot of people. That – I think, also, causes lots of people to move a little. You create a safe spot in which those who want to perhaps go there, [who] have been a bit reluctant to go there because their neighbours aren’t going there. But then you have an event or two, or you create an atmosphere. I’d like to think that our interfaith group added to that.”

Community participant (B) added:

“... [W]hat we’ve set out to achieve has begun to be achieved... the short term goals have all been achieved, as in putting on an [community] event that’s not a rally of any sort, that’s not advertised as such, that doesn’t mention any politics, any particular religion or support for this or whatever. It’s just quite openly welcoming and celebratory of Bendigo, who we are as a whole, inclusive, diverse and proud, but not in an obviously patriotic way, people cling to and prefer ...

I was glad and proud to be a part of. On 2 October last year – AFL grand final eve – was a success because all these people who wanted to show support for the anti-fascists, but were too nervous about aspects of that, could come. Full of people who just wanted to feel safe in town.”

Community participant (A) also appreciated this approach to the situation, and noted:

“The problem with the protests before Believe in Bendigo was there was no dignity; the anti-mosque protestors took away dignity from the debate. You can disagree with someone but everyone should always be treated with dignity.”

Leaders in the Believe in Bendigo group experienced hate e-mails, vandalism, vilification on social media, abuse on the street and death threats. One member’s home was under police surveillance due to threats. These events resulted in anger, but also a continued belief and desire for members to pursue an open diverse society. One outcome has been positive media attention on the group and the movement, lending support and a high public profile. There was even an episode on Australian Story – ‘A Force of Nature’ (23 November 2015) about one of the key leaders.

## 5.7 Anti-racism/anti-fascism protestors

Other local community groups also contributed support for the mosque and a culturally diverse society, but they are dealt with separately because their approach is substantially different and included connections from outside of the city. The Bendigo Action Coalition, which later became the Bendigo Action Collective, were active in protests, community discussions, and handing out anti-racism and anti-fascism flyers. They succeeded in convincing one venue to cancel anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestor bookings.

During the first protest, the Bendigo Action Collective (BAC) rallied, and without prior communication, joined by people associated with national groups No Room for Racism, Antifa and Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, travelled to Bendigo to counter the United Patriots Front (UPF) and other anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups who planned to protest. The BAC wanted to ensure that the focus was local, so members established an agreement with external groups that they could join protests, but they were to support and follow the lead of BAC.

During protest events that followed, some scuffles broke out due to the burning of an Australian flag by Anti-fascist Centre (Antifa) member who had taken it from a UPF supporter. As a result, the Antifa group was also depicted in the media as extremist. Indeed, a few of the interview participants believed anti-racist/anti-fascist groups used the same strategies and tactics as the extreme right wing groups. In this way, the message, intent and potential value of the BAC may have been dismissed due to their political affiliations.

Within a plural society it is expected that individuals and groups will have different perspectives on issues, thereby constructing alternative meanings and ways of identifying and enacting response strategies. Community participant (B) identified the value of the anti-racism/anti-fascism protestors’ approaches:

“... [C]learly, sitting back and saying nothing, doing nothing and just waiting for it to go away was not working. A lot of people worried about, and are still worried about the way activists and anti-fascists and whatnot go about their business. ... I’m fully supportive of them, and if I was 20 years younger, I’d be one of them. But to criticise those guys unnecessarily is no more helpful than just flat out vilifying people who are completely on the other side of the fence.”

There is recognition, however, that some actions can polarise people and undermine goals, while reinforcing the views of opposing views of ideologically based groups. Community participant (B) observed:

“I am shattered, just like every other rational thinking person, when I see an Aussie flag being burned. As little as I respect that flag for what it represents – I wish I could see a more appropriate flag for our country – but that is, by definition and by every definition, inflammatory behaviour. It’s not helpful, it’s not going to change anyone’s mind.”

From a different perspective, Community participant (E) indicated that anti-racists/anti-fascist protestors use of ridicule against opposing views is not an effective tactic. This person indicated that aggression from left-wing groups made it more difficult for people who are questioning their own position to learn a different point of view. This was particularly salient for Community participant (E) who was seeking to leave the extreme right-wing group to which s/he belonged:

"I think the tactics of the left wing were completely wrong ... I was their target for a good year while I was at the [right wing group 1] ... I said ... 'I could have come over to you guys 10 months earlier had you not been being so ridiculous with the way you treated me; you just made me hate you more'. So it pushed me away from their point of view and their facts that they could have shared with me.

... As soon as you ... wear an Aussie flag on your Facebook profile or you share something from a right wing news story or something, they'll straight away grab your picture and they'll start making a mockery out of you and making an enemy of you. That's not helping the situation; that's just pushing these people, who aren't fully right wing extremists straight into their [patriot movement] hands ... they've [anti-racism groups] calmed down a lot on that, since we had that big discussion ... and I sort of told them that they could win a lot more hearts and a lot more minds if they were to just be educational and factual."

These comments demonstrate that when the boundaries of individuals' and groups' lifeworlds seem impenetrable, opportunities for dialogue, mutual learning and understanding can be lost, threatening the potential for transformative change.

## 5.8 Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors

There were many individual anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors who were influenced by local and national groups, even if they were not members. This was apparent in the nature of objections to Council, which shared common goals and information, as well as the strategies used to object. Local groups formed organically and initially comprised people associated with the No Mosque in Bendigo Facebook page. Other groups also emerged, such as Concerned Citizens of Bendigo, which splintered to form Rights for Bendigo Residents, as well as Voices of Bendigo. Extreme right-wing groups from other parts of Australia, some of which have links to overseas organisations, soon supported these groups.

External groups who supported the planning appeals processes and local protests included Restore Australia (which emerged from One Nation), Q Society (with ties to UK groups), Reclaim Australia, United Patriots Front – UPF (which splintered from Reclaim Australia) and True Blue

Crew (which splintered from the UPF) as well as other groups. **Figure 13** provides a diagram of the different anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups and their relationships. The anti-mosque campaign was the first time these groups communicated and organised together to protest against a development, and against Muslims.

In a televised interview, the main objector who brought the mosque development appeal to VCAT, indicated the UPF informed her the group would travel to Bendigo to protest, and that she was wary of joining forces (ABC 1, 2015). Soon after, Restore Australia provided \$10,000 to assist with the appeal, and speakers from interstate, who shared ideas about strategies and tactics, supported local objectors. In addition to this support, additional crowd funding for the case was initiated, busses and people organised for public protests, and publicity stunts organised. For example, the UPF did a mock beheading outside of Council offices.

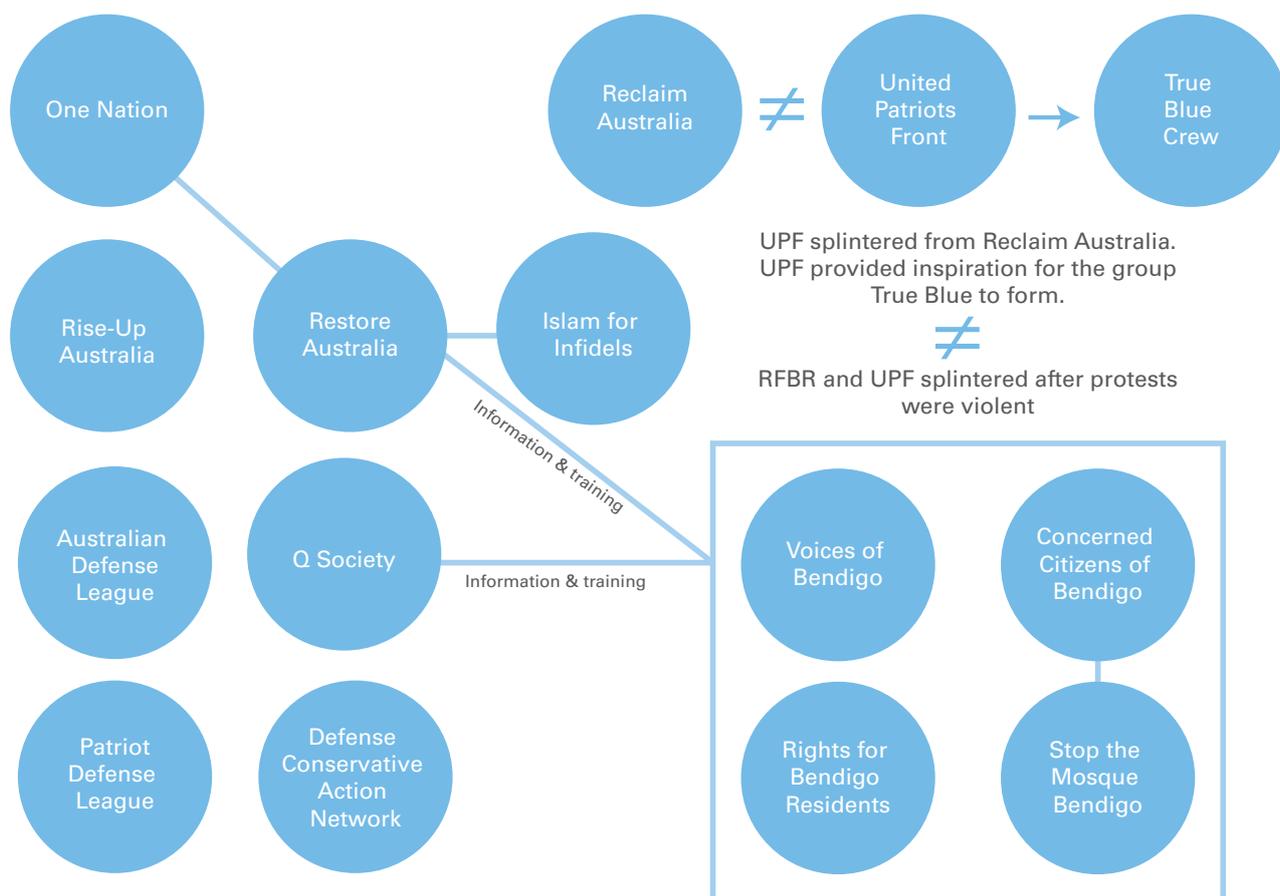
These groups were active in campaigning for support, and even approached faith organisations. Faith participant (B) noted:

"In the early days of the anti-mosque movement we had several members of the United Patriots Front and Reclaim Australia come here, basically saying, 'Oh, it's a terrible thing what's happening with the mosque, isn't it?'. One of them even said that Bendigo would be the same as Afghanistan, where the Muslims blew up the Bamiyan Buddha statues... 'they'll do the same thing here'.

We made it clear to them from the outset that we support the mosque and we think it's a great thing. So we had probably about half a dozen to a dozen people come early on and then we just didn't see them after that."

The shared resources, guest speakers from interstate and weekly stunts leading to protest events were tactics used to keep potential supporters interested. This seems to have been effective as one police participant who was interviewed noted:

"So we were really just hijacked for those times, and the trouble is, the UPF's got a very good following here ... that's why they built on that success for that first rally, and they've just gone from there. They've had rallies up the eastern border of the country, and they haven't had that support."



**Figure 13: Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups and associations** *Source: Researcher, 2016*

Much has been said in the media about the type of person who might be attracted to right-wing groups and their politics. Common characteristics attributed to group members included being working class, white, younger and male. Many members of the groups who protested in Bendigo and are active in these groups tended to match this profile, however there is diversity amongst their supporters. From Community participant (C)'s perspective, recruiters seek people who are less educated and worldly:

“They look for people that aren’t as well educated, that don’t have as much life experience as others. It always tends to be people that have never left Australia, have never seen anything other than it. So they’re very insular in their thought patterns and their socialisation. ... they want to protect what they’re used to, and I can understand that. But you shouldn’t just base anything on someone’s skin colour or their religion. It should be based on who they are as a person.”

Of all the objections submitted, at least 36.2 per cent were identified as being copied from a shared source, and there were three key shared sources. Of these sources, one was a notice of demand that appeared legalistic, and sought to identify particular

issues with the planning process in addition to issues raised against Islam. Another focused on the investigation process and indicated fault with consultants’ reports e.g. traffic, in addition to issues raised against Islam. The third source appeared to be linked with Gavin Boby, a UK lawyer who calls himself a ‘mosque-buster’. Stop the Mosque fundraised to bring Boby to Bendigo, as his ideas were influential with regard to the inaccurate and inflammatory messages being circulated.

Key messages indicated that the local airport was being upgraded to facilitate Syrian refugee transport, the mosque was being paid for by council or Saudi Arabia, a housing estate for 22,000 people would be built around the mosque and non-Muslim people would be restricted in the use of the area. Although Council latterly produced a fact sheet to counteract this misinformation, objectors and protesters were sceptical and did not believe the organisation.

According to Boby, Muslim organisations engage in a deliberate process whereby mosques are constructed for the purposes of attracting Muslims to an area. This supposedly creates opportunities for Muslim people to engage in ‘parking jihad’, which means Muslims disturb neighbours around a mosque site by doing such things as blocking

driveways with their cars. In Bobby's narrative, parking jihad is purposely done to create conflict so Muslim people have an excuse to intimidate non-Muslim people. This is purportedly followed by pressure for non-Muslim people to sell their properties to Muslim people for a lower price, thus creating a Muslim enclave. Further inaccurate information about the use of the mosques as education centres to promote radicalisation is promoted. Thus increased numbers of Muslims in the surrounding area results in the implementation of Sharia Law – which is also inaccurately interpreted and explained. In addition to these processes, distributed information asserts that rape and violence will increase and the non-Muslim community will be severely affected.

While formal objections to Council made claims that crime and violence would increase, this was contradicted by Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner Blayney (2014) who noted:

“We have welcomed people from war-torn countries and given sanctuary to some who have experienced trauma the magnitude of which we could not possibly comprehend.

Despite views expressed to the contrary, the fact is, local crime figures clearly demonstrate that people practising the Islamic faith are underrepresented.

The real story does not justify the unwarranted hysteria, which surrounds this particular minority within our community.”

Community participant (E) explained the tactics of an extremist group with regard to attracting members. Leaders demonstrate compassion and understanding for people's concerns about international and local terrorist events, and offer an opportunity to be active and feel strong about protecting Australian values.

“... [I]t all started with the Lindt café siege, so that embedded a lot of fear into the normal everyday person – not only white Australians, but at that point it was anyone who is living in Australia, started to feel, ‘you know, this could actually happen to us’; ‘this could actually come here’; ‘we’re not safe’. People like [name withheld], sort of took that and ran with it; they knew that people were feeling vulnerable ... So we were all sort of used as tools, I guess, to get that fear and make sure it doesn't go away, make sure it comes back around.

... [T]hey were recruiting ... these people who were genuinely concerned ... and making sure they had that passion – that they were doing something right for the country and right for the Australian people. And when I say Australian people, at that point I mean the multicultural Australia; that's when they ... very gradually and very subtly turned it into a ... they sort of went, ‘okay white guys come this way’ – anyone else, ‘they're lying, they're out to get us, everyone's out to get us.’”

White supremacist values are not necessarily shared initially, but emerge over time. Thus, the narrative shifted from protection toward aggression, based on increasing fear and anger:

“... [I]t started with this excitement or the pride and feeling that we were all protecting each other, and it very subtly turned into a, ‘we need to get stronger than them; we need to push them out’; ... it became fear instead of pride, and what we thought was being protective became being scared of everyone who's not a white Australian. I was a part of that, I was in amongst the leadership ... and helped to promote their cause and actually believed what I was being told...”

It sort of reached a point where it became like a power in numbers sort of situation, where it became acceptable and almost heroic ... to start being violent. So everyone's thinking, ‘we're proud Australians, let's join to protect our country’ ... and then it turned into aggression and violence, where it was okay to say, ‘you know, there were Muslims over at the footy, why didn't someone put a boot to the back of their head’. ... From there, it started moving very rapidly into a very radical, extreme, right wing sort of – an atmosphere.”

The leaders intimidate members psychologically to prevent them from leaving. The threat of shame and punishment are used as disincentives for leaving the group:

“... [The leaders] demand that you put a lot of faith and trust into them... They make you feel very scared of ever betraying them. Or the word traitor – the label traitor, also got thrown around a lot .... You're kind of taught that if you're a traitor or if you're disloyal to them, you better be ready for a massive amount of punishment.

[Name withheld] ... used movement as a stepping stone..., getting all the people on board that and then sort of steering off into white supremacist direction. It's when I saw all that aggression start and it became okay to harass women in car parks and all the things that they were doing, I just went, 'hang on a minute, this is not what we started – this isn't what it was meant to be'. I felt like I'd been sort of misled and lied to."

Leaders' lifeworlds were described by Community participant (E) as narrow, secretive, paranoid and cult-like. Leaders also seek to circumscribe members' lifeworlds by rejecting information from other sources and controlling what members can access and interact with to ensure support for particular world views.

"... [T]hey're very much like a cult, the way they'll outcast you....It's all very calculated and secretive, the very small little circle ...  
... [T]hey have these real 'hype' sort of games going on, and no one's allowed in that inner circle. ... what they tell the public is usually quite different to what they actually intend on, the end game.

... [A]s soon as a Muslim person does talk, the right wing person will straight away say, no it's the fear, it's just they want to infiltrate our country and take over our country and all the paranoid, conspiracy theories come into play then. So they completely shut out any idea that there could possibly be – that they could possibly be wrong about it, you know, it's impossible to get through to them."

Concern about the increasing violence against Muslim people, made Community participant (E) decide to leave the group. This person's lifeworld had also narrowed and s/he wanted to broaden it; hating people with different views did not make sense anymore.

"... I ... started opening my mind to the counter information. ... I contacted people who were ... administering... the [web]pages, because I knew that they had info that I wanted. I contacted them and I said, you know, I'm really interested to hear your side of things.

For a whole year of my life I've been on this tunnel vision because ... [of] what I've been told ... and I wasn't allowed to open my mind up to any counter information. The fact that I'm hating these people just because they have opposing views to me, did not sit well with me."

The ramifications of questioning the group and seeking other information were swift, harsh and gendered. Based on lies and misrepresentations, group members whip-up a mob mentality on social media that panders to those willing to engage uncritically with the information presented to them.

"They will, for example ... if I'm a target, make a Facebook profile of me. ... It will be an exact replica of my profile, so it looks like it's me, and they'll go all over Facebook and they'll post incriminating things, making it look like I'm saying them. Then they'll screenshot it and then they'll make an article in their Word Press about it, saying, 'oh my god, was caught doing this and look at what [s/he] said here and look at what [s/he] commented here.'

Before you know it, 40,000 of their page followers are saying, 'let's stomp on that [b\*\*\*h's/b\*\*\*\*d's] head' and 'where does s/he live; we'll go get [her/him]' and sending me threats, all different sorts of violent threats. And that's the game they play. There's no taking that back; once you've put that out there to so many people and they've straight off the bat believed what you say, there's not much you can do. You just have to sort of hope that they get over it and find something new to focus on.

...The truth doesn't matter. Everything that they made up about me and since they did that to me, I realise how many other people – I sat back and I went, oh my god, all of these people that I've been taught to hate. You know, I was told so-and-so's a paedophile and I was told so-and-so's this and so-and-so's that and all these people that I've been hating all this time, because they told me these stories about them. It was all absolute b\*\*\*\*\*t. These people are victims as well. So I think it was a really good learning curve for me to be put in the position, the same position, as all these other people ... and I had a hand in it a lot of the time, without even realising."

This type of vitriol was common, and the lines between concern and hate blurred. Media participant (B) also observed how the middle group people were being swayed toward the right wing; this person also sought to protect staff from the types of material they would encounter on the Internet:

“... [A] lot of people in that middle group followed those, thinking they were voices for Bendigo and standing up for the everyday citizen, but it was hate-speech, and people were joining in and following that. That’s when they were building their numbers.

... [T]he social media space was tough. We ended up saying to the journos just don’t follow it any more. Don’t look at it. I’ll look at it, it’s my job to protect you, but don’t look at it.”

In Bendigo, leaders of extreme right-wing groups recognised, acknowledged, legitimated and capitalised on the emotions of local people – something that the planning system and Council staff did not do. Leaders of these groups provided assurance of safety and security through a dichotomous insider/outsider and us/them power struggle between people concerned about the mosque/Muslims/Islam and Council, the business class, and ‘lefties’ who support diversity. Significantly, their strategies and tactics aimed to curtail democratic processes and participation even as the groups and their supporters claimed to be protecting these values.

A discussion with an expert on extremism and politics indicated that the ideologies and strategies being used by these types of right wing groups are being imported from Europe, even though the events and social relations in Australia are different. This has serious ramifications if these extreme right wing groups escalate incidents and events to ignite the conditions that lead to the disenfranchisement of Muslim people and the potential radicalisation of young people.

## 5.9 Victoria Police

The function of Victoria Police during the development approvals and appeals processes was to ensure the peace, enforce the law, investigate threats and manage the public response such as the protests at council offices and in public space. The first protest in Bendigo resulted in the largest police operation outside the metropolitan area. There were 450 officers on duty, with horses and other supports to manage 1,000 pro and anti-mosque protestors.

There has been much discussion about the extent of outside influence at the protest. Police participants indicated that many locals were curious at the first rally then lost interest.

Police Participant A:

“Certainly the first one, there was quite a large population of local residents there. I think it was just that they were inquisitive and just wanted to know what it was all about. ... there was quite a few Bendigo people there, only because I knew a few them just to look at.

But then as the second one and third one come on, they just realised that the intention of these groups just wasn’t ... for them, It was someone driving their own agendas, generally.”

Police Participant B:

“I think it would be fair to say that the extremists on both sides... They were from Melbourne.”

Police Participant A:

“Yeah, we were just the battleground. These same groups ... just move around the state a lot of them, and join up.”

There were two key aspects to police roles and responsibilities at public events. One was to support citizen’s rights to engage in democratic actions through protest and the other was to uphold the law with regard to how protestors conduct themselves:

“...[T]hat was one of our considerations ... about making sure that whatever actions either side took on at the rallies, was lawful. ... We’re pretty clear in our messaging. You’ve got a right to demonstrate and have your say, but you’ve got to do it within the lawful boundaries that exist.”

A positive outcome was increased connection between police and the Muslim community. There is now stronger communication, and local training has taken place so officers can learn more about Muslim people and Islam. This is important for community policing, as officers rely on the community to help them in their work:

“Well we’ve certainly built on our strong relationships within our local communities, but particularly with our Muslim population. We’ve built some really strong, and we feel long lasting, relationships with our local community. With a wider, multicultural community, within Bendigo as well, through LCMS through the City of Greater Bendigo and their cultural diversity inclusion plan.

We’re really keen – we won’t rest until we actually recruit a local person, Muslim person into our organisation.”

## 5.10 Summary of social effects, strategies and tactics

**Table 3** summarises the negative effects of planning application processes and social processes on each of the aforementioned stakeholder groups as per the risk typology introduced in Chapter 2.

**Table 4** summarises the strategies and tactics each stakeholder group used to deal with various situations. Listed in the table, but not yet mentioned were the impacts on the city, state, nation and governance, which are addressed in the following section about places and belonging.

**Table 3: Negative Effects of Planning application Processes and Social Processes**

Population	Life & Being	Experience	Knowledge	Reputation	Financial	Spatial/ Environment
<b>Muslim Community</b>	Psychological: decreased sense of belonging; feeling judged as a bad person Physical: fear of harm Values & beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness, equity & safety	Anxiety Verbal abuse Intimidation Discrimination Being eclipsed by other leaders	Discrimination due to incorrect information about Muslims and Islam	Image of violence, division, Anti-community Image of links to terrorism Image of domestic violence	Project delays	Reduce public activities Reduce use of public transport Leave the area
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Planners</b>	Psychological: Attacks on competency, professionalism & integrity	Verbal & visual abuse	Abuse due to ignorance about role & function of position Abuse due to ignorance about planning systems	Professionalism: Questioning accountability, transparency, legal compliance	Cost to council re: responding to public	Insufficient data to comment
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Community Partnerships</b>	Psychological: Attacks on competency, professionalism & integrity	Anxiety, verbal abuse Intimidation	Abuse due to ignorance about role & function of position	Professionalism: Questioning accountability, transparency, legal compliance	Cost to council re: responding to public	Insufficient data to comment
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Councillors (all – anti &amp; pro mosque)</b>	Psychological: Attacks on competency, professionalism & integrity Values & beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness, equity & safety	Anxiety, verbal, visual & physical abuse Intimidation	Abuse due to ignorance about role & function of position Abuse due to ignorance about planning systems	Professionalism: Questioning accountability, transparency, legal compliance	Legal fees Cost to council re: responding to public	Experience of community response at work, at home & in public space
<b>VCAT Members</b>	Psychological: Attacks on competency, professionalism & integrity		Delay in process due to ignorance about role & function of positions Delay in process due to ignorance about planning systems	Professionalism: Questioning accountability, transparency, legal compliance	Cost of proceedings to community	
<b>Police</b>	Physical: possibility of harm	Verbal & physical abuse	Public ignorance of law impeding processes	Legal processes: Potential complaints about application of duties	Cost re: labour, vehicle, horses, transport to site	Inability to cover all potential sites of conflict & violence

Population	Life & Being	Experience	Knowledge	Reputation	Financial	Spatial/ Environment
<b>Businesses &amp; organisations (Pro-mosque)</b>	Decreased viability – possibility of closure	Need to change operations e.g. hours (especially hospitality & retail)	Insufficient data to comment	Affected by image of city as racist via tourism	Loss of trade – especially during protests	Need to restrict use of public space (e.g. outdoor dining & displays) Vandalism
<b>Businesses &amp; organisations (Anti-mosque)</b>	Decreased viability – possibility of closure	Need to change operations e.g. hours (especially hospitality & retail)	Insufficient data to comment	Image of being racist	Loss of trade – due to anti-mosque stance Loss of festival investment	Need to restrict use of public space (e.g. outdoor dining & displays)
<b>Pro-diversity local community groups</b>	Values, beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness & equity	Verbal abuse Intimidation	Discrimination due to incorrect information about Muslims and Islam	Denigration for being educated	Banners & other symbols of inclusion	Vandalism of materials promoting inclusion in public space
<b>Anti-Racist/ Anti-Fascist Groups</b>	Values & beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness, equity & safety	Verbal & physical abuse	Abuse due to perceptions about their ignorance re: Muslims & Islam	Unwanted image of being violent or similar to anti-mosque and/ or anti-Islam groups	Time & cost of travel to sites (external people) Time & cost of arrest	Focus on funding and people from other places – dismissed local views
<b>Local mosque objectors</b>	Psychological: decreased sense of belonging Physical: fear of harm Values & beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness, equity & safety Legal processes: Feeling Persecuted	Anxiety, verbal abuse Intimidation	Abuse due to perceptions about their ignorance re: role & function of council staff; planning systems; Muslims & Islam	Unwanted image as racist (even if not anti-Islam & ok if mosque in a different area of city) Feeling defamed	Cost of proceedings (own, and other parties)	Reduce public activities
<b>Anti-Mosque Anti-Islam Groups</b>	Values & beliefs: Damage to sense of justice, fairness, equity & safety	Verbal & physical abuse	Abuse due to perceptions about their ignorance re: Muslims & Islam	Unwanted image as racist	Time & cost of travel to sites (external people) Time & cost of arrest	
<b>City, State &amp; Nation (as an entity)</b>	Decreased sense community safety & security	Negative media coverage Questioning of business location	External and internal views conflict	Unwanted image of being racist, anti-Islam Unwanted image of being unsafe	Cost of addressing image e.g. media & marketing	Real and imagined negative comparison to other towns, cities, nations
<b>Governance</b>	Challenge to democratic ideals: need to change council community engagement processes	Negative media coverage	Decision-making is criticised	Unwanted image of division Damaged professional relations	Combined cost of resources from all parties	

Table 4: Strategies and tactics used

Population	Regulation	Education	Communication	Mobilisation
<b>Muslim Community</b> <b>Purpose:</b> Build a mosque Good community relations Safety	Comply with planning process	Invite community to ask questions  Emphasise common values, beliefs, needs and aspirations	Address misinformation  Emphasise community support	Interfaith Council  Believe in Bendigo Group
<b>Pro-diversity community groups</b> <b>Purpose:</b> Support mosque development  Support Muslim community  Support human rights	Write letters of support as part of the development process	Provide activities for people to mix	Focus on human rights & democracy with regard to being able to practice faith	Change.org petition  Facebook page to support the mosque  Picnics & other community events
<b>Businesses &amp; organisations</b> <b>Purpose:</b> Support mosque development Support Muslim community Support human rights Support business		Value of multiculturalism to local economy;  Negative impacts of protests on local economy	Focus on human rights & democracy with regard to being able to practice faith	Letters in the local paper  Staff joining community groups  Ending business dealings
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Councillors (7)</b> <b>Purpose:</b> Support planning law and system Support mosque Support human rights	Comply with planning and other regulatory processes	Produce fact sheet	Address information, emphasise the nature of the planning process	Supporting City of Greater Bendigo staff;  Speaking with residents  Providing information about processes to residents
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Councillors (2)</b> <b>Purpose:</b> Support constituents Protect city from their images of Islam Stop mosque	Challenge planning and other regulatory processes	Sharing of information that is not supported by acceptable evidence within legal, planning and research systems, about Islam and Muslim people	Emphasise the importance of including community views in the planning process	Speaking with residents  Providing information about processes to residents

Population	Regulation	Education	Communication	Mobilisation
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Planners</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> <b>Support planning law and system</b> <b>Assess planning application</b>	Implement planning regulations	Planning processes and procedures	Address information, emphasise the nature of the planning process	
<b>City of Greater Bendigo Community Development</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> <b>Support community cohesion;</b> <b>Prevent further discord</b>	Implement regulations related to human rights, non-discrimination, multiculturalism	Provides information about different cultures, values and council policy  Implements programs such as Q&A sessions with the Muslim community, Racism stops with me campaign; Racism Bystander training	Emphasises the value of multicultural society  Emphasises rights and responsibilities in relation to multicultural society	Supporting City of Greater Bendigo staff;  Speaking with residents  Providing information about processes to residents  Running community events
<b>Police</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> <b>Support criminal, civil &amp; property law</b> <b>Support peaceful community</b>	Implements various criminal, civil & property regulation	Provides information about rights and responsibilities with regard to criminal, civil & property matters	Emphasises rights and responsibilities in relation to language, behaviour and systems including issues related to violence	Planning, monitoring and managing protests  Engaging with community at events
<b>Anti-Racism Groups</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> <b>Support international agendas of non-discrimination</b> <b>Confront racism</b> <b>Support mosque</b>	Engage positively and/or negatively with regulations about public protest	Talking with people who have concerns about anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam	Emphasise the need to be vigilant against racism and fascism  Emphasis need to confront racism	Pamphlet distribution  Public protests  Attempts to stop venues from supporting One Nation
<b>Anti-Mosque Anti-Islam groups</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> <b>Support international agendas to stop Islam</b> <b>Stop mosque</b>	Challenge planning and other regulatory processes  Engage positively and/or negatively with regulations about public protest	Sharing of information that is not supported by acceptable evidence within legal, planning and research systems, about Islam and Muslim people	Emphasise the negative impacts of permitting mosques & being socially inclusive of Muslims  Development of instructional videos	Providing seminars & other information to assist people to protest against mosque planning applications  Street protests  Disruption of public meetings
<b>State</b> <b>Support criminal, civil &amp; property law</b> <b>Support peaceful community</b>	Implement regulations related to human rights, non-discrimination, multiculturalism, planning, criminal, civil & property law	Provides information about different cultures, values and associated policy	Emphasises the value of multicultural society  Emphasises rights and responsibilities in relation to multicultural society  Emphasises rights and responsibilities in relation to language, behaviour and systems	Premier Visits  Human Rights Commissioner Visits



6

PLACEMAKING, BELONGING  
AND UNCERTAINTY



# PLACEMAKING, BELONGING AND UNCERTAINTY

Placemaking is an integral activity for individuals and groups seeking to create and nurture relationships with their locales. Emotional, psychological and social connections are complemented by physical and spatial expression. These expressions include the need and desire for places of worship – like a mosque, visibility, acceptance and safety for all members of society in public space, and the symbolic nature of being able to claim spaces and places as sites for belonging.

## 6.1 Placemaking

Placemaking and its association with social encounter and familiarity is a function of daily community interactions through work, shopping, leisure and so forth. It has intergenerational aspects because community diversity will increase over time as the Muslim community and other ethno-religious groups grow. As such, placemaking is about change and engagement with change. University participant (A) observed:

“We do ... have a significant non-European population ... still largely invisible to most of the population. The kids are starting to come through ... into senior secondary now ... in the junior secondary there was quite a cohort of Karen kids.

I think ... when those kids actually get retail jobs and start moving around town, it will be quite different. But I think there's a lot of people haven't realised how much the city's changed yet.”

The urban fabric in Bendigo physically and spatially reflects past placemaking activities and will accommodate future endeavours. For example, architectural features like the minaret, materially and symbolically represent Islamic design and faith. As McGurn's expert report to VCAT identified (2014):

88 The proposed buildings adopt a particular vernacular typical of buildings of this type. Notwithstanding the central location of the building the size and higher elements of 'architectural features' will be inevitably seen beyond the site and are designed to be 'visible' as symbolic of the Islamic community. I consider that the design of the building is appropriate given the articulated design which incorporates a variety of materials, the incorporation of significant setbacks from all boundaries and the landscaped setting.

Although some features are new to Bendigo, they also represent a continuity of Islamic-design in Australia. In a recent article for *The Conversation*, Bowker (2016) traces the architectural history of mosques in Australia from the structures built by the Afghan cameleers to contemporary mosques in Melbourne. Islamic design also has its counterparts throughout metropolitan, regional and rural communities as highlighted by Deputy President Dwyer in *Rutherford & Ors v Hume CC (includes Summary) [2014] VCAT 786 (31)*:

117 A further part of the context is the desired style of architecture of a mosque. Different faiths have their own traditions when it comes to architectural styles. While more modern Pentecostal faiths may be content with large modern low scale buildings, all manner of faiths have their firmly held architectural styles. These include the Catholic and Anglican churches with their spires, the Coptic Orthodox Church with its domes, and the equally distinctive architecture associated with the domes or minarets of mosques. It is important, in applying planning principles to the assessment of architectural outcomes, to recognise that such architectural styles are often an important component of the expression of faith from a faith-based community.

Placemaking and the need for a mosque are also about respect, equality and pragmatism.

As university participant (A) observed:

“So that’s not an issue I’ve heard about [a reduction in the number of venues being made available for Iftar or other celebrations during and after Ramadan].

The one issue that I’ve been conscious of ... is that it’s difficult to find a space large enough to cater for some of the Iftar functions. But I think ... that’s about the numbers of people attending rather than a reduction in the venue. I attended one at ... Kangaroo Flat at the Senior Citizens Club last year. It was really crowded. ... there might not be enough suitable venues, I think that perhaps is a problem.”

The construction of the Bendigo mosque will be a local expression of the faith for Muslims, as well as a commitment to the broader community through the provision of leisure facilities. This is a multi-layered territorialisation of a specific space that creates a place located outside the city proper, and it is one that will provide opportunities for people of different lifeworlds to interact through prayer, education and sport. Yet the proposed development triggered the desire by anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam to deny placemaking activities by the Muslim community.

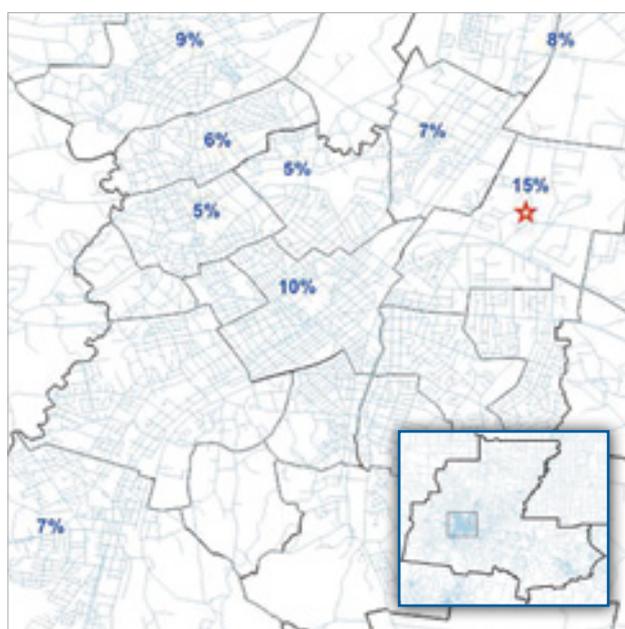
## 6.2 Places of origin

A key debate throughout the planning application process centred on whether anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and anti-racism/anti-fascist protestors were local or not. According to Council participant (D), police estimated that up to 30 per cent of protestors were not local. People attended protests from Melbourne and other places in Victoria, as well as from interstate e.g. New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD). Yet defining local becomes problematic since this can comprise people from the urban centre and suburbs of Bendigo, the townships within the Bendigo local government area, as well as towns in the surrounding regions who use Bendigo as their main city for work and/or shopping, entertainment, socialising etc., such as Castlemaine or Maldon.

The issue of origin played out in one particular Council meeting because residents against the mosque and Islam felt silenced and sidelined by the political and media debates that claimed

protesters and objectors were not local. This was supported by the geographical representation of written objections to the mosque development, as shown in **Figure 16**. While 74.2 per cent of respondents were from the Bendigo local government area, a further 4.5 per cent were from Victoria. There were also objections from NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Christmas Island. The origin of 10.3 per cent of the objections could not be determined. It is possible that due to social mobilisation, some objectors from outside the area falsely indicated a local address, as ‘Bendigo’ and the main street near the mosque were sometimes listed without further details. Objections were received from 22 suburbs or areas within the local government area. All areas that contributed over five per cent of the objections have been mapped in **Figure 14**, totalling 72 per cent of all objections; only inner suburbs are shown. The red star is the site of the proposed mosque.

The nature of mosque objections as identified previously and the geographical distribution of objections in the map below, suggests that the lifeworlds of Mosque objectors may represent spatial characteristics. A review of the demographic data did not indicate great polarity between education, profession and income, nor did it suggest vastly different distributions of non-Christian communities. This is not necessarily surprising and differences are often flattened in regional cities. However, people with specific values and ideals may be connected through working, social and sporting networks.



**Figure 14: Objections mapped by suburbs in the City of Greater Bendigo LGA**

Source: Researcher, 2016, using QGIS



**Figure 15: Key sites during protests**

Source: Researcher, 2016, using Google Earth

### 6.3 Territorialising spaces and places

Both anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and mosque/pro-diversity campaigns sought to re-territorialise public space in Bendigo's central business district. This was played out during council meetings and street protests, as well as through the Believe in Bendigo signage placed throughout the city. The main sites used for public protests included large areas where people could gather such as the Town Hall, Rosalind Park, the train station and the main thoroughfares (in red), between these areas, as shown in **Figure 15**. The yellow star is the street in which the peace rally/Say No To Racism event was held. A few participants indicated that local pubs were also sites of gathering. In addition, Council offices became a site for protests, including a fake public beheading by the UPF.

The spatial expression of the mosque protests and support for the mosque and Muslims illustrated the symbolic importance of public space and city streets. They demonstrated how physical actions represented much broader networks of ideas and people. Community participant (B) talked about the difference between online conflict and its manifestation in public space:

"It's inarguable that they feel safer to express views that would otherwise cause conflict, physical conflict when they're online...."

Then when it manifests itself like in the rallies that we've had here, that's what made it really realistic to me.

You can easily dismiss because you have to, to a degree. Oh well, that's just someone spruiking online being really nasty to someone. Hopefully the person copping it isn't taking it to heart and [is] dismissing it the way they should ... When there's violent clashes in the street between well-meaning people on both sides, it's pretty scary."

The presence of anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups from outside of Bendigo, combined with the realisation that many people in the city were willing to protest publicly about the mosque, elicited a visceral reaction from many in the local community. There was a desire to reclaim public space. Council participant (C) described how many people in Bendigo felt violated and wanted to create spaces of inclusion:

"Public space is safe for anyone. ... Believe in Bendigo could have been conducted completely just through the media or people being interviewed or people sending out – writing letters.

But there was a deliberate campaign [tactic] to hold events in the centre of Bendigo, ... in a sense, well we're not going to have our streets taken over by a group with a negative agenda. ... The fact that things were organised in the public space was almost symbolic that, ... the public space belongs to everybody ....

... [A]ll those sort of things were deliberately designed to ... symbolically take back the public space. I suppose in the sense that the public space had been violated by groups of people who particularly – I think there was resentment that people from outside had been bussed in."

Acts of reclaiming public space may have benefited many in the local community. However, longer-term affects are unlikely to provide a sense of security for the Muslim community.

### 6.4 Spaces and places of safety and security

Ephemeral moments of political engagement through public rallies and permanent expressions of faith through construction can transform understandings of space and facilities into places of insecurity and safety. For some Muslims, their sense of safety in public space has been affected by the mosque protests. Many Muslims no longer assume they are welcome or belong in Bendigo,

and their lifeworlds have been restricted to a certain extent. Unlike safe social gatherings like the peace ceremony and picnic in the park, and unlike the safety of the future mosque, everyday urban spaces have become sites of uncertainty. As community participant (A) reflected:

“The sense of place has changed dramatically for the Muslim community. For me it was easier as... my family are not so easily identifiable. The rest of the community are, especially if they wear a hijab. It has meant they do not feel safe walking in places in the town, and at certain times of day.”

Non-Muslims in Bendigo initiated strategies to protect the Muslim community and promote a sense of safety, and these activities had spatial aspects. For example, staff at La Trobe University were careful not to draw attention to its prayer room to avoid anti-mosque protestors arriving on campus. It turns out that anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors were aware of the prayer room, but it did not become a site for protest.

Although the lack of discussion about the prayer room appeared strange to university participant (A), who noted that among those most actively opposing the development of the mosque:

“There was almost ... bizarre acceptance that that was okay. ... [As if] it was okay for Muslims to come here for a couple of years, as long as there was nothing that would keep them here longer.”

However, these observations suggest that temporary rather than permanent placemaking is acceptable, drawing attention to the uncertainty experienced by the Muslim community.

The spatial implications of safety affected the Muslim community's ability to engage in social and cultural activities, use sites throughout the city and travel places. For many in the Muslim community, the Australian flag has become a symbol of uncertainty regarding their access to the city. The use of the flag by anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups means that Muslims in Bendigo may question whether they enter shops or access services, and the type of response they may receive. The flow-on effects have implications for the Muslim community and Bendigo as a city, as Community participant (A) explained:

“We are normally quiet people, but felt driven to be involved. Now people in Bendigo hang up on us when we call and try to book the hall for Iftar. It is a council owned property and they just don't want to deal with us ... Before we used to be able to access it all the time. We have let it go, because at the end you don't want to always have to find a law to get access, not just through the law, you want to feel welcomed by the community itself.

A few of the Muslim community did leave, and I know of others that are thinking about leaving. They are basically reconsidering staying here. ... Roughly five families I know of have left and two are considering leaving. It's sad because one of them [families] ... used to love Bendigo and used to try and convince other people what a great place it was. Now they themselves are leaving; this is very sad.

In terms of safety, many of the women who wear hijab will avoid the centre of the town and anywhere there are groups of young people gathering. They feel much safer around the University. A lot of people have reported that they have stopped using busses, which makes things hard too.”

CSO (A) indicated that families of Bendigo Muslims express concern about their safety, and likely influences whether Muslim people migrate to the area:

“... I think almost everyone would have had family members call them and say... ‘what are you doing living there? I'm really worried about you’. We know of two families who have left.

Yes I think it would definitely have an impact on people moving here. It's been very much in the media. Even family members overseas ring people and say, I've heard about Bendigo and how awful it is.”

Decisions to leave Bendigo and concern about family members in Bendigo indicate that there are public perceptions among the local community as well as elsewhere that there are real threats to the safety of Muslim people, and that these threats may be carried out.

## 6.5 Public image

There was strong concern amongst the participants about the public image of the city and its people. These concerns were also expressed in comments made to the media. The effect of the protests was so extensive, that concerns were also raised about the reputation of the state of Victoria. Concern about image was identified in a piece written by the Victoria Police Service assistant commissioner Blaney (20 June, 2014). His views represent many that were reported in the papers during the application and appeals process, as well as those interviewed for this project:

“Victoria is one of the most successful multi-cultural communities in the world where people from over 200 different countries, speaking 260 languages and dialects and practicing over 135 different faiths have come to live and prosper.

That’s what makes the recent events in Bendigo so disappointing. A small minority of people expressing anti-Islam rhetoric may damage our proud history of tolerance and respect for people who come to live in Bendigo from other parts of the world.”

Events in Bendigo were surprising because they did not happen elsewhere. Many participants referred to other cities and towns such as Brimbank, Shepparton, Ballarat and Ararat where mosque applications were approved with few objections. It was reported that planners in some of these cities and towns were perplexed by the response in Bendigo.

CSO (A) remarked on comments made by people from outside the city. Although Bendigo’s reputation has been tarnished, this person does not think the city is different to other regional locations:

“It’s had a huge impact on reputation. ... the more I look into it... I don’t think there’s any high levels of intolerance or racism, at least pre the mosque issue. I wonder about that polarisation in other regional areas. But we do know that regional areas have high levels of intolerance. That’s something we need to work at as professionals working in regional areas.”

In a globalised world, multiculturalism can create significant opportunities for business, arts and tourism, as well as for the people who work in these sectors. It is significant that reputational risks to the city have emerged from the Bendigo protest events. This was a concern raised by interview participants involved in business and festival events. Community participant (A) also believed that the protests could affect local economic development:

“... [T]he problem is the reputation of this town is destroyed. ... beyond being a Muslim, if you are any other minority or an open minded person you wouldn’t want to come here. For example, I know a PhD Student that was considering coming here and he did a Google search for Bendigo and then decided against coming ... because of the protests.

If people don’t feel welcome less people will actually move here, and then that in turn will lead to less change and less diversity and [affect] growth and positive social change. Also it may mean you will attract less skilled people, e.g. the hospital requires more skilled people. However, they may have more and more trouble recruiting people now.”





7

## ANALYSIS OF EVENTS: WHY BENDIGO?

# ANALYSIS OF EVENTS: WHY BENDIGO?

Events in Bendigo distilled international and national debates about migration, terrorism, economy and security. Both anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-diversity groups rallied around identity and community values, but their understandings conflicted. This was evident in their articulation of human rights, democracy and calls for political leadership. Strong social networks, dissemination of information, communication and physical presence were essential to stakeholder engagement with these issues, but they also contributed to vast gulfs between lifeworlds. The nature of the debate and the events, while reflective of a healthy democracy, also supported community polarisation and a need for the city and its people to identify pathways for moving forward.

## 7.1 Human rights, democracy and discrimination

Democracy featured in the discourse about the planning assessment and appeals process, as well as in the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-diversity discourse. Key themes in debates were:

- the diversity of Australian heritage,
- issues of hate speech,
- the need to actively protect democracy, and
- the need to accept the 'umpire's' decision in democratic processes.

For people against the mosque, democracy was conceived as the freedom to object to the development and conduct protests. Many individuals enacted their democratic rights by engaging with the planning process through letters of objection and support, attending council meetings and participating in rallies. But threads within social media pages indicate that mosque protestors conceive democracy as winning and having their demands to stop the mosque implemented. Threats to democracy include notions of political correctness and social political agendas. One Stop the Mosque Facebook thread indicates one poster's view upon learning the Supreme Court would not allow further appeal,

Justice has not been done. Political correctness has been done. Democracy has not been served, Socialism has been served.

CSO participant (B) provided a sharp assessment of anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors' activities with regard to upholding democracy:

"... [T]he work of Manning Clark ... I think his first PhD at Oxford back in the thirties – a famous Australian historian, .... was looking at the rise of fascism in Europe in the late twenties, early thirties and posing the question; What do we as a civil society do with those people who would use the very tenets of our civil society to then bring down that civil society?"

In a sense, that's what we've seen with some of these people. They're using their freedom to associate, using their measured freedom of speech, using their rights of association to stop other people using those very same rights.

... [F]rom an NGO point of view ... I felt we had a duty and an obligation to stand up against further demonization of the people who come in our door."

In contrast, those who supported the mosque and the Muslim community conceived democracy as a process and a set of governing structures. For these people, democracy entails both rights and responsibilities. Australia's democratic system of governance and the outcomes of political decisions are to be respected and upheld. They recognised that the system protects all people's right to protest while also protecting Muslim people's rights to practice their faith.

Interviewees indicated that democratic principles prevailed overall, but certain events such as the disruption of council meetings, was viewed as undermining democracy. Council participant (E) held the view that it was necessary to engage and work together democratically towards a solution:

“In closing down the council meeting we believe both justice and democracy were dealt a blow in our city. It is disappointing from our perspective to recognise faces in the crowd who purport to support the democratic process yet at the same time behave like spoilt brats when they don’t get the decision or answers they want.

We as a group of seven councillors call on the Greater Bendigo to stand up and support multiculturalism, democracy and the rich Australian heritage that is a blend of cultures, religion and race. This is what built our society and country and by working together and recognising each other’s needs and desires in a respectful way, we can build an even stronger future.”

Mosque objectors tried to control the process and dominate the agenda. Objectors may have viewed their disruption at the Council meeting as exercising their democratic rights. In doing so, however, they denied the rights of others to contribute to the debate. For example, a spokesperson for a local social service organisation was prevented from speaking at the public meeting. As Childs (2015) reports, ‘[Name withheld] was booed and shouted down at the aborted council meeting, ... talking about refugees and Bendigo being a welcoming place. “Who’s paying you?” protesters yelled’.

At both local and state level comments by political leaders clearly established government expectations for upholding democratic rights, such as respect for process and peaceful protest. The Weekly Times reported comments made by the Mayor about the effect of disruptions on democratic processes (Australian Associated Press, 2015c):

Mr Cox, a vocal supporter of the mosque, said he felt safe as he was escorted from the council chamber but said he’s disappointed at the way the meeting ended. “They put their point of view but they made so much noise that it was not possible to continue running the council meeting...

“It is disappointing that some people would not allow other points of view to be expressed. Only one point of view was heard. The whole democratic process broke down because we had to adjourn the meeting.”

The Weekly Times also reported however that ‘He is confident the majority of Bendigo residents support the right of people from all faiths to have a place of worship.’

Some mosque protestors used aggression, intimidation and violence as techniques for political engagement; these behaviours contrasted with the orderly conduct of government, thus demonstrating the clash of different lifeworlds. Comments by Premier Daniel Andrews in the Australian Associated Press (2015b) illustrate the expectation that democratic engagement should be peaceful:

“Whilst I’ll always defend a person’s right to peacefully protest and have a view about things, I think we have seen, particularly in Bendigo, some very ugly scenes,” Mr Andrews told reporters on Monday. Mr Andrews was responding to claims from mosque supporters that many protesters were coming from outside Bendigo and Victoria.

Some objectors and protesters are articulate and able to express their concern in ways that conform to government structures, but many are not. Protesting groups, in order to be recognised and heard, may use other avenues of expression. These approaches may be effective at attracting attention, but they do not contribute to issue resolution. ABC local news (2015) reported that Minister for Transport and Minister for Major Projects, Jacinta Allan, MLA for Bendigo East was disappointed at the meeting closure:

Victorian Government frontbencher and Bendigo East MP Jacinta Allan said she was “incredibly disappointed” the council meeting had to be shut down. “If people are committed and passionate about democracy and freedom of speech, then shutting down a democratically elected council, holding their public meeting, is no way to demonstrate your case,” she told 91.1 ABC Central Victoria.

Ultimately, the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protestors aimed to stop change by preventing placemaking activities. Yet all levels of government supported the mosque development. Delahunty (2015) reported comments by Lisa Chesters, Federal Member for Bendigo about the importance of placemaking for Victoria’s multicultural communities.

“When completed, the mosque will stand as a symbol of our community’s diversity and acceptance of people from all faiths and backgrounds,” she said. “I feel proud that our council stood up to a small, but vocal minority and approved plans for the mosque, so that Muslims in Bendigo can practice one of their rights of Australian citizenship – the right to freedom of religion,” she says.

The Australian Islamic Mission and local Bendigo Muslims recognised the support from Council and the local community. Their articulation of democracy, as presented below (Australian Associated Press, 16 December 2015), focused on choice. They recognised the political decisions made to uphold the sanctity of human rights and associations of equality and freedom. Council could have abdicated decision-making responsibilities by not assessing the planning permit, or its staff could have given greater credence to objectors.

The Australian Islamic Mission, which is behind the mosque proposal, thanked the Bendigo community and council. “The wider Bendigo community has shown resilience and solidarity and we are so appreciative of the heartwarming support we received,” it said in a statement. “We would especially like to thank the Bendigo Council for holding on [to] the great Australian values of equality, freedom, democracy and a fair go for all.”

Democracy is a concept that needs active engagement; it survives through its re-enactment, and governing of those who participate in democratic processes. Victoria Police were praised for their role in upholding democratic processes. They needed to manage the potential confrontations between different groups of people whose lifeworlds might only overlap during protest events. In addition, the police were praised for their role in upholding democratic processes. Council participant (B) commented:

“And I can’t let you go without saying about how wonderful the state government and the Victoria Police were in terms of upholding the democratic processes. So what democracy brings is that people are allowed to have their point of view, no matter how extreme it might be ... on the day, the state government paid for 350 police to be in Bendigo. It would have cost an absolute fortune. But that’s the price of democracy.”

In many ways, democracy associated with the Bendigo mosque protests was viewed as a battlefield (contested ground) that required strategic engagement, rather than an opportunity for reasoned and informed debate and negotiation. In this way, Muslims and Islam were viewed as a threat to democracy by objectors and protestors, as a quotation in an article from the Australian Associated Press (2015a) shows:

One man, dressed in a koala suit and carrying an Australian flag, said he was at the protest to fight ‘the Islamisation of Australia’. “I’m here to support all the humans. We’re standing up for freedom, liberty and justice,” he said.

Unlike objectors, pro-mosque/diversity supporters upheld similar views to those of the government representatives and bodies. They emphasised human rights, equality, fairness and justice. As Bendigo’s Citizen of the Year Gordon McKern stated in a news report (McGinn, 2014):

The number of new citizens who just love being part of Australia and are proud of being part of a free country. We have to maintain that freedom. It’s up to all of us to make sure that happens, we can’t just rely on others.

## 7.2 Leadership

Leadership, trust and accountability were important issues raised by interview participants and identified in the popular media. The discourses revealed there were diverse expectations about leadership and that these expectations were not always met. Demonstrations of leadership were influenced by roles and responsibilities, while interpretation of leadership was affected by the lifeworlds that people inhabited.

The local Muslim community were placed in a difficult situation regarding leadership. Muslim leaders and their communities are expected to take responsibility for people who conduct terrorism acts and vociferously denounce violence. Muslim people in leadership roles are also expected to demonstrate national allegiance and commitment to Australian laws, culture and values. At a local level, individuals in the Muslim community are given responsibility to educate, provide a public face for the community, and accept they represent ‘all’ Muslims, regardless of community diversity.

Yet being a leader and showing leadership can create vulnerability and insecurity. Media participant (C) observed that wariness by Muslim people about taking on leadership and public roles was justified:

“As it got ... to the decision ... [making] we assumed that the best people to talk to the idea of building a mosque would be the local Muslim community, who I think were saying, ‘this is going to be really controversial’. ... Two years down the track you can understand why. ... In Australia, we’re used to reasonably dispassionate but robust conversations about an issue. The mosque very quickly became very different.”

The City of Greater Bendigo is a community leader, and was thrust into a leadership role in relation to the mosque protests. The organisation as a whole was simultaneously criticised for not acting swiftly or strongly enough against anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protesters, and praised for its leadership. Expression of leadership amongst councillors was complicated; as a group, they were fractured, but individually many upheld what they believed to be community values – which included responsibilities to maintain integrity of the planning and political process.

For pro-mosque/pro-diversity supporters, there was serious concern as to whether the Councillors who opposed the mosque separated their personal views from their professional views in decision-making. There was a common belief that at least one of the Councillors acted inappropriately by sharing confidential information from Council meetings, and actively encouraged extreme right-wing groups to visit Bendigo. One Councillor openly stated, “I am not a fan of Islam” in a Council meeting and allegedly tweeted inappropriate information related to female genital mutilation to a constituent who supported the mosque. This Councillor in particular was also linked to One Nation as a potential candidate.

This example of leadership was identified as a major incentive for extreme right-wing groups to visit the city and engage in mosque protests. As community participant (A) noted:

“That’s what happens when a person of authority invites a group like that in. They had the insight into the planning process because they were in a position of leadership and they invited them in and spread rumours e.g. mosque means there will be no more Christmas, that it would be the largest one in the southern hemisphere.

It’s sad because in contrast the first mosque is in Shepparton another ... country town and that has not ever been a problem. After 9-11 the truth is Muslims are now seen as less trustworthy everywhere. The media don’t help with their propaganda and the lies and details they choose to spread for headlines.”

Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protesters suggested that government leadership was ‘weak’, and this weakness opened the door to future threats from Islam. From their perspective, Council was viewed as having evaded their responsibilities, as reported in the Australian Associated Press (10 Aug 2015):

United Patriots Front (UPF) spokesman Blair Cottrell – who is not from Bendigo – told supporters the rally reflected local concerns. “Do you want a mosque in your community?” Mr Cottrell asked the crowd, who shouted their opposition. He took aim at the government and local authorities for encouraging multiculturalism. “Islam can only pose a threat to our nation if our weak leadership, or rather complete lack of leadership, is allowed to continue,” he said.

The complexity of the situation meant that Council and Councillors were expected to do more than comply with planning regulation, uphold human rights legislation and ensure democratic processes. They were also expected to publically condemn hate speech. A few participants expressed anger with the leadership shown by Council and the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protesters.

Ultimately, the volatility and enormity of the situation may have impacted on Council staff’s ability to respond, and the timing of the response. This was true for some community leaders as well. Many research participants expressed surprise at the vehemence of anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protests. They believed that protest would be short lived and decided not to encourage or enflame the situation. As many developments often elicit a few heated responses, planning staff did not realise the extent or seriousness of the issue until they noticed a pattern in the content of the objections.

Council participant (C) identified that the protests demanded deep reflection within the community about the nature of Bendigo; leaders forced Council to make a stand:

"It's remarkable; I still think that the biggest change was the fact that it forced a lot of people in Bendigo to say to themselves, have we embraced multiculturalism? Have we embraced a diverse ethnic community? Have we embraced religious diversity? ... then ... leaders came out and it forced the Council to make a stand on this issue, .... of course Council has got a stand, but it forced it to be much more public."

CSO participant (B) felt that Council did not show leadership on the issues. S/he disagreed with staff decisions to separate social issues from planning matters, and s/he was critical of the lack of community engagement and public debate:

"What should have happened is that we should have seen some leadership from the Council from day one and the Council insisted on treating this as if it was a planning issue. Yes, from a strict analysis, it was a planning issue. But the reality was this was a bubbling up social movement that they gave permission to by virtue of not taking a strong leadership stance about what the real issues that people were complaining about were.... I would have expected that we would have seen more people begin to take a leadership role quicker and we did not. There were people who were horrified, but there was no unified call to action."

This same CSO participant (B) stated that Council leadership should have made the connection sooner rather than later, but conceded that the intensity or response was unexpected.

"Probably the ferocity of it was [unexpected], particularly when it hadn't happened to that extent in other regional areas. ... we ... [did not] expect that Bendigo would be more intolerant or there'd be more issues around racism ... or Islamophobia than anywhere else.

...That was a surprise that it was kind of to that level. It was definitely a surprise for our members and clients. My sense is that was a small minority of the community. But the impact was huge."

Overwhelmingly, interview participants believed that there was an error in waiting to make public pronouncements in support of the mosque, and wished they had acted sooner. Community leaders

expected the protests to be small, temporary and unremarkable. It did not occur to them that people from outside Bendigo would support local protesters. Business leader (A) recalls the low level of concern at the time:

"... [T]he community leaders in the city were very aware of what was going on. I think most of us were taken aback by the fact that there was even a protest. ... most of us are going, oh you know, that'll be five people and a dog type thing ... just a couple of radicals that will go away.

As you expect, most good people would think it would go away. Of course what [we] didn't expect is that there would be bigots bussing in from all round Australia to a bit of a radical sort of cry."

A decision was made that the university would publicly support the local Muslim people and their right to develop their own place of worship through news stories, a letter to the editor and in speeches by both local and Melbourne based staff. However University participant (A) noted from a personal perspective that, with hindsight, the university could have responded sooner:

"We discharged some responsibility as a community leader. ... going on record was important to the whole discussion. ... in a sense... it changed the public discourse – not appreciably. Perhaps it might have influenced a certain sector of the community. Perhaps provided encouragement for other people to take a bit of a stand.

... [M]y regret is probably that we didn't jump in harder, earlier. Now ... that's my personal view not an institutional view. ... I think we do have responsibility across a whole range of social issues. ... that does involve pushing the envelope occasionally to be progressive. I think that's part of our remit."

The aggression of anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protesters in public space, social media and via e-personal e-mail meant that showing leadership required an analysis of potential threats. Media participant (B) observed that the anti-mosque protestors used tactics to instil fear, but no one was actually hurt physically. However, with the heightened levels of acrimony at the time it was difficult to judge whether or not threats would be carried out.

“... Looking back ... I think most of those people who were giving us a hard time were cowards. They were never going to go through with what they said ... It was ... all about fear, and it was abuse, but it wasn't ever going to be physical harm. So we possibly would have come out stronger.”

The ability to demonstrate effective leadership was partially due to the strength of social networks and ability to engage with various media networks to communicate with others.

### 7.3 Power and networks

Social networks were integral to successful engagement in planning and political processes. They helped reinforce the motivations, rationales and actions of stakeholders. These networks legitimised ideas shared within and across lifeworlds, by empowering members to engage in collective action. However, different groups experienced varying levels of acceptance, legitimacy and ability to exercise power in the public sphere.

The Muslim community had power in its own right, and individuals experienced power as leaders within their communities. Power was associated with legitimacy, which was affirmed through multicultural policy, democratic processes as well as media and public support. The power of the Muslim community was extended through participation in groups supporting multiculturalism and Believe in Bendigo, who advocated strongly on their behalf.

Council as an organisation is powerful through its status as a government agency; staff received their power through delegated authority. Council staff could therefore determine the content, focus and structure of discourses surrounding the planning process and protests to a certain extent. While anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors and protestors could disrupt council processes, they could not affect interpretation and application of relevant regulations. Individual Councillors, however, are connected to their communities differently, and thus participated in different social networks, which called their personal authority and legitimacy into question.

Business leaders, many of whom were part of Believe in Bendigo, already exercise power and legitimacy as individuals and through their organisations. This authority transfers into their community activities as observed by Community participant (A):

“Believe in Bendigo was a success because of the people that were involved. They were the type of people that others seek guidance from – they are seen as wiser people in the community. All of them are successful business people in Bendigo, and if they think it's okay for Muslims to be here then it sends a message that it is because they are the older and wiser known people in the community.

They have a certain reputation and standing within the community. They are also seen as established and long standing within the community not outsiders. Leadership has an important role to play. It provides guidance, and that's why Believe in Bendigo worked.”

Part of the community and political success of business leaders and participants in Believe in Bendigo rests on the strength and longevity of their relationships. Group members live and work in Bendigo, many have known each other since school or engage socially through sports and other activities. As Business participant (A) explains:

“I don't think we're any different to any other community. It is about how well leadership mobilises and how well connected they are. We've got some geographical elements that support us there because with a community of just over 100,000 ... people and often inter-generational connection – you've been to school with these people; you've worked with community leaders in town. ... [I can] get on the phone and ring five community leaders and know they'll come.”

Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam individuals and groups also had strong social networks; and these extended nationally and internationally. Extreme right-wing groups like the UPF seek power and legitimacy; they often try to achieve this through a showing of strength – and in some cases through threat of violence. Many interviewees thought extreme right-wing groups were legitimised by ongoing public discourse at the level of federal politics as well as media. In this way power for these groups has been enhanced with greater public exposure.

Community participant (A) observed how the national political discourse could impact upon different communities, including feelings of inclusion and belonging in a multicultural society. It is also about a more measured discourse.

“There is also the ‘Abbott factor’ you felt the difference before and after he was in power in Bendigo. The Federal Government and who is in power can change how people feel. Now that Turnbull is in, it is the same government and policies, but the language is different – there is not a hatred of minorities and of Muslims. So overall leadership at the Federal level can change the way people are and how they are guided to see things.

While we are educating people, what is sad is when people like Abbott are elected because when a person is elected by the majority they are speaking for the majority; and if they are speaking with [careless terminology that doesn’t condemn] hate and racism then that is [what] the Muslim community will feel that most Australians are like.”

The effect of political discourse on people who subscribe to extreme views was identified by Community participant (B). S/he commented that:

“[P]eople are so publicly and unashamedly coming out with these views when a few years ago, [they] would have been shouted down as idiots.”

S/he further comments:

“It’s out there for the world to see like crazy at the moment because the politicians on the right have gone about actively validating these people for making these views. They’ve created an environment where they feel like, yeah, I can say that, you’re oppressing my right to believe and say what I want.”

CSO participant (B) also drew this conclusion when s/he reflected on the political legacy created by successive politicians since the mid-1990s, emphasising that the issue is about the protection of basic rights:

“You don’t have the right in this country under our constitution to prevent people exercising their civil rights. That’s what [section] 18C is about.”

One Councillor in using the phrase ‘Team Australia’, which was promoted by a previous Prime Minister, demonstrated this linking of national and local discourses. The Age (Bucci & Spooner, 26 Feb 2015) reported:

The VCAT hearing continued this week, with a decision not expected for months. Cr Chapman describes herself as ‘proudly

Team Australia’ on Twitter, and writes that the views she shares are hers, and not those of the [Council]. She has not signed the [Council] code of conduct, saying she does not agree with its contents.

## 7.4 Communication and social media

The role of information, communication and media in the protest was significant. Misinformation and disinformation spread widely and quickly amongst those objecting to the mosque and Islam, and it was difficult for Council to ensure correct information was received and understood. Metropolitan news coverage was viewed as selective, misrepresenting the extent of violence at events and thus contributing to social division. Social media was singled out as a key factor contributing to the explosive nature of the mosque objections.

In the media and in materials produced by anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam, metaphors of ‘battleground’ were used often to describe clashes of ideologies and people. In contrast, Believe in Bendigo and other locally based community groups used metaphors of ‘violation’ and ‘taking back the streets’. Thus the language of debates illuminated the conflict of a local issue becoming a national issue, and global issues becoming local, such as conflicts in the Middle East and the rise of ISIS. These perspectives and the lifeworlds they represent, reinforced an adversarial exchange of ideas, values, and beliefs, which were played out politically and spatially.

Communication between anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-diversity groups were characterised by frustration, disdain and ridicule. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam protesters devalued ‘leftist’ and educated people, while pro-mosque and pro-diversity portrayed the ‘right wing’ as uneducated. Within these conceptualisations, politics, class, experience and view were compressed and oversimplified. The middle ground of discussion was difficult to find, articulate and promote.

For Community participant (B) anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam messages indicated disgust about support for entho-religious diversity:

“They’re so bold in their bigotry in their videos and in all their posts on social media ... They’re not even trying to conceal their bigotry. They’re saying, ‘your diversity’ and ‘your multiculturalism’ – they say it with disdain in their voice like it’s a hideous, infectious, invasive thing, and that’s the way they perceive it clearly.”

Social media played a major role in communications to promote ideas, organise meetings, and share information. It was also integral to bullying, harassment and vitriol. In essence anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam and pro-mosque/pro-diversity protestors and groups inhabited completely different lifeworlds in which the ideas, information, interpretation and language prevented openness and discussion.

Council participant (E) referred to the use of social media 'as a weapon and a tool'. This person was frustrated about the lack of accountability, lack of truth and its impacts – including dissuading individuals from running in council elections:

“Facebook and associated social media campaigns are demeaning and of a personal and vitriolic nature and show a disrespect and lack of social accountability.”

Supporting the experience of Community participant (E) who experienced severe online harassment, Council participant (B) identified the aggressive nature of many social media posts, some of which are death threats, and the lack of transparency and accountability of the posters:

“The impact that, 10, 15, 20 people can have on an issue using social media, is emphatic. You can say anything and not be held accountable.”

Social media users can create or access posts that tap into emotions and elicit immediate responses. Sharing of posts can quickly create a 'mob mentality' of bullying. Business participant (A) commented on the use of social media as an illusion of support:

“Historically it could happen again, of course it could. There's always going to be a bigoted element that will have a voice. Social media has many positives but it has many negatives.”

Lack of exposure to different modes of being and ways of doing things was posited as one of the reasons that discomfort and polarisation may have occurred. Media participant (A) observes that the events in Bendigo provided a window into other people's lifeworlds. Some of these lifeworlds are narrow and lack critical engagement:

“We've seen some great positives come out of this experience, and it's given people a much better understanding of how some people have to live their lives because of the hate that exists, and I think fear.”

“I think that's the space we're in at the moment, where education's going to be really important over the next few years. Particularly around the building of the mosque and what it's going to be used for.”

In contrast, some members of the community have the capacity to use empathy to imagine other people's lifeworlds. For example, Community participant (E) used imagination and logic to explain how a Muslim might feel, and identifies the similarities for him/herself if s/he went to a new place:

“Imagine if I went to another country and they hated me? I'd go, oh, I don't want to hang out with you guys, you're mean [laughs].”

Some interviewees identified social interaction as a means to educate and overcome division. CSO participant (A) conducted community education workshops and found that face-to-face contact was valuable. Many people form their views based on media representation, but when they meet Muslims from the local community, they can change their views through interaction and gaining understanding:

“There is quite a significant level of negativity around Islam and Muslims .... A lot of the feedback has been, I've never met a Muslim person before. ...

It's an opportunity for people to get to meet the local community and to see a human face.”

Faith participant (A) also supported personal contact as an effective means of learning and suggested that there is hope for bridging differences by engaging through schools:

“We have little discussions about what you believe. We have started a series of programs with the schools. Many schools don't mind being involved in the inter-cultural question.”

Creating space and places where people from different lifeworlds can gather together to engage in respectful dialogue is viewed as an essential strategy for moving forward and overcoming division.

With opportunities for open and non-judgemental conversations, one community participant saw opportunities to engage with others who have more conservative views or are associated with right wing groups could follow this path and change their views:

"I feel guilty about a lot of the things I've said and done and you just have to sort of seek out counter information and make up your mind for yourself.

I never had the opportunity to make up my mind for myself, that was the thing, I went straight into the right wing and that was all I was given to work on. ... There's so many people just like me who are still caught up in it and all it would take is that one conversation to see, hang on a minute, that person we call a lefty that we're meant to hate is actually ... just like me.

... Then you start applying that to, well why couldn't I do that with a Muslim person? ... It really just takes that one thing, ... to break down the wall in your own mind and you can't do that as long as you've got ... tunnel vision and you're only letting in people who have the same beliefs."

## 7.5 Moving forward

It is difficult to determine whether different decisions should have been made. The nature, speed and vitriol of the protests meant many organisations and people were unprepared. Yet individuals responded, new community groups and networks formed, and organisations took a stand about their values. Both popular and social media were blamed for creating polarisation, but they also supported multiculturalism, religious diversity and right to worship. There are many people who might feel unable to share their views and discuss the issues, and this needs to be addressed.

However, there is a view among interviewees that events in Bendigo are not quite over yet. They indicated that the protests and the vitriol might start again when works on the mosque commence. Many in the community are focusing on healing and going forwards.

Faith participant (A) and others believed the protests helped to polarise people in the city:

"The effect of the demonstrations has been very polarising, so it's meant that holding the position in the middle ground is no longer as easy for people to do. So I think what it's done is it forced people to either camp."

Preventing individuals and groups from exercising their rights to protest is counter to democracy. However, stricter implementation of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification regulation

could help improve the debate and decrease polarisation. Media participant (C) noted that polarisation may have acted to subdue debate and prevented people with genuine concerns engaging in discussion. This related to development objectors who were not anti-Islam and had legitimate planning concerns.

"... They became far less vocal, [saying] I don't want to be painted with the same ... brush as a UPF member. I'm not a UPF member. I have got genuine concerns about a massive building on this place with a huge car park. I just don't think it's appropriate. ... So I think that in some ways it subdued national debate."

Progress depends on finding ways to nurture community and cultural change by creating spaces for mutual dialogue and discovery of new opportunities. Faith participant (A) sees the potential of the city's social capital that stems from culturally and religiously diverse communities who can engage in a global economic market:

"... If we turned the whole thing round and if there's a business in this town who wants to do business in certain parts of the world, we've got social capital here of 24 languages that five years ago didn't exist.

Now when the world keeps judging everything by economics, maybe they should be looking at the social capital of this particular group of people and capturing it."

Business participant (A) viewed Believe in Bendigo as a model that other places could emulate, although recognises that Bendigo's size and urban centre help to focus activities:

"... We've got a model that other communities could use so that when a radical element. ... You can look at that and say, is there ... some learnings here or something ...

I do think we have unique opportunities in a regional city of this size that we want to capitalise on. I think in terms of social cohesion there's real benefit that can come from working in a community this size."

It's about creating welcoming spaces. Council Officer (D) sees the size of Bendigo as a strategic asset, with a focus on the possibilities of physical spaces. Public space is democratic space; it's for everyone:

“... Increasing the number or the spaces that are welcoming and people feel that they don’t have the right to harass others and people feel that they won’t be harassed.”

Respectful communication is the way forward identified by community participant (B):

“... What people need to appreciate is that we’re not going to heal by continuing to just be angry at each other. We really do need to set an example, and it should be easy ...

We don’t have a wall really between – cutting across the time and literally fighting over anything.”

In terms of future reporting, media participant (B) indicated that a lot has been learned from events and that the human rights issue should feature more in reports in future:

“We just played a straight bat with it and said, ‘this is what’s happening’ ...

...I think that the future decisions would be around ... a human rights-based argument. It is not about a mosque, and it’s not about the left versus the right. ... It is about the people and what they should be entitled to do.

... We believed that both groups were radical and equally irresponsible in how they behaved. We said they were entitled to do what they did, but went to extreme lengths to do that. ...

I don’t think it’s over for Bendigo. I don’t think that it will go away. I think once they start building the mosque it’s going to become an issue again.”



8

## BEYOND BENDIGO: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE



# BEYOND BENDIGO: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

The protests in Bendigo symbolised desires to define and articulate the future of the city. Anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam objectors believed the development of a mosque would lead to severe adverse social impacts on the local community, and wanted an SIA to be conducted to support their views. Council, VCAT, the Supreme Court and mosque supporters assessed the planning proposal as contributing to community benefit. While the development will have minimal social impact on Bendigo, the same cannot be said for the public protests.

As the Bendigo mosque issues demonstrate, determining when, how and why a social impact assessment should be conducted and the criteria it should address are fraught for this type of planning proposal. This is due to the differing logics of planning and of political debate about the ideal society. This research sought to explore the role, function and nature of social impact assessment in planning decision-making and to what extent social impacts should be considered, for whom, when and how. A significant consideration is whether provision made to conduct social impact assessments for developments are clearly acting against particular groups of people.

Development assessment is about land use and the activities that occur on zoned land. As discussion of the literature (Fincher et al., 2014; Valverde, 2008, 2012) indicated, ideology, values and beliefs about the ideal society are embedded in planning decision-making, and decisions about proposed developments indirectly regulate people. As there are limited avenues for the public to express their dislike, concerns and fears of changes of pervasive influences and responses like globalisation or immigration policy that occur in different arenas, dissatisfaction is often played out over specific land use developments.

Concerns about the perceived impacts of large developments, including places of worship may be legitimate, but should not be legitimated as part of planning decision-making or through an SIA process. Cultural and ethno-religious change is not

a disruption to social processes; rather it is part of a continuous change process that has occurred since non-Aboriginal settlement. Conducting an SIA in these types of development disputes could facilitate discrimination through the targeting of specific faiths and their believers.

While many scholars and practitioners assert the benefits of SIA as a process, especially if combined with mediation (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996; O'Faircheallaigh, 2010; Peltonen and Sairinen, 2010; Vanclay, 2003), there are some matters that are best addressed through planning law. This is not to preclude other avenues for discussion and debate, but these should not be attached to the planning process. In the case of Bendigo, the greatest social impacts were created by responses to the development assessment and appeals process, but these were outside the scope of decision-making.

This research found that interview participants thought the planning process was 'hijacked' by social agendas, and were wary of introducing SIA into development assessment and appeals review. It is common within planning process to receive objections that do not comply with processes or are based on incorrect information. But the sustained objection to the mosque and the ways in which objections were raised through street protests, protests at council meetings and formatted responses were new and surprising in its vitriol.

SIA was useful for identifying how different stakeholder groups demonstrated diverse understandings, aspirations and capabilities for reproducing and re-legitimising their values, beliefs and desires during conflict. They played different roles within the permit and appeals processes, as well as in relation to the processes of social mobilisation. Some stakeholder groups may have had mutual goals, but the effects of events suggests different, but overlapping lifeworlds (Atkinson, 2010; Miller, 1992; Crossley, 2000; Rasmussen, 2014; Sandywell, 2004; Zhao, 2015). The dynamics between subjective and inter-subjective experiences of external conditions were

influential in identifying, assessing, managing, communicating and negotiating threats and risk. Also influential was the novelty of the situation that created a need for stakeholder groups to mobilise around problematised knowledge (Habermas, 2015). Assumptions about the meanings and conditions of the proposed development and of the Bendigo community were challenged by the protests, requiring innovative strategies and tactics to create a sense of control and certainty; sometimes these created conflict between groups even when goals were similar.

The lifeworlds concept provides a lens through which the conflicts that arose can be understood; it provides some insight into the ways that different values, beliefs, histories, social milieus and experiences may be unknown and unfathomable to others. Those opposing the mosque and rejecting Islam objectified and demonised the Muslim community. This enabled a view that the Muslim community, should not and do not hold the same rights as themselves in terms of political, social, cultural and religious expression. Political expression was also complicated by the fact that many anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam individuals and groups, whether honestly or strategically, refused to acknowledge Islam as a religion.

This research found that individuals and Muslim people as a group need to negotiate their local communities anew due to conflicts over self-determined and externally imposed identities, whether they want to or not. Assumptions about the nature, character and worthiness of Muslim people and Islam permeates political and media discourse, and forces Muslim people to engage with increasingly vocal anti-Islam and anti-Islam attitudes. As extreme right wing individuals and groups seek to gain control over their own lifeworlds, they also seek to impose their worldviews on others.

Believe in Bendigo and the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups suggest that unique dynamics affect their success at social mobilisation and will influence their potential political and social impacts in future. Believe in Bendigo is deeply embedded in the city across many layers of its economic, social and political structures. The group incorporates business and community members, people with higher and lower incomes, and across nationalities and religion. The group and its key ideas are positive, inclusive and flexible. It seeks to create a vibrant urban imaginary connected to possibility.

The group's vision is representative of changes in the community e.g. global connections through arts and culture and creative city expressions such as markets, social enterprise, café culture. Values of helping learning, and engaging with diverse community members are promoted.

In contrast, the anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups have a base in Bendigo, but extend beyond the city to other states. They captivate feelings of anger and loss of power, and present a way to resist change and counteract uncertainties symbolised by migration, Muslims, and Islam. A sense of control and protection is asserted through dogmatic agendas, physicality, aggression and masculinity. However, many of these groups are characterised by in-fighting, leading to splitting and the formation of new groups. With their messages of anger and a desire for dominance, leaders of these groups can also contribute to their implosion.

Mosque objectors and protestors aimed to influence democratic processes, but their political platform was viewed as extreme and contrary to values of multiculturalism, freedom from discrimination, and citizenship participation. Clashes with political leaders were reflective of different power structures, levels of authority, class and conduct. Political leaders are often well educated and middle-class, plus they primarily operate in a professional world with other highly skilled people. Unlike the protestors, they do not feel the need to wrestle power from authority to stop or create change.

The lifeworlds of individuals and groups who were particularly active in protest events were narrow which may have contributed to a poor self-assessment and misunderstanding of their strengths and weaknesses – legally, politically and socially. For example, their claims against the mosque, Muslim people and Islam did not have legal standing and were rejected by the Council, VCAT and the Supreme Court. Socially anti-mosque and/or anti-Islam groups experienced conflict and division; many individuals have excluded themselves or been excluded from the broader community. Mosque objectors who stood as Federal candidates and their limited support-base did not have an impact on the July 2016 election, although the outcome may be different in local level elections to be held in October 2016.

Objectors and protestors who connected through virtual national social networks and local place based networks sought to transform the physical spaces and places of Bendigo into demonstrations

of power. They wanted to materialise notions of authority, ideals, hopes and fears. Analysis of written objections and protests revealed complicated collective expressions of belief, values and institutional norms around gender, family, socio-economic status, culture and religion. Significantly, this provided insight into the shifting nature of inclusion/exclusion as society changes, and what it means for individuals' and communities' sense of belonging, safety and agency. Symbolic sites of conflict over public imaginaries of nationhood, the role of the state and conceptualisations of democracy become physical sites of conflict.

Public and social media influenced communication of differing belief, knowledge and social networks systems upon which risk rationalities were formed. These often relied on a conglomeration of demographic assumptions. Anti-mosque protesters were associated with being white, having certain narrow Christian beliefs, lower incomes, lower education and non-professional work, compared to the aggregate characteristics of diversity pro-supporters as multicultural, multi-religious, higher incomes, higher education and professional. While the characterisation of anti and pro mosque groups may have illustrated general tendencies, their actual composition indicated within group diversity, purpose, desires and capability. In reality, the intersectionality of people, and their engagement in social processes presents even more complexity, which was and is difficult to identify, predict and capture.

Significantly, protest events and media reporting helped to create a polarised city, in which the lifeworlds of citizens who were neither strongly right or left wing were eclipsed from discussion. Although many lifeworlds overlapped, it was often during conflict or unknowingly. The way in which people in Bendigo seek to address community polarisation needs to be considered due to the diversity of the population. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work. For some anti-racism and bystander training will assist them to become more effective in addressing conflict and communicating in conflict situations. Others may see these programs as part of the problem. Therefore it will be important to recognise the variety of approaches and recognise their value for different groups of people. This includes the more confrontational approaches of anti-racism groups and programs and the softer approach focusing on engaging people in community activities.

Positive outcomes to emerge from events in Bendigo were explicit discussions about democracy, fairness and equity, and their enactment in public space. Although aspects of the social media campaigns and public protests became ugly, systematic responses suggest democratic governance is robust. Council, Victoria Police, health and CSOs, and the public were engaged in ideological struggles about the future of the city and of Australian society, yet the value and integrity of Australia's legal, social and cultural institutions were reinforced – notwithstanding issues of potential corruption of process and possible illegality of actions at times.

What does this mean for the future of the city?

Faith participant (A) articulates a possibility:

“...I know in fact that ... the current leadership of the Muslim community want a mosque. They don't want a Turkish mosque, they don't want a Shiite mosque, they don't want a Sunni mosque. They want a place where all Muslims can come and worship.

... If we can pull this off – and I say we deliberately, ... if the [whole] community will stand with the Muslim community, and they get a mosque for all Muslims, I think that's terrific for the sake of the world. We talk about peace, we talk about unity, ... and here's a golden opportunity for Bendigo ... to be unique.”

**Table 5** provides a set of suggested strategies for communities to take who seek to prevent crises situations in conflicts similar to those experienced in Bendigo. The suggested strategies build on the actions identified in this report, reflecting the researchers' observations and community activities at the time of reporting, including advice from interviewees. Essentially, the suggestions focus on providing ground rules, spaces and places for communication so issues can be solved, managed or mitigated. These strategies are elaborated upon in a 'toolkit' accompanying this report – A Toolkit for Promoting Civic Participation.

Table 5: Strategies to promote civic engagement

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Target
<b>Community Processes</b>			
<p><b>Cultural and religious community can unintentionally be disempowered, e.g. actions, debates &amp; public representation of Muslims by Muslims can be 'backgrounded'</b></p>	<p>Ensure cultural and religious communities are recognised for their diversity</p> <p>Ensure cultural and religious communities have power in influencing policy, debates and representations that affect their everyday life</p> <p>Ensure cultural and religious communities have representation on committee/s</p> <p>Provide skills development opportunities, e.g. leadership, media training</p> <p>Shift focus from an emphasis on religion to complexity of identity in various contexts, e.g. inclusion of Muslim people on committees, as experts for media commentary etc., so that knowledge, skills &amp; community contribution becomes 'ordinary'</p>	<p>Cultural and religious communities, government &amp; non-government agencies</p>	<p>General community service organisations</p> <p>Cultural and religious communities</p> <p>Cultural and religious communities</p> <p>General community service organisations</p>
<p><b>Bias and discrimination is associated with poor knowledge and experience of others</b></p>	<p>Develop constructive avenues for social learning through discussion and debate, such as school talks, question and answer sessions, public seminars</p> <p>Identify venues for community exchanges</p> <p>Develop knowledge, skills and resources to engage critically with information and to articulate views and concerns effectively</p> <p>Advocate for retention of 18c and 18d in the Racial Discrimination Act and educate the public about what this means in practice, including the difference between freedom of speech and vilification</p>		
<b>Organisational Matters</b>			
<p><b>Misinformation and disinformation can impede processes and understanding</b></p>	<p>Provide factual, and if needed, corrective information quickly</p> <p>Ensure staff are trained to respond effectively and with confidence to questions from the public</p>	<p>Media</p>	<p>Staff and community</p>

Table 5: Strategies to promote civic engagement (continued)

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Target
<b>Communications can be bias, threatening and inappropriate</b>	<p>Assess language and meaning for cultural/religious bias</p> <p>Ensure parity of language, images and content across ethnic and religious groups</p> <p>Streamline public communications into organisations, e.g. specific e-mail address that can be monitored</p> <p>Develop guidelines as to when public communications needs to be directed toward police services for review</p>	Relevant organisations	Staff
<b>Receiving threatening and inappropriate materials can cause stress</b>	<p>Develop a clear set of guidelines for the public with regard to their rights and responsibilities for engaging with the organisation, and ensure these are available publically through media, social media, letter drops</p> <p>Ensure staff access to counselling/mentoring</p> <p>Conduct staff debriefings</p>	Relevant organisations	Staff
<b>Communication pathways from ground floor to executive can be blocked</b>	<p>Ensure front-line staff are supported</p> <p>Ensure expertise of staff is accessed and applied</p>	Relevant organisations	Staff
<b>Staff may not be experienced or understand importance of cultural/religious sensitivity</b>	<p>Develop a cultural plan and training module</p>	Relevant organisations	Staff
<b>Planning Process</b>			
<p><b>Community can be polarised</b></p> <p><b>Community can be silenced</b></p> <p><b>Emotional, if not addressed, can erupt</b></p>	<p>Contract specialised professional services to develop mediation processes to suit the type of conflict, with a particular focus on helping community members understand regulatory processes</p> <p>Closely consider the allocation of permits for public protest jointly with the Victorian Police Service</p>	State government, local government, consultants and community groups	Concerned citizens seeking information & understanding of issues (middle ground)
<b>Misinformation and disinformation can impede processes and understanding</b>	<p>Executive to work with media to establish facts and guide media campaign</p> <p>Ensure staff are trained to respond effectively and with confidence to questions from the public</p> <p>Provide factual, and if needed, corrective information quickly</p> <p>Amend existing public planning process information to the specific situation</p>	Local government	Applicants and objectors

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Target
<b>Public conduct can be threatening and inappropriate</b>	<p>Develop a clear set of guidelines for the public with regard to their rights and responsibilities for engaging with the organisation, and ensure these are available publically through media, social media, letter drops</p> <p>Provide information about legal responsibilities, political processes and systems</p> <p>Support community members to articulate their views effectively</p>	Local government, Police and community service organisations	Applicants and objectors
<b>Planners need to justify their decisions</b>  <b>Objectives are used in expert evidence and to clearly articulate assessment criteria to the public</b>	Ensure regional and local economic development, housing, recreation, arts and cultural strategies more explicitly identify multicultural objectives	Local government	Planners and other staff
<b>Media</b>			
<b>Misinformation and disinformation can impede processes and understanding</b>	<p>Engage with various communities to learn about and identify how subtlety and bias is communicated</p> <p>Ensure parity of language, images and content across ethnic and religious groups</p> <p>'Did you know?' type media campaign directed as dispelling myths and misunderstandings of cultural and religious groups</p>	Media	Staff and community
<b>Community may not know how to work with media</b>	Assist with media training for community and business leaders	Media	Community
<b>Issues of ethical compliance need to be discussed</b>	Ensure ethical conduct in reporting by enforcing industry standards	Media	Staff

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# APPENDIX 1

## Interview Questions

These are the key interview questions asked, which were supported by probing questions.

### City of Greater Bendigo Council Staff

In 2014, the City of Greater Bendigo approved a planning application for a mosque in Rowena Street. Subsequently, there were a number of protests in the city and at Council meetings.

- Can you tell me about the planning process and the outcomes?
- To what extent did this application highlight any strengths or weaknesses in the Victorian Planning System?
- In this context, what are the future challenges and opportunities for planners (or councillors) and local government councils more generally?

### Victoria Police Service

In 2014, the City of Greater Bendigo approved a planning application for a mosque in Rowena Street. Subsequently, there were a number of protests in the city.

- Can you tell me about role of the Victorian Police Service at this time, including your challenges and opportunities? (also probe using map of area to identify use of space)
- To what extent did the protests push the boundaries of appropriate and legal actions?
- In this context, what are the future challenges and opportunities for the Victorian Policy Service in community policing?

### Key Informant Interviews/Non-Government Stakeholders

In 2014, the City of Greater Bendigo approved a planning application for a mosque in Rowena Street. Subsequently, there were a number of protests in the city.

- What prompted you to take action?
- What did you want to achieve and to what extent did you achieve them?
- What were the implications for you and the broader community?

## Media

In 2014, the City of Greater Bendigo approved a planning application for a mosque in Rowena Street. Subsequently, there were a number of protests in the city.

- Can you tell me about role of the media at this time, including challenges and opportunities?
- To what extent were was the local media coverage different to state or national media coverage?
- In this context, what are the future challenges and opportunities for the media in reporting on community issues?

## Experts

In 2014, the City of Greater Bendigo approved a planning application for a mosque in Rowena Street. Subsequently, there were a number of protests in the city.

- Based on your research, how do you interpret the events in Bendigo?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities for the future?
- To what extent can social and spatial policy influence situations like the one that occurred in Bendigo?

# APPENDIX 2

# PLANNING ON A PAGE

Planning Victoria's liveable communities together



The economic, social and environmental needs of the community are constantly changing...



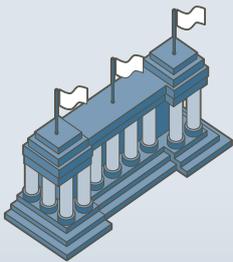
Broad strategies need to be developed to plan for these changes...



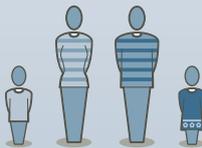
The planning rules ensure that broad strategies and policies can be implemented...



So that fair and transparent decisions that are consistent with the planning rules can be made...



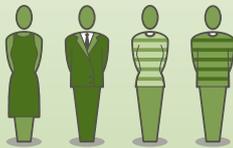
The Victorian Government looks at these needs to understand how to respond...



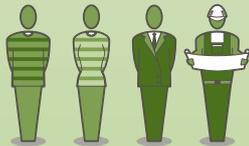
They work with the community and with councils to get broad agreement on the way to respond.



The Victorian Government, councils, and the community work together to develop the planning strategies...



The broader community is then asked what they think...



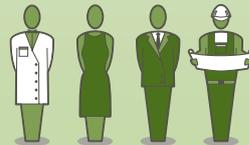
Strategic plans and policies setting out the way forward are agreed.



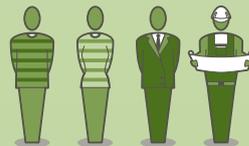
The Victorian Government and councils propose changes to the planning rules to deliver the policies...



The community, councils and industry are asked about the proposed changes...



Some changes may need expert advice from an independent committee or panel.



The Minister for Planning approves the changes and the planning controls are updated.



Before submitting a permit application, the applicant talks to council about the proposal\*...

\*Some proposals are assessed by the Victorian Government



Council may then refer the application for specialist advice to help make a decision...

The proposal may be advertised so that anyone affected can have a say.



If those affected are not satisfied with the council decision the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) can be asked to review it.

Understanding the community's needs

Planning for the community's needs

Making fair and transparent planning decisions

# APPENDIX 2 (CONTINUED)

## Understanding the community's needs

### Economic drivers

- » Population growth
- » Transport and land-use coordination
- » Airfield, ports and freight logistics
- » Infrastructure (e.g. water, waste, education, telecommunications)
- » Economic development (e.g. business, industry, forestry)
- » Access to employment
- » Agriculture
- » Tourism
- » Global economic cycles

### Social drivers

- » Affordable housing
- » Social housing
- » Planning for health
- » Heritage and culture
- » Population change (e.g. household types, cultural diversity, ageing)
- » Liquor and gambling
- » Community infrastructure (e.g. open active space, libraries)
- » Sense of 'place'

### Environmental drivers

- » Biodiversity
- » Natural hazards (e.g. coastal sea level rise, wildfire)
- » Environmental protection
- » Climate change
- » Renewable energy
- » Sustainable design
- » Vegetation protection
- » Resource management and protection
- » Sustainable transport



“The Victorian planning system responds to the changing needs of a growing population”

## Planning for the community's needs

### Implementation through the planning controls

- » The **Planning and Environment Act** sets the legal framework for the planning system
- » Each municipality in Victoria is covered by a **planning scheme** that regulates the use, development and protection of that land
- » Planning schemes set out the planning rules – the state and local policies, zones, overlays and provisions about specific land uses that inform planning decisions
- » Council develop the vision for the municipality with input from the community
- » These ideas are included in the planning scheme as local policies and the **Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS)**
- » A planning scheme can only be changed by a formal amendment process
- » Permit application decisions must be consistent with the planning scheme

### State-wide policies

- » *Victorian Transport Plan*
- » *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional Victoria*
- » *Integrated Housing Strategy*
- » *Victorian Coastal Strategy*

“The system relies on participation across all sectors of the community to guide the future development of the state and deliver the right planning controls”



### Expert advice

- » **Agencies**
  - » Can comment on proposals that affect their area of interest (e.g. catchment management authorities, EPA, Melbourne Water)
- » **Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD)**
  - » Makes recommendations to the Minister
  - » Administers changes to the planning controls as required
  - » May refer for additional expert input
  - » Can seek community input about proposals
- » **Independent Advisory Committees**
  - » May be appointed to provide advice on any planning decision under specific Terms of Reference
- » **Independent Planning Panels**
  - » Make recommendations to submissions to planning scheme amendments

## Making fair and transparent planning decisions

### Local Government

- » Acts as responsible authority for local planning matters
- » Assesses permit applications against the planning scheme
- » Refers application for specialist input
- » May require public notice and engagement
- » May request amendments to the Planning Scheme
- » May delegate a decision to a council officer

### Minister for Planning

- » Is responsible for state significant projects in some areas
- » Can refer an application for specialist input
- » May take responsibility for important decisions by calling-in or through development facilitation
- » May delegate some decisions to DPCD

### Other decision makers

- » **Development Assessment Committees**
  - » Joint local/state government decision making body for key metropolitan areas
- » **DPCD**
  - » Delegated decision making on behalf of the Minister
- » **VCAT**
  - » Decides some planning permit applications on review



“Decisions are made at the state and local level depending on the nature of the proposal”

### Outcome

- » Permit is issued
- » Permit is refused



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*strengthening our community*

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