

## Update – Measurement System, International Relationships Alderman Thomas

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At the end of 2017 Alderman Thomas attended the Sister Cities Australia (SCA) annual conference in Mildura. Alderman Thomas attended the conference to brief the executive and to present to the delegates the concept of the association joining in and participating in the completion of a survey of interested cities in terms of the best contemporary measurement and evaluation of the value and worth of city's sister associations.

Sister Cities Australia has a membership of some 60 city councils within Australia and has alliances with international sister city associations.

Alderman Thomas requested that the executive of the Sister Cities Association consider assisting the City of Hobart in conducting the survey for the intention of arriving at a robust system of measuring the value in economic, social and cultural terms of sister city activities. Alderman Thomas made clear the fact that the City of Hobart had yet to formally commit to the project.

Measurement of the value of the expenditure of scarce ratepayer funds on any activity is critical and in this case no less so. What was at one time seen as basically a nice thing to do to have relationships with cities elsewhere, cities as large as the City of Sydney have now based the core of their economic activity on the success of their sister city program.

Measurement can be achieved in both qualitative and quantitative form, measuring for example the cost to the budget of every activity carried out on an annual basis will also be valuable to a city and its community arising from the social and cultural exchange that invariably these relationships produce.

In Mildura, Alderman Thomas requested that the Association consider and provide an *in principle approval* for support for a project which seeks to:

1. Survey the membership to obtain information on what basis cities form and then operate sister city relationships.
2. From the information received seek to establish a framework which measures the qualitative and quantitative outcomes from all sister city activities of individual cities over a period, including cultural programs.
3. Provide a framework by which each unit of outcome is given a priority by a city from time to time in terms of its relative importance to the city and a notional unitary value struck.
4. The combined total unit value is monetised and then compared to and measured against the total resources spent on the sister city relationship in any given period.

Example: The City of Mildura has a Chinese sister city and educational exchanges, city staff exchanges and cultural performances occur on a regular basis. The City council is criticised by the local rate payers association for the \$70 000 all up cost of the program in 2018. The council would have full use of the model developed by the City of Hobart partnership with Sister City associations in Australia, New Zealand and the USA from which the council can vote to give a level of importance based on what it sees as the value to its community from all 3 activities. The council having therefore been able to apply a '*notional financial value*' to each of the 3 activities based on importance [number of students studying at the Mildura university campus, learnings from the staff exchanges and the cultural diversity 'barometer' for Mildura from cultural activities] is able to demonstrate a total value received of \$450 000 for the use of \$70 000 of ratepayers' money.

## What was asked of Sister Cities Australia?

1. At this time SCA noted that the project will only be undertaken if there is broad support for the project from the Sister Cities Associations of Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Accordingly the request was expressly conditional on all 3 associations participating, noting that the associations can be involved through assisting the development of the model (including the survey), assisting by circulating to members the survey, assisting in collation of the results or at their discretion only one or some of this assistance. The project would be supported by a rigorous academic framework for which indicative support from Emeritus Professor Peter Frappell has been received. *Note: following the Mildura discussions I became convinced that starting smaller was the better option as we have many examples to draw on of sister city effectiveness here in Australia. So the ultimate request was for national project support only.*
2. The SCA acknowledged and appreciated the personal advocacy of the project by Alderman Thomas former Lord Mayor and Chairman of Finance from the City of Hobart.
3. All that was asked of SCA at that time was an indication of its support for the project to occur and a level of involvement if it proceeds.
4. The project would be conducted in calendar year 2018.

## Decision

The request was considered at the Annual General Meeting and debated by the members present. A further meeting was arranged by the President of the Sister Cities Association, Mr Bill Wilson with Alderman Thomas who travelled to Devonport at his own cost.

SCA has advised the following:

*After careful consideration by the National Executive the involvement of SCA is confirmed but it is suggested it may be prudent to commence the suggested survey in the latter stages of the calendar year. One of the several reasons for this is due to the timing of Local Government elections and we believe it may be best served to be working with a newly elected council.*

The National Executive also came up with the following list of questions, in no particular order, that it believed needed to be considered and responded to:

- *When will the survey instrument be ready?*
- *Will SCA get to 'approve' the final format and the questions in the survey?*
- *Are there any IP issues seeing as it is using the Sister Cities NZ survey from a few years ago?*
- *Should the survey go out, how do we decide which cities it goes to as a 'pilot' group?*
- *Who will collate and analyse the results – how long will this take?*
- *Who will develop a 'marketing plan' to roll-out the survey and how will we encourage councils to respond?*
- *How will we gauge the success, or otherwise, of the instrument and the survey?*
- *Is there any way that the University of Hobart will allow SCA to be the sole 'issuer' of the survey instrument, and how could this be managed – this would give us some leverage to encourage memberships (free use of the instrument)?*
- *Who would develop a publicity strategy/plan to showcase results, case studies, statistics, etc.?*
- *Will the University be available to update the instrument, free of charge, in perpetuity should future changes be needed?*
- *We believe the number of organisations interviewed is very important and also the follow up, that is - who is responsible for ongoing monitoring?*

## **Similar Projects**

Alderman Thomas has also been briefed by the former head of corporate administration for the City of Sydney who developed their sister cities economic policy. Sister cities activity for Sydney now forms a key platform of its economic development activity.

Latrobe University, the local government Association of South Australia and possibly other organisations are actively doing or considering work in this area. It is important that Hobart does not expend large amounts of ratepayer funds on activity which has been duplicated or replicated elsewhere, when it is possible that Hobart in due course could collaborate rather than pioneer the issue on its own. There is also merit given the issues involved that a national activity be conducted at this point rather than spreading the research effort too far.

Given the decision of the Sister cities Association to support this project but seek a deferment until after the next City of Hobart elections Ald Thomas is happy for this matter to be deferred until after the October local government elections.