

Expression of Interest ... Commercial-in-confidence

Research proposal as part of the Ella Bay master-planned integrated tourism community

Proposed by:

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Executive summary:

The Ella Bay development proposes to transform a 450-hectare ocean-front cattle property south of Cairns into a fully master-planned integrated tourism community with up to 1,150 visitors staying at any one time. The wider community needed to support this development is expected to reach an additional 4,060 people.

We propose a well-defined research project which addresses the community news needs of this new community of around 5,000 people and base our proposal on Cokley's ongoing published research already undertaken in the "laboratory communities" of (1) Blackall, central Western Queensland, (2) Norfolk Island, (3) Bathurst Island, Northern Territory, and (4) Lord Howe Island, and Hetherington's ongoing community news research and practice in the *Kelvin Grove Urban Village*, a master-planned community bringing together residential, educational, retail, health, recreational and business opportunities.

A clear understanding of *community news needs* is important for any group but especially so for a group of people living in a well-defined, remote, and highly-focussed community such as is planned for Ella Bay. Community news is a key ingredient in community capacity building and our existing research and that of Plowman (2003) demonstrate that this is relevant for Queensland communities. Community capacity building is an essential ingredient in ensuring that Ella Bay reaches not only its target of completion in 10 years but thrives and grows into the future, making a worthwhile social and economic contribution to the region and the state as a whole.

The proposal:

Background:

The proposed Ella Bay community contains features which are analogous to the communities already studied. While Lord Howe Island occupies a total of 1,500 hectares, the inhabited town and

residential area is less than one-third of this; Norfolk Island occupies a total of 3,500 hectares but again, the concentration of homes and businesses is limited to much less; Bathurst Island itself covers 210,000 hectares of rough bush terrain but the only settled portion, the capital of Nguiu, (population 1450) sits in an area of around 500 hectares; Blackall Shire occupies about 1.6 million hectares but the town itself and included homes covers but a fraction of that. The Kelvin Grove Urban Village displays elements of contemporary master-planned communities central to this project.

Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and Blackall (for a range of different reasons) are popular tourist destinations for both Australian and international travellers, and Lord Howe especially attracts members of the worldwide cruising yacht community, which is also heavily represented in the Great Barrier Reef waters around the Ella Bay area. Each of the four communities studied features a range of retail shopping facilities and a range of public transport options such as tourist coaches, taxi cabs and shuttle buses. These features form the focus of our research. Cokley has successfully obtained ethical clearances for similar work in 2006.

Our research in those communities:

Using methodologies including survey, interview, and unobtrusive participant observation, we have identified and confirmed strong links between *word-of-mouth* and *shopping* as news communication channels in each of these communities, and we propose to investigate those further with a view to developing a model for deployment in the Ella Bay master-planned community. In particular, we propose to further investigate the part played by taxi drivers and other commercial “public transit” carriers such as shuttle in this model.

Results of this research will be important for the developer in deciding how to place and promote access to community meeting facilities, how to attract the right kind of shopping facilities, and with the licensing of such carriers as cabs, shuttle buses and charter boats around the Ella Bay area. The licensing of shuttles and cabs, and the placement of shops, forms an important part of the amenity of the proposed community, and is an indicator of its future viability. Financial inputs such as leasing and royalty returns from retail and transit operators should also interest the developer.

The advent and rise of the “free newspaper” in sites along the north Queensland coast (Townsville and Cairns) suggests that free media is likely to be part of the Ella Bay market but our proposal would eliminate the potential for litter resulting from paper-news distribution.

The class of traveller and visitor which the Ella Bay development intends to attract is already familiar with the concept of news communication through transit vehicles and the retail environment. Such channels have been documented in our publications but include airport city developments (the Aerotropolis concept), media on large cruise-liners (such as the Disney cruise and resort network), media in-flight on airlines (Singapore Airlines), the social networking being planned for the Dubai Palms estates in the Middle East, and hotel-media partnership such as the CNN Hotels concept and Starwood Hotels.

The proposal:

We propose setting up a “laboratory” in a community reasonably near Ella Bay to replicate the North Queensland, small-town environment proposed in the master-planned community. Sites as far north as Cooktown and as far south as the Whitsundays would be considered.

Project requirements:

1. purchase, set-up and installation in a local supermarket of a fully-featured networked touch-screen computer to enable interactive creation and delivery of community-generated news content, as well as news content from outside the community (from sites to be determined by surveyed users) ... \$15,000
2. purchase, set-up and installation in a local taxi cab or tourist shuttle of a fully-featured Tom-Tom GPS navigation system to enable interactive selection and reception of relevant news and other tourism content ... \$15,000
3. costs for researchers to travel to site to introduce the community to the project, engage, talk and consult with locals, implement and fine tune the equipment and content @ (per researcher) \$1,200 per return airfare + transfers; \$250 per day accom + meals, cost of researchers + research assistant approximately \$1000 per day. We estimate that this research would involve 10 days on site and another 10 days development at The University of Queensland and QUT in Brisbane (pre-deployment), followed by another 10 days of compilation and analysis of results back in Brisbane (spread over a period of 3-6 months) ... \$29,000 (site work); \$40,000 (R&D, analysis) = \$69,000
4. ***Estimated totals: \$99,000 (Figures are based on current equipment and service prices, to be confirmed in detail if proposal moves to formal submission stage.)***