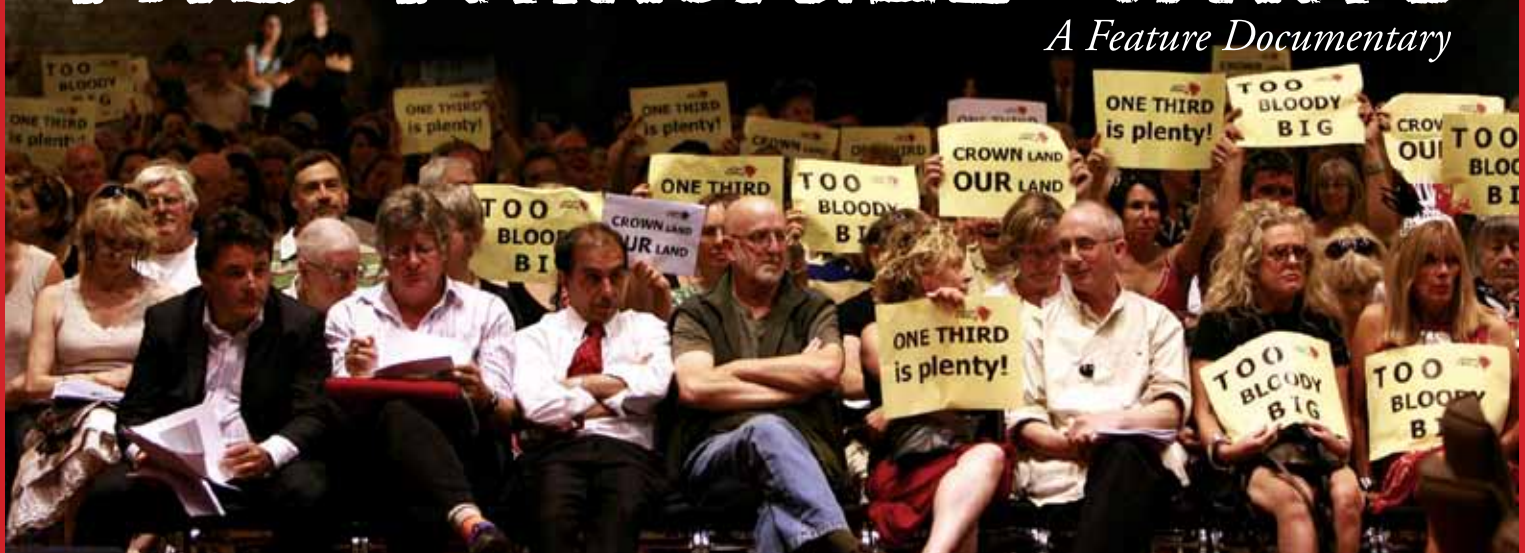


They saved paradise ...
including the parking lot!



THE TRIANGLE WARS

A Feature Documentary



A **STUDY GUIDE** MARGUERITE O'HARA



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

ISBN-13-978-1-74295-092-1

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>

A man with short brown hair, wearing a red t-shirt and a colorful, abstract patterned jacket, stands with his arms crossed in front of a large, vibrant mural. The mural features bold geometric shapes in black, yellow, orange, and green. In the background, a red and white striped building is visible under a clear blue sky.

THE TRIANGLE WARS

A CELEBRITY PHOTOGRAPHER

AN ECCENTRIC POLITICIAN

A HIGH-POWERED PROPERTY DEVELOPER

This is not just an economic choice. This is a social choice, this is a moral choice, this is a cultural choice ... in twenty years time when you look upon the vista of St Kilda, will you look at your children, your partners and your friends and say to them, 'that is the vista I ruined,' or will you tell them 'that is the area I stood up for ... and I saved'?

DANIELA RAULLI, ST KILDA RESIDENT

... A lot of people don't like change, you know, and just sorta wanna freeze it as it is. They love it as it is and they don't want an evolution to occur. But cities aren't like that, cities are always changing and I think that's great ... obviously that is the game I'm in ... the game of changing cities.

STEVE MCMILLAN, DEVELOPER



INTRODUCTION

A celebrity photographer. An eccentric politician. A high-powered property developer. A fierce battle to decide the fate of one of the most coveted foreshore development sites in Australia – the St Kilda Triangle.

In May 2007, the City of Port Phillip Council unveiled plans for a \$300 million development of the St Kilda Triangle site that would include 180 shops, a hotel, a supermarket, eight cinemas, a gallery and bars for 5000 patrons. Local residents were outraged, and with developers preparing to push the project through council, the community galvanised to stop it going ahead.

In this compelling story of democracy in action, truth proves stranger than fiction as accusations of betrayal, deceit and corruption abound. Filmed over three years, *The Triangle Wars* captures the fascinating battle between a passionate community, an intractable local government and a powerful development consortium, as heads roll and careers are destroyed.

CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

The Triangle Wars would be suitable for middle and senior secondary students across a number of curriculum areas, including:

- » Civics and Citizenship
- » Politics and Society
- » SOSE/HSIE
- » Media Studies



Learning outcomes addressed include:

Civics and Citizenship

- » understanding what active citizenship can mean

SOSE/HSIE/Politics and Society

- » understanding how citizens in a democracy can participate and respond to the decision-making processes of governments – in this case, local and state governments
- » observing a case study of the ways in which a community can generate media interest in a local issue
- » exploring how local pressure groups can change the balance of power in local councils through acting as powerful lobby groups
- » revealing the ways in which elected officials can lose their way when they are unprepared to deal openly, courteously and fairly with their constituents
- » understanding how a single local issue can galvanise people and reverberate throughout the community

Media Studies

- » exploring how the complexities of a contentious political or civic dispute can be presented on film
- » identifying the advantages of presenting a civic dispute through visual language rather than through a verbal account

Themes raised in this film related to the above learning outcomes include:

- » the erosion of democratic rights as economic and environmental pressures increase
- » the importance of transparency and honesty at all levels of government
- » the profound connection between individuals and the spaces we inhabit
- » the redefinition of urban space for the future – including environmental sustainability, the balance of commercial and open space and heritage planning
- » how collusion between government and business can impact on urban planning

- » the rights of citizens to protect and control their urban space
- » the compromises we must make on the way to a shared vision of community
- » the global struggle between private and public interests
- » the reduction of the value of urban spaces to purely monetary terms – commercial value only.

Through following the campaign – processes, setbacks and achievements – of a group of citizens opposing the project to re-develop a part of the St Kilda foreshore (the Triangle site), the film offers an entertaining and dramatic account of the ups and downs of using ‘people power’ to achieve change and ensure that local councils remain accountable for the decisions they make. It also shows how, when people work together, they can achieve outcomes that put community concerns for their suburb ahead of commercial developments.

Stories similar to that of the St Kilda Triangle site are regularly played out in suburbs and towns across Australia as citizens try to preserve

what makes their suburb or town a good place to live. These battles for justice are often played out in the face of powerful development consortiums and local councils whose own powers to act may be greatly limited by state planning laws. This story is truly a ‘David and Goliath’ battle, the outcome of which will set precedents for how local councils and citizen action groups conduct their business.

While some of the immediate background to this issue is presented in the film, it would probably be useful for teachers and students to read through the background information in this guide before watching the film. Understanding something of the history and identity of St Kilda, its diverse population and the history of the Triangle site is crucial to understanding the nature and intensity of this dispute over the development of a relatively small parcel of coastal land.

The pre-viewing questions are designed to encourage students to contextualise this local dispute within their understanding of civic disputes and the role of municipal councils in planning decisions and development projects.



BACKGROUND

1. About St Kilda

*I want to see the sun go down from
St Kilda Esplanade*

*Where the beach needs
reconstruction, where the palm
trees have it hard*

*I'd give you all of Sydney harbour
(all that land, all that water)*

For that one sweet promenade

**PAUL KELLY, 'FROM ST KILDA
TO KING'S CROSS'**

St Kilda is a beachside suburb on Port Phillip Bay, six kilometres from Melbourne. According to the 2006 Census the population was 16,122 although it is now estimated to be closer to 19,000. St Kilda has a colourful history, with a charm and beauty that over the years has attracted all kinds of people, some to settle and work and many others to visit. Once known as the Australian Riviera, many of its attractions, such as Luna Park and the Palais Theatre, are often described as 'iconic'. It is a destination for Melburnians, Australians and international visitors alike, a tourist hot spot with beaches and parks, live music venues, cafes, restaurants, pubs, art galleries, trams and a diverse community that includes European migrants and their descendants, many of whom settled in St Kilda after World War Two. St Kilda is also home to many artists, writers and musicians. Over the past thirty years it has become a popular destination for visiting backpackers, attracted by its vibrancy and nightlife, short-term employment opportunities and proximity to the city.

Like many other inner-city suburbs all over the world, especially those on waterfronts, St Kilda has become an increasingly desirable and expensive place to live; as professional people buy up the houses and apartments, there has also been a change in how residents regard their suburb. There are a number of welfare organisations and rooming houses in St Kilda (though many of these are disappearing),

where people down on their luck, some of them homeless, find support and services through organisations such as the Sacred Heart Mission.

There is also a sex industry in St Kilda. Street sex workers, nightclubs, alcohol, drugs, the all-night partying and parking problems that often accompany these activities, do not always sit well with residents. While attracted to the colour and diversity of St Kilda, people also want to be able to enjoy the place where they live and its myriad attractions. The changing demographics and gentrification of St Kilda has inevitably resulted in more people being actively involved in how the suburb and its natural and man-made assets are managed by the Port Phillip council, the locally elected body responsible for many of the planning processes and decisions that affect people's lives.

2. The Triangle site

What is the St Kilda Triangle and why has its proposed re-development aroused such passions in the local community?

The use of the land on the lower esplanade of the St Kilda foreshore has a long and colourful history. In 1906, the St Kilda Council reclaimed the foreshore land from the Crown and terraced rockery gardens were constructed to the design of Italian engineer Carlo Catani who came to Melbourne in 1885. These extensive gardens with palm trees and rotundas are still known as the Catani Gardens. There have been three Palais theatres on the land adjacent to the Triangle site, the present building dating from 1926. Originally designed as a live theatre, in 1929 it also started operating as a cinema.

In 1998 the State Government was reported as threatening to sell the Triangle site which had really only been used for car parking since the closure of Little Luna Park in 1973. In 2001, the Council's *St Kilda Foreshore Urban Design Framework* committee began planning what to do with the site. The government handed management of the site to the City of Port Phillip, the mega-council created by the State Government in

1994 when the three existing councils, St Kilda, South Melbourne and Port Melbourne were amalgamated.

The council invited tenders to be submitted for a \$300 million development in a two-year process and fifteen groups responded. Three submissions were short-listed including that of the Citta Property Group from Sydney whose proposal was eventually accepted. While providing public space, it also included 30,000 square metres of retail including a supermarket, an underground car park, cinemas, a live music venue and a nightclub. The 1926 Palais Theatre would be refurbished. Some people suggested that 'no live music venue has ever survived in a shopping centre'.

The notion of building a huge commercial development on Crown Land is central to this conflict. People were angry because Crown Land, which is owned by the people of Victoria and intended to be used for community benefit, was being virtually handed over to a private developer for ninety-nine years. If the development had gone ahead, it could have created a precedent for development on Crown Land throughout the state.

In June 2007, the Palace Nightclub in another building that was part of the foreshore site, was badly damaged by fire thought to have been started by vandals. Graffiti read, 'Chadstone by the Bay – this venue will suck the soul and music from St Kilda' and 'Yuppies don't rock, they suck'.

The proposed development included 181 shops. St Kilda already had a number of shopping strips, in Acland, Carlisle, Barkly and Fitzroy Streets and three large supermarkets servicing different parts of the suburb. Existing shop owners were naturally uneasy about this new retail proposal. There was a good deal of community unease and public concern and commentary about the style and size of the project.

To read more about the proposed development and the growing opposition that led to the formation of unChain St Kilda, see <<http://www.skhs.org.au/~SKHSbuildings/PDF/3.pdf>>.

The unChain St Kilda timeline is at <<http://unChainstKilda.org/timeline.html>>.

Read the editorial in *The Age* newspaper from December 2007, outlining the dimensions of the issue at <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/editorial/the-government-must-strike-a-note-on-the-st-kilda-triangle/2007/12/04/1196530676921.html>>.

3. Pre-viewing questions

- » How many different communities do you belong to, e.g. family, school or sports teams, town, suburb, city, region, state or country?
- » What responsibilities and/or rights does being a member of a community involve?
- » Name your local shire or council. What are the main responsibilities of shire or suburban councils?
- » Go to the Municipal Association of Victoria website <<http://www.mav.asn.au/about-local-government/local-government-services/Pages/Local-government-services.aspx>> for an overview of local council responsibilities. When you have read through this brief summary, type the name of your council or municipality into a search engine and investigate the roles and responsibilities of your local council. Most councils have comprehensive well-indexed websites detailing their activities, responsibilities and policies.
- » Are councillors and local mayors paid for their work? Do you need special skills or qualifications to stand for election to your local shire or municipal council?
- » Are councillors generally members of, and/or endorsed by political parties such as the Labor Party, the Greens, the Liberal Party, etc., or do they generally stand as independents with a particular platform of promises?
- » How are the activities of local councils funded?
- » How can individuals who live in a particular region or suburb become actively involved in the activities of local government?
- » What are some of the issues that often precipitate involvement in council and shire business?
- » Name three ways in which people can make their views about a council decision known to their local councillors?

- » If you strongly object to a council decision, whether about planning, the environment, charges for rubbish removal, changes to use of public parks, liquor licensing laws such as changes to hotel and nightclub hours and venue size, how would you go about having a council decision changed?
- » Have you or your family ever been involved in organised opposition to a council or government decision that you thought was wrong?

People – politicians, activists, celebrities and citizens

There are several different perspectives about the proposed development of the Triangle site presented in this documentary. Politics is always about people and, like St Kilda itself, the personalities in this film are colourful and eccentric. The three men at the heart of this conflict are driven by a desire to win the battle for a variety of reasons. However, as you watch the film, you will see and hear from others whose personalities may be less colourful, but whose contribution to the outcome is equally important.





Key figures in the film

Serge Thomann (above) – A celebrity photographer by trade who got his break in Australia photographing Michael Hutchence in the 1980s. Outraged by the plans for the Triangle site, he trades the red carpet for council meetings and emerges as the public face of the community opposition group unChain St Kilda. French-born, the son of a small-town mayor, Serge's penchant for outrageous oratory and theatrics, combined with a savvy understanding of the media and public perception, prove to be formidable assets in the political arena.

Dick Gross (above right) – A twelve-year council veteran and former mayor who is equally charismatic and singular. He doesn't exactly fit into the standard mould of a politician. Favouring garish, traffic-stopping sports coats and fluoro Doc Martens over staid business suits, and unapologetic bluntness over political double-speak, Gross is in many ways an embodiment of the community he serves. A witty, animated bohemian dilettante (author, lawyer, former ballet dancer) of independent means, he has an innate understanding of the anomalies and contradictions that define St Kilda. Determined to cement his legacy in the community, he champions the Triangle development and unwittingly provokes the ire of his friends, neighbours and constituents.



Steve McMillan (above) – The CEO of Citta Group, the developers who successfully tendered to re-develop the Triangle site. This Sydney property developer does his best to watch the proceedings from the sidelines as he waits to break ground. For McMillan, the Triangle is just the latest in a long-line of high-profile, controversial projects including Fox Studios, Bondi Junction and the award-winning Aurora Place. Witty, acerbic, dispassionate and with a steely resolve, McMillan has weathered community resistance many times before. But as the unChain campaign gains momentum and the brutal arrival of the Global Financial Crisis sends investors and tenants running scared, McMillan finds himself in a very unfamiliar place – on the back foot.



Famous faces

There are a number of high-profile locals appearing in this film, all opposed to the proposed development. They include actor **Rachel Griffiths** (below, right) whose mother Anna is one of the founding members of unChain St Kilda, television and radio personalities and comedians **Dave Hughes** and **Kate Langbroek**, artist **Mirka Mora** (below, left), actor **Jane Turner** and comedian and actor **Magda Szubanski**.

The councillors and council staff

The City of Port Phillip Council represents several inner-Melbourne bayside suburbs including Port Melbourne, Albert Park, Middle Park, Elwood and St Kilda. Apart from Dick Gross, members of the 2007 council appearing in the film include Janet Cribbes, the Mayor of Port Phillip, Janet Bolitho, the previous mayor, Darren Ray, another long-term councillor, Judith Klepner and Frank O'Connor, a member of the 2009 council.

David Spokes was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the City of Port Phillip until he resigned in January 2009.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

A. Watching the film

There is a lot happening in this documentary which was filmed over three years between 2007 and 2010. As you watch the film, select one of the following characters and one other aspect of the film on which to focus your attention, e.g. Serge Thomann and the musical soundtrack or Judith Klepner and St Kilda itself. Make brief notes and share your impressions with others later. Identify each individual's role in the events, select a key scene and jot down your impressions.

TABLE 1

CHARACTER OR FILM ELEMENT	ROLE IN THE DISPUTE AND/OR THE FILM	KEY SCENE(S)	IMPRESSIONS
Serge Thomann			
Steve McMillan			
Dick Gross			
Judith Klepner			
Local celebrities			
St Kilda			
Musical soundtrack			
Use of the media by unChain St Kilda			
Use of iconic images of Luna Park as metaphors for the twists and turns in the dispute			

B. Civic and political disputes

Being an active citizen in a society can involve standing up for what you believe in by participating in a number of ways, some more direct than others. You can write letters or emails to your local representative, sign petitions, join a protest group, leaflet householders, go to the media and march in protest marches. While all disputes have different elements, there are many common factors and usually one group holds more economic power than the other.

Voting to change your elected representatives is the ultimate power people can exercise in a democracy, but it is sometimes necessary to act more immediately to overturn decisions you believe are not right for a community.

Fill out the table below by answering the questions outlining the major elements in any dispute between governments and citizens. Keep in mind that just because something is legal, this does not necessarily make it right. Some laws need to be challenged.

You can use this table to make notes on the stages in the St Kilda Triangle dispute or a local dispute you may be familiar with. This could be concerned with water allocation, flood prevention, the proposed expansion of an airport or building of a new tollway or a proposal to build a twelve-storey housing block on top of your local railway station in a suburb where buildings over two storeys are uncommon.

TABLE 2

POLITICAL DISPUTES – LOCAL, NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL

What is the dispute?
Who are the main parties to the dispute?
Why is it an issue in the community?
Who has raised the issue – a particular person or group, a political party, a media report?
Why has the issue been raised at this time?
Who stands to lose or benefit from the outcome?
Who is affected by the issue? (Different groups and individuals may be affected in different ways)
What is the community reaction? Is it possible to accurately measure the feelings of a community of 16,000+ people without putting the issue to a vote such as a referendum?
What is the main concern of each side in the debate?
Have all voices been heard?
What actions have been taken?
What actions should be taken now?
How has social media been used to publicise the issue?

C. The St Kilda Triangle dispute

Here is an outline of the major stages in the St Kilda Triangle dispute from when the Citta/Babcock & Brown Group development proposal was accepted by the City of Port Phillip.

May 2007 – Agreement signed between the Council, the State Government and Citta group outlining the legal and financial terms and conditions of the development and the obligations on each of the parties. Documents not made public – ‘commercial in confidence’.

Public invited to information sessions that devoted a lot of time to the developer’s proposal while essentially ignoring the concerns of residents.

5,500 written submissions opposing the Triangle plan submitted to council on grounds that it distorted the council’s own *Urban Design Framework* recommendations.

December 2007 – Decision to approve, approve with modifications or reject the Citta proposal deferred by council at a meeting attended by more than 900 citizens.

February 2008 – Council approved the project. More than 2000 people called for the resignation of councillors and officers.

2008–2009 – Fallout

November 2008 – in council elections all but one of the councillors who had supported the Triangle were either defeated or resigned. A new council which included several opponents of the Triangle site, as well as other Independents was elected.

January 2009 – Port Phillip CEO David Spokes resigned

August 2009 – State Government Ombudsman’s report into council practices reveals ‘poor procurement and contract management processes, failure to demonstrate transparency, honesty and probity in decision making, conflict of interest and staff misconduct’.

February 2009 – unChain St Kilda sought a decision at VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal) that the Council’s approval of the Triangle Development Plan was invalid because it did not comply with the council’s own planning scheme and *Urban Design Framework*. VCAT found against unChain St Kilda but noted the concerns raised by the community should be considered by the council at the next stage – that of issuing planning permits. As the legal loser at VCAT, unChain St Kilda were excused from paying the \$157,000 legal costs involved in bringing the action.

December 2009 – the new Port Phillip council, led by recently elected mayor, Frank O’Connor, reached an agreement with the developer to terminate the Triangle Agreement development. The City of Port Phillip agreed to pay the developer \$5 million over three financial years. Six of the seven councillors voted to accept the termination. Port Melbourne representative, Janet Bolitho, who was Mayor of the previous council that oversaw the selection of the winning bid, maintained her support of the project.



- » Describe some of the different kinds of actions – demonstrations, marches, legal challenges, petitions and media events – that were taken by unChain St Kilda and others objecting to the proposed development of the Triangle site. Refer to actions we see in the film as well as the ones mentioned in the timeline on page 10 of this guide.
- » What do you think were some of the main advantages unChain St Kilda had in mounting and persisting with their opposition to the proposed development?
- » How important is an understanding of the media, as well as an ability and preparedness to stage visually compelling events, in drawing public attention to a local issue?
- » What are the advantages for a protest group such as unChain St Kilda in having members such as lawyers and architects who understand and are able to clearly explain the legal and planning processes involved?
- » What do you think are the most important factors in mounting a successful protest action – persistence, time, media skills, celebrity support, legal know-how, money, an understanding of planning laws, an awareness of local history, passionate commitment? Which of the above factors was unChain St Kilda able to utilise in their fight?
- » Is it possible to identify mistakes made by the City of Port Phillip

council and some officers during this process? In what ways are some decisions shown to have been made without adequate public consultation?

- » What price and cost did the employment of management consultants, including Caroline Shahbaz, have on public perceptions of accountable council practices?
- » How can a well-organised community group influence governing bodies such as councils in ways that are more powerful than when an individual acts alone?
- » What is at the heart of the development proposal that Steve McMillan says necessitates the commercial aspect of the development, i.e. shops, pubs and nightclubs?
- » Who is alleged to have been likely to benefit either directly or indirectly from the implementation of this development?
- » Could more skilled public relations, and consultation meetings with locals, have resulted in a different outcome in this dispute? What would you have done if you had been working for the developers to present the project in a more positive way?
- » The Global Financial Crisis, beginning in 2008, had an effect on many developments worldwide. What effect, allied with online shopping options, does the GFC continue to have on many retail outlets?

D. Making The Triangle Wars

The Triangle Wars was directed, edited and narrated by Rosie Jones, a St Kilda resident. It is her first feature-length documentary. Jones directed *Westall '66: A Suburban UFO Mystery* (2010), a documentary about a widely observed and reported UFO sighting over a Melbourne suburb that occurred in 1966. She also directed *Obsessed with Walking* (2010), a film about writer Will Self and his obsession with walking. Like *The Triangle Wars*, these earlier films are about people's sometimes quirky and eccentric passions; they all deal with particular events and personalities that reflect much broader issues.

Here is the director's statement about *The Triangle Wars* (emphases [bolding] are those of the writer of this guide, not the director)

Director's Statement:

When producers Lizzette Atkins and Peter George asked me to take on the task of directing The Triangle Wars, they were already well into shooting it. Pulling together crews at short notice and on no budget, they'd managed to capture some extraordinarily dramatic moments as the battle over the Triangle development escalated.

I jumped at the opportunity to be involved. This was a story set in my own community, with most of the action taking place within a few hundred metres of my front door. I knew the key players, the background, the politics. What none of us knew was how the story would develop and resolve.

It seemed unlikely that the protestors would win. There are many precedents where resident action groups have rallied against developments, but very few where they have actually stopped them going ahead. In this case, the State Government had delegated control of the Triangle site to Port Phillip Council, and it was obvious the Council wanted the development to proceed.

MAIN CREW OF THE TRIANGLE WARS

Director and editor	Rosie Jones
Writer	David Tiley
Producers	Lizzette Atkins and Peter George
Director of photography	Michael Williams
Narrator	Rosie Jones
Cinematographer	Shyam Ediriwerra

What drove the protestors was a deep-seated desire to connect with their surroundings and control the space in which they lived with their neighbours. The odds were stacked against them, but they approached the fight strategically, harnessing the power of social networking and the media to engage the community and enlist support. With architects, lawyers and ex-councillors on their team, they had 'insider' knowledge of the machinations of local government and planning policy.

Our aim was to shoot the unfolding drama from all sides of the debate – to present different perspectives and let the audience make up their own minds. Luckily for us, the councillors and the developer were happy to be involved and were surprisingly frank.

What emerged as we filmed and edited were three passionate, engaging and articulate characters – Serge Thomann from the protestors, Councillor Dick Gross and the developer Steve McMillan – who represented the three sides of the Triangle story. The other 'character' that emerged was St Kilda itself.

St Kilda has always been a progressive place, diverse, eclectic, welcoming and forgiving. It's also a beach that evokes the same passion people have for the sea's edge right around Australia – a place that is public, collective, sensual and beyond ownership. An ancient sand dune on the edge of a bay that creates space and air in crowded lives, it is painted with the colours and moods of a distinctive weather and ecology.

At the heart of this struggle is a passion for place. It's not about words or logic – it's about the experience of a space of light and air, sea and masonry, history and transience. It's the sublime stage on which our characters live and interact, with opposing players sometimes living next door to each other.

To capture this, we've filmed images that evoke the feel of St Kilda – the hot summer nights full of traffic and people, the palm trees and the pleasure grounds.

We've used evocative archive of old St Kilda to make its history tangible and link us with the past, including very early films of Luna Park, the

beach and the Palais Theatre, and photographer Rennie Ellis's wonderful stills from the 1970s and 1980s.

As Luna Park is right next door to the Triangle site, and the Triangle site itself used to be called Little Luna Park, we use the rollercoaster and the carousel as metaphors for the unbelievable twists and turns of the narrative and our music is carnivalesque in tone.

Artist and unChain St Kilda supporter Mirka Mora, whose European outlook changed the culture of St Kilda in the 1950s, brings the history of St Kilda to vivid life. It was actually signed prints of Mirka's painting of St Kilda pier that raised around \$300,000 towards unChain St Kilda's legal challenges to the proposal.

Incorporating this historical perspective enables us to reflect on the changing connections between people and place, and links our story with the broader philosophical questions that face every community around Australia and internationally, as we struggle to come to grips with the effects of huge economic and environmental change.



In the end, filming and editing The Triangle Wars took us four years. We shot about 230 hours of footage and spent months in the editing room weaving together the strands of the story to retain the subtlety, humour and complexity we experienced as we filmed.

It was a matter of good timing for the protestors that bigger issues – such as changing community attitudes to alcohol and violence, the densification of inner-urban spaces and the global financial crisis – intersected with the groundswell of community opposition and culminated in a dramatic Council election that sealed the fate of the Triangle. The swift resolution of the struggle a year later surprised us all.

This is a ‘David and Goliath’ story about a group of people who take on government and big business in a fight to protect their democratic rights. It’s tragic, it’s funny and it reaches into the heart of what it means to be part of a community.

Whether the audience is from St Kilda or St Petersburg, whether they are aware of the issues or not, I’m sure they will be

drawn into the story by its passionate characters and universal themes.

- » On the City of Port Phillip website <<http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au>> you can see the Port Phillip logo. What are some of the icons of St Kilda incorporated into this symbol?
 - » Describe some of the images of St Kilda that we see in the film. In what sense can some of the places and vistas shown be described as ‘iconic’? Discuss what this word means today as it is applied to places, people and images.
 - » How are ‘the passion for place’, and the particular beauty of St Kilda, evoked in the film?
 - » What part does music play in this film, i.e. how is it used to create suspense and reflect the atmosphere of this seaside suburb?
 - » Making political issues visual and cinematic is always a challenge for filmmakers, whether they are making a film about the financial crisis, a political dispute or a scientific issue. (Note the favoured
- images of politicians in hard hats or kissing babies or tripping in the news media). Mute the audio for the first two or three minutes of this film and see how the visuals convey the sense of place that is expressed in St Kilda’s history.
 - » Is a fair range of views represented in this film? Are the different viewpoints and arguments given equal time and weight in how they are presented?
 - » Why do you think so few people who support the proposal, apart from Councillor Dick Gross, speak on camera?
 - » How do you think the director’s position in relation to this issue is revealed in the film?
 - » What effect do you think the real-time footage of television news reports about different stages of the opposition to the development and stories about the council’s conduct, including the employment of change management consultant Caroline Shahbaz, might have on how viewers respond to the dispute?



E. The language of politics, protest and commitment

How people talk about a political issue can greatly affect the way it is perceived in the community. Often, public relations experts, sometimes referred to as 'spin doctors', are engaged by political groups to present an issue in a positive light in the media.

The language used to characterise an issue can sometimes be inflammatory or hyperbolic (exaggerated) as we see and hear in this dispute. People like to use grand historical analogies to characterise their protest, invoking figures such as Ghandi and De Gaulle. Here are some of the things people said in the film.

» Try to identify the speaker of each of the following statements from the main figures in this conflict – Steve McMillan, Dick Gross, Serge Thomann, unChain St Kilda residents and other councillors.

1. *We are creating a significant amount of public open space and the edge of the public space will have a pathway on it, which we call the Yellow Brick Road ... and this is an animation as if you were walking along the yellow brick road, so it gives you, I think, a very compelling idea of what it would be like to be walking along there and to be able to have unencumbered views, enhanced views of the foreshore.*

We also, in our approach to this project wanted to do something which meant that it had an everyday role in people's lives here in St Kilda. That's why we have incorporated a supermarket and a convenience shopping area.

2. *I love the history of St Kilda because it was in the turn of the century and before 1870, in 1850 when it was called the Riviera, like in France. There were very wealthy people who lived there and very poor people who used to live there too. There were a lot of people who just came from boat and migrated to Australia. St Kilda is special really. You can bathe in the sea, in very sexy little swimsuit. You have restaurants by the seaside. Its romantic isn't it to be on the seaside? I don't know why we love the seaside – because it is*

very dangerous and yet, the more dangerous it is the more we love it. St Kilda had a certain reputation. I wasn't too sure what it was, but it was slightly lascivious and I liked it, yes.

3. *I mean St Kilda is not hard to get. People sort of philosophise about it or carry on about it, like it's not that hard. Okay, it's an artsy community, it's got this, it's got that, blah blah blah. Yeah, I get it. But so is Darlinghurst in Sydney or so's Venice Beach in Los Angeles! You know like, you know to the extent where there's, OK I know I got it, you know it's not that hard! And you read a few of the books, you read the planning documents. Da, da, da, and you sort of got the spirit.*
4. *This is one of the best moments of my life. I love revolution. (laughs) The core people of unChain St Kilda are retired architects, ex-councillors, lawyers, teachers and locals. This is a big issue and we have already collected 3,000 objections in just a week.*
5. *Who are they? I mean they are just a bunch of guys in the community, fair enough. They are entitled to form their own association but you know [there are] 100,000 people in this municipality, and there's 4 million in this city. Why do we have to be dictated to by a group of 100 people? It's ridiculous! You can't run the state or the municipality on that basis. That these pressure groups can become the quasi approval authority.*

Generally, the people who are opposed to it are quite old. Not that I'm young, they're old (laughs) ... and they've got nothing else to do in their lives; so probably you know they're just sitting there, drinking their lattes, and you know ... waiting for the next step.
6. *You have to forgive me if I sound a tad emotional. After all it is our place that you are trying to flog for 300 million pieces of silver. According to you, the council, we need an over-blown development to finance the restoration of the heritage-listed Palais. This should be the province of the state government, which has recently announced a pre-budget surplus of over half a billion dollars.*

7. *I was part of the council that had the culture of saying 'No' to everything.*

By saying 'no', we got a feeling of virtuous righteousness. But we were as impotent as a pre-Viagra seventy year old. We were getting nothing done in terms of effective, coherent decision-making about land use in our patch. Now my fear is, if you say no too often, the state government will just come in and go, 'Whooshka' and impose a solution which will be worse. I promise you that, it will be worse.

8. *There is loveliness in this proposal.*
9. *At every meeting, we asked questions of the Chief Executive Officer, and of the Mayor. And we were given no answers ... we were treated with contempt.*
10. *The real battle here is what sort of community do we want to live in? And to live in a desirable community, we have to be able to stand up for ourselves. The great community organiser last century, Mahatma Ghandi had this to say about people who tried to change their society. He said, 'First of all, they ignore you. And then, they laugh at you. And then, they fight you, and then, you win.' We will.*
11. *Against all odds, we have stopped a very unpopular development, but our fight has brought together and united a whole new community. From all walks of life. And tonight, not only have we not broken St Kilda's heart, St Kilda's heart and soul is stronger than ever before. And that's really what I'm proud of tonight. So, we won!*
12. *As my old boss used to say, 'there's always another pretty girl around the corner,' so you sort of, you know what I mean? You move on and you deal with it because there is another pretty girl around the corner so we'll go and see, go and find her. Right? In fact, we've already found her on three or four fronts.*

» How would you characterise the language of the three main protagonists in this dispute – McMillan, Gross and Thomann? What does the nature of their language and use of hyperbole reveal about each one?

F. Documentary style

The Triangle Wars is a documentary, dealing with a real situation. There are several different types of documentary film. These include:

- a. A 'fly on the wall' approach which is observational and seems to make no judgements
 - b. A balanced presentation of the viewpoints of the major sides, allowing viewers to draw their own conclusions
 - c. An informative account of a social issue that is supported by statistical information and facts about the topic. Science documentaries often use this relatively objective approach
 - d. A presentation that essentially represents one view about an issue while giving some time to alternative views
 - e. A completely one-sided or partisan presentation designed to inform and persuade viewers to agree with the position of the filmmakers about the issue
- » Which of these five types (a, b, c, d or e) do you think best describes the style of *The Triangle Wars*?
 - » Is it ever possible, or desirable, to present a completely balanced account of a dispute or a social issue?
 - » How important is it to present an issue with some humour, particularly when the people involved may be quite self-regarding in their political ambitions?
 - » List the different kinds of material that are used to tell this story, e.g. archival footage, direct to camera statements, etc.?
- » How can the framing and close-ups of people's faces reveal something of their feelings and thoughts, even when they do not speak, as happens in this film?
 - » What kind of film do you think the developers, in conjunction with the council, might have made to persuade people that their proposed development would be a good thing for St Kilda and its residents and visitors?
 - » Discuss how a film about St Kilda and this dispute is able to provide a more complex account of the nature of the conflict and the views of the people at the heart of the story than a written account? Explain what a film is able to do that goes well beyond a written account of the dispute.
 - » How do the slogans on banners and chanted by protestors succinctly express the strength and convictions of the protest group?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Where to now? Have your say

In 2011, four years on from the start of this dispute and its eventual scuttling by the council, the Triangle site is still a car park on the St Kilda foreshore. Here is a recently published article from a local newspaper about what is happening in 2011.

ST KILDA TRIANGLE FORUMS TO ENGAGE

» 7 June 2011 @ 06:48am by Natalie White

THE controversial St Kilda Triangle will be the focus of talks starting soon.

Port Phillip Council has launched the first stage of an extensive community engagement program about the future of the Triangle site.

A plan to develop the car park was scrapped in late 2009, with Port Phillip Council agreeing to pay out developer Citta \$5 million over three years to abandon its unpopular plans for a retail and entertainment complex.

Styled as a community conversation with residents, workers and businesses, the first phase will see the council meet 40 members of the public in an ideas forum.

Representatives include members of unchain St Kilda, representatives from the Stokehouse and the St Kilda Novotel, members of the Fitzroy and Acland streets Traders' Associations, specialist planners and architects and council staff.

Mayor Rachel Powning said she was hugely excited that the council had started the process of 'real community engagement'.

'With an issue as important as the St Kilda Triangle site, it would be unacceptable to do anything less,' Cr Powning said.

'We want to ensure that the community has real ownership of whatever the final plans for the site are.'

The forum is the first opportunity to discuss ideas before the council begins wider discussions later in the year.

'For many years there was a great deal of angst about this project,' Cr Powning said.

'This council is proud to have put an end to what we, and the community, saw as an inappropriate development.'

'Council remains totally committed to putting the views of local people at the heart of this project.'

<http://port-phillip-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/st-kilda-triangle-forums-to-engage/>

Go to the City of Port Phillip website <<http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/stkildatriangle.htm>>.

- » Look at the position and size of the Triangle site, as well as its relationship to other buildings and its beachside location
- » Suggest ways you think it could be developed or used that will:
 - a. benefit the whole community – residents and visitors alike
 - b. be sustainable
 - c. be cost effective
 - d. ensure the sea views are not impeded
 - e. respect the historic aspects of the site
- » Who do you think should fund the development and maintenance of public spaces such as the land around city beaches and other tourist attractions which are visited and enjoyed by people from all over Melbourne, Victoria and beyond?
- » In some parts of Europe, such as Italy, visitors pay to use beaches to offset the cost of rubbish cleaning and beach cleaning. Do you think visitors should be asked to contribute to the maintenance of beaches in Australia through parking fees or entrance fees to beaches?
- » How can commercial developments on public land such as waterfronts be commercially viable while respecting the sensitivities and wishes of the local community?

2. The three tiers of government – federal, state, local

For clear information about the different roles of federal, state and local governments, download this Fact Sheet from the Parliamentary Education Office website <<http://www.peo.gov.au/students/cl/multi.html>>.

- » Are we over-governed?
- » Should local councils be done away with and their roles in planning and environment given to State and Federal Government departments?
- » Corruption and payment in relation to planning issues are sometimes thought to be a part of some local governments in Australia. How do you think negative perceptions about the awarding of council tenders for work and development can be avoided?

- » What do you understand by the following terms, frequently used in relation to decisions made by governments and local councils

- a. Transparency
- b. Accountability
- c. Commercial in confidence
- d. Community consultation

Give some examples from *The Triangle Wars* that indicate how each of these terms concerning honesty, openness and integrity were not properly addressed, respected practised or sometimes even abused by the City of Port Phillip council and some of its officers.

3. The place where I live

- » What would motivate you to take an active part in civic action?

Most towns, suburbs and communities have their own unique features that residents appreciate and value, whether this is landmarks, views, buildings, open spaces, natural features or particular customs. Either through photos or in writing, outline the most important and even unique aspects of the area or place where you live.

Describe the kind of possible threats to your community and environment that would motivate you to take direct action, whether in response to planning decisions or in relation to the use or misuse of community facilities.





REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

The City of Port Phillip website with information about planning processes and the Triangle site includes images, aerial maps and a place where individuals and groups can contribute their views about how the site should be developed:

<http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au>

St Kilda Historical Society account of the history of the Palais Theatre and The Triangle site:

<http://www.skhs.org.au/~SKHSbuildings/PDF/3.pdf>

This document includes an excellent resource list of material related to the Triangle site dispute.

unChain St Kilda website which includes a timeline of their activities:

<http://unchainstkilda.org/timeline.html>

A 2009 **article from *Architecture and Design*** magazine decrying the council decision to scrap the proposed Citta Group Triangle development, suggesting that the decision is regressive and economically disastrous for developers. This article includes a number of computer-generated images of what was proposed for the site:

<http://www.architectureanddesign.com.au/article/Outrage-over-St-Kilda-Triangles-death/507895.aspx>

The Age newspaper editorial from December 2007 about the Triangle controversy:

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/editorial/the-government-must-strike-a-note-on-the-st-kilda-triangle/2007/12/04/1196530676921.html>



This study guide was produced by **ATOM**. (© ATOM 2011)
ISBN-13-978-1-74295-092-1 **editor@atom.org.au**

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