



## TRANSCRIPT

2018 Melbourne Insights

### PANEL DISCUSSION: PROGRESSIVE MELBOURNE

#### Speaker Key:

- JG Jane Gazzo (host)
- SK Stuart Kollmorgen, Deputy Chair, Victorian Pride Centre
- SC Seb Chan, Chief Experiences Officer, ACMI
- BS Ben Sellenger, Director, BastionLive
- AM Audience Member

JG On progressive creativity. Melbourne has a history of grassroots activism, an arts and culture scene, founded by the gold rush era, and a pioneering technology arena. Melbourne is a city in endless pursuit of self-expression and evolving response to the world through progressive and courageous creativity. While not intrinsically linked, progressive technology, social and arts have all thrived in Melbourne.

It's a city that brings together collections of disparate ideas in ways that haven't otherwise been connected. A unique panel we have for you this morning that's brought together by Melbourne's self-expression, and I'd like to welcome to the stage, from Bastion, who's leading the charge in the esports movement, Ben Sellenger. Welcome, Ben.

I'd also like to welcome the chief experiences officer from ACMI, that's the Australian Centre for Moving Image, Seb Chan. Welcome, Seb. And the deputy chair of the Pride Centre, and St Kilda will be the home of a brand new Pride Centre in 2020, I'm sure you're going to fill us all in on that, I'd like to welcome Stuart Kollmorgen from the Pride Centre.

Progressive creativity, specifically in Melbourne. I don't know if you read that article a few years back, but the former editor of The Sunday Age, Gay Alcorn, once wrote that politically, socially and culturally, Victorians are a breed apart from other Australians. Of course, she was talking about the way we voted, and a lot of her predictions actually came true in that particular article, the way we were voting, and that's just been seen in the State Election, but what is it about Melbourne that enables people to feel free to self-express through technology, socially and artistically, compared to other cities? Who'd like to take that?

SK I'll kick off, if that's all right?

JG Please do.

SK Obviously, I'm coming from an LGBTIQ perspective on this, and I think it's probably a good barometer of any city's progression, acceptance, tolerance, outward-looking approach. The city

of Melbourne had the highest vote in the Marriage Equality vote, not that we loved the process but, having said that, the outcomes of it have actually supported our positioning.

And also, the city that we're in now, Port Phillip, had the third-highest vote of any electorate in Australia, the second was the city of Sydney, so we're very fortunate in terms of where we're based, here in St Kilda. The former prime minister described Victoria as the Massachusetts of Australia, which I actually quite like, the thinking behind that, but where I think the maths is interesting is we are also 33% of the nation. So if you can't win here, you can't win.

JG Do you want to add to that, Seb?

SC Yes. I think as someone who grew up in Sydney and moved here from New York, I think Melbourne's an amazing city and it's an amazing city that has a long history of being progressive, and also one that is engaged with culture in quite a different way too, I think, where I've lived in the past. And where I work now, the idea that you would have a national museum of film, TV and video games, where else in Australia, let alone the world, would you find that?

And I think that builds on the history of digital art in this city, stretching back to the '70s and '80s, and also the history of cinemas in this city too. Cinemas have been part of Melbourne culture since the '50s, and the prevalence of those, those disappeared from many other cities around Australia. And now, we also see the amazing video game developer scene here, as well as players, that sort of sense that there's a real density of creativity, and that density is supported by the presence of the universities in the middle of the city, which is very similar to New York. And also, all of the things that Shane Homan just also spoke about.

It's a place where people can think and play and go out and see great bands, go out to fabulous clubs. We didn't hear anything about the amazing club scene here, but there's amazing music being made here which also feeds into all of the other things. Video game-makers, filmmakers, need people who make music for their games. Filmmakers.

JG And we haven't even touched on Melbourne being the third-largest city for comedy. We've got one of the biggest comedy festivals in the world, and some of the best comedians have come through there as well. Would you like to add to that?

BS That level of creativity is really fed by, as Shane was talking to you, that high student population, the high number of students coming out of comms and tech, I think it's a third of all the numbers all across Australia, the high level of co-working space that really, really assists some of the...

JG Shared space now is a real buzzword, and open plan and...

BS Yes, and it's growing exponentially in Melbourne, something like 900% over the last three or four years, up to about 170 spots across Melbourne. And then, also, being exacerbated by the level of funding, whether it's government funding through Creative Victoria into the arcade, things like game publishing, development, are into private funding, into start-ups. So I think all that feeds that creativity in Melbourne.

JG With your line of work in esports, how is Melbourne working for you? How is Melbourne working for you as a city in the field of work that you do? How does it feed into...?

BS It's an interesting one with esports because, to a large extent, there can be no home, it's an industry that it doesn't really matter where you live. Having said that, though, Melbourne, and Visit Victoria, have been at the forefront, and with the launch of the Esports Open, the Melbourne Esports Open, this year, which is the first really of its kind, trying to bring together a

multitude of different games, it is probably trying to force-fit a sporting structure into esports, but it was really well received, big crowds, and I think it's something that will grow enormously in the coming years. And increasing on the back of that, you're seeing a lot of other state governments trying to rush into that space and think, what can we grab a hold of in this ecosystem.

JG The Pride Centre, this is really special, do you want to tell us a little bit about this?

SK Yes. So this has been a long time coming: Australia's first Pride Centre, along the boulevard, here on Fitzroy Street. The location was a fascinating decision that we, as a board, needed to make. St Kilda area has the highest proportion of same-sex couples in Victoria, so it was sort of obvious from that perspective. There's a lot of growth north as well, so we need to make sure that we're outreaching to the entire city and state, but at the same time, this was the logical home for the Pride Centre. It's really wanted by Port Phillip Council.

We have great support from the Minister for Equality and Creative Arts, Minister Foley, who's also the member for Albert Park, but it's not just the Labour government in Victoria that's been supportive; we've also got DGR, which is Deductible Gift Recipient status, which the federal government has supported us in getting, so Coalition and Labour as well, and local council.

JG But what's the vision for the Pride Centre? What do you hope...?

SK I'm so logistical, because we're building it right now.

JG I know. Which is wonderful.

SK So, the vision. We really want a townhall for ourselves. We want a place where the LGBTIQ community can be on a permanent basis. We don't want to be cap-in-hand anymore, asking for small locations. We want to have a place where board members of all these 80-plus organisations don't have to be meeting about how we're paying our next rent, but rather they can meet about how creative and progressive they're going to be.

There'll be ten resident organisations. Some of the notable members in that group are Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Joy 94.9 will have their radio studio and Bent TV there, and Thorne Harbour Health will have health services, multicultural, multi-faith Victoria, Team Melbourne Sports, the list goes on.

JG So it's an epicentre.

SK And it will be. If you think of that area of the middle part of Fitzroy Street now, we'll have 300, 400 people doing their radio shifts and volunteering each week, hundreds of volunteers also into the health centre, so it really is going to rejuvenate that part of St Kilda. I'm in my 40s, so I remember this was a fantastic place to be and go out when I was growing up in my 20s; it's going to come back.

JG Excellent. We did say it was a rejuvenation of the area. Also worth noting too, Collarts in Collingwood, which will be another creative hub in Melbourne, just on Johnston Street there, next to The Tote, there's going to be several key players involved there in the next couple of years. It'll be called the Collarts Centre. PBS will be coming out of there. The Push will be coming out of there as well, and there are several other organisations, I think Music Victoria are coming out of there. So we're putting all the creative music-related areas all together in that one hub there in Collingwood, which is going to be very, very exciting. Could ACMI exist, Seb, in any other city?

SC I don't think so. And I think that's super-exciting is our redevelopment. We are, in fact, embarking on, we're actually part-way through, we're closing our doors in May for a \$40 million redevelopment of our Federation Square site, which will take about 11 months, and develop...

JG Will there be an Apple Store there, though?

SC Across the way perhaps from us. But what's very exciting about this, we have 1.5 million visitors now, but we know the world has changed, so nowadays media literacy, screen literacy and digital literacy is not only a nice thing to have, it's the core of our democracy. People need to know how images are made, distributed and manipulated as well as the creative production that goes on behind video games, behind cinema, behind what comes after cinema. What about emerging forms? We're already doing commissions in VR and mixed reality, but what is next?

So you will see a \$40 million redeveloped site, new permanent galleries telling a new story of the moving image, and this really will be a new national museum of the moving image and media, and that will be the most visited moving image museum of its type anywhere in the world, with strong connections to the Asia-Pacific region as well as the amazing work done by First Nations communities here in Australia too.

So it's very exciting, and I think that's one of the things, seeing us look out to the rest of the world rather than just looking in. What I think Australians do, we look into ourselves, and it's like, actually, no, we need to talk about this sort of stuff to the world because there are amazing things going on here, and it's the ecosystem that makes it work.

We also run a co-working space and accelerator programme, we're across the way from the arcade, it's all of these things knitted together. And I think Melbourne's transport network, its growing population, the education that is in the city as well, and the quality of that, is what makes it work.

JG I have to commend you on, for example, the David Bowie exhibition, David Bowie Is. That was just fantastic there, and I can't see that happening in any other city in Australia, for example. A question for all of you. How can Melbourne show cultural leadership and set the cultural direction for the nation?

SC I'd say it is, and I think we need to get better at talking about that it is and not be so shy about saying Melbourne's actually really great, and there's a lot of other cities that are looking to Melbourne. And also, if we can effectively deal with the growth in the population and work and do more with the infrastructure programmes that the government's rolling out now, this will be a fabulous place to live, particularly with climate change too. This is really an exciting place to be, thinking about the future and the way we need to live in our collective future.

JG We've got 24-hour transport, haven't we, on the weekends, but can we do better as a city, do you think?

SK It's an interesting position we find ourselves in. We're starting off a Pride Centre which will have at least a 20-year life. During that 20-year period, Melbourne will become Australia's largest city. Whether we like that or not, with all the infrastructure issues it brings, we're feeling that energy and that pace now.

In support of that, the Federal Labour Party committed \$10 million to us as the Pride Centre. We're positioning ourselves as the Pride Centre for the Asia-Pacific region. We've achieved so much in the first world, but what about other parts of our world?

Just think of the Asia-Pacific region. India just decriminalised homosexuality. Taiwan, they had a plebiscite on same-sex marriage which failed, a few weeks ago. Indonesia, our biggest neighbour, fifth-biggest country in the world I believe, just to our north, life not so good there for LGBTIQ. So we are very well placed in our region to support these communities. And we are going to be Australia's largest city, so we need to start operating like that if we're not already, and I think in many, many areas we are, but that's just our reality now.

JG I wish you the best of luck with that. Has anyone got any questions for our amazing panel?

AM I'm curious about the potential of esports in terms of bricks-and-mortar. Can it have a purpose-built venue, Melbourne is so fantastic in its sporting precinct? Can it be a part of that?

BS It certainly can, and internationally now we're seeing lots and lots of examples of those sort of purpose-built facilities pop up, particularly in countries like China at the moment, where I was reading, a few days ago, in Hangzhou there's a \$280 million facility just being opened, where they're trying to build an esports city.

I think they've committed to 2.2 billion over the next five years, to open up 14 more different esports-themed facilities, from theme parks to esports-specific hospitals and hotels in this particular city, to drive an entire economy off only esports.

And there are other examples as well. There's one city of less than a million people that doesn't have an airport and doesn't have a railway station and is a three-hour bus ride from anywhere else that's just signed off on another \$250 million to build an esports stadium.

Now, I'm not suggesting that's justified, but there are lots of examples, internationally, where it's happening and I think that there is certainly a very, very strong case for building a hub that can encapsulate things like the arcade's already doing in and around publishers and development but also high performance and coaching, and the types of things that we already see within a sporting ecosystem.

Because the fact is, with something like esports, the tyranny of distance between Australia and the rest of the world means that, realistically, we can only compete against ourselves. We have an esports team that, at the moment, is in Korea for a month so that they can train against Koreans and get better, so I think that development of an infrastructure where we can bring the best of the world down here, coaching facilities would allow the system here in Melbourne to develop a lot more quickly.

JG The tech sector in Melbourne currently employs 85,000 people in around 8,000 companies, and generates \$35 billion annually, which is nuts, it's fantastic.

BS It's amazing.

JG Any other questions? Have you any final thoughts? Your favourite thing about Melbourne?

BS Sport and restaurants and, of course, coffee.

JG I'm not a sport fan, so I'm going to say music, coffee, food.

BS I'd be surprised if everyone doesn't mention coffee on the panel. Seb?

SC Totally. Music, coffee, food would be me too.

SK Socially progressive, I would say. Welcoming, more and more multicultural, and we're seeing the benefits of that.

JG

Wonderful. Seb, Stuart and Ben, thank you so much for being on our panel this morning. Thanks so much.