

Disaster memorials as government communication

Susan Nicholls examines the capacity of disaster memorials to express relationships between communities and government

Abstract

This paper discusses disaster memorials in terms of their capacity to foster dialogic communication between affected communities and government. Offering definitions of community and memorial in the context of disasters and disaster recovery, it argues that governments tread a risky path in acknowledging disaster by participating in disaster memorial creation, and that they have a triple motive in this participation: to respond appropriately to perceived community needs, to contribute to recovery, and to communicate their involvement in both the memorial process, and in the disaster itself, in a positive light. Extensive community consultation is seen as the strategy by which this can be achieved. The World Trade Center memorial site in New York, and the Port Arthur massacre memorial are used as examples of the great difficulty involved in the development of disaster memorials. The paper concludes with a detailed review of the Canberra Bushfire Memorial consultative processes which serves as a case study for a community consultation strategy in the successful development of a disaster memorial.

Eyre (1999) refers to memorials as one of a number of 'post-disaster rituals and symbols', and notes that there are a 'range of psychological, social and political issues associated with these aspects of the immediate post-impact and longer term rehabilitative stages of disaster.' (Eyre, 1999: 23) The link between memorials, political concerns and recovery is clearly identified. This paper focuses primarily on the communication aspect of disaster memorials with respect to government participation in their creation, and looks at their contribution to community recovery after a catastrophic event. It seeks to explore how governments utilise community consultation, and to discuss issues arising from such consultation and other processes leading to the creation of disaster memorials.

The paper will look briefly at disaster memorials generally. It will contextualise the social processes and hazards of memorialisation by using the New York World Trade Center memorial as an exemplar. It will briefly discuss relevant aspects of the Port Arthur massacre memorial development. Looking at the processes undergone by the ACT Government in its participation in the creation of a memorial for the losses suffered in the 2003 ACT bushfires, the paper will focus on the practices of government communication in relation to disaster memorials. (It should be noted that this paper mentions war memorials only in passing. Although commemorating large-scale, grievous human loss, this kind of memorial is not the focus here.)

First, the terms 'disaster memorial', 'community' and 'recovery' need to be defined in the context of this paper.

Introduction

This paper argues that formal disaster memorials – in the context of this paper, disaster memorials funded by government authorities – are a unique form of government communication. Governments use memorials to send specific, complex and subtle messages to the communities they govern. Governments responding to a community's expressed or perceived need seek to 'do the right thing', especially after a disaster, for a range of reasons including 'doing the right thing' because it is the right thing: that is, a genuine response to grief and the desire for formal remembrance. The issue of genuineness is complicated, however, by the fact that solid electoral dividends are the prize for 'doing it right'. It is very easy to get it wrong.

Disaster memorials

Carden-Coyne (2005), referring to war memorials, says that they 'enact a form of rehabilitation. In quite an embodied sense, they can provide a vision of wholeness and restoration' (Carden-Coyne, 2005). Eyre (1999) notes: 'Just as war sites and those killed by armed conflict are commemorated at permanent memorials, so physical reminders have been constructed as a way of remembering forever particular disasters and their legacy' (Eyre, 1999:28). Eyre says disaster memorials take many forms, but all are 'collective symbols commemorating the event and its significance' (Eyre, 1999:28). Other writers question the capacity



The Canberra Bushfire Memorial, ACT, Australia.

of memorials to do this work of remembering and reminding: Ware (2005) argues that memorials do not necessarily educate future generations not to repeat the past, or to respect those lost. Instead, she suggests that memorials do the opposite: 'They ameliorate the situation and alleviate our guilt so we can let go of the past. They promote collective amnesia' (Ware, 2005:12). Ware also questions who is commemorated and who is forgotten: 'Memorials also help us to mourn victims of tragic circumstances, both natural and human induced. But how we choose which victims, which circumstances and which events are worthy of memorials is quite significant' (Ware, 2005:12). Bowring (2005) is also critical of memorials, saying they are 'characterised by a deadening symbolic precision' (Bowring, 2005:8). She is critical of the use of 'the symbolic potency of *information*' (author's italics) in memorial design, 'as though the more we know about a tragedy, the more we are saved from having to deal with things that are unknowable. Everything is spelled out ... creating datascares of death' (Bowring, 2005:8). She also criticises how symbols 'are served up in an unquestioned and unproblematic way ... symbols are ... insufficient, and when deployed in a way where easy reading dislocates the beholder from any real appreciation of the tragic, they shield our selves from ourselves' (Bowring, 2005:8). Bowring, Ware and others subscribe to the notion of the anti-memorial, in which estrangement, the unknowable, acquiescence to transitoriness and a multiplicity of possible interpretations are foregrounded (see Bull, 2005:48).

In *Traumascapes*, a study of sites of catastrophic loss, Tumarkin (2005) also suggests 'that, instead of compelling remembering, memorials might just do the opposite and encourage forgetting; that, instead of representing the past, they may in fact mystify and displace it.' However, she notes: 'Ever since the unveiling of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC in the early 1980s, a culture of memorialisation has

shifted profoundly and a new generation of memorials has shown itself more than capable of providing a genuine focus for the acts of individual and collective remembering and mourning' (Tumarkin, 2005: 205-6).

The purpose of a disaster memorial is manifold, but principally it is to speak meaningfully to those affected by the memorialised event, and to those who come after, about the shared experience of the disaster. Eyre refers to disaster memorials as 'the sacred sites of contemporary culture' (Eyre, 1999:24). As Tasmanian artist Peter Adams stated in his design brief for the Port Arthur massacre memorial, a memorial should be 'a vehicle of deep healing for all people' (Tumarkin, 2005:209-10) underlining the recovery aspect of memorials.

Acknowledging the vexed aesthetics and interpretations of memorials, a disaster memorial is defined in this paper as

- *some combination of site, structure, building, planting, landscaping, artefact and/or monument specifically designed and deliberately positioned to commemorate eloquently a disaster that has catastrophically affected some combination of people, other living things and/or places. Disaster memorials are explicit messages, from the authority that sanctions and funds the creation of the memorial, to those for whom the reason for the memorial is important.*

What is 'community'?

Marsh and Buckle (2001) emphasise that community as a term is misleading and unhelpful in terms of emergency management. They also point out that individuals in communities defined by location may have little else of importance in common (Marsh & Buckle, 2001:5). Similarly, communities defined by a shared experience of disaster may have little else

of importance (apart from that shared experience) in common. Gordon (2004) describes community thus: 'Community is not a static entity, but a combination of open ended groupings defined by organising cultural beliefs and practices, constantly open to change (Masolo 2002)' (Gordon, 2004:20). He further suggests:

'A community is a large, relatively stable collection of groups and individuals, organised with coherent relationships on multiple dimensions... A community occupies a common locality with a relatively stable social structure of authority, power and prestige and with a common culture (Alperson 2002). Its members are interdependent, with networks enabling them to meet each other's needs and provide security. ... In this model, a community can be likened to a crystalline structure with social units and subsystems bonded to each other in patterns of varying strength and distance...' (Gordon, 2004:21).

Sullivan (2003) discusses the complexities of community at some length, and finally settles conditionally on the idea that community is 'a group of people who interact, but who may do so within and between a number of sub-communities ... The community need not be bounded by geography, but for the purposes of analysing the effects of emergencies on communities in terms of recovery, will be bounded by the impact of the emergency' (Sullivan, 2003:19).

Following both Gordon and Sullivan, this paper understands 'community' in the context of disaster memorials to be:

- *a social grouping which interacts, albeit inconsistently, on a number of levels; often but not necessarily bounded by a geographic commonality but bounded by the effects of the disaster; and characterised by a self-recognised and self-defined commonality of experience which changes over time.*

Recovery

Recovery is probably the most vexed definition of all in the context of this paper. Emergency Management Australia defines recovery as 'the coordinated process of supporting disaster affected communities in the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical well-being' (EMA, 2004:3). In New Zealand, recovery is defined as 'the coordinated efforts and processes to effect the immediate, medium and long-term holistic rehabilitation of a community following disaster' (Norman, 2004:35). But as journalist Megan Doherty pointed out in an article in a special recovery magazine published by *The Canberra Times* in August 2003 (following the ACT bushfires of January 2003), 'Who's to say who has recovered? Who hasn't? Who is recovering? Who isn't? The January bushfires were a monumental community event but also an intensely personal one that has affected each and every individual differently' (Doherty, 2004:6). It is the duality of the 'intensely personal' alongside the wider affected community that makes disaster memorialisation so complex for dialogic communication between communities and governments seeking to assist with recovery through memorialisation. However, as later sections of this paper indicate, disaster memorials can play an important part in the recovery process.

Memorials as message

Disaster memorials carry messages of complex components: acknowledgement and naming; compassion; recognition of courage and loss; description and enumeration; a call to remember and a call never to forget (not the same thing). There is also sometimes an element of education: learn and do not let this happen again. These are the overt components of the message. Beneath the surface there is acknowledgement



World Trade Centre Site.

of involvement by the sponsor of the memorial: involvement in the wider community's response to disaster, involvement in shared suffering and perhaps, most problematically, involvement in the cause or causes of the disaster. By taking responsibility for the creation of a memorial, governments may tacitly recognise (if not acknowledge) to a greater or lesser extent, their 'implicatedness' in, and even responsibility for, the ills that befall their communities.

It is this latter characteristic that presents interesting possibilities for governments negotiating their reputation with affected communities, and opens up a range of questions about the public relations aspects of memorial building. Nicholls and Glenny (2005) discuss the organisational structures put in place by the Australian Capital Territory Government to consult, communicate with and hear the views of a traumatised community in the year following the ACT bushfires (Nicholls & Glenny, 2005:55). Similarly, because everything about the conceptualising, development, siting, design and construction of memorials is so risky, governments need to go to great lengths to ensure thorough community consultation, both to 'do the right thing' as mentioned above, but also in order to minimise criticism from disaffected, angry, grieving communities. In this they demonstrate the Grunig communication model of two-way symmetrical communication, taking a dialogic approach in which each party has equal say and agency in processes and outcomes (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992:286).

WTC, New York

Tumarkin writes: '... the World Trade Center site has been transformed into a traumascap right in front of our eyes. As its contemporaries, we are privy to the depth and reach of its power. We are able to feel in our bones its enduring allure, to observe the reactions and meanings it continues to elicit at their most unmediated and raw' (Tumarkin, 2005:23-4) When I visited The World Trade Center (WTC) site on a cold, grey, showery day in May 2005, this huge lower Manhattan site at the engine room of US power was all but silent. Puddles on the cleared concrete wasteland reflected grey skies. The monochromatic quietness, in a city so renowned for its noisy, brash brilliance, was uncanny. The amount of sky that could be seen, unlike the uptown perspectives of narrow strips between canyons of buildings, was unnerving. At this 'sixteen-acre wound in the heart of one of the world's foremost cities', in Tumarkin's words, shock and loss were still able to be sensed, as they are at Culloden in Scotland, and on the old, vast battlefields of Europe. Nothing was happening. The site was utterly deserted. Around the steel mesh barriers, visitors like myself were slowly walking and looking, reading the

temporary information plaques that give an account of the attack and list the names of those killed. The words 'hero', and 'freedom', are frequently used on signage around the site. Other passers-by were going hurriedly about their downtown business. The souvenir circus that so appalled Tumarkin and others had, thankfully, disappeared.

The World Financial Center (WFC) faces the emptiness of the site, its glass frontage reflecting nothing but sky. A large banner behind the glass states: 'From recovery to renewal'. Inside the foyer there is an extensive public display about the WTC and its restoration, including models and artist's impressions of the new buildings planned for the site, and the winning memorial design¹. Tumarkin comments that the memorial competition 'attracted endless controversy and publicity' (Tumarkin, 2005:202-3). The design of winning architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker, one of more than five thousand submissions from sixty-three countries, is stark, simple but very moving. It involves water falling around the perimeters of two vast square pools that mark the footprints of the twin towers. The pools reflect sky and surrounding trees; light wells built in the centre of the two pools shine down through a number of accessible levels into the footings of the original towers; and at the bottom of each, two massive, tomb-like, black stone boxes, containing unidentified human remains, are lit by the light wells above.

The success of the Arad-Walker design followed an immense public consultation period in which literally thousands of New Yorkers and others had their say in the preliminary planning and concept stage. Affected publics being able to have their say is now seen to be an integral part of contemporary disaster memorial processes. Eyre (2004), quotes Judith Herman on the politics of trauma: "Recovery requires remembrance and mourning. ... Restoring a sense of social community requires a public forum where victims can speak their truth and their suffering can be formally acknowledged." (Herman 1997:242). Eyre notes that 'recovery requires a sense of social community in which people feel supported in looking back and looking forward ... It is only when this kind of support exists that survivors from disasters are really able to talk about recovery' (Eyre, 2004:27). A disaster memorial that evolves out of a shared, consultative process is such a 'kind of support'.

The WTC post-11 September is an extraordinarily vexed and conundrum-ridden site. My overwhelming impression of the WTC restoration process was a sense of cross-purposes – the impulse to claim 'business as usual' in the face of the attack; the sheer, paralysing, impotent rage that such a thing could have happened; the imperative to staunch the haemorrhage of lost

¹ Since this paper was written, the designs for both WTC buildings and the memorial have undergone significant changes following widely reported and acrimonious debate, further indicating the difficulties surrounding memorial creation.

income from the most expensive vacant real estate in the world; the unwillingness or unreadiness of people to go back to their former workplaces at the site; and the profound grief still being worked through. Ongoing controversy surrounding redevelopment confirms this impression. The banners shout: 'From recovery to renewal'. But recovery is not so easily or speedily achieved.

Whatever is finally decided for the WTC site and, more particularly, the memorial for the losses of 11 September, in my view nothing could be more eloquent or affecting than the damaged sculpture presently serving as a temporary memorial at nearby Battery Park. In the World Financial Center (WFC) display, a plaque states the following:

The artistic centerpiece of the World Trade Center was a 45,000 pound, 12 foot-high bronze and steel sculpture that sat atop a granite fountain in the Austin J. Tobin Plaza between the Twin Towers. Commissioned by the Port Authority and forged by sculptor Fritz Koenig, it was a monument to fostering world peace through world trade. It was one of the few public art treasures recovered after September 11, 2001. The sculpture was structurally intact but had a large gash through its center.

On March 11, 2002, the six month anniversary of the September 11th attacks, ... [the sculpture was] unveiled ... in a new and nearby setting. Now called 'The Sphere', it is an interim memorial to those lost at the World Trade Center.

"It now has a different beauty, one I could never imagine," said Fritz Koenig of his sculpture and the resilience it expresses through its pierced and dented skin. "It now has its own life, different from the one I gave it" (WFC plaque, noted May 2005).

This paper has diverged momentarily from the distanced, dispassionate voice usually employed in academic writing for a reason: that is, to demonstrate the profound emotional impact that disaster and disaster memorials can have on the individual (see *Hobart Mercury*, 29 April 2000:7). This has implications for the creation of messages. Response to disaster memorials and their significance is both an individual and a community response. Therefore, the processes utilised to consult over the creation of disaster memorials need to address both individuals as such, as well as various communities, from the immediately affected to more removed but still interested communities – in Hallahan's (2000) terms, active, aroused and aware publics (Hallahan, 2000:504). The series of consultations that took place in the lead-up to the commencement of the Canberra Bushfire Memorial is an example of how this might be done.

Australian experiences

To go from the WTC attacks to the Canberra bushfire disaster requires a massive change of focus and scale. And yet, to the extent that we seek to know how to communicate with human beings dealing with disaster and loss, to discover how they go about their recovery, and how they remember and mourn, we can usefully look at the two side by side. Before the Canberra experience is examined, however, it is worthwhile broadening the perspective by taking a brief look at some of the difficulties that arose in planning the memorial at Port Arthur in Tasmania.

In April 1996, Martin Bryant shot and killed 35 men, women and children, and seriously wounded another 29 people at and in the vicinity of the Port Arthur historical site. The shootings began at the Broad Arrow café. Hollow (2002) discusses in detail not only the positioning and significance of a huon pine cross that was initially erected on the waterfront near the café, and controversially moved later on, but also the lengthy and difficult debates about how to memorialise the event. Tumarkin writes: 'Created by local artists, including Peter Adams, in a spontaneous response to the tragedy, [the cross] served as a memorial to the victims of the massacre ... With the unveiling of the official memorial on the fourth anniversary of the massacre in April 2000, the cross was moved from the foreshore and relegated to the back of the official memorial, where it is expected to silently rot away and fade into oblivion' (Tumarkin, 2005:211). Tumarkin implies that this was a disgraceful interference by nameless authorities imposing their will and crushing a spontaneous memorial process. However, Hollow's research reveals rifts between a number of stakeholders, including the bereaved and the historical site staff, relating to this issue. Information made available to me by a government official who participated in memorial consultations suggests that some of the families of victims were deeply angered by the cross (a Christian symbol) and its plaque naming those killed. In March 2000, the *Hobart Mercury* cautiously reported:

A poetic tribute – rather than the names of the 35 massacre victims – will be the focus of the Port Arthur memorial garden, which opens next month. It is dedicated to the dead, the wounded and those who assisted at the massacre site...

The Huon pine and stringy-bark cross that names the victims will stay at the edge of Carnarvon Bay for the time being – at the request of some families involved in the tragedy.

It is understood that the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority is under considerable pressure to move the cross into the garden.



Port Arthur Memorial, Tasmania, Australia.

To avoid controversy on the issue, the authority has concentrated on the poetic tribute.’ (Lovibond, J., 2000:2)

The cross was not the only problem. The Rev. Sydney Smale, Central Coordinator Disaster Recovery, Victorian Council of Churches, writes: ‘... the very thing that could have led to a unifying of the Port Arthur community contributed to an extended controversy. The crux of the problem was what to do with the Broad Arrow café ... Many in the community wanted it to be razed to the ground. But many of those who lost loved ones in the café felt a sense of attachment and wanted it retained’ (Smale, 2000:3; see also Hollow, 2002:58-9) It was not until January 1999 that agreement was reached. The formal memorial includes the remaining walls of the café, a fountain and reflection pool. (Smale, 2000:3; see also Hollow, 2002:58-9)

This account indicates once again how difficult it is to get memorials right, so that they meet the needs and desires of the affected community but serve wider purposes as well. As the following study of the Canberra Bushfire Memorial consultation suggests, consultation is a key strategy to achieve this.

CASE STUDY

The Canberra Bushfire Memorial consultation

On 11 June 2004, almost 18 months after the bushfires, a 34-page document called *A Bushfire Memorial for the ACT: Community Consultation Discussion Paper* was published and distributed for public comment. It was the outcome of an initial community consultation that

had taken place between January and March of that year, guided by a Bushfire Consultation Advisory Committee which comprised community and government representatives. This initial stage involved an invitation to interested people to provide their views by phone, email or letter; participation in five focus groups; providing input at four special interest meetings; and participation in interviews. These consultative efforts were the first indications that the ACT Government was very interested in an ongoing two-way communicative process.

The document arising out of these inputs, written by consultants for artsACT and the ACT Department of Urban Services, was addressed to those directly affected by the bushfires, but it also aimed at a wider readership, and invited responses from anyone who cared to do so.

In its introduction, the question of the purpose of a community memorial is addressed. Acknowledging the personal, private memorials that people spontaneously create, the discussion paper comments that a more formal memorial does not seek to replace these. It states: ‘Over time, the question of a permanent memorial takes more precedence [over personal memorials] as a way of acknowledging a significant event in the history of the region and marking a milestones [sic] in people’s lives. ... The most effective communal memorials reflect a *shared* meaning of the disaster held by the community in which it occurred. The critical first step in developing a memorial is establishing what that shared meaning is. This is not necessarily straightforward as there may be many tensions and diverging views’ (authors’ italics) (RPR, 2004a:3).

The discussion paper goes on to describe exactly how the consultation would be run, who the decision-makers would be, and how people could contribute their ideas to the process.² The paper includes numerous quotes from material already received from the public, showing how these fed into the process.

The consultation and decision-making process in the creation of the permanent memorial had four stages. The first stage was setting the four components of the guiding framework which had arisen out of initial discussions. These were: the purposes of the memorial; how the memorial’s meanings should be expressed; elements which should be included in the memorial; and the kind of site which would best suit the memorial. These components as ultimately defined would feed into the next stage, the brief ‘for design of a memorial written by government using the design framework developed by the community as a base.’ The third stage was

2 Members of the Bushfire Memorial Community Consultation Advisory Committee included five citizens who had been directly affected by the fires. They represented those who had lost a family member, houses, pets and businesses; the rural community; firefighters; and the Bushfire Community and Expert Reference Group which continues to advise the ACT Government throughout the recovery period; and three representatives from the ACT Government.

'Various designers invited to submit design concepts' based on the Government's brief. The final stage was the selection by the Advisory Committee of the winning design (RPR, 2004a:7).

In the consultation documents, it is striking how often the affected community is invited to participate in the process by communicating with the consultants, via email, phone or other form of contact, quite separate from the formal feedback questionnaire that formed part of the consultative document. As well, interested people were invited to attend a community workshop to share their views. The final report quotes one participant commenting on the 11 June Discussion Paper: 'This paper has clearly and fairly presented the various views of our community about this memorial. If the bureaucratic process can remain faithful to this process it will be a worthy memorial' (RPR, 2004b:7). In a nutshell, this comment reveals how governments are on notice to pay attention to the wishes of the community.

A ten-page commission brief was prepared on the basis of this third stage of consultation, closely reflecting the outcomes of the community consultations. In November 2004, a design put forward by a team of three Canberra community artists was selected as the proposal most appropriate to the community's wishes and which met all other criteria. In April and again in May 2005, they presented their plan to the community at Orana School, which had been partially destroyed by the fire. Around 250 people came to the two days of the presentation. They were invited to contribute to the memorial in the form of contributing photographs, and writing inscriptions on bricks which would be included in a wall as part of the memorial structure. This participation was available to the whole Canberra community, and many did so. Hundreds of photographs, and more than 150 brick inscriptions were received.

The memorial has now been completed and was dedicated by the ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, on the third anniversary of the bushfire. A month later, a group of fire-affected people who remain deeply angry with the failure of government authorities to either prevent the bushfire, or to adequately warn the community about its threat on the day, held a dedication ceremony of their own. (They were also disaffected by the Chief Minister's intervention in the coronial inquiry and, subsequently, by his role in the dedication of the memorial.) Tellingly, however, comments from members of this group indicated satisfaction with the memorial itself, alongside profound criticism of the ACT Government over these other matters. One of the most vocal critics of the ACT Government's overall handling of the bushfire described it as 'a beautifully designed memorial' (Doherty, 2006:16).

Whether or not these issues are resolved, this memorial, deeply embedded in the landscape of the disaster and the product of the wishes of those most affected, will take decades to reach its full potential. In this it reflects the nature of Canberra itself, the so-called 'bush capital', still becoming what it will one day be.

Conclusion

Memorials for disasters are difficult to develop for a number of reasons, some of which concern purpose, emotional significance, 'ownership', recognition of and agreement among stakeholders, political response, and effective communication between communities and governments. The profound feelings of involvement of affected individuals and communities guarantee that controversy will probably accompany most if not all efforts to conduct any process designed to come up with an appropriate and acceptable disaster memorial. Conflict surrounding the WTC memorial and the Port Arthur memorial exemplify this. The ACT experience, involving community consultation conducted at the behest of the ACT Government, which allowed both government and community input at each stage of the memorial process, and was key to decision-making, created the ground for mutual understanding – the holy grail of communication. The staged processes evolved by the ACT Government for consultation in the creation of the memorial were deliberately formulated to foster two-way communication, and were dependent on community input. Both these processes indicate awareness of best-practice government-community communication involving extensive input from affected people, and of the nature of recovery (to paraphrase Gordon [2004]), evolving in meaning over time.

Although the ACT Government has been criticised, not only over the events of January 18, 2003, but also over delays in the coronial inquest, the memorial itself and the processes that led to its construction appear to have been received well by the Canberra community. The Government conducted the development of the memorial with some finesse, observing communication methods regarded as best practice by theorists such as Grunig. It was assiduous in both consultation and transparency. The indications so far, this paper suggests, are that, while the bushfire wreaked havoc on the ACT community, and despite many issues arising from the disaster remaining unresolved, the ACT Government fully embraced its role as facilitator of the processes of recovery via its support of the memorial, and acknowledged its duty to provide the means to create it, both financially, and by conducting enabling processes. The Government's message, through the memorial development process, attempted to convey trustworthiness, reliability and, above all, receptiveness to the community's will. It remains to be seen whether the ACT community as a whole will accept that message at the ballot box.

In terms of best practice for authorities involved in disaster memorial creation, the following recommendations can be made:

- Allow the call for a memorial to come from the affected community
- Establish a steering committee composed of key stakeholders including community opinion leaders
- Establish transparent processes for extensive and inclusive community consultation employing people skilled in such consultation
- Utilise as many forums for input as practicable (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups, Internet and email mechanisms)
- Conduct consultation in stages to allow wide-ranging and developing conversations between community members, and community and government
- Act on responses received and report back to community members at each stage of consultation showing how responses have been acted upon
- Minimise government over-ride of community requests and, when necessary, explain reasons in order to achieve understanding
- Disseminate reports on decisions and outcomes widely

Research implications

In the wider context, further research needs to be pursued to clarify connections between memorials and recovery: that is, between the establishment of a community-approved memorial following a disaster, and how both individuals and the community perceive their recovery process. Another line of inquiry with regard to the position of government authorities in facilitating the development of a disaster memorial is whether there is a difference for people affected by disaster when the disaster was from natural or criminal causes, and notions of blame predicating recovery. Finally, given the fraught nature of disaster memorial development processes, media representation of the opening or dedication of disaster memorials as a media event (see Dayan & Katz: 1992) could be usefully explored, tying in with other research into media reporting of disasters and disaster recovery.

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