ARTWORK 55 EDITORIAL

Editorial by Dee Martin

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ARTWORK 55 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CULTURAL PLANNING

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Local government and ccd. Ccd and local government. Is it made in heaven or a one night stand? And what of the love child – cultural planning?

I asked Frank Hornby, the Director of Community and Cultural Services at the Townsville City Council, what he knew about the status of the relationship.

He reminded me that in 1990 the Australia Council for the Arts and the Federal Office of Local Government initiated a Task Force to investigate ways of assisting local government to develop a clearer role in arts and cultural development and to strengthen the partnership between the 3 spheres of government. ‘A bit like counselling?’ I asked him. ‘Counselling for a ménage a trios’, he hissed in a stage whisper.

‘It might be worth noting’, he continued ‘that the first surprise for the Task Force was to discover that spending by the three spheres of government accounted for 30% of all government spending on arts and cultural development. The National Task Force also indicated that local government was the major provider of local and regional infrastructure with galleries, museums, performing arts centres and libraries. In the subsequent decade significant expenditure has gone into cultural development officers and the provision of project funding for community based arts groups.’

‘So local government is a good provider?’ I asked.

‘And in Queensland there’s a Pre-Nup Agreement’ he ignored my question. The Local Government Association Queensland (LGAQ) Policy Statement states: The role of local government in cultural development revolves around the development and implementation of planning and policy frameworks which identify and aim to address the needs of the community. Cultural planning processes make communities better places in which to live, make communities fairer and develop strategies for cooperative action ... (local government) seeks to enhance its capacity to integrate cultural development into all aspects of planning.’ (my emphasis)

I pounced. In Queensland, they not only acknowledge the existence of cultural planning, they brag about it! Questions filled my head - if cultural planning is acknowledged, how is it treated? Are the cultural development and local government sectors good parents? How is it nurtured, what are their parenting strategies? Is there any hint of (I whispered the word) neglect? Or worse? Frank? Are you still there?

In desperation I returned to the articles for Artwork 55. It’s all there - drama, desperation, desire ... Councillor Eddy mourning the demise of local government ‘the thing I love to hate, and hate myself loving’. Through Don Chapman he tells the story of local government as a dramatic saga, a rich history of passionate relationships, intrigue and, ultimately, betrayal. His basement museum is a tomb-like testimonial to the halcyon days of local government, ultimately compromised by the language and processes of corporatisation.

We tend to write about our romances, and Catherine Murphy traces one history of the local government/cultural development relationship from diaries dating back at least ten years (Okay, publications, don’t quibble). Like Councillor Eddy, June Moorhouse regrets the seductive influences of the corporate world, and the glib rationalisations of economic suitors.

Like Deborah Mills, she warns against pretenders - is it culture in this relationship, or is it arts? None of us are perfect parents, and Susan Conroy exposes some of the early shortcomings of local government in realising the potential of cultural planning, with a nod to the next generation.

Queensland writers John du Feu and Robin Trotter describe some other off-springs of the cultural development/local government relationship, and Malcolm McKinnon some close but independent relatives.

It’s fair to say that at this point I’m almost as tired of the analogy as you are, but there’s one more: Deborah Mills suggests a dark secret, in which the real relationship of local government and cultural development is exposed. Not only lovers, but also blood relatives. Local government and culture are members of the same family! Which explains some resemblances of purpose, and their strange, on-again, off-again attraction. Which means that the various local government are actually cultural activities. Which means that culture is actually embedded in councils ... if you get my drift. ■

Dee Martin
Commissioning Editor
On behalf of the National Editorial Committee
Eddy? Is that you?’ I asked incredulously.

The voice on the other end of the line sounded more like gravel than the bitumen I remembered.

‘Of course, it’s me! Who else?’ he thundered.

I told him who I was. How we had met years ago after his conversion to arts and culture, when he was Mayor of the newly-amalgamated City of Rambunctious, the result of a merger between the City of Unruly and the District Council of Recalcitrance. How I was researching an article that would read like a journey through the acronyms, jargon, language, myths and changes that have characterised local government.

At the mention of this he perked up. The down-to-earth, jovial, love-you-or-hate-you, iconoclastic, don’t-give-me-anything-of-that-crap, Councillor Eddy of old began to shine through.

‘I’ll be buggered’, Eddy exclaimed. ‘This is right on the money. Come over to my place in Unruly and I’ll give you an interview, and I’ll throw in a little surprise.’

‘I don’t like surprises’, I offered too quickly, remembering that Eddy had more than a mischievous sense of humour. His pranks and faux pas were the stuff of legend in local government.

‘Don’t worry, mate, this’ll knock your socks off, but it won’t blow your boiler. Trust me.’

Trust him? I thought. ‘Do I have any choice?’

‘Not if you want an interview, you don’t. I’ll see you tomorrow. I’m looking forward to it.’

And with that Eddy banged the telephone down. I was left with the unsettling feeling that I was in for more than I bargained. Could I trust Eddy? What was the surprise he had in store for me? Would it compromise my professional integrity? Could I do this article without him? That was the question. The one I couldn’t avoid. I resolved immediately to prepare a list of questions that would get me what I wanted, and hopefully, prepare me for his little surprise.

Having introduced me to ‘the wife’ and the chihuahua, Eddy was keen to show me his little surprise without further delay. He led the way through a door under the stairs leading to the basement.

‘Watch your head’, offered Eddy as I followed him down the creaking stairs. ‘Give me a second while I find the switch.’

A blaze of spotlights temporarily blinded me. When I regained my sight I stood mouth open, amazed. The basement was filled wall to ceiling with exhibition display material of newspaper clippings, headlines, photographs of famous and not so famous people, and room upon room of glass-filled cases of memorabilia. The sheer size was overwhelming. The basement floor space corresponding to the modern four-bedroom brick veneer above. Eddy stood proudly in the middle of the main room.

‘This is it! The only Museum of Local Government in existence!’

I was dumbfounded.

‘Look around. Get your bearings, and when you’re ready we can start the interview.’
I did as he advised. I strolled from room to room, examining the articles and displays, impressed by its professionalism. There was no discernible chronology, and there was no interpretive material, but rather a thematic treatment using primary and secondary sources to tell the story.

‘I’m hoping that the material will tell its own story, rather than the hand of the curator too heavily guiding what he wants the visitor to know’, Eddy chimed in helpfully, as if reading exactly what was in my mind.

‘You’re the curator?’ I asked disbelievingly.

‘Of course, I am. Who else?’

‘It’s impressive’, I offered, ‘you’ve treated the historical context, shown how local government had its heyday in colonial times, explaining the existence of those extraordinary, monumental Town Halls littered across the country. You’ve captured the transformation brought on by Federation, the establishment of the three tiers of government and the loss of power as local government becomes the plaything of the States. You’ve treated its changing roles and functions through two world wars, the Depression, the Cold War, and the 1970s renaissance. You’ve captured the rise of economic rationalism and along the way you’ve profiled some of the watershed moments in local government history - Marrickville Council’s Sydney Airport blockade, the impact of postal voting and paid elected members, Brisbane City as the biggest and perhaps the best council in Australia, and countless smaller model projects of good local government.’

I fiddled with my tape recorder and turned it on. ‘But, it appears you’ve stopped half way through the 1990s. Why is that?’

‘Good question, you know I love local government. I love the cut and thrust of debate and vitriol that litters the Chambers floor every fortnight. The chats and the camaraderie you develop with other Councillors and the community. A lot of people would say we’re too conservative, but I reckon that’s a step in the right direction.’

‘So, what’s gone wrong, Eddy?’ I asked steering him back to the question.

‘Local government’s always been the thing I’ve loved to hate and hated finding myself loving. But, things have changed so much I don’t recognise it anymore,’ he said, in a way that was remarkably uncharacteristic of the Eddy I knew.

‘Aren’t you famous for the saying that you’d seen a lot of changes in local government ... and you’d voted against every one of them?’

Martin Sharp
'Guilty as charged. But my professional awareness has been somewhat enlarged since then. You know, I remember when Chief Executive Officers were called Town Clerks. They had been Town Clerks for over 150 years. Then with corporatisation they became City Managers, and then Chief Executive Officers. Their personal assistants used to be secretaries. My point is that the functions haven’t changed, only the form. It’s all part of the homogenisation of corporate structures. The downside is that local governments have lost their identity, and to my way of thinking, their direction. How can they get ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’ so wrong? They no longer know who they are, why they’re here or where they’re going. Sounds like a prognosis for the whole country at the moment, doesn’t it?’

‘You’re not wrong. So, by identifying too closely with the corporate world modern local government has lost its way. Is that what you mean?’

‘Exactly. It hasn’t identified with the region or the communities that feed it. Why does local government need to identify so strongly with the corporate world?’

‘Presumably to enable it to provide better services to its communities’, I proffered.

‘I’ve tried. I get told to stay out of Administration affairs. But how can you when the modern council treats their communities with such contempt? I well remember a council that was trying to bend over backwards to oblige a rich developer by offering to sell him a slice of council reserve in a premium area. During the public consultation there was an outcry from the community and the council became prickly and defensive. So prickly, that when one unsuspecting resident wrote to the Mayor and said that she thought there was something going on under the table, she was issued with a solicitor’s letter demanding she make a public apology or face court action. A public apology for a private letter? I ask you? The poor woman was intimidated into apologising in the local paper. Is that the kind of relationship we should develop between council and community?’

I shook my head.

‘The new order of change management embraces cultural diversity in theory and unilateralism in practice. The modern corporate local government’s values and principles are continually being compromised and the communities are missing out. You know it may come as a surprise to you, but I have a great respect for Indigenous people and I think they’ve been the subject of the worst of modern council self-interest. There’s some truth in that old legend that goes that when the First Fleet landed at Botany Bay, one of the first things they did was to plant a sprig of mistletoe in front of the assembled Eora people and announced: ‘Now you can kiss your country goodbye!’ I well remember one shocking story of a metropolitan Mayor who publicly refuted the local dreaming story explaining the origin of a series of sacred springs along the coast. A retired engineer, he was convinced that the spring in his area was nothing more than a drain and went to extraordinary technical lengths to prove it in a very public way. Shame local government, shame! Racism is more than just a pigment of the imagination. Think about that. You know, I think that mistletoe is still growing. Fascism is never having to say you’re sorry. I think John Howard wrote that.’

‘But what about amalgamation, hasn’t it been good for local government? They instituted CCT, you know, Competitive Compulsory Tendering, bigger councils, better services and holistic strategic planning’, I countered.

That’s what the strategic planning gurus in bullshit castle want you to think’, thundered Eddy.

‘Bullshit castle?’ I asked meekly.

Eddy was getting into full stride, ‘That’s the name all outside council staff give to the Administration Centre. Where have you been?’

‘Not working in local government. I like the expression’, I commented.

‘Me too. It’s the kind of levelling dissent that makes this country great. You know I have a theory that amalgamation didn’t dawn on Jeff Kennett until after he witnessed the amazing success of the new AFL clubs, the West Coast Eagles and the Adelaide Crows. What was the key to their success? Merging a number of clubs into one. So, the penny dropped for Jeff and he brought in compulsory amalgamation of local councils throughout Victoria. We’re a great sporting nation, but I think that was going too far.’

‘Was it successful?’ I murmured.

‘Well, he’s not Premier anymore is he? The Libs in South Australia tried the same thing, admittedly by halves, and look what it did for them? The only discernible benefits were the enforced rate rebates. The real benefits or losses have never been analysed. One thing I know for sure, I couldn’t give you the name of one of these new councils in Victoria, other than Melbourne. See what I mean about identity?’

Eddy was now in full flight. There didn’t seem to be anything he didn’t know about local government or at least had an opinion about. I decided to try and probe deeper into the peculiar culture of local government. I took a breath, glanced at a nearby wall display, and found the inspiration for another question.

Racism is more than just a pigment of the imagination.
‘What about the improvements hailed by all the benchmarking projects of the last few years?’ I asked.

‘Benchmarking has been to local government what steroids have been to sport – a series of inflated outcomes of little substance.’

‘Is that all?’, I probed.

‘Don’t get me started. If you want best practice. If you want world’s best practice, you better start practicing, at home first.’

‘How about the local PARs? The Plan Amendment Reports and improvements in Local Development Plan legislation? Haven’t they meant improvements in quality, innovative and environmental development?’

‘Didn’t I ask you not to get me started? Local Development Plans, those tiresome documents endorsed by the Minister for Local Government seem designed to ensure the maximum constraints over development that doesn’t conform. They manage to constrain the good with the bad’.

‘Conform to what?’ I asked.

‘Their expectations of what is appropriate under the Act.’

‘And what’s wrong with that?’

‘Bureaucracy is the mother-in-law of invention. The things that get regularly constrained include innovative public art, proposals that may interrupt heritage character, innovative design and construction methods and use of materials, environmentally responsible development that involves grey-water and stormwater recycling, and especially composting toilets in built-up areas. The modern local council is still too eager to frustrate the new and the different if it doesn’t conform.’

I caught sight of an acronym in large letters in the next room. ‘ILAP? What on earth is that?’

He chuckled. ‘Integrated Local Area Planning. It’s a mouthful, isn’t it?’

I nodded.

‘ILAP - A superb initiative of the Australian Local Government Association to improve inter-governmental relations and joint planning and implementation to improve services to Australian communities. It involved a brilliant process for addressing issues, reviewing processes and service delivery, and strategic planning at a local level in an inclusive and consultative way. It was impressive. Equally as thorough as the Local Agenda 21 process.’

‘How’s it going?’

‘Over 60 councils around Australia were given seeding funding to develop strategic plans in 1992. It was dead in the water by 1996.’

‘Why?’

‘Change of Federal Government, mate. Change of emphasis. The notions of regionalism and integrating government services were put to bed.’

‘What irks you most about local government at the moment?’ I chipped in from left field.

Without taking a breath, ‘Elected members with fire in their bellies, steel in their hearts, putty in their brains and lead in their pants.’

‘Isn’t that going too far?’

‘Is the Pope a Catholic?’

‘What about the ongoing rancour between State and local government?’
Eddy was now in the groove. Fired up, his wit and wisdom were as potent as the beads of saliva gathering in the corners of his mouth.

‘State government is like a tree full of monkeys, some climbing up. The monkeys on the top look down and see a tree full of smiling faces. The monkeys on the bottom look up and see nothing but assholes.’

Listening to Eddy was priceless. I decided to throw my professional integrity out the window and pissed myself with laughter, even though it was still morning and I hadn’t so much as had a cup of tea.

‘Eddy are you prepared to say something about your conversion to arts and culture?’

Eddy sat upright. ‘Sure, I’d like that a lot. But, I’d just like to preface my statements with this: It’s ok to prick your finger, but not the opposite. This saying was one of the dominant paradigms in local government during the ‘Roads, Rates and Rubbish’ years, for want of a better cliché. We all remember them. Local government in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s was a no through road if you weren’t white, Anglo-Saxon, mono-cultural, conservative, small-minded, poorly trained or you missed out on the university entrance exams. In the 1970s, the Whitlam years brought a bold new wave of federal acknowledgement for the worth and value of local government, backed up by dollars for regional projects and local community arts and culture. Artists and professionals began to engage with local communities like never before and the established culture of local government was threatened. So, the culture that perceived these new people as finger painters and wankers, was forced to work shoulder to shoulder with them.’

‘It sounds like a defining moment, but one that has passed the historians by. What about your role in the fall of the mono-culture?’

‘To be truthful I was one of the mono-culturalists. But, I was struck in my own small way, by the sheer unlimited potential of arts and culture to engage communities in respectful, participatory and empowering ways. And, now you can see I am still an acolyte of ccd. Here we sit in what my wife jokingly refers to as The Museum of Latter Day Local Government. You know, there are over 45 000 individual entries in that compactus in the next room, all categorised and cross-referenced, and over half of them relate to arts and culture. So, you may not have detected it, but there is a strong curatorial bias in this museum.’

‘What’s the future of this museum?’

‘I’ve tried for the past five years to get my local council interested in it. I applied for a Federation grant. I talked to the History Trust. I even made an application to the Local Government Development Scheme and the Australia Council. But, to no avail.’

Eddy was waning. This was the unfinished part of his local government story that was the hardest to tell.

‘You can’t get any voluntary or community help?’

‘I’ve had the most marvellous help from the local community. Oh, I didn’t do it alone. Oh no, don’t get that impression. This isn’t all my work. I may have provided a lot of the information and records because I love to hang on to that kind of stuff. This project has been a ccd project from the start. I got great help from the local school, and a young, enthusiastic history teacher who looked me up to get me to talk to the kids about local government. And, it’s gone on from there. The school’s art department did up the display boards. A good job, too. The compactus and glass cases are all donated by community people who got wind of the project, along with the air conditioning and the lights. I regularly take groups of school-children, new elected members, local people or visitors through. Now it just needs a more suitable, permanent public home.’

Eddy picked up a thick, red, leather bound volume and handed it to me. ‘Here’s the visitors book. Please feel free to look through it and sign it before you leave. I’ll go and get us a cuppa.’

End Tape
For the last 15 years or so, cultural planning has been promoted by Federal and State Governments as a good thing for local government to do in order to elevate the status of culture within the realm of local government activity so that it could take its place alongside other strategic plans developed by councils for land use, transport, social and economic development. In some instances it was seen as part of an integrated local area planning process which would equip councils to effectively plan for the needs of their communities in integrated and holistic ways.

With some isolated exceptions, this project has failed either to elevate the status of cultural concerns within local government or become part of an integrated local area planning process.

I should like to propose two reasons for this failure.

Firstly, culture has remained marginalised because it has been viewed as something to add to the list of topics that an integrated planning process must address, rather than something which could inform the whole planning process itself. For this reason it has remained a thing apart, with its own budget, staffing and operations. Cultural planning is seen as planning for culture, or at least arts resources management, which leads me to my second reason for failure, what I like to refer to as the ‘arts plus’ swindle.

By this I mean the tendency of the arts-led push to talk about culture, but to focus on the role that the arts can play in furthering the economic and social objectives of government. This emphasis fails to recognise the role that art and culture play in determining values and aspirations - in giving meaning to peoples lives. This ‘arts plus’ approach has reinforced the marginalisation of cultural planning within the government context - it is seen as the icing on the cake rather than the yeast, without which the cake fails to rise to its full potential.

Some Early Attempts at Cultural Planning

Much of what purported to be cultural planning undertaken in the early 1990s tended to focus on developing a relationship between councils and their arts community. The emphasis was on mapping the arts resources of a community and identifying strengths and gaps. In some instances the scope of the mapping was expanded to include the built environment and heritage, but for the most part it concentrated on the arts.

Few projects attempted to encompass a broader cultural framework or make specific attempts to establish links with broader economic and social structures and mechanisms, perhaps due to the difficulty of establishing mechanisms which could deliver such an integrated vision.

Deborah Mills considers the significance of culture in the planning process, and suggests ‘ways of seeing’ culture within the functions of local government.
One such attempt was in 1993 in South East Queensland (SEQ 2001) where rapid growth in the population was significantly challenging government policy makers. This project attempted to ensure that the planning for cultural resources, policies and actions was integrated with the processes for industrial, economic, environmental and social planning (Regional Planning Advisory Group, 1993). While the long-term results of this project are not readily discernable, the project is important for the important principles it establishes for cultural planning, which still hold true today:

1. It moves beyond the arts in what it encompasses. In this project cultural resources were seen to include:
   - the arts and crafts
   - cultural industries of film, video, broadcasting, photography, electronic music, publishing, design and fashion
   - the structures and skills for the management and development, distribution, marketing and audience development for the products of the arts, crafts and cultural industries
   - commercial and public cultural facilities
   - the built environment and humanly created landscapes
   - local traditions
   - ethnic and cultural diversity
   - heritage
   - the natural environment
   - the image of a community

2. It acknowledges up front that indigenous peoples and people of non-English speaking backgrounds may have different policy frameworks and protocols and this consciousness is reflected throughout the project’s work.

3. It emphasises the importance of making strategic connections between cultural policy and activity and infrastructure development, industry location and development, urban consolidation, human services, community development and land use.

4. It introduces an industry development model. By this I mean, the project challenges the distinction between commercial and subsidised arts activity and encourages policy makers to look beyond the supply side of the arts into strategies for supporting the whole process of art making including training of artists, manufacture, marketing and distribution.

5. It introduces the concept of cultural indicators. There has been a great deal written about cultural indicators since, and I will come back to this point later in this paper, as they can play a useful role in both shaping and implementing policy within a multi-disciplinary environment.

More Recent Cultural Plans

Some of the cultural policies produced for local government in the late 1990s have gone beyond mapping arts resources and reflect some of the principles evident in SEQ 2001. They do this in two main ways, firstly in the scope of the topics included under the heading of cultural development and secondly in the range of strategic connections they make with other sectors.

For example, Wollongong Council’s Cultural Plan which was signed off in July 1998 is broad in scope encompassing urban design, urban regeneration, economic development and tourism. The policy advocates establishing links with other sectors, in particular the education sector, National Parks and Wildlife, the Department of State and Regional Development, the film industry and the local Business Chamber.

Newcastle’s cultural policy has a strong cultural industry development focus. The city’s cultural industries play a role in helping to reposition what has been seen as a dirty, industrial town to a contemporary, vital and culturally diverse place to live and work. The strategy also emphasises the role that the arts and culture play in developing citizenship and participation in civic life.

In the case of both Wollongong and Newcastle, the recruitment of other departments of council into the implementation of the cultural plan have included ensuring that Section 94 plans reflect the need to levy for cultural infrastructure and, in the case of Newcastle, integration of the funding for public art and place-making into the budgets of the engineering and planning divisions and into the Development Control Plans developed for the city. In this sense, these policies are beginning to focus on a whole of council approach to cultural development and are attempting to integrate a cultural development agenda into the operations of those sections of council responsible for infrastructure, land use and human services.

Fremantle Council’s cultural policy was finalised in 1999 and goes further than either Wollongong or Newcastle in the way in which it is securely entrenched into council’s other strategic planning policies and processes. The cultural policy is informed by and in turn informs the sustainability plan, participation policy, the youth strategy, the urban design strategy, the town planning scheme review, the artworks in public places strategy, the green plan and the recreation plan. An in-house project team was formed to help define the nature of the project and to ensure integration across the organisation in both the plan’s development and implementation.

Although the scope of some local cultural polices has broadened beyond the arts, none reflect the full extent of official Commonwealth Government policy which categorises the functions of cultural production into 17 sectors including media, education and sport. Apart from the old Brisbane City Council policy, I have only found one Australian local government cultural policy that acknowledges and supports the role that sport plays in reflecting and developing culture, and that is the policy of Thuringowa City Council in North Queensland.
Overseas it is a different matter. The Culture & the City document produced by the Cultural Strategy Partnership for London for the Mayor and London Assembly around 1999 covers 'the arts, tourism and sport, museums and galleries, library services, broadcasting, film production and other media, and the buildings, sites and collections which form the heritage of greater London.' (Culture & the City). Strategic links are proposed in Culture & the City with a very wide range of sectors including transport, libraries, education, digital educational institutions, independent and commercial cultural institutions, the media, tourism, the business community, Local Agenda 21, the health sector, volunteer organisations, developers, funding bodies and employment and training agencies.

The Public Policy Context

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, public policy was dominated by economic rationalism. Much arts policy consequently focussed on repositioning the arts as an industry and justifying public expenditure in terms of the economic impact of the arts. This use of the language and metaphors of the old dominant paradigm – the economy – can hold us back from fully realizing the potential of culture as part of integrated local area planning. I will return to this point in a moment, but first I want to discuss the other significant development in public policy, namely the push for sustainability.

With the ‘triple bottom line’ approach to public planning the economic imperative is no longer dominant, at least in theory. Economic objectives must now be achieved simultaneously with social and environmental sustainability. Jon Hawkes argues in his monograph The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s Essential Role in Public Planning, for ‘culture to become [the] fourth dimension’, He states that this fourth dimension is necessary if we are to ensure effective ways of ‘ moving towards a society that authentically embodies the values of its citizens’, and where those citizens have a ‘shared expression of, and commitment to, a sense of meaning and purpose.’ (ibid. p11).

Hawkes also explores how culture is embedded in many of the public planning concepts which have gained prominence in the last ten years. Sustainable development, for instance, is open to numerous interpretations and these in turn, are based on differing values - values which are informed by cultural perspectives. Community building, capacity building and social capital are all concepts which refer to the glue that welds a community together, and that glue is the production and maintenance of values of interdependency, tolerance and respect. The making and maintenance of these values is a cultural process. Livability and quality of life may have something to do with urban amenity, but attachment and a sense of belonging may have more to do with an icon (a tree, a landmark, a person), or shared and collective memory or just ‘the feel of the place’. If our planners could un-tap these intangibles, then public consultation processes may be rescued from the rather arid rituals they are in danger of becoming, and our planning policies may more closely reflect something deeper than the values of planning elites.

This is not an argument for justifying why arts and culture should receive public support. Nor is it an argument for the arts as a tool for achieving government economic, environmental and social objectives. Rather, it is a way of making visible what has until now remained invisible to planners; the cultural concepts which underpin, often implicitly, many public planning policies. If we can acknowledge these concepts and recognise them as living, breathing parts of individual and community life, then we can give new meaning and force to efforts to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

Cultural policy is often confused with arts policy

Now I would like to return to an examination of the way in which the blurring of the meanings of the word culture is proving an impediment to the effective realization of cultural planning.

As Hawkes writes:

The emphasis on the economic dimension of culture has caused the focus of policy to be on transactions in the market place (e.g. attendance at arts events, sales of arts objects) rather than on wider issues of social meanings, values and aspirations. (ibid. pp. 7,8).

Like Hawkes, I am arguing for a new rationale for government involvement in the arts and culture, one which recognises that the way in which we make sense of the world and perpetuate our view of the world is through cultural processes and practices. If the stated objectives of government’s involvement in planning are to be achieved – sustainability, regional distinctiveness, capacity building and so on - then planning processes must uncover cultural resonance and meaning and engage citizens in these processes. Art making and creative endeavour are then the means by which citizens acquire the skills, language and connectedness to engage in these processes.

While we continue with the ‘arts plus’ approach we run the risk of seeing cultural matters continually marginalised. The arts will be seen as something we do after we have taken care of the ‘important things’ - roads, land use planning, child care centres, recycling.
Developing and applying a cultural framework

What is needed is a re-conceptualisation of the policy task and objective so that we understand that cultural development can function simultaneously as a means of ensuring sustainable economic, environmental and social development through cultural development. For this reason a cultural framework which can be applied to all aspects of the planning process may be more effective than a distinct cultural policy.

Take an inner suburban street of terrace houses. Let’s look at it from the perspective of the different disciplines brought to bear in an integrated planning process.

From an urban development perspective the street could become a site for contesting urban consolidation and multiple occupancy.

From a heritage perspective, the street could become a site in which efforts are made to conserve site lines, scale and heritage features.

From a public safety perspective, the street becomes a site in which maintaining the informal surveillance of the street is important. Planners may wish, therefore, to stem the construction of large garages in front yards which can obscure the ability of people living in the houses to interact with the street.

From an economic perspective, the planners may wish to promote the tourist potential of the heritage buildings and streetscape, or may be ignorant of the cultural implications of the installation of a shopping mall in the next suburb on the viability of the corner store, an important neighbourhood resource and heritage feature.

My point is that each of these dimensions to planning has a cultural dimension and that rather than stake out yet another separate and distinct (cultural) empire, we should be establishing a cultural framework through which all planning can be evaluated. This is where indicators of cultural vitality become important, because in order for these impacts to be assessed and evaluated cultural indicators need to be developed.

My other point is one put very well by Colin Mercer in his latest book, namely that ‘cultural planning must take as its basis the pragmatic principle that culture is what counts as culture for those who participate in it. This can mean contemplating an art object and it can mean strolling down the street.’ (Mercer, 2002 p174).

Cultural Indicators

Much work has been done in other sectors to integrate economic, environmental and social sustainability indicators. There has been a great deal written on cultural indicators, in particular, Jon Hawkes proposes the development of indicators which capture the impact of planning activity on:
- cultural content, i.e. values, identity, aspirations, history;
- cultural processes and mediums (practice): fluency in and access to cultural expression;
- cultural manifestations (results): community initiated cultural action, public access to presented cultural activity, and so on (ibid. p 39-47, 57-60).

Others such as the ALGA (1997) Grogan and Mercer (1995) and Matarasso (1999) also explore a range of indicators for liveability and cultural vitality, all of which attempt to measure the impact of activity on the qualities communities may define for themselves as valuable, rather than what may be defined as desirable by planners or other political or administrative elites.

In his latest book, Colin Mercer (2002) takes some of these ideas further and proposes, ‘a sustained dialogue between cultural research, indicator identification and practical policy [as] vital and the context in which indicators become ‘tools of policy dialogue’.’

Not Only ... But Also

The development of a cultural framework and appropriate indicators are only part of the story for successful cultural planning.

Because of the ‘bottom up’ approach to defining culture as ‘what counts for those who participate in it’ (Mercer 2002, ibid. p174), then cultural mapping and other participatory strategies must be employed if we are to effectively tap into values, meanings and relationships and how people use and interact with cultural goods and services. We need to go beyond the mapping of just the goods and services themselves.

We need political leadership which is able to sustain its commitment to cultural planning processes and frameworks over longer than one term in office. We need policies which direct planning decisions in ways which are consistent with the cultural, economic, social and
environmental outcomes agreed to for our communities. We need planning tools, e.g. Development Control Plans, Cultural Impact Statements, with which to apply these policies and make them live. We need the staff who implement these policy ideas to understand them.

We need organisational arrangements for policy delivery. These will include reorganising budget and administrative frameworks to ensure that the scope of the policy is fulfilled, the strategic connections secured and the mechanisms established to deliver an integrated policy. We need to develop partnerships with other organisations which share our commitment to cultural planning processes and frameworks and who understand the need to make culture the policy task and objective, not the tool.

While finalising this article my attention was drawn to City of Port Phillip in Victoria which has produced a Corporate Plan for 2002 – 2006 based on four key goals, which they refer to as pillars, perhaps in an acknowledgment of Jon Hawkes’ influence on their thinking. The four pillars of the City of Port Phillip’s Corporate Plan are Economic Viability, Environmental Responsibility, Cultural Vitality and Social Equity. This corporate plan is an impressive application of many of the ideas referred to in this paper, and their section on indicators is interesting not only for its comprehensiveness, but for the boldness of their political vision and commitment. It would be a mistake, however, to ascribe what may be a model application of integrated cultural planning in local government to the act of any one individual. The City of Port Phillip has a long history of commitment to social, environmental, economic and cultural development and sustainability. It has attracted some outstanding leadership at both the political and administrative level (Tim Costello, Jude Monroe, Anne Dunn). A study of the council’s organisational arrangements polices and policy tools and their effectiveness in giving life to the vision of the plan would be worth doing, but that is another story for another time.

We need to develop partnerships with other organisations ... who understand the need to make culture the policy task and objective, not the tool.

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This article is adapted from a paper delivered at a Local Government Community Services Association Seminar, Developing People and Places: The Role of Cultural and Recreational Planning/Development in Local Government, July 2002

THE VERY SHORT ANSWER ON DR MILLS

Deborah Mills’ commitment to community cultural development (ccd) has been applied in a variety of settings including the community sector, local and State governments and as the Director of the Community Cultural Development Board (CCDB). Currently a consultant, she is happiest when working on cultural policy.

*This article is adapted from a paper delivered at a Local Government Community Services Association Seminar, Developing People and Places: The Role of Cultural and Recreational Planning/Development in Local Government, July 2002
old onto your hats – cultural planning has hit the big time! The economic development gurus have discovered that creative and vibrant communities attract talent, which is the most prized commodity in today’s knowledge economy. Culture is the X factor that provides the competitive edge!

Where could this roller-coaster ride take us and who’s got their hands on the wheel?

In his book The Rise of the Creative Class, Richard Florida outlines his thoughts on the emergence of a new class of people – the creative class – and the impact this is having on the geography of economic development. Florida is Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University in the US and has been tracking the factors that cause some cities and regions to prosper and grow while others decline. The book documents the significant shift in those factors over the last ten to 20 years.1

In the past, argues Florida, a major key to economic growth for communities was the attraction and retention of large companies that brought employment with them. Those jobs in turn attracted people, generating markets and economic activity. This thinking continued to be applied through the 1990s, despite the fact that the source of greatest employment growth was shifting from larger (often manufacturing) companies to smaller, knowledge-based companies. What Florida identified in the late 1990s was that in this new workplace environment people were no longer moving to the source of jobs, jobs were moving to the source of talent. And where was that talent? Living in places that were diverse in both
character and demography, and that offered a tolerant, creative community life. Their (the creative class) location choices were based to a large degree on their lifestyle interests and these, I found, went well beyond the standard quality-of-life amenities that most experts thought were important ... My conclusion was that rather than being driven exclusively by companies, economic growth was occurring in places that were tolerant, diverse and open to creativity – because these were places where creative people of all types wanted to live. [author’s italics]

Florida’s research applied a range of indices to those communities that were thriving with knowledge-based industries and concluded that these factors were the key to attracting individuals from the creative class. Although most publicity about his research focussed on the Gay Index (which showed a correlation between the presence of the gay community and knowledge-based industry), it also included the Bohemian Index – a measure of the density of artists, writers and performers in a region.

There’s a great deal more to the concept of the creative class and of course, Florida is not the only contributor to the discussion about creative communities attracting greater economic activity.2 This thinking is taking hold internationally and it has real implications for those engaged in cultural planning and community cultural development (ccd), particularly those working in the local government system. These issues are behind the recent ‘Brisbane it’s happening’ campaign where the decision was made to move away from the tourist-focussed projection of sun, surf and sand to an image of Brisbane as a dynamic urban centre where bright young things are creating new opportunities for themselves. The aim of the exercise is not to draw tourists, but to draw young creative talent and in turn, business investment. This approach is consistent with the statements being made at the launch of the Queensland Government’s Cultural Policy, Creative Queensland, released last October. At the time Premier Peter Beattie said, A Smart State is a creative state which recognises that cultural development contributes to the economic and social well being of Queenslanders. Many new jobs for the information age are emerging from the creative and cultural sectors. We are seeing closer, stronger ties between innovation and industry and between creativity and our State’s success in the global economy.
This comment points to an increasing acceptance of the inextricable links between creativity, culture, globalisation, the knowledge economy and innovation. Having experienced 150 years where the attraction of finance for capital investment has been the name of the game, the new mantra is: first get the ideas, the money will follow. This is about as radical a change as can be imagined.

The realisation that people are drawn to particular qualities in a community or region may be nothing new for many who have been working in the community sector. As CCD workers we are obliged to observe what makes a community function well and what is valuable to people. However, there’s no getting away from the fact that as these arguments start coming from economists it has the potential to greatly increase the credibility of our position regarding the role of culture.

So, here we are, strange bedfellows with economists, wanting the same thing – enlivened, engaging communities where people experience a sense of connection with others and share their community life in a spirit of openness and acceptance. And what does this mean for cultural planning? Well, before we get to that, let me talk specifics ...

I have lived in this ideal community. A community with a rich human and architectural history that is prized by its residents, a heritage of social and environmental diversity that is nurtured by its forward thinking local government, a place with abundant street life, where the patrons of a local sidewalk café generate community networks and initiatives, ideas and creative events as fast as the Italian staff serve their great coffees. This is a place where you can afford to live, eat cheaply, walk everywhere, ride your bike, have your dog along for the ride and bump into neighbours and friends all the time. You can catch up on classic black & white movies or the latest cinematic experience in a comfy, intimate locally run cinema, or choose from four local theatre companies performing on the streets or in local venues. You can join groups of visual artists and crafts people who gather to make and exhibit their work and debate their ideas. This is a place where you can sit in the street beside a wharfie, a student, a hippie, a nun, a migrant fisherman, a leading international academic, an artist, a writer, a crook or a footballer (or any combination of the above!) and know that you’re ‘at home’.

Fremantle then

This is Fremantle, Western Australia c.1980. Like a number of my generation, I arrived in Fremantle in the mid 1970s, drawn by the character and architecture of the place, particularly the beautiful old homes that provided cheap and comfortable student housing. (The then radical Murdoch University had just opened nearby.) Although I didn’t see the university career through, there was never any question of leaving Fremantle from that time and, apart from periods overseas and interstate, it has been ‘home’ ever since. Over those years I have variously related to Fremantle as a student, an arts activist, an amateur performer, the journalist with the local newspaper, the organiser of the Fremantle Festival, the General Manager of the Fremantle Arts Centre, a local business person, a mother of two, President of the primary school P&C, a consultant to the local council and local arts organisations, a facilitator at large public meetings, a residential and commercial property owner, a friend, neighbour and colleague to many other Fremantle people and, of course, a regular café user.

Now, as part of a Community Cultural Development Board (CCDB) Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts, I am examining changes to the community over the past 20-30 years as experienced by the people who live here. Primarily, I’m interviewing a cross-section of residents about their feelings towards the community and the changes they observe. These interviews confirm that my description of Fremantle in the 1970s and early 1980s is not nostalgia-fuelled romanticism. As Polish-born heritage architect Agnieszka Kiera recalls when she arrived in 1981;

There was a strange mixture of working class people, Homestwest (state housing) tenants, ethnic groups ... a lot of artists
and intellectuals. The mixture was interesting because what they all had in common was one thing – their appreciation of Fremantle. They didn’t necessarily love each other ... however they all, for a variety of reasons, came to Fremantle and became strongly loyal to the city. Italians or Europeans, people like myself, because it reminded them of home, artists and intellectuals because they were attracted by the architecture and character of the city and working class (people) because they were still working here ...

Agnieshka goes on to relate how in her role with council these citizens had a strong sense of their individual rights but also a commitment to what she calls ‘the common good’. This meant she could work with people to ensure they achieved what they wanted in developing their properties and also that the heritage of the community was preserved.

Mind you, in those days Fremantle wasn’t everyone’s cup of tea. As a port city it had a long-held reputation as a rough, working-class town. With an abundance of well-used workingmen’s clubs, hotels and drinking holes for visiting seamen, visitors were guaranteed a lively, at times raucous, presence day and night. It was home to a large migrant population (principally Italian, Yugoslav and Portuguese) who were integral to the local fishing industry and whose presence was clear from the distinctive architectural features of their homes as well as from the local restaurant trade. Many people in largely Anglo-Celtic suburban Perth were not in a hurry to celebrate the ‘difference’ that Fremantle seemed so willing to embrace and stayed well away. This extended into the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of hippies and, in particular, a large population of sanyassins, followers of Bagwan Shree Rajneesh or ‘Orange People’, who established an ashram and several businesses in the town centre. Their highly visible and voluble presence was similarly disconcerting to those unfamiliar with Fremantle ways.

Resident Jean Hobson recalls ticking off a passer-by who made a deprecating remark to an ‘orange person’ in the street. ‘You can’t talk like that (to people)’, said Jean, ‘you’re in Fremantle now.’

In this climate the arts and cultural life of Fremantle was flourishing. From state-funded major institutions such as the Fremantle Arts Centre (and its off-shoot publishing house, Fremantle Arts Centre Press) to pioneering companies such as Swy Theatre (now the Perth Theatre Company), Deckchair Theatre and Spare Parts Puppet Theatre. From Praxis (now the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art) to various artist-run-initiatives in converted spaces providing studios and in some cases training for individual artists – including visual artists, sculptors, ceramists and performing artists. Buskers of all styles were in the street and people played their guitars and read their poetry in cafes – it was constant and abundant.

In a 1984 report, Investigation into the Performing Arts undertaken by Paula Silbert for the City of Fremantle, Sharon Flindell, the Administrator of the fledgling Swy Theatre Company said,

The Company would like to retain its home base in the Fremantle area.

Fremantle has established itself as the Arts community. We believe a base in this area makes our Company accessible, not only to the Fremantle residents but to a large percentage of the greater (Western Australian) community. The large amount of arts activity in the Fremantle area also creates the opportunity for arts organisations (within such close proximity) to provide support for each other in a very practical way.

Given these elements were all in place in the 1980s, Fremantle was perfectly placed to benefit from the economic activity that accompanies the rise of the creative class. So, does it follow that Fremantle is now a thriving hub of creative and knowledge-based industries, with increased diversity, more arts activity and a strong sense of social cohesion? No, it does not.

The interviews reveal that while people still regard Fremantle as a very good place to live many think it is becoming ‘more like any other community’. The physical and built environment remains a major attraction, there are pockets of social activity which are reminiscent of the 1980s café energy (most of them now located outside the CBD area), arts organisations are still here but less visible on the street, artists are still based...
It was as if 15 years of gentrification was crunched into three.

here although artist-run studio and exhibition spaces are hard to find and younger artists are no longer attracted in large numbers. Migrant communities are still here with more recent waves of migrant populations added. However, many of the second and third generations are choosing lives in other parts of suburban Perth. The introduction of containerisation has made the wharfies and many port-related industries and services redundant. Footballers are now AFL stars and far less likely to be strolling the streets or working in a nearby shop or factory as they used to when the WAFL was the main show. Students need cheaper accommodation than Fremantle now offers and have by and large, moved further out.

Why Fremantle hasn’t been able to capitalise on the opportunities that appeared to await it in the 80’s and why people feel a diminishing of the loyalty or commitment to the common good that Agnieszka described, are topics that have been well considered by many of my interviewees. It’s useful to look at their observations and my own at a time when so many communities and regions are jockeying for position in this new economic environment. More importantly for those of us committed to building better communities, what has happened in this town raises significant questions about our role - how we work, what we focus on in our work and who is setting the agenda.

Clearly a full analysis of this situation is impossible in this context as there are many complex contributing factors to the process this community has undergone over the past two decades. Some are unique to this place, others are part of global change. However, at the risk of being reductionist I’ll skim through some of them and then move on to what may be learnt from this experience.

The America’s Cup

Alan Bond won it for Australia in 1983 and from the moment Australia II crossed the finishing line and an exuberant Bob Hawke gave us all the day off, all eyes turned to Fremantle WA, where the challenge would be mounted in 1986. The Cup brought with it many things – public attention, government investment, private investment (and greed), overseas visitors, syndicates, Walter Cronkite and unbelievable yachts. Money poured into Fremantle as it hastily prepared for the onslaught of tourists and competitors - buildings were painted and restored, new harbours, spectator areas and transport systems were built, new cafes emerged and old ones were tarted up, accommodation options flourished. Vastly improved infrastructure and services were provided and our old port city sparkled. Commercial operators outlined new, often harebrained schemes each week in the local paper. Residents were encouraged to make their fortune from renting their houses for the period and real estate prices boomed as the Cup drew near. Despite a considerably forward-thinking and cohesive council at the time, in keeping with Western Australia’s history of economic opportunism, this particular event was mined for all it was worth.

The Cup’s legacy included:
- a cleaner, ‘prettier’ city which provided greater services to its residents and visitors
- the sensitive preservation of significant heritage buildings and sites made more accessible to the community
- a love affair with tourism as a source of economic opportunity - which has continued to dominate the policy direction of local economic initiatives
- increased real estate prices - not because of the pre-Cup inflation but because of the improved look of Fremantle and the greater awareness of its advantages

It was as if 15 years of gentrification was crunched into three.

Structural change

At the same time Fremantle was experiencing the demise of port-related industry. As in ports all around the world, technological change drove the large-scale loss of employment amongst wharfies (or ‘lumpers’ as they were known here), storemen and the many businesses that serviced this particular population. This led to vacating of significant amounts of warehouse and commercial space, which in the early 1990s began being transformed into apartments and trendy living spaces – a process which is still active. In this regard, Fremantle is no different from many other communities that have undergone or are undergoing significant economic and structural change and, especially if they are physically attractive or close to amenities, the resultant
process of gentrification. Of course, the great irony of gentrification is that the demographic diversity that attracts new residents is frequently neutralised by their arrival, or that the new residents’ arrival is only possible once another sector of the community (in Fremantle’s case the working class) has been displaced. The America’s Cup experience merely heightened this phenomenon, encouraging emphasis on property and tourism as economic drivers.

The rise of ‘managerialism’

In keeping with global trends the local government authority in Fremantle has undergone significant changes over this period, particularly since the mid 1990s. Prior to 1993 three Mayors served Fremantle over 41 years. Since 1993 Fremantle has had another three Mayors, each serving one term of four years. This is just one example of the volatility that is now being experienced in local government at both the elected and staffing level, whether driven by the political process (and the volatility of the electorate), changing work patterns, or an individual’s desire to move on.

Other global trends in management include:
- The push for transparent decision-making and accountability
- Concern regarding liability that has led to risk-averse organisations
- Changing work patterns that mean managers often arrive, qualifications in hand, having moved from one institution (whether educational or work-related) to another

In Fremantle Council, some manifestations of these trends include:
- Organisational restructuring
- A Fremantle City Plan which includes a Strategic Plan, a Corporate Plan and points to 22 other ‘major strategic documents’ that guide the organisation
- A lengthy consultation process regarding the potential to build a new performing arts venue and co-located gallery which at one point sparked legal action by a consultant against a community member and which also kept the Cultural Services Coordinator of the time so busy that little progress could be made on the newly adopted Cultural Policy and Plan
- Exhaustive efforts by Cultural and Community Services to find solutions to public liability issues to ensure the survival of the annual Fremantle Festival, Buskers’ Festival and numerous street-based activities
- During the first, extremely strained enterprise bargaining agreement negotiation, the CEO opening his address to a group of disaffected depot staff by quoting management guru and writer Peter Drucker. Needless to say, it was downhill from there.

As I am discovering in interviewing others, the result of these factors (and, as I freely admit, many others) is a diminishing sense of the unique nature of Fremantle and the commitment to a common good.

My purpose is not to take pot shots at my local council. I’m more interested in what can be learnt from this process and, in the case of Fremantle, what I can do to contribute to retaining the best of what we still have and nurturing more of what people are telling me they want. Further, given this latest wave of thinking within economic development, I’m keen to know how I, and others, make the most of the opportunities this represents without compromising the values of the work we do.

So, how? It’s tempting to finish here with the cry ‘work-in-progress!’ That’s true, but here are some thoughts that arise out of my consideration of these issues so far.

Confidence in culture

Firstly, I think we need to maintain confidence in the essential role of culture in economic development. Jon Hawkes outlines the case in detail in The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s essential role in public planning, and highlights the central importance of culture to all public planning which strives for sustainability.1

Part of ensuring our confidence in culture is to know what we mean when we use the term. Again, Hawkes provides an extremely useful discussion of the meaning of culture, teasing out its different uses and clarifying the meaning that is most commonly used in the arts sector; that is, culture equals an expanded notion of the arts. And the meaning that we need to be using to ensure the development of effective public policy; that is, culture equals:
- our values and aspirations
- the processes and mediums through which we develop, receive and transmit these values and aspirations

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Are we developing arts policy or cultural policy?

Are we undertaking arts planning or cultural planning?

The tangible and intangible manifestations of these values and aspirations in the real world.

We need to be able to be consistent in our use of the term and resist the conflation of arts and culture that is so prevalent. Are we developing arts policy or cultural policy? Are we undertaking arts planning or cultural planning? They are very different things and both important.

Stewart Brand in *The Clock of the Long Now* further articulates just how important and different art and culture are. He visualises ‘the order of civilization’ as a series of layers like a rainbow, with art the fastest paced layer on the outer edge, on the next layer down commerce, then infrastructure, governance, culture and finally, nature, the slowest paced layer at the bottom. Brand argues that in a healthy society each level is allowed to operate at its own pace, safely sustained by the slower levels below and kept invigorated by the livelier levels above. This is a fascinating discussion that reinforces the importance of being very clear about what we are doing in our work because strategies to stimulate fast-paced art and creativity are not going to be the same as strategies to facilitate the maintenance of a rich and diverse cultural life. I wonder whether the America’s Cup shocked the Fremantle ‘system’ in the 1980s, disrupting the balance between fast and slow elements and sending things off-course for a period?

The broader debate

Secondly, we need to be conscious of the broader debates that are underway, grapple with the issues those debates generate and frame our work in that broader context while, at the same time, ensuring that our thinking is grounded in the real needs of our communities. No small ask, especially given that most people have been hit by the demands of ‘managerialism’ and the many other complexities of modern life. In this context, considered reflection is a luxury and policy-making or project development can become seat-of-the-pants exercises. Perhaps in this setting we need to take strength from collaborative effort and do our thinking together. We need to develop more avenues for encouraging analysis and support each other in taking time to reach appropriate conclusions, rather than rushing to meet externally driven ‘deadlines’.

Clarity of purpose

We need to avoid being diverted from what matters most in our work. And each of us needs to determine what does matter most in our work, to us. As individuals working in *ccd* we each have strengths, weaknesses, experiences, attitudes, prejudices that make us unique. The more we know about ourselves and our motivations, the more able we are to contribute and to work with others. In my view, this is our individual challenge - to understand, take responsibility for and enjoy, as much of ourselves as possible. That provides the base from which we then relate to others, reflect on our work, consider complex issues, decide on action, make choices, and sleep (or not) at night. From this base we determine what matters most in our work, how to respond to the demands of external pressures, where we stand on issues affecting our communities. The healthier that base is, the healthier our actions and the outcomes from our work.

Well-honed bullshit-detectors

Another useful side effect of a healthy individual base is that we become better at identifying bullshit when it comes our way. As this latest wave of economic development thinking becomes the next policy fashion filtering through the government system, there will be plenty of it about. We need to be able to identify how the rhetoric is being used, by whom and to what end. With hindsight, talking about the arts as the ‘arts industry’ was a major piece of collusion with economic rationalism in the 1980s. It may have seemed like a good idea at the time but we traded away recognition of the intrinsic worth of creative expression and left ourselves dependent on delivering on, often inappropriate, economic measures to prove our value. It may not have had such an impact if we had first identified measures that met the need of the economists and satisfied acknowledgement...
of intrinsic worth. Not easy, but these are the sorts of tasks we must take on to maintain the values of our work.

In this debate about the building of creative communities for economic growth we will need to operate with integrity and rigour at every level – intellectually, personally, professionally – if we are to claim the best outcomes for our communities. I also think there are those arguing the economic development line who have a real appreciation of the crucial role of culture and are excellent potential allies in the debate.6

Undoubtedly we will encounter the hard-head, hard-heart economic protagonists who want to ‘use’ culture in a cynical bid to achieve greater wealth and in so doing will fail because they don’t appreciate the role of culture. (Failure is not what our communities need). Many of them will also assume that cultural workers are all soft-heads, soft-hearts who do not appreciate the importance of wealth generation or the complexities of economic renewal and, if they are correct, their experiments will fail because we have not been able to work in effective partnership with them.

However, if we can be strong and purposeful, hard-head, soft-hearted leaders working with our counterparts in the economic development arena, we may be about to embark on the ride of our lives – a ride with much greater direction than any roller coaster provides and one in which we are active contributors to some startling community development.

Footnotes
2. See also the work of Charles Landry @ Comedia (UK), Allen J. Scott @ UCLA, Kevin O’Connor @ Melbourne University, Manuel Castells @ UC Berkeley
3. It wasn’t perfect – what felt to me like a huge psychological community blind-spot was the presence of a maximum security prison which housed one of the largest concentrated populations of Aboriginal people in the state. It had been built by convicts’ c.1851 and was finally decommissioned in 1991.
6. Florida’s arguments seem to me to point to a genuine appreciation of the role of culture in economic development. Dr Onko Kingma,, a Director of CapitalAg and a Visiting Fellow with the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania, participated in the 3rd Regional Arts Australia National Conference in Albury-Wodonga last year and demonstrated his understanding of and commitment to these issues.

June Moorhouse has a 25-year history in the arts, much of it in senior management roles and now as a consultant. June is passionate about creating environments that inspire creative expression and meaningful human connection. She is currently undertaking a CCDB Fellowship and would welcome comments on the ideas in this article at moorhouse@telesis.com.au or via the online forum on ccd.net - current forums.
After a dozen years working regularly with local government bodies, I can offer a couple of basic precepts for promoting recognition of cultural development as a worthwhile field of endeavour. These are as follows:
Demonstration is the best kind of explanation.

You can talk ‘til you’re blue in the face and there’s a good chance that the relevant people still won’t have any real idea of what you’re on about. Tangible, well-documented outcomes within the context of real-life project initiatives are, in my experience, the only sure-fire way of developing understanding and enthusiasm.

When in Rome, speak Latin.

There are significant translational issues to be dealt with when attempting to engage local government operatives. Art talk (and, in many cases, the words ‘art’ and even ‘culture’ themselves) will generally elicit only blank looks. Art, within the context of local government, is not a self-evident virtue. The most effective rhetoric is that which addresses existing local government agendas. In other words, talk about art and cultural development approaches in terms of their functional attributes and the benefits they can elicit in the context of issues already on the local government agenda.

I’m spelling out these basic principles because they are central to the success and the ongoing ambitions of a program called ‘Small Towns: Big Picture’, an ongoing, collaborative initiative involving five small towns, various artists and numerous government and non-government agencies in the Central Goldfields region of Victoria. The project as it stands is not a local government initiative, but it does address issues of local leadership and local sustainability that are central to the role and responsibilities of local government. As the project develops further, it will certainly target more direct, key-level involvement from the three local councils responsible for the towns in question. In doing so, the project will clearly abide by the precepts outlined above.

More than a parochial celebration

There’s a big crowd packing out the Dunolly Town Hall, a real cross section of the local populace. We’ve enjoyed a lively selection of cameo performances by a diverse range of local artists, imbued an excellent country supper out in the foyer and now we’re waiting to witness the centrepiece of the evening’s program, a performance of a musical play titled Right Where We Are. Before the curtain goes up, an interesting thing happens. A few people stand up in the audience and present personal statements of their feelings for the town. One of these people has lived in Dunolly all their life. Another person left the town but has now come back. A third person is originally from elsewhere and has come to live in the town quite recently. Mention is also made of a fourth person who has left the town and not returned (and who is therefore unable to present a personal testimony). Together, these statements present a compelling picture of the things that make this community tick, the things that sustain it but also the things that threaten its well-being. It’s a succinct critical portrait, and the audience response is one of keen self-recognition. It’s also an excellent introduction to the play, which amplifies and elaborates this critical self-portrait. The play presents a range of scenarios illustrating both the attractions and limitations of life in small towns like Dunolly. It celebrates the joy of being Right Where We Are, but also asks that most pertinent of questions: ‘Why are they always leaving?’

Written and composed by Craig Christie, the development of this musical play came about via an innovative collaborative process. Craig was an invited observer within a series of community workshops to evaluate local social cohesion and quality of life against a given set of indicators. Facilitated by social scientists and researchers associated with the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities at La Trobe University, the workshops targeted people from four sectors of the local communities: volunteers, business people, young people, and senior residents. Witnessing the often passionate discussion that occurred in the workshops, Craig sought to report and reflect community sentiment through the creation of various snapshots capturing common experience. The play is a sophisticated, heavily quotational piece of writing that manages to encapsulate and coalesce complex responses to big questions.

The musical play was just one part of a larger program involving several artists working with researchers and local communities to develop broadly understood indicators of community progress towards social, environmental and economic sustainability. In the words of program leader, social scientist Dr Maureen Rogers, the project sought to give people ‘a tool kit for measuring the health of their communities, and for establishing a set of benchmarks for sustainability’. This activity is seen as essential groundwork to inform the subsequent development of local action.
plans, exploring opportunities identified through the initial audit exercise. In addition to measuring levels of social health and cohesion within the five towns, the project also measured environmental sustainability in terms of energy consumption and carbon emissions. Artists worked with communities and researchers to make representations of local ‘energy consumption footprints’, quantifying carbon emissions against the acreage of trees required to absorb those emissions. In another component of the project, an artist worked with research and community data to create an interactive website documenting the extent and structure of organisational and community networks within each of the towns. The website will function as an ongoing, perpetually evolving tool to promote more efficient linkages within communities and to identify entry points for people wanting to become involved in community activity.

Local leadership - where does it reside?

One of the numerous reform programs ruthlessly pursued by the Kennett Government in Victoria in the 1990s was a radical restructure and rationalisation of local government. As a result of this process 210 councils was reduced to 79 councils, with the new organisations having greater resources but correspondingly greater responsibilities across larger, often more diverse geographic and demographic regions. For many small towns in regional Victoria, this has meant that the genuinely ‘local’ aspect of local government has effectively disappeared, with councils now seeming more distant and less capable of responding in a hands-on sense to local issues. In some instances, towns now compete against each other for council attention and resources, and councils can’t afford to invest (or be seen to invest) too much in one local community at the expense of others within the larger municipality. On top of this, the out-sourcing of local government services under the state-enforced purchaser/provider model has meant that local communities now engage with their councils less directly.

In light of this, it’s perhaps not surprising that local direction and management of Small Towns: Big Picture has come via local progress associations comprised of civic-minded volunteers. These associations are often focussed around an institution such as the local Neighbourhood House or community resource centre, an institution supported by local government but also by various state government service providers. More and more, these local groups are being effectively asked to assume responsibility for determining and managing the future direction of their towns. There are, of course, a couple of ways of looking at this phenomenon, all of which have some validity. One of these is to resent the seemingly ever-increasing burden of responsibility being placed upon small numbers of already over-burdened, largely unrecompensed community members. Another is to observe that, given the economic and social factors currently affecting most rural communities, those that best survive and prosper in these circumstances will be the ones that assume control of their own destiny. Successful communities will increasingly need to move beyond a mendicant position, working to solve to their own problems rather than expecting some external agency (including the local council) to do this for them. Dr Onko Kingmar, a respected agricultural industry
consultant, persuasively articulates this argument, at the same time underlining the importance of creativity as an essential tool for survival;

Communities are being challenged as never before. The magnitude of change in many areas demands a quantum shift in the use of resources, the structure of economic and social enterprise and in communications. Cooperation and inclusiveness are the cornerstones of new approaches to sustainable development, requiring new strategies for capacity building, investment and adjustment. Cultural activities are important in conceptualising these strategies and in making them work. The arts provide fertile ground for the growth of new ways of expression.  

To date, the ‘Small Towns: Big Picture’ program has involved only limited direct involvement on the part of local councils. Councils have responded when asked to do something (eg – hanging banners in the streets) but they haven’t had substantial involvement in major aspects of project work. It’s important to appreciate however that, in line with the first precept spelt out at the beginning of this article, an ambition of the project in its initial stage has been to demonstrate to local councils how arts projects can effectively engage local communities in complex planning agendas. Tangible, substantial outcomes and positive community engagement and response have now elicited real interest from the various local councils. The challenge within stage 2 of the project, involving the development of action plans for each of the five participating communities, will be to translate this existing local council interest into more substantial, hands-on involvement. It’s interesting to hear the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) if one of these councils comment that: ‘Look, it’s one of those things that local government need not necessarily be involved with, but yet when you look at the aims of the program ... it sits almost directly with what local government’s thinking is.’ 

A vital role for artists

To me at least, one of the most significant things about Small Towns: Big Picture is that it clearly casts artists in a vital role, engaging local communities in critical discussion and planning. Judy Spokes, Executive Officer for the Cultural Development Network, says that this integration of artists within a broad based community research program was the fundamental objective driving her organisation’s initiation of the project in partnership with La Trobe University. In evaluating outcomes to date, it is precisely this integration that has made the project successful.

With a project like this, local councils are compelled to move beyond a view of art as merely soft window dressing ...
The project provides strong demonstration of the value of artists within core local planning and development agendas. With a project like this, local councils are compelled to move beyond a view of art as merely soft window dressing within the occasional festival or annual Christmas pageant. Significantly, most of the artists involved in the project are actually members of the communities concerned. The project increased local recognition of the value of these artists, and demonstrated their capacity to function as leaders in their communities. In a practical sense, artists in this project are the critical translators of complex processes and data, making accessible material that would otherwise be dry and alienating. From a local government perspective, where community engagement should be an underlying objective, this surely must be recognised as a vital function.

Small Towns: Big Picture is an ongoing initiative. The project has generated ideas and expectations that are already being acted upon at a local level. In Dunolly, for example, a local energy committee is using data collected and interpreted through the project to inform discussions with Bendigo Bank and the CSIRO directed at the establishment of a Community Power Company and the trialing of hydrogen cell technologies at the local hospital. In Carisbrook, the project created impetus for a successful campaign to restore the local Town Hall. In Wedderburn, the local council is incorporating artworks produced through the project within a community garden, and the Principal of the high school is planning new projects involving local artists. At a more macro level, La Trobe University is developing a new series of local workshops to audit economic performance and identify opportunities for replacing imported goods and services with local produce.

Footnotes
1. Small Towns: Big Picture is a joint initiative of the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities at La Trobe University and the Cultural Development Network Victoria, working with local government and local management groups in the towns of Maldon, Carisbrook, Dunolly, Wedderburn and Talbot. The project has employed numerous artists, including Craig Christie, Anne Moloney, Andrea Hicks, Philip Ashton, Fay White, Judy Lorraine, Tanya Walsh, Tiffany Tishall, Donna Baily and Anna Ashton. Funding for the project to date has come from a range of sources, most notably the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, the Sustainable Energy Authority and the Ian Potter Foundation. More detailed information about the project is available from the Cultural Development Network via e-mail: judspo@melbourne.vic.gov.au

2. Right Where We Are is an original musical play composed by Craig Christie over an intensive (and amazingly brief) three-month period in April - June 2002. Premiere performances of the work took place in each of the five towns involved in Small Towns: Big Picture, involving two separate casts of performers, all of whom were members of the local communities concerned. A CD soundtrack featuring songs from the musical was also produced.

3. Quotation from essay by Dr Onko Kingar for catalogue publication accompanying documentary exhibition of work from Small Towns: Big Picture at the City Gallery, Melbourne Town Hall, April – June 2003.

4. Central Goldfields Shire CEO Mark Johnson, interviewed in a video produced to document the Small Towns: Big Picture project.
It used to be claimed that the core business of local government was ‘rates, roads and rubbish’. It is becoming fashionable to claim those days are passed and that local government now has a broader remit - one that includes taking responsibility for culture at the local level. How close to reality are such claims? What responsibility are Local Government Authorities (LGAs) taking for cultural development? The Minister for the Arts, Queensland, recently announced at the opening of an upgrade and extension to the Cooloola Public Gallery that culture is the core business of local government. In this analysis, I will be looking at how true is this of LGAs today, or whether this is a prescriptive rather than a descriptive view.

There are tensions, even conflicts, that emerge from studying LGAs and cultural development strategies. These may involve the relationships between councils and their constituents, between councils and local cultural groups, between councils and local artists and cultural workers. Moreover, the objectives of different players are not necessarily complementary.

The term ‘local’ also raises another set of tensions around the question of what comprises ‘the local’. Whilst the responsibility of a local government authority is to the constituents of that particular area, increasingly it is being recognised that ‘no [local area] is an island, entire of itself.’ Australia has long had a predisposition to regionalism as an alternative way of organising political, economic, social and cultural differences. The tensions here are increasingly being exacerbated by the emerging influence of globalisation. Global networks are increasingly affecting - some may say ‘infecting’ - not only nations and regions but also impacting on local activities. In this context we have seen numerous approaches to cultural development implemented and of particular interest to the notion of local cultural development for communities is the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) of the Queensland State Government.
Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF)

From the various funding models available it is the ‘partnership’ model that was adopted by the Queensland Government for its RADF program which, since it commenced in the early 1990s, has aimed to:

... facilitate the growth of professional and amateur arts activity at the local level. The fund will be established to redress the lack of cultural development in regional and rural centres and will create rapid and balanced arts development throughout Queensland. This will be achieved through the Labor Government entering into a partnership with local government and community groups. (State Parliamentary Labor Party, 1989, p.7)

This program is based on a close relationship between the state and local government and the local community - represented by an RADF community committee which bears the greatest workload in the partnership. In addition to putting in funding bids, dispersing monies and being responsible for acquitting projects, these committees can also take on other activities - cultural mapping and planning processes, cultural industry development, cultural tourism, general advisory services to council on cultural matters and involvement with local cultural activities. It is these roles that I wish to focus on to explore the potential of RADF committees to encourage - and facilitate - both council and community to greater efforts in relation to community cultural development (ccd).

Evidence of emerging tension

Over the years tensions in the RADF program have emerged with claims that the scheme is inherently conservative. Is it because: ‘The direction of [RADF] funds towards regional activity and the highly prescriptive social justice considerations that must be included in individual policy documents lend an air of democracy to a fund that is still hierarchical at its core’ (Sykes, 1997, p.23)? Or does it reside more in the RADF community committees? Or the communities themselves?

Anecdotal evidence (comments from various interviews with people involved in RADF at community level) suggests that often the wrong people get in - and stay in - there is not sufficient turnover; committee members are often not committed - it’s just another chore - or they don’t have the time, enthusiasm, skill or training; increasingly regular ‘volunteers’ in rural communities are being reduced by age, by economic pressures requiring extra hours on the farm or off-farm employment. More critically,
committees may represent ‘peers’ but they are often not qualified or ‘too narrow’ in their concepts of cultural development or they may have a simplistic approach to culture and its development. Many committees also tend to ‘take the easy way out’ - they want to avoid conflict and contentious issues or to avoid difficult projects that might involve expertise or something ‘novel’. Small communities also foster ‘incestuous’ relationships that shape decision-making, there is a predominance of women, and there can be infighting in committees and councils.

Then there is the attitude of the LGAs. For some, RADF money for the region represents political mileage, it ‘looks good in the budget’, and has a prestige value. Many LGAs lack the skills in dealing with their communities in consultative terms with councils used to a top-down approach to administration. Nor, in most cases, is there any cultural development expertise available on the staff of local governments.

In the mid 1990s, Linda Sykes undertook a study of the RADF which she entitled Clash of Cultures. These are several comments she collected from participants:

There seems to be heightened awareness of cultural activities, but there’s no hard data for measuring the success of projects. Sometimes I think the program stifles creativity because people try to design projects that fit into categories, that will appeal to the selection panel. (Personal interview F 1996, p.14)

RADF is important and I would like to see it go further, perhaps with two levels of funding - one for professional arts and cultural workers assessed by arts peers and one for community projects assessed by a community elected committee (Personal interview G. 1996, p.16).

I tend towards community activities that reach more people. I’m not sure if I’m interpreting the guidelines correctly, but I myself feel that you’re funding one person largely to benefit themselves. In the end this is not as beneficial as funding something where lots are involved. (Personal interview, D. 1996), p.17)

RADF Funding

One of the primary roles of the RADF community committee is to put forward funding proposals for the forthcoming year, using five funding categories: Individual professional development, projects, skill development workshops, concept development and policy development and/or implementation - the last category covering such activities as cultural mapping, policy development, and RADF committee training. It is the balancing act between focusing, on one hand, on professional development for arts and cultural workers and on the other, facilitating cultural development at a community level - that is a major cause of angst. Let’s look at how different communities might take up the RADF opportunities.

The first example came from focus groups held in Central Queensland. At a small township of about 100 people located in a remote area, participants (all female) talked about the various RADF workshops they had attended. These included, among other things, hat making, silver smithing, making bush furniture (a couple of men had attended that workshop and enjoyed it). Then one participant commented that most of the items made at workshops were taken home, stored away and then forgotten. From this comment emerged a general consensus that the workshops were, in fact, appreciated more as occasions to socialise than for opportunities to ‘make art’ or craft.

I would suggest that this is indicative of an underlying problem; that some of the workshops and cultural programs that are offered (or that are chosen by communities) fail to connect directly with the experience of rural participants.
Another perspective came out at a focus group held at a neighbouring small town. One participant related how a small group had got their Cultural Centre up and running:

Arts and crafts started about eight years ago I think, with a couple of ladies that have now left. I guess we started as an Arts and Craft group, accessing the money through the RADF funding for two tutors. At those activities with the tutors I think they all decided, well there’s other things needed in the area such as the Museum. So we founded the Slab Hut [museum] and we moved it piece by piece to town and of course that’s no good without this [the Cultural Centre]. It’s been six years from when we decided we needed this building to when we had the money to build it. Thanks to the Centennial Foundation we got $78 000 from that fund, $34 000 from the Arts Office, $8 000 from our local council and then we raised the $25 000 whatever with steak sandwiches. Thought I was going to look like a steak sandwich before the building was built ... three months and we’re up and running ... it now seems to be the drop in centre at the moment. It’s good. The place is bringing people together - the number of locals that come here just for smoko. You don’t get any work done when you come here.

In this case the ladies had built on various funding sources to achieve a special place for ongoing activities - a place of aspiration and inspiration. Their Cultural Centre now incorporates culture, community, creativity and also commercial enterprise and entrepreneurial-ship. It can be argued that their experience demonstrates evidence of community development embedded in cultural development. Culture, here seemed to be more about getting together and sharing experiences and ideas; about exchange and mutuality; and a tendency to perceive culture as an activity grounded in home and community and in daily lives. But it is also about establishing a place for making as well as disseminating culture.

In a different context, a number of professional and semi-professional artists from a Sunshine Coast shire spoke highly of professional development opportunities offered through RADF. The LGA has been successful in attracting RADF monies for a range of projects and workshops with diversification across art forms but with visual arts grants dominating both in value and number of successful applications. However, a number of successful applications were also for cash advances to cover preliminary costs of theatre performances, particularly musicals. So, besides encouraging and supporting professional development, this form of funding also contributes to the shire’s public entertainment programs, providing access to theatre experiences that residents may not otherwise be able to access without travelling to Brisbane. There is also a contribution here to developing cultural tourism through these funds.

Murals at Alpha, Central Queensland, were a community effort to ‘put Alpha on the map’. Photo: Robin Trotter

What might we take from these examples? First, there are various objectives that the RADF community committee might pursue. There may be an ad hoc approach where, serendipitously, things may fall into place and a set of outcomes may be achieved that meet the community’s aspirations and ambitions. The RADF committee may focus on individual projects and career development of individuals (or groups) and in this context, community flow on (or trickle down) effects may also be seen as benefits of the funding program. Or it may consciously – or more often unconsciously, achieve CCD goals. But is there a more constructive path to follow to ensure better outcomes for communities?

RADF and cultural planning

Let’s hypothesise that an RADF committee might set out to exploit, by strategic use of funds, both avenues of development - professional and community. How that
... a planned, strategic approach not only proposes a shift in the agenda of local RADF committees but also has the potential to change relationships between the committee and its local council and between the committee and its community.

When using the term ‘cultural planning’, our hypothetical RADF committee might open up the notion of planning to look more carefully at cultural infrastructure and resources. Turning back to the focus groups, one question posed was: ‘What cultural infrastructure and resources can you access locally?’ In the remote areas libraries and schools were always a topic of concern however, smaller communities often turn to the CWA hall or the pub. How then might our RADF committee connect with culture in this context and the programs move out of the gallery and into the street - or the pub?

An example of an arts/historical project that moved in this direction was the ‘Buckles’ project undertaken by Outback Arts at Mount Isa. This involved assembling a collection of the belt buckles awarded to prize-winning buckjumpers, recording the owners’ stories, and finally incorporating photographs of the buckles and the stories into a publication. The project was popular with participants and it was well received locally. It grew out of the community. And it involved a partnership between funding body, local artists, local arts organisation and community members not generally associated with the arts.

Such a planned, strategic approach not only proposes a shift in the agenda of local RADF committees but also has the potential to change relationships between the committee and its local council and between the committee and its community. For the local council it provides a new potential to change relationships between the committee and its community. For the local council it provides a new

connections being made between cultural development and development across other council departments - economic and social amenities etc. and even link culture to the traditional ‘core’ interests of local government - roads, rates and rubbish.

Regional v’s Local

Another tension exacerbated by the RADF program is that between regionalism and localism. Although regions are currently experiencing growth and many large provincial towns are expanding commercial, business and government infrastructures and services, this is often at the expense of small communities within the region. This pattern is becoming more apparent as workshop participants from small communities report having to travel to larger centres to access programs on offer. Regionalist discourse not only blurs the distinctiveness of small communities within larger regions, it also informs policies and practices that result in these communities being marginalised. In addition, the popularity and resourcing of government cultural funding programs such as RADF can have negative impacts on local arts organisations - as Philippa Hanrick found when she undertook a study of Arts West, a community arts organisation located in Blackall, Central Queensland. Arts West, was founded in 1969 and from its earliest beginnings organised schools and workshops across a range of arts and crafts (Hanrick, 1997, p.5). Hanrick found that RADF had a competitive element: ‘RADF workshops not only undercut Arts West programs, they also undercut the Arts Council and the Flying Arts and they also duplicate many of the programs as well’ (Ibid. p. 50). Exacerbating the impact of RADF on local arts groups is the increased costs of taking programs into smaller centers and declining numbers of participants due to socio-economic change. Complicating this is the fact that the RADF program is based on funding individual LGAs. Consequently, small LGAs are unable to join together for funding bids. So, stronger regions do not necessarily mean stronger local communities across those regions.
committee. The discussion above has
important, tool for ccd is the RADF
The second, and potentially most
benefits of ‘culture’. Consequently, more
‘culturally aware’. Councillor’s and council
relationships and connections with other
sectors - community culture, commercial,
and other sections of the
community (arts workers, youth,
privileged, disabled, isolated, aged
etc). This should not be with the aim of
providing an ‘add-on’ to other sectors,
or a form of cultural ‘nourishment’ to
‘others’, but to draw on the cultural
strengths that lie unrealised in these
untapped sources.

The tensions identified above are just two
of a whole set of dynamics in the field.
And instead of treating these tensions as
negatives, it is more useful to see them as
challenges and sources of energy and
vibrancy that can be drawn on to
stimulate ccd efforts. Exploring new
directions for ccd and locating these
alongside developments in sustainability,
community development, co-operative
partnerships and regional strategic
planning are possible future avenues for
RADF committees and for local
government. It will be the way in which
local governments, and community
members - in all their diverse interests and
capacities - meet the challenges of cultural
development and open it up to broad
community participation and engagement
that will be the ultimate test of viable and
energetic communities into the future ■

Policy tools for ccd?

An important spin-off of the RADF program
has been that LGAs in Queensland now
have a set of tools for managing cultural
development - the first is a cultural policy.
At first these cultural policies tended to be
pro forma documents rather than well-
considered policy. But times are a
changing! Many LGAs are now more
‘culturally aware’. Councillor’s and council
workers are becoming attuned to the
benefits of ‘culture’. Consequently, more
and more local governments are revising
and rewriting their cultural policies.

The second, and potentially most
important, tool for ccd is the RADF
committee. The discussion above has

How might our hypothetical RADF
committee address this tension? Arguably,
LGAs need to see the RADF as only one
program in a raft of cultural resources
that are available, or they need to lobby for
policy change - even though such a
strategy would require a co-operative
rather than a competitive approach from
local governments. It is the latter approach
that several councils on the Queensland
Sunshine Coast (Caloundra, Maroochy and
Noosa) have followed with an across-shire
RADF project. This enables larger grant
monies to be awarded to the participating
LGAs, it generates a co-operative
relationship as opposed to a competitive
one, and the strategy also requires
sustained commitment from the partnering
councils to the objectives as well as
obligating a higher level of planning across
the local government bodies and areas
involved.

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was on the relationship between museums,
heritage and tourism, hence her research
interests continue to include: museums,
galleries, heritage, and tourism. To this raft
of interests, Robin also is involved in history,
arts and cultural development with a special
focus on regions in all their possible forms
- ranging from political and geographic
regions to local catchment regions. Other
research work has covered cultural policy
development and media policy issues. To all
these research and writing interests Robin is
keen to bring a perspective that takes into
account cultural development and ccd
practices and processes.
The brief for this article proposes that the status and integration of cultural planning in NSW local government is inconsistent and asks how art workers and their communities can make sense of this.

The short answer to this dilemma is that there is no ‘one way’ to cultural planning – it is as varied as the communities from which they are generated. Nevertheless, in surveying the range of cultural planning practice there are a number of consistent themes which have emerged during its relatively short development over the past 20 years. Art workers, local communities and councils may find these consistencies useful as a foundation on which to explore, support and develop their community’s unique culture and create a cultural plan.

Firstly there is a consistency in utilising a definition of culture that broadens the concept from an arts focus to recognising that culture is about our way of life in all its diversity and the principles which underpin and guide cultural planning practice are based on social equity.

Secondly three distinct applications of cultural planning practice can be observed in local government. Cultural planning is used: for corporate and strategic planning, for land planning and urban design and for resource management. These three uses reflect the traditional roles of local governments and have influenced the diversity of arts and cultural programs and infrastructure that councils operate today. I will touch on some of these in the course of this article.

And finally, the development of cultural planning in NSW is directly linked to the changing role of local government in the provision of cultural resources. Over the past 20 years councils have, to varying degrees, expanded the traditional role of ‘roads, rates, rubbish’ to encompass community services, environmental and economic concerns. Councils have also recognised that consultation and cooperation with its community in tackling these considerations is not only democratic, but can reap great benefits such as community ownership, responsibility, support and participation.

History

Cultural planning has had a relatively short life in Australia and is still very much a developing discipline. In the mid to late 1980s, the Australia Council for the Arts initiated lecture tours by cultural planning practitioners from America and England such as Robert McNaulty, Ken Walpole and Charles Landry (Comedia), and Susan Clifford (Common Ground). From memory, the focus of these speakers was to promote the arts and cultural planning as a vehicle to create more liveable communities. These
programs were generally aimed at local governments, Community Arts Officers, artists and designers who worked with communities and, the professional associations allied to local government and community arts workers.

In NSW, the NSW Community Arts Association (now CCD NSW) and the Community Arts Officer network affiliated with the NSW Local Government & Shires Association (now LGOV NSW) were quick to respond. Local government arts workers, community artists and designers devised specific projects to bring artists and communities into planning, design, development or refurbishment of public spaces and facilities. However that the success and quality of the outcomes was varied, was not surprising for a number of reasons.

Cultural planning was a new field of planning practice with few apparent precedents and no formal training. However it should be acknowledged that cultural planning grew out of and was an extension of the principles and practices generated through the social justice and community arts movements of the 1970s.

Cultural planning offered much potential and many challenges, beginning with its approach. Cultural planning claims to take a holistic and integrated approach to planning for communities. Professional antagonism within local government departments and particularly between planning and design disciplines made the going tough for early practitioners.

Often, there was little infrastructure or organisational support for the fledgling activities being initiated through cultural planning within councils, which was compounded by national or state wide competition for external funding.

This lack of organisational support was, and still is part of the bigger issue of the commonly argued perception that local government does not play a role in the cultural life of its community. The perception ignores local government investment in cultural infrastructure such as libraries, parks and gardens, civic centres, theatres, local halls, regional galleries, regional or local museums and public art as
well as funding a myriad of community, arts and cultural related services and programs – from art prizes to festivals.

I suspect one of the reasons for this perception is that with the exception of libraries, local government did not plan for and was reluctant to be involved in the provision of cultural infrastructure particularly where there was no funding from state or federal agencies. Thus the development of cultural infrastructure was often haphazard, responding to local interests and pressure groups with councils failing to recognise that their role in culture was continually evolving and developing.

Over several years policy proposals to clarify the role of local government were forwarded to the annual conference of the NSW Local Government & Shires Association. Although these policy proposals were never successful the professional support of the NSW CAA, individual staff in the Australia Council for the Arts and emerging alliances with individual planners and designers was important for this nascent planning discipline and its early practitioners.

So while there was plenty of encouragement and lobbying for local government to embrace arts and cultural infrastructure in all its forms, there was little encouragement to work strategically. Generally, there was a lack of awareness of the role that cultural policy could play for local government in improving accountability and in contributing to resource and program decisions to address the needs, issues and aspirations of a council and its community.

From my perspective, this is the context in which the first cultural planning initiatives were undertaken in NSW. From 1990, Metropolitan and Western Sydney Councils instigated cultural planning projects. Marla Guppy, artist and cultural planner worked on a variety of initiatives including projects with public housing tenants, redesigning public open space in various communities and the preparation of a cultural plan for development of a suburb in new release area in the Penrith Local Government Area, Glenmore Park. John Skennar a landscape architect committed to working with communities in the design of local public spaces was also active in these early days.

The first cultural planning position in local government in Australia was established in Liverpool, NSW in 1991. The Community Arts Officer position was changed to Cultural Planner and refocussed to work strategically on major infrastructure initiatives. However this was not to be at the expense of community arts initiatives. Council recognised that the two positions were complementary and within a year had reinstated the Community Arts Officer position.

Liverpool Council adopted a Cultural Policy but did not have a cultural plan. The Cultural Policy provided the mechanism whereby cultural planning was integrated into other council initiatives through the Corporate and Management Plans. At the time, this integration marked a significant shift in council’s approach to its role and recognised that the support of its community’s culture and way of life was as important as other core council concerns.

Over the next few years the Blue Mountains, Parramatta, Warringah, Leichhardt and Newcastle City Councils appointed cultural planners, developed cultural policies and plans. Examples of cultural planning being utilised in urban development and urban design were initiated through councils such as Marrickville, South Sydney and Wollongong. These councils engaged cultural planners, urban designers and artists to work with communities on refurbishing public spaces in shopping centres, parks and in the development of new public venues. The approach was also taken up by rural councils and their communities through Regional Arts Development Officers and the Creative Village Program.

Although many councils across NSW have now created or commissioned cultural policy or plans it is difficult to have a sense of what’s happening and who is doing what. There is little consistency across councils with regard to roles, rules and responsibilities for the development of cultural policy. Should we be surprised? There has been no requirement for councils to have a cultural policy or cultural plan and there is still a lack of understanding about how a cultural policy and plan applies to local government and its functions. The inconsistencies are also a by-product of the fact that cultural planning is a new discipline still seeking endorsement and legitimacy from the field and from funding authorities.
There have been a number of missed opportunities to clarify the role of cultural planning in local government. These included the 1993 review of the NSW Local Government Act, the requirement for local government to develop Plans of Management and Social Plans and the review of the Environment Impact Assessment Criteria within the NSW Local Government Act in 1997/8. Conceivably the lack of involvement by state government in the establishment of cultural planning in NSW has contributed to the reasons for these missed opportunities.

To my knowledge local government has taken the lion share of responsibility to develop an approach to cultural policy and cultural planning and is to be congratulated for doing this in the absence of committed support from agencies at other levels of government.

At a state level in NSW there are three government departments that should play a role in supporting cultural planning in local government: Planning NSW, the Department of Local Government and the NSW Ministry for the Arts.

Perhaps change is on the way. In 2002, the Ministry for the Arts and the Department of Local Government commissioned the development of a draft set of Cultural Planning Guidelines which were released by the Department of Local Government for comment to local government and various professional bodies in late 2002.

The draft Cultural Planning Guidelines are currently being reviewed in the light of the significant number of submissions from the field. It is to be hoped that Planning NSW is brought into the picture to contribute to the development of the Guidelines. If not, then the continuing contention as to whether a cultural plan is a plan for the arts or a plan for a community will continue.

But enough of history what is happening now? How can local arts workers and members of a local community make sense of what is happening?

There has been enormous growth and diversification of cultural workers in local government. There are still Community Arts Officer positions however there are also cultural planners, arts managers, arts facility managers, community cultural development (ccd) workers, curators, education officers, public art officers, cultural project officers, specific art forms officers and events and tourism managers with an arts or cultural role to their position description. This diversity of employment represents growing recognition by local government of its role as a cultural provider.

Local government arts and cultural workers may be positioned organisationally within any of the Council Divisions - Parks & Recreation, Engineering, Economic Development, Community Services, Corporate Services or Planning.

I don’t think there is a right or wrong on this however it must be recognised that the location will have a huge impact on how ‘culture’ is perceived, how cultural programs are implemented and the level of support the cultural worker will get from their manager.
Being based in a particular Council Division will always present both opportunities and constraints for the cultural worker and for the community and artists they will provide services and programs for. The fact that cultural workers can be found in so many different departments demonstrates their versatility and adaptability. However, without a cultural policy or plan, the opportunities and potential that cultural policy offers to improve accountability and to harness the cultural resources of the council and its local community are diminished.

Cultural planning initiatives

So what are some of the outcomes of cultural planning initiatives? In 1993, Wagga Wagga adopted a cultural plan focusing on facilities which led to the redevelopment of the Council Chambers with the integration of a new regional art gallery, a special gallery to house the National Art Glass Collection, revamped library, refurbishment of the Civic Theatre and a major refurbishment of Bayliss Street which provided a number of opportunities for honouring members of the local community (the Honour Walk) as well as providing employment opportunities for local artists for public art initiatives.

In Liverpool, culture was integrated into Council’s Corporate and Management Plans. The refurbishment of Macquarie Street with an open mall has created a series of accessible public spaces that are in constant use. The Casula Powerhouse provides an exciting program of contemporary art exhibitions which draw on the cultural interests, talents and skills of artists across Western Sydney.

In Parramatta the public art policy ensures that major new developments will employ an artist to create a public art work.

In Willoughby a photographer and performance artists have been employed to work with the Environment Education Officer and the Cultural Projects Officer to extend the role and capacity of environmental education practices to raise community awareness about storm water issues.

This article has sought to understand why there are significant inconsistencies in the development and implementation of cultural planning in local government in NSW. In essence, cultural planning is a new discipline still developing its form and process. It is heartening to see the level of interest and debate developing around cultural planning. Some training is now available in a number of modes including at post graduate diploma level through CAN SA and diploma level at CCD NSW, as part of the town planning course at the University of NSW and as a post graduate degree at Griffith University.

It will be interesting to see the outcome of the Department of Local Government proposal to establish Cultural Planning Guidelines. Hopefully the guidelines will provide a structure that supports the definition and principles of cultural planning and encourages an adaptability which recognises the integrity and the essence of cultural planning, that each community is diverse and unique. One size must still not fit all!

To conclude I would like to paraphrase from a recent speech by Donald Horne ...

... cultural policy safeguards the cultural rights of the people and places these rights on a par with political and social rights ... ie the right to engage with the intellectual and cultural heritage of people, to create a sense of wonder of our fellow citizens, to undertake a variety of approaches to develop our own forms of art and culture and to imaginatively engage in what is presented by others ...
The concept of devolving regional cultural infrastructure to the regions has been regularly mooted in the on-going debate about cultural development in Australia. Just as regularly it has been discarded as too difficult. Clearly, were such a thing ever to happen local government (as the recognised lead agency in regional planning), would have to be involved. Given the diverse and often competitive nature of neighbouring local councils, this has been seen as one of the chief obstacles. Recently, in North Queensland, a ‘hub’ organisation has grown up which bucks the trend, combining broad cultural industry support with strong local government leadership. While its early steps have not been flawless, it does make a worthwhile case study for other regions considering taking the same path.

The two-day North Queensland regional seminar was attended by a wide range of arts practitioners and administrators. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the idea that the Regional Arts Fund (RAF) might lead to devolved arts infrastructure that could act as a local focus point for state bodies in their often high-impossible task of providing, from Brisbane, services for the most widely distributed state population in Australia. With an intervening distance of 1400 kilometres between North Queensland and the state capital, a local ‘hub’ for the arts was seen as a great deal more than a luxury. The initial plan was for this ‘hub’ to be based around the already existing ‘Professional Arts Working Group’ (PAWG) which would be expanded to become RAWG, the Regional Arts Working Group. This model failed to receive funding - turned down by RAF as being, amongst other things, too Townsville-centric.

This stumble-at-the-first-hurdle was received with some dismay by the North Queensland arts community, particularly as it had been the product of an unusually thorough process of community consultation, however, the impetus generated by the seminar was strong. After further consultation with Arts Queensland, Paul Jenkins was sent to initiate negotiations between a geographically-rational group of local councils with a view to laying the groundwork for the envisaged ‘hub’. Seven local councils joined up. These were:

- Hinchinbrook Shire (main centre, Ingham)
- Townsville City Council
- Thuringowa Shire Council
- Charters Towers City Council
- Dalrymple Shire (main centre, Charters Towers)
- Flinders Shire (main centre, Hughenden)
- Richmond Shire Council

It was decided that each council would lend its assistance to a survey of needs and resources. To ensure that the process was not dominated by the larger centres, the group would be chaired by Vi Groundwater, Councillor of the Hinchinbrook Shire. Successful RAF funding supported Regional Project Officer, Barbara Smith for a twelve month period. The work of ACROC, as it then became known, began in earnest in May 2001.

The initial task of ACROC was a cultural mapping exercise - data basing arts and cultural resources across the seven council areas. The work was to be conducted locally in each area and co-ordinated by ACROC’s project officer. The resulting database could then be made available on the web. Additionally, there would be a lobbying and networking function, culminating in a regional seminar to bring together practitioners and organisers from the region with representatives of relevant government departments and state service providers. It was intended to develop strategies for arts and cultural activity in the context of regional economic and social planning.

In her report The ACROC Project: May 2001 - May 2002, Barbara Smith points out that between the early discussions, circa October 1999, and the end of the initial project period, there were changes in a number of key factors. One was that the concept of regional hub groups like ACROC had been sidelined along with the draft study in which they had been proposed - the Queensland Government’s ‘Regional Arts Strategy’. While this in no way negated the initial work proposed for ACROC, it did mean that the future purpose and development of the scheme would need a re-think. Effectively, the state-wide context into which it had been imagined ACROC

John du Feu reports on the model of ACROC - the Arts and Cultural Regional Organisation of Councils in Queensland.
would fit, along with the planned external support for the scheme, had been swept away.

There were other complications in getting the scheme off the ground. ACROC was and still is managed by a committee which includes representatives of all seven participating councils. The position of Chair rotates, moving annually from council to council with the host council taking on the duty of providing meeting facilities as well as the project’s administration. During Barbara’s period as project officer, the committee was chaired by Vi Groundwater. Office space for Barbara’s position, however, was provided by Townsville City Council, (around 120 kilometres from the Hinchinbrook Shire offices in Ingham). The geographical distance between the project officer’s support and resourcing base and her office location highlighted the kind of problems ACROC will have to overcome if it is to work successfully with seven proudly independent local council’s, seven hundred kilometres apart. As Barbara comments in her report:

This posed some operational difficulties on a day-to-day basis and despite the use of modern communication technologies, it effectively isolated the Regional Project Officer from easy access to IT back-up, administrative support and peer interaction.

Sheer physical distance has also created obstacles to the effective use of management committee meetings. A five-hour plus drive between, for instance, Hughenden and Ingham, means that each meeting entails great commitment of time and resources and must be combined with meetings on other matters. With only a two hour meeting possible every two months, it is often difficult to focus discussion and come to considered decisions.

In spite of these challenges, in the course of its initial year, ACROC did achieve a number of important goals:

- a cultural audit across the seven local council areas
- a needs/assets analysis through focus groups
- a two day regional seminar of project development workshops

The results of these exercises then formed the basis for a fourth element which was the development of the ACROC Strategic Plan.

These exercises produced a gratifying amount of data and it was the intention that, in a variety of ways, this data should be made available to assist with planning both within the ACROC area and in relation to the state as a whole. There were to be two media for this propagation:

- the web - all data was to be made available on an ACROC website;
- GIS - through Townsville City Council’s Land Information Unit, the data was to translated into a series of maps based on the increasingly popular Geographical Informations Systems technology.

The difficulties ACROC has experienced in accomplishing the propagation of data have highlighted the quandary in which the project has found itself (the project officer departed at the end of the grant period). It was assumed that it would be possible for follow-up work to be done by staff members of the participating councils and by the ACROC committee. This however, has proved problematic. Lack of staff time, communication and co-operation issues within the committee and, above all, the lack of any dedicated ACROC staff has meant considerable delays in getting the data on to either the web or the GIS system.

The difficulties persevere to the present although, as Jenny Lane - Councillor of the Thuringowa Shire and current Chair of ACROC - told me, the data will shortly make its long-awaited appearance on the web. Jenny feels that there is still uncompro-mising commitment to the project on the part of the seven councils and that solutions will be found. She feels however that the current situation, in which the project is simply an additional burden on already overworked council cultural staff, is not manageable if ACROC’s strategic plan is to be fully implemented. Others on the committee, particularly those who see the principal focus of the ACROC Strategic Plan as being networking and resource-sharing, see a project officer as less of a priority.

The focus of the strategic plan lies in what the mission statement describes as ‘Enterprise and Audience Development’. In the original community consultation, an
industry development approach was strongly advocated by many delegates, taking precedence over the less easily-understood community cultural development (ccd) approach. This economy-based focus, with its implications for employment and tourism, has certainly helped councils to engage in the ACROC process but Barbara Smith acknowledges that not all aspects of local government responsibilities in respect of arts and culture are satisfied by this approach: ‘It is not ACROC’s role to re-position the community cultural development focus of regional arts activity. Rather, ACROC has the scope and opportunity to value add to these CCD activities for additional benefit.’

Community support prevails despite the fact that the only really tangible result of the ACROC process so far, for the broader cultural community, has been the introduction of the highly-successful Northern Queensland Regional Arts E-bulletin. Access to information is an issue particularly for remote communities. The E-bulletin drew on the existing partnership between Townsville City Council and the Community Information Service and extended a similar publication already distributed locally by CIC.

This lack of equality in information is only one of the inequities which the ACROC process has highlighted. Townsville is by far the largest of the councils involved and, like many regional capitals, has always seen itself as the disadvantaged underdog struggling with Brisbane for an equal share. It quickly became apparent that the smaller towns of the North Queensland region do not necessarily see Townsville as an ally, in fact, at times they tend to see the regional capital with much the same wariness that Townsville sees the state capital. A key factor in the successful co-operation between the seven councils has therefore been the deliberate policy of equality of input that has avoided the larger councils taking centre stage.

Apart from a worker, the future for ACROC may include some form of incorporation. This will facilitate funding and perhaps in the relatively distant future provide ACROC with a separate existence in co-operation with the councils rather than as their dependent and sometimes problematic child. Jenny Lane says that a number of different models are being considered including one which would see a membership base operating in a way similar to a Chamber of Commerce, co-operating to build and promote the arts and cultural industry. A number of small merchandising initiatives are also being planned - a kind of cultural ‘branding’ exercise for the Northern Queensland region.

Clearly, local government will have a continuing part to play but it would be impossible for particularly the smaller councils to provide much of the funding. Arts organisations may contribute in the form of a membership fee but funding support from state and federal government a necessity if ACROC is to go beyond being purely a networking instrument. One thing ACROC has in its favour is that, as an enterprise-based project, it may have access to a relatively broad range of non-arts government funds. It may be that this type of ‘hub’ group, in spite of its arts and cultural orientation, is more likely to be funded through departments like State Development or the Department of Primary Industries than through scarce arts funds. It is perhaps a matter of which arts departments ought to be taking note, considering carefully the long-term implications of losing contact with the processes of arts and cultural development in their regional areas.

In some respects this is, of course, no more than a pious hope. The implication is that, if ACROC can help to develop a strong arts and cultural contribution to the economic health and well-being of the community, this will eventually have benefits for the community’s cultural development. Obviously, the opposite could be argued - that, if ACROC provokes the community to be actively engaged in determining its cultural future first then economic benefits will result, along with social health and a greater sense of ownership, empowerment and identity. Only time will tell whether the current ACROC gamble pays off.

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From Here to Community

Catherine Murphy looks at two publications from South Australia which map developments in the relationship between local governments, the arts and cultural sectors over 10 years.

Over a 20 year stretch (prison sentence images unintended) in community arts/community cultural development (ccd), the smallest number of projects - two - have brought me into contact with local government. It’s been a slight, casual style of contact, rather than formalised, sustained employment inside council structures. In my experience, local government continues to be mysterious and monolithic. So this article has been an opportunity to get behind the scenes, pull back the screen on South Australian local government, where is it now in relation to arts and culture compared to ten years ago?

As the curtain started rolling up during my research, I was surprised and pleased to see a stage occupied – quite companionably - by representatives from the ccd sector, state and regional arts funding agencies, some local council employees, and the Local Government Association (LGA - representing all 68 local councils in South Australia). I was engaged by the story of this creative and constructive alliance and their considerable task of ensuring local councils had a full understanding of key issues in relation to arts and culture in their communities, and had access to simple, best practice methodologies. I was relieved to find this long-term undertaking hadn’t focused exclusively on bureaucratic policy writing - always useful, sometimes dull - but that original work by artists and communities had resulted in some stunning project outcomes, skills development and employment opportunities along the way.

Creating Communities - a publication

In May 2003, South Australians elect their local councils. (In the late 1830s, Adelaide City Council was the first elected local council in Australia, and possibly Australia’s first democratically elected body. How’s that for a clear demonstration of an essential, historical connection between local government origins and community participation/community expression?) The 2003 elections are likely to provide an appropriate focus for a launch of the soon-to-be published document, Creating Communities: a good practice guide to arts and cultural development for local governments (2003). It’s the most recent, tangible outcome of this long-term consultation between South Australian arts and local government, and the result of a year long initiative (2001-2002) by the Creative Communities Network (CCN originated in 1993 as the ‘Inner Adelaide Arts and Cultural Development Group’ a network of ccd workers employed by councils.)

A useful, accessible product has emerged from a simple, strategic idea of writing a comprehensive, non-prescriptive framework for councils which are serious about initiating, researching, writing and implementing policies for arts and culture, following consultation with their...
communities. This clear-headed document is peppered with insight and good advice. It systematically demonstrates due processes to be followed by workers inside local councils, eg: cultural development officers, community development officers, Chief Executive Officers and councillors, who are likely to be the champions of this product. They may either want to develop, refine or maintain a sound, effective local government arts and cultural policy, and ensure it’s safely enshrined in their council’s corporate structure. It’s also a cunning way to ensure councils maintain an involvement in arts and culture beyond individuals who take their knowledge and enthusiasms with them when they move on to other employment.

Vigorous guidelines for policy development are amply supported by good practice story sheets modelling successful arts projects (not ccd projects exclusively), as well diverse, arts and culture policy statements already in existence. This document was jointly funded by the Local Government Research and Development Scheme, administered by LGA and the South Australian Government through Arts SA and Country Arts SA. It’s not light, bed-time reading (although policy has been known to make some of us snore) but certainly fulfils any need for a generous serving of information born from experience in the field. It should empower and inspire readers (not excluding ccd artists) who may be searching for accessible, inside information about the rigorous workings of local government processes. It’s clear that while the core aim of this project is not exclusively ccd, the hope remains that it may lead to a future commitment by local government to more ccd processes, projects and employment of artists.

Before I go into too much detail about this latest publication, I’d like to circle back to the beginnings of arts and cultural development inside local government in South Australia. That way we can appreciate, more fully, the distance travelled in 10 years, and the methodical processes of groundwork laid. A comparison between then and now, may also shed light on central, remaining, unanswered questions about the future. There are a few niggling ones.

Esteemed ccd practitioner and former Community Cultural Development (CCDB) bureaucrat, Andrew Donovan, wrote Creative Councils (1993) a spirited documentation of the first consultation project (1991-1992) between arts and local government in South Australia which aimed to find new ways of initiating cultural development and planning at a community level through local government, thereby encouraging greater understanding, responsibility, and participation from both council and the community when addressing quality of life issues.

This consultation project arose from a meeting between Anne Dunn (always a passionate advocate for the role of arts and culture in community) who was then Director of the South Australian Department for local government and LGA. This was a new era of trust between State and local governments, made possible in 1990 by the Labor Government’s formal recognition of the LGA as the legitimate representative of 118 local governments through the Ministry for Local Government Relations and a State-Local Relations Unit. Certainly community arts/ccd had a successful profile in South Australia before the 1990s, but the only prior attempt to involve local government in a community arts officer program – a joint initiative by the South Australian Government and Australia Council for the Arts in the late 1970s - had failed. Lack of trust between local and State Governments was identified as the contributing factor to this failure. (Artwork, 1991, The Town Clerk in a Bow Tie, Chris Russell and Paul Christie)
Councillor Eddy provided a source of identification for (too) many real life Councillors

The Creative Councils project (1991-1992) with a healthy budget of $115,000 (State Government) received submissions from local councils who were interested in developing a new level of understanding about arts and culture in their communities. The project identified one metropolitan council, Marion, and one regional council, Port Pirie, who were to be given consultative assistance and advice from an inner-city council. This was Prospect Council, whose local identity had been uniquely defined by its proactive arts and cultural strategy and a paid community arts officer position. In consultation with Prospect Council, job descriptions for community cultural development (ccd) officers were written by Marion and Port Pirie, resulting in employment for Don Chapman and Malcolm McKinnon. This well resourced project had innovative short and long-term artistic outcomes, substantial community and skills development and, through its project management, built stronger, enduring relationships between State and local governments and the ccd sector.

A very funny sub-text about a stereotypical, politically conservative Councillor Eddy, shadows the descriptive and evaluative documentation of Creative Councils project processes. Councillor Eddy’s story is a playful device for the comedic journey, as the project unfolds, taken by councils and individual elected members, whose routine, dogged opposition to art and culture and confusion about its meaning and significance, is gradually transformed into wholehearted support, personal growth and genuine appreciation of the project’s goals (violin accompaniment with lashings of pathos and joy). Councillor Eddy provided a source of identification for (too) many real life Councillors, as well as being a safety value of laughter and learning for the 1990s progressives frustrated by Councillors like Eddy.

It’s widely agreed, in retrospect, that the vitality, energy and creative flair of this first arts and local government project appears not to have been matched in 1994 by Stage 2 of Creative Councils, documented in 1995 by Richard Brecknock and Joanne Pettidemange. While stage 2 was modelled on the previously successful strategy of expanding a core group of local councils committed to arts and cultural development, the project appears to have been inadequately resourced. Instead of just two, there were seven councils who participated in stage 2, yet total funding ($70,000 from the Australian Local Government Association and the Australia Council for the Arts) was half the budget of stage 1. No funds for stage 2 flowed from the State Government and it’s likely the build-up to South Australian local government amalgamations were also unhelpful. Councils may have been reluctant to enlist resources for arts and culture, while anticipating organisational upheavals. (Following council amalgamations in 1996, the numbers of local councils shrank from 118 to 68.) Despite this, documentation of Creative Councils (1995) makes it clear that some of these seven councils made significant leaps in the objective of raising the profile of arts and culture and making a commitment to this agenda in their communities.

Throughout these two project stages, the 1993 network of ccd workers employed by local government continued to meet, share resources and experiences and support each other’s professional development. By 1997 this network was officially recognised as the Creative Communities Network (CCN). It had expanded its membership of arts and cultural workers (their precise titles are various and therefore problematic, since not all are labelled ccd workers) from councils as well as representatives from the LGA, Community Arts Network SA Inc, Arts SA, Country Arts SA and the former Local Government Training Authority (now part of the LGA). The agenda included advocacy for arts and cultural development in metropolitan and regional councils and in 1998 and 1999, CCN initiated and hosted two major forums on the topic. In 1999, membership expanded again to include...
The calibre, commitment, generosity and sustained expertise of this kind of participation is awesome and probably critical to the success of such a large-scale project.

In late 2000, CCN successfully applied for $59 400 for their project, Creative State Policy, to:

- conduct an arts and cultural audit of Local government policy and practice
- develop an arts and cultural policy for the Local Government Association
- develop cultural policy guidelines and ‘best practice’ information for all SA councils.

Which brings me back to the present, and the kit resulting from this project, called Creating Communities: a good practice guide to arts and cultural development for Local governments (2003). This is the third stage of this long-range goal of bedding down arts and culture into local government plans and structures, so it’s been a great opportunity to avoid previous mistakes and apply the considerable learning. Initiated by CCN with people like Don Chapman driving the project, the application quickly gained support from others like Chris Russell, now Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the LGA. Don Chapman and Chris Russell have, to varying extents, been involved with each of the three stages of this project over the past 10 years. The calibre, commitment, generosity and sustained expertise of this kind of participation is awesome and probably critical to the success of such a large-scale project.

It’s worth noting that this project brief was constructed entirely by arts and cultural workers in Local government and members of CCN; CCN was robust enough to manage stage three, despite key people like Don Chapman, Brenda O’Connor and Anne Thoday moving jobs and therefore out of the circle, and half the project’s funding came from local government’s own Research and Development Scheme managed by the LGA.

In many respects, stage three has been a pretty smooth manoeuvre.

Firstly, LGA led by good example and at their AGM in 2002, endorsed their first draft policy for arts and culture, which added political weight to this project.

Secondly, there’s legislative weight. The South Australian Local Government Act (1999) reinforces the role that councils have in improving the quality of life of the community, their responsibilities for providing community and cultural services and facilities, and ensuring equitable access to these. The Act also requires councils to produce strategic management plans, which means if councils are already involved in significant arts projects and cultural activities, they should stem from documents outlining strategic policy objectives.

Thirdly, the LGA, through its stage three project consultant, sent a cultural audit template to Chief Executive Officers in each of South Australia’s 68 councils, and with one exception, these were filled in, returned and inform the Creating Communities Guidelines. The kit, in its own take on the Old Testament routine, creates its communities in seven chapters rather than seven days. Chapter three, ‘Undertake an arts and cultural audit of local activity and resources’ has therefore already been attempted, to a greater or lesser extent, by all local governments. The kit’s remaining six chapters offer advice on getting started, establishing an arts and cultural advisory group, developing policy, developing strategy and evaluation.
Approximately one-third of South Australian councils employ workers who have a significant engagement with the development of arts and culture in their communities. So it’s likely the Creating Communities kit offers these councils the tools to achieve more successful and more strategic projects. It may also help councils become more effective with their resources, and give a stronger more integrated voice within council corporate frameworks, for the range and diversity of community expression through arts and culture. Naturally, the kit will be useful for councils who are just beginning this process and is likely to be particularly useful to smaller, regional councils with fewer resources to dedicate to cultural workers.

With all this talk about arts and culture, I wondered if there was a place within local government for the process and practice of ccd as we know and love it? Matthew Ives is the deputy convenor of CCN and deputy chair of the Community Arts Network SA Inc. He is also the community arts officer at the Parks Arts and Functions Complex, part of the City of Port Adelaide Enfield. Matthew is confident that ccd practice - such as recommendations for a cultural audit, an advisory committee and community consultation - is implicit in the Creating Communities kit methodology. He also nominates some of the processes of guiding this project through CCN - such as discussion about the hard issues - as crucial to raising the profile of ccd. And he’s not shy about acknowledging that compromises were inevitable.

While the principles of ccd are definitely there, the guidelines document is not written in ccd language. We needed an arts and cultural policy plan for local government which is a much broader brief. I really enjoyed the sense of celebration of shared experiences by members of CCN who came from so many different backgrounds, but, at the same time, this made our project processes more arduous. We were trying to be slaves to so many different agendas that we risked diluting the project. Yet we remained clear that credibility for arts and culture inside council structures could only be achieved through doing the work, collating the research and presenting the hard evidence, so policy support as well as funds would be forthcoming. And essential ccd elements, such as the spirit of community, are present in this kit through the story sheets about arts projects, many of which involved ccd processes.

Where to from here? It’s certain the process of implementing arts and cultural policy within local councils will require time - and plenty of it. And time is equal to allocation of financial resources by local councils. All this work, over a ten year period, has been achieved for around $244 400. Apart from its obvious successes within local government, it’s also resulted in extensive community building and empowerment. It’s encouraged a large number of very successful ccd arts projects, employed artists, contributed to the creation of enduring arts and cultural infrastructures, and improved the physical environments of many regional and metropolitan communities. It’s certain the success of this project has been ultimately dependant upon a three-way commitment - not only funds,
but energy and ideas – by individuals from state, local and regional government and arts funding agencies. There are already suggestions about how to provide on-going support for the implementation of this project’s objectives to more needy local councils and CCN will continue to monitor future progress councils make in the adoption and implementation of cultural plans and strategies.

A full evaluation of this project is yet to be undertaken by CCN and is likely to result in more developed and considered innovations for advancing the agenda of ccd arts processes and projects in South Australian communities. The underlying hope is that ccd methodology, which informs the Creative Communities policy guidelines, will seed future ccd projects. But there’s always the question of funding for such projects and CCN may explore funding models for arts projects in local government implemented by other State Governments. Finally it must be said that while local government is undeniably at the grass-roots of government, as well as community, it cannot be expected to be a sole catalyst for community enrichment through arts and culture – ccd or otherwise – without funding commitment from all levels of government.

... while local government is undeniably at the grass-roots of government, as well as community, it cannot be expected to be a sole catalyst for community enrichment through arts and culture – ccd or otherwise.

Catherine Murphy has been working with communities on story-telling, oral history and writing projects for twenty years and together they’ve produced more than a dozen publications. These days she’s also working with communities and artsworkers as a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method.
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