

Community Engagement and Creative Community Culture: A Study of Queensland Arts Council and the Role of the Arts in Building Stronger Communities

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Abstract

During the latter part of the 20th century, Queensland Arts Council (QAC) sponsored arts activities throughout the state of Queensland, annually presenting many hundreds of events. The organisation successfully attracted local elites, and enlisted thousands of members in more than a hundred regional towns. It helped to drive the evolution of Queensland's cultural ecology, as regional members advised local governments, wrote cultural policies, and drove campaigns for facilities and infrastructure. Towards the end of the 20th century QAC began to lose audience and influence, because it had lost touch with its constituency.

This three year Queensland University of Technology project funded by the Australian Research Council, studied how QAC reformed its structures and processes to re-engage with local communities, and reassert its relevance. Mendicant local branches became autonomous Local Arts Councils (LACs). Each LAC now responds to local community interests and needs, both facilitating local artistic activity and functions, and representing community interests at state and national forums.

Based on case studies of seven LACs, this paper examines how they operate to build social and cultural capital, and support the Cultural Industries in small regional towns and cities. It explains their role in terms of nurturing Creative Community Culture, with important consequences for long term community health and sustainability, and identifies creative community catalysts, members of an elite knowledge class, who are essential to their success.

Keywords

Creative, culture, networks, leadership, elite

Introduction

This paper has evolved out of a research partnership between Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Queensland Arts Council (QAC), funded by an Australian Research Council 'Strategic Partnerships with Industry — Research and Training' grant that provided the writer with an Australian Postgraduate Award Industry scholarship.

Queensland Arts Council has been presenting and supporting the arts in regional Queensland for over 40 years. Today QAC has a turnover of around \$4.5 million, and presents some 6000 events each year, to audiences totalling over 600,000. It services communities scattered across Queensland through a network of 60 independently incorporated Local Arts Councils (LACs) with a menu of activities including entrepreneurial touring of live theatre and music, arts performances in hundreds of state and private schools, community development activities, master classes and workshops, and support for locally-initiated art events. The 60 LACs also operate independently, interacting with government agencies, community groups, and other arts organisations to promote and facilitate art activity within their local communities.

The QUT/QAC research partnership was established to evaluate the pertinence of QAC and LAC policies, and the effectiveness of QAC and LAC structures, processes, programs and other activities in an environment of rapid, complex and multi-dimensional change. Critical to this, and central to the research and to this paper, are the ways in which QAC and LACs engage with the communities they serve.

The culture of regional communities

QAC's charter is defined by geography, so this paper assumes a definition of community in terms of place. At the same time it recognises that community is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon with origins, according to Vincent (1987, p. 24) in notions of "fellowship, personal intimacy and wholeness, moral commitment and social cohesiveness" prevalent in Germany towards the end of the 18th century.

The Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council defines community as "any group of people who identify with each other" and goes on to say: "Their common interest may be geographical location, shared cultural heritage, age group, professional, social or recreational" (CCDB 2003, p. 30). On the other hand, Garlick (2001) opines that communities of place are dead and have been replaced by communities of self interest, while one community worker Ramilo (2001, p. 19) provides a very practical albeit minimal definition of: "People working together without murdering each other."

Notwithstanding all this, for a Local Arts Council, community is in a broad sense determined by its catchment population, that is by the number of people who live close enough to travel to the arts events it provides. A radius of 30 to 40 kilometres defines a reasonable catchment for most LACs, but in remote areas people commonly travel 100 kilometres, and sometimes much further. Communities defined in this way encompass a diverse range of demographic, social and

psychological characteristics. Within any single geographic community, we might then identify many smaller communities of interest, such as ethnic communities, a school community, the arts community or the horse racing community. Community might also be defined by age, gender, a shared medical condition or disability, vocational, religious or political affiliation, and so on. Membership of each community comes with various distinctions, benefits, loyalties and obligations.

People simultaneously belong to more than one community. Each community is in flux (as people fall in and out of the defining boundaries), and fragmented (as people are brought together by shared interests and characteristics, and separated by difference). No matter how it is defined, each community will inevitably be further split. It will be, "...divided and complicated by gender, sexual, class and even ethnic differences and hierarchies across which criticisms and transformations are constantly in play" (Lloyd 1994, p. 229).

Despite this division and fragmentation, regional communities tend to have in common a range of characteristics and particular problems that derive from their geographic location and relative isolation. The divide between metropolitan and rural Australia, or as it's usually put, between the city and the bush, has long been a feature of the nation's social ecology, often celebrated in popular culture, and central to dominant national myths. It is also very real, and geographically defined disadvantage occasionally takes centre stage as a social and political issue.

Sidoti (2000) has examined geographic disadvantage from a human rights perspective and specifies six areas in which Australia's regional dwellers are deprived: education, health, general living standards, 'cultural' life, the benefits of scientific progress and employment. Even before the current drought, the worst on record in many parts of Australia, many regional communities were doing it tough.

Global forces that drive massive technological, industrial and demographic changes bring consequent changes in social structures and behaviour, while the increasing integration of the global economy overwhelms local economies. These changes are particularly disruptive in smaller regional communities which tend to be characterised by narrow based and therefore unstable local economies, less educated and less flexible workforces, limited commercial and industrial infrastructure, and restricted investment and entrepreneurial potential, and which are therefore inherently less flexible and less resilient than larger communities.

Other changes driven by social evolution compound the difficulties. Populations are growing older across the state. Individual communities may be losing both their young people and their elders,

as the young are increasingly drawn to employment and lifestyle opportunities elsewhere, and retired adults migrate to more amenable towns. The general hollowing out of the middle class creates a large class of underprivileged. In many centres population decline casts a pall of pessimism and negativity, especially because those leaving are often influential persons holding key roles, business owners and managers, professionals and other functional elites.

In some regions 'sponge cities' prosper at the expense of smaller towns. Some coastal regions grow so rapidly that infrastructure and services are unable to cope, and many people live in relative deprivation in new but barren estates, where social alienation and crime rates are high. Participation in traditional forms of community continues to decline. Organisations that rely on volunteers, such as the Girl Guides, bush fire brigades, service clubs like Rotary and Apex, and even the Country Women's Association, are in crisis.

Other factors compound the challenge. The agricultural and resources industries that provide much of regional Australia's wealth remain susceptible to the periodic impact of natural and market cycles. The disaffection of regional dwellers has been fuelled in recent years by increased feelings of powerlessness and confusion as the economy has been caught up in accelerated global change, giving rise to what many commentators have called the culture of complaint. Symptoms include the rejection of established political parties in favour of minor parties, independents and renegades. As Farley (2001) said of one of these renegades, Pauline Hanson: "She is the touchstone for the powerless because they know they can't change things. They just want revenge."

But there is a brighter side. Awareness of the problems is growing, and a regional regeneration movement gathers momentum across the country. Some regional communities manage better than others, and research has identified factors critical to community health, sustainability and regeneration.

These include many non-economic factors such as: optimism, community spirit and community pride; strong social capital networks; social justice and equity; community cooperation and participation; diversity and tolerance, which together enable communities to harness the widest possible range of human capacities; an entrepreneurial outlook that welcomes challenges and solves problems; strategic self-awareness and a commitment to planning; high value placed on education and technology; and a concern for health and wellbeing, broadly conceived (Kenyon 2002).

The problems that beset regional communities are many and varied, but the solutions to them are all founded in the way people react to them, by what they want to achieve and how they go about doing so. That is, they are a function of human beliefs, values and behaviour — they are cultural — and indeed so are the problems. But a healthy and sustainable culture is more than apprehending and responding effectively to problems. What is needed for real community progress is not merely a response, or a sequence of responses, no matter how concerted and effective they might be, to problems as they are perceived, but a constant and enduring way of apprehending and interacting with a constantly evolving environment, harnessing individual and community resources to enable the community to navigate most advantageously through constant change.

Such a way of living might be described as Creative Community Culture, a term derived from the realms of Cultural Industry and Creative Industry, where theory and research clearly establish a nexus between vigorous creative community, innovation in industry and wealth creation. These realms of theory and research also identify a crucial role for the arts (Florida 2003; Landry 2000; Roodhouse 2001).

It has long been recognised that the arts have a role to play in building better and stronger communities. As early as the 5th century BC it was compulsory for the citizens of Athens to both fund and participate in the drama festivals that were central to Athenian society (Pick 1988, p. 12). When the Royal Academy of Arts was founded in London in 1768, its function was explained in terms of civic humanism, which “constructed the individual as a citizen member of a polis governed above all by actions which were beneficial to the public” (Gibson 2001, p. 14). The social functions of the arts were later taken up with alacrity by the social reformers of the 19th century in Europe and America.

In 1836, foreshadowing today’s cultural policy arguments, the British government initiated an inquiry into how education in the arts could improve British industrial design, and so benefit the nation through increased exports. Recommendations included the building of public galleries, and it was anticipated that “exposure to good decorative art might in some way improve the artisans’ behavior as well as their skills” (Borzello 1987, pp. 9-11).

The arts contribute in another way. They promote a way of approaching and dealing with the circumstances of our everyday lives that is conducive to Creative Community Culture. They encourage people to see the world differently, with fresh eyes and a receptive mind. It is a primary function of the arts that they penetrate the walls erected by routine and complacency, re-sensitise people to the wonders of the phenomenological world, and reawaken us to life. By so

doing they lead us out of Plato's cave, the cave of ignorance and the humdrum, into a new world of awareness and possibility.

The arts permeate our lives in so many ways that the contribution they make to the quality of our lives is thoroughly woven into them, and cannot be readily disentangled. People in arts-rich communities indicate greater satisfaction with the quality of their lives, and benefit from lower rates of crime than people in communities providing more limited options. They also enjoy greater mental and physical health, as the arts are seen to deliver health benefits, both preventative and remedial to individuals and to communities.

Communities offering a rich lifestyle with diverse leisure and entertainment options are better able to attract the people they need in order to prosper. Most importantly they attract the omnivorous cultural consumers identified by Bennett et al. (2001, p. 193-218). These are the key people already identified as otherwise most likely to abandon regional communities, influential persons such as business owners and managers, professionals and other functional elites, so their retention is highly beneficial. Arts-rich communities are also more attractive places to visit, attracting travellers and tourists, thus bringing economic benefits, stimulating enterprise and growth, and contributing to the further diversity and richness of local cultural life.

Arts-related facilities and activities become gravitational poles, drawing together creative and active community-minded people, and contributing to a self-sustaining cycle of energetic and creative engagement that can benefit entire communities. Outcomes can include strengthened personal and social networks, innovative community events and social, educational or health programs, creative solutions for everyday problems, and enduring artistic and entrepreneurial ventures.

The arts deliver specific benefits in areas of disadvantage identified by Sidoti. In education for example, it has been recognised since the Calouste Gulbenkian report of 1982, that the arts play an essential role in learning, and that an arts-rich environment enhances educational outcomes in all subjects across the board (Fiske 1999; EAPIQ 2004).

The Queensland Government has recognised the complexity and importance of these cultural factors, and of their interplay with the arts, in its Creative Queensland Cultural Policy which expresses the aspiration that each community become: "... a culturally dynamic place, rich in diversity and experiences — where ideas and talent are supported; where artistic and cultural pursuits are encouraged; and where the economy is enhanced by excellence in creative innovation" (Arts Queensland 2002, p. 3).

Organisations and institutions associated with the arts are important, not only because they enable artistic production, but also because they are themselves essential organs of civil society. They represent the interests of their constituents, and serve as intermediaries between those who make policy, resource and management decisions, and those most affected by them. Thus they provide important channels for the communication essential to healthy democracy.

Whether or not arts organisations effectively fulfil their potential depends on how effectively they engage with and genuinely represent their local communities, and the extent to which they are integrated into local community structures.

Engagement paradigms

Two general paradigms have been applied in cultural development and the arts, generally described as top-down and bottom-up.¹ Top-down (or centre-out) models are typified by belief that culture is a qualitative improvement or sophistication that can be bestowed on people. Policy is developed and culture produced by people and in places that have cultural capital, and are exported to people who, and places which, whether innately or by circumstance, lack it. These models evolving out of 19th century social reform agendas were from the start driven by an idealism which asserted that “to have a better world we must have better citizens” (Garran 1945), and were devoted to notions of excellence which legitimised amateur arts practice primarily because it allowed the amateur to better appreciate the superior artistry of the professional.

Bottom-up (or periphery-in) models such as Community Arts (CA), Community Cultural Development (CCD), and Community Capacity Building (CCB) are typified by a focus on popular participation, process and social rather than aesthetic outcomes. As Mills explains, during the 1970s community arts meant access to arts product and skills development, and an antidote to television; in the late 1970s it became a forum for challenging notions of excellence and cultural homogeneity; and during the 1980s it evolved into the more comprehensive ideology of community cultural development which was defined in terms of “people working together to bring about improved understandings and/or changes important to them in their lives” (Mills 1999, p. 3).

CA and CCD posited community as a counter force to the hegemony of oppressive powers (the establishment, the state, elites and world of art) on one hand, and capitalism on the other. They were driven by a simplistic logic: “If Art and capitalism are bad, then community and ‘the people’

¹ While this dichotomous framework has been broadly adopted and provides alignment for much vigorous and even acerbic debate, it provides a limited and inadequate basis for analysis. For a more comprehensive and adequate four vector analysis see Richards (2005).

are good;" (Hawkins 1993, p. 19), and came to emphasise artwork that is "In, for, with, of and by the community" (Pitts and Watt 2001, p. 12).

The arts council movement was initially driven by a top-down ethos that championed excellence and aimed to improve people by exposing them to it. Thus the touring of exemplary arts product has generally been arts councils' dominant operational mode. Champions of CA and CCD criticised this emphasis on touring as elitist and politically repressive, and accused it of servicing a narrow and already privileged sector of the population of being, in effect, still beholden to 19th century notions of class and privilege. They deride touring as 'hit and run' because travelling performers arrive in a community, stay only long enough to perform, and then move on, apparently leaving nothing behind.

Those who support the traditional arts council touring model have often derided CA and CCD practitioners as a disorganised and delinquent rabble who alienate large sections of the population through their explicit politics, and who, because they focus on process and intangible social outcomes, generate no finite impacts. The contest between these ideologies has been bitter at times, with one arts council manager deriding CA workers as "just the boiler suit brigade" while a champion of CCD characterised arts councils as: "A regiment of pampered freaks performing for sedentary sickly voyeurs."

For many years QAC was highly centralised. Head office in Brisbane exerted strong parental authority over a distribution network of mendicant branches. The primary function of branches — the network grew to a peak of 84 in 1992 — was to host, support and promote QAC touring productions when they came to town. Artistic policy was determined by head office, although branches were consulted, and QAC-owned all branch assets and was ultimately responsible for branch debts. If branches wanted to conduct their own activities locally, they had to submit an application for approval by head office.

Branches were generally founded by prominent local citizens — town and shire mayors were often prime movers — and so came to be dominated by and to represent primarily the interests of local elites. In an ideal scenario these local elites would generate broad community interest and support, and during the 1960s and 1970s, when television coverage was limited and many communities offered limited lifestyle and entertainment opportunities, they often did. But as Queensland's maturing cultural environment provided more options, arts council lost much of its support base.

Television in particular made damaging inroads by splitting the cultural 'market' into what Bennett, Emmison and Frow (2001, pp. 193-218) call univorous and omnivorous cultural consumers. Univorous consumers are those less educated, generally unskilled and skilled workers and their families who adopted television as their primary and even exclusive entertainment medium. Omnivorous consumers, a more educated group of knowledge workers and professionals, continued to patronise arts council offerings within a broader and more eclectic cultural diet. These knowledge class elites often stood aloof from the rest of the community. The result was that many arts council branches came to represent only a narrow sector of their community. As already noted this provided the rationale for much criticism of QAC by proponents of CA and CCD.

Some branches worked hard to retain broader community engagement by proving popular activities and working to build awareness and develop the artistic and cultural climate of their communities, advising local government, lobbying and raising funds. But overall most branches declined. Some lapsed into permanent torpor from which they awoke only briefly whenever a touring QAC production came to town.

Overall network decline led to an extended period of review and reform at the end of the 20th century. One outcome was a restructuring of the branch network whereby branches became incorporated as autonomous LACs. Another was an incremental shift away from broad scale 'one size fits all' touring towards more targeted niche marketing and an increasing focus on local event management and arts production.

The transmogrification of branches into independent LACs was a fundamental shift. Each LAC now operates under the regulation of the Queensland Office of Fair Trading. It must exercise due diligence in administration, comply with administrative and documentation requirements specified by Queensland legislation and pay an affiliation fee to QAC. There may also be book keeping expenses, bank fees and so on. These are real costs, and to meet them each LAC must generate substantial income. Indeed every LAC is a small business, and if it is to survive it must generate paying customers for the arts, be they members who pay an annual fee, rather like subscribers to an urban theatre company, casual customers who pay to attend individual events, or sponsors who recognise benefits that flow more broadly from LAC activities. To attract this support an LAC must provide something people value, and make a genuine, visible and distinctive contribution to the enhancement of community life.

We might see the QAC/LAC reconfiguration in terms of shift from top-down (or centre-out) to bottom-up (or periphery-in) arts production, or in terms of a shift from supply driven to demand driven distribution. However we see, it the communication between QAC and LACs must travel

both ways. Engagement must not be understood to work from the top down, or from an active centre to a passive periphery. LACs must be seen as active partners. It is also their responsibility to engage with QAC, and it is QAC's responsibility to be responsive. LACs must also engage with their communities. They cannot stand apart, as their predecessor branches sometimes did.

Today there are around sixty LACs spread across five state regions which encompass huge geographic and demographic diversity. Around Boulia there are 0.009 persons per square kilometre. In the town of Dalby the figure is 199 persons per square kilometre — and for LACs adjacent to major population centres it is much higher. To look at it another way, there are only about 393 people living within 100 kilometres of Boulia, while more than 17,000 live within 50 kilometres of Dalby, and over 80,000 live within 10 kilometres of the centre of Ipswich.

Consequently some LACs have access to a vastly greater population of potential members, patrons and participants than others, and these host populations vary greatly in character. In many locations LACs compete for attention, patronage and support with a number of other groups or organisations, each of which offers an alternative nucleus, around which those interested in the arts may gravitate. These alternative nuclei include locally based organisations such as little theatres, or painters' or potters' groups, or local representatives or agents of other state or national institutions such as Queensland Community Arts Network or the Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association, and so on. In these instances, an LAC may struggle to establish a distinct identity, a sense of purpose, and an effective presence. In Maryborough, a coastal city of 25,000 people, as the millennium approached, the LAC languished and appeared likely to close. But since 2003 Maryborough Regional Arts Council has regenerated because it has found a niche market, garnering moderate but earnest support by providing regular screenings of art house and foreign language films.

In smaller communities an LAC may be the only significant arts and cultural organisation. Here it has the opportunity to establish itself, not solely as an arts organisation, but as a broader service organisation at the heart of the community. In the small mid-western town of Tambo, population around 350, the Tambo Arts Council (TAC) works in partnership with the shire council and other community organisations to stage events and to develop community resources, facilities and infrastructure. In recent years, TAC has, among other things, contributed to beautification of the main street, published a regular community newspaper, funded extensions to the sports club, raised money for the kindergarten, and equipped the health care centre with an ECG machine.

Moving forwards — Arts organisations and networks

It is apparent that LACs can effectively contribute to their communities in many ways. Whether we see this contribution according to the conventional arts council model, in terms of fostering creative community culture, or in terms of community arts, community development or community capacity building, is immaterial. The most effective LACs combine aspects of all these into integrated Cultural Industries Support Organisations uniquely suited to their local ecologies.

“It makes sense for a local cultural industries support service to be developed specifically through an understanding of the development needs of the local cultural sector. Intermediaries must engage in processes of ongoing research into the local sector, identifying strengths and weaknesses and developing services accordingly. The key to developing effective local embeddedness is the adoption of a “bottom-up strategy”, nurturing existing activity and information networks; accelerating “the organic”; listening to what is required from different parts of the cultural sector, at different stages in the business life-cycle, and from different social and ethnic groups” (Fleming 1999, p. 196).

LAC activities commonly include advocating, promoting and supporting the arts in general, and arts council in particular: initiating, supporting and managing local arts activities; facilitating, promoting and providing on-ground support for QAC touring productions; liaising with QAC on administrative matters, and providing QAC with community information and feedback. Most importantly, an effective LAC will liaise, collaborate and form strategic partnerships with other community organisations and institutions including local government, schools, businesses, other arts agencies and so on. In so doing, the LAC becomes an important agency for community integration, building synergies and mobilising community resources to optimal effect.

The heterogeneity endemic to all community can be both asset and affliction. On the one hand it contributes to the richness and vitality of community life; on the other it may create internal tension and fragmentation as subgroups and individuals seek to further their own varied and sometimes conflicting interests and agendas. Internal tension and fragmentation diminish community capacity through redundancies in organisations and infrastructure, and suboptimal application of resources as a result of isolation, duplication, dislocation and non-productive competition. Thus they ultimately compromise the health, wealth and vitality of communities. They are particularly damaging within regional communities, where infrastructure and resources are likely to be more limited, and where the need to make most effective use of them and the synergies they allow is therefore more pressing. In building productive partnerships an LAC can help mend community fractures, generate communication and help the community engage with

itself. This internal engagement is vital to the health of every community, and an essential prerequisite for effective engagement with outside agencies.

The formation of each branch or LAC has been driven by a small number of key people, often only one or two. In Tambo which has only around 350 people, the LAC was initiated by prominent local citizens including the school principal and a minister of religion. In Biloela inauguration was driven by prominent local citizens including the president of the Rotary Club. In Gympie and Atherton, shire mayors were instrumental. In Hervey Bay, the movement was driven by a prominent local businessman and politician who saw the community missing out, and wanted to correct the disadvantage.

What all these people most importantly have in common is that they wanted to do something for their communities. They are the people McInnerney (2000) calls *animateurs*. I call them *arts council champions*, or more broadly *community cultural catalysts*. Although motivated by strong community spirit, they may not see themselves as community cultural workers. One observer noted: "They're not interested in the finer points of CCD ideals. They couldn't give a damn. They just want to do something for the community."

These local champions are typically highly educated, members of the general knowledge class, which Bennett, Emmison and Frow describe as culturally omnivorous, because it enjoys both highbrow and lowbrow cultural forms. John Frow has also written independently of a group of cultural intellectuals situated within a more general professional–managerial class. There is considerable congruence between these conceptions of a knowledge class, and notions of a creative class (Florida 2003), or a class of highly mobile professionals that Brooks (2001) calls bourgeois bohemians or 'Bobos', and Lasch (1995) calls a self-indulgent 'global elite'.

The role of elites is highly contentious in arts debates, more broadly in discourses about CA, CCD and CCB, and even more broadly in arguments about operational modes of democracy. Some commentators such as Roshwald (2003) link elites to specific functional roles and consider them essential to democratic structures and processes; others associate elites with social engineering and the manufacturing of consent. What all agree on is that elites who indulge self-interest at the expense of the broader community perpetrate enormous damage, whether by commission or by default. Thus Florida accuses his creative class of abdicating its responsibilities, by failing to show the leadership that he urges it to provide, while Lasch condemns the global elite for betraying democracy.

For members of an international elite, mutuality and community are not defined by the minutiae of every day life within a shared geographically defined local ecology, but are considered to exist in more intangible and abstract associations maintained across vast distances by communications and travel technology, and these people have transferred their allegiances accordingly. At one research site, a grazier living outside town openly expressed disdain for townspeople. She said, “They are not our market. That’s not who we are, and what we are.” This grazier’s family is living their dream. They value excellence in beef production, have little contact with people in town and do not consider themselves to belong to it. Instead they belong to “the international community that values excellence in beef.”

These omnivorous cultural consumers live amidst a community most of which is culturally univorous in favour of ‘lowbrow’ forms, and they leave town whenever they can in order to indulge their omnivorous tastes. An affluent couple living in another regional town explained that they maintained a second home in a foreign capital city, and travelled between their two homes several times a year. They considered themselves to have ‘more in common’ with their highly affluent international friends.

This transfer of allegiance from the local to the global is typical of knowledge elites. It helps explain the changing nature of community and the shifts in community participation documented by Putnam, and supports the proposition that these represent changes in the nature of community engagement rather than an absolute decline.

It also helps to explain why in local contexts, the Creative Class has, in Florida’s terms largely failed to acknowledge its leadership responsibility. As Florida makes clear, geography remains fundamentally important to the creative class but — and this is a critical qualification — the creative class does not usually develop commitment to any particular geographic location per se. They are interested only in the lifestyle it offers, and because they are affluent they have the mobility to go wherever the lifestyle suits them. At its extreme, the global elite is a floating elite that has links to everywhere but belongs nowhere. They are perpetual tourists.

What makes the creative cultural catalysts that I have identified exceptional is that while they are members of the knowledge class, and while they exhibit many characteristics of Florida’s creative class, or Lasch’s global elite, they are not detached from, or dismissive of geographically defined community. They are on the contrary intensely committed to local community. Whether this is a function of age — the global elite become more attached to location and local community in middle age — or whether these local champions represent a particular variant within the knowledge class that is, however we define it, immensely broad and heterogenous, these are

exceptional people. They are elite individuals who have not (in Florida's terms) failed the test of leadership, or (in Lasch's terms) betrayed their fellow citizens.

These are the people that LACs need to recruit, and it is largely immaterial whether or not they are experienced in the arts. Macdonnell (1992, p. 400) has noted that the arts are often better served when key policy making and administrative roles are executed by 'concerned generalists' rather than 'practitioners'. Businessman, local politician and self-professed 'meat pie and beer man' George Bezant is an example. He has little personal interest in the arts, but in 1984 he drove the formation of an arts council branch in Hervey Bay and became its first president. The value of such a local champion is as a catalyst, coordinator and manager, driving purposeful activity towards desired objectives. This does not require specific arts related knowledge because the champion enlists and directs the contributions of others who are experienced and knowledgeable in the arts.

If an LAC is to be an effective cultural industries support organisation it needs to develop durable policies and establish enduring structures and processes. This requires sustainable leadership that is not dependant on any single individual. Sustainable leadership is collaborative in two senses. Firstly, it is collaborative in that leaders can lead only so far as others consent to follow. Consent is contingent upon some recognition of benefit to the followers — that is, of mutual interest or benefit between the leaders and the led. As Limerick and Cranston (1998, p. 41) observe, this will be rooted in, and grow out of "the values and social contexts within which we are practising leadership". Limerick and Cranston debunk the 'great man' theory of leadership, and advocate participatory decision making, and recognise that leadership involves the empowerment of others.

Erez and Earley (1993, p. 172) promote the concept of transformational leadership, which provides a growth environment within which leader and followers together work towards and attain higher levels of both motivation and morality. The transformational leader's ultimate purpose is to enlighten and empower followers to realise their own maximum potential. This is taken a step further in Greenleaf's concept of the servant leader, who seeks primarily not to lead, but to learn. The servant leader helps those s/he leads to articulate their own goals, and is devoted to their personal development. "Ultimately, the goal of the servant leader is not just to facilitate immediate change, but to liberate the innate capacity of each individual to learn and to become excited about new imaginings" (Boyett and Boyett 1996, p. 195).

This form of leadership is sustainable not only because it equips and empowers followers to become leaders, but because it diffuses leadership functions amongst the leaders and the led.

Leadership is thus an emergent function that grows out of the relationship between leaders and followers, in which ultimately the distinction between them may evaporate. It is a special form of teamwork, a mutual progression in which enlightened individuals recognise each other's specific leadership credentials and work together, leading each other towards goals which they could not individually achieve.

Sustainable leadership is also collaborative in the sense that any institution, organisation or group — that is, whatever is being led — must sustain itself within and evolve in tandem with its evolving environment. This requires it to form relationships with a host of other agents active around it, to recognise common values and mutual interests, to form alliances and partnerships, and to collaborate.

The QUT/QAC research project identified the key attributes of effective LAC leadership. It is not necessary for any individual to possess all these attributes, but the leadership group as a whole should exhibit and mobilise them all.

- Commitment and vision — they are driven by the conviction that the arts have an important role to play in community life, and some vision of what that role is, and how the arts can be mobilised towards specific goals, objectives and community benefits.
- Energy — they are predisposed towards action, with an enthusiastic and often infectious vitality. As a group, these people don't sit around waiting for somebody else to do something. They get up and do it.
- Collaboration and inclusiveness:
 - Internally this manifests in cohesive and effective teamwork. They respect each other's opinions, interests and abilities, delegate and share responsibility. They exhibit generosity of spirit by sharing credit and frequently commending others.
 - Seen from the outside, the group is highly social and keen to involve others. They consult widely, respect and respond to the opinions, interests and needs of others. They are keen and generous applicants of the quid pro quo — mutual reciprocity is their universal expectation and normal operational mode.
 - Connected — they are net-workers with a strong social capital base sustained by connections at many levels throughout the community, in particular amongst local business, political and social elites.
- Diversity and cultural tolerance — the group's inclusive attitude towards others extends to their cultural values and practices (in so far as these values and practices are not themselves intolerant or sectarian). They endorse and support a broad definition of the arts and a wide range of practices not limited to their own personal artistic tastes.

- Experience — individuals within the group have various degrees of familiarity with and experience of the arts, and possess a diversity of practical knowledge and experience
- Skills — individuals within the group have a range of applicable skills covering fields as diverse, and as specialised, as long term planning and policy development, financial management, personnel management, public relations and promotions, event management and support, and possibly many more. Specific arts related skills such as writing and publishing or graphic design are particularly useful.
- Entrepreneurship — they actively seek opportunities and take risks responsibly
- Diligence — they are well organised, and attend to administrative requirements and management issues promptly and competently
- Cheerfulness — they are positive and optimistic in their general outlook on life, enjoy what they do, and positively affect others
- Most importantly they care about their community. These people are volunteers. They give up their time and energy to work for the benefit of the broader community. This is unlikely to be purely altruistic, but reflects the shared values and mutual interests at the heart of all community. We might think of this in terms of de Tocqueville's notion of "self-interest properly understood", or Bertrand Russell's "enlightened self-interest".

In practice, LAC leadership teams variously measure up to this ideal. Some are insular and to an extent dysfunctional. Others work very well under difficult circumstances, to manage and advance their LAC amidst the hector of complex and demanding lives. Most leadership groups comprise four or five people, but they may be larger or smaller, and they vary in size as the involvement of individual members waxes and wanes. A group larger than this is difficult to coordinate and bring together for meetings. A smaller group becomes unstable as the loss of any individual saps energy and reduces capacity.

Conclusion

It is clear that the arts have a major role to play in a healthy community. They enhance the quality of life, both by enhancing entertainment and lifestyle options and by contributing to the moral, mental and physical health of individuals and communities; constitute an important sector of economy, generating substantial wealth in their own right, as well as driving innovation in other sectors; contribute to the creative community culture that underpins vigorous, progressive and sustainable community; and they provide an arena for the contest of ideas that is essential to an open and vigorous democracy. They also suggest strategies and instruments by which we can improve the quality of our lives without subscribing to the insane and unsustainable notion that perennial economic growth is the only way we can improve our lives (Hamilton 2003).

LACs, most appropriately conceived of as cultural industry support organisations can, through the contribution they make to creative community culture, become potent agents for community development, and further those benefits listed above. As core community development agents they also contribute to the integration and healing of fragmented communities, building alliances of mutuality and synergy between disparate community groups. They thus help the community to engage with itself, an essential prerequisite for effective engagement with external agencies such as state, federal and even international service organisations, businesses and governments.

A cultural network such as Queensland's network of arts councils actually comprises a number of parallel and interacting networks that to a certain extent overlap, reinforce and complement each other. The institutional network of legally incorporated LACs is relatively formal and closed. But it operates parallel with more open and informal social networks of professional and personal associations between individuals, and each LAC or node marries into various local networks that are open and closed in various degrees.

These networks both distribute products and services — which might be generated at the centre or at the periphery — and also provide important avenues for feedback and reciprocity. Indeed, in an ideal state where a network functions optimally and without restraint, the notions of centre and periphery become redundant as all network nodes have opportunity to assume equivalent status. Cultural networks thus serve as intermediaries between citizens and ruling elites, both within any given local community and in its relations with more broadly defined communities, bridging social, economic and political stratification, and contributing to the dispersal of social, economic and political power throughout the constituency. They become crucial agents “for limiting authoritarian government, strengthening the empowerment of the people, and enforcing political accountability” (Caparini 2002).

This paper recognises that key individuals, here conceived as local arts council champions or creative community catalysts are essential to the effective operation of LACs. It views these individuals as specific functional elites engaged in the business of building creative communities. The recruiting of these persons is essential to the effective operation of individual LACs and the Queensland's arts council network as a whole. These persons generally fall, by virtue of educational and vocational characteristics, within Bennett, Emmison and Frow's knowledge class, Florida's creative class and Lasch's global elite. What is exceptional about these people is that they remain engaged with and acknowledge their responsibility towards those we might regard as their constituency, the members of their locally defined communities. That these exceptional individuals remain engaged and responsible, contributing effectively not only to their own LACs, but also to the effective operation of the network more broadly to channel reciprocal

communication and to negotiate power, is critically important not only for the survival of Queensland's arts council network, but also for the effective functioning of our democracy.

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