

Chapter 6: Managing creativity and cultivating culture

Let us briefly summarise the case developed in this monograph.

Government ideas about how to support arts and culture were traditionally very limited in their success and effectiveness. Historically, governments spent little on culture and what was spent tended to be earmarked for the elite arts sector. Arguably this support was not motivated by ambitions to broaden awareness of culture more generally in the community, but by notions of ‘showcasing’ endorsed representations of elite culture. Support was given to major signature institutions which constituted an oasis of culture, often situated in major cities.

Gradually, a greater range of activities began to be classified as ‘culture’ and from the 1960s onwards, governments were persuaded to invest more widely in these various cultural activities. Two things happened in parallel: government financial support widened to include many new and different forms of culture (films, festivals, events, more institutions, local community developments), and the older forms of arts patronage became more and more expensive to operate and sustain (owing to escalating costs, increased investments, artistic purchases, artistic salaries, and bureaucratic administration). These parallel developments put considerable pressure on the system.

On the supply side, production expanded as more people were able to practice various artforms and the costs of participating became more manageable to intending contributors. Changing technologies, better equipment, new media and more variable inputs meant that the arts and cultural sector was now more accessible to potential contributors. The sector became wide open to new players, not due to the policies of the old elite guard but due to initiatives of the new participants themselves. Some of these developments were welcomed by the arts habitués. So, for example, there was a spectacular growth and interest in special interest arts — such as indigenous and multi-cultural ‘folk arts’. Much of this was not necessarily ‘traditional’ artistic expression but was reinvented through the use of new styles and techniques against the backdrop of traditional cultures (as with Aboriginal dot paintings done in acrylic).

On the demand side, the old arts sector did not highly value the size or diversity of its audiences. The sector operated as a self-referential ‘closed shop’ that, in practice, only expected to engage with itself. Artists and the cognoscenti were the intended audience and often were the sole revolving audience for elite arts presentations. The sector was organised and ruled by ideas of excellence and elite peer taste. But again, pressures from the 1960s onwards posed challenges to the insular *status quo*. Governments wanted to widen the reach of the arts

and adopted the twin mantras of access and equity. They wanted to stimulate greater mass demand and engagement with forms of cultural expression.

However, attempts to widen access and improve equity have met with only limited success. The high arts sector has not necessarily approved of the government's aim to make the arts more accessible. It is not unknown for arts bureaucrats to give 'lip service' to all forms of culture in their 'impact' reports to government (such as CD sales, attendance at popular music events, gardening, and folk festivals) only to subsequently ignore these sectors once the case has been made about 'accessibility' or the funding request has been submitted.

Meanwhile, 'new' or non-traditional entrants in the sector compete for the marginal funds remaining after the elite organisations and institutions have secured their 'cut'. The result is often unsatisfactory for many players. In responding to claims of 'crisis' and 'reduced funding' (usually on an organisational basis rather than across the cultural field as a whole), governments face a dilemma. Should they pick cultural winners and reinstate forms of patronage or should they institute new funding models and force organisations to compete and meet new regimes of accountability and performance criteria?

Supporting elite arts that are demonstrably not self-sustaining attracts criticisms of *elite nurturing* while the application of competitive regimes is condemned as inappropriate *economic rationalism*. To avoid either charge, numerous governments have adopted a compromised or 'instrumentalist' approach that uses art and culture to leverage broader social outcomes in other more demonstrably 'needy' or 'deserving' portfolios (such as art programs in hospitals, prisons or for the mentally ill; cultural training schemes for unemployed or 'at risk' youth; art and cultural projects for marginalised or disadvantaged groups). Yet, this approach, too, has proved problematic.

Today's Challenges

The major challenges facing governments with respect to supporting the arts and cultural sector are:

- to what degree should governments be locked into supporting arts and culture;
- how best to address the imbalance between the sustainability of different sub-sectors of arts and culture;
- choosing appropriate policy models to achieve measurable outcomes; and
- demonstrating the effectiveness of whole-of-government approaches to arts and cultural policy.

These challenges are outlined in brief below.

The Drip-feed of Government Support

Contemporary governments seem to be inevitably and inextricably committed to supporting arts and culture. Given that, what options do they have and what are the consequences of adopting certain strategies over others? Generally, three basic models of support have been employed by governments:

- *patronage strategies* through which cultural activities are underwritten through direct public funding;
- *indirect funding* through diverse models of delivery including arms' length agencies such as art councils, ministerial directorates and departmental arrangements; and
- *facilitative strategies* designed to build philanthropic, sponsorship and partnership liaisons between culture and public and private sector agencies, clients and communities.

Concurrently, a bureaucratic culture of arts administration has burgeoned, bringing with it myriad managerial-style interventions in funding and evaluation.

Governments have struggled to justify the adoption of 'mix-and-match' approaches to arts and culture. Among the justifications frequently offered are:

- *boosterism*, involving the sustained promotion or 'talking up' of strategies;
- *instrumentalism*, through which 'culture' is used to leverage solutions for social, economic and cultural disadvantage;
- *cultural capital*, in which arts and culture curricula in public education are used to build 'cultural competence';
- *branding and recognition*, using culture to enhance international competitiveness, brand awareness and export potential;
- *citizenship*, by embedding culture within notions of citizenship and national identity; and
- *cultural or creative industries*, in which culture is viewed as an 'industry' capable of demonstrating commercial viability and success within the constraints of broader consumer culture (cf. Jowell 2004, 2006; cf. Holden 2004, 2006).

The result is that governments at all levels now support more forms of culture than ever before and for more diverse reasons. Although there is talk of budget cuts or shortfalls, total government spending on the arts and culture is increasing. Governments are funding this sector, both *directly* (in the form of agencies and programs) and *indirectly* via strategies such as tax expenditures. Culture is certainly on the agenda but at what cost?

In many cultural forms, such as the performing and visual arts, arbitrary attempts to change support mechanisms have in fact compromised their potential for sustainability and created what may amount to a permanent dependency on support. Meeting enhanced accountability requirements often results in an

increased cost burden that is not compensated by increased box office takings, merchandising or franchising revenue. In short, if these artforms are forced to undertake more activities in order to fulfil accountability requirements, they risk becoming less economically viable and sustainable (MPAB 2004).

Some level of government subsidisation of the arts and cultural sector appears to be inevitable. Government support for the arts is a double-edged sword, as the accountability requirement attending funding provision is often perceived as a source of 'interference' with the creative nature of the endeavour. This is especially so with the elite forms of culture that are under increasing pressure from a combination of rising costs, declining and aging audiences and other competing forms of culture. Governments, therefore, find themselves unable to resist calls to support both elite and marginal cultural forms. Furthermore, they are susceptible to the arguments of insider lobbyists and elite institutions (as Australia's cycle of reviews including the *Nugent Report* demonstrated).

We need to ask why governments accede to special pleading by elite arts and, furthermore, why established elite arts are unable to stand on their own two feet? Furthermore, does a resort to direct subsidy or co-funding undermine efforts to shift the funding burden to the private sector and community partnerships?

Sustainable versus Non-sustainable Arts and Cultural Sub-sectors

The second challenge facing governments is dealing with the uneven profile of the arts and cultural sector. The tradition of supporting expensive and generally non-sustainable artforms has largely persisted and settled into 'patronage plus' models. Arguments about market failure as the rationale for providing support for services and activities that are perceived as 'public goods' are not sufficient to explain why there is always support for elite and less popular arts and culture irrespective of party ideology or the type of support model that underpins the policy. Indeed, support flows even when there is no clearly articulated policy by government. In such circumstances, 'policy' tends to rely on 'back of envelope' largesse strategies, or 'accidental policy'. There are no market or economic rationalist arguments that can succinctly or persuasively be cited to justify continued support for traditional elite culture.

Yet support for this sub-sector continues to be at the heart of cultural policy even when placed within a broader cultural planning framework (such as Richard Florida's creative classes or Robert McNulty's sustainable communities approaches, see McNulty 1986; Ciccarelli and Coppa 2001). In fact, if anything, we are witnessing a re-emergence and reinforcement of bifurcation in the domain of arts and culture with a retreat to earlier forms of patronage for the top of the arts hierarchy and the propulsion of broader notions of culture into a *compote*

of policies brought together under the umbrella of well-being, sustainability, entrepreneurship, citizenship and innovation.

As discussed earlier, the broad cultural arena or *eco-culture* that links to the everyday and popular cultural forms consumed by the majority of the population is of marginal interest to cultural policy makers despite its self-evident resonance with the community. Furthermore, one of the ironies of the instrumentalist approach to cultural policy is that it simultaneously ghettoises elite culture *and* alienates potential new audiences, resulting in perverse policy outcomes reminiscent of Jowell's *spiral of decline*. So while new cultural forms such as physical circus and indigenous art continue to prosper, older forms such as classical performing arts and mainstream visual arts still struggle.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Policy Models

The third challenge for arts and cultural policy internationally is the difficulty of justifying and measuring whether different policy options actually work. In every advanced country there is some ongoing debate about the effectiveness of diverse models or suites of cultural support. Typically, one country's lament over its inadequate policy model is another country's ideal or proposed solution. America envies levels of funding in Europe. Countries with arms' length arts council envy American patronage. Direct funded countries envy both. The UK's lottery approach has generated plenty of investment and activity but has not necessarily guided the direction of that cultural explosion. And so it goes.

Attempts to measure the outcomes and effectiveness of arts and cultural policy — even where an explicit and limited instrumentalist strategy is employed — seem doomed to failure. Various commentators suggest that the purported outcomes of investment in the arts cannot readily be translated into measurable indicators, apart from the most basic statistics (audience size, ticket or product sales or practitioner income). Reliable measures of cultural capital or enhanced citizenship remain hard nuts to crack. Further, many evaluations are conducted at the end of a project with no or little attempt to conduct longitudinal or comparative studies of the impact of a program on artistic taste or cultural participation.

A complicating factor is that the policy choices in this domain seem to be intimately tied with broader policy, political and ideological dispositions — not to mention cultural history — in ways that cannot simply be addressed by adopting another funding model. In this sense, arts and cultural policies seem to be more locked into the nuances of the past than other policy arenas. This seems to restrict contemporary policy options more so than in some other portfolios where radical changes in governmental objectives and global trends has resulted in significant re-structuring, for example, the fashion (clothing, textile and footwear) industry.

Against this backdrop, governments appear less able to re-invent their policy models to fit new circumstances and so existing policy pathways and approaches are repeated. It would require a major re-think of policy processes to abandon traditional forms of arts and cultural support and engineer genuinely new approaches. In particular, the arms' length arts council model — so fêted in the past — seems particularly resistant. Although the failure of such approaches to achieve desired ends has been demonstrated, there is little indication of a mood to supplant these models with more effective policy machinery.

Criticisms of arm's length agencies are commonplace and have included such things as peer review bias (for or against particular applicants and artforms); a monopolistic or closed shop mentality that excludes anything new or different; misuse of financial and administrative arrangements; niche 'cognoscenti' bureaucratisation of arts and culture against trends in public administration in other agencies; and insufficient funds to broadly underwrite cultural activity in the public interest. In a number of jurisdictions, arts councils have had their ambit and breadth cut back by a variety of competitors in the cultural policy fields, be that government departments, ministerial largesse, community or private sector partners other levels of government.

Moreover, policies often have had unintended consequences that have undermined the ability of central cultural policy agencies to deliver effective policy outcomes. It is tempting to argue that the elite arts council model of cultural policy is outdated and counter-productive for efficient and effective arts and cultural policy. But are the alternatives — ministerial portfolio, administrative bureaucratisation, philanthropy, partnerships, cultural democracy — any better policy options? The question remains: should these monopolistic arts agencies have to compete with alternative cultural organisations for policies, strategies, funding largesse and clients?

Should Arts and Cultural Policy be a Niche Portfolio or a Broad Governmental Responsibility?

The fourth and final challenge to arts and cultural policy identified in this monograph is whether arts and culture requires a specialist policy approach or whether it should underpin government policy as a whole. In recent years, there has been a trend towards *whole-of-government* (or 'joined up') approaches to cultural policy as part of the broader definition of culture and its scope in everyday life. Yet the question needs to be asked as to whether this has undermined the integrity of cultural policy as a distinctive domain of public policy.

The answer appears to be yes and no. In some ways, the whole-of-government approach has been counter-productive and reactionary. In the area of traditional and elite arts there has been a return to forms of traditional patronage models

or what might be called *neo-patronage* (old wine in new bottles). But in other arenas, there has been a proliferation of forms of art and culture outside the sanctioned domain of government agencies and largesse. Examples include physical theatre, digital media, multi-media, cross-platform visual and performing arts, indigenous art and performing arts, 'ethnic' and community artforms, 'street' and youth arts, and so on. These forms of culture resist patronage and often occupy spaces outside sanctioned cultural domains. They tend to be cost-effective, sustainable and even profitable as well as merging (or making irrelevant) the distinction between creator, audience and consumer.

These new forms of arts and culture perhaps pose the greatest challenge to existing policy rationales and options. The combination of changing public perceptions, trends in cultural participation and recent patterns of investment, support and partnership in art and culture have created a demand for models of cultural support that are based on community and creator-generated strategies of cultural enervation and exploration. Critics of such new policy approaches, however, warn of the limits to a policy framework driven by cultural democracy and popularity (e.g. Lammy 2006). Nonetheless, fractures within the conventional cultural policy community, together with challenges from new players, make re-thinking the tenets of arts and cultural policy a priority.

Much contemporary cultural vitality and energy is occurring outside the traditional arts and culture political framework and increasingly challenges the philosophy underpinning it. Examples include circus (physical theatre), new media arts, youth arts, performance culture consumed outside official parameters (CDs, DVDs), sub-cultures, community groups, amateur artists and performers, and electronically networked/produced/consumed arts and culture. These diverse examples of arts and culture are informing the development of active citizenship and cultural competence on various levels — local, regional, national, sub-cultural and global.

In the face of this challenge from below, some arts organisations have acknowledged the need to step outside their comfort zones and redefine the ambit of 'the arts' in contemporary society and social change. As Jennifer Bott said, in her last speech as the CEO of the Australia Council:

If the arts are to impact on all Australians, it needs to enter communities of interest — and draw government, media and corporate support. For that to happen, we need to put culture not at the end of the value chain, tacked on 'if and when' funds are available, but right at the start — and the heart — of community building and engagement, where it belongs. (Bott 2006)

But such rhetorical commitments run counter to real trends evident within the Australia Council. While its budget has doubled in a decade (from \$72 million

in 1996 to \$152 million in 2006) largely in order to fund the major performing arts companies, its outreach capability has been compromised and engaged boards of community arts and new media have been cannibalised. As mentioned earlier, the appointment of former AbaF head Kathy Keele as CEO of the Australia Council signals a commitment to pursuing business models of support. It seems, once again, that little 'a' arts (popular cultural forms) is a useful rhetorical tool to trot out on occasions but culture still resides in the big 'A' end of privileged artforms (performing arts, visual arts, literature).

There is, however, abundant evidence that 'culture' is not the privileged domain of elite academies. Elite interests do not exercise a natural monopoly over arts and culture. In fact, arts and cultural practice (and consumption) thrive outside Culture's hallowed spaces: elite galleries and performing spaces. Broad-based culture is increasingly and insistently impinging on orthodox and elite sectors. Even so, traditional elite arts and culture remain privileged recipients of government support justified as the articulation of symbols of civility, cultural competence and international visibility. Yet, while audiences and consumers for elite artforms are declining, audiences for prosaic arts and culture are blossoming.

Perhaps, because of the pervasive reach of culture and media, participants in and consumers of everyday culture are confident about defending their choices and celebrating prosaic culture as the real backbone of community identity and sustainability. Yet, there is still a divide in policy terms between community cultural development and elite cultural subsidy.

When Raymond Williams (1976) defined 'culture' in his seminal book, *Keywords*, he noted that its earliest use was in the horticultural context of animal and plant husbandry or 'cultivation' (caring or tending). While later uses went on to emphasise self-improvement and intellectual, artistic or spiritual development, our present cultural trends suggest that contemporary culture has embraced earlier notions of cultivation amid a wide spectrum of competing definitions (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris 2005).

But there is still a divide between those arts linked to self-improving civilisation and those linked to survival civilisation. Most commentators continue to make a distinction between the latter (e.g. folk art, mass art and various natural traditions) and the former transnational institutions of art that connects the artistic practices of urban centres around the world (Carroll 2007:142). Governments, too, reproduce the divide in their contradictory mix of policies.

It seems that, if governments want to avoid endlessly retreating to patronage forms of support, then it is imperative that they re-think the basis of arts and cultural policy and develop coherent strategies for further development. This is the challenge if we are to revitalise government responsibility for, and

commitments to coherent arts and cultural policies, thereby allowing culture's 'garden' to flourish.