

CREATIVE CITIES, CREATIVE MUSEUMS

This paper emerges from a convergence of contemporary issues affecting the future of our cities and communities and, we believe, the future direction of museums and galleries in these communities.

It is set in a larger context. As a profession we grapple with an understanding of the role and value of museums [and galleries] (for the purpose of this paper I will refer to them all as museums unless I need to differentiate) and the changing environment in which they exist – indeed several papers at this conference address this issue.

In an even broader framework, we are mindful the work of Richard Florida, on the value of creative cities in developing sustainability and growth.

We ask the question what role *do* museums play in shaping a creative environment and what is our responsibility as a profession to strengthen this role?

However, today we explore how museums can participate in developing more creative communities by working with local government, supporting local community initiatives and ensuring that the role of museums is fundamental to community culture. We strongly advocate that this role needs to be embedded in the cultural planning process which is currently taking place throughout NSW. We will also examine examples and models to illustrate these points.

Sometimes, museums and galleries are seen as an end in themselves, being described as the stewards of community collections, venues for creative programming and support infrastructure for local artists. They also play an important role in informing, educating and entertaining communities and their visitors. Museums are also community symbols. Along with a courthouse, the possession of a museum enhances the status of a municipality or shire.

However, while they are regarded as cultural assets by local government the activities of museums and galleries are frequently viewed as external to the core business of a council and not necessarily providing broader cultural programs for the community at large.

Fortunately, this attitude is changing, both through more enlightened approaches of museums/galleries themselves and through the expectations and engagement of government.

In the UK, you can clearly see how government agendas are cascaded through to museums – with an emphasis on education, learning and access. In Australia, change is also noticeable at a local government level where museums and galleries are becoming more seamlessly integrated into local government responsibilities, because they are seen to add value to council's community agenda.

We've heard a lot at this conference about the danger of government intervention - assuming that such intervention is negative. I'm speaking here about both a

government and a museum's commitment to the needs of a broad community through a mutually supportive relationship.

Creative city guru Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* proposes that economic growth is strongest in those places that are tolerant, diverse and open to creativity. His work demonstrates that new industries and talent are attracted to places with a high 'Bohemian index' – a denser population of artists, writers, street culture, high art and performances; a higher level of tolerance (their gay index, for instance, is high) and greater diversity.

In a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* Florida reaffirms that a creative city has a competitive advantage in attracting talent and generating economic prosperity and will "lead other countries heading into the creative era".

Interestingly, Florida's perspective is being echoed in local governments in regional NSW. A number of Councils, now needing to attract diminishing professional services back to their country town, look to the very real benefits that arts and culture provide. At the same time, others look to culture to create a distinctive and attractive environment, to support or to shape economic development and to play an increasingly important role in community social development. Think of the impact of the Tamworth Country Music Festival.

The penny has even dropped in many places that it is cultural initiatives that can enhance communities rather than an over abundant supply of football fields.

The emergence of cultural planning as an integral component of local government planning provides arts, culture and heritage with a great mechanism to advocate, nurture and develop the cultural life, wealth, diversity and activities of a community.

In 2004, to assist local government in cultural planning, the NSW Ministry for the Arts produced *Cultural Planning Guidelines*. These reinforce the role of local government as the lead organisation for cultural planning and outline the benefits of the process. Key features in the Guidelines include:

- Encouraging local government to view cultural planning as integrated into council's other planning mechanisms
- Community engagement is central to the planning process
- Culture is broadly defined – beyond 'arts' to include a sense of place, values and identity
- Identifying products, cultural assets, resources and cultural infrastructure in both public and private ownership and understanding their potential and current use
- Identifying mechanisms for "removing barriers and enhancing opportunities for shared cultural expression and participation"
- Providing a framework for realisation of the plan including resources

A copy of the Guidelines is available on the NSW Ministry for the Arts' website www.arts.nsw.gov.au

Our organisation, Museums and Galleries NSW, has been prompting museums to play a stronger role in cultural planning for some time and in 2003, we brought together a group of museum and gallery directors to advise us on this. We found that while our colleagues were interested in the planning process, on the whole they had little awareness of how it worked - even within their own council, they lacked knowledge of the language and mechanisms of cultural planning and in some instances had missed out on any involvement in planning that had already taken place.

In a few instances, the gallery or museum director was given the task of preparing the council's cultural plan with little information or support.

Exclusion of museums from the planning process reflects attitudes within some councils to these bodies. Deborah Mills, a coordinator/author of the Guidelines gave us some insight into this

When she asked "Why has the art gallery, museum, performing arts centre or library been omitted from the planning process?" the responses included:

- Do museums have something to do with culture?
- Oh, the art gallery does its own thing- we want this plan to be for everybody
- Oh – our art gallery and performing arts centre are managed by a separate board. We just give them money – we don't tell them what to do

She also experienced a level of suspicion and concern from the museum's perspective about the impact of a cultural plan on their organisation – a fear of government intervention perhaps.

We've been examining NSW cultural plans to gain a better understanding of how the future of museums can be shaped by the planning process and to provide some pointers to our colleagues to give them insight into this process. We have identified what not to do in a few current plans, while others are models to inspire.

We will protect the guilty, by not naming names, however you might recognise some planning bloopers in the following – and can be wary of repeating these mistakes.

Firstly, cultural planning is a continuum and councils often go through a number of generational versions. Often – at least from the museums' perspective – the first plan can get it all wrong. It's important to see this as an iterative, ongoing process. Mistakes can be fixed!

In early plans, integration of culture with other areas of council is often a victim. Cultural assets may be identified, but the plan ignores their role, seems happy abandoning each to its own devices or leaves the responsibility of delivering integrated outcomes solely to the Cultural Services area, with no performance criteria for other areas of Council – not the most persuasive way to get integrated results!

In one plan, we've seen the entire responsibility for cultural development given to a separate entity, such as an arts board with no representative from the museum sector. While acknowledging the value of these boards, culture needs to be developed and delivered holistically, with strong input not only from arts boards, but

from other formal and informal structures.

Museums particularly (as opposed to art museums and galleries) often become totally invisible throughout the planning process – there is no mention of the museum within the arts and cultural asset base, no consultation is sought with the museum – or they are not represented in a working group. In another plan librarians are recognised as arts workers, museum workers are not!

We have also found plans where the local gallery – a key cultural asset and a major resource and repository of community funding – is seen as a very minor player.

Hardware versus software can also be a problem, where a large and generally expensive building is perceived as the outcome rather than the 'software' or programs that will light up their spaces or the staff to manage them. It is necessary to ensure that staff and programs are also effectively planned and resourced.

Councils also can ignore cultural assets which lie outside their own portfolio, despite being strong community initiatives ripe for partnership opportunities. This occurs frequently with volunteer-managed museums and historical societies, but one major council's plan overlooks the potential of partnerships and relationships with museums managed by the National Trust and the Historic Houses Trust in their local government area.

There are, however, a number of excellent cultural plans that provide models of inclusion for museums and galleries. We will focus on Albury, Tweed and Bathurst and make reference to several other examples

The Tweed Shire Plan is an example of an evolutionary process. Initially a cultural policy was developed in 1999 that has grown into a *Five Year Cultural Program*.

The first policy identified museums and galleries as cultural assets and while the new regional gallery building was highlighted, there was no further mention of the museums.

The second, in 2001, utilised existing facilities and organisations, such as the gallery and museums to provide positive and creative outcomes for youth, arts employment and the representation of cultural diversity needs that had been neglected.

Themes of the plan include:

- Distinctiveness
- Equity and access
- Cultural Diversity
- Built and Natural Environment
- Youth
- Employment and Economic
- Training & Skills development
- Facilities

The “distinctiveness” program includes local festivals, and marketing. Museums are involved in a number of projects involving cultural diversity through oral history, assist in the interpretation of the region and identification of the significance of collections is seen to strengthen the region’s identity.

The gallery will be involved in the development of an Arts Trail and also in a training and skills development program and an artist in residence program.

Bathurst, too, recognises that a cultural plan is not a final solution but part of a process of ongoing review and consolidation.

The Plan, developed in 2000, has themes of:

- Development
- Heritage
- Learning
- Tourism
- Cultural Industry

The themes are linked into existing infrastructure. For example, Learning has been identified, as Bathurst is home to Charles Sturt University and a TAFE both providing teaching in the cultural arena (education is one of the largest employers in Bathurst). There is an understanding of how cultural facilities can nurture life-long learning with the gallery, library and museums linked into formal education structures.

Heritage is strongly identified as the “sense of place” of Bathurst. It permeates all aspects of the plan and is particularly identified as a cornerstone of cultural tourism. The plan also acknowledges the strong role of culture in shaping the city, perhaps reflecting the notions of Richard Florida.

The Cultural Plan “should be seen as a beginning in the strategic positioning of Bathurst as a regional city of economic, social and cultural prosperity. The real test will be faced in the years to come as the plan is modified and improved to take account of the changing needs of the Bathurst community”

Interestingly, both Tweed and Bathurst have museum development plans that complement the main cultural plan – that of the Tweed focuses on the role of three historical societies which will collaborate as a multi campus regional museum, under the guidance of a museum professional and the Gallery Director, and operating in new and upgraded facilities. Bathurst’s plan incorporates a range of museums, and the art gallery.

Musing Bathurst: A review of Museums in the Bathurst Region for Bathurst City Council was developed in April 2003 for the council’s collections of more than 7000 items with a combined value of at least \$5.4 million. It also acknowledges “affiliated” museums and museum assets within the community and identifies gaps in the current museum sphere, for instance little Aboriginal representation.

One of the key proposals is an Art Gallery and Museums Unit that provides the “shared vision for all museums, strategies for collaboration between facilities and the establishment of an effective management model for museums” including an integrated model for collection management and the funding of specific cross-sector

collaborative projects. This shows a level of integration and support that is uncommon in the current landscape.

It is a long-term plan – 50 years in horizon – with the “establishment of a quality regional museum” as a goal (by 2015). The regional museum model is a “multi-campus ... museum comprising a number of institutions drawing on unified management and marketing resources”. The incorporation of external museums such as the Historical Society into the planning framework, recognises that its collection “irreplaceable social history” which cannot be duplicated by council. The Historical Society will benefit from being incorporated into the plan through projects such as a group disaster plan, while maintaining its own identity and support base.

Albury takes the model of collaboration and convergence even further. Albury City’s Four-year Cultural Plan is linked to a 10 year plan entitled “*Albury 2010: Lifestyles on the Murray*” as well as council’s Management Plan.

Six key strategic directions were identified:

- Leadership
- Lifestyle
- Environment
- Infrastructure
- Economic Development
- Corporate Development.

The cultural plan acknowledges the wider region and suggests developing a regional plan with the Murray Regional Organisation of Councils. The plan also identifies the importance of outreach activities by the Library, Gallery and Museum as well as small grants and funding assistance for community groups such as the historical society.

The vision focuses on plans to transform the CBD into a thriving community, entertainment and cultural precinct.

The library, museum and gallery are identified as “major cultural enterprises” within this precinct and over ten years, around \$30 million will be spent on their enhancement.

An evaluation of the short and long term economic and employment impact of the proposed Precinct found it would “yield a positive economic benefit of over \$81 million over four years and \$224 million over nine years. Employment would increase by up to 276 jobs in the short term and 357 as stage 4 is completed.

This plan takes active steps towards converging heritage and cultural activities and there is a strong emphasis on collaboration.

The Library and Museum will be housed in a joint facility and proposed collaboration includes joint public programs in the precinct, sharing friends’ groups and volunteers, a shared Library/Museum education officer and so on.

It is proposed that heritage will also be more integrated - the library/museum will house the heritage advisor, heritage symposiums and information days will be

presented at the museum, and both built and movable heritage collections within the council's care are viewed holistically.

This convergence of cultural functions, through joint facilities and shared programs reflects initiatives at the Federal level in Australia with the Heritage Collections Council and, if you listened carefully to (DGM of the NSW Ministry for the Arts) Roger Wilkins' speech at the commencement of the conference, presages a possible new direction for the collections sector in NSW

A number of Indigenous-specific strategies are also identified including the interpretation and promotion of Indigenous cultural heritage through Albury's cultural services, promoting Aboriginal artists and consolidating Aboriginal Traineeships.

The Murray is also seen as an important cultural location and the development of the "Port of Albury" will provide a wharf for the Paddlesteamer *Cumberoona* and link in to Wodonga's Riverland Interpretation Centre, with an Indigenous exhibition gallery, cultural and entertainment precinct and boardwalks.

Two further models:

Coolamon is, a small town in the Riverina, close to Wagga Wagga. Like many regional areas, Coolamon has competition from this larger city in close proximity (the vacuum effect!). However, the town's built heritage is intact and distinctive and is seen as a drawcard for cultural development and economic regeneration.

The Coolamon plan capitalises on heritage. Museums and collections support this identity. The conservation of the iconic *Up To Date Store* in Coolamon as a museum/heritage centre as well as brochures and signposting supporting heritage and culture provide a strategic advantage for the town's future.

"The Shire's buildings, collections, oral and written history make a significant contribution to the Shire's distinctive visual amenity, speak of long established and well nurtured ways of life and provide the links with the past which can form a basis for the future." (Pg 13)

The plan also promotes proximity to Wagga as a strength, not a weakness, as Coolamon can become a desirable commuter town and distinctive recreational village for the larger city.

The development of Coolamon, based on its authentic cultural offerings will help a significant number of businesses in the area gain local outlets, which are currently unavailable and encourage the development of new businesses such as restaurants and recreational shopping. Festivals too, are being developed, using the town as a backdrop.

The museum is a significant and key component of this plan and already there are plans for the further development or enhancement of existing collections and sites.

Finally, mention must be made of the **Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils' (WSROC)** ground breaking cultural plan - *Authoring Contemporary Australia, A Regional Cultural Strategy for Greater Western Sydney*, a cultural plan covering the area of greatest cultural change and development in the state.

In a bold move, the councils across the western Sydney region – from the Blue Mountains to Liverpool – collaborated to develop this plan. The Greater Western Sydney area is expanding rapidly and will grow by over 510,000 people in the next 15 years. The plan emphasizes that Western Sydney’s cultural infrastructure must service the needs of more than half of Sydney’s population.

The area is “dogged by an image of disadvantage, crime and inertia” and is threatened through constant stereotyping. Cultural planning and infrastructure will play a pivotal role in changing this perception and determining the city’s futures.

The region’s major cultural institutions have a primary role in this. The plan affirms the importance of a sense of place and the provision of ‘hard’ physical cultural infrastructure is a vital ingredient. However it is noted that “Hard infrastructure, no matter how well-designed, is just an empty shell without people and programs of activity.” The plan also aims to secure ongoing funds to support cultural planning in individual regional councils.

There are many plans that provide a range of initiatives through museums and galleries that will benefit the community. Some approaches we’ve identified that we find valuable include the following:

- a broad definition of culture
- consultation and engagement with the community
- Involvement of cultural facilities staff in the development of the plan
- Involvement of the wider museum community
- Links with other council plans including the LEP and any specific heritage plans
- Integration with council’s strategic and business plan - including timing of activities/funding etc.
- Integration of programs and staff across council departments (eg the youth worker working with the gallery to develop a youth curated exhibition), a coordinated approach to managing collections across council, an integrated marketing plan involving tourism and cultural facilities
- Identification of heritage assets (including museums and collections) within the scope of the plan
- Realistic goals and articulated strategies
- Innovative use of existing resources, cultural organisations and facilities - building on these rather than starting from scratch
- Recognition of the need to resource staff and programs not just the ‘hard infrastructure’
- Recognition of the value of partnerships beyond council borders- both with other organisations in town and organisations beyond council’s geographic reach
- Aspirational- doesn’t just accept the lowest common denominator but aims in long term planning to markedly improve the cultural contribution of museums

In addition to some of the roles for museums and galleries outlined above, we believe that museums and galleries can participate in community development and the achievement of richer and more creative communities through:

- Working with a community to find pathways to influence and understand the environment in which they live
- Advocating that cultural uses are integrated into new development or judicious regeneration of older areas
- Supporting a broad range of cultural activities, beyond those traditionally presented in museums and galleries
- Ensuring they encourage participation in culture by the widest range of people in the community, including those facing social exclusion
- Integrating the work of museums and galleries with other cultural groups to provide a 'critical mass' of cultural activity and a stronger cultural voice
- Encouraging shared approaches and resources between a range of cultural agencies and institutions

In summary, our research has indicated that museums have a valuable role to play in engaging fully in the cultural planning process and that these organisations can strengthen the cultural capacity of their communities. Indeed they are essential to the community's development of a vibrant creative environment to both sustain and nurture the future of that community and ensure a viable future for museums in these communities.

Because workers in museums and galleries are often the longest-established and amongst the most credible in a community, they have a prime role and, I would advocate, a responsibility to take leadership in shaping the creative life of their communities – as well of course, in ensuring their own organisations perform well to fulfill their cultural plans.

Maisy Stapleton, CEO

Sarah-Jane Rennie, Team Leader Research and Training

Jean Probert, Special Projects Officer

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