



Session D: CULTURAL VITALITY

Symposium: Strengthening cultural communities in regional Australia, Regional Arts

Australia: Wednesday 26th October, 2.00 - 3.30 pm

Cultural Planning with Local Government in NSW: an overview

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Slide 1:

As an introduction, I hope that our presentation will convince you of two things:

1. That local government can be the most strategic partner in building **stable, just and inclusive** societies, where it includes arts and cultural development as part of its core business, and,
2. That cultural planning, as a **means of engaging communities in local government planning processes**, can deliver sustainable outcomes to balance those of economic, environmental and social responsibilities.

Spike Milligan once said "Good. We don't have a plan, so nothing can go wrong" and I am inclined to agree that planning processes can set up expectations by which we may be unfairly measured and by which we become accountable for outcomes that may not be within our control. This is probably not a good thing for a planner to say but it is a good thing for a planner to remember. I do believe, though, in the case of cultural planning, less is better, particularly in the circumstances where we are enlisting the engagement of people in local government to whom the word 'culture' might encourage them to leave the room very suddenly, possibly screaming. Alternately, if they are associating the word culture with 'opera, ballet and classical music' they may think that the expectation is for them to sing very loudly, dance provocatively and wear flamboyant outfits to become involved in culture. Although that sounds like a fun thing to do on a quiet day in Council, it would be better to have a more accessible way into something called 'cultural planning' that opens the process up to everyone, from the Mayor to local arts and cultural groups; to children in schools; to bikies and nuns in convents (if there are any left).

Which brings me to a point of entry for the NSW Cultural Planning Guidelines. These were released by the NSW Ministry for the Arts in partnership with the NSW Department of Local Government at the end of 2004 and are currently being used by a healthy number of local councils in the state.

I must say the focus of my comments is particularly on rural and regional local government, because smaller and less well resourced councils are more likely to say, 'We don't have the resources for cultural planning'.

But, because of the accessibility of these guidelines many smaller local councils are engaging with this process readily and productively and Elizabeth Brown, who is the other half of this presentation, will show us how she has worked with local governments in the Southern Tablelands region of NSW and how cultural planning is happening with or without the guidelines.

Firstly I need to talk a bit about how the CPGs are being implemented across NSW and about the regional arts network's connection to them. The guidelines were contributed to by the whole network of Regional Arts Boards and their Regional Arts Development Officers, other state arts service organisations, cultural workers in councils and by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW so they have been drafted and redrafted a number of times to the satisfaction of most parties - give or take a word or two and some of the more churlish contributors! There is also some lack of communication from the state level at the moment, from the Ministry and the Department, but that does not seem to have affected the use of the guidelines in many local government areas. As with many other state initiatives, things will occur at a regional level with or without the support of the state.

However, I am pleased to report that the 'less is more' philosophy is working well with these guidelines, because they provide a simple step by step process, good frameworks, measuring tools and a terrific check list to help each local council see their progress and where they need to plan for the next steps. Council planners already use these skills to do social, environmental and economic planning for their local communities (in the most part) so the processes are not unfamiliar territory.

The biggest challenge for the guidelines in NSW is that just having them available is not enough when we are dealing with the kind of diversity across NSW that would buckle anything being attempted at a state or national level. RABS differ in size and complexity, servicing between 3 and 13 local government areas in each region, with populations ranging from 30,500 to 272,000 and in areas from 14,417km² to 177,249 km².

'Give us a copy of these guidelines now!' you say, and I have some copies available, but they can also be accessed on the net.

I'll quickly introduce you to the network, then speak more about the guidelines, then Elizabeth with follow up with the case studies for the Southern Tablelands.

Slide 2:

Regional Arts NSW is the secretariat for 13 autonomous, independent, self directed Regional Arts Boards who employ Regional Arts Development Officers and other staff to consult, plan, develop and implement regional arts programs designed specifically for each diverse and complex set of regional environments.

Slide 3:

Regional Arts NSW is located at the hub of government negotiations in Sydney with its core purposes of Building Capacity, Advocacy, Communications and Promotions, and Support for regional arts and cultural development in NSW, predominantly through the network of RABs.

Slide 4:

Each of the 13 RABs comprises partnerships with local arts and community representatives as well as local governments that contribute funds towards the costs of operations or projects conducted by RABs.

Slide 5:

RABs work with in excess of 1900 regional arts and cultural groups comprising over 28,000 volunteers, 104 local government areas, and 1.7 million people across 780 sq. kms. They sustain a population that represents 23% of the total state population and 33% of the national regional population.

Slide 6:

They employ over 495 projects artists and arts workers and generate employment for an addition 868 artists and cultural workers through their assistance to groups; they are engaged in around 200 projects a year with partnerships in a further 180 projects; they support over 137 Regional Arts Board Directors and employ over 40 members of staff only 17 of whom are full time.

Slide 7:

For every \$1 the state provides for their operations they generate in excess of \$4.56. For the funds they help generate for local arts and cultural groups they generate \$8.08 for each MFA \$. Not bad for an average of 2.8 employees per region with a car and an office in each of the 13 regions.

Through their Regional Arts Development Officers, RABs work alongside local councils in their regions to encourage them to take up cultural development outcomes as part of their plans of management. The guidelines are seen as a core, strategic process by which this can occur and by which local governments are able to dovetail many of their community outcomes with cultural outcomes. The whole network is promoting the notion across local government that it is **fair and just** as well as strategic for local councils to take up engagement in the cultural development of communities, because all of the surveys are telling us that the fourth pillar of sustainability in a community is that of cultural growth, alongside economic, environmental and social sustainability. We are making this argument *before* we make the economic, environmental and social arguments, because we now have the information to support it. The arts and culture are not the icing on the cake but a critical ingredient that sustains healthy communities. The arts and culture are to communities what baking powder is to a cake - they help them rise to the top level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Now to the Cultural Planning Guidelines:

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The guidelines cover four parts:

1. Policy principles and main features of a cultural plan.
2. Background to local cultural planning and the benefits.
3. Guidelines.
4. Practical advice; step by step guide.

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Part 1 proposes the three dimensions of culture:

1. Our sense of place, our values and our identity;
2. The material products of creative processes; and
3. Our engagement with and participation in creative processes.

The kind of place, product and process equivalent.

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Part 2 proposes a rationale for local government to become involved:

1. Local government is best placed to lead local cultural planning;
2. Cultural planning builds councils' capacities to engage with communities;
3. Cultural Planning promotes a higher status for culture at the local level and is already enshrined in the Local Government Act of 1993.

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Part 3 promotes the following cultural opportunities through cultural planning:

Citizens should have certain cultural opportunities, namely;

- Free artistic expression;
- Engagement with their human cultural heritage;
- Engagement with new intellectual and artistic production; and
- Engagement in their own forms of intellectual and artistic production.

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They promote:

- A knowledge and understanding of local cultures - a mechanism for recognition and response.
- A shared vision between communities and local governments.
- Integration and connectivity of the various functions of local government.
- A means of demonstrating sustainability, building capacity, supporting cultural activities, consistency, policy delivery, tools for determining priorities, formulation of indicators of cultural vitality and acknowledgement of the interdependency of social, environmental, economic and cultural indicators.

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Part 4 describes

- A strategic approach to cultural planning; *strategic* and *operational* differences.
- The integration of the cultural plan into council's other plans; useful indicators for determining where Council is up to.
- Checklist for successful planning.
- A Nine step local cultural planning process.

I'd like to conclude with some of my own comments about the processes and practices of cultural planning: From my personal experience, I am convinced that cultural planning generates partnerships between local government and local communities very effectively. Most particularly, if it is guided by good frameworks that embrace inclusiveness, accessibility and participation by stakeholders these partnerships continue beyond the planning phase and spread

the responsibility and support for implementing the plan beyond lone council officers struggling against a tide of disinterest.

In relation to dealing with cultural planning processes, the diverse nature of regional communities calls for situational management of the planning process to make sure that members of the community who have always been on the outside of planning, are brought into the process, not just because that is what a *just* community should reflect, but because it makes good sense to consult with those who can make significant contributions towards building healthy communities for all citizens. The theories around inclusiveness must be backed up by processes that genuinely engage stakeholders and, fortunately in my experience, the processes used by the arts and cultural sector for decades have come into greater use as the need for consultation has achieved greater legitimacy in government planning processes.

And if you don't believe me, Elizabeth Brown has pictures and I will hand over to her to convince you further.

Thank you for listening and I'm happy to answer any questions now, or when it is appropriate.