

Creativity, Cultural Vitality and the Future

Culture, as an integral domain of human activity, has been formally recognised in public policy since the 1980s. The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2002 Agenda 21 for Culture (to which Australia is a signatory) recognises that for ongoing human development to be sustainable, culture must be given a central role in policy. As a consequence cultural policy in Local Government is now accepted as the 'fourth pillar of sustainability' alongside economic, social and environmental policy.

Nationally, Local Government makes a considerable annual investment in arts, heritage and cultural development including infrastructure, staffing, programs and support. In 2010-11 Local Governments in Australia invested around 20% of estimated total expenditure on cultural activities (approx \$1,260 million). This level of investment increases annually.

Culture in its widest sense is about what matters to people and communities; what we value: The three key dimensions of culture are:

- Our sense of place, our values and our identity
- The material products of creative processes
- Our engagement with and participation in, cultural and creative processes

The arts are the creative expression of our culture; the activities that enable the expression of cultural meaning. Heritage is what we value about our cultural history and preserve and honour for future generations. Events and festivals are how we celebrate our culture the things we value about our lives and our community.

Global research into the benefits arising from investment in arts and cultural development show that this investment can generate considerable public benefit, described as **public or cultural value**. These measurable benefits include:

- Personal Value
 - Contribution to personal enrichment, health and wellbeing
- Cultural value
 - Contribution to culturally rich and vibrant communities
- Social value
 - Contribution to healthy, safe, inclusive communities
- Civic Value
 - Contribution to civic image and democratic and engaged communities
- Environment
 - Contribution to sustainable built and natural environments
- Economic Value
 - Contribution to economically prosperous communities

The extent of arts and cultural opportunities in a community, the level of involvement and participation in those opportunities and the benefits that flow from these are described as **Cultural Vitality**. The research shows that cultural vitality not only contributes to liveability but also can underpin economic vitality. Culturally vibrant places encourage residents to stay in the region, are more attractive to new residents and are more appealing to visitors. Cultural vitality also underpins a region's capacity to prepare for and participate in the new global economy, the emerging creative economy and cultural and creative tourism or the experience economy.

Looking ahead, development in the modern era will rely on people. Educated, knowledgeable and creative people will be the drivers of future wellbeing and prosperity.

"...the activities of the arts and cultural sector and local economic vitality are connected in many ways..... leading to improvements in competitiveness, sense of place, attracting new and visiting populations, integrating community and business visions and contributing to the skilling of the workforce" (Dwyer and Beavers 2011).

Stephen Clark
Director

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good thinking