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# ANIMATING SPACES
## THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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arts
AUSTRALIA

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*Cover Image: Artist David Atkinson, Hay That's Cool,
Sculpting Samford, 2014, Samford, QLD.
Photograph by Peter Storer.*

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# OVERVIEW
## STATS AND STORIES:
## THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

**Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia** is a ground breaking project funded by Regional Arts Australia and The Australia Council for the Arts that calls for new ways to identify and respond to Australia's vast land, diversity and differences, including its challenges and opportunities in regional Australia, using the arts as the vehicle.

The Stats and Stories project covers five themes and five case studies. The five themes were developed from the literature on the regional impact of the arts. One case study is written on each of the five themes.

The five themes are:

1. Community connectedness
2. Economic regeneration
3. Social inclusion
4. Civic pride and community identity
5. Regional development

The five case studies are:

1. Animating Spaces
2. Silver Ball Screening Festival
3. In the Saddle; On the Wall
4. Big hART
5. First Coat

The research project was undertaken by academic staff at Deakin University in the Business School. The project was led by Professor Ruth Rentschler, and Dr Kerrie Bridson at Deakin University, as well as Associate Professor Jody Evans at Melbourne Business School. Research support was provided by Claudia Escobar, Emma Winston and Nick Cooke.

For more information about the project please contact John Oster, Executive Director, Regional Arts Australia john.oster@regionalarts.com.au

Community Connectedness: Providing opportunities to engage, improving health of individuals and communities through Artslink Queensland's Animating Spaces three year project to celebrate and profile regional communities through support and volunteering.

# INTRODUCTION

Animating Spaces is a three year project funded through Artslink Queensland that commenced in 2013 to celebrate and profile regional communities. The use of multiple art forms transforms unconventional, yet regionally significant spaces.

The project aims to create a more cohesive network of regionally-connected communities by demonstrating the power of art to 'bring people together and build participation'.[1]

During 2014, five towns in Queensland participated in the Animating Spaces initiative. In each of the five communities, three creative projects were undertaken. Each project used a different art form to represent interests and goals to formulate a weekend of cultural activities.[2]

The five communities were chosen for the project based on 'evidence of need', 'capacity to deliver' and the 'guaranteed partnership and financial support from local government.'[3]

Kerryanne Farrer, Regional Arts Development Officer from Artslink Queensland explains:

*It was a big risk to do something this big but it has paid off. It has some elements of the community arts model matched with capacity building. The supported nature is what makes it fire and have great impact.*

The arts events include public exhibitions to highlight visual artists, cultural sharing spaces, reinvigorated public places, light installations, theatre performances and street art/murals to commemorate the past, present and future.

Animating Spaces provides opportunities to connect with the community, celebrating and profiling them, supporting volunteering, and improving health.

This project provides a platform for community connectedness in different ways, as each of the five participating towns illustrates. Farrer provided more detail when discussing the implications to community connectedness:

*This project fits with the trend of what people are asking for in communities. It has confirmed that people want to stay in their communities or want a reason to stay and that new people coming to town want to be connected. These events are perfect for people to get to know other people or express themselves creatively.*

Animating Spaces facilitates and fosters interactions between individuals and the broader community by inviting local community members to come together and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of their regional area whilst connecting with individuals from other community groups.

Arthur Frame, CEO/Artistic Director of Artslink Queensland, told us:

*Animating Spaces facilitates and makes things possible [by] empowering people at a local level [to take] ownership [and for communities to understand] what is important to them....what spaces have they got that they're concerned about?*

Interactions enabling greater community connectedness allow increased levels of engagement, greater clarity surrounding shared goals and opportunities for participation, such as volunteering and support of other community members.[4]

This is achieved through the use of public art installations to encourage the sharing of stories and re-imagined public spaces to provide both a retrospective account and futuristic forecast of the region being profiled.

*Desley Bramwell & Lincon Ross,*
*Ripple Reflections Mural, 2014, Lions Park, Cooktown, QLD.*
*Photograph by Rebecca Payne.*

# BACKGROUND

Queensland is a vast state which stretches from Cape York in the north to the southern capital city of Brisbane and beyond into the hinterland.

The five towns that were selected to participate in the 2014 Animating Spaces project were:

- Yeppoon,
- Roma,
- Samford,
- Cooktown and
- Gladstone.

These five communities differ in size, offer different industries and services and have their own history.

## YEPPOON

Yeppoon is a small coastal town of 15,141 people. In the 1990s Yeppoon's population grew by over 40%, expanding residential housing along the coast and northwest. Yeppoon is located 38 km north east of Rockhampton,[5] with an Indigenous name reflecting its location of 'where the waters meet.'[6]

Yeppoon is the primary town of the Capricorn Coast with seaside communities reaching approximately 150 kilometers from north to south.[7] Historically, the town provided accommodation services to farmers and miners as well as a tropical fruit industry.[8]  The town has some of the largest producing pineapple farms in Queensland and has a strong reputation as a producer of tropical and exotic fruits including mangos, pineapples, lychees.[9]

As a tourist location, Yeppoon is known for its beaches, tropical climate, and the islands out on the bay.[10]

## ROMA

Roma is located in the Maranoa region, 420 km west of Brisbane. The area was dubbed a 'campaign region' to acknowledge the 'level, open country'.[11] Roma has a population of 6,906[12] people and has grown significantly since it was first declared a municipality in 1867.[13]

Dairy farming and the cultivation and factory processing of wheat, barley and oats progressed throughout the early 1900s until the 1960s. Following the closure of the factory, the town developed the natural gas industry with a gas-fired electricity generation plant, which later evolved into the Maranoa oil refinery in 1975.[14]

The town has capitalised on its tourist potential with its Big Rig theme park and visitor centre and the court house and police complex being listed on the Queensland heritage register.[15]

## SAMFORD

Samford Village has a population of 3,044 located 22 km north-west of Brisbane.[16]

The first inhabitants of Samford Valley are likely to have been Aboriginal people, with traditional Aboriginal ceremonial life in this region alleged to have ceased by 1880.[17]

The area was settled by the Europeans in 1855 as a cedar and hoop pine harvest district. Once the land was cleared, it was utilised for dairying and agriculture.[18]

The village is a part of the Morton Bay region and offers the most historic landmarks of the area, including the Samford District Historical Museum.[19]The village features a school, public reserve, three churches and a CSIRO livestock station.[20]

Animating Spaces is a state-wide based initiative that acts as a conduit for arts inspiration within the state.

## COOKTOWN

Cooktown is a small town of 2,339 people.[21] It is situated in the eastern coast of Cape York Peninsula, in far north Queensland, 1600 km north of Brisbane.[22]

Cooktown grew rapidly during the gold rush in the 1870s; however an equally rapid population decline followed in the 1950s once the gold rush came to an end. Since being saved by a revival in tourism, the town is now known for gold workings, timber cutting and farming.[23]

The town offers attractions for tourists, including museums and a botanic garden, along with a heritage-listed lighthouse built in 1886[24].

## GLADSTONE

Gladstone is considered one of Queensland's fastest growing cities with 32,073 people, located 430 km north of Brisbane.

Its growth is attributed to coal mining and an auspicious trade agreement between China and Japan. Gladstone prides itself in being a regional education centre where the University of Queensland has built a campus.[25] Universities are seen as a means of connecting communities, through education, outreach bringing an influx of new ideas and domestic and international students.

The town has four heritage-listed sites, including the Catholic church and school and a former Commonwealth Bank from the 1920s, the former town hall, now the gallery and museum built in the 1930s and the former post office built in 1924.[26]

## ORIGIN OF ANIMATING SPACES

Animating Spaces is a state-wide based initiative by Artslink Queensland that acts as a conduit for arts inspiration within the state. Inspiration stems from the involvement of regional artists, and both cultural and educational institutions.

The main purpose of the initiative is to bring people together to help develop culture within the state whilst linking both schools and businesses to products and services. [27]

Frame explained that Artslink Queensland is looking to create 'ongoing benefits…that go well beyond the life of the project'.

He continued by stating: 'we look for things that leave a legacy in the community' as opposed to an ephemeral benefit, such as festivals. Frame wants Animating Spaces to be a 'reminder to the community of what they have achieved'.

Artslink Queensland is a not-for-profit organisation and member of the Regional Arts Australia network with over 50 years of experience delivering arts-related activities to regional and remote areas of Queensland. [28]

The organisation is primarily concerned with delivering a portfolio of arts-based programs and services to facilitate the connection of disparate groups throughout the state. Numerous artists and institutions collaborate to create vibrant, culturally enriching experiences for residents leading to higher degrees of engagement.[29]

The transformation of regional areas creates opportunities for locals to re-imagine familiar spaces, providing employment to local artists and strengthening community capacity by educating and mentoring locals about cultural project management.

Additionally, funding assistance is provided to help bring ideas to life. Frame elaborated that: 'With some investment and creative ideas they can change and use….for the social well-being of the community.'

*Artists Vanessa Chadwick & Bonnie Hart, Dancing Dragon, 2014, Celebrate Samford, Samford, QLD, Photograph by Dianne Hodge.*

*Frolic at the Aquatic team, 2014, Gladstone, QLD, Photograph by Luck Grice.*

One of the main objectives of the
event focused on connecting different
members of the community to form new
partnerships and collaborations.

# YEPPOON

Changing Tides took place in Yeppoon during 2014 to acknowledge the cultural heritage of the township whilst celebrating local landmarks and community spirit.[30] Farrer discussed the motivations for the region to become involved in the Animating Spaces project, saying:

*Yeppoon has a thriving arts council and have been running festivals for a number of years. They have recently stepped away from this to do more in the community. Animating spaces, for them, was very much about engaging with the community.*

The Changing Tides event engaged volunteers and participants from schools, artists, designers as well as event organisers, business people, and the general public, creating new connections throughout the community.

The project involved local primary school children collaborating with local artists and designers to develop bright lanterns and colourful flags to embody sea life forms. These artefacts were used as part of the *'High Tide'* Beachfront Esplanade event and highlight the location's unique waterscape.

One of the main objectives of the event focused on connecting different members of the community to form new partnerships and collaborations.

These groups included primary school students, established artists, businesses and the general public[31] Farrer explains:

*There had been a regular full moon gathering on the beach front in Yeppoon, which had died off. One of the things they wanted to achieve through the Changing Tides event, was to engage with children in the community by encouraging them to design lanterns and flags.*

*They wanted a family feel to the event and for it to reignite the old monthly gathering and give people a reason to gather together again.*

Farrer told us the flags and lanterns have been used in five community events in Yeppoon since the Changing Tides event.

She goes on to discuss the impact this event has had on the community of Yeppoon, saying:

*The community has not only engaged with the beachfront event, they have engaged with the art work and requested its use in different places. It's almost as if the flags and lanterns are sign posts to say "arts and culture happens here."*

The second event that took place in Yeppoon as a part of Animating Spaces was called *Through the Porthole.* It was designed to be an interactive visual arts, pop-up exhibition featuring ceramics.

Ceramic artworks emerged through the use of digital imagery. The artists involved in the exhibition intended to convey the unique perspectives of coastal living, showcasing the sublime surroundings of Keppel Bay with the potential to evolve into a prime tourist destination and cultural asset of the Capricorn Coast,[32] thus boosting the community profile and providing additional community connections.

*Digital Drifting* was the third event of the Yeppoon event. It focused on the heritage of the town. Artists used this event as a platform to acknowledge the township's rich heritage by combining colour, light, movement and sound to re-imagine collective memories from the past.

The purpose of the event was to capture the essence of coastal living through the offering of an immersive experience to audience members,[33] again raising the town's profile.

*High TIde, Kids Flags, 2014, Yeppoon, QLD, Photograph by Allan Reinikka.*

*Artists P. Szilvester & H. Simmons, Digital Drifting, 2014, Yeppoon, QLD, Photograph by Allan Reinikka.*

# ROMA

Roma's heART received funding from Artslink Queensland alongside partner, the Maranoa Regional Council.[34] In August 2014, the Roma Community Arts Centre precinct was transformed to house the Animating Spaces event Roma's heART with the purpose of injecting creativity and redesigning familiar spaces for community members, thus increasing community connectedness.

Three events typify what occurred. Hibernian Hall was re-imagined as *'Historic Hall'*—a space to highlight past memories of the town with photos of the hall being used to chronicle the heritage of the site.

Whilst the interior featured projected photos, the exterior featured a light projection where the facade of the heritage building was enriched with a contemporary, yet transient facelift. Farrer explains the town of Roma was experiencing a 'Roma coma', a term the locals used to explain 'an unwillingness to participate in something new'.

She goes on to say:

*A lot of people had connected history to that hall. People were absolutely thrilled to see it being used again. The community was reinspired to use the hall again for future events.*

A second event located at *Hibernian Lane* was inspired by metropolitan laneway culture by designing a space for creative minds to explore their art.

Contemporary street art featuring rustic metal installations with textiles and mosaic components provided aesthetic inspiration for the facilitation of artistic exploration. It was seen as a community connectedness project.

Finally, the Roma library was used as the venue for '*Hideaway – A Place to Go'*—a cultural sharing space. The transformation of the historic site featured a vibrant mural with metaphorical living art pieces, such as bush furniture to symbolise the resilience of the Maranoa people and appreciation for the land.[35] In other words, it connected communities from Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds.

# SAMFORD

A sculpture walk entitled 'Samford Sculpts' was used to reinvigorate the Samford parklands. The sculptor was working on installing the sculpture next to one of the towns walking paths which encouraged community members to interact with the process.

Farrer told us people would 'stop and chat to the sculptor about the work he was doing.' She goes on to say animating spaces 'brings people together', it is 'visible and vibrant' and 'attracts people to have a conversation.' Farrer explains:

*These projects can only help people who feel marginalised or excluded. Rural or remote communities don't often get profiled and this project helps with that. It encourages people to work across disciplines and to develop partnerships, which strengthens communities.*

The first of the three events held in Samford was an interactive visual arts inspired initiative called '*Samford Shorts*' to encourage local participation in contributing to the town's history, connecting communities.

This was achieved by film-makers dedicating their time to conduct workshops for locals to embrace digital technologies, such as smart phones and video cameras found in the home environment.

Additionally, the program aimed to harness the collective expression of local stories in their construction of Samford as a place throughout history whilst developing film literacy through education. Community connectedness played a pivotal role in using the arts as a vehicle to deepen kinship, also raising the profile of the region.[36]

Additionally, '*Celebrate Samford*' utilised Station Street as a space for street art that included myriad workshops cultivating skills in lantern, music and puppet making. These art forms were selected as a medium to enable locals to express their individual meaning in being a community member of the township.[37]

*Left: Artist Donna Maree Robinson, Historica Hall, Roma's HeART, 2014, Hibernian Hall, Roma, QLD Photograph by SNAPS.*

*Right: Artist Cathy Ellem, Library Cortyard, Hideaway, Roma's HeART, 2014, Photograph by SNAPS.*

*Artist Paolo Denti , Owl, Sculpting Samford, 2014, Samford QLD, Photograph by Dianne Hodge.*

Using the arts as a vehicle for connecting communities.

# COOKTOWN

The *Ripple Reflections Mural* involved young people painting a large mural inspired by interviewing a number of locals about their experience of living in Cooktown. Collective stories and interpretations were used to construct a cohesive yet fragmented interpretation of the town´s myriad story tellers. [38]

Farrer told us, as a part of this event, community members were asked to participate by painting poles that were a part of the shading structure for the mural, one of which celebrated survivors of the cyclone in Cooktown. Farer says this created 'ownership of the artwork' for community members. She goes on to say:

*Sometimes the art form is not the main focus, sometimes it is the process in which the artwork is formed. As a part of this event, young Indigenous artists from the local school came to paint.*

*The process was about them overcoming their fears of painting in a public space and the shame that normally goes with that, and talking them through this. This mural is now a permanent reminder for those young people of that experience.*

*This is community connectedness which leads to the potential for other community projects.*

The '*Echoes of the Wind*' event series held in Cooktown as part of the Animating Spaces project has been designed to help showcase memories of the town through an emotionally charged retrospective exhibition. [39]

Three events took place in Cooktown to connect communities who were Indigenous, non-Indigenous, young and old, artists, organisers and the general public.

The other events included *Spindrift Yarning Circle*—a socially cohesive public art space decorated in mosaics. The circular sitting space was specifically designed to encourage the sharing of music, poetry and stories whilst inspiring locals to invest in developing skills to feature similar events in the future, thus connecting communities in new ways.

*Warrama Light Wave* featured the creation of a new Indigenous cultural dance and song. The purpose of the event was to highlight the story of contact between Europeans and the Guugu Yimithirr Bama people to ensure the continued survival of the story for future generations. Contemporary multimedia installation and light projection techniques were used to augment the experience and cultural transfer. [40]

*Sonja Gibson, Lincon Ross, Desley Bramwell & Rodenta Burns, Warrma Light Wave, Dance Rehersal, 2014, Cooktown, QLD, Photograph by Rebecca Payne.*

# GLADSTONE

As part of the Animating Spaces project, Gladstone's Aquatic Centre precinct was redesigned to create a sense of adventure for locals and the city's young people. It was called *Frolic at the Aquatic.*

Farrer explains that 'the event was inviting people to do something different on a day out were they are there for sport. It was about bringing arts activities into these sporting areas.' She continued by stating:

*The event was inviting, you could just be there and have it happening around you. It was a safe place for people who were not familiar with the arts.*

The first of three events—'*At the Pool*' featured an inviting youth space imbued with artwork from local sculptors and visual artists to symbolise the interests of the region's youth.

'*In the Park*'—the second Animating Spaces event; involved an interactive performance space set amongst the re-imagined tennis and squash courts of the aquatic centre.

At the event, the 'Conspire Isis Theatre Ensemble'— a Gladstone-based youth theatre company showcased their edgy and challenging performance art to help communicate transformative yet traditional stories. [41]

'*With Light*' featured a culturally-enriched space full of local photographic artwork and videos that helped transform the Squash Courts. [42]

An example of an interactive installation at the event included the work of visual artist, Daniel Thomas. [43] The light installation projected onto the squash court building and welcomed participants to use hand motions to activate certain components of the art work. [44] Farrer believed the interactive projection 'was fitting with the sporting activities that normally go there.'

In short, these five vignettes in five regional centres in Queensland provide different perspectives on Animating Spaces using the arts as a vehicle for connecting communities.

*Artist Jenny Fournier, Frolic Sculpture, Frolic at the Aquatic, 2014, Gladstone, QLD, Photograph by Annie Grice .*

The project provoked collective thought and the generation of creative ideas.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Artslink Queensland would like to continue the Animating Spaces project in the future in order to boost community connectedness.

Farrer explains that Animating Spaces is considered by Artslink Queensland as 'the way forward.' She goes on to say:

*The project is about communities having the up and go to make something happen.*

Frame informed us that residual benefits emerge as a result of both community participation and non-participation in the project. When reflecting on the success of the Animating Spaces project to date he stated that the initiative started 'communities talking about what they would like to do' irrespective of participation.

In essence, the project provoked collective thought and the generation of creative ideas—'a catalyst'.

Artslink Queensland wants to continue to work on projects that are 'supported initiatives' that the 'community has come up with.' Additionally, Frame wants Artslink Queensland *'to ensure [that] twelve months down the track…the energy is still in the community'*

When considering the future intentions of Artslink Queensland and the prospect of future initiatives, Frame stated:

*There's a lot of effort and energy being invested… we now need a model that builds upon the success of the Animating Spaces project moving into the future.*

In the future, Frame expects that there will be more direct consultation with communities 'to develop strategic plans' and help them understand the reasoning behind the programs and how they correspond with their future aspirations.

Essentially, Animating Spaces demonstrates to other communities 'what could be achieved'; however Frame believes that more energy should be focused on developing more 'financially viable' community engagement models.

*Artist Anika Shelley, Wonderland, Celebrate Samford, 2014, Samford, QLD, Photograph by Agathe Rolez .*

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*Artist Lucie Verheist, Sculpting Samford, 2014,*
*Samford, QLD,*
*Photograph by Peter Storer.*
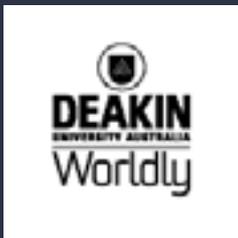
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