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CIVIC PRIDE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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AUSTRALIA

FAST FACTS

CIVIC PRIDE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

55%   Australians are connected extremely or very strongly to Australia as a whole.[1]
46%   Australians expressed connection to their locality or town.[2]
37%   Expressed connection to their state and territory.[3]
28.5%   Australian festival organisers aim to promote a place, theme or activity.[4]

IMPACT OF THE ARTS ON AUSTRALIAN QUALITY OF LIFE[5]

Australians believe that the arts can have a big impact on quality of life, though this is more confined to impact on individuals than on broader social connections. In 2013 people believe the biggest impacts of the arts are on:

66%   Development of children.
61%   People's ability to express themselves.
59%   People's ability to think creatively and develop new ideas.
56%   People's ability to deal with stress, anxiety or depression.
52%   Improved sense of wellbeing and happiness.

ARTS FACTS[6]

96%   Agree both the arts & sport can be enjoyed together.
92%   Agree Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture.
85%   Agree the arts make for a richer and more meaningful life
45%   Believe community pride & identity has a big impact.
45%   Believe the arts help shape and express Australia's identity.

Snapshot of one state: SA and the arts[7]

92%   South Australians believe participation in the arts offers community benefits.
71%   South Australians agree art & cultural groups play an important role in our community.
71%   South Australians agree artists and other creative people are respected in the community.
66%   South Australians developed new social networks through their participation in the arts.

INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS[8]

22%   Indigenous people participate in the arts and live in remote areas of Australia.
21%   Indigenous people participated in writing or telling stories.
16%   Indigenous people participated in music, dance or theatre.
14%   Indigenous people living in non-remote areas participate in writing and telling stories.

MIGRANTS LIVING IN REGIONAL AREAS

30.8%   Migrant youth state the easiest way to meet people is through recreational clubs (sports, arts, etc).[9]
90%   Migrants were made to feel welcome since moving to regional place of residence.[10]
90%   Australians feel proud when Australian artists do well overseas, signalling the capacity to promote national pride and identity.[11]
72%   Increase in social connectedness of migrants with children in a household.[12]
55%   Migrants developed strong social networks as a result of having children.[13]

"At best, the interplay of skills and opportunity enabled in a wealthy, democratic society creates cultural products that define us to ourselves and represent us to the world, are tangible and symbolic, profitable and accessible, makes us proud and happy, reflective and imaginative, and encourage us to be empathetic and ambitious."[14]

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Cover Image: Artist Damien Kamholtz,
First Coat Festival, Toowoomba, QLD.
Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.

STEAM! Fireman's entrance,
100th Goldsmith Steam Rally, near Beaufort, VIC.

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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 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 a 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. BighArt
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

CIVIC PRIDE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

How has civic pride and community identity been shaped? In what ways? To what extent have people influenced regions and places, using the arts as the vehicle? There are gaps between rhetoric and reality in shaping civic pride and community identity, with government policy being only one part of creating a sense of community. It also entails a sense of well-being and shared identity, bringing people together (often through arts events) and active citizenship.

In other words, civic pride and community identity occur at both the collective community and individual levels through successful execution of cultural policy that facilitates and promotes identity formation. Additionally, policy favouring the mapping of cultural infrastructure to preserve a community's heritage contributes to the continued evolution of civic pride and community identity. It favours people-focused strategies at the grass-roots, targeting sustainable outcomes for regional communities.

Some challenges identified as threatening civic pride and community identity pertain to the community resilience, male-dominated culture and pressures to compete internationally.

The shift in discourse is from idealist to realist, from government to market, and from supply to demand. These shifts are not complete. The dualism within and between the subsidised sector and the wider creative industries shows a tension in embracing consumption which caters to the majority or rejecting it by focusing on the non-profit arts which contribute to social development. In this theme, we integrate approaches that work in regional areas.

> "Culture is not created by government, but enabled by it. Culture is created by community."[15]

DEFINITION

CIVIC PRIDE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The individual efforts by all of us collectively leads to an improved sense of community, well-being and the outward improvement in the appearance of the municipality.[16]

Civic pride is based upon an inclusive sense of being...that offers a single shared identity to a diverse population. Events have a key role to play in as they bring people together so that they learn with and from each other. Through this learning and sharing in active citizenship a core of shared civic values can be developed.[17]

"The constitution of identity is not only marked by an inward turning to 'place', but also the awareness of self and other."[18]

BACKGROUND

Civic pride and community identity possesses implications at both the individual and community levels. Civic pride and community identity at an individual level assists in the development of community knowledge and awareness of regional issues whilst building an understanding and tolerance from multiple perspectives.

Implications at the community level include a cohesive and consistent shared regional identity that communicates pride. Viewing Civic pride and community identity from multiple perspectives promotes the capacity to engage and establish new relationships. Similarly, existing relationships can be strengthened to create new sources of social capital.[19]

Civic pride and community identity features robust discussion of the role of 'creative cities' and the interrelationship between arts and community. Creative cities are described as 'unique', 'authentic', 'dynamic and 'unsettling'. Diversity plays a pivotal role in forming local identity whilst maintaining cultural heritage and cementing loyalty.

Indigenous communities place family and culture central to their well-being and identity where resilience of the community rests on strong kinship between members.[20] The promotion of civic pride within Indigenous communities instils 'self-determination' in people who are employed, volunteer or who are in training.

Dunphy attributes civic pride of Indigenous communities to cultural performance by providing a space for representation. In short, community development within an Indigenous setting disregards the traditional, western 'top-down' approach and relies on people working from the 'bottom up' or 'inside out.'[21]

Civic pride and community identity facilitates change and ongoing cultural expression, for example, in the provision of public goods, such as the installation of public art which leaves a community legacy. Indirect benefits create an appreciation of an artwork's symbolic value and representation that cause pride during and after its developmental process.[22]

Although 'creative place-making' facilitates civic pride, some see culture as drawing a distinction between social classes. Some see distinction between social classes as protecting advantage.[23] Writers who take this position, see culture as "objectified." Activities causing impact and identified as being a form of 'objectified cultural capital' include: paintings, films, food, books, performance and regional precincts. These art forms become embedded in community identity to enhance community position. Nonetheless, art forms do continue to evolve and accommodate additional perspectives and cultural traditions.[24]

In order to overcome such perceptions of community identity, actions and activities can be made personal; and culturally impoverished spaces can be augmented through public art that symbolises active civic dialogue. Public art contains messages and meanings about the community and acts as a vehicle for identity expression whilst maintaining a high quality appearance and representing the integrity of the artist[25] that boost civic pride.

DIMENSIONS OF CIVIC PRIDE
AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Civic Pride and Community Identity consists of six sub-dimensions: sense of community; well-being; outward improvement in community; shared identity; events bringing people together; and active citizenship.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

A sense of community is generated by building cultural capital through tangible and intangible assets, including universities, retail operations, reputation and transport infrastructure. The arts are rich in cultural capital, which entails education and training. In the arts, people develop by using their informal social and professional contacts, which also builds a sense of community. Aspirational goals when creating compelling cultural destinations develop an appreciation of place perceived as a rural utopia or idyll.

There are different types of communities. Culturally-autonomous communities embrace a sense of ownership and play an active role in creative 'place-making' where the promotion of creative enterprise and community-based art connects disparate members. Additionally, a sense of community fosters safe neighbourhoods, offers opportunities for professional and personal development, honours cultural heritage and history of place and provides a space for Indigenous representation.

Communities are also referred to as having a collective sense of identity. A collective sense of identity displays characteristics of uniqueness and authenticity where legacy and prestige become embedded in interlocking networks. Awareness of self and others becomes apparent through community solidarity, cohesion and loyalty leading to enriched relationships and a greater sense of community resilience.

WELL-BEING

Well-being of individuals assists in providing quality of life for communities. Hence, it plays a role in developing civic pride and community identity by boosting internal and external perceptions of a region, town or place. Well-being balances community purpose, respecting its traditions and perspectives, whilst encouraging belongingness and empowerment. A community possessing these attributes enhances daily lives.

The arts provide opportunities to harness individual and collective capacities that create well-being within regional and rural areas. Opportunities can be presented to communities through personal and professional development programs focusing on strengthening identity and clarity of purpose regarding well-being.[26]

Additionally, well-being is enhanced by participation in community identity strengthening programs, enabling a sense of community control and direction. An example of civic participation entails public celebrations and hosting local festivals.[27]

Dusk Mantra Community Voices, Animating Spaces, Eudlo Dreaming, 2013, Eudlo, QLD. Photograph by Bibiana Stanfield.

OUTWARD IMPROVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Festivals play an integral role in community pride and identity, outwardly improving the community. The multi-purpose functions arising from festival culture enable a deeper understanding of self-identity, an ability to connect with others, community well-being and the expression of spirituality.[28]

Festivals and arts events give regional communities an opportunity to communicate the vision and values of a place as a means of outwardly improving community. 'These celebrations provide participants with a physical manifestation and better understanding of the relationships between residents, their environment, their neighbours and visitors.'[29]

Festivals help a regional community to form 'strong and distinct identities' and improve the outward appearance of regional areas. They can protect the natural environment, increase social equity and provide a vision for spectators and participants alike.'[30]

SHARED IDENTITY

Creative organisations, visionary individuals, and the broader political culture achieve a shared identity.[31] Shared identity is a defining characteristic between a society and an economy,[32] using art as the vehicle. The development of communities through art places the focus on aesthetics to nurture enriched community relationships, positive emotions and the enhancement of daily lives through beauty, pride and identity.

Art affects the lives of myriad community members from one generation to the next.[33] In short, art provides a continuation of the cultural heritage and leaves a legacy. In this way, art provides a narrative for people's lives. Creating a shared identity provides benefits that include: social-belongingness; opportunities to interact and contribute to community development; a sense of accomplishment; the cultivation of community-mindedness; and self-actualisation. These are big ideas. But they are realised through shared identity in the arts.

Shared identity honours diverse perspectives within a community requiring a pluralistic approach to community consultation and engagement. It takes decision-making to the grass-roots level, which includes members of disadvantaged and minority interest-groups, and is empowering for them.[34] The arts can support these shifts occurring.

"Individual identities evolve by creating collective communities where people collaborate to achieve a shared sense of history."[35]

According to Curtis the arts should "assist people towards the expression and understanding of community values and identities." [36]

Changing perceptions of a region through evolving community-level identities can be achieved through the arts. The arts provide the potential to promote social responsibility, self-discipline, tolerance and acceptance of diversity.[37] They celebrate community as symbols of renewal where people feel engaged, empowered and achieve a sense of community control.[38]

The digital era presents numerous opportunities to leverage media platforms when reinforcing a region's collective identity whilst honouring individual differences. The arts can be part of these changes.

With the emergence and proliferation of user generated content within the Web 2.0 paradigm, there are 'distributed aesthetics' in the form of symbolism, used to create shared identities within a virtual 'networked culture.'[39]

EVENTS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Events bring people together. At the individual level, arts events encourage active participation within communities, providing opportunities for personal and professional development. Immersion within the community provides individuals with support: efforts that create civic pride.

Symbolic expressions of identity can be found through community celebrations, festivals and the installation of public art. Sustained impacts of these activities drive resident interest in creating sustainable living which revitalises communities, and empowers individuals, leading to a sense of well-being.

The arts hold events in public spaces. This implies that public spaces provide opportunities to be transformed into creative places. At the community level, people engage through events so that they develop a greater sense of ownership of the place where they live, work and play, which underpins engagement levels and translates into safer neighbourhoods.

The essence of 'creative place-making' mediates social cohesion, injects vibrancy within the area and connects disparate community groups.

A number of activities occur that create a safer environment. Examples include: community-based art, animating public spaces through the use of installation and performance, and recycling old infrastructure to create a platform for creative enterprise.

People are brought together through the guise of parades, museums, painting, dance, theatre and ceramics. These activities act as a platform to engage with the expression of diverse cultural heritages. Broader impacts transcend beyond the community-level and extend to a wider tourist audience, visitors, past residents and local workers.[40]

Further, cultural landmarks and special events communicate community identity and a sense of pride. In order to improve perceptions about the arts within regional communities, traditional media communication tools can be leveraged, such as advertising, promotion and public relations.[41]

Nonetheless, not everyone is on side all the time, meaning that bringing people together sometimes is a challenge. In a survey of arts events and festivals in regional Australia, 43% of festival organisers felt their event assisted their community to adapt to hardships within the region by lifting community spirit, providing a distraction to hardships, and facilitating social networking.[42]

However, for 'community building' to occur risks need to be taken and success does not always come easily. Local communities may have concerns about the benefit that they will see as a result of a large scale event or festival and divisions in support may occur. In a survey of festivals in regional Australia, 39% of the local community expressed opposition to these events.[43]

In one regional city, two people stood for election to council in local government specifically to push the bandwagon of 'bring back my gallery.' They didn't like the direction the gallery had taken in focusing on large, quality exhibitions which they felt neglected local community needs. Local concerns surround fair distribution of economic benefits, the need for a local voice and logistical problems around capacity within a regional area.

To avoid the sense of inundating residents with crowds and disruptions, an inclusive approach can be taken. Inclusivity can be achieved by communicating the goals of arts events to ensure that residents feel there is a collective benefit of change.[44] Increased involvement and leadership amongst residents can also allow them to become 'agents of change' rather than 'victims of change.'[45]

*Terrah Guymala from Nabarlek,
Country Arts WA Sand Tracks Tour, 2013, Amata, SA.
Photograph by Mathew McHugh.*

Regional Event Portfolio

An event portfolio builds a brand, enriches a region's tourism product and image, and attracts increased visitation by offering events of different types and scales throughout the year.[46] The relationship between sport and cultural events is symbiotic sharing common objectives, resources, and markets.[47] The concept can be capitalised on through an event portfolio, where a region has a strategic patterning of events that complement one another through operational and thematic relatedness.[48] A study of festivals in regional Australia found that a third of festivals were part of a wider network of events.[49]

An event portfolio allows a community to create synergy among events. The impact of events can be sustained as long as each event in the portfolio complements or reinforces the benefits of other events.[50]

There is a concern that human and built infrastructure in the regional arts sector is under pressure.[51] To address this issue, an event portfolio including arts events and festivals can transfer knowledge in organising events, use connected themes among different events to maximise impact, and share resources and volunteer pools.[52]

Daylesford's ChillOut Festival is an example of a regional event that has positioned the region as the 'gay capital' or 'gay heartland' of country Victoria and rural Australia.[53] ChillOut attracts around 16,000 visitors, making it the largest gay/lesbian festival in regional Australia.[54] Motivations for rural visitors include the celebration of differences, alongside networking and community-building amongst GLBTIQ people in country Victoria.[55]

To enable the arts to be a driver for regional development, programs that include both minority and majority groups can promote a celebration and acceptance of diversity.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Active citizenship provides an opportunity to develop sustainable communities, placing people at the forefront of strategies. Viewing people as valuable assets in developing pride and identity has been suggested as a path towards a more sustainable future.[56]

A sense of community is created through 'active civic dialogue.' Active civic dialogue provides a platform for interaction by cultivating a community mindset, such as volunteering. Ongoing consultation and vocalising diverse voices enables cross-cultural exchange that strengthens the bridges between neighbourhoods and neighbours, encouraging the development of human capital and greater political engagement where community members feel confident when critiquing the dominant culture to create improvements.[57]

Grass-roots involvement in community arts and their organisations develops civic pride and community identity. Grass-roots involvement is deemed successful when it actively stimulates, strengthens and engages disparate neighbourhoods. The development of artistic and cultural talent in conjunction with community ownership of grass-roots cultural projects aids sustainable change, facilitates identity maintenance and strengthens the local economy.[58]

Sponsoring and promoting the development efforts of Civic Pride and Community Identity can be interpreted through different lenses. The arts can be seen as an ongoing narrative where its historical importance and meaning is inherited from previous generations.[59] From a historical vantage point, the celebration of self-governing, democratic political structures interwoven with art, commerce, sustainable architecture and civic values,[60] creates pride and promotes identity.

Active citizenship has been criticised as homogenisation where communities focus on creating spectacles to attract volume as opposed to leveraging the creative capacity of community members and harnessing collective innovation.[61] If that occurs, it undermines civic engagement.

Subjective interpretations of civic pride contain researcher bias and misinterpretation of findings that inadequately measure factors of success.[62]

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