

Submission  
No 46

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND  
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY  
CBD

Organisation:

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29 August 2008

The Honourable Mr David Borger MP  
Chairman  
Legislative Assembly Public Works Committee  
Parliament of NSW  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney 2000

E: [Catherine.Watson@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Catherine.Watson@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear David

**Subject: SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE ENQUIRY  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS**

***Inquiry into the development of arts and cultural infrastructure  
outside the Sydney CBD.***

I was delighted to see the NSW Public Works Committee taking an active interest in the development of arts and cultural infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD. It is also most welcome that the Committee has made the effort to engage on the issue of arts and cultural planning and infrastructure and the impact on communities through public notifications.

You would be well aware of discussion of the role of creativity in contributing to community wellbeing, cohesive societies, vibrant cities and regions, and economic wealth. You would also be well aware that the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure is fickle and can be guided more by reflex than by a serious, planned process and commitment.

Consideration of arts and cultural infrastructure and policy is also highly vulnerable to changes of governments and readily seen as dispensable.

I have found that local government is under-valued and often not recognised for its role in contributing to the cultural life of communities through policy, services and programs, the provision of cultural resources as well as engaging in community building using arts and cultural skills.

Along with this there can be an unfounded perception that local government does not and should not play a role in the arts and cultural life of its community. The perception ignores the long history in Australia of local government investment in cultural institutions such as libraries, civic centres, theatres, local halls, local/regional galleries and museums, parks and gardens, memorials and public art, as well as funding a myriad of community, arts and cultural related services and programs including art prizes and festivals.

My perception is that arts and cultural development will continue to be an area of significant activity for local government and that there are a number of factors at play. These include: increasing participation and support for arts and cultural development by local communities and local government; rapid social, cultural and economic change; policy changes at Commonwealth and State levels; and, the devolution of responsibility for arts and cultural development to local government. It is in this context that I believe it is essential that the NSW Government consider arts and cultural infrastructure and the relationship to other needs for cultural policy development.

In the following pages I have grouped responses according to the matters identified that the Committee is investigating and in which I have some accumulated knowledge and/or experience.

I look forward to the outcomes of the Committee's investigations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Conroy". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

**Susan Conroy**  
**CULTURAL PLANNER**

***Issues of Public and Private Funding and Allocation of Resources***

There are a variety of issues around funding and allocation of resources. It is difficult to get a clear picture of how much funding is being allocated by local government to the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure in NSW.

The following is a series of points for consideration:

- Arts and cultural resources and expenditure can be embedded in a multitude of ways in local government and reported in annual reports in a variety of ways. Library Services, Community Services, Strategic Planning or Recreation Services being just a few examples of where arts and cultural resources and programs may be located for policy and management purposes. The purchaser/provider split model can also obscure the extent and level of activity. While there are benefits to this diversity of approaches, it can create problems for tracking trends and being able to undertake comparative research.
- I am not aware of any significant level of private philanthropy to support the provision and or management of arts and cultural infrastructure **at a local level**.
- Local government does not necessarily have the skills or resources to dedicate to attracting sponsorship and private philanthropy including establishing and managing community trusts with tax deductibility.
- Attempts by Councils to get arts and cultural infrastructure funded through developer contributions has a fraught history. This has included expensive legal challenges and in some cases losses.
- Some Councils arts expenditure is clearly reported in Annual Reports while in others, it can be buried within global reporting and impossible to assess.
- Established regional galleries, theaters and the museums sectors have identified pathways for the development and maintenance of infrastructure and programs.
- Options for local government to apply for funding for other arts and cultural infrastructure seems limited at both national and state level.
- There is no comprehensive and up to date list of arts and cultural workers employed in local government in NSW.

***Suitability of Infrastructure for Arts and Cultural Life***

I have been working as a cultural planner since the early 1990s. Since that time I have been involved in cultural facility planning and development including the redevelopment of Casula Powerhouse in Liverpool as a major regional arts facility, public art programs as well as a number of arts and cultural facility feasibility studies in regional NSW and parts of metropolitan Sydney, Qld and the ACT.

The following is a series of points for consideration:

- A common feature for local arts and cultural infrastructure is that rarely are they purpose built. Frequently buildings now being used were built for other purposes e.g. factories, power stations, housing, schools, hospitals, heritage listed

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buildings etc are often identified as being capable of being adapted for arts and cultural purposes.

- Arts and cultural facilities are often located in other types of buildings which can lead to inefficient use of spaces; poor climate and sound control; high maintenance costs and significant costs in retro-fitting.
- In regional NSW, the 'community hall' often plays a major role as a venue for the cultural and social life of communities. While these venues often also have a distinctive vernacular architecture, legislation such as Places of Public Entertainment (POPE) and public liability insurances combined with limited budgets for maintenance has seen many facilities under-used and/or closed with Councils not being able to see a way to maintain or upgrade facilities to meet contemporary building standards.
- The cost of managing/programming arts and cultural infrastructure can be overlooked and/or costs minimised. A common attitude to management is to treat buildings as 'empty vessels' waiting to be 'filled'.
- Cost recovery policies have had a limiting affect on types and diversity of users of venues.
- There has been negligible establishment or support for local or neighbourhood level arts and cultural facilities which provide venues for local level participation as well as a stepping stone for people who may pursue careers in the arts and cultural sectors.
- Many existing facilities do not meet BCA and other legislation requirements such as: mobility and accessibility, separation of chemical and other toxic waste from storm water; climate control etc. This is exacerbated by other issues such as poor sound separation which can lead to user conflicts and sub-optimal use of facilities and venues.

### ***The Desirability Of Locating Cultural Facilities In Close Proximity To Create Hubs.***

The following is a series of points for consideration:

- It is well established principle that the location of arts and cultural facilities benefits from centrality and co-location in mixed use areas with good access public transport.
- It would be helpful for planning policy and legislation such as LEPs to provide validation and encouragement for the creative and innovation sectors in LGAs'. This may be in retail areas to activate declining strip shopping centres or as an appropriate land use buffer between high impact land uses and residential areas.
- Areas such as the media and entertainment businesses which developed in North Sydney and Willoughby LGAs are examples of where commercial, industrial and retail activity developed closely with the significant creative industry sector of television.

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- The arts/entertainment precinct of King Street and Enmore Road in Newtown and the use of D grade industrial buildings for creative industries and activity within the Marrickville LGA are also good examples of where proximity fosters employment and industry development. It is also about affordability.
- Affordability is driving the relocation of many creative sector activities out of central Sydney areas to more outlying areas of Sydney as development pressures lead to gentrification and increased costs of property for rent or ownership. While this may benefit 'fringe metropolitan areas' it increases costs to the many micro businesses which flourish around larger with increased travel, transport and freight costs.

### ***Accessibility Of Arts And Cultural Education***

The following is a series of points for consideration:

- Access varies greatly across metropolitan and regional NSW.
- For many communities there are gaps between different offerings and the absence of any strong pathways from childhood to life-long learning, to vocational training and/or being able to convert from learning to employment in creative industries and/or professional practice as an artist.
- Community Colleges play a major role, particularly in providing a variety of arts and crafts based activities. This is an over-looked resource however there is a reliance on user pays which eliminates a range of community members from being able to pursue hobbies.
- The push to vocational training meant that the key role TAFE historically played in regional NSW as a provider of life-long learning for people with an interest in a variety of arts based media has been restricted or removed leading to a total loss of opportunity for participation in regional/rural NSW.

### ***The Adequacy of the NSW State Plan and Desirability of a Cultural Plan for the State to Maximise Diversity of Access, with Reference To The Tourism Master Plan And Other Relevant Planning Strategies***

The following is a series of points for consideration:

- Agenda 21 for Culture<sup>1</sup> would be a good platform for developing a cohesive approach to a state cultural plan. The key themes of Agenda 21 for Culture are: culture and human rights; culture and governance; culture and sustainability; culture and social inclusion; culture and economy.
- Agenda 21 for Culture also recommends the development of cultural impact assessment tools to measure the impacts of proposals where development will lead to significant change to the cultural life of the city and community. This is best undertaken at a local government level however currently there is no agreement on what constitutes cultural impact assessment and how it could or

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<sup>1</sup> United Cities and Local Governments – Working Group on Culture. *Agenda 21 for culture*. Undated. <http://www.agenda21culture.net>

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should be measured. It would be helpful for this to be considered and supported in the context of development of a NSW State Cultural Plan with a recognition of impact assessment at a state level

- The *NSW State Plan*<sup>2</sup> and the *Metropolitan Strategy*<sup>3</sup> recognise the essential role of cultural development and artistic and entertainment precincts in creating liveable cities.
- The key priority in the *State Plan* affecting arts and culture is Priority E8 which states “more people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activity.” A 10% increase of participation in arts and cultural activity by 2016 has been established as the target for Arts NSW with an expectation that this will be measured by ABS surveys.
- ABS data gathering in Arts and Cultural Leisure Statistics is commonly based on state/national activity and consumption patterns. This overlooks the role that local government plays in achieving this outcome yet it is the key provider of local and regional arts and cultural facilities. It would be helpful for avenues to be established /or supported for local government to secure better access to more locally generated data.
- The *Metropolitan Strategy* notes that the maintenance of a lively cultural scene will assist in maintaining Sydney’s position as a global city and its cultural richness and diversity are one of Sydney’s special characteristics.
- The NSW Government’s *Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government*<sup>4</sup> have no official status however Arts NSW expects any Council seeking funding for arts initiatives to have developed an arts or cultural policy or plan.
- Despite having been a collaboration between Arts NSW and the Dept Local Government, there is minimal connection between the *Cultural Planning Guidelines* and urban planning and development.
- Linked to the Cultural Planning Guidelines is the four yearly Cultural Accord initiative on the NSW Government.
- Arts NSW and the NSW LGSA are now working toward the development of the *Fourth Cultural Accord*. This presents an opportunity to put items on the agenda for the new Accord to consider eg. the erosion of arts funding, identifying links between arts and cultural development with the State Plan and creative industry initiatives as well Agenda 21 as a model for local government to support arts and cultural development.
- Recent changes to local government reporting now mean that social planning reporting is now part of an integrated Council document whereas it has been a specific requirement for Councils to prepare a Social Plan. For some Councils,

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<sup>2</sup> NSW Government. *State Plan: A new direction in NSW*. Nov 2006.

<sup>3</sup> NSW Department of Planning. *City of Cities: A Plan for Sydney's Future* 2005.

<http://www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au/dev/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=28&languageId=1&contentId=-1>

<sup>4</sup> NSW Ministry for the Arts, Dept Local Government. *NSW Cultural Planning Guidelines*. July 2004  
[http://www.lgsa.org.au/resources/documents/Cultural\\_Planning\\_Guidelines1411051.pdf](http://www.lgsa.org.au/resources/documents/Cultural_Planning_Guidelines1411051.pdf)

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the Social Plan was the means by which they addressed arts and cultural planning considerations. There are mixed benefits/drawbacks to this approach. There is some concern within the arts and cultural sector that this will further diminish opportunity for consideration of the role that arts and cultural development and the creative industry sectors play for local communities and local economies

- Some areas are facing significant development pressures or are more at risk from a combination of factors including gentrification, the impact of State Government policy and reduced access to public space and infrastructure.
- There are strong links being made between the *State Plan*, *Metropolitan Strategy* and the *Innovation Strategy* for state based cultural planning.

### ***Any other relevant matters***

The following is a series of points for consideration:

Apart from planning for hard and soft infrastructure planning, there is considerable need to consider cultural diversity. The race riots in Cronulla and the recent planning debacles at Camden Council and before that Baulkham Hills Council are testament to social and cultural tensions and conflicts brewing between and within the communities of NSW can spill over into urban planning realms.

There needs to be consideration and support for local governments and local communities to develop policy and program responses to better manage these matters.