

**Submission
No 27**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Arts OutWest

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Arts OutWest: Economic and social development in central western New South Wales (Inquiry)

As the Regional Arts Board covering 12 council areas across the Central West, Arts OutWest is concerned with the arts and cultural development of the region. While the Central West does not have the density of population of some of the state's coastal regions, the area is regarded as having a high level of activity in the arts, with high participation rates and some good if somewhat patchy resources and infrastructure and is seen as making a major contribution to quality of life. However there are also some significant challenges and areas in need of development.

The activity within the region may be represented by three main areas:

1. Participation in arts because of the love of arts and the way it helps us interpret our lives
2. Arts used as a tool for social inclusion
3. Arts as a business, means of employment or income generation – the creative industries

The first of these activities – love of arts or 'arts for arts sake' - is seen throughout the region in examples of traditional engagement with arts practice: going to the theatre or a music event, making visual art or going to a gallery, playing a musical instrument, taking dance classes and so on. These things are offered across the Central West, but there is a vast



difference in what is offered in the larger centres compared to the smaller centres. This is unavoidable as many activities do require some sort of critical mass to make them viable. The high level of services available in centres such as Orange and Bathurst help to make these places much more attractive towns to live in and can contribute to the growth of such centres, while correspondingly the lack of such services in smaller centres can deter people from either moving to a centre or choosing to stay there. It is interesting to look at the success some smaller centres have had in creating a landscape in which arts provision figures with some predominance: it could be argued that small towns or villages like Canowindra and Millthorpe are gaining many economic benefits from being seen as attractive and artistic communities, acting as magnets for educated incomers. It should be noted that for many small centres it will never be financially sustainable to provide a comprehensive range of arts experiences, but the importance to the community of having access to the arts highlights the need for subsidy and public funding of the arts in regional communities.

The arts can also be used effectively as a tool for **social inclusion**. For example, both Bathurst and Orange have extensive Arts and Health programs; these have included workshops with Aboriginal pregnant mothers in Bathurst and Cowra in which art was used to connect the young mothers more effectively with health workers, work in palliative care using art and storytelling to address issues of isolation; current work includes an Art and Alzheimers program. Other examples in the region have included work in Orange to get the Aboriginal and Sudanese communities working together, work with young people using hip hop to explore issues around respect and violence, or programs working with young Aboriginal students in filmmaking to address literacy. There is a strong tradition in the region of work by organisations and bodies such as museums and libraries to present a range of



social inclusion projects. While there are many examples of great work in the region and many specific regional issues to address through arts work, the biggest issue in supporting this work is funding. For example, in the Country Art Support Program or CASP funding round of 2011, Arts OutWest received more applications than any other region in the state and the standard was particularly high, but Arts OutWest was only able to award \$16,000 of the \$43,000 requested. Not only is there not enough money to support this work, but the short-term nature of most funding programs make it difficult to embed approaches and have long-term effects.

The third area we have identified involves the support for the **creative industries**. Growth in the creative industries on a national level has been at around double that of the rest of the Australian economy over the past ten years. However the Central West has not enjoyed the same amount of growth in the creative industries. While it is true that some creative industries do rely on their urban locations for access to services, it could be argued that many businesses would benefit from the lower costs associated with being regionally based. In order to maximise the potential of this growing area of the economy (which in 2008 was measured as being equal to half of Australia's agriculture industry and employed about the same amount of people as financial services), the Central West needs to look at the ways in which support could be provided to overcome the challenges of being regionally based, such as more support for the setting up of small enterprises and, perhaps most importantly, assisting broadband and bandwidth access for businesses. The Central West 2008 Creative Industries survey demonstrated that there is substantial activity in the region (around the equivalent economic benefit as activities on Mount Panorama), but the sector remains a neglected area of regional development.



As a result on of ongoing consultation, Arts OutWest has set four priority areas that we feel we need to address and focus on throughout our region:

1. Aboriginal arts development
2. Young People
3. Arts and Health
4. Creative Industries

We would recommend that support is given to all of these areas. For example, **Aboriginal arts** has been a largely neglected area until recent times and offers opportunity for employment, business development and career pathways for young people, as well as building a local profile of Central West Aboriginal arts and building a sense of pride in this. The focus area of **young people** is another area that requires ongoing attention; young people in regional settings can often feel disconnected and as though they are missing out. The importance of popular culture in their lives means that there are opportunities to use the arts to build skills as well as help keep young people engaged as active community members.

Arts infrastructure is an issue in the Central West. Strengths within the Arts OutWest area include several well-equipped theatres, three regional galleries, several conservatoriums and many libraries. A study by Museums and Galleries NSW and Western Research Institute demonstrated a significant economic input from the major public infrastructure institutions. However once one moves away from the major centres, there is a problem with access to



public space for arts. Furthermore the burden of building and maintaining the region's public spaces for arts and culture falls very heavily on councils.

There is also a lack of other **smaller spaces** for arts use. At Arts OutWest we frequently get calls from people trying to identify space they can use – for exhibitions, for workshops, for small scale performance. Over the past year we know of three separate ventures in our region being developed privately for arts use and we are aware that all three have encountered major difficulties with upgrading the space to be compliant with council regulations. It would be useful to look at ways that such ventures could be better supported so that barriers such as these can be overcome without compromising on safety or quality.

Empty shops are a feature of many Central West towns. The work of Renew Newcastle has provided a good model of ways to get creative enterprises into such space. There is more potential in the region to implement this initiative.

Unlike our bigger metropolitan LGAs, our councils do not have the resources to support specialised staffing structures, which means that the arts and culture sector does not benefit from **staff** positions such as Cultural Development Officers, and other specialised positions such as Youth Officers are only part-time. However the demands on these positions tend to be quite high.



Lack of **transport** services is a barrier to development. We have had reports from creative industries businesses that have relocated to Lithgow that the train services were a factor in their decision to move there; other areas in our region do not have the same level of train service, and other forms of transport have issues.

The mining sector can have a distorting effect on other areas of the economy.

Accommodation demands affect the figures for the tourism industry as well as inflating the housing market, and the employment patterns can change as well. It is important too that the mining companies do contribute to the communities they operate in. The long term affects of mining on the growth and decline of populations needs to be considered.

There is more potential for the region to become a leader in developing environmental approaches. In an area in which so many people are connected to land, in which distance and travel are factors, and where there is space and resources to look at alternative energies and where water and drought have been big issues, the Central West could be more innovative and braver. CENTROC has done some good work in getting some of this on to the agenda and instigating some good practice.

In terms of arts development, I would summarise in saying that apart from the inevitable issues of needing increased arts funding, including the need for Regional Arts Boards to receive a higher level of State Government funding, the main issues for the Central West include looking at what support is needed to make sure the region is able to gain the advantages of creative industry growth, the need to support not only councils and public



bodies in providing infrastructure support but also to find way of giving better support to private individuals developing space for public use in arts, and to look more closely at the input that councils have to arts development and whether state government can influence this more, both in supporting the good practice of councils and in helping to remove some of the barriers presented by this level of government.