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Arts-based community development: rural remote realities and challenges

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In the context of burgeoning acknowledgement that the arts, and skills inherent in artistic/creative processes, have potential to meaningfully contribute to socio-economic growth and community renewal, this article reports on research across 12 Australian communities examining perceptions the arts in supporting community regeneration. It focuses on community perceptions of the extent arts-based programmes are integrated with other community development programmes and harnessing economic, social and cultural potentials. Results suggest that while the arts play an important role in communities, they are under-valued, under-accessed and under-used. This article issues new challenges to artists and community arts workers and suggests the need to work more proactively and collaboratively with key community stakeholders to harness and integrate artistic skills and capabilities across a full spectrum of community interests.

Keywords: arts; artists; community renewal; rural/remote communities; community arts, community development

Introduction

The rural/urban divide fissures ever more deeply as contemporary economic and technological pressures challenge communities, often to the very precipice of existence. Rural and remote communities are increasingly challenged to move from primary industries and manufacturing to knowledge-based services (Ryser & Halseth, 2010). Pressured to respond in new ways to the globalization of national economies and emergence of complex and competitive economic environments, they confront information and communication technologies transcending distance and place, requiring communities to embrace communities of interest rather than communities of place (Rideout & Reddick, 2005). In this rapidly changing context, rural and remote communities struggle to maintain identity, preserve historical, cultural and environmental distinctiveness, and achieve

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genuine economic competitiveness, existing in survival mode. Changes include economic and technological transformation, mounting ecological concerns and evolving social attitudes. Environmentally responsible citizens now question the farming and grazing practices of rural communities, raising issues about agricultural sustainability, land degradation and waterway destruction (Cocklin & Dibden, 2009). Furthermore, metamorphosing social mind-sets prompt closer scrutiny relationships between communities and indigenous peoples, poverty and inequity. Rising ecological and social awareness, and increasingly dominant urbanism, feeds perceptions of rural living's functional insularity, parochialism, circumscribed viewpoints and reluctance to change, accompanied by a fettering unwillingness to innovate. Extant abilities, attitudes, skills and resources in rural and remote communities remain key to socio-economic improvement and provide the platform for growth and community renewal. This article examines to what extent arts are integrated in community development programmes, their perceived importance and potential for community creativity and innovation.

Literature review and theory

Rural populations tend to have more children and fewer young adults than urban areas (Argent & Walmsley, 2008), lower education levels due to limited opportunities and restricted access to resources/higher education (Hossain, Burton, Lawrence, & Gorman, 2010) and lower household incomes than metropolitan areas (Athanasopoulos & Hahid, 2003). Geographic isolation and distance from services are compounded by ecological threats and economic downturns. Droughts, flooding, salinity and fire place significant financial stress on rural/remote communities and public infrastructure, service closures and restructuring of farming businesses have resulted in economic uncertainty and social insecurity (Anwar McHenry, 2011), contributing to population decline and rendering the maintenance of services and businesses difficult. The inevitable "cycle of decline" results in unemployment and out-migration, particularly among youth (Cavaye, 2001). Limited entertainment, employment and/or educational opportunities exacerbate trends while socio-economic difficulties erode a sense of community (Anwar McHenry, 2011).

Although areas affected by socio-economic decline are commonly inland agricultural and pastoral regions, mainly because farming and grazing are no longer sole pillars of rural economies, some have successfully accessed or grown natural amenities for tourism and recreation, cultural and historical heritage, or natural resources for farming, forestry and mining (Macadam, Drinan, Inall, & McKenzie, 2004). Diversification renders traditional economic development strategies less relevant and meets changing market conditions (Chaston, 2008; Haggblade, Hazell, & Reardon, 2010). Such communities engage in innovative marketing of natural amenities, cultural heritage and other income-generating strategies attracting people and jobs (Woodhouse, 2006), not only building natural resources, but

also community capital such as historical heritage, cultural uniqueness, geographic distinctiveness and human talent (Daskon, 2010; MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003) to enhance rural communities as places to live, retire and/or holiday (Lee, 2010). Singularly focusing upon traditional revenue and employment-generating activities overlooks innovative opportunities and the embedded knowledge, skills and creative practices that offer unique community-based learning and growth opportunities. Creative decision-making, problem-solving, critical analysis, presentation of alternative viewpoints, collaboration and networking are inherent in artistic processes and critical for building community growth strategies (Mayes, 2010).

The potential for arts to support community development is based on the concept that the arts may connect with broad community agendas, products and services. For example, the concept of community arts derives from belief that cultural meaning, expression and creativity reside within a community so artists assist others to, "free their imaginations and give form to their creativity" (Goldbard, 1993, p. 2). This usually involves artists making art in partnership with community members in one-off projects involving short-term processes and products inherently commendable (Anwar McHenry, 2011), yet lacking an integrated developmental framework to underwrite lasting and meaningful outcomes (Evans, 2005) and remaining at the periphery of community life. Placing the arts at the centre of community development is challenging, requiring artists and arts workers to initiate/participate in dialogue with new collaborators, although whole-of-government strategies/programmes exemplify how different disciplines can solve problems collaboratively and deliver services in creative and innovative ways (Agranoff & McGuire, 2004). The impetus towards whole-of-government approaches may position the arts as integral in policy debates and programmes, linking the arts to reconciliation, social cohesion and economic prosperity. "If the arts are to impact on all Australians, it needs to enter communities of interests – and draw government, media and corporate support. For that to happen, we need to put culture not at the end of the value chain, tacked on if and when funds are available, but right at the start – and the heart – of community building and engagement, where it belongs" (Bott, 2006, p. 4).

Currently, the arts play an important role in urban revitalization and community renewal, attracting businesses, visitors, new residents and encouraging broader consumer spending, all creating new economic opportunities and increasing community revenue (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Richards & Palmer, 2010). A key component in attracting new economy workers and encouraging corporate relocation, the arts also enhance the market appeal of regions and communities and are explicitly recognized as key contributors to workplace innovation (Florida, 2002; Pratt, 2009). Arts-related skills are critical to software development firms, technology companies, advertising firms and audio-visual/entertainment industries, and now other industries also recognize their value to high-level communication, creative problem-solving and thinking ability (Birch, 2002; Phillips, 2004). While the literature suggests the arts' potential for building creative,

vibrant and dynamic communities, it provides limited direction about approaches, the focus of this article, which examines community perceptions of current art-based development programmes in small, inland communities in south-western Queensland, Australia.

Research methods
Definitional parameters

Initially, two definitional issues required resolution. First, the multi-faceted nature of arts-based disciplines indicated the arts might reasonably encompass book/magazine publishing, visual arts (painting, sculpture), performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance), sound recordings, film and television, multi-media and electronic arts, even advertising, fashion, toys and games. While selecting one or two arts sectors that demonstrate the relevant qualities (e.g. creative problem-solving and decision-making, interpersonal effectiveness through collaboration and team work, a dedication to innovation and quality) would focus the research and make it more manageable, it would ignore the importance of collaboration and diversity, complexity of organizational patterns, distinctiveness of processes within subcategories, contemporary developments in hybrid, multi-arts and inter-disciplinary approaches to creative endeavours. Additionally, a singular focus would limit consideration of particular interests and idiosyncratic talents residing in rural and remote communities. Consequently, the research encompassed the potential of all the arts within a framework and understanding that arts-based products and processes have their origin in, " … individual skill, creativity and talent and each has the potential for wealth and job creation through the exploitation of intellectual property" (Cunningham, 2006, p. 5).

The second issue involved differences among Australian metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities. Australia is a vast country characterized by urban concentration and sprawling population. Distance from major population centres, however, is only one of many classification criteria. Wakerman and Humphreys (2008) identified the most commonly used rural/urban classification systems are the Faulkner and French Index of Remoteness; the Griffith Service Access Frame; the Rural and Remote Area classification developed and used by the Australian Department of Human Services and Health; the Rural Remote and Metropolitan Areas (RRMA) classification used by the Australian Department of Primary Industries and Energy and Department of Human Services and Health; the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) used by the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The last three are most commonly used and relevant to the current research.

The RRMA uses population size and calculated direct distance from the nearest service centre to yield seven discrete categories: capital cities, other metropolitan centres, large rural centres, small rural centres, other rural areas, remote

centres and other remote areas. The ARIA uses geographical information to define road distance from service centres with a population of more than 5000, thus producing a five-point sliding scale of remoteness: highly accessible, accessible, moderately accessible, remote and very remote. The ASGC refines the ARIA and consists of five discrete categories: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. Despite the relative advantages of these classification systems, a rural–urban classification system to underpin this research is neither useful nor informative as the targeted communities are at the remote/very remote end of these scales. Moreover, these formal classification systems are not sensitive to the diversity of communities across Australia. For example, a small rural community in Victoria located a few hundred kilometres from a major city has very different needs from one in Western Queensland located over one thousand kilometres from a major centre. Yet, both types of communities are integral to this research. To overcome this problem, a new category of *remote/rural* was introduced to accommodate communities with populations fewer than 4000 and distances greater than 400 kilometres from a major centre (population >10,000) as contextualized in Table 1.

Two major data collection techniques were used, survey and site visits incorporating interviews with identified key stakeholders. Surveys are an appropriate method to support environmental scanning of communities to identify broad trends and responses to key issues (Choo, 1999, 2001). Site visits were adopted to provide generalizable insights on programmes and activities undertaken in different contexts in different communities (Lawrenz, Keiser, & Lavoie, 2003). The survey was designed to yield generic information about (a) whole-of-community perceptions of arts-based community development and (b) arts-based projects or initiatives related to community growth and development. Using a cross-sectional approach, key stakeholder groups in the community building process were identified through an analysis of contemporary literature, including local government officials and employees, local artists and art workers, community business owners, farmers and graziers, and members of community organizations. Table 2 summarizes survey responses by occupation and response rates.

The survey enabled identification of 12 communities for site visits chosen to exemplify the diversity of activities undertaken by communities and the variety of contexts, settings and management approaches across communities. The

Table 1. Categories of communities by population, dispersion and access to services.

	Urban	Regional	Rural	Remote/rural
Population	<100,000	<50,000	<10,000	Less than 4000
Dispersion	Nil	Low	High	Very high
Access to services	High	Moderate	Low	Very low

Table 2. Survey distribution categories and response rates.

Respondent categories	Distribution	Response (No.)	rate (%)
Local government officials	25	3	12
Local government employees	100	12	12
Artists and arts workers	155	74	48
Community business people	80	13	16
Farmers and graziers	45	4	8
Members of community organizations	95	22	24
Total	500	128	25.6

communities visited were all located in western Queensland, Australia, with populations varying between 400 and 4000. All the communities provide significant service centres for the pastoral and/or mining industries. Between two and four semi-structured face-to-face interviews (total $n = 35$) were conducted with key stakeholders including arts-related individuals and organizations, local government officials, local artists and arts workers, community development officers, community project managers, local business owners and operators, and community residents, in south-western Queensland. Informal, unstructured interviews were also conducted with local identities (retirees, publicans, teachers, shop keepers and police officers) using snowball sampling. Interview questions were derived from survey responses and focused on (i) perceptions of the usefulness of arts-based community development, (ii) contemporary issues impacting the arts in communities and (iii) insights into potential future directions for arts-based community development. Data analysis was conducted by generating descriptive statistics for the survey data and thematic analysis for the interviews.

Findings
Community perceptions of the usefulness of the arts
Respondents were asked to rate their perception of the impact of the arts/arts-based initiatives, their communities' economic development and development of social cohesion in their community. Table 3 illustrates the majority perceived the arts contributed in important ways to social cohesion and community development.

While there is quite strong recognition of the arts, 39% perceived the arts as less or not important to economic development in contrast with 17% perceiving the same for social cohesion. As Tables 4–6 illustrate, perceptions varied considerably by respondents' occupational category.

Unsurprisingly, 87% of artists and art workers reported the arts were important/very important to community development, a perception consistent with

Table 3.   Respondents' perceptions of the arts' contribution.

Perceived contribution of the arts to	Very important		Important		Not important
Community development	10 (8%)	24 (19%)	62 (48%)	27 (21%)	5 (4%)
Social cohesion	17 (13%)	48 (38%)	40 (32%)	16 (12%)	7 (5%)
Economic development	12 (9%)	28 (22%)	38 (30%)	36 (28%)	14 (11%)

local government officials' and farmers, graziers and land owners' perceptions, albeit with relatively lower percentages, supporting prior research (Anwar McHenry, 2011; Woodhouse, 2006). In contrast, fewer community-based businesses and community organization members (less than 40%, respectively) perceived the arts played an important role in community development. These data provide new insights into perceptions across the spectrum of community interests and the future role of the arts in remote/rural communities. Table 5 presents the social cohesion perceptions by category of respondent.

While artists and art workers perceived a strong link between the arts and achieving socially cohesive communities (100%), others were less convinced with the majority of business owners, graziers, farmers and landowners viewing the arts as unimportant to achieving social cohesion.

Table 4.   Perceived contribution of the arts to community development by respondent occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
0%	33.33%	66.67%	0%	0%	
Local government employees (No. = 12)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
16.67%	25%	50%	8.33%	0%	
Artists and art workers (No. = 74)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
8.11%	22.97%	56.76%	12.16%	0%	
Community-based business people (No. = 13)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
0%	0%	38.46%	46.15%	23.08%	
Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	
Members of community organizations (No. = 22)					
Very important		Important		Not important	
9.09%	13.64%	18.18%	45.45%	9.09%	

Table 5.   Perceived contribution of the arts to community social cohesion by respondent occupation.

Local government officials (n = 3)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%

Local government employees (n = 12)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	25%	50%	25%	0%

Artists and art workers (No. = 74)

Very important		Important		Not important
21.62%	56.76%	21.62%	0%	0%

Community-based business people (No. = 13)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	30.77%	38.46%	30.77%

Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	25%	50%	25%

Members of community organizations (No. = 22)

Very important		Important		Not important
4.55%	13.64%	50%	22.73%	8.09%

Table 6.   Perceived contribution of the arts to economic development by respondent occupation.

Local government officials (No. = 3)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%

Local government employees (No. = 12)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	16.67%	50%	33.33%	0%

Artists and art workers (No. = 74)

Very important		Important		Not important
8.11%	21.62%	29.73%	27.03%	13.51%

Community-based business people (No. = 13)

Very important		Important		Not important
15.38%	23.08%	23.08%	38.41%	0%

Farmers, graziers and land owners (No. = 4)

Very important		Important		Not important
0%	50%	25%	0%	1%

Members of community organizations (No. = 22)

Very important		Important		Not important
18.18%	22.73%	18.18%	27.27%	13.64%

At least 60% of occupational category regarded the arts' contribution to economic development as important/very important. Artists, art workers and government officials and employees viewed the arts' contribution to social development as more important than to economic development, while the reverse was perceived by local business members, graziers, farmers and land owners.

Interview data complimented the survey findings that the arts were valued in communities, adding depth of meaning through explanatory comments such as "Our activities usually attract a fair number of people – people enjoy them and come back year after year. It's a real social occasion; people all muck in together and have a bit of fun" (Carol, Local Government Official, Rural Community). While the majority of interviewees agreed the social value of involvement in the arts was difficult to quantify, they reported a likelihood to consider oneself more involved in community life after participating in group activities. As one interviewee stressed, participation in local community networks and organizations encouraged people to collaborate for the community's common good. "It's really about working together and getting a feeling of personal fulfilment and the satisfaction about making a contribution. It's also about meeting new people and talking and listening to them and realising that everyone has a contribution to make" (Maree, President, Local Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community).

Interviewees generally stressed the arts' importance in building self-esteem and trust through open and collaborative communications with community members, reporting need to facilitate the development of social outcomes through improved access to basic infrastructure (meeting rooms and public spaces) to permit work on projects, develop networks and strengthen connections. Perceiving the arts' role as generating opportunities for social interaction and developing a socially cohesive community, as the following quote demonstrates, interviewees questioned the comparative social value of the arts in community development:

> There are a lot of social benefits arising from arts-based activities in our community but, when compared with other social events, they probably pale into insignificance … especially when we compare the arts with sporting events like our race meetings which really bring people together and have a strong community focus. Even pony club events attract a greater number of people than arts based stuff … and football galvanises the community much more than our local theatre production or our art exhibitions. (Brian, President, Local Arts Council, Rural Community)

Generally, communities appear to have recognized the social value of the arts, with interviews reporting participation in arts events such as concerts, festivals and/or workshops. Little evidence of active participation in arts-based projects was directed towards the building of tangible outcomes for the community or the development of human and social capital within the community.

Arts participation was typically construed as entertainment in rural communities. "The arts sometimes operate in the same way sport does – its spectator entertainment. People in this community are not involved in the arts. It's good

to see but not to do" (David, Art Teacher, Regional Community, Rural Community). Even interviewees reporting economic benefits to the community from the arts acknowledged limitations, expressing surprise at the implied link. "Well I've never really thought about it – what are other people saying?" (Margaret, Local Artist, Rural Community); "Our programs are not really concerned with economics – they're for art" (Mary, Local Government Employee, Rural Community). The only potential economic benefit linked directly to the arts mentioned was increased visitor and tourist numbers, although none reported any formal measures of increased tourist or visitor numbers as a result of the arts. "Economically the arts in rural areas just don't add up! The demand is generally low and the quality is usually mediocre. Arts activities are almost always sponsored, usually by government. They don't make money" (Brian, President Local Arts Council and Local Accountant, Rural Community).

Two interviewees in separate communities countered the majority view of the arts' limited economic value. One had a long standing enterprise specializing in the manufacture and sale of a local product based on creative design, advanced craft-based skills and imaginative marketing. While not formally evaluated, reference was made to an increase in registered visitors to the local information centre, to tour operators, who previously ignored the town on their itineraries, now ensuring tour groups spend over an hour in the town, and that a new coffee shop was established to cater for the demands of increased visitors. "It's put us on the map … people used to just drive through the town, now they stop, even if it's just to look, they usually buy a drink or something to eat" (Maree, President, Local Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community). The other community conducted an active programme of festivals and major events including an annual Mardi Gras attracting locals and regional visitors, a biennial Food and Fibre Festival attracting visitors from around the country, and a widely recognized annual arts competition and exhibition attract exhibitors nationally. Strong recognition of the economic value of these festivals and events appeared. "Each year our events attract more visitors. Our local businesses have all experienced the economic benefits of increasing numbers of visitors … .So much so that we are seeing a significant increase in sponsorship by local businesses" (Leanne, Economic Development Officer, Rural Community).

Perceptions of issues impacting the arts in communities

Interviewees were asked to raise other issues impacting the arts in their community. Issues identified focused on community engagement, funding and demographic changes. A reoccurring theme raised was community members' lack of interest and engagement. In several communities, the arts were reportedly seen as elitist, attracting only minority participation. In one community, disengaged youths were involved in painting historical murals on the supports of the town's main bridge to create a unique, pictorial history of the community. Council built a pathway to allow visitors and tourists to stroll through the supports

and learn of the community's history. The local arts community, however, failed to engage with or support the project with some members openly critical that it was not *real* art. One interviewee suggested a deeper problem. "There is a major problem with negativity; not only do people not want to make an effort but they have no connection with the arts. They're just not interested and see no use in the arts" (Sonya, Community Development Officer, Remote/Rural Community). Sonya reported negativity had caused a decline in volunteers and led to the closure of two community organizations. She observed the local council's current tourism strategy may disengage residents, noting it may increase revenue to local businesses with medium- and long-term positive results, but council also needed to improve the town's liveability by enhancing facilities for residents. Another interviewee reported that, while engagement levels were high in his community, its reach was restricted given limited sector participation. "We need to work harder not just to increase the number of people involved in the arts but also to increase the types of people involved – the young, the poor, the average bloke ... " (Brian, President, Arts Council, Rural Community). Others focused on the need to change prevalent community cultures, suggesting communities were *just not open* to new possibilities:

> As a community we just don't know how to say "yes" to possibilities. Our attitudes are entrenched and we are more likely to point out why things will not work rather than saying "let's give it a try". We need to develop a culture of experimentation, some things will work, others will fail but we need to try new things. Otherwise people will continue to do the same things and continue to think that all art should be landscapes depicting a western sunset. (Ann, Local Artist, Remote/Rural Community)

Another reoccurring theme was current levels of funding for the arts are inadequate, specifically government support for the arts as Maree's comment reflects. "There's a lot of rhetoric from both state and local government about the importance of the arts to communities but that's not backed up with dollars. We're not lacking in ideas but we can't do things without money" (Maree, President, Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community). When questioned about other funding mechanisms (local sponsorships and fund raising), interviewees noted local fundraising was limited to raffles and street stalls raising minimal dollars. Local sponsorships of the arts in communities were almost non-existent and only involved very small amounts:

> Local businesses provide some sponsorship for major events like our festival but are usually only prepared to provide a couple of hundred dollars. But at least they are now recognising that the festival brings money into the community and their businesses benefit so they are prepared to support it. There is a long, long way to go before they begin to appreciate and support the arts in a broader way. (Kerry, President, Arts Council, Rural Community)

One interviewee argued for a more imaginative and broader-based approach to arts funding:

> I think just about everyone agrees that the arts should be a part of broader issues and the biggest issue in the bush at the moment is the environment and environmental issues are not just about grazing practices – art has a key role to play in addressing environmental issues. We should be seeking out opportunities to apply for funds available through environmental programs or just seeking to partner with environmentalists. (Annette, Local Artist, Remote/Rural Community)

A common concern was the steady decline of rural/remote populations and the consequent threat to the arts' talent pool. A compounding problem was the perceived lack of opportunity for talented artists:

> We can't expect to keep people when the opportunities are much greater on the Coast … but if we could generate a little more community interest in the arts we might manage to nurture local talent and even lure people back to the community, at least for a short while. (Tanya, Community Development Officer, Remote/Rural Community)

Increasing competition with larger centres in both business and the arts was also identified:

> More and more people are travelling to [major regional centre] for shopping, business and entertainment. As the road continues to improve the travelling time gets less and people find it easy and convenient to travel. For shopping, the choice is greater and the prices are cheaper. For the arts, there is much more on offer, better and bigger productions, better galleries and access to arts courses through the TAFE. (Anthony, Councillor, Regional Community)

In essence, decreasing population negatively affected local businesses:

> More businesses are closing every year. We maintain essential services, food, petrol, accommodation but specialist services cannot survive. This impacts the quality of life in the community. Local artists can't get their materials locally but there are a lot of things we used to be able to buy locally that we can't anymore. As businesses close, business services leave and the closure of banks has been the most obvious of these. (Lydia, Community Arts Worker, Remote/Rural Community)

Insights into future directions for the arts in communities

When asked about potential future directions for the arts in their communities, interviewees' suggestions exposed five sub-themes.

Effective engagement of community youth

Limited engagement by young people in the arts was a concern expressed in all communities visited. While interviewees indicated local schools worked hard to engage students in art, the transition from school-based art to community-based art was regarded as problematic. "It's almost like the kids think its fine to get involved in art in school but it's not cool to get involved in the community arts – I think we have to somehow make it more attractive to kids but I don't know how" (Melinda, President, Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community). One interviewee suggested youth engagement was a complex problem in rural and remote communities and was much broader than the arts per se:

Youth disengagement is a complex problem and we talk about the arts and how we might get them involved but this approach reflects the whole problem with arts in the community. We are facing big problems and the arts are only a small, a very small, part of the solution. We need to address the problem of youth on many levels. We need to build facilities and programs across a whole range of areas and interests. We need programs that address what young people want and what they will engage with. Our approach to youth and the arts is too narrow and too insular. If the arts are to be part of the solution they need to be integrated into other programs. (Brian, President, Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community)

Only one interviewee raised the issue of the role of new technology in engaging community youth:

One thing we do is advertise our events in the local newspaper but we forget that the kids don't read the newspapers. Not just the kids but all people are more and more getting their information from the internet. We need to develop a community presence – well at least try it, there's no guarantee that it will work but it's worth a shot. (Karla, Community Worker, Remote/Rural Community)

Another interviewee emphasized its strong engagement potential:

Our art teacher offers free art courses, two afternoons a week for anyone who would like to come. Perhaps we could encourage the technology teachers to work with her. I'm sure the school would provide community access to the community labs out of hours. It would be a way of experimenting with this new media that we hear so much about. We couldn't afford to support it as a community but with the resources already at the school, it just might help to engage kids in art. (Karla, Community Worker, Remote/Rural Community)

Community leadership in the arts

Interviewees described training for community arts leaders and their organizations as minimal, largely volunteers and seldom recognized as community leaders by government or other support agencies.

There are a few people in the community who always take a leadership role. They are the few we rely on to get things done but we as a community don't give anything back. We need to nourish and support these people. (David, Local Businessman, Remote/Rural Community)

The identification and mentoring of new leadership was perceived important.

The itinerant workers are often the leaders of the community especially the art teachers. We need to get better at recognising the leadership potential of our own people and start to support people instead of just expecting people to step up. (Karla, Community Arts Worker, Remote/Rural Community)

When questioned about the type and nature of training needed to support the development of local leaders, interviewees suggested negotiation skills, committee management skills, team building, prioritizing and goal setting skills. Interviewees also suggested a range of training options in areas not typically associated with leadership, such as developing business plans, book-keeping, fundraising, recruitment

and dealing with conflict, intimating the importance of management skills development in the arts.

Supporting local artists

Interviewees also indicated a decline in the number/role of emergent local artists:

> There are about ten local artists practising in the community and most live just out of town on properties. They participate as much as they can but their contribution is fairly limited. When they retire or move from the area, there is no one to take their place. (Brian, President, Local Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community)

Others suggested the need to become more proactive in promoting and supporting emergent local artists:

> There are many talented people in town but we need to generate interest and then support the development of these people. Our approach at the moment is a broad approach that allows everyone to participate if they want to. We probably need to continue to do this but at the same time we need to focus on real potential and develop long-term approaches to nourishing local talent. (Carol, Local Councillor, Regional Community)
>
> You know we have part-time positions in the Council that provide assistance and guidance for farmers and business people. We should create a position to support and guide local artists. Not just in their own practice but the position could mentor local artists to take a more active role across a range of local issues, even nominate them for positions on committees and boards. That might create a bit of new thinking around the place. (David, Council Employee, Regional Community)

Although the need to support arts and artists was strongly conveyed, the practicalities of how to achieve this had yet to be addressed. Interviewees suggested communities successful in supporting the arts have active and involved councils. The most proactive councils developed local projects that aimed at integrating the arts with broader community goals, including using local artists to design new entrances to towns, commissioning concept designs to enhance streetscapes and cultural mapping of the community, while others adopted strategic directions involving local artists and arts workers more directly in community projects. One council developed a three-year community plan focusing exclusively on local history and the environment, channelling the whole community's talents and resources to achieve tangible and intangible outcomes such as local attractions reportedly resulting in increased visitor numbers and community history and pride.

Need for longer term, more strategic approaches

Interviewees revealed the arts in rural and remote communities suffer from approaches governed by short-term goals and strategies exacerbated by annual funding cycles limiting longer term strategic planning. Arguing the need for

new approaches to integrate the arts with wider community goals, one local council's approach is noteworthy:

> We are moving away from grants (the hand-out mentality) towards a tender based approach. Instead of the same organisations just getting the same amount of money every year to run the same events, we are asking all community organisations to bid for funding. We hope that it will help them think about what they are doing and plan new approaches to attract funds. We also hope that it will stimulate new groups within the community. There is a lot of resistance in the community but we will continue, it will take a few years. (Brian, President, Arts Council, Remote/Rural Community)

Another interviewee noted rural/remote communities are facing social, economic and environmental challenges threatening their very existence:

> There are many challenges facing the community but these are big issues requiring new ways of thinking in all areas, business, agriculture, government. The arts or rather artists may have something to contribute but I think we've missed the boat with art. The problem is now so critical that it requires action now; the arts are not currently in the game. (Jack, Director, Development and Community Services, Rural Community)

The perception that the arts are on the periphery of the challenges facing communities was supported by the operator of a local enterprise specializing in the manufacture and sale of creative products. "I'm not an artist. I'm not part of the arts community. I'm a businesswoman" (Melinda, Business Owner, Remote/Rural Community).

Need for fresh thinking and new ideas

While there is a view in communities that current challenges need creative problem-solving and innovative thinking, little evidenced the arts is making, or able to make, a contribution to that process. One interviewee reported a big problem for communities was their lack of a vision for the future:

> We just plod along doing the same things year in and year out. There is no view of where the community is heading or, more importantly, where we want to be heading. We are a community of just six hundred people, we should be able to come together and develop a shared view of what we want our future to be. (Sophia, Economic Development Officer, Remote Community)

Sophie also described approaches potentially useful for communities to develop a shared vision for the future:

> People wouldn't engage with formal processes to develop a view of future directions. One way of getting people engaged might be to work with local and external artists to develop new designs for the community, things like streetscapes and art at the entrances to the town. Some of the designs could be a bit controversial to encourage debate and discussion. The designs could be displayed publicly for comment. One outcome of such an approach would be to stimulate thinking about our future public face. We could then develop some design principles to guide future development. The other benefit would be community recognition of just what artists can contribute to the community.

Discussion and conclusions

Findings support relevant academic literature noting the important role for the arts and artists in working with communities to generate new ideas and visions for the future yet also indicate this is a resource currently under-used in remote rural communities. Much contemporary literature contends the arts provide communities with tools to address a very broad range of civic concerns in creative and cost-effective ways (Anwar McHenry, 2011; Birch, 2002). The evidence to support these claims derives from research demonstrating the arts' role in fostering student learning (Fiske, 1999), offering positive opportunities for disengaged youth (Davis, 2008), developing new enterprises and industries (Cunningham, 2006), promoting tourism (Phillips, 2004), engendering civic pride and developing community identity and social cohesion (Anwar McHenry, 2011). While the current research confirms much of this, it demonstrates the many social and cultural benefits derived from the arts by rural and remote communities that is documented in the literature (Anwar McHenry, 2011; Mayes, 2010). Further, it raises important questions about (a) the breadth and scope of art programmes and their consequential impact across all community sectors and (b) the long-term sustainability of programmes' impact on community growth.

This research found arts-based programmes undertaken in remote/rural communities are typically short-term, single event-based endeavours exemplified by festivals, art contests and exhibitions, community art projects and arts workshops. While these offer unique and authentic experiences reflecting local traditions and relevant to the needs of remote/rural communities (Anwar McHenry, 2011; Cavaye, 2001; Pratt, 2009), they are also in the main proscribed, insular and lacking longevity in design and implementation. Despite the best intentions, the remote/rural arts processes investigated were generally limited to specific, single-discipline activities, such as the preservation of an historical site, the conduct of a single event, such as an art competition, or the creation and construction of a public monument.

Furthermore, the remote/rural processes examined were usually aimed solely at social outcomes, increasing community networking and maintaining social cohesion. The research identified little or no appreciation in remote/rural communities of the potential to use the arts to generate and/or support economic outcomes. While contemporary literature identifies significant potential for the arts in economic development (Cunningham, 2006; MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Pratt, 2009), most of the evidence derives from studies in urban contexts. Arts-based activities in the remote/rural communities examined in this research generally sit apart from major community planning agendas involving plans to increase tourism, attract workers, attract new businesses, build community infrastructure and improve the liveability of communities.

Contemporary literature provides a platform to build new knowledge about the practicalities of arts programmes/initiatives and how achievements can be measured against claims made for the arts in remote/rural locations. A dearth of

information, however, about how the arts integrate with, and support, other community development processes and strategies exists remote/rural communities, as well as the organizations that purport to support them in development programmes, must be challenged to be innovative and visit new vistas to develop comprehensive and integrated visions for the future, pursuing less insular and narrowly focused art forms and projects. Likewise, artists will have particular interests and contribute to individual art forms and projects, but they, too, must think more broadly and comprehensively and be prepared to contribute their knowledge and creative skills across the full spectrum of community development.

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